

Teacher's Notes Film Four

Dare to Know

Background Notes

Dare to Know is the title of Immanuel Kant's essay 'What is Enlightenment' written in 1784:

*"Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without another's guidance.... **Dare to know!** Sapere aude! 'Have the courage to use your own understanding', is therefore the motto of the enlightenment."*

The Enlightenment or 'The Age of Reason' that swept through Europe during the 18th century looked at everything with fresh eyes. Medieval theories based on superstition or outdated reasoning were confronted and discarded. As the rights and dignities of individual men came to be more recognised, so ideas about governance also changed and the period was a time of intense social and political upheaval. The French Revolution (1789-1799) was the first in a line of revolutions that engulfed Europe, replacing the rule of Church and Monarchy with more liberal ideals of equality and political representation.

The Enlightenment and Religious Thought

Enlightenment thinkers also believed that mankind should free itself from the blind allegiance to religious dogma that had characterised medieval life. They questioned the truth-value of religious claims and the place of the supernatural in people's lives. Philosophers like Voltaire (1694-1778) demanded to know what part religion should play in society, while people like David Hume appeared to challenge the very foundations of faith in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779).

Others refused to discard religion but hoped that, by the use of reason, they might arrive at one purified of outlandish features - a "rational" or "natural" religion. It was during the enlightenment that deism, fideism and so-called 'religion of the heart' developed along with acceptance of no religious belief at all, or atheism:

Deism: The belief that reason does lead us to a creator but that there is no evidence that the Being continues to act in the world. A priori arguments such as the Ontological Argument or even a posteriori ones such as the Teleological Argument do point to an originating force but that is all. Miracles, revelation and the divinity of Christ are all rejected.

Fideism: Allows faith to be independent of reason, which may oppose but can never defeat it. A precursor of Wittgenstein's understanding of the separate autonomies of different kinds of saying, faith occupies a different ground to reason. In the Enlightenment, it was Kant who wished to separate faith and reason; although he did see faith as a 'postulate of practical reason' (i.e. can be inferred from it). While Kant championed the conception of a thoroughly "rational" (or moral) version of Christianity he also placed religious belief outside the domain of what can be known by means of speculation. In this way, he "*found it necessary to deny knowledge, in order to make room for faith*".

Religion of the Heart: During the Enlightenment philosophers such as Rousseau and poets such as Wordsworth embraced a God perceived, not by the intellect, but through appreciation of nature. In a different but similar vein, John Wesley (who had had a profound religious experience in his youth) stressed the immanence of God and the need for genuine personal faith, undisguised by clever-sounding dogma. This was a 'God of the heart' and could be found as equally in the meadows in which he preached, as the grandest Cathedrals in England. A sense of the nearness of God pervades Wesleyan teaching; a God that was accessible to all. Wesley swept away Calvinistic ideas of an elect who alone would be saved for heaven. He was equally scathing about the debt of original sin – preferring to concentrate on the inherent goodness of man and his intimate relationship with God. .

Atheism: Inspired by the scientific method, some thinkers began to assert that we no longer need to appeal to any transcendent author of existence, but rather find all the impetus for life within nature. In 1770 Baron Holbach's book *System of Nature* argued for atheism and caused considerable outrage. A century later the findings of Darwin intensified the debate about the origins of life and the need for a supernatural Being.

Biblical Criticism

During the 18th century theologians began to investigate the Bible. Rather than accepting Scripture as something revealed or handed down, these scholars began to study its composition in the hope of establishing its

original form. They also investigated the types of audiences the Biblical authors might have been writing for and how texts developed over time. This Form Criticism that had started by Old Testament exegesis, turned its attention to the New and postulated an original oral tradition before the later written Gospels. So much similarity exists between the three synoptic Gospels that most scholars think that many of Jesus' sayings come from an early lost source - 'Q'. Mark is probably the earliest, Matthew was written for Jewish Christians, Luke probably for Gentile converts whereas John shows an evolved understanding of Jesus' divinity.

Karl Barth Biography

"The gospel is not a truth among other truths. Rather, it sets a question mark against all truths."

Born in 1886 in Basel, Switzerland, Barth studied under some of the leading liberal theologians of the day - most of whom taught a cosy Christianity with God as a loving father. But working as a young curate Barth became increasingly alarmed by the growing militarisation of Germany – a militarisation that his former professors accepted. Despairing at what he saw as the moral weakness of liberal theology, Barth immersed himself in a study of the Bible, particularly St Paul's Epistle to the Romans. As he studied, he became more and more convinced of the absolute centrality of Christ's resurrection – and the abject sinfulness of man.

Writing his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Barth challenged the liberal views which, in his view, had lost sight of the radical nature of the Gospels. He wrote of humanity's inability to know God outside the revelation in Jesus Christ. He also rejected Natural Theology which he believed insufficiently acknowledged the God of the Trinity.

Barth wrote in a way that woke his readers up. In his monumental *Church Dogmatics*, he claims: *'So-called natural knowledge of God...is the invention of the antichrist.... There is no such thing as a "theology from below" where knowledge of God may be 'found by observing sticks and stones (as in the natural sciences) or triangles (as in maths)'. The only possible revelation is the self-revelation of God in Jesus.... 'God is' means 'God loves' and all other insights into who God is must revolve around his loving. God's self determination to be God for creatures – the God of the covenant – has the incarnation of Jesus as its*

fulfilment. Revelation and reconciliation are interdependent – revelation is reconciliation.'

Barth's refusal to accept natural revelation was echoed in his refusal to accept the rise of Nazism and the support given by some German Christians to the Nazi regime. The Reich Church had called for Hitler's *Mein Kampf* to be placed besides the Holy Bible as a secondary source of revelation. Barth helped create the Confessing Church; a group of Christians who opposed this. The pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer was also involved and interestingly, the "Filoque clause" (first mentioned in Film 2) helps us to understand the reason for his dissent. Both Barth and Bonhoeffer argued that Christianity involved the centrality of belief in Jesus as the Son of God. The Reich Church's attempts to introduce a nationalistic 'folk' spirit, bypassing the compassion of the Gospels and aligning Christianity with the aims of the 3rd Reich had commandeered God without Christ.

When Barth refused to take the oath of unconditional allegiance to the Führer, he was sacked from Bonn University and on leaving Germany was offered the Chair of Theology in Basel where he continued to work for the oppressed.

John Hick Biography

"For to say, without explanation, that the historical Jesus of Nazareth was also God is as devoid of meaning as to say that this circle drawn with a pencil on paper is also a square"

John Hick was one of the most influential philosophers of religion during the latter part of the late twentieth century. He was born in Scarborough in 1922. As a young man Hick had an intense religious experience, leading him to a deep evangelical commitment to the Christian faith. When war broke out in 1939, Hick registered as a conscientious objector and joined an Ambulance unit serving in the Mediterranean.

After the war he worked as an academic in America where he gained notoriety by denying the Virgin Birth. On his return to the UK he taught theology at Cambridge University, where he wrote *Evil and the God of Love* (1966) arguing that although the existence of evil is a mystery, it is a necessary part of "soul-making". In 1967 he was appointed Chair of Theology at Birmingham University, where his theological beliefs became markedly more liberal. Hick became an influential player in

community relations and inter-faith councils and while working and worshipping alongside men and women of other faiths became aware that they too experienced the Transcendent just as authentically as he.

Influenced by Kant's phenomenal/noumenal distinction, Hick believed that religious people of whatever faith experience the Real through their own culturally-shaped lenses. Reinforced by visits to India, Hick began to speak of religion in terms of "*one light, but many lamps*", a view expressed in a book he edited, with the provocative title *The Myth of God Incarnate*. In 1993 Hick published *The Metaphor of God Incarnate* (1993), concluding that "*a non-traditional Christianity can see itself as one among a number of different human responses to the ultimate transcendent Reality we call God*". This position saw him become at once a world authority on interfaith relations and beyond the pale for evangelical Christians.

Hick argued that a literal understanding of Jesus as the Son of God forced Christianity to be over-dogmatic. In contrast, by understanding language about Christ as the language of myth and metaphor, we can say that the Logos of God was working in the person of Jesus just as it worked "*in various ways within the Indian, the Semitic, the Chinese, the African.... forms of life*".

As Hick's views developed, so too did his theological understanding and he went on to develop interpretations of doctrine such as incarnation, atonement and trinity not as metaphysical truths but as metaphorical ones; arguing that such an understanding increases, not diminishes, the importance of Jesus in today's world. The world has need of God, whatever religious tradition we use to talk of Him.

Recapitulation Theory

'He became what we are so that we might become what He is'
(Irenaeus)

Irenaeus' had a much more mystical understanding of the Incarnation than many of the Church Fathers and his recapitulation theory teaches of man's close relationship with God. As the head of humanity, Jesus both heals and leads us in the struggle against evil. Famine, war, disease and death are symptoms of that evil – but God experienced it on our behalf. And won. Aligned to this is the ancient understanding of *theosis* certainly present in the early church as the quest for mystical union with God. When the Desert Fathers retreated to their caves this is

what they sought. It is within Eastern traditions that we generally find people seeking the divine within themselves, but actually the West has exactly the same perception, expressed by mystics throughout the ages.

ACTIVITIES

1. Maybe we think of the people around Jesus as being different to ourselves. They lived 2000 years ago after all. As a quick look at our underlying assumptions, answer the following as 'knee jerk reactions'. Don't think about what you are answering – just answer it. True or False (in your opinion).
 - a) 2000 years ago people were more 'primitive' than they are now
 - b) They didn't understand the physical causes of many illnesses
 - c) They saw glory as being the same as strength
 - d) They were more frightened by things such as thunderstorms
 - e) They believed in God without question
 - f) They expected the end of the world
 - g) They didn't have fire or the wheel or bread
 - h) They didn't live in houses with glass windows
 - i) Everyone believed in resurrection of the dead
 - j) Many people did miracles
 - k) Many people had disciples

2. Now look at those same statements and decide which are actually *unknowable*. Either the question is phrased in such a way as it cannot be properly answered, or you don't have sufficient information to answer it. Or maybe it's just irrelevant – yes the people were different but they were not so different as to make them unrecognisable or untrustworthy.

3. The Gospels were not written as history or biography in the sense that we would recognise. Instead the word Gospel literally means 'Good News' hence they are a kind of good news declaration. In the light of what you have learned, try and summarise what good news the Gospel writers may have been trying to express.

4. Which of the following are true/false
 - a) The Synoptic Gospels are Mark, John and Luke (F)

- b) The gospel of John contains miracles not in the others (T)
 - c) Luke is probably the earliest gospel (F)
 - d) Matthew is written for Jewish Christians (T)
 - e) The 'I am' sayings are in John (T)
 - f) Jesus calls himself 'The Son of Man' in the Synoptic Gospels (T)
 - g) Jesus also refers to himself as 'The Son of God' in the Synoptics (T)
 - h) Q stands for the German word '*Quelle*' meaning 'source' (T)
5. John Hick argued for a Copernican revolution among religions – which of the following statements would he agree with
- i) Jesus was the sole incarnation of God (D)
 - ii) There is no God – all religions are really just poetry (D)
 - iii) There is a God about which all religions are trying to speak meaningfully (A)
 - iv) A metaphor is not a worthwhile kind of statement – it is meaningless (D)
 - v) Some things are beyond our knowing and Jesus points to that thing (A)
 - vi) Most religions make false claims to be the only true faith (A)
 - vii) The Bible is God's only revelation of Himself to men (D)
6. Which statements would Barth agree with
- i) Jesus was the sole incarnation of God (A)
 - ii) Man is deep down sinful and can be no other way (A)
 - iii) Jesus is the only revelation – the Bible is secondary to Him (A)
 - iv) Any attempts to say that other faiths are as valid are mistaken (A)
 - v) The fact that God became man is also the only atonement there is – in revealing Himself, men were restored. (A)
 - vi) God the Father is more important than God the Son (D)
 - vii) God can be revealed through nature – you do not ultimately need Jesus (D)

7. The hypostatic union is ‘The..... of divine and natures in the..... person of’
8. Does Theosis mean ‘finding God within oneself’ or ceasing to believe or search for God?
9. Decide whether you find more to agree with as Barth or Hick. Now, in character, ‘hot seat’ your position by allowing other members of the class to question you about your views.

Dare to Know

Film Script

“To love truth for truth’s sake is the principal part of human perfection in this world and the seed bed of all other virtues”

John Locke, English Philosopher {1632- 1704}

When John Locke wrote those words he was contributing to one of the great shifts in European thought – The Enlightenment or Age of Reason. Before the early 18th century it was a sin to question religious dogma too deeply, afterwards, it was a sin not to. The age of reason took over from the age of faith and just as Copernicus had proved that the earth was not the centre of the universe, people began to ask what exactly God was.

Ever since the age of reason, people have been taught to ask questions. In the 18th century philosophers such as David Hume challenged ideas about God but it was a century later in Germany that the Bible itself first came under scrutiny as a serious *historical* text. As the gospels were compared, it became obvious that each one used different accounts to portray different agendas and all could be dated some decades after Jesus’ death. Matthew, Mark and Luke all made use of a mysterious lost text, nicknamed Q, whereas, John, the last Gospel written made bold incarnational claims.

This Form Criticism created waves... on the one hand it produced conservatives such as the German thinker Karl Barth but on the other it

gave rise to a liberal tradition such as the work of the British philosopher John Hick.

Even before Form Criticism, liberal theologians had tended to play down the miraculous and other worldly claims of Christianity. But throughout the 20th century scholars such as John Hick began to cast real doubt on the historical nature of many of the New Testament stories. For Hick the gospels are *layered* narratives - even the story of the resurrection is not the straight forward thing it appears to be with such serious discrepancies among the four accounts that they 'can't all be right.' Was Jesus seen in Galilee for just a few hours or for forty days and in Jerusalem as well? And why does the spiritual Jesus, who can appear without warning in a locked room, need the stone to be rolled from the tomb? Then there is Matthew's startling claim that others were also raised:

"Such an extraordinary event would surely have found its place into the Roman records But Josephus and Tacitus, who do mention the fact that there was a teacher called Jesus.....make no mention of stories either about his resurrection or about this mass resurrection of people coming out of their graves and being publicly seen in Jerusalem".

John Hick, *The Resurrection of Jesus* {2006}

So what exactly is Hick asserting? On the one hand he's certainly denying a literal understanding of ideas such as the resurrection, the trinity, incarnation and atonement but his critique is not as simple as it appears.

Noumenal world: the world "in itself"

Phenomenal world: the world as experienced

Influenced by Kant and his understanding of the noumenal and the phenomenal world, Hick asserts that the Real - or unknowable God - does reveal himself – but it is through our perceptions of events. We are products of cultures and world views but that's not to say that what we perceive is not genuinely true in the realm beyond perception, in the noumenal world.

Hick argues for a Copernican revolution among religions. Rather than seeing the Incarnation of Christ as one event around which all other

faiths must revolve, Hick places the Real at the centre, about which all faiths have their own way of talking. Christ's incarnation is a metaphor.

Like the actors who know they are playing a part, but believe that what they are saying is in some sense true, religions must embrace the language of metaphor. If we talk about a teacher planting the seeds of wisdom, we mean something meaningful even though no one imagines a seed actually exists. To say that Christ is God is to say something meaningful - that in the person of Jesus, the divine world and the human world do genuinely meet, even though he may not have been literally God. The world of the Real and the world of the Human use stories, or metaphors, to meet each other – it's the only thing they can do.

Writing years before Hick, the views of Karl Barth could not have been more different. He had been well on the way to becoming another liberal theologian when the carnage of the First World War unleashed itself on Europe, overseen and approved of by the Church. Shaken to his core, Barth blamed this arrogance on a liberal theology that could mould God as it pleased. For Barth, man had coined God, constructed him in his image, adapted and used him to shape his own ends. Man had deserted God. Reading Paul's letter to the Romans as if for the first time, Barth took himself back to that early understanding of Christ and put him firmly centre stage. Christ was the centre, not man. Everything started with Christ.

Barth belongs to the so called Reformed tradition which has its roots in Calvinism. The Reformed tradition see man as corrupt and living in 'total depravity', unable to escape the sin of Adam, witnessed in war, greed and egotism. Being human is to be sinful – unable to approach a God who is totally different to the creatures he has made. But this God doesn't want to be without us. Separated from us by our 'otherness' and the depth of our sin, he intervenes by becoming man. It is in that act – that single act of intervention - that salvation takes place. The *fact* of Christ - that God became man - *is* the atonement. In Christ's death the old human being ceases to be, as Christ bridges the gulf between God and his creatures.

Hypostatic union: the fusion of divine and human natures in the single person of Christ

So the true God intervenes to become a true human being. As he does, the children who were his enemies become his children again. Revelation and reconciliation are interdependent – the act of God

revealing Himself is also the act by which He reconciles Himself to humanity and this hypostatic union is the heart of what Barth means: the Christ event, the Divine but equally Human life of Jesus, “*belongs to the essence of God himself*” and is all the revelation you need.

So what are the implications of either of these views: their strengths and weaknesses? At the outset, in common with all religious language, there is simply no proof that any of what either theologian is saying is true. Barth in particular makes fundamental assertions that have all the appearance of propositional truth claims – he appears to be talking of fact. ‘Unverifiable!’ ‘Unfalsifiable!’ shout his detractors, and even some conservative Christians have found his particular brand of certainty a little too dogmatic. How do we know his vision of Christ is correct?

Similarities to penal substitution theory make Barth’s work uncomfortable reading for people who don’t buy either the wrath of God or the extreme sinfulness of man. Likewise he is accused of being a Christo-monist, excluding the other persons of the Trinity – Father and Spirit. Because everything is centred on Christ, the acknowledgement of God and spirit seems a little too thin for some.

On the other hand, Hick has also been accused of going too far – to claim that the incarnation, the trinity and atonement are all metaphor may be to throw the baby out with the bath water. Metaphor of what one could ask. To which he would reply ‘the Real’ but if Jesus’ life is fundamentally only that of a human does that not also undermine the weight of his moral teaching?

Surprisingly both Barth and Hick are Universalists, believing that everyone is ‘saved’ whether they are Christian or not. For Barth this is because God’s incarnation is a gift that owes nothing to humans – freely given, mankind receives it and receives it equally. For Hick, all religious traditions are different ways of approaching ‘the Real’ and so are also identically valid.

The Moral Exemplar Theory

If the Incarnation explains how God limited himself in order to *really* know and be known by his creation, then all the theories of atonement seek to explain how he went on to save that creation from being mortal and being less than perfect. All the theories have tried to do this and possibly all fall short. If Satan has been bought off why does evil still exist and if Christ is victorious why do we still suffer?

But there is another, even older theory, that doesn't just say 'this is how it works' but rather says '*you* are how it works!'. The idea that Christ's life and death is a moral example has its roots in Irenaeus who thought of Jesus as the new head of humanity - a new Adam. The Latin word for head is '*capit*' and so this theory is called Recapitulation Theory.

Christ as the new Adam, succeeds where Adam failed, undoing the wrong that Adam did. Because of Christ's union with humanity, we're led to moral perfection and eternal life as He shows us what a well lived life looks like. So we must love one another, call God our father, and greet the outcast and the oppressed as Jesus did. The moral exemplar theory does not rely on Jesus' divinity although that divinity can equally be believed. All Christians would say that they must model themselves on Christ's life, and moral exemplar theory is saying that his death is made sense of by the life we live as a result.

At the heart of all dogma as to what this Christ man was – metaphor, cosmic event, Jewish magician, resurrected vision – there is a simple human quest. To understand how the divine world that man perceives as if from the corner of his eye can be expressed, understood and believed. It is the attempt of men and women to reach their inner essential self, and, an attempt to say something of that which hides inside the majestic, cryptic, infuriating but monumental title: 'God'.

The Incarnation says that God became man, The Trinity explains how that man was still God, the resurrection says that that man defied death, atonement tells us how on earth any of it might affect us, whether we believe it literally, figuratively or indeed not at all.

It's a complex human story – and it might just be a simple divine one as well.



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