

ESCAPE FROM REASON OR THE RENEWING OF OUR MINDS? (SLIDE 1)

There will be two main parts to this paper: **(Slide 2)**

The first will deal with a fundamental question concerning the state of human rationality in current 21st century intellectual thinking. It will explore briefly changes in the essential criteria, developed to achieve good reasoning, since the beginning of modern science in the 16th century, and ask whether such criteria are still in existence in ordinary social conversation in the 21st century and, if so, whether they can lead us confidently to truth.

The second part to the paper will consider how one should, from a Christian-Biblical perspective, contemplate the use of the human mind in today's world.

A recent conversation (Slide 3)

The question about what it means to reason in today's attempts to communicate in a way that seems to be self-evident appears strange. Children are expected to learn from an early age, at the level they can understand, what is a reasonable way of expressing their thoughts and ideas to other people. We think we know how to discern what is a rational proposition and what is irrational. We all believe that, on the whole, we are rational people; we know how to discuss matters in a measured manner that abides by principles of logical argumentation that everyone else recognises as the right way to communicate with one another.

And yet, there can be strong disagreements about claims that people make about what is true, and even whether the concept of truth itself can be defended any longer. A week or two ago, I listened to a broadcast debate between two prominent academics with its title "**What is 'truth' in a post-truth world?**" At a number of points they disagreed on fundamental issues about the nature of truth or, indeed, whether in the contemporary intellectual environment one can speak meaningfully about truth as a reality at all.

Here are some highlights of their exchange:

- To speak of a post-truth world is to turn to a world where subjective feelings become the measure of what the present generation is prepared to accept as being true for each individual. Thus, in a discussion about what is right to believe and how to act, two people may appeal to the distinction between 'my truth' and 'your truth'. The main criterion for how a person relates to what they

believe to be true is what they feel comfortable about. In other words, truth becomes a purely subjective, personalised feeling about what gives people pleasure, and its opposite falsehood what causes them to be disturbed, irritated or angry.

Objective facts about a matter no longer persuade people to base their opinions and lifestyle on what can be proven by overwhelming reliable evidence. The problem is that facts can easily be twisted and manipulated. No longer can they be relied upon to judge what is true and what false. The outcome is a complete moral relativism, where every moral judgement is subjected to individual preferences. What on social media is codified as either like or dislike. Any truth claim is judged within a particular framework of belief, which might well echo one's cultural heritage or ideological leaning. We see everything through the kind of glasses we put on, often for reasons of self-interest. This being where social forces have landed us, we cling to the perspectives that we find most appealing. This should lead to a tolerant world, where no universally-recognised, objective truth can be discovered that divides individuals or groups into antagonistic adversaries. Reason, therefore, has its limits. It cannot compel us, by its appeal to incontrovertible evidence, to believe that certain facts about the external world are actual and real, because they are accurate and correct. **(Slide 4)**

- The problem about truth is if it comes from an external source. We should start with the notion that there is nothing good or evil in the world. We, from within our highly personalised consciousness, impose moral right and wrong, according to our experience of life. We project what is good and evil for us, according to what effects these characteristics have for us. In other words, what we accept or deny depends on what consequences they produce for our individual lives. For example, if I hate some people I soon discover that unconditional hatred has negative consequences for my well-being. We don't need someone else to tell us what to believe or do. What motivates us to believe or act in certain ways are just the things that produce positive results in the world. I have to make up my mind from my experience what is valuable in life and then act on it. Objective truth is dangerous, because it cannot be challenged. It is incompatible with individual freedom. We need the autonomy to be independent of other peoples' certainties so that we can discover who we are and grow into that reality. **(Slide 5)**
- These are some of the arguments that are used to confirm that culture now operates in a post-truth world. However, there is another side to the argument about truth and rationality. Truth matters in order that we can discern what is in error, inaccurate, a misunderstanding, a fallacy, or just plain wrong. This requires the ability to reason in a way that is logical and coherent; that the conclusion of an argument, for example, does not contradict the premises on which the mode of reasoning is based. It is based on the necessity of antithesis, so that truth claims can be judged to be either right or wrong. The truth about

what is real in the world has to make sense, it has to produce beliefs and actions that we can live by.

- A post-truth world leads to a post-justice world. Let's take an example. It is true that Russia has signed up to a UN Treaty that protects the complete independence of Ukraine as a sovereign nation. Its signature to the Treaty cannot be denied. The Treaty forbids external interference in the life of the Ukrainian people. An invasion of its territory, therefore, is a complete contradiction of the decision it made to recognise the independence of this nation.

All these facts are undoubtedly true. It is, therefore, a major untruth to repudiate the arguments it used when it signed the Treaty. Moreover, it also contradicts other Treatises that have affirmed its previous adherence to a long list of Human rights. If only feelings dictate knowledge about facts and the post-Putin Russian government feels that Ukraine should be an integral part of its sovereign sphere of influence then its stance is based on subjective categories, such as fear, remorse, shame and grief. If justice is to prevail in international relations, it is not just because it will produce peace, but because justice is an objective reality that demands compliance. The alternative is the situation described at the very end of the Book of Judges: "in those days...all the people did what was right in their own eyes".

- Morality cannot be just a collective decision. What about moral revolutionaries? How is it possible to justify the actions they have taken to challenge and overturn evil laws and actions, such as slavery, female genital mutilation, trafficking of women and young girls for sexual usage, torture, racial injustices, to name but a few, if truth is not universally recognised and upheld? **(Slide 6)**
- It is dishonest to claim that truth claims are dangerous because they are often bigoted. Only human beings are bigoted. Truth claims can, of course, be wrong. They can be manipulated to push the particular agenda of a campaigning group. One such claim is that gender-confused young people are more likely to commit suicide if they are refused hormone treatment in the (false) hope that they can change gender and, thereby, alleviate their confusion. Such a claim has been debunked by carefully constructed longitudinal research on thousands of young people, undertaken in Sweden. The results show that statistically the claim is false. There are proven ways of validating or falsifying truth claims. They are based on a careful assessment of the evidence adduced for making them: are the sources reliable? Do the people who make them have a history of being reliable in affirming certain allegations, or can their affirmations be exposed as being the result of pushing a certain ideological opinion. Things are true if they measure up to what actually exists and can be demonstrated by a judicious weighing of all relevant evidence in their favour and in the rejection of arguments against their trustworthiness.

Rationality as exercised in scientific discoveries (Slide 7)

The work of scientists depends for its success on the ability to follow correctly certain rational principles of investigation. In so far as science continues to function adequately, producing new understandings of the working of the natural world, it is an irreversible part of the fabric of life. It is, therefore, a curious paradox that the claims of science are denigrated by some and the rationality on which it is based is dismissed, and yet the achievements of science are adhered to and depended on. To give one example. The most complete answer to post-truth assertions is to entrust oneself, at a speed of 240 kilometres an hour on an airport runway, to the conclusive knowledge achieved by aeronautical engineers. An indisputably affirmative answer to the question ‘and will it fly?’ is sufficient to quell a basic disbelief in the reality of, at least some, scientific conclusions as being true. Over and over again, the scientific method has demonstrated its capacity to reach and chart an irreducible reality in the material world. We should, therefore, conclude that there exist certain objective laws of nature – in the above example, those investigated by the science of aerodynamics – whose valid formulation and practicality is precisely what explains why aircraft fly in accordance with those laws.

The proven track record of scientific discovery and subsequent technological development is inexplicable on any other grounds than those which confirm that unequivocal knowledge of the real world is established. The success of science in the empirical testing of hypotheses, derived from a general account of gathered data, and in the ability to make positive predictions on the basis of theories, points to an utterly reliable structure to the universe. Humanity, therefore, can dismiss as fantasy any proposition that anyone may put forward that humans are able to create a different kind of basic reality, based entirely on how they feel. Thousands of further examples could be given of the logic of scientific research, on whose results we depend daily for health and well-being.

Rationality as exercised in legal processes (Slide 8)

In ordinary life (in accordance with what may be called a common-sense view), truth refers to a belief or statement about an event or fact that corresponds to the reality to which it refers. We sometimes phrase it by saying, “*it is the case that...*(for example) this morning, it started raining at exactly 0934 hrs.” This is a true statement, if, and only if, in fact the first drops of rain fell when the atomic clock registered 0934.

The ability to check out the truth of a claim by seeing how it agrees with a certain set of circumstances is a necessary assumption for any conversation, as in the statement, “sadly Alfred Smith (a fictitious character) has just been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.” The assertion, to be true, has to correspond to a scan or x-ray that shows a malignant growth in the pancreas. **(Slide 9)**

This understanding of truth is applied rigorously in a court of law, where statements purporting to be true (for example, “I was 50 miles/ 80 kms) away from the scene of the murder, when it happened”) have to be supported by incontrovertible evidence before they can be accepted as what actually was the case. If the truth of the matter cannot be ascertained (by reliable witnesses or some material proof), there is no way of judging whether the claim may be a mistake, due to poor memory, or a deliberate fabrication, intended to deceive the judge and jury into thinking there was a convincing alibi. Discovering the truth of a matter is paramount in all trials; it is particularly important in cases of the miscarriage of justice, when fresh evidence or a reassessment of existing evidence points to errors of fact (or the interpretation of fact) in the case of the first trial. **(Slide 10)**

So far so good, one might say. It would be a brave (or foolhardy) person who did not hold to a correspondence theory of truth, when she was the one being falsely accused of a crime and was trying to clear her name. However, when we move from statements about events in the world that can be verified or falsified to statements about aesthetic judgements (e.g. about the undoubted beauty and significance of a particular painting or piece of music), moral values (such as the integrity and sanctity of all human life) or religious beliefs (e.g. the affirmation that Jesus Christ rose to new life three days after he was declared dead and had been buried), the situation becomes more complicated. The matter of complexity is, of course, true for any theory about how truth claims can be justified.

Inference to the best explanation (IBE) (Slide 11)

Knowledge that is entirely derived from below, that is by inference from data acquired from material sources (as in the cases of scientific research and legal processes), is intrinsically incapable of discovering the whole truth about what it means to be human. What is required, in addition to knowledge ‘from below,’ is knowledge ‘from outside.’ Just as science operates within the framework of a given material reality, so, in order to complete the circle of knowledge, there needs to be another reality available, which tells us what otherwise we could not know. Within the Christian tradition of thought, this is called revelation or divine disclosure.

What is required, if we are to obtain justified true belief about matters that cannot be settled by appeal to empirical data alone? In other words, how can we arrive at a unified body of knowledge that does justice to human reality in this world in all its manifold aspects? It seems to me that the heuristic device, known as ***Inference to the Best Explanation (IBE)***, may serve as a fruitful tool for concluding what is the ultimate truth of any matter. The *best* explanation is unlikely to be the *simplest* explanation, just because the latter tends to reduce complexity to what can be handled by unaided human reason, and as a result ignores substantial pieces of evidence on methodological grounds. However, when the simplest explanation does not explain, a more comprehensive one, if available, has to be sought. **(Slide 12)**

IBE works by comparing alternative explanations of the data of experience. Inherently, it incorporates into its method of working any evidence that seems to be germane to the case. Nothing is ruled out of court *a priori*. The 'best' explanation is, at one and the same time, the explanation most warranted by all relevant evidence and the one that would, if true, provide the best understanding. I claim that this heuristic device is the most adequate way of engaging in a dialogue between the Christian faith and the predicament of secular, post-Enlightenment culture concerning how powers of human reason can be authenticated and the question of what is true and how can we be sure? I would further argue that in this sense it amply fulfils the criteria for being a missiological project, just because inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue is one aspect of the church's missionary mandate.

Before citing instances of the way in which IBE can work in the context of the dialogue with a so-called 'post-truth culture', particularly in current Western discourse, we need to deal with a criticism of the method itself, namely that it is not the purpose of Christian faith to give explanations. It can be shown that science is unable, on its own terms, to give an adequate explanation of why its own procedures are highly successful, but the Christian faith (understood as Trinitarian theistic realism) produces a refined explanation that does justice to the question, why is the scientific method so profoundly able to do its job? It also gives a coherent explanation of the origin and justification of moral sentiments and judgements, showing that it is not possible to derive intrinsic prescriptive demands from a naturalistic view of the world. **(Slide 13)**

Now, let us suppose that this discussion is applied to arguments about the causal events that have produced *homo sapiens* (as we know ourselves), the best explanation becomes the one that has the ability to give a more probable solution to the question, how has human life arisen? And, if this is then cast in the form of the likeliest originating set of circumstances, then we may adduce Judeo-Christian theism (the belief in the infinite, personal creator God, revealed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and new Testaments) as the most probable explanation of the anthropic principle, a proposition which speaks of the necessary conditions existing for the emergence of human beings on this particular planet within a vast universe. If the theistic explanation is correct the chance of human beings coming into existence is 100%, because the will of the creator will be accomplished. If, on the other hand, the naturalist explanation is correct, the chance is greatly reduced (almost to zero), for the probability that the events necessary for human beings to have shown up out of an impersonal evolutionary process is almost inconceivable; only the slightest, minutest variation in the initial conditions and subsequent developments would have caused the process to finish up being utterly sterile. This does not equate to demonstrating the truth of the theistic hypothesis, but makes it both extremely probable and all other theories about human life on earth extremely improbable.

In answer to these difficulties in applying the theory of IBE to the question of a theistic or non-theistic universe, one can readily admit that there cannot be as great a

degree of conviction about the truth of the matter as is the case of scientific investigation. This is because the evidence is of a different class. This is in the nature of the case, for we are dealing here with two kinds of reality, and therefore two kinds of knowledge: the external world and the internal world of the human experience of being human. In the latter case, the observer becomes the observed and, therefore is highly engaged in a personal and subjective exploration of her own sense of being and identity. The challenge of being entirely honest about questions that affect our own self-understanding is immense. How does one begin to stand outside one's own formation as a human being in order to have an impartial and unprejudiced vantage-point?

Fortunately, it is precisely this heuristic means of arriving at the greatest possible approximation to the truth that can overcome subjective partialities. IBE is a rational consideration of all claimants to know the ultimate reality that lies behind the experience of being human. No claim to know the ultimate meaning of life is excluded prior to debating the alternatives. All can be part of the dialogue, which proceeds by way of testing the claims against one another and against the stubborn facts of human life in the world. Naturally, there is no final human arbiter. Each person or group has to decide for itself how far its intuition, common-sense, philosophy of life (home-spun or borrowed), ideology or religion is best able to make sense of the widest spread of the reality of life. The process is one of advocacy in which alternative explanations are promoted, discussed and judged. It is assumed that where there are conflicting claims, they cannot both be valid.

When it comes to knowledge in the realm of human self-awareness, this is almost certainly the best way of arriving at an understanding of how and why things are as they are. This is a non-dogmatic, bottom-up approach. If alternative explanations are treated fairly, on the basis of considering the opinions of others as one would wish others to consider one's own, the most favourable condition for arriving at a knowledge of the truth can prevail. The method, in its application to the dilemma concerning rationality and truth, can heal the breach between knowledge of facts and mere opinions, between public truth and private beliefs.

It is exemplified in a book by Keith Ward, in which he concludes by arguing that, as an explanation of human experience in the universe, materialism as an alternative to theism is deficient in its ability to explain a number of ultimate questions: the final basis of matter, consciousness, moral sensibility, the universal longing for a sense of purpose, the commitment to rational thinking and the existence of the universe. These are precisely the questions, and there are others (such as aesthetic appreciation and the intrinsic dignity of human beings), which are unanswerable on the basis of a truncated materialistic view of reality.

It is curious, however, that a theistic world-view (rejected by metaphysical materialism) gives a perfectly adequate, rational explanation of each one of these questions. It is, perhaps, not surprising that some atheists are prepared to concede that, although in their opinion theism is false, human beings nevertheless function

better on the supposition that it is true. This, of course, though not a demonstration of its truth, may be a reliable indication.

Renewing of the mind (Slide 14)

The outcome of the previous discussion, if it can be intellectually reasonable to argue that the best arguments are in the hands of those committed to a theistic view of human life, then there is ultimately only one way of thinking, if truth is to be attained.

It is not at all surprising, on the basis of the Biblical doctrine of God's creation, that the minds of human beings, when used correctly, are able to be attuned to what is true about the objective reality of life around them, especially what they can learn about themselves as created in God's image. Our intelligence is a precious gift given by God, so that we can communicate with him and enjoy the creation he has made for our benefit.

The Scriptures have much to say about our minds that is extremely positive. At the same time it recognises that our minds have become warped because, as fallen human beings, we have demanded to be independent of the God who has made us.

The Biblical passage that most clearly and powerfully uncovers the delusion of false thinking amongst human beings occurs towards the beginning of Paul's letter to the church in Rome. He indicates that it comes naturally to human beings to suppress the truth about the fundamental reality of existence, namely the being of God and the creation he has brought into life. The passage begins with the observation that the suppression of the ultimate truth has a moral cause: it is "by their wickedness" (Rom. 1:18).

As a result of not being willing to recognise that God alone is the origin of all things created, "their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Rom. 1:21). "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie" (Rom. 1:25). The result of this exchange was that God confirmed them in the exercise of their "depraved mind (leading them) to do what ought not to be done" (Rom 1:28). All this was against the background of the fact that humans who act in this way believe this is the wisest way of behaving: "although they claimed to be wise, they became fools" (Rom.1:22). There in a nutshell is the foundation of human folly in all its manifestations, the human deceit to believe that their thinking prevails over God's intelligence.

Elsewhere, Paul emphasises the futility of a mind that inherently is hostile to God: "Those who live according to the sinful nature (literally, according to the flesh) set their minds on what their nature dictates...The mind that is guided by the sinful nature is death...Such a mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law...Those controlled by their base instincts cannot please God" (Rom. 8:5-8).

He repeats these thoughts in other letters, using different language, but basically saying the same thing. To the Ephesian Christians he says,

“You must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts” (Eph.4:17-18).

The consequence of following their disordered minds is that

“they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity with a continual lust for more” (Eph. 4:19).

Paul warns the Christians in Colossae to keep clear of those whose “unspiritual mind puffs them up with idle notions” (Col. 2:18).

Finally, on the negative side of what has happened to the minds of humans who refuse to recognise the only wise God, Paul reminds the Christians in Rome that

We speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing...We speak of God’s secret wisdom...None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory” (1 Corinthians 2:6-8).

The route to a renewed mind (Slide 15)

So, what is the Biblical pathway to a renewed mind, to right thinking, to a purified rationality amidst the absurdities that are disseminated by the ill-considered, short-sighted and self-appointed guardians of this world’s wisdom? Paul’s injunction to the Christians in Rome is well known:

“Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2).

Believers in Jesus are united to him, who has given his life to set them on a new path, and his Spirit to enable them to keep to that way of living. At the same time, they continue, whilst living on this earth, to be in daily contact with the old way of life with its myriad temptations and pressures to stray from the new commitments they have entered into. It is not surprising, therefore, that the apostolic letters to the young Christian communities remind them to guard against the kind of world that they have undertaken to leave. They are strongly urged not to be drawn back into the kind of life that once dominated their thinking and actions.

What does Paul say to the young converts whose lives he is nurturing about having their minds transformed? The foundation-stone upon which the new life being experienced by those who have transferred their allegiance from the darkness of paganism to the light of Jesus Christ is God’s initiative in sending his only Son into this troubled world to create, through his death and resurrection, a new order of human existence. Paul summarises God’s action as an act of salvation:

“The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright and godly...Jesus Christ...gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds” (Titus 2:11, 14).

Throughout his letters, using different metaphors, he follows his summary, of the disarray which characterises the present world, with the ways by which God has provided an escape from its false certainties and destructive habits, thereby entering into a new world. We may pick out three different ways indicated by Paul that God uses to ensure that our minds are attuned to the characteristics of kingdom-based rationality:

- The first pathway to a new life is signalled by the symbols of death and resurrection. Through trusting personally in the one sacrifice offered by Jesus that atoned for the sins of the whole world people are counted as righteous in the sight of God. What follows is that we are reconciled to God, our alienation is overcome and we enter a new dimension of life. Paul uses the image of baptism to convey the meaning of what has taken place:

“We have been buried with (Christ) by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

Baptism is an act of initiation into this new life. It is highly symbolic in the way that it was carried out in the apostolic and post-apostolic periods. Usually it happened by total immersion, in which the new believer was submerged in water and then brought out of the water, whilst the words of administration, “I baptise you in the name of Jesus”, or “in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit”, were pronounced over the candidate. It was also customary to remove one’s everyday clothes and put on a special robe.

In this rite we can see the three-fold transference from the old world to the new by death (entering the water), burial (going under the water) and resurrection (emerging from the water). The removal of the impediments of the old way of life is signified by the change of clothes. Possibly, if the baptism happened in a river, the transference from one world to another is indicated by entering the water from one bank and leaving it by the other. This imagery is further reflected in Paul’s letter to the believers in Colossae:

“You who were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in the body of (Christ’s) flesh through death” (Col. 1:21-22).

“In (Christ) you also were circumcised...When you were *buried* with him in baptism, you were also *raised* with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead” (Col. 2:11-12). The italicised words are intended to emphasise the images of death (by crucifixion) and resurrection.

“If you have been *raised* with Christ, seek the things that are above... Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have *died*, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:1-2). The symbolism of the change of garments, seems to be implied in the following injunction: “Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly...Seeing that you have *stripped off the old self...Clothe yourselves* with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience...Above all, *clothe yourselves* with love” (Col. 3:5, 12,14, emphasis added).

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- The second pathway to a new life is the gift of God’s Spirit for those united with Christ in his death and resurrection. This new presence of the Spirit is also related intimately to the transition from one world to the other:

“Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death... (We) do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires, but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires...The mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God...If you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body you will live” (Romans 8:2, 4-7, 13).

The language Paul uses here coincides with what he has already used in speaking of baptism as dying and rising with Christ. The new life is life in the Spirit, which empowers believers to rid themselves of the desires, prompted by the unreconstructed, sinful nature still enmeshed in the thought processes of the old world, that used to dominate their minds and emotions.

In his letter to the churches of Galatia, Paul spells out in detail the complete contrast between the two worlds: one controlled by “the law of sin and death” and the other by “the law of the Spirit of life.” In a nutshell, in passing from one world to the other we come alive:

“Live by the Spirit...and do not gratify the desires of the flesh (sinful nature)...*Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh (sinful nature) with its passions and desires.* If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16, 18. 24-25); emphasis added

Paul gives a list of examples of the desires of the flesh. He then contrasts these with a further list of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:19-23). The reality that distinguishes the two arises from the origin of each. In the first case, it is fallen human nature that stimulates an appetite for passionate yearnings that can only be satisfied by thoughts and deeds which further destroy our humanity. In the second case, it is the work of God’s Spirit that, through a new birth, produces those virtues that correspond to the kind of humans God intends us to be.

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- The third pathway to the new life in the kingdom of Christ is set out by Paul in his letter to the churches in the region around Ephesus:

“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self...to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:22-23).

Paul spells out some of the elements of this divergence between the old and new worlds in a passage that warns of the appalling consequence for those who are still sucked into this world’s system of belief and behaviour:

“Among you there must not even be a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people...For of this you can be sure: no immoral, impure or greedy person – such a person is an idolater – has any *inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.*”

Paul and the other writers of letters to the churches during the first century, Peter, John, James, the author of Hebrews, were acutely aware that the Christians were undergoing persecution, sometimes of a very degrading kind. Surprising though it may seem, but the way they are to react is to manifest an extremely high pattern of goodwill and generosity towards those who despise, detest and abuse them:

“Have unity of spirit, love for one another, a tender heart and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing” (1 Peter 3:8-11).

Conclusion (Slide 18)

I hope that this talk has given you some insights into the pressures that Christians are under when trying to guide their lives through the disordered thinking and acting in a so-called post-truth world. In the Western world in particular, but not only there, human beings are emerging from a world that for 1,700 years has embraced the Christian world-view. The result in so many ways, some of which I have tried to illustrate, is a lack of confidence in the power of unaided reason to think straight about what is the best way to live in the only world that God has created for humans to flourish in.

As we have seen, in attempting to order our daily lives, ignoring or opposing the existence of God’s self-revelation in which he tells the truth about who He is and what it means to be human, the contemporary world has become confused about its own humanity. Increasingly in the last 60 or so years, there have been a number of attempts to substitute deceptive and destructive ideological convictions as substitutes for the only real world that exists. One of the principal callings of Christian mission in these days is to show that badly directed thinking has enormously harmful effects and to call our generation to acknowledge again the universal truths about who we are. This

requires us to have the mind of Christ as revealed to us in his life and in the teaching of his first disciples. Hopefully, this will help to stem the tide of the fictitious beliefs being disseminated by the false prophets of the present age. This is a prophetic mission directed against the worthless idols being promoted and venerated by mindless advocates on all forms of media.