

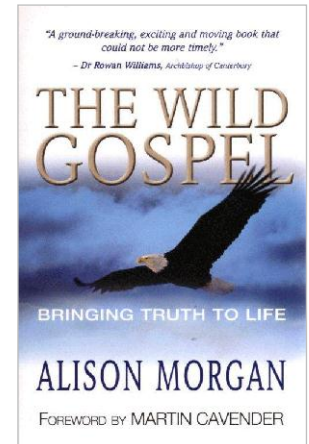
# The Wild Gospel : bringing truth to life

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## Introduction

*The most real in this world is the most invisible; but because the most invisible the most easily forgotten. Reading about these invisible realities of our Faith corrects the tendency for our hold on the invisible to lessen. It feeds our minds with the Truth.*

John Dalrymple<sup>1</sup>



This book is the mid point on a journey of discovery. It began a quarter of a century ago, when as a sixteen year old faced with the prospect of trying to map a path through the tangled growth of the adult world looming up before me, I first set out to acquire the tools that would make my journey possible. I began then with a question, and the question was this: what is truth? It seemed to me that if I could find the answer to this question, I would be standing on some kind of basic platform from which it would be possible to try and build the building that would be my life. And so, not knowing where else to begin, I took myself to the philosophy section of the school library and got out everything I could find on truth. Some of these books I took to Italy on the first of what were to become many trips there; and as I walked by black lava shores and surveyed the horizons of this new world I learned the difference between contingent truth and absolute truth, despaired of ever reaching out into the latter, if indeed there was such a thing as absolute truth, and settled for the prospect of constructing my platform on a foundation of contingent truth. Contingent truth doesn't bother itself with the absolutes of the universe; contingent truth is man-made truth, and it can be managed. Contingent truth declares that the 9.15 train for Sheffield will leave from platform one, and that when I sit on my chair it will hold my weight. Contingent truth offers a framework for life, a framework of predictability. You can build with contingent truth.

Back in England, I did two things. Because it seemed to me that to believe any contingent truth was an act of faith, and because I remembered from going to church parade as a Brownie that faith was what Christianity was supposed to be about, I went out and bought myself a Bible. The problem was that I couldn't understand it. Chairs and trains I was familiar with, but this book didn't seem to speak my language. So I returned to the philosophy section of the school library, and discovered Jean-Paul Sartre and existentialism. And I found that Sartre did speak my language. In fact he offered precisely what I was looking for: the suggestion that in the absence of the existence of any absolute truth the only way to make sense of life was to create one's own meaning.

So I did just that. I began the task of forming the world around me into the shape I wanted it to take. I set myself aims and targets and achieved them. I got a place at Cambridge to read Modern Languages, and embraced the opportunities of university life. My horizons broadened, and what had seemed to be the forbidding tangled growth of the adult world became, once parted with the tools of my new philosophy, not just manageable but exciting. Released from the confines of home and school, I flung myself into new activities. I cycled through the mist of frosty mornings to row on the Cam. I took the little orange tent of my childhood into the fens, and spent summer weekends amongst the hum of mosquitoes and the grating of sedge warblers. I discovered two thousand years of literature, and explored new modes of thought and expression. I spent a year in Florence, studying in shuttered libraries with curved wooden seats, watching shafts of sunlight slant through the darkened air, specks of dust dancing in their beam, and intruded upon by the hum of different sounding buses and the hooting of motorcycles hot in the world outside. I wandered through the flower-specked olive groves of

Tuscany in spring, and watched the solid yellow light of the afternoon sun spread itself like butter on the thick clods of the freshly ploughed fields in autumn. I stayed in the snow-blanketed valleys of Romansch-speaking Switzerland with one friend, surrounded by white peaks and enjoying the silence of crackling icicles and the warm breath of domestic cattle sheltered in wooden winter chalets; and I drove through the undulating vines of Bordeaux with another, pausing to taste the round oak warmth of the red and the laundry-crisp freshness of the white wines offered us at the end of tree-lined drives by sun-smiling vinticultors. I returned to Cambridge victorious in my conquering of this new world, fluent in Italian and confident in my abilities to ride the wave of the challenges I had embraced. A year later, and with a First to my name, I decided to stay on in this wonderful world of stimulus and opportunity, building on my platform of existentialism, creating my own meaning, making my own decisions, achieving my ambitions. I chose as the subject of my research the *Divine Comedy* of Dante Alighieri, foremost writer of the Italian Middle Ages and one of the greatest poets who has ever lived, and set out on a voyage through two thousand years of painting and writing in the attempt to discover why Dante had portrayed the other world as he had.

Then my friend died. Her name was Ruth, and she had been my Director of Studies as an undergraduate. They told me one day, as I walked from the library back to my college for lunch, that the cancer had returned. She was 41, dark-haired, intelligent and vivacious, with everything to live for. She inhabited a square, chaos-filled room with a big window overlooking the sunlit grass of the college quadrangle, pictures by her school-age children pinned crookedly to the walls, books and papers piled high on the desk, stimulus and encouragement oozing out of the brickwork for those who reached the mark of her high standards. I had spent many hours there breathing it all in, and she had changed me. Over the next few months I was to spend many hours with her again, shorter visits this time, sharing the jokes I'd picked up from my fellow-researchers at lunch time, and watching her die. And as I found myself forced to face the fact that that was what was going to happen, the universe that I had so carefully arranged around me fell apart. As the cancer consumed her body and dimmed her spirit, an earthquake rumbled beneath my platform of contingent truth, and the bricks of my self-constructed meaning began to totter and slide. Fresh back from Italy, I felt like the tower of Pisa: a magnificent edifice, the source of endless satisfaction to those who had built it, and the object of wonder and envy to the lesser buildings around it, now lurching over because it turned out to have been built on an unstable foundation. Ruth herself, by contrast, was more worried about the lectures she was supposed to be writing than about the prospect of impending death. She was a Christian. She didn't want to die; but she knew where she was going, and she felt quite capable of going there. We talked about it. The strength of Christianity, she said, lay for her in the fact that it had been found to make sense in many different cultures. It had a universality about it; it was not subject to history or geography. And so she took me back to the Middle Ages we'd spent so many hours discussing in that sun-filled room 3 years previously, and asked me a simple question: could I imagine existentialism making sense in the 13th century? And almost before she'd got the words out, dynamite exploded beneath my unsteady marble tower and blew it to smithereens. Of course I couldn't. I left the house that day drained and empty. You cannot construct your own reality. There are absolute truths, and one of them is death. Build what you like, but you're building it in a bubble. And sooner or later the bubble will meet a pin. Mine just had.

Ruth died on March 31st 1983. I saw her the evening before she died. She wished me a Happy Easter, and I think those were the last coherent words she spoke. A week before, she'd given me a book. It was a beautiful copy of the Visconti Hours, a 15th century Italian illuminated prayer book, and in it she'd written, in Latin, the following words: *I know two masters: Christ and letters.*

So as I boarded the train to Florence a few days after her funeral, I knew it was back to the drawing board. What is truth? Well, I'd watched Ruth die, unperturbed and in peace, a peace that had contrasted

so sharply with my own turmoil, and I knew that her building had stood on a platform which had not subsided when faced with the intrusion of death into our seemingly immortal lives. 'Two masters, Christ and letters', she'd written. I remembered my attempt years previously to look at the Bible, and it occurred to me that perhaps I should look at it again. Back in my familiar Florence, I went one day into Santa Croce, the big 13th century Franciscan church that stands near the river, just up the road from my old student digs, and round the corner from the National Library where I had watched the dust dance in the sunbeams. E M Forster compared it to a barn, and it offers a strange impression of emptiness, the footsteps of visitors clattering on the stone floor and echoing up to the high wooden roof, and frescoes of the saints glowing on the walls in the chapels at the east end when you put two hundred lire into the little slot machine that provides measured seconds of light. In the thirteenth century, before the days of the university, Santa Croce was a centre of learning, and Dante probably studied there - Dante, the poet who told the tale of his own journey from the tangled wood of confusion to faith in God, and in whose quest I was beginning to see my own. So as I gazed at the simple solidity of Giotto's paintings of St Francis I resolved that wherever truth was to be found, it had to be capable of providing a framework of meaning for then as well as for now. It had to meet Ruth's criterion and stand outside the language and assumptions of a particular culture. I'd had enough of contingent truth. This time it had to be the absolute version.

And so my journey began again. I read John's gospel, and admired the broad sweep of his philosophical concepts, but failed to understand any of his references to the Holy Spirit. My world didn't have a space for the Holy Spirit; my world was the tangible world of libraries and relationships, ambitions and bicycles. I took my Spiritless summary of John back to Ruth's husband in Cambridge. How would I like to pursue my quest, he asked. I could look at Christianity as a philosophy, and think about whether it made sense of the world I lived in - whether Ruth was right, and it would do a better job of offering meaning and purpose to any culture and any society than had my existentialism. Or I could look at it historically, and think about Jesus, the man who stood at its centre - for although the Christian faith was just that, a faith, it claimed to be founded on a fact, the fact of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and a fact furthermore which if it was indeed accepted as a fact would change the whole shape of the universe for me yet again. Or I could look at it experientially, and think about the lives of people like Ruth who had lived and died by it, and seemed to find it satisfactory. In the end I did all three. And I arrived, some months later, at the conviction that I had at last found absolute truth. Absolute truth was God, and it came incarnate in his son Jesus. It made sense of life both personally and universally. It offered a framework of meaning that could not be shattered by anything I could think of that life might throw at it; and it extended beyond my material and psychological world into a new world, a second, overlay world, a world of spiritual reality, a world of truth in a different dimension. And so it was that my journey began.

## **In the beginning**

When Jesus was taken by the council of the Sanhedrin to give an account of himself before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, this is what he said:

*'For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth'.<sup>2</sup>*

But what is truth? That was the question I had first asked myself at sixteen as I stood on the threshold of the adult world, and it was the question with which Pilate immediately responded to Jesus. For me it remains the crucial question of all time. It is a simple question. And yet, as often with simple questions, I find it admits of no simple answer. Jesus, of course, was the truth. 'I am the way, the truth and the

life'.<sup>3</sup> But what could such a statement possibly mean? For me it has been like a pebble dropped into a pond: it lands, splash, in the centre, clear and visible, at the moment of first encounter with Jesus; and yet its arrival is a beginning, not an end, for from the point of impact spring concentric ripples which slowly move over the surface of the pond in ever increasing and interdependent circles. God is at the centre; but then it turns out that God is at the circumference also. So the truth starts with God and has to work its way out over the surface of the pond from God, only to find its destination is also God. From the moment of impact there begins a dialogue, a dialogue between you and God, a dialogue which never ends, a dialogue which if honestly conducted will spread out into all areas of your life, into your relationships, and ultimately into the world you inhabit. This dialogue takes place, as dialogues must, in words; and it reflects and repeats a process that began at the beginning of time with the creation of the world itself.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.* John 1.1-3, 14

God spoke, and the universe sprang into being. In the beginning, we read in Genesis, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep. And what did God do: God spoke. *And God said*, let there be light. Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters. Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear. Let the earth put forth vegetation. God spoke; *and it was so*.<sup>4</sup>

Now for us this is tantalising but confusing. For us, words don't do this. For us, the spoken word is merely a vehicle, a vehicle for information. We live in a world of words, and words have become devalued. Millions of words sit locked up in books on the shelves of my study, ready to serve me and inform me the moment I take them down from the shelf. Words obey me as I sit at my desk and make them appear on the screen in front of me by a mere movement of my fingers. The very air is thick with words, words throbbing from radio masts and through mobile phones. Everything we do generates yet more words; reports, files, letters, newspapers. We have invented the internet, a world word machine where words jiggle and dance before your eyes the moment you log on. Everywhere there are words. We use them, abuse them, and ultimately flee from them; one of the essential skills of modern life is to know how to filter out words.

But for the writers of Genesis and John it was not so. For them, words are the expression of truth; and truth is the very principle of reality. For them, a word does not just exist, as it does for us. It isn't that the truth *is*, but rather that the truth *does*. When John wrote in Greek that Jesus was the Word, he used the word *Logos*. And *Logos* does not mean word in the sense we mean word. For us, a word is no more than a unit of speech, a soundbite in the air or a splatter of ink on a page. *Logos* is not this. *Logos* is a philosophical term, and it means something more like Reason than like Word. For the Greek philosophers who used it, *logos* was a principle or force, a statement about the universe.<sup>5</sup> When Jerome translated the Greek Bible into Latin some three hundred years after John first wrote his gospel, he translated the Greek *logos* by the Latin *verbum*, from which we take our word verb. And it has always seemed to me that in many ways 'verb' would be a better translation. A verb, as we learn at school, is a *doing* word. And through the verb, conjugated as we learnt to conjugate it at school, God does. God did, God does and God will do.

So Jesus is the Word, the word that spoke the world in the first place, and the word that became flesh and lived among us as truth, a truth that, like the pebble dropped in the centre of the pond, is not static

but dynamic; a truth that *does* something. This is the absolute truth I first started to look for at the age of sixteen. This truth is a force, the creative force which comes from God, through Christ, into the matter of the universe and into the spirit of man. This truth is the ultimate principle of reality. It pulses through the universe. It has to be engaged with for our life as we experience it to come into contact with that reality, to be transformed by it and to stay in contact with it for eternity. This is the truth that created the cosmos, the truth that sets us free, the truth in which we find ourselves and in the power of which we too become part of God's continued speaking into our world. But all that happens only as we appropriate the truth for ourselves and proclaim it to others. Truth is the gospel. Pilate couldn't take it in.

In a sense none of this was new with Jesus. It couldn't have been, of course, for the Word that God spoke in the incarnation of his son was the same as the Word which he spoke when he created the universe. God has always spoken. Before Jesus, he spoke through the prophets of the Old Testament. Since Jesus, he has spoken through the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth as Jesus called him. And always his words have been not just vehicles for information but carriers of power, the power of the creator himself.

This has enormous implications for us today. If the world was spoken by God, if Jesus was the word he spoke, and if the words that Jesus spoke are the truth, then it must surely follow that we, also spoken by God in the moment of our creation, spoken to by Jesus in the moment or moments of our conversion, and spoken to by the Spirit of truth who lives within us, we too must speak. What then are the words that we must speak?

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.* John 1.1-5

God spoke, and what he spoke was life, the life of a living universe. Jesus spoke, and what he spoke was life, the life of a living faith. God spoke, and there was light, and God separated the light from the darkness. Jesus spoke, and the light shone in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. The power of the creative word is a principle of the universe, in both its physical and spiritual aspects. And we, who are made in the image of God, and heirs to the kingdom of God, we are to speak also. What we are to speak are the words of the gospel, the truth of the good news which brings light into darkness. We have the key to the universe and therefore the power to change it - an outrageous claim, but one which lies at the heart of our faith.

The prophets of the Old Testament knew this. The task of the Old Testament prophets, like the task of their successors, was to speak the word of God to the people. It was not primarily to foretell the future, but to speak into the present - not to foretell, but to forthtell. The Old Testament prophet spoke the 'now' word of God to the people.<sup>6</sup> What did these prophets understand by a word? A word for us is merely a tool, which can be used for framing laws or explaining computers or advertising sunflower margarine or a whole host of other things. But in the mouth of an Old Testament prophet words were much more than that. Words didn't just contain meaning, they contained power. The Hebrew word *dabar* means both *word* and *deed*. The two were inseparable. So the prophet didn't merely pass on a message; his very enunciation of that message was itself the beginning of its fulfilment. He expected his God-given words to have the creative power of their originator - not just to be, but to *do* something. As the word was spoken, so it began to happen. The spoken word of God is invested with the creative energy of God. It isn't just a verbal noise; it is a living and powerful thing.<sup>7</sup>

And so it is with us. Since the ascension of Jesus and the subsequent coming of the Holy Spirit, we all have the potential to speak out the word of God, and in so doing to be part of his creative purposes. The Old Testament prophets knew that this would happen. Moses had expressed the wish that everyone might be a prophet, able to listen to God and to speak his word. Isaiah promised that God would pour his Spirit one day not just on his chosen prophets but on all people. Joel confirmed it in his famous declaration that sons and daughters would prophesy, old men dream dreams and young men see visions, and even menservants and maidservants receive the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>8</sup> We are the heirs of these ancient prophets. We, like them, are charged with the task of speaking the ‘now’ word of God into the lives of the people around us, of reintroducing the power of the Word into the lifeless garbled and printed shapes of our information age, of bringing the creative force of God into the formless void of empty souls, and light into the darkness of a world which has disconnected itself from truth. This is what it means to preach and to minister the gospel; this is what it means to live in the truth. It means nothing short of learning to live plugged in to the energy that sparked the Big Bang itself. And just as the energy of that explosion brought light into darkness and created the matter of the universe, so the energy available to us now brings light into the darkness of people’s lives. One day, that same energy will create a new universe, a new heaven and a new earth, and the old will pass away. That will be the day that we pass from Genesis and from John to Revelation.<sup>9</sup> That will be the day that our task as ministers of the word of God is complete - then, and only then.

So: I had begun at sixteen with the question ‘what is truth?’. And I came at twenty four to the conclusion that the answer lies in Jesus. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. Jesus is the Word of God, the word which created the universe and which created me. Jesus is the Word spoken by God into his spoken universe, to bear witness to the truth of its creation and purpose, and to draw humankind back into relationship with that truth. And I too am to speak that word. Everything I now do and am comes out of that single conviction. As Christians we do not speak words of information. We speak words of truth, and therefore words of power; and like Jesus we don’t just speak them, we *do* them. When Paul tells the Ephesian church to ‘speak the truth in love’, the verb he uses in fact means not just to *speak* the truth but rather to *do*, to *maintain*, to *live* the truth.<sup>10</sup> And that is our task too. Of ourselves, we can change nothing. But when we speak and live the truth, we find that our words and our deeds have the power of God himself: for a verb, as we saw, is a doing word.

But often the power of God has not been noticeably present amongst Christians. As I have pursued my question, and sought to watch and understand the ripples which spread out over the waters of life as I have experienced it and known others to experience it, I have found myself asking, in some anguish, a second question. Truth is the power of God in the universe. But is it the force that pulses through the church? Have we Christians learnt to appropriate that power in our own lives and to make it visible to others? Are we showing them the splash of the pebble and inviting them to allow the healing and liberating power of the ripples to flow through their lives? Is the truth, in all its life-changing power, what we have on offer?

And sadly I conclude that often it is not. We live in a culture which by and large is not receptive to the gospel. But we do not help the gospel, because we ourselves have lost touch with its dynamic power. We live by the truth; but it is a truth which has been stripped of its energy. The gospel burst into the world two thousand years ago as a word spoken with all the power of the creator God. It changed everything. People embraced it all over the Roman empire and beyond, many facing persecution and death rather than renounce their new, life-changing relationship with God. It is likely that within 50 years of Jesus’s death nearly 30% of the world’s population had been exposed to the gospel, and by the early 4th century the whole Roman empire was officially Christian.<sup>11</sup> The gospel has been a force for

change throughout history and all over the world, wherever and whenever it has been effectively preached and wholeheartedly embraced, both in the lives of individuals and through them of the societies of which they form part. And yet that is not the case, by and large, in the West today. There have been exceptions, but on the whole the last 300 years have been a period of decline, of loss of confidence in the power of the word, and of decreasing ability in the church to proclaim it. We stand, in the church, at the end of a long process of accommodation in which we have unconsciously sought to harmonise the gospel with the assumptions of our culture, a culture which in abandoning the quest for absolute truth has embraced a new set of values - rationalist, materialist, technological, and reductionist.<sup>12</sup> The effect has been that we have gradually turned the gospel from something subversive and life-changing to something tamed, packaged and institutionalised; from something expressed in words of power to something conveyed, if it is conveyed at all, in words of information. The gospel has been squeezed out from under the platform of our lives and become merely a picture on the wall, familiar but essentially unrelated to everyday reality. We must learn again to turn the word into a language, a living language that can speak into the assumptions of our culture just as Jesus spoke into the assumptions of his, and in so doing can do what he promised it would do:

*If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.* John 8.31-32

I think there is great hope that we can do this. We stand on the threshold of a new millennium. We have hailed it as the gateway to a new era of peace and plenty. Maybe it is; maybe it isn't. But one thing is sure: we are living at a time of cultural change. We are seeing a turning away from the technological and reductionist certainties of the recent past, and the beginnings of a search for a renewed spirituality. That spirituality is often not sought in the church; for the church stands for the old certainties of a reduced truth, certainties of dogma and religious practice and set ways of doing and being. As Christians we have an opportunity: the opportunity to reconnect with the truth, to reassess the way in which we live and proclaim the gospel, and to allow God to burst into the third millennium with the same force with which he burst into the first. But we will do that only if we are prepared to abandon the values and certainties of our culture, to learn to look at it afresh in the same way that Jesus looked at the culture of two thousand years ago; and then to have the courage to reach out from that new place and proclaim the truth into the lives of the individuals around us.

This is an exciting prospect. We have the opportunity to seize and inspire a new vision of the potential of the gospel in contemporary society. Let's watch the pebble fall, and let's follow the ripples outwards. This isn't going to be a how-to book; my aim is rather to paint a picture of new possibilities, and invite you, the reader, to enter into it; to impart the confidence to undress the gospel from its dull, restricting clothes, and reclothe it in the eye-catching colours of its original garb. Four centuries ago Michelangelo painted the Sistine chapel ceiling. With the common usage of the chapel the protective varnish became discoloured until, although the power of the figures could still be seen, the bright colours of the original were lost. It took the Japanese to restore it, to clean away the grime and return it to a glow of colour so bright that many were horrified by the unfamiliar intrusion of life into what had become reassuringly muted. And so it is with the gospel. Jesus burst into the world with a power and a dynamism which turned the settled ways of doing and being upside down. Many didn't like it; but its impact could not be denied, and the world was transformed. Then gradually the colours dimmed with usage, and now the Christian faith is familiar, still accepted by many, but given no real place in the way things are. In other parts of the world this is not so; and perhaps just as it took the Japanese to bring Michelangelo back to life, so we should look to Argentina or South Korea, Uganda or China, to see what restoration can look like for the gospel. For we live in exciting times; times of change, times of opportunity. There is, as Shakespeare perceived, 'a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood,

leads on to fortune; omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries.’ And, to continue in his words, ‘on such a full sea are we now afloat, and we must take the current when it serves, or lose our ventures.’<sup>13</sup>

If we are to ride this current I think there are two things we must do. Firstly, we must take a close look at the assumptions of our culture in the light of the gospel. The gospel is not a sealed and timeless package, fixed in a set form of words and lived out in a particular way. The gospel is the word of God, spoken before time but spoken also into time, spoken therefore in a particular language and into a particular culture, and yet containing universal truth which can be carried by any language and be understood in any culture. If it is to be successfully appropriated by anyone other than a first-century Jew, it therefore has to be translated - not just verbally, from Aramaic to English or Bemba or Punjabi, but conceptually, so that it speaks to the needs and values of a given people. In order to do this for our generation and our culture, we need firstly to examine the way in which Jesus spoke the gospel into the cultural context of first century Palestine, and then to try and look at the assumptions and values of our own society and see how he might have spoken it to us. If the gospel is about truth, it follows that it must be focussed into untruth; and each generation must challenge the untruths amongst which they live with the same blunt force with which Jesus challenged the untruths of his day. And so in this book we will look both at the challenge Jesus mounted to the culture of his time and, drawing on the work of what we refer to as the gospel and culture movement, at the challenge he might have mounted to ours.

It is however my conviction that essential though this process is, it is no more than a precondition, a necessary first stage in what we have to do. Jesus spoke words of radical criticism into the culture of his day, but not, I suggest, with the fundamental intention of changing it. His target was not society but the individual, and his critique of the values and practices of his society was directed to that end. His aim was to open the eyes of the individuals and groups with whom he spoke to the shaky foundations on which they had built their lives, and on which their whole society was founded - just as Ruth opened mine with her one simple question about the dubious universality of my late twentieth century Western European existentialist philosophy. Jesus criticised the culture in order to get people out of the culture, out of the world of empty words and truthless practices, and into - to use the traditional language - the kingdom of God, the alternative world of spiritual reality, the world of truth. So once we have learned to look with God’s eyes at our manmade world, we must learn to speak with God’s words into the lives of the people who belong to it. That is the real aim: to let people know the truth, so that the truth can set them free. Then, and then only, can the two worlds begin to fit back together; then only can we talk about what it will mean to live out the gospel in our own particular setting.

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<sup>1</sup> *Simple Prayer*, p.48. Full details of the works cited in the notes are given in the bibliography at the end.

<sup>2</sup> John 18.37 (RSV). All Bible quotations are from the NRSV unless otherwise stated.

<sup>3</sup> John 14.6

<sup>4</sup> See Genesis 1.1-2, 3, 6, 9, 11.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of this see Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, p.115-26.

<sup>6</sup> ‘The prophetic task in any age is to perceive the word of God in its contemporary relevance so that it may be proclaimed with prophetic authority as the ‘Now’ word of God’, C Hill, *Prophecy past and present*, p.5.

<sup>7</sup> See for example Isaiah 55.10-11, where God says through the prophet that the word which goes out from his mouth shall not return to him empty, but shall accomplish that which he purposes.

<sup>8</sup> Numbers 11.29; Isaiah 44.1-4; Joel 2.28-29

<sup>9</sup> See Revelation 21.1.

<sup>10</sup> Ephesians 4.15. See J Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, p.171-2.

<sup>11</sup> Statistics given by P Johnstone, *The Church is bigger than you think*, p.68. Christianity was made the official religion of the empire by Constantine in 312 AD.

<sup>12</sup> This is a theme developed with particular power by Walter Brueggemann; see especially *Finally comes the poet: daring speech for proclamation*. For a recent discussion of our concept of truth see Os Guinness, *Time for truth*.

<sup>13</sup> Julius Caesar, IV iii 215.