

FAITH IN FOCUS

WEST CHURCH, BANGOR

CHRISTIAN THINKING IN THE MODERN WORLD



Week 1, 19 Feb 2019

A Christian approach to making choices

The Sanctity of Life

SERIES OVERVIEW



AIM: help to think through some of today's big issues so we can make wise decisions and share the Christian faith confidently with others

Week 1 Tuesday 19th February @ 7.30 pm

A Christian approach to making choices ~ the Sanctity of Life

Week 2 Tuesday 19th March @ 7.30 pm

Is it ever right to end a life? ~ Facing death faithfully

Week 3 Tuesday 9th April @ 7.30 pm,

Explaining our faith ~ Understanding and Engaging Worldviews

Week 4 Tuesday 7th May @ 7.30 pm

The problem of evil & suffering ~ the uniqueness of Christianity

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THE MODERN WORLD?



THE
Post.
Christian
CENTURY

Post-Christian Britain



In a London school a teenager with no church connections hears the Christmas story for the first time. His teacher tells it well and he is fascinated by this amazing story. Risking his friends' mockery, after the lesson he thanks her for the story. One thing had disturbed him, so he asks: 'Why did they give the baby a swear word for his name?'

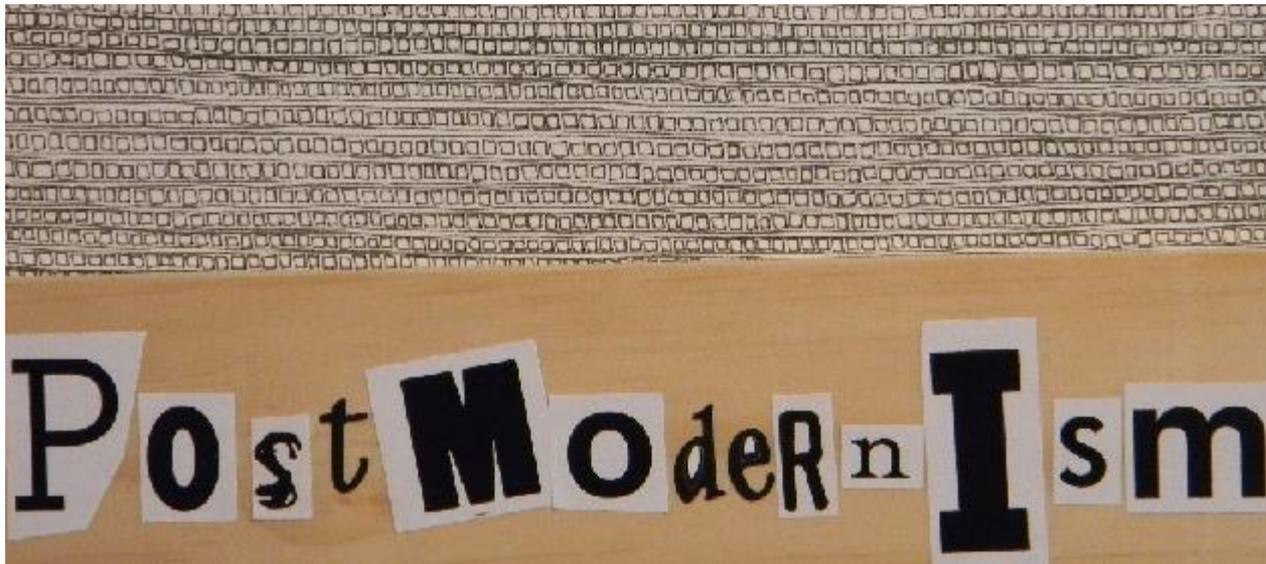
One Sunday in Oxford a man visits a church building to collect something for his partner who works during the week in a creative-arts project the church runs. He arrives as the morning congregation is leaving and recognises the minister, whom he knows. Surprised, he asks: 'What are all these people doing here? I didn't know churches were open on Sundays!'

Stuart Murray (2004) *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World*. Paternoster: Milton Keynes. p.1

THE MODERN WORLD?



THE **Post** Christian CENTURY



POSTMODERNISM



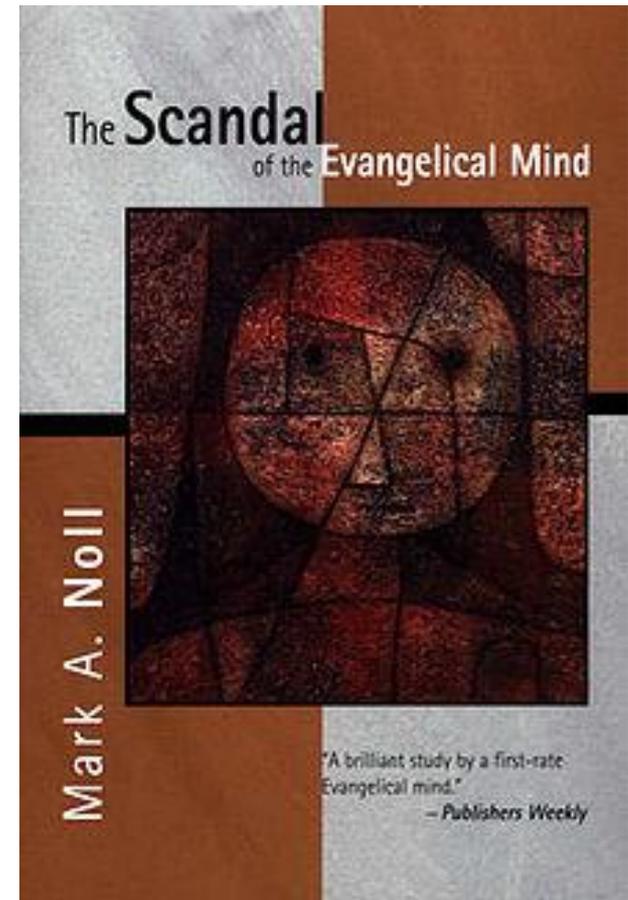
- World Wars, postcolonialism, feminism, cultural diversity → suspicion of progress through knowledge
- All knowledge is relative (culturally conditioned)
- Absolute truth either doesn't exist or is unknowable
- No truth claim is absolute except the claim that no truth claim is absolute
- All authorities and systems are questioned:
 - Metanarratives (stories claiming to explain everything)
 - Judgements about cultures
 - Identities (male v female)
- Individual stories and values matter

WHY CHRISTIAN THINKING?



“The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind”

Mark Noll, 1994



CHRISTIAN THINKING



Expresses love for God

Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul **and with all your mind.**” (Matthew 22:37)

Exposes Satan’s lies

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. [...] Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. (Ephesians 4:14; 6:11)

Enables effective evangelism

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5)



A CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO MAKING CHOICES



How do people today
decide what is good?



BIG QUESTIONS



1. **What** is good?

2. **Why** be good?

3. **How** to be good?

WHAT IS GOOD?



Moral standards may either be:

- a) **Absolute** – the same for everyone, everywhere, all the time
- b) **Relative** – decided either by individuals (based either on emotions or reason) or societies

A Christian answer:

- An absolute standard based on God's revealed character and will

WHY BE GOOD?



- Egoism (what we gain, including pleasure)
- Altruism (selfless benevolence)
- Fear of punishment
- Respect, duty or love

A Christian answer:

- Fear of God; Love for God

HOW TO BE GOOD?



- Human goodness and potential are often assumed (educate / improve conditions etc.)

A Christian answer:

- The Word and the Spirit

BIG QUESTIONS



1. **What** is good?

➤ God's revealed character and will

2. **Why** be good?

➤ Fear of God; love for God

3. **How** to be good?

➤ The Holy Spirit



How can we know God's will?



DEFICIENT APPROACHES



A COMMON QUESTION



Does God reveal His will specifically?

- He may do (through various means), but doesn't promise to
- We must learn to test experience against Scripture and develop wisdom

A METAPHOR



THE GOSPEL FRAMEWORK



God rules

- What did Father God intend for human life in this issue?

We rebelled

- What are the sins of belief and behaviour in this issue?

God rescues

- How do we experience forgiveness in Christ in this issue?

We respond

- What do repentance, faith and obedience mean in this issue?

God restores

- What hope does the Spirit's new creation give in this issue?





THE SANCTITY OF LIFE – EARLY LIFE ISSUES

EARLY LIFE ISSUES



- ‘Designer babies’
- Fertility treatment (especially IVF)
- Contraception
- **Abortion**

ARGUMENTS FOR ABORTION?



- **Compassionate grounds**
 - preventing back-street or overseas abortions
 - the hard cases (sexual crime / foetal disease)

- **Women's rights**
 - reproductive equality
 - bodily autonomy

THE GOSPEL FRAMEWORK



God rules [creation]

- Human life is sacred, irrespective of age, location, potential or ability



So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;

Genesis 1:27

This is the written account of Adam's line.
When God created man, he made him in the likeness of
God. [...] When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a
son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he
named him Seth.

Genesis 5:1,3

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his
blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made
man

Genesis 9:6

GOD'S DESIRE



God rules [creation]

- Human life is sacred, irrespective of age, location, potential or ability
- God involves us with Him in the process of procreation – we have choices to make
- Children are a gift from God to raised in His ways, ideally by married biological parents
- Individuals are known and loved by God from before creation and throughout their lives



[God] chose us in [Christ] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

Ephesians 1:4



For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
my soul knows it very well.
My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.

Psalm 139:13-16

THE GOSPEL FRAMEWORK



God rescues

- Not condemnation, but forgiveness and acceptance for those who respond in repentance and faith

God restores

- Hope of ultimate restoration and help in the present from the Spirit and the compassion of the Church (the new creation community)



WHEN DID YOU BEGIN?



LANGUAGE MATTERS



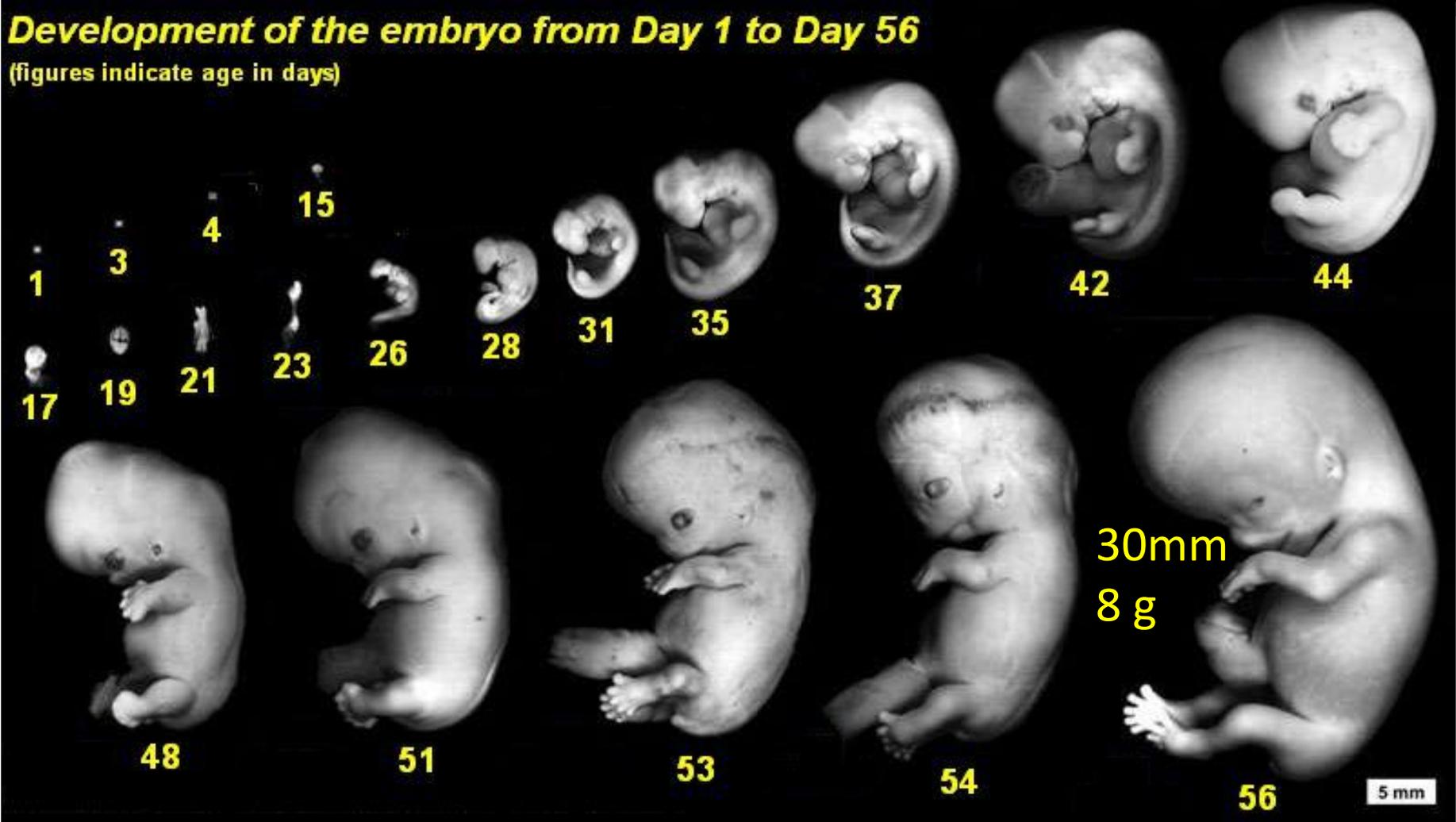
- Embryo, foetus, unborn child?
- ‘The pregnancy will be removed’
- ‘The tissue will be removed’
- Abortion no different from having bunions removed or accessing dental treatment?
- Women given a diagnosis of ‘fatal foetal abnormality’?

GOD'S DESIGN



Development of the embryo from Day 1 to Day 56

(figures indicate age in days)



12
WEEKS



© PregnancySymptoms



resin model

FERTILISATION [DAY 1]



“a new, genetically distinct human organism is formed”

Ronan O’Rahilly and Fabiola Mueller (2000) *Human Embryology and Teratology*, 3rd edn. New York: John Wiley & Sons, p. 8

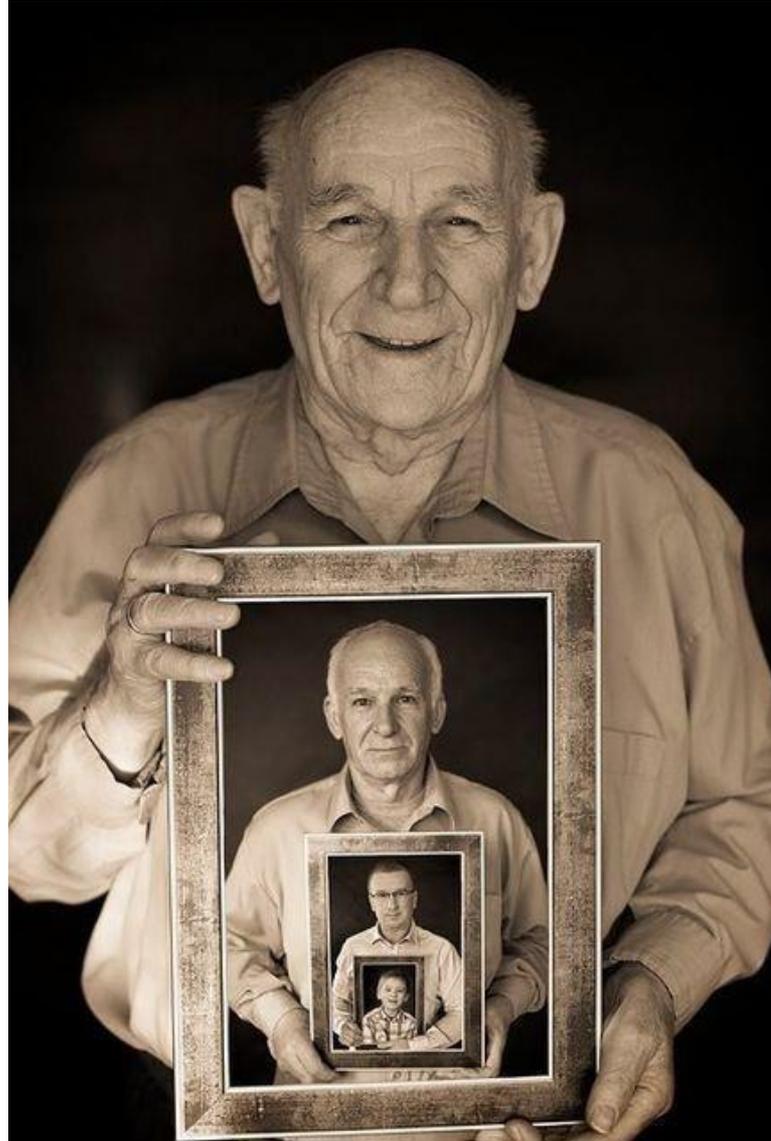
GOD'S DESIGN



all [the embryo] needs to develop to the mature stage is what human beings at any stage need, namely, a suitable environment, nutrition, and the absence of injury or disease.

Lee, Patrick, Tollefsen, Christopher O. and George, Robert P. (2015)
'Marco Rubio Is Right: The Life of a New Human Being Begins at Conception', *Public Discourse*, The Witherspoon Institute.

CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT



MATERNAL NURTURE



- Nutrition in the 'egg' cell
- Directly from her blood supply
- Via placenta
- Breast feeding
- Mitochondria (powerhouses of the cells)

BIBLE AND BIOLOGY



- Individual uniqueness begins at conception
- Development is continuous and lifelong
- Maternal nurture extends throughout life



GOD'S COMMAND



You shall not murder.

Exodus 20:13

BUT, what about the hard cases?

- Mother's life at risk
- Sexual crime (rape and incest)
- Life limiting conditions

NI LIFE AND TIMES SURVEY 2016



| | Probably or definitely YES | Probably or definitely NO |
|---|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Fatal abnormality (will die at birth) | 81% | 16% |
| Serious abnormality (may not survive birth) | 73% | 23% |
| Rape / incest | 78% | 19% |
| Mother's choice | 34% | 60% |

THE HARD CASES



- No easily solution – the pregnancy can't be undone and pain cannot be avoided
- Excellent support and care is needed for **both** mother and baby

MOTHER'S LIFE AT RISK



- No good choice, but the right choice in this situation is the lesser of two evils (a necessary evil)
- Current abortion law in Northern Ireland recognises this

SEXUAL CRIME?



- Practical challenges
- Value of the unborn child should not depend on circumstances of its conception
- The life of the unborn child should not have less value in law than that of the perpetrator
- Small numbers – most do not abort
- No regrets among those who keep the baby; significant rates of regret after abortion

LIFE LIMITING CONDITIONS?



They can't live independently

- Who genuinely can?
- How independent do you need to be?

They won't live long after birth (can't develop)

- Who does not have a life limiting condition?
- How long a life is worth living?

They will suffer if allowed to be born

- Who is born into a life free of suffering?
- How great a burden of suffering is too much?

Who judges?

WHAT KIND OF SOCIETY?



- Some lives judged not worth living?
- Parental love as chosen love?
- No 'defective' people?

LIFE LIMITING CONDITIONS?



Maximise dignity for **both**
mother (nurture life as long as possible)
and
child (until its 'natural death')