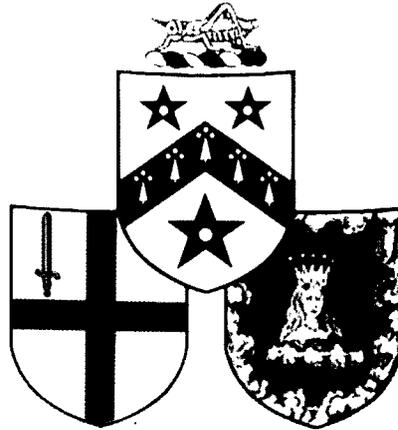


G R E S H A M
C O L L E G E



Reproduction of this text, or any extract from it, must credit Gresham College

THE MYTHS OF CHRISTIANITY

Lecture 6

THE END OF RELIGION

by

PROFESSOR RICHARD HOLLOWAY
Gresham Professor of Divinity

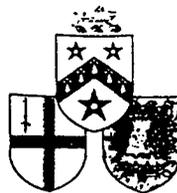
15 March 2001

GRESHAM COLLEGE

Policy & Objectives

An independently funded educational institution, Gresham College exists

- to continue the free public lectures which have been given for 400 years, and to reinterpret the 'new learning' of Sir Thomas Gresham's day in contemporary terms;
- to engage in study, teaching and research, particularly in those disciplines represented by the Gresham Professors;
- to foster academic consideration of contemporary problems;
- to challenge those who live or work in the City of London to engage in intellectual debate on those subjects in which the City has a proper concern; and to provide a window on the City for learned societies, both national and international.



Founded 1597

Gresham College, Barnard's Inn Hall, Holborn, London EC1N 2HH

Tel: 020 7831 0575 Fax: 020 7831 5208

e-mail: enquiries@gresham.ac.uk

Web site : www.gresham.ac.uk

The End of Religion

Professor Richard Holloway

Some years ago I copied into my note book an aphorism from a Russian writer called V.V.Rozanov: *'All religions will pass, but this will remain: simply sitting in a chair and looking in the distance'*. I would like to adapt Rozanov's saying and suggest that religion is a consequence of sitting in a chair and looking in the distance. Another way of expressing the same thought is to use the vocabulary of Paul Tillich. Tillich said that, as well as the usual matters that pre-occupy us, deep questions about the meaning of life came with our humanity. He called this dimension of our lives, 'ultimate concern'. We are creatures who can't help wondering about the meaning of our lives and the universe in which we spend them: this is our 'ultimate concern' and our response to it, no matter how despairing or empty, is what we call religion. Even if we reply that life has no discernible or ultimate meaning, we are still offering that as an answer. This is the kind of reply to the question that is given by the scientist Richard Dawkins: *'Nature is not cruel, only pitilessly indifferent. This is one of the hardest lessons for humans to learn. We cannot admit that things might be neither good nor evil, neither cruel nor kind, but simply callous - indifferent to all suffering, lacking all purpose'*.¹ This echoes something that Nietzsche wrote: *'Becoming aims at nothing and achieves nothing'*.² These replies to the question put by life may appear to repudiate the idea that there is any kind of meaning out there for us to discover, but the idea of the non-meaning of the universe is itself an answer to our question and must mean something. Whether it is paradox or irony, the discovery of non-meaning or nihilism is itself a kind of meaning, if only because it means something to *us*, is something we ourselves read out of the reality that confronts us.

Just as interesting as the answers that Nietzsche and Dawkins give is the fact that they themselves are so passionately engaged in wrestling with the question. It is the nature of humans to do this; in us life has started to ask questions about itself. That is where religion comes from. Unfortunately, religion has been dominated by special interest groups who claimed that only their answers were true and that everything else was error and falseness. It is no surprise that this has happened: it is just another example of how the world ran itself for so long. Those in authority not only organised things to suit themselves, they interpreted things to suit themselves. From their position of power, they may have said that there is a god and the rest of us must accept the fact; or they may have said, from their position of power, that there is no god and the rest of us must accept that fact. Whether it was the Vatican or the Politburo, it didn't matter, as long as they called the shots.

The folly of subjecting the religious passion to the politics of power is that it cannot be controlled in this way and refuses to be subject to external direction. I suspect that this is at least part of what the writer and film-maker Dennis Potter meant when he said just before his death from cancer: *'Religion to me has always been the wound not the bandage'*.³ This is a particularly difficult statement for religious officials to live with, especially if they work for religions of salvation. By definition, religions of salvation are in the bandage business; they have come to heal our wounds. They do not sit alongside us in the chair looking in the distance, comparing points of view; they want to protect us from what we might discover for ourselves, by telling us

¹ Richard Dawkins, *River out of Eden*, Weidenfield and Nicolson, London 1955, p.96.

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, Vintage, New York, 1968, p.12.

³ Dennis Potter, *Seeing the Blossom*, Faber and Faber, London, 1994, p.5.

exactly what the official view is and how dangerous it will be for us if we do not accept it. Or, to mix the metaphor slightly, they want to sell us their special spectacles, which have been theologically tested by experts to give us maximum power for long distance looking. Given the extraordinary energy and variety of the human species, none of this should surprise us, but buyers should always beware of sellers. By definition, they want to move their product, whether it is a Mercedes or a metaphysic. To punish the metaphor a little longer, in the culture of global capitalism everything has become a commodity, including religion. The most blatant exponents of religious consumerism are the television evangelists, the best of whom are brilliant salespersons. But even the subtler and more traditional religions try to push their brands. None of this would particularly matter if it were a case of the rival systems inviting us to view reality from where they were sitting: 'Come, try our view and see if you'd like to build your dwelling place at our bend in the river'. More of that is going on today and I shall return to it in a moment. In the past, however, religion, like everything else, was dealt with in an authoritarian way. We were told, for our own good, what to think and what to look at; and we were told, for our own good, what not to think and what not to look at. And because they believed they were dealing with momentous issues that determined eternal destinations, religions tended to be at war with each other. It is no accident that the vocabulary of religious vituperation is so gross, particularly in the Christian tradition, more particularly in the long feud between Catholics and Protestants. We get riled with each other in areas where it is difficult if not impossible to establish the truth. We don't beat each other up over the multiplication tables, but we get very agitated about religion and politics, because it is impossible to establish their incontrovertible truth.

The fascinating thing about our own day is that the intellectual attitude to these matters has changed utterly. If I can use the Rozanov metaphor one last time: today we positively revel in and celebrate the fact that there are almost as many chairs for distance gazing as there are people to sit in them. There is no universally accepted answer to the question posed by our ultimate concern. The dominant characteristic of what is called post-modernity is the absence of agreement on the core meanings and values that undergird the human experience. Sociologists call these underground streams of value and meaning 'metanarratives' and they tell us that the main characteristic of our society is its lack of agreement on how to understand and order human communities today. In their language, we have no common metanarrative. We describe our society today as 'multicultural' and its values as 'plural'. The leaders of most religious institutions deplore this situation, for fairly obvious reasons. They talk contemptuously of 'pick and mix' Christians or 'cafeteria Catholics' who take what they want from traditional religious systems and ignore what is not congenial. While unattractive, their dyspepsia is understandable. After all, if you are invested in the proclamation of a particular system of meaning and value, not because it is one among many, but because it is the only true and saving one, then you are bound to be disturbed by the new plural culture. Religious officials feel the way all monopolists feel when competition invades their market place: they resent it, precisely because it threatens their dominance. Before returning to the effects of post-modernity on religion, it will be instructive to look at some of the things it is doing to politics.

In a brilliant paper, Robert Cooper, Deputy Secretary of Defence and Overseas Secretary in the Cabinet Office, applied the concept of post-modernity to the political realities of the world today. He said there were three kinds of state around at the moment. What he called the post-modern state had no territorial or imperial ambitions and no taste for war. It was willing to share sovereignty with other states, not just in defence, but in law and economics. Members of the European Union were the purest examples of the post-modern state. Other countries, such as China and Iraq, were still modern states. He characterised 'modern' states as expansionist,

suspicious of the intentions of other nations and with more than a residual taste for war. He warned that post-modern states might still have to resist the aggressions of modern states in the traditional way. He went on to point out that much of the world had fallen into a pre-modern condition, in places where the state no longer fulfilled Weber's criterion of possessing a legitimate monopoly on the use of force. Pre-modern states have no legitimate authority and no central control. They are *kleptocracies*, areas controlled and dominated by gangsters and robbers. In its relations with these chaotic areas, he advises post-modern states either to conquer or keep out.

Cooper used his analysis as a basis for advising European governments in situations of conflict with modern and pre-modern states. I do not want to engage with that part of his discussion, except to observe that truly post-modern states find it difficult if not impossible to conduct traditional warfare with sufficient ruthlessness, even if they are persuaded of the justice of their cause. This is mainly because they find it difficult to endure the deaths of their own military personnel. However, because of the phenomenon of the global village and the fact that we are able to look in on the tragedies that are daily enacted in modern and pre-modern states, public opinion often prompts the leaders of post-modern states to interventions that are rarely effective, usually because they lack the kind of callousness that might make them stick.

Cooper's analysis can be applied to the global religious situation. Just as there are significant minorities in all post-modern nations that crave a return to the nationalistic and xenophobic style of the modern state, so there are elements in the Christian world that long for a return to the old days of dominance and control that once characterised the life of the churches. In Cooper's typology, most churches in the North Atlantic region are 'modern' institutions uneasily operating in an increasingly post-modern culture. One of the main characteristics of post-modernity, which is reflected in effective business ventures, is the flattening of hierarchies and the sharing of patterns of governance. Though still more honoured in theory than in practice, there is also a commitment to equal treatment for women and sexual and ethnic minorities. All of this is in marked contrast to life in the traditional or 'modern' churches, the greatest and most characteristic of which is the Roman Catholic Church. Though it is increasingly disturbed by pressure from post-modern elements at the grass-roots level, it is still, at the top, an intensely authoritarian and interventionist church, which practises the rhetorical equivalence of warfare, usually upon its own clergy and lay people, though not infrequently upon society at large. The Roman Catholic Church is, in many ways, an ecclesiastical version of the state of China. Like China, it is enormous and extremely powerful, so it is able to make many of its interventions stick. By contrast, the Anglican Communion, which might, with wise and courageous leadership, emerge as the first truly post-modern church, seems to be caught in a state of transitional futility, in which pre-modern, modern and post-modern elements all contend with each other. The particular tragedy of the Anglican Church is that a truly post-modern structure of dispersed and plural governance was emerging, which is now under severe attack from strong pre-modern elements in the communion that are forcing a timid leadership to row back towards increasing centralisation and ethical and doctrinal control. Protestant churches with fewer international elements to harmonise should, in theory, find the transition towards appropriate ecclesiastical versions of post-modernity easier to manage. In practice, this does not seem to be happening, mainly because most of them are heavily invested in a theory of human relationships that is wildly at variance with the way most people are now choosing to live.

So the crisis in the churches is not simply a matter of managing painful elements of change in a dynamic situation. Like an ancient galleon that has spent ages at sea, Christianity is encrusted with customs and attitudes acquired in its voyage through the centuries and it is making the

tragic mistake of confusing the accidents of theological and cultural history with eternal truth. Callum G. Brown in his book, *The Death of Christian Britain*, claims that the single most important element in the free-fall in church attendance in Britain is the churches resistance to the feminist revolution.⁴ The classic sociological account of the decline of religious observance in Britain was what was called 'secularisation theory'. The idea was that the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution gave birth to a new kind of consciousness that was inimical to religion and began the process of its dissolution. While there is clearly something in secularisation theory, Brown challenges many of its essential elements. One of the elements of secularisation theory was that the Industrial Revolution alienated the working classes from Christianity. Brown dismisses that claim and shows that working class Britain was profoundly involved in various forms of evangelical religion. The boom time in working class religiosity in Britain was the mid 1950s, of which the success of Billy Graham's crusades in 1954 was more a symptom than a cause. What Brown calls the background discourse of this period was the evangelical economy of salvation and, to use another of his terms, it was a highly gendered discourse.

This is where I find his narrative convincing, because it exactly mirrors my own theological experience. Traditional Christianity was based on very rigid gender roles. Women were subordinated to men as far as leadership went, but were viewed as spiritually superior to them and sent by God to restrain and civilise them. All of this was based on a particular reading of scripture as well as on a particular stage of social evolution, and it still lies behind the nostalgia that characterises the debate about the family in Britain and the USA. When Christian feminists started challenging these stereotypes, traditionalists argued against them by claiming that changes in gender roles would undermine the whole biblical system and nothing would remain unchallenged. During the debate on the ordination of women, I remember arguing against the traditionalists on the grounds that they were exaggerating the effect that ordaining women would have. This was not a revolution, I argued, it was a tiny adjustment of the dial of history to accommodate changes in relations between women and men. The doctrine of ministry would not be affected by admitting women, it would only be widened slightly. Everything would go on as before, except that there would now be women with dog collars on. We would get used to the change, as we did when women doctors started wearing stethoscopes round their necks. After a few months we would think nothing of it. Not so, argued the traditionalists: make this change and, in time, the whole edifice will fall. Historic Catholic Christianity is all of a piece, a minutely articulated whole, and if you take out one piece of the structure, the whole thing will gradually fall apart, because there will be nothing to stop the process continuing. Question an element as central as this and you substitute human judgement for divinely revealed truth and the whole edifice will collapse like a stack of cards. They said the right thing for the wrong reason, but their prediction is gradually coming true, and it is one of the main elements in Brown's revisionist theory of church decline. He says that it was the feminist revolution that contributed most to the dramatic decline of traditional Christianity in Britain. In a remarkably short period after 1963 the whole edifice started to crumble, except for a few defensive redoubts that still guard the old tradition with increasing desperation. What finished off Christianity in Britain, therefore, was not the slow creep of secularism, but the swift success of the women's movement. That is Brown's central claim. He is well aware of the way the experience of the United States appears to contradict his thesis, but his response is instructive: *'The way of viewing religion and religious decline in Britain offered in this book should have wider applicability. It may help to explain the near contemporaneous secularisation of Norway, Sweden, Australia and perhaps New Zealand, and should help to account for the rapid secularisation of much of Catholic Europe since the 1970s. Critically, it may help to explain the*

⁴ Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, Routledge, London, 2000.

North American anomaly. Throughout secularisation studies from the 1950s to the 1990s, the United States and Canada have seemed difficult to fit in the British model of religious decline. A supposedly obvious 'secular' society of the twentieth century has sustained high levels of churchgoing and church adherence. Debate on this has gripped American sociologists of religion for decades without apparent resolution. Perhaps the answer lies in seeing the same discursive challenge as Britain experienced *emerging* in North America in the 1960s, but then not *triumphing*. A discursive conflict is still under way in North America. The Moral Majority and the evangelical fight back has been sustained in public rhetoric in a way not seen in Europe. North American television nightly circulates the traditional evangelical narrative of conversionism...and a discursive battle has raged since the 1960s. Secular post-hippy culture of environmentalism, feminism and freedom for sexuality co-exists beside a still-vigorous evangelical rhetoric in which home and family, motherhood and apple pie, are sustaining the protocols of gendered religious identity. Piety and femininity are still actively enthralled to each other, holding secularisation in check. In Foucauldian terms, North America may be experiencing an overlap of epistemes (of modernity and post-modernity)⁵

The fundamental issue for Christianity in this debate is not whether you are more comfortable with the traditional evangelical version of gender identity than with the post-modern feminist interpretation, but whether it is right to claim it as exclusively Christian. We all have preferences in life and sometimes we are more comfortable with the way things were than with the way things are. Some people like to be old fashioned, some people absolutely *au courant*. Sometimes we even twist back on ourselves and establish a neo *retro-look*, in which we give a contemporary spin to a previous model of something, whether in clothing or furnishing. Post-modernism is so plural it can even find a place for yesterday or for last century in its interior design. Society is full of interesting survivals of this sort, including groups who exist to restore various European monarchies. In Scotland there are groups that plan for the return of the House of Stuart to a renewed Scottish monarchy. They gather from time to time in out of the way buildings, dramatically swathed in tartan cloaks, to plan the return of the king from over the water, who, though a genetic descendant of the Stuarts, is probably an elderly Portuguese wine exporter. There is no harm in this. It's a Scottish version of the re-enactment of the shoot-out between the Earp brothers and the Clancies at the OK corral. It's all part of the heritage business and our endearing nostalgia for extinct cultures and their artefacts

The big question for the churches is whether they are so identified with the values of a previous culture that they are incapable of adapting to its successor. The culture wars of North America, in which Christianity is identified, not only with a particular version of gender relationships, but with a hatred of sexual minorities and many contemporary human freedoms, is a prospect that dismays Christians who are perfectly at ease in the new culture of post-modernity. One can prefer a particular culture without being blind to its defects. Every way of ordering society has its shadow side, and post-modernity is no exception. The issue is not whether it is imperfect, but whether any other way of ordering society, including the one associated with religious conservatism, would be significantly better. A deeper issue is whether it makes sense for Christianity to identify previous cultural arrangements exclusively with the mind of God. Out of date systems are no more likely to be perfect than up to date systems. The decisive element in the situation is that up-to-date is where most of us are, for better or for worse, and there is a lot to be said for accepting rather than running from where we are. The fact is that we now see the human struggle to claim meaning and value for our lives as an enterprise of many approaches, many answers. I would suggest that there is likely to be something of value in that very variety.

⁵ Brown, pp.196-197.

More negatively, the presence of many systems is a good bulwark against the tendency to abuse that is found in societies where single systems dominate. Single systems always become arrogant. So the relativising effect of the presence of other accounts of the human adventure tempers the absolutising tendency of single systems or the endless contention that characterises societies with two dominant systems. Voltaire understood this: '*...if you have two religions in your land, the two will cut each other's throats; but if you have thirty religions, they will dwell in peace*'.⁶ Voltaire expresses the best value of post-modernity in that quotation. When authority, in religion as well as politics, is dispersed among many centres, it helps to neutralise the corrupting and oppressive effects of power. But there is an inevitable rear-guard action on the part of traditional centres of power. We see something of this going on in the debate about what should be the extent and scope of the European Community in the lives of its member states. And we see something of the same dynamic in the relationship between churches and other faith communities. The new ethic of pluralism is difficult for exclusive theological systems to deal with. If you have strongly internalised the conviction that your outfit, whether political or spiritual, is superior to all others, you will find contemporary multiculturalism difficult to cope with. It is even more difficult if you believe that your system is exclusively true and no salvation beyond it is possible. Comfortable co-existence with friends and neighbours who are on their way to damnation is an awkward, though not, apparently, an impossible feat to carry off. In the religious wars that are raging in North America at the moment many casualties have been created, such as the family of a Presbyterian minister I heard about. John, a conscientious if unimaginative pastor of suburban churches during a long career, was a characteristic product of early twentieth century American Protestantism. A gentle, liberal minded man of extremely conservative instincts, two of his daughters married ordained ministers, the third a wealthy stockbroker. Shortly after John's death, the wife of the stockbroker became a born-again Christian and announced to her mother that her father, regrettably, was now in Hell, because he had never really given his life to Jesus. Traditional Presbyterianism, apparently, doesn't have the fuel to get souls to Heaven. That sad little story perfectly illustrates the dilemma that faces Christianity today. There is much in the Christian tradition that can be used to support the ugly exclusivism of the rich sister's religion. There is plenty in our past that makes the sentencing of this gentle American pastor to eternal torment mild by comparison. When Callum Brown discussed the contrast between traditional evangelical Christianity and contemporary human experience, he focused on the specific role of women, but he could have made the same point in a more general way. The real question is not any particular human consequence of believing the classic evangelical economy of salvation, but the whole set of assumptions that undergirds it. When Christian traditionalists opposed the emancipation of women within the structures of the Church they intuitively understood that the real issue was the status of the scripture and the religious claims that have been based upon it. If you believe that every word in the Bible was, in some sense, dictated by God, then you are going to have massive problems with contemporary society, particularly with its attitude to women and human sexuality. To come at it from the other side for a moment, if you are a Christian who believes in the freedom of women to order their own destiny, within the normal limitations that define any human life, then you have already deconstructed the traditional view of the Bible. A contest has occurred and been resolved, whether you realise it or not. The contest is between what you now believe about the right of women to the same freedoms and opportunities as men and the traditional, biblical view of the status of women. As Brown reminded us, in his sociological jargon, the classic Christian attitude to these matters was a highly 'gendered discourse', which set down a precise and unalterable set of gender identities.

⁶ François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire, *Reflections on Religion*, from, *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, Penguin Books New York, 1995, p.131.

That is clear, so the choice is obvious. Brown suggests that, because people in Europe, though less clearly in North America, have chosen a new gender discourse that affirms and celebrates the right of women to embrace roles that were previously closed to them, they have simply abandoned Christianity en masse, because it is fundamentally inconsistent with their new consciousness. For these people, the majority of the population in many parts of Europe, the traditional Christian understanding of life is no longer plausible. It is as irrelevant to them as crinolines and stage coaches. It is true that refugees from post-modern consciousness, who find a life of multiple choice difficult to sustain, occasionally seek asylum in a traditional religious system, but even here there is something unmistakably post-modern going on, because the element of choice is so strong. And the clamour they raise against the consciousness they have left is itself highly significant.

The question is whether the options for choice are limited to the two I have described, either abandonment of Christianity or of contemporary consciousness, or whether there is a third choice. Most people in our culture appear to have decided that being a Christian means inhabiting a kind of consciousness that is no longer possible for them, so they have abandoned it and rarely ever think about it. They are fortified in their rejection by the Christians they hear most about today, because they agree with their estimation of Christianity, though they draw diametrically opposite conclusions from it. Both groups believe that Christianity is emphatically committed to a specific way of ordering human relationships that was decreed by God and cannot, therefore, ever be changed.

Is that it, then? Christianity has already been pushed to the edges in our society as an eccentric type of consciousness that is profoundly antipathetic to contemporary values: are we to witness its slow but inevitable death, apart from a few refugee encampments here and there? Is there another approach, which is not a middle way between belief and unbelief and which is neither diluted fundamentalism nor watered-down scepticism? There is another group in the game, though whether it will be sent off the field is still an open question, since it tends to be despised by both the other groups as traitors. This group believes that it is possible to be Christian and post-modern, to be a member of a church and a supporter of feminism and the rights of sexual minorities, in spite of Christian tradition. It is a radical position, which has uncoupled Christianity from absolute claims about the status of the Bible and tradition. And what broke the chain, as the traditionalists rightly foresaw, was the emancipation of women. Having embraced the ethical imperative of feminism, those of us who are members of this group came to realise that we were now reading the Bible as a human, not as a divine creation. The issue for those of us who find ourselves in this position is whether we can discover new ways of using the Christian tradition that will deepen our humanity, our care for the earth and for one another. That was the agenda I set myself in this series of lectures.

My working assumption was that the discoveries we have made in our quest for meaning all came from us, were all human constructs. Their existence is testimony to our extraordinary creativity as a species. We are constantly digging for meaning, searching for understanding. During these lectures I made use of one of the most influential texts of our era, Thomas Kuhn's, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Kuhn argued that, in seeking to understand and interpret the world that lies before us, we have created habits of thought and practice that he called 'paradigms'. These are working systems of interpretation that endure until they are succeeded by systems that do the job better. Ptolemaic astronomy was succeeded by the Copernican system, which was succeeded by Newtonian physics; and so endlessly on. We are astoundingly fertile in our conceptions. There is unlikely to be a final, settled endgame which absolutely establishes everything in a single theory, because it is our nature to go on questing

for understanding through time and space. It is important to remember that a wise humanity does not dismiss previous paradigms with contempt or scoff at them as primitive. They were valid interpretations of the world for their time, though they were later succeeded by other points of view. If you accept the Kuhnian approach to meaning, then you find yourself in a state of permanent, but relaxed and expectant uncertainty. You don't make absolute claims for your present position, but you allow it to work for you as long as it can, till the next set of revolutionary insights replaces it.

I have argued that that is the best approach to the great religious narratives and systems that have been such a profound part of the human story. I tried to distinguish between the transient and the enduring elements of these traditions, and suggested that it is better to see them as good poetry than as bad science. It is obvious that the astronomy of the creation narratives of Genesis no longer works for us, so it is just silly to cling to that ancient paradigm as a piece of descriptive science. It is inevitable that the religious narratives that have come down to us are framed in the science and social norms of their own day. Do we reject them for that reason, as many people appear, reasonably, to have done? Is Christianity to be rejected because of its accidental historical framework, which includes an attitude to women that is profoundly at variance with our own best values today, or does it contain an enduring challenge that needs to be separated from its incidental context? I believe that at the heart of Christianity there lies a moral challenge that is as pertinent today as it ever was. Released from their antique setting, the anger and pity of Jesus will confront us with renewed power. Since I believe that the Christian account of meaning has to be separated from its historical packaging if it is to work for us today, I have spent time deconstructing important aspects of the Christian doctrinal tradition, but my ultimate intention is resoundingly positive. I have tried to find ways of using the ancient writings of both the Hebrew and the Christian scriptures that have meaning for us today. In deconstructing the doctrinal themes in Christianity, such as Original Sin, Incarnation and Resurrection, I was more intent on using the power of these great themes for our lives today, than in discarding the ancient containers that convey them to us. I am trying to craft from the Christian past a usable ethic for our own time. The way I am proposing is not a middle path between those who hold to the old beliefs and those who totally reject them. What I am proposing is not a way of belief or unbelief, but a way of action. I have argued that it is more important to follow the way of Jesus than to believe or disbelieve the traditional Christian claims about him. Above all, I have claimed that the task of Christianity today is the challenge, not to go on interpreting the world in the ancient way, but to start disturbing it in a new way.

© Richard Holloway