

Workshops Exploring

**Is Christian Morality
Unique?**

Part 2

Michelle Nailon CSB

*Time and Place World Views
in Tension*



'FROG IN A POT WORKSHOPS"

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Is Christian Morality Unique? Part Two

Time and Place World Views in Tension

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WORKSHOPS PART TWO

Is Christian Morality Unique? Part Two

Summary Notes

1. The workshops on Part One of *Is Christian Morality Unique? Part One* considered a Christian detachment from money, power and relationship. It also asked 'Is Christian morality unique because of its basic social structure?' Part Two of the workshops explores this.

2. Exploring social structures requires the discipline of sociology. This is a human science without the exactness of natural sciences like mathematics.

3. Mark, the first gospel writer (ca 70 CE) picked up on the aim of the apostle Paul (writing in the 50's) to combine the two distinctly different social systems of Judaism and Hellenism (cf. Greek philosophy). Judaism has an emphasis on time and law. Hellenism has an emphasis on place and order.

4. Matthew's gospel (ca 85 CE) sets out a "blueprint" for a Jewish-based social system. He lists personal qualities likely to be found there and communal attitudes in its social environment. However he also outlines its tendency towards over-stress on external law.

5. Luke's gospel (ca 85 CE) points out the "best" personal attributes found in a Hellenistic society and also those at the corporate level of a democracy. On the other hand he also points out a tendency in this type of society towards over-stress on idealism.

6. Luke's Book of Acts shows how the hybrid society of the followers of Jesus was launched. There was the sense of a "living" authority and a "Living" word.

Is Christian Morality Unique? Part Two
Summary Notes Continued

7. Part Two of *Is Christian Morality Unique?* deals with a difficulty in interpretation of the gospels at a sociological level. At present, in academia there is a heavy stress on a natural sciences approach to interpretation which is called Historical Critical Exegesis. This method takes a "diachronic" approach to the text, that is, it looks at one small section at a time. This emphasis leads to a disinterest in the findings of a sociological approach which has to look at the text as a whole. A Sociological investigation would use a "synchronic" approach such as semiotic analysis.

8. A disinterest in an "overview" analysis of the gospels means the "warnings" of the gospels about the excesses of the two types of societies at the base of Christianity can be overlooked. Thus a society's perspective on the whole of reality can be warped. It is like a frog in a pot of boiling water, unaware of the increasing danger around it.

9. Part Two of *Is Christian Morality Unique?* deals at length with the book *Truth and Method* written by the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer in 1960. Gadamer had lived in Nazi Germany and had tried to understand the errors of its philosophy. He followed his mentor Heidegger and highlighted the importance of a sense of time.

10. Gadamer validated the importance of tradition and allegory as vehicles of "the truth". The philosophy of the Enlightenment had downgraded these.

11. He showed that "play" and art such as a portrait, act like a subject. They draw in a participant leading them to an understanding of the "truth" that would be otherwise overlooked.

12. Gadamer showed that tradition is, in a sense alive, because it dates back in time and it enables those who share in it to imbibe its insights.

13. Gadamer refers to an "anonymous will" that shapes history. He says the significance of events and situations can only be understood from within the perspective of time.

Is Christian Morality Unique? Part Two
Summary Notes Continued

14. He says that all language is inter-connected. The meaning of language is constantly changing and in this sense it is "alive"

15. The underlying message of *Truth and Method* points to the inadequacy of natural sciences. These cannot encompass the full reality of, for instance, the significance of history or the meaning of language. Those who rely on a narrow dimensional view of the "truth" can be like the "frog in a pot."

16. The gospel of John (ca. 100 CE) presents the presence of Jesus Christ as the unifying life of Christainity. He is presented as a Living Authority and a Living Word. When his followers identify with him they become like a living social organism, challenged to adapt to the pressures both within and without.

17. Part Two of *Is Christian Morality Unique?* takes a brief overview of Christian history. At the time of the Protestant Revolution (1500's CE) there was a split between a Judaic approach with its emphasis on law and time (cf. Catholics) and a Hellenistic approach with its emphasis on order and place (cf. Protestants).

18. The Catholic vatican Two council of the 1960's attempted to push Catholics into a more rationalistic approach and outreach into the wider community. There was more appreoeciation of the position of Protestantism.

19. However the tendency of people to "tip" towards the extremes of one type of society or the other continues on. With the Catholic move towards a more Hellenistic type of approach there has been a decline in the status given to its living tradition.

20. Into the future present Society's tendency to live in the "now" is likely to be challenged by an emerging generation that is trying to prepare for the catastrophies to come.

In order to Explore the basic social structure of Christianity the human sciences discipline of Sociology is needed.

Some Characteristics of Sociology are as follows:

1. It is not treated and studied as a branch of any other science.
2. It deals with the social universe.
3. Sociology confines itself to statements about what is (not what ought to be).
4. Its immediate aim is the acquisition of knowledge about human society.
5. It is an abstract and not a concrete science e.g. it is concerned with social phenomena as type's social conflict.
6. Sociology tries to find out the general laws or principles about human interaction and association... by observing and studying a few.
7. It only studies human activities in a general way.
8. Sociology is both a rational and an empirical science. The empiricist collects facts, the rationalist co-ordinates and arranges them.

Sociology explores basic social structures

for example the extent to which societies are based on universals such as:

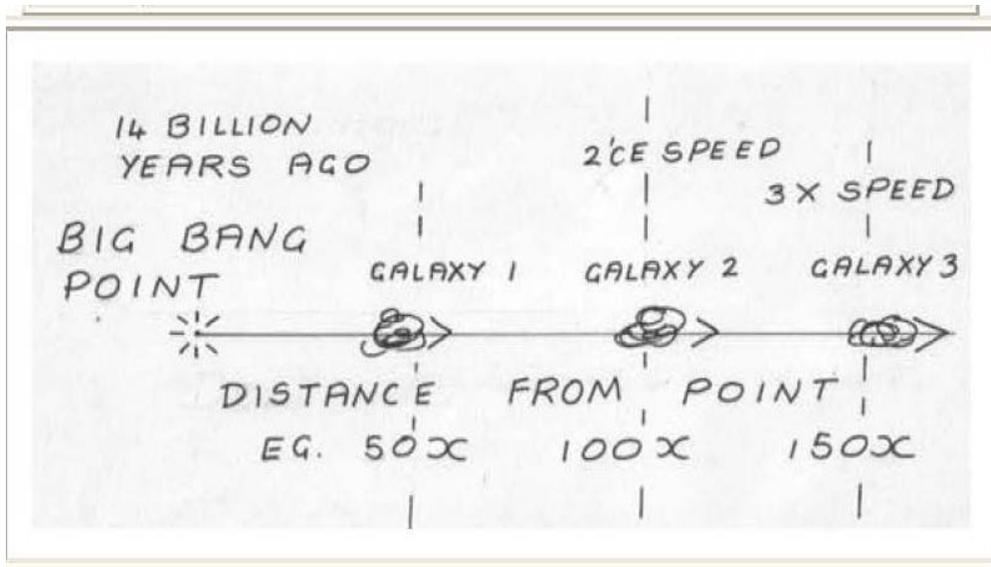
TIME AND PLACE

which are at the base of the Cosmos

Consider the Big Bang of 13.7 billion years ago

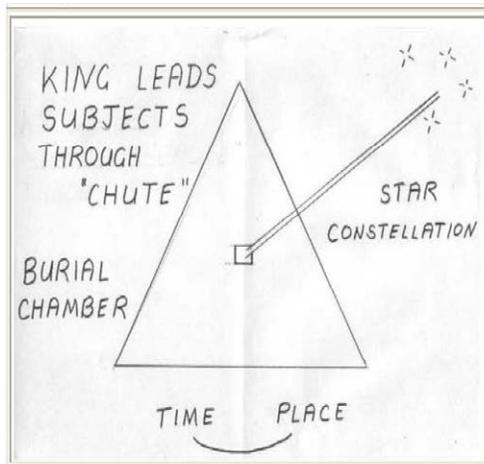
Cosmologists worked out that the light spectrums at the end of a galaxy show the speed at which it is moving.

Galaxies travelling at double the speed of others are twice the distance from a point in space that all of the galaxies are moving away from.

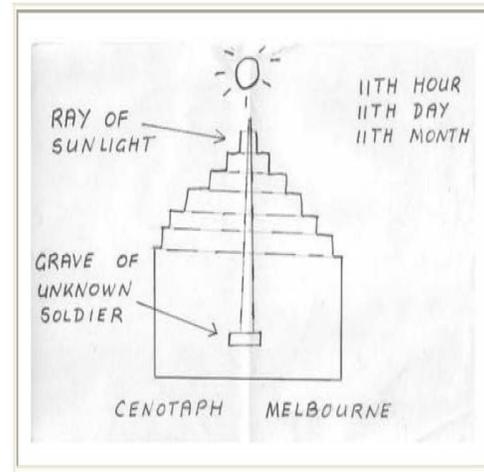


Question: Can you understand this?

The cosmic base of time and place was reflected in the belief and social system of the ancient world, for example in the pyramids.



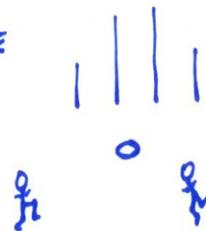
The time and place connection was still being expressed in the C20th



C 21ST

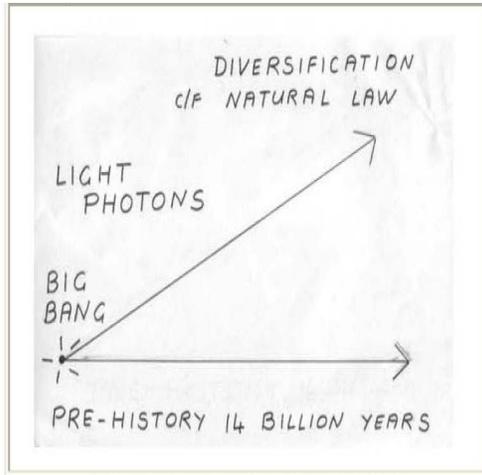
TIME

PLACE.



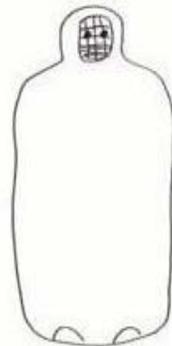
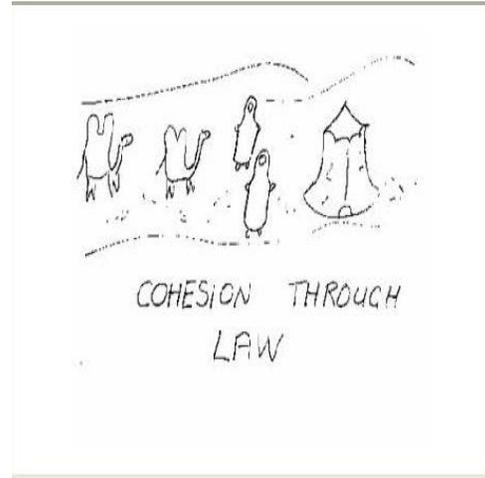
It sits at the heart of major sports

Question: Would you agree?



People came to understand that cause and effect within the framework of time was an expression of the natural law.

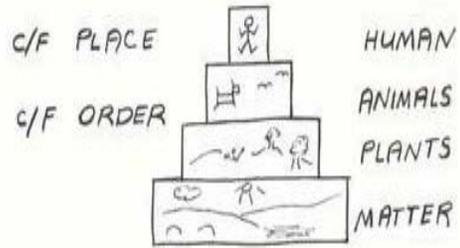
They based their society on their understanding of the moral law e.g. Judaism and later Islam



However a society based on law can over-stress external law and tradition

Question: Would you agree?

SCALE OF BEING

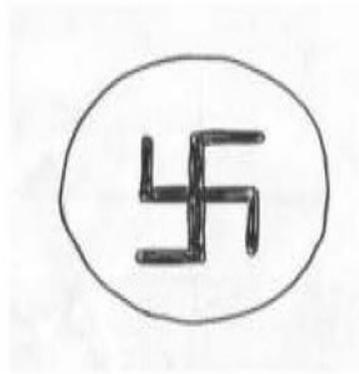


On the other hand
people came to understand that within nature
there is a universal order

A society could be largely based on
this for example Hellenism (cf. Greek
Philosophy).



COHESION THROUGH
ORDER



However a society based on order can over-stress idealism

Question: **Would you agree?**

A COMBINATION OF THE TWO

Paul (writing 50's CE) is known as the first Christian theologian.

He pulled together

Judaism
cf. law and time
and

Hellenism
cf. order and place.

The book
Is Christian Morality Unique? Part Two

argues the underlying structure of the gospels describes these two differing types of society.

It provides warnings about each of them. It proposes a possible combination of the two.

In the book the underlying structure of the gospels is explored by using an approach to interpretation called

"semiotic analysis".

Semiotic analysis is based upon three main principles

1. Each text forms a unit of meaning complete in itself.
2. The analysis consists in establishing the network of relationships between various elements in the text. Out of this the meaning of the text is constructed.
3. In the collection of sentences there are various levels, each of which has its own distinct grammar.

The users of Semiotic analysis try to take into account the historical milieu of the text.

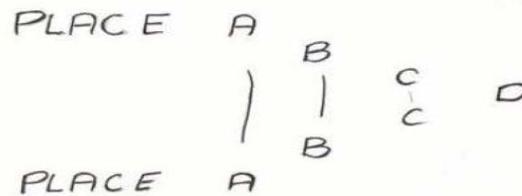
The approach has special relevance to those with limited knowledge of the gospels.

Question: Do you understand this?

Semiotic Analysis of the Gospel of Mark

(1st Gospel written around 70 CE)

Analysis shows textual patterns using place names to pair paragraphs cf.



In a Section A (Mark 1:9-3:35) key points common to each pair are as follows:

Based on God's will
Extends to good and bad
Requires support

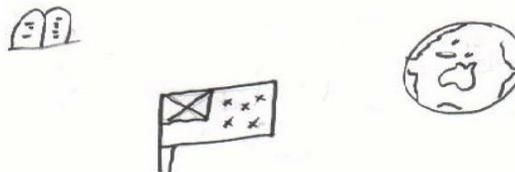
Challenges corruption
Gives priority to people
Respects human needs

Can innovate new order
Reaches to crowds
Ready to forgive

The point in common to all pairs is

AUTHORITY

(a) Authority is based upon natural law and furtherance of the common good. (c/f Law)



Authority undergirds a society based on law.

**What list of attributes for authority could you come up with?
Do you think there is a difference between "rule of law" and "rule by law"?**

Semiotic Analysis of the Gospel of Mark

Analysis shows textual patterns using place names to pair paragraphs cf.



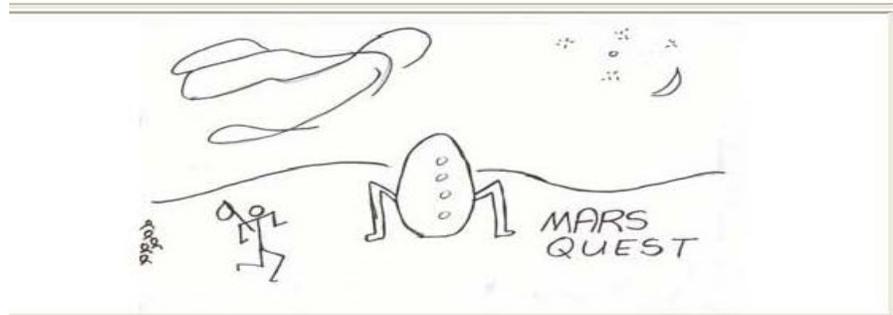
In a Section B (Mark 4:1-9:1) key points common to each pair are as follows:

<p>Be receptive Perceive as well as see Note dignity of the person</p>	<p>Realise big picture is complex Value personal contact Believe in own power</p>	<p>Avoid bad actions Don't overstress formality Stay anchored Avoid hardheartedness</p>
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The point in common to all pairs is

What is needed for a SENSE OF DIRECTION

(b) A sense of direction underpins constructive use of patterns within the universe (c/f Order)



A sense of Direction is needed in a society based on order. Otherwise there is idealism for its own sake.

**What list of attributes for a sense of direction could you come up with?
Can you recall order-based societies that imploded e.g. the Roman Empire?**

Semiotic Analysis of the Gospel of Mark

Question: If both types of societies were being cultivated, what type of person would be flexible enough to move between the two?

Question: What about a "child-like" person?

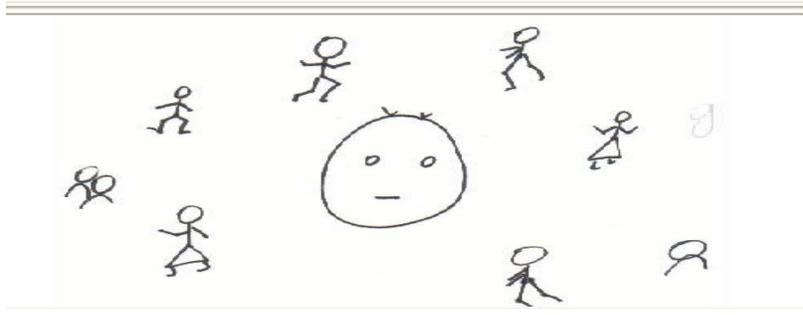
In a Section C (Mark 9:2-10:31)

c) An 'adult child' with certain qualities can straddle both social structures



In a Section D (Mark 10:31-16:8)

d) The one person has to deal with a range of factors in a social context



Fear
Place getting
Asking
Crowd pressure
Accepting help

Praise and mockery
Belief in self
Civic authority
Regeneration
Individual/corporate guilt

Crowd Fickleness
Finding Support
Plots and criticism
Taking initiative

Question: Any other examples?

Question: How to retain a "child-like" approach??

The Gospel of Matthew

Semiotic analysis of the gospel of Matthew shows a society based upon time and law. The gospel shows where this is found, how to cultivate it, what it looks like and warnings about over-reliance on it. Most paragraphs start with a time statement.

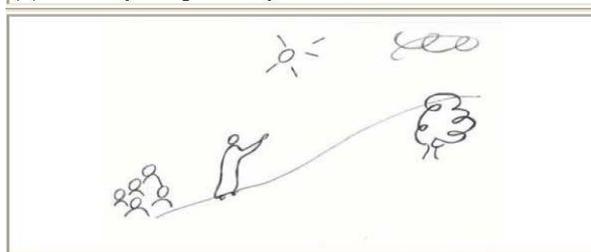
Matthew 1:1-4:25

(a) The "child" of a law-based society



Question: Would you agree the most natural type of society based on the natural law is the family?

(b) Ways to push 'beyond' the law



Would you agree that pushing beyond law observance and cultivating relationship would include pushing 'beyond' the following?

Sin
Being average

Being literal
Show

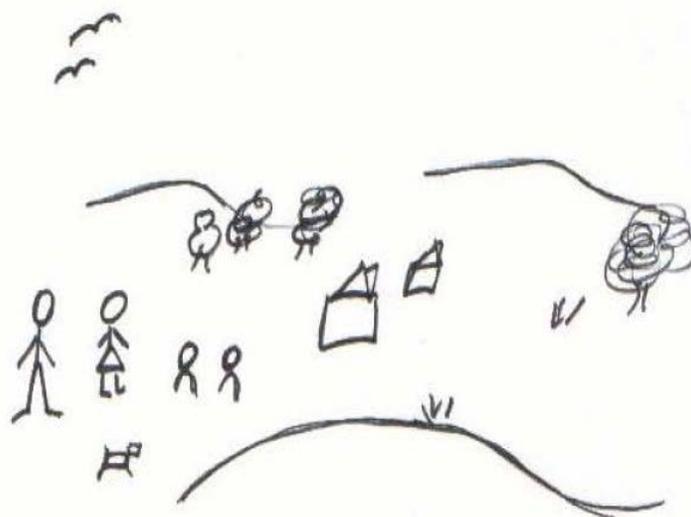
Treasure
Judging
The easy

How so?

The Gospel of Matthew

Matthew 8:1-10:42

(c) Attributes to help internalise law



Ask for help

Recognise authority

Accept touch

Accept healing

Be independent of crowd

Be ready to move

Leave excuses

Follow

Trust

Prioritise

Forgive

Entrust

Renew

Lead

Touch

Ignore ridicule

Believe in own power

Believe

Teach and heal

Pray for harvesters

Reach out

Question:

Would you agree?

Question:

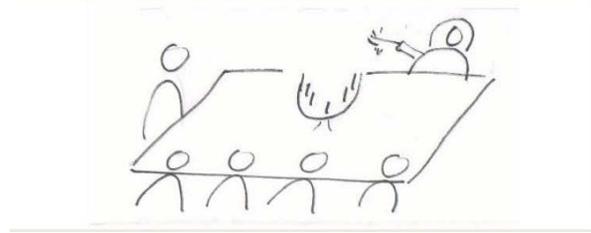
What about an environment of internalised law?

The Gospel of Matthew

Environment of Internalised Law

Matthew 11:2-18:35

(d) Factors in an environment of internalised law



Proves	Bears fruit	Dismisses petty	Shines
Excuses	Hears	Sees clearly	Anticipates
Relieves	Proclaims	Praises	Empowers
Prophesies	Retrieves	Feeds	Grieves
Brings Hope	Is affected by	Warns	Pays dues
Justifies	Listens	Recalls	Is present
Discerns	Is Concerned	Builds	Forgives
Relates cf. God's will	Heals	Foresees	

Question: Would you agree?

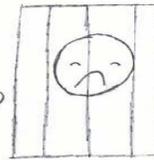
The Gospel of Matthew

However

A Society based on law can have **pitfalls** cf. Matthew 19:3-25:46

(e) Warnings against over-stress on external law

THE BOY
WHO BREATHED
ON THE
GLASS



Selfish use of law
Belittling of children
Many possessions
Making demands
Condemnation
Ambition
Controls
Vestiges of greatness

Money from religion
False appearances
Reliance on rank
Privilege
Separatism
Anthropomorphism
Legalism
Narrowness

Hypocrisy
Temple reliance
False Prophets
Lack of watchfulness
Presumption
Lack of development
lack of accountability

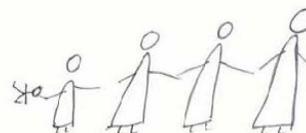
Question: Would you agree?
What about the following?

The "type" of follower of Jesus that emerges from Matthew's gospel appears to be

THE DISCIPLE

Matthew 26:1-28:20

(f) Lead through a Forgiving Relationship



Semiotic Analysis of the Gospel of Luke

Semiotic analysis shows an emphasis on **Place**.

For example paragraphs are "paired" in Luke 4:31 - 9:51 via matching places.
Also there is an underlying direction in the gospel towards Jerusalem.

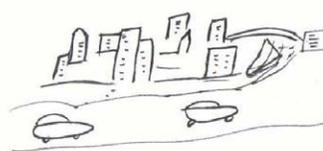
A Section A (Luke 1:1-4:30) shows a child of the world.

3. <i>Give Direction to Order</i>
(a) The Child of an Order-based Community


A Section B (Luke 4:31 - 9:51), shows attributes needed for a society based on Order.

Think in terms of an urban neighbourhood.

(b) Attributes for an Order-based Community



Authority
Compassionate Power
Bodily care
Proclamation

Power in nature
V disease & V spirits
Prayer
Forgiveness

Fraternal Proclamation
Union with God
Invitation
Solid Foundation

Question: What do you think?

Semiotic Analysis of the Gospel of Luke

Greek Philosophy was a cradle of democracy which is open to improvement.



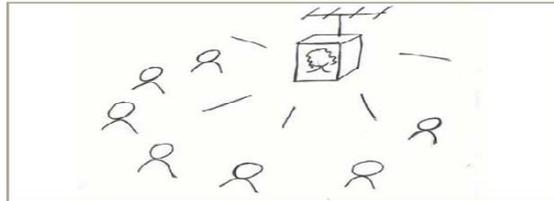
<p>Stay peaceful</p> <p>Be detached</p> <p>Look to future</p> <p>Keep moving</p> <p>Reach out</p> <p>Make love basic</p> <p>Prioritise reflection</p>	<p>Ask</p> <p>Use spiritual power</p> <p>Listen</p> <p>Seek wisdom</p> <p>Prioritise integrity</p> <p>Accept outsiders</p> <p>Prioritise truthful speech</p> <p>Direction not treasure</p>	<p>Focus on direction</p> <p>Internalise honesty</p> <p>Discern</p> <p>Nurture nature</p> <p>Dignify woman</p> <p>Loosen bonds</p> <p>Start from small</p> <p>(Luke 9:52-13:22)</p>
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Question: Any suggestions?

It could be argued that capitalism and communism are "two sides of the same coin"
 It could be argued democracy and totalitarianism are also "two sides of the same coin"
 What do you think?

Semiotic Analysis of the Gospel of Luke

(d) Warnings against over-stress on idealism



V means opposed to

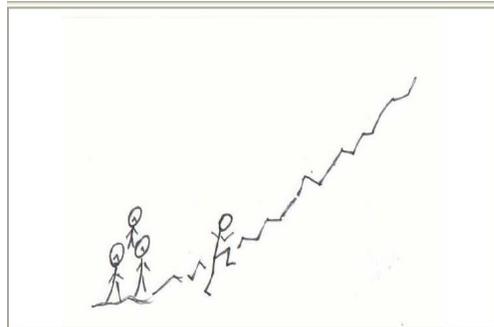
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> V "Saved" Leader V Rejection V Hierarchy V Payment base V Elitism V Ideological foundations V Exclusion of difference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> V over-absorption into system V Material obsession V Inflexibility V Ingratitude V Alienation of dignity V Predictability V Over-formalised justice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> V Self-grandisement V Exclusion of children V Over-focus material security V Total self-reliance V This life only V Closure to the new <p style="text-align: right;">(Luke 13:24-18:31)</p>
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Question: — What do you think?

_____ The "type" of follower of Jesus that emerges from an order-based society appears to be **the Kingdom Figure.**

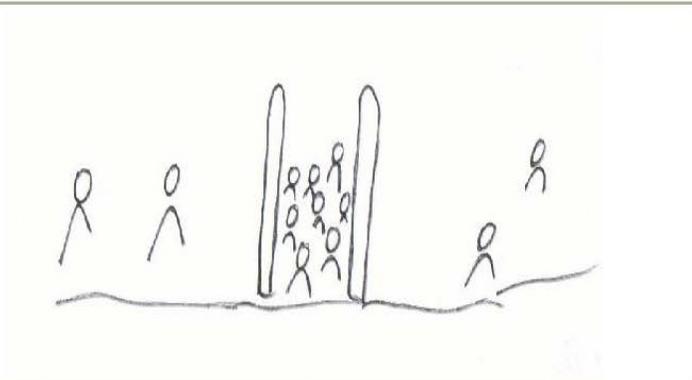
Obtains needed pity
 Makes retribution
 Increases profits
 accepts welcome
 warns of danger
 exercises stewardship
 exerts rights
 maintains order
 points beyond this life
 signals future
 donates their only mite
 comes with power
 (Luke 18:35-21:37)

(e) The Kingdom Figure with an Independent Social Conscience

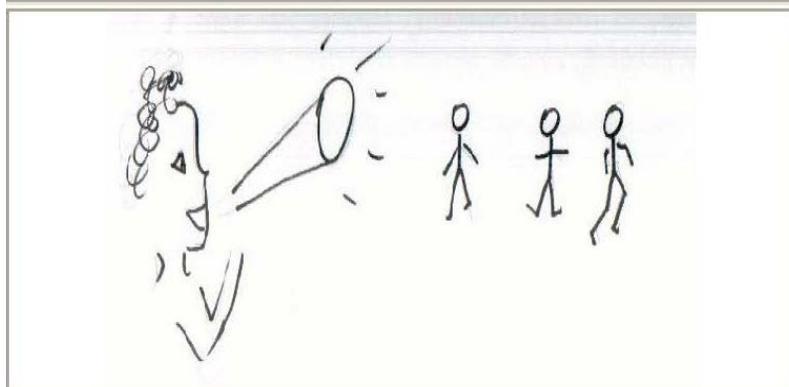


At the end of his gospel (Luke 21:38-24:53)
Luke Sums up the dangerous tendencies in each of the two societies

(f) Warning against narrowness
(c/f a law/time based society)



.. and the 'loud voice' ..
(c/f an ordered/place based society)



Question: What do you think?

Luke wrote a second book known as *The Acts of the Apostles*. In this book he shows how the new "hybrid" society was launched into the world of the Roman Empire in the first century CE.

Luke'S Acts of the Apostles (i.e.) "Launch the Society".

Consider: Time and place remain two separate categories.
Law and Order remain two separate categories.

Do you think the combination of a society based on law (and time) and a society based on order (and place) would merge into a new society altogether **or** remain as a hybrid?

4. Launch the Society

(a) The links between the founding of a new 'hybrid' society and its early beginnings.

$$A + B = C$$

OR

$$A + B = A + B!$$

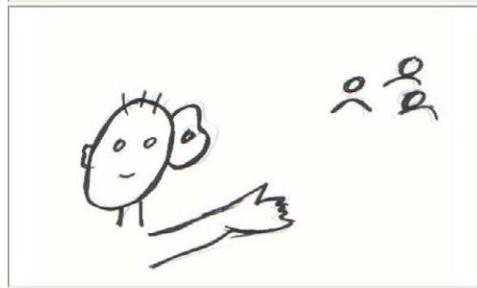
(cf. Acts 1:1-6:8)

Question: What principles would those launching the new society would face as they tried to reach out beyond the boundaries of a law and ethnically based society? What about the following?

- Power is in the Person (not a system)
- Separation of spiritual favour and money
- Inter-racial outreach
- Power is outside the priesthood
- Movement is promoted
- Orientation towards re-birth
- Inter-cultural base
- Readiness to adjust
- Mutual financial support

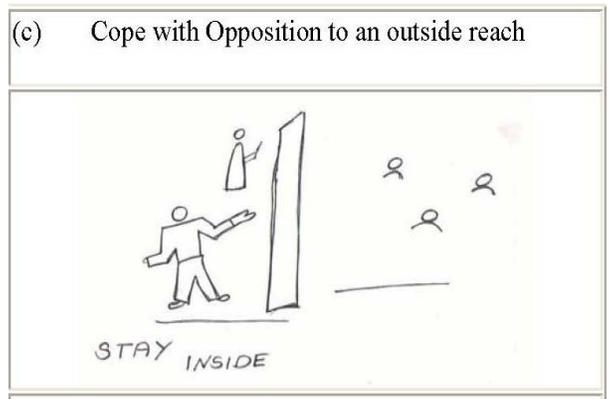
(Acts 6:8-11:29)

(b) An outreach beyond the emerging group in order to recognise the authenticity of outsiders



Luke'S Acts of the Apostles (i.e.) "Launch the Society".

Moving outwards into the Gentile (non-Jewish) world would not be easy.



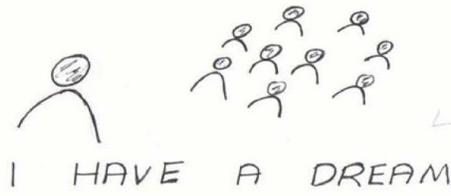
Coping Response	Likely Motive for Opposition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power through focussed goodwill • Power through truth • Material independence • Perception to esape • Stress on humanness • Brotherly support • Salvation through spiritual strength 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politics • Money • Influence amongst wealthy • Crowd influence • Adulation • Desire for leadership power • Sect control Acts 12:1-15:29)

— How would these problems and solutions stack up against your own experience?

Luke'S Acts of the Apostles (i.e.) "Launch the Society".

**If a society based on belief in God moves beyond Judaism,
What sort of governance structure would be needed??**

(d) Heed multiple voices and a 'Living Word' which exists across these. This 'Living Word' gives independence from the loud voice.

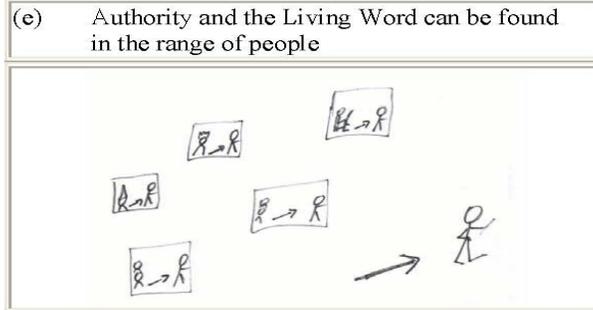


**If belief in a "living voice" or "living word" is basic to such a structure,
What would be understood about the "Living Word"?**

- The "word" is taught and preached by many
- The "word" continues to live on with those who 'have' it
- Speaking the "word" is permitted by the Ultimate Spirit
- The "word" is spoken to those ready to believe
- The "word" is received by those who include the wealthy
- The "word" has opponents
- The "word" urges proclamation
- Teaching the 'word' is commanded by the final "I Am"
- The "word" expects attention
- The "word" is increased and strengthened by the "I Am"
- The "word" is linked in with "the Way"
- The "word" continues the work of "I Am" (Acts 15:30-20:22)

How does this line up with your own understanding of "the voice of the people" in a
Democracy?

Luke's Acts of the Apostles (i.e.) "Launch the Society".



Authority Figures

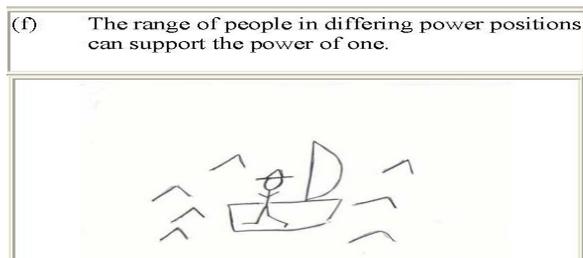
- Disciples
- Prophets
- Church leadership
- Law enforcers
- the people
- State Law
- Religious leadership
- Kith and kin
- the Governor
- the Successor
- the Emperor
- Monachy

Assistance Given

- accompany
- warn
- require purification
- protect
- challenge
- impose respect
- provide forum
- give secret help
- give on-going protection
- weigh up case
- provide base for outreach
- give a hearing

Acts 21:1-26:32

What are your ideas about EVERYONE being able to make a contribution?



-- to the world--

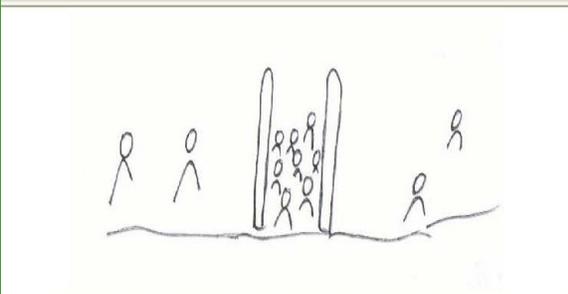
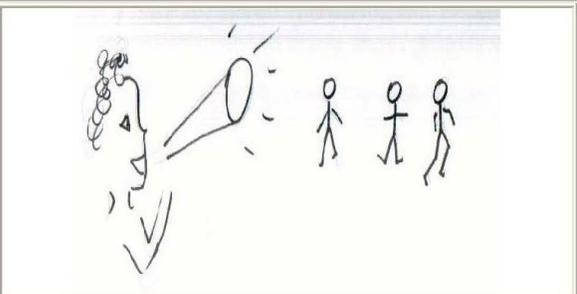
Acts 27-28

However

Keeping a balance in society is not easy



A society and the people in it can tip towards the extremes of one society or the other.

Over-stress on External Law	Over-stress on Idealism
<p>(f) Warning against narrowness (c/f a law/time based society)</p> 	<p>.. and the 'loud voice' .. (c/f an ordered/place based society)</p> 

**And, if people are focussing on details, they don't notice what is happening in the big picture.
They become like a "frog in a pot"**



“The Boiling Frog story is often used as a metaphor for the inability of people to react to significant changes that occur gradually or to events which have become commonplace.”

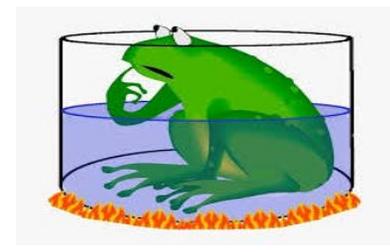


The problem has been around for a long time



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It is still around!

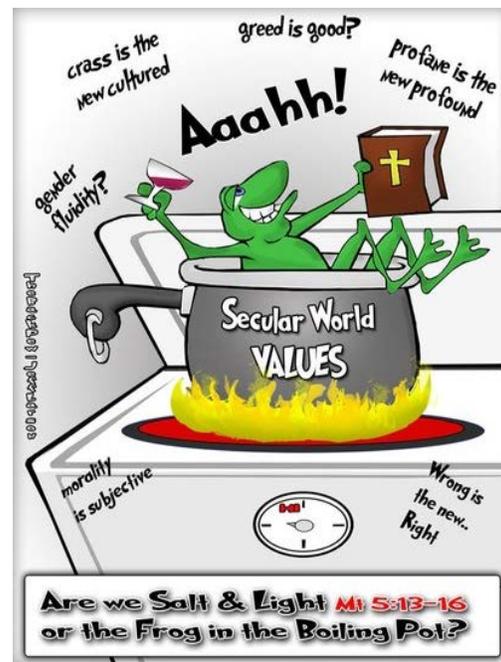


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People can be in their own narrow group



Or they can be spread too wide



Should one try to escape?



Or does awareness help with coping?



Where does "Frog in a Pot" apply to the basic social structure of Christianity??
Consider a quick overview of its history.

Constantine 306-337 AD	Christianity became the established religion of the Roman Empire
Middle Ages ca. C5th-C15th	Christianity was considered to be the one uniform society. The manuscripts of Greek Philosophy and Hellenism were lost.
Crusades ca. 1095-1492 AD	When crusaders went to the "Holy Land", now occupied by Muslims the manuscripts of the ancient Greeks were re-discovered and brought back to Europe
Renaissance ca. C14th - C17th	Re-finding the Hellenistic roots of Christian society (cf. Gospel of Luke) triggered an upsurge in Greek architecture, art and philosophy etc.
Reformation ca. 1517-1648	An awakened interest in a Hellenistic view of Christianity helped spark nationalism and whole countries broke away from the control of the Catholic Church in Rome.
Religious War	Wars and division between Catholics and Protestants continued on until the C20th.
Enlightenment ca. 1715-1789	Amongst European philosophers there was an over-emphasis on "the now". The Stoic idea of a divine spark being inherent in people was developed into concepts of personal "genius". Tradition was put aside.
Nazism ca. 1930's-40's	Nazism was based on philosophies of the Enlightenment with a stress on the "now" and place and the rejection of traditional morality. Their rejection of time-based Judaism was aligned with this.
Heidegger and Gadamer 1889-1976, 1900-2002	Gadamer's mentor Heidegger turned the "philosophy of the day" on its head because of his stress on TIME. He claimed that "being is time".
<i>Truth and Method</i> 1960	Gadamer, who lived in Nazi Germany, pointed to the shortcomings of a philosophical approach that relies on method. This tends to reject a wider grasp of reality that incorporates the sense of time.

"Arguably" Christian society "tipped" too far towards a time-based, law-based society during the Middle Ages. Then with the exception of Jews and most Catholics it "tipped" too far towards a place-based, order-based society in Europe (especially), during the Enlightenment.

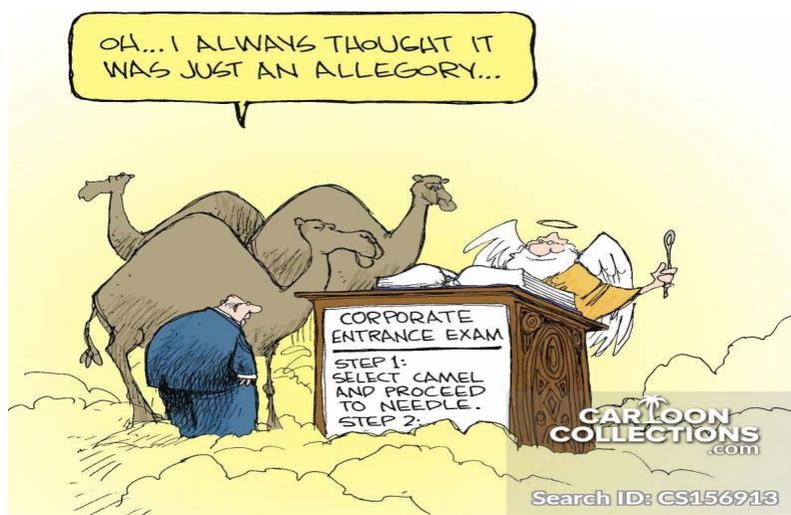
Consider. If gospel interpretation **only** uses a diachronic approach (cf. one small piece of text at a time) then a synchronic, sociological approach to the gospels can be downgraded and overlooked.

So too with the overview warnings about social extremes in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. Also they can be overlooked if people no longer consider the gospels at all.

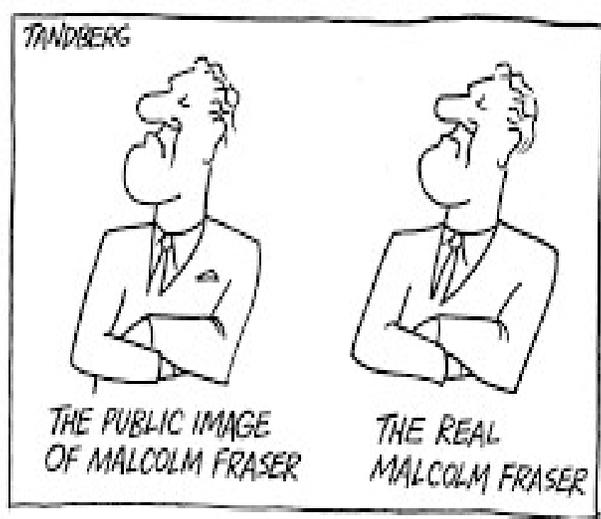
Gadamer's *Truth and Method* challenged the position of Enlightenment Philosophers who were living with a "now" mindset. Insofar as we live in a "now" society today, the five main Sections of his book apply to our own society as well.

1 Gadamer argued Enlightenment philosophers shifted the time-honoured meanings of culture, common sense, tact etc. into a more subjective understanding of these. They stressed the natural sciences rather than the more comprehensive and abstract human sciences. Thus the credibility of tradition and literary forms such as metaphor and allegory were downgraded.

cf. "I'll say it again—it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!" Matthew 19:24



2. Gadamer pointed out that play and drama "draw in" a participant. In that sense they act as a "subject". The same is true of a portrait. These art forms point to realities that could otherwise go unnoticed.



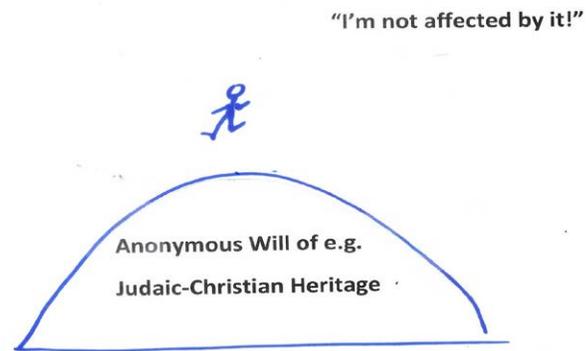
A LIVING TRADITION

3. He argued that the insights of a living tradition can best be learned if one shares in the tradition.



It helps to be on board!

4. Gadamer pointed out that the significance of historical events can only be understood from the perspective of time. He also pointed out that "anonymous will" affects the unfolding of history.



5. He claimed that all language is interconnected. Also the exact meaning of language e.g. in historical texts, cannot be fully understood because the meanings of words shift around.



Ironically enough there are parallels between the philosophy of Gadamer and the Gospel of John.

John teaches about "Living Authority" throughout history (cf. anonymous will) and "The Living Word" (cf. language as subject).

Semiotic Analysis of the Gospel of John

5. *Pass on the Power of One*

(a) The Sense of an 'Authorised, Living Word'

" I AM "

John 1:1-18

b) Characteristics of a Living Authority

BE RESPONSIBLE

John 1:19-5:47

Represents God
Invites
Uses power
Relies on Household
Works for "Father"
Gives witness

Appeals to Crowd
Is sought after
Achieves goals
Brings life
Is doubted and outlawed
Is aware of death threats
Has public witness
Is conscious of timing
Light of the world
Is commanded by "Father"
Speaks like a shepherd

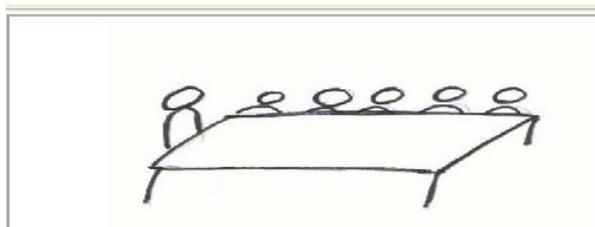
(c) Characteristics of the Living Word

BE FLEXIBLE

John 6:1-13;1

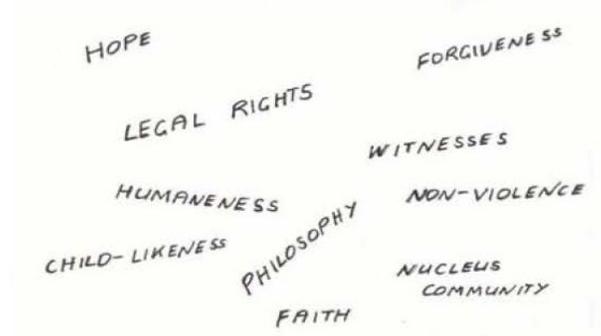
Semiotic Analysis of the Gospel of John

(d) A challenge to identify with the Authorised Living Word

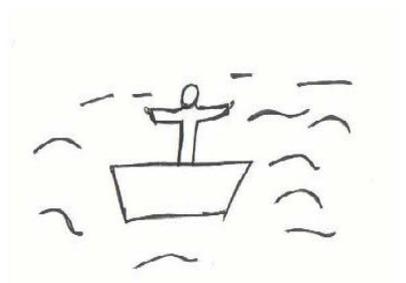


John 13:1 - 17:26

(e) A challenge to allow the Authorised, Living Word to set direction for the future.



John 18:1 - 20:30



However

The tendency to "slip" into the extremes of a time-based or a place-based type of society remain.

After centuries of conflict between the Catholics (cf. time and law) and Protestants (cf. place and order), the Catholic Church attempted to correct its own imbalance with a Vatican II Church council in the 1960's.



The Disciple

The Kingdom Figure

Changes have caused disruption and loss of valid traditions



**The challenge to find an easy reconciliation continues.
So also does the relevance of points made by Gadamer**

