

1997 IMF Ministers Conference

Presentation Thursday, August 14, 1997
Seminar B 10:30AM

The Untying of the Enlightenment Knot

By Christoph Lameter (Rev, M.Div, M.S. Computer Science)

1. Introduction

[Overhead "Intro + Song"]

1.1. Greeting

- Questions any time but only on the topic discussed
- Announce: 20 minute general Q & A time at the end
- Stop me if I should talk too fast.

1.2. The Topic and the Approach

Communicating the Gospel effectively is something that is very important to us as Ministers of the Christian Faith. I think the greatest source of the failure to reach the people in our current "PostModern" culture today is a problem in our understanding of our times. We do not have an effective means of communicating in the public arena about the Christian faith. The early Church was a master in using the Greek culture to communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ and accomplished the amazing feat of converting the biggest and most powerful empire of that time to become Christian in a couple of centuries. The early Church was not only built on the blood of the Martyrs but also on the Holy Spirit using the surrounding culture to communicate.

The early Church had so called "Apologetes" who saw their calling in responding to attacks and challenges from educated people of the Greek and Roman culture on the church. They were using the same Greek and Roman culture to argue for the integrity of belief in Christ, of the Christian Faith and of the healing it might bring. **They broke down barriers** that enabled large parts of the population to become Christian.

What I will be doing here is to present an approach in its infancy on how it might be possible to use our current secular thinking patterns for the communication of the Gospel.

We will go through a short survey on how society developed in the last centuries to get a better understanding why we as Christians face always the same issues in dialogue with non-believers. Maybe the historical overview will also enable us to see certain spots where we have compromised faith and imported some baggage from times that have gone by. That is the Knot part of the topic. I would say that the Enlightenment period has left its imprint on our Christian faith, which might be causing us some problems.

I will be using research results in a variety of academic and scientific fields to show how our faith can be talked about in a way that communicates the essential. That will not be easy.

Trying to communicate in another framework about our faith is awkward and problematic. It is certainly impossible to express the complete richness of our Christian beliefs in those other frameworks. But what I am looking for is an in-road into secular thinking. Once the beachhead is established we may find ways to **conquer more of the land**. So please do not wonder if some of what I say might sound somewhat strange. Maybe the one or the other important point cannot be made in the material that I had available.

Graham Kendrick is one of the most gifted songwriters I know of today. He has the ability to combine good praise music with texts that also have a message. They really speak to me. I have a song here, which I think is fitting our topic well.

His song *Meekness and Majesty* is definitely not out of the Enlightenment Period anymore. Kendrick is combining contrasts here that the Enlightenment Thinking was never able to do. Meekness and Majesty do not fit together. You cannot be both can you? The Enlightenment wanted clear answers and know for sure. What was it meekness or majesty? Was Jesus God or was he human? The early Church had no problem saying he was fully God **and** fully human.

We are still enjoying the God who is so meek that he was ready to die for us on the cross. But he is also the God who created the world and who will reign in majesty. Let us sing:

1.3. Graham Kendrick's "Meekness and Majesty"

1.4. Prayer

2. The Enlightenment

[Overhead "History of Modern Thought"]

2.1. Historical Development

If you look at the transparency you see a timeline from the year 1600 to the year 2000 illustrating some of the key developments in our Western society. I have tried to depict the time periods. Note that those are not clear-cut boundaries. There is quite a bit of carry-over between those periods and there are precursors and also developments after the mainstream has already abandoned major elements of one scheme of thinking.

Medieval Period

To the very left you have the tradition-based society of the medieval period. The authority for all truth was the Roman Catholic Church. There was a great plurality of opinion and also strands of society that revolted against the dominance of the Roman Catholic Church. But as a whole society accepted the Church as the ultimate source of truth and the priests and bishops were those who determined how to live and what to believe. Knowledge was bound to authorities. Research or Science in that day consisted of the study of the recognized authorities of the past in the respective fields of study. Theology was one of the core elements at the core of all study. Famous great Teachers like Thomas Aquinas were compared with others such as Augustine and so on. What we

today would call science was a minor area in most schools of thought. And in those areas the Greek Philosophers like Plato and Aristotle were the main contenders. Greek Philosophy was accepted as the basis for science and to view reality.

The Roman Catholic Church had worked for centuries to integrate all these sources of knowledge and was the final authority on all matters regarding ethics or belief or science. A tradition of belief was the result and a **wide consensus** among the people for long periods of time.

Reformation

The western world was unified by the theology of the Roman Catholic Church. But the Reformers saw that the Church had moved away from the faith of Scripture and so the Reformers made a challenge to the ultimate authority of the Roman Catholic Church. They put **another authority** against the tradition of the Catholic Church: The ultimate authority was in divinely inspired scripture in the Bible and not in the Leadership of the Catholic Church.

At that point the **unity of the society was broken**. Different standards for what is right and wrong resulted. Both sides went to extremes to defend their views. Governments used this struggle to enlarge their realm of power. Wars broke out in Europe. The most horrible time was the time of the 30-year war, which left areas of Europe desolate after long periods of plundering and killing. More than half of the population of Germany died in that war.

Rene Descartes

Rene Descartes was a Frenchman who was in Germany during the thirty-year war. He saw what was going on and the disputes about what was right and wrong that he felt led to the catastrophe. Descartes tried to come up with a way to decide what is right apart from having to rely on persons in position of authorities. That way – he hoped – there would be more agreement, the power hungry rulers would not have so much influence anymore and the wars would cease.

Descartes was concerned about how to know something for “certain” apart from relying on tradition or authorities. He began by first **viewing all knowledge** that he had not verified as correct, as **unproven and therefore suspicious**. What he was taught as a child from his parents or what society had given him he saw as totally unreliable and to be rejected until it could be proven by rational methods.

He sought for self-evident truth. From these self-evident truth he would then use logic to develop a system of truth, which was certain knowledge in contrast to the opinion of authorities. In this fashion everyone would be able to evaluate the truth independently from any authority.

He demolished everything and started from scratch from a sure foundation. That is why this kind of reasoning is called sometimes “foundationalism”. All other knowledge should ideally be derived from that sure foundation.

Descartes' basis of knowledge was basically intuitive ideas about the world, which he called self-evident truths thinking that everyone would agree that those are true without any proof. Self-evident truths included logic and basic reasoning.

One of those self-evident truths was the existence of God for Descartes. This is unbelievable for us today but in that day and age he lived in a society where this was never questioned and it was so self-evident that Descartes felt that all reasonable people must agree without argument that there is a God. Descartes saw himself as finally providing a way to decide the disputes over religion in the thirty-year war based on reason.

The scheme of a foundation on which all reasoning has to build is common to the Enlightenment period. Reasoning would be impossible without a limit for the systematic suspicion and the system of doubt. It would get develop into circular reasoning without a basis of "truth".

Descartes provided the basic building blocks of modern reasoning and we are still caught in a lot of this kind of thinking. Our children are taught in most schools nowadays to question and to ask for a proper way of reason. Critical thinking is something of value for us.

The big weakness in such a scheme has always been how to justify the foundation. That foundation has been changing and changing. No one was ever able to provide a clear and satisfactory answer to what the foundation of modern knowledge is.

Isaac Newton

Isaac Newton invented the basic approach and the fundamental theories of modern physics. He was the first to formulate the laws of motion that allow us today to build machines. He was extremely successful in science. And surprisingly the same was valid for his work in theology. He wrote extensively in theology and was renowned for his biblical studies.

Newton thought he had discovered the Laws of the Universe which were created by God. They are Laws of Nature because God has created nature with these Laws (Nothing new to us today. This is basic for us but it was brand-new at the time)! Newton opened up science as a way to discovering the eternal unchanging laws God had created. Now we can have a peek at how God made this universe work. Those laws operate the universe and it was the mission of mankind to discover those. People feeling mandated by God to explore what rules God has created to operate the world motivated the beginning of the scientific period.

Newton's ideas became very successful and dominated Science until the 20th century. The view of the world being **governed by eternal divine laws** is still very popular today. Today the secular world does not call them "divine" anymore. They are just scientific laws. But in many minds those laws still have the eternal, never changing and universal aspect to them.

2.2. The Knot

[Overhead "Enlightenment Characteristics"]

The Enlightenment thinking is a result of the development from the basis of Descartes, Newton and other have worked out over centuries.

First of all there is the **general attitude of suspicion** against values handed down by tradition or against values that do not seem to be reasonable to us. The early Church was building on the witness of the Apostles to the risen Christ. Never did the Church approach those witnesses with suspicion. The Enlightenment challenged those witnesses.

Second there is the need to **know for sure**. There are high demands on the quality of knowledge. It cannot just be a person telling us. There must be systematic proof build on a sure foundation.

Third there is the idea that every person is competent to reason on their own and make their own decision leading to modern individualism.

Fourth there is the belief in God-given eternal and unchanging laws of nature. We humans have discovered the rules that God created to make this world go in science. Those laws do not change and they are universal and forever. No exceptions are possible.

And fifth: Language is something used to communicate information. Information which is either true or false. Language must deal with facts.

I think these assumptions are deeply ingrained in us and they have caused a lot of trouble for Christian's living in obedience to God's word as well as to the troubles we are facing in spreading the Gospel. Not everyone has accepted that kind of thinking but quite a lot of it is everywhere today.

Let us think about the consequences:

First: There are no miracles, not acting of God anymore. Why pray? The world is a machine that works according to a divine engineering plan driven by eternal and unchanging God-given Laws. God has created the laws of nature in the beginning and now should he violate his own laws? Is God inconsistent? God would not change his mind would he?

Second: Our knowledge has passed rigorous testing and systematic doubt. Now it is build on a sure foundation and we know what is right through our own reasoning. Where is faith then? Generally faith is viewed as something suspicious. People are afraid to trust or have faith. Having faith without proof is something we are trained to be very suspicious of.

Third: Every one can reason this way and decide according to universally valid logic what is right and what is wrong. No need to be dependent on others. We have our rights to choose. Is there any need of a Church of a body of Christian believers anymore? Everyone on his own and the lifelong fellowship that prior generations experienced is gone.

Fourth: How then can all that God-Talk be understood? God does not intervene and so talk about an intervening God is just imaginary. Everything was planned from the beginning. Saying something about God merely expresses our feeling.

And what the Enlightenment people did not realize was that God slipped away. God was not there anymore. Sometime in the past he created a world but now?

Here is a story of a God who left. God is gone for good. He switched on the Grand Mechanism of the Universe and now its ticking down to its end. The laws of nature are working and everything works like clockwork as he has created.

Such a view of the world has commonly been called “Deism”. A deist is someone who believes in such a God who left. Deism was very common in the past. Most of the founders of the United States would fall in that category for example. Are you wondering where “rugged individualism” and the prized ability to “choose” come from?

Some of the brighter minds realized that you really do not need God in this kind of scheme. It is sufficient if there are those laws governing the world. The old Greeks thinkers had already said that the universe was eternal. Maybe there was no creator?

[Overhead “History of Modern Thought”]

There is a famous conversation that Napoleon is said to have had with his teacher Laplace -- a famous French Mathematician.

After Napoleon had listened for weeks to Laplace teaching about the regularities and the laws of the universe he had a question. He asked Laplace:

“I have enjoyed listening to your great scholarship and it has taught me very much. I am very indebted to you. But I have one question: What is God’s role in this?”

Laplace’s famous answer was: “There is no need for such an hypothesis”.

Meaning God is irrelevant. Laplace believed in a mechanistic universe for which no God was necessary for anything. God was irrelevant.

The great Talent of the 19th century, Nietzsche, also realized that and he took that worldview to the bitter end. In his famous masterpiece “Also sprach Zarathustra”. The hero says: God is dead.

Nietzsche realized that a worldview based on Enlightenment thought must by necessity lead to a view of a senseless universe with helpless human beings left on their own. And Nietzsche died in desperation and agony about this knowledge. He did not know any alternative that would make sense.

Is anything of enlightenment thinking in you? There certainly is quite a bit left in me since I was raised to think “scientifically”. Some of the enlightenment thought might be good for us but some might be disastrous to our spiritual health.

I often wish that Nietzsche had lived one hundred years later. Now would have been a good time. It turned out that much of the stuff Nietzsche was so desperate about was only true in a limited way.

3. Postmodernity

[Overhead “Postmodernity”]

3.1. Why “Post”- Modernity

What I have shown you so far is the Enlightenment and its ideals and thought. The Enlightenment period has also often been called the “Modern” Period.

When I am now talking about the Post-Modern Period and about Post-Modern thought then I am talking about something new that has developed in this century in response to the extravagant claims of the Modern Period. Many elements of Post-Modernity have shown the Modern Period to be plainly wrong. The Enlightenment has in many respects totally overstated its case.

The term “Post-Modern” is a buzzword today and there are many different ways of understanding what it means. To many it is referring to the **absolute denial of any values**, to absolute relativism and has to do with New Age. I think that kind of use of the term is invalid. Nothing in that line of thought can be supported by our current available knowledge. Quite to the contrary. The New Age and most of the “post-modern” pop-culture is an abuse of the term. For them Post-Modernity is a sign of the desperation, general skepticism and cynicism, the continuation of the thinking that drove Nietzsche into death. But that is still Enlightenment thinking. I would say that they are still caught in their old paradigm that they so dearly wish to escape from.

Post-Modern to me means a **leaving behind of the ideals and aims** of the Enlightenment period because of scientific as well as religious reasons. All of the things that I have shown before about the Enlightenment have been clearly shown as inaccurate. Post-Modern for me is a hope for the future. It’s a reason for optimism. It is a critique of the deeply ingrained enlightenment thinking that finally frees us from the Knots that this kind of warped thought has caused in our minds. As such I would like to co-opt the term for Christianity. Post-Modernity basically supporting many things we have tried to express for centuries as Bible Believing Christians.

3.2. Scientific Laws

We are basically still taught Modern thinking in our schools and its prevalent wherever we go. The developments in this century in know-how are rarely integrated into our secular worldview.

Around 1920 Albert Einstein presented his Theory of Relativity. The naming of his theory is often misunderstood. It is **not saying that everything is relative** but that the movement of two physical objects relative to each other causes some effects that were not taken into account by the classical physical laws known since Isaac Newton. Einstein was an Enlightenment person and his ideal was the pure and certain scientific truth.

When Einstein proposed this theory most scientists rejected it outright because it basically said that the Newtonian Laws of Physics were inaccurate. They thought they had discerned the basic, the eternal, the unchanging workings of the universe and now someone tells them that they were wrong! Einstein’s Theory said that the old laws of physics are only a special case of the more comprehensive system that he was proposing. There was a factor in most calculations of modern physics that was not seen before. Einstein claimed that his theory could explain some phenomena that science has had trouble with so far.

It took awhile until there were observations in science that confirmed Einstein’s Theory. But it was overwhelmingly confirmed and it is now one of the fundamental laws of science. That was the first blow to the confidence in a mechanical universe. Time and space, the former absolutes, the foundations of science until then, were relativized!

The final blow came later in the form of Quantum Mechanics. Quantum Theory is dealing with the small particles that compose all matter that we know. And one of the results of Quantum Theory is that those small particles do not behave according to any scientific laws. They are **non-deterministic**. This is also called indeterminacy. They sometimes do this and sometimes do that. The only thing we can do is to calculate probabilities. This questions the basis of causality, as we know it. All matter we know is composed of these small particles. Therefore: Scientific laws are a statistical average and not something that is real or unviolable.¹

No wonder that Einstein got very very upset about Quantum Theory. Einstein himself was committed to a deist worldview and he spent the last decades of his life fighting against Quantum Theory. Ironically Quantum Theory is partially built on the pioneering work he had done. Einstein's sophisticated arguments against Quantum Theory led to scientists scrutinizing the theory in all its details. The result: It is the best-established Theory of Physics today and many of the attempts by Einstein to prove Quantum Theory wrong are used to illustrate the basics of Quantum Theory.

Einstein's had a famous objection to Quantum Mechanics. He said:

God does not play dice!

He meant by that his expectation of God creating scientific laws and not probabilities! The universe must behave in a scientific lawlike way for Einstein. Quantum Theory questioned the basis of his worldview. Einstein was bright: He immediately saw that this one would cause the death of his deist worldview.

All matter consists of those small elements behaving according to probability. Since the small particles are not law-governed in the classical sense therefore all our scientific laws are probabilistic. Scientific laws tell us what is the most probable outcome. It does not tell us that the calculated outcome will happen. Granted it can be highly improbable that something out of the ordinary will happen. But combining probabilities can never result into something that is completely predictable by laws as we have assumed them in the Modern Period.

Scientific Laws are not laws that cannot be violated. They are deduced from what we observed as regularities in the world. Anything can happen given what we know about the physical universe. Miracles are definitely possible with such a view of reality as presented to us by "Post-Modern" science.

The result of these developments has been openness for other forms of explaining the world than just scientific enlightenment based materialism. It is sad that the Churches have not seen the opportunity so far. We have not effectively communicated how Christianity could be understood in this new scientific framework. Instead other strange groups – the so-called New Age Movement – have taken the vocabulary developed in science and used it for its own purposes. We need to take that field back to be effective in the communication of the Gospel.

¹ Further Details can be found in my paper "Divine Action in the Framework of Scientific Thinking", Winter 1997, Fuller Theological Seminary

3.3. Paradigms

The shift from Newtonian Physics to Einsteinian Relativity has led to a lot of thinking about the nature of science. The enlightenment ideal of finally being able to acquire the final truth in science was given up as a result of the correction in the core of scientific knowledge. Some holdouts remain like the well-known Stephen Hawking who is still dreaming of a theory to explain everything (The so-called **Unified Theory**). The term paradigm was first used by Thomas Kuhn in his book “The structure of Scientific Revolutions” to discuss the development of thought in science. The term has been widely used by the New-Age folks and used to refer to all sorts of things. Please forget about that. We are interested here in the use of the term in science and not in the use in some esoteric group.

Thomas Kuhn used the term Paradigm to refer to frameworks of thought. For example the Newtonian Worldview was a Paradigm that was later overturned by Einstein’s Theory of Relativity. The interesting thing about Paradigms is that they have a coherence in themselves and develop their own language and way of reasoning. But elements of paradigms are not easily interchangeable. It is not possible to just rip one part out of one paradigm and compare it with another. Paradigms have to be seen as a whole and if they are to be compared then a part must be understood as a part of the whole system. There is a basic communication problem between paradigms since terms used might have slightly different meanings in different context (or paradigms). Our Christian faith could be seen as a Paradigm. Other Worldviews can also be treated like paradigms.

Alasdair MacIntyre later worked out how paradigms change and how people choose the paradigms they use. He favored the use of Tradition over the term paradigm. He said that paradigms can be evaluated by comparing their usefulness and their adaptability to changing circumstances. If you take Christianity as such a Paradigm then it surely qualifies for the superior Paradigm. No other “framework” has survived for so long and has shown to be able to adapt to all sorts of changing societal situations. Alasdair MacIntyre was very much anti-Christian before he studied Paradigms. He became a Thomist (someone following the thought of Thomas Aquinas a medieval Church-Theologian) as a result of his studies!

3.4. Web-based thinking

The Enlightenment viewed our knowledge as a hierarchy. Knowledge is built on a sure foundation. We have now ample evidence that such a foundation of certain knowledge as envisioned by Descartes does not exist. Instead all knowledge is by necessity circular and self-referential. It turned out that the long condemned self-referential features of frameworks of thought are one of the most important concepts in modern computer science and in modern mathematics. They are the most powerful ways to describe things.

Knowledge is more seen as a patchwork of different sources and experiences drawn together to make up what we know. The better and more comprehensive this patchwork is the higher we value it. Knowledge is by necessity partial. The systematic nature of Knowledge is limited. Post-Modern science has confirmed that what Paul said regarding knowledge about God is also true about our knowledge about the World and true for science:

I Cor 13:9 For we know in part.

Today there is a reluctance to adopt any Grand Schemes to explain everything like hoped for in the Enlightenment period. Communism and Nazism are such Enlightenment Grand Schemes that had to be abandoned.

Moreover the result of research into how we know came to the result that there always is a faith component in every scheme of reasoning. There are always parts of the system that cannot be proven by the system itself. Thus all rational schemes are incomplete. A mathematician with the name of Goedel found that out around 1930. His results are widely accepted and it is called “Goedels Theorem”². Any comprehensive scheme of reasoning is by necessity incomplete and cannot fully prove the validity of all its parts. The power of logic is limited by logic itself.

3.5. Nature of language

Quite a bit of study in this century went into the understanding of language. The Enlightenment assumed that language was a communication of information that was either true or false. Religious language was not seen as communicating anything of value.

But there is a simple example to prove that one wrong: Let us say we are in court and there is a Judge sentencing a criminal and he is saying:

“I sentence you to five years in prison”

Is this sentence’s primary role to communicate information? Is it true or false? These criteria really do not catch what is happening here. With that sentence the Judge has legally given that person a prison term. It is a legal declaration and that declaration has an effect on reality. It is in effect an action changing reality. The next thing that will happen as a result of this declaration is that the bailiff will come and take the prisoner away. Before the Judge pronounced his sentence the person was no prisoner. Now he is.

The question if a sentence is true or false is irrelevant. We do not know if the person will actually be in prison for 5 years.

Language is not only about communication but can also be a real action that can affect the future. Maybe we could think along these lines about prayer, blessings and exercising spiritual authority. We would be able to communicate what we mean by these things that we do based on the newly discovered action aspect of language.

The meaning of words is not just their definition. If I am talking about a cat then there is not only the picture of a generic cat in our minds but our whole lifetime experience with cats is triggered. The brain associates words and does not look up definitions. Thus everyone will understand something different when I say “cat”. From the rest of the context where this word was used our minds will select the correct interpretation of that word. Right now your mind is probably wondering what cat I was talking about. But sorry this was just an example of a word.

Language use requires a context, both a historical and a social context. Meaning is determined by the environment we live in. I had to relearn a lot about expressing myself when I moved into the United States from Germany where I grew up in. And I probably am not finished yet.

² See my Paper “Limits of Formal Systems”, Fall 1996, Fuller Theological Seminary

4. Implications for our Ministry

4.1. A response to Enlightenment

Maybe you are wondering: What does this entire presentation have to do with real ministry? First of all you will still hear lots of people using “Modern” Enlightenment thinking to judge Christianity as invalid. Here is good ammunition. Those people trying to attack you are not up to date on the development of science. Those things I have talked about can be used in creative ways. Here is a list of the most common objections against Christianity that I have experienced and some answers based on Science:

The Laws of Science determine the outcome of every event. Miracles are impossible.

Answer: The Laws of Science are based on probabilities. Miracles are highly unlikely to happen (that’s why they are miracles). Quantum Mechanics clearly says that matter is not behaving according to deterministic Laws. There is indeterminacy. If God can act on this level then God can do anything.

There is no God. Everything is just pure chance.

This is definitely a faith commitment. Chance means we do not know the reason why some things happen. Such a statement is therefore a commitment to ignorance and it may be a refusal to accept other explanations that give reasons why these “chance” things appear uncontrollable to us.

As Christians we know more than that. We know that God works through these things that science cannot explain. We also make a faith commitment. But we are not hiding that fact. And our explanation is in sync with creation and the witness of the historic and current Church. Our faith commitment actually explains and makes sense out of why there are events that are not controllable. The commitment to ignorance is not something one would expect from a scientist and certainly not helpful in looking for answers.

Christianity employs circular reasoning

All systems of knowledge or reasoning have to use circular reasoning to some degree. The question is not if a paradigm or a system of thought uses circular reasoning but the question is how good does it fit reality? Can it give purpose to life? Does it give an answer to the essential questions of life? And then: Was this system able to respond to different life situations? Does the system of beliefs propagates have any references in the past of working for longer periods of time? (The New Age systems are of recent origin!)

[this or that] is not reasonable/wrong/offensive

One cannot simply pick up one item out of a system that one does not understand and judge it. What is an offensive or unreasonable thing to be understood in relation to other parts of the framework. The person saying this should get familiar with the system of thought he is trying to judge before making such statements. Paradigms need to be understood as a whole. And the understanding of an insider of such Paradigms is usually superior to someone trying to understand it from the outside.

4.2. Evangelism as a Paradigm Shift

[Overhead “Paradigm Shift”]

One can use the notion of a Paradigm Shift developed by Thomas Kuhn and his followers to speak about conversion. This is based on our best available secular knowledge and maybe we can get a pointer or two from it.

There are two persons on this diagram. Each has its own framework of thinking. The outer boundaries are the level of experiences: Something that was heard, felt or seen. Then further to the center you have the conclusions drawn from experiences. The regularities which were deduced from these experiences. Finally there is the center which represents the central beliefs of that person. Those beliefs are far removed from the experiences and are highly abstract. They usually cannot be directly tested. The only way to get to those core beliefs is through multiple layers of reasoning.

In a Christian we would expect Christian Core beliefs and there is something else in the center of the person to be evangelized.

The interesting thing is now to observe what happens when these two frameworks meet.

There is an intersection of those two frameworks. This is the area of shared knowledge and shared experiences. We live in the same world after all and so there is a natural shared amount of experiences and perhaps some thought patterns. That shared area is very important since this is the basis for communication. Elements in that shared area might be seen differently from each person though. It is important to understand how the other persons views these shared events in order to build a better basis for communication.

The object of evangelism is now to replace the Central Beliefs with Christian ones (This certainly sounds very strange to you, but remember I am staying at the level of science).

To reach the core beliefs of the other person the Christian has to work through layers of reasoning. The best approach is to expand the area of shared experiences and knowledge first. Getting involved into that other person’s life can do this. Shared experiences can build a better basis for communication. But then also the interpretation of events and the understanding of reality need to be shared to reach the upper levels of reasoning.

What we want is to cause a so-called “Paradigm Shift” in the other persons life. This means a fundamental change in the core beliefs of the person. That is not easy. The way paradigms work is that they are trying to build systems of coherency. That person certainly has mechanism and explanations in the current paradigm to explain it and justify it. A paradigm change is something very dramatic for a person and this will not happen easily. There needs to be persistent work on the outer layers showing that the new paradigm proposed is better and can replace the other paradigm. This means working on issues here and there while the person is still holding up the old paradigm but it letting you argue about points in the outer areas and letting new experiences in. At some point the new paradigm has so completely replaced the surrounding area that a shift in the core becomes inevitable. And we could then see this as a conversion.

Note that there needs to be work done all around the core beliefs. You cannot simply have one issue to bring the conversion of the person about. There must be confirming

experiences, reasoning and other things all working together to effect such a change. And this process demands quite a bit of the person doing the evangelizing. That person must show that the new paradigm works better. A clear Christian witness embedded in daily life is essential.

Conclusion

I think our Christian faith has a big chance to turn our society around once more. Let us arm ourselves with the best knowledge available and then argue for our Christian faith on their turf! Most of the time they are hitting us with old overturned knowledge and we do not know how to defend ourselves.

Resources

Christoph Lameter *The Limits of Formal Systems*, 1996 Fuller Seminary,
<http://private.fuller.edu/clameter/phd>

Christoph Lameter *Divine Action in the Framework of Scientific Thinking*, 1997 Fuller Seminary, <http://private.fuller.edu/clameter/phd>

Dyrness, William. *Christian Apologetics in a World Community*. Intervarsity Press, 1983.

Warning: Most of the following resources take some discerning to handle. They contribute to the area presented but many do so from either a liberal or a non-Christian perspective. Elements can be useful but the general outlook is not acceptable. Resources are scarce in this area.

Hawking, Stephen. *Black Holes and Baby Universes and other Essays*. Bantam Books, 1993.

John Gribbin. *In Search of the Big Bang: Quantum Physics and Cosmology*. New York: Bantam Books, 1986.

Murphy, Nancey and George F.R.Ellis. *On the Moral Nature of the Universe*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.

Peacocke, Arthur. *Theology for a Scientific Age*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.

Polkinghorne, J.C. *The Quantum World*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984.

Russel, Murphy and Peacocke ed. *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine action*. Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1995.

Russell, Murphy and Isham. *Quantum Cosmology and the Laws of Nature: Scientific Perspectives on Divine action*. Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1993.

Templeton, John Marks and Robert L. Herrmann. *Is God the Only Reality?* New York: Continuum, 1994.

MacIntyre, Alasdair *Three Rival Version of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy and Tradition*, 1990, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana

Hauerwas Stanley, Nancey Murphy & Mark Nation ed. *Theology without Foundations: Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth* 1994, Abingdon Press

Kuhn, Thomas *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* University of Chicago Press, 1962