

Christianity and Philosophy

Introduction

- during O'Week 1989, there was a fire in the main quad building, which seemed to have its focus in the philosophy department. It was a truly spectacular affair, with visible flames, massive amount of smoke and fire engines blaring all over the place. Far from interrupting the festivities of O'Week, it seemed only to add to them. No one could quite bring themselves to take seriously the fact that the Philosophy department was burning down. I don't know how many times I heard people joking about whether there were still grey haired bearded philosophers in the building, trying to decide whether or not the fire was real.

- philosophy, what Hegel defined simply as 'thinking things over', used to enjoy a position of pre-eminence in the intellectual universe. For centuries, it was the pinnacle of intellectual endeavor. I don't think you could say that today. In fact, there seem to be more jokes than respect.

Question: What do you get when you cross the Godfather with a philosopher?

Answer: An offer you can't understand.

Descartes is sitting in a bar, having a drink. The bartender asks him if he would like another. "I think not," he says and vanishes in a puff of logic.

Jean-Paul Sartre is sitting at a French cafe, revising his draft of Being and Nothingness. He says to the waitress, "I'd like a cup of coffee, please, with no cream." The waitress replies, "I'm sorry, monsieur, but we're out of cream. How about with no milk?"

- and yet at same time, philosophy still profoundly forms how we live our lives and the values we share and act on. Although I have spoken to enough architects who think it is they who really determine how we live our lives, the fact remains that thoughts that begin in philosophy departments, even burnt down ones, end up as cultural movements in the wider society. The questions that philosophy asks – what is real, how do we know about reality, what are minds, if anything, and how are we to think about abstract entities like thought; what is good, and why is good good – these questions are as important as ever, fundamental life directing sorts of questions, and the fact that we are pretty much a philosophically mute society means I suspect that we assume answers to these questions rather than think about them and decide them.

- and so this afternoon, in the brief time we have together, I want us to put a break on the drip feeding of philosophy into our minds that mostly takes place, and step back and think a little more critically. And in particular, want to do that by means of saying a few things about the relationship between philosophy and Christianity. Again, for many centuries, the two were virtually indistinguishable, but if philosophy has fallen on hard times, it should spare a thought for Christianity. Nonetheless, I want to suggest that if we gave more time to philosophy and in particular the philosophy of Christianity, I am convinced we would be the better for it.

- so then, I have 4 points to make
 - Christianity is the opposite of a philosophy
 - Christianity has philosophical implications
 - The religious function of philosophy
 - You and philosophy – the unexamined life

1. Christianity is the opposite of a philosophy

- this first point may seem strange, but in a sense, it's the most important. I was not born into a Christian family. My parents had nothing to do with church, and I didn't grow up with any knowledge of the Christianity, rather I became a Christian because I was convinced of its truthfulness as a late teenager. One of the things I remember Christians kept saying as I was doing my investigating was that Christianity was not really a religion, and it used to drive me batty. Couldn't understand what they meant. As it turned out, they were saying something of profound importance.

Most religions really fall into the category of a philosophy. That is, they are theories about the way life is, and therefore the way we should live if we want to live well. For the most part, they consist of collections of suggested timeless truths, such as 'desire' being the cause of suffering, or 'karma' as the way to understand the things that happen in our lives. What is at stake here are ideas, and in particular, whether your ideas are better than my ideas – that's the stuff of philosophy, and of religion as philosophy. Now, the fact that most religion is a form of philosophy is not a big deal in itself – it's just that the kinds of reasons that can be given in support of a particular philosophy are often hard to decide about one way or the other.

But it's at precisely this point that Christianity is so very different from all other religions. Christianity falls under the category, not of philosophy, but of history. That is, it is not primarily about ideas, which need to be argued about, but about events that need to be heard about. The Christian message really is an

announcement; that is, it reports what is best described as an achievement, something that has been done in a specific time and place, which was witnessed by specific people who announced the things that had happened. Of course, that specific thing focuses on Jesus. In a sense, Christianity is the sort of thing that could be recorded on a video tape, an event to be preserved and written about, more than philosophers.

You see how Christianity is the opposite of a philosophy – to the ancient Greek city of Corinth, steeped in philosophical tradition, the apostle Paul recognized that what was sought after was wisdom, deeper and deeper philosophy, but he said all he had to offer was foolishness, the only thing he would talk to them about was the most stupid thing they could imagine – Christ crucified. In one sense, the most stupid, pathetic thing imaginable, a man hanging on a cross. But Paul says, this event is actually the great achievement of God, the great powerful victory of God over Evil, right there, the moment when heaven and earth kissed, when God took into his very being the pain and suffering of the world, and overcame it, reconciled it, and made a new start for the world. The day before that first Good Friday, that was not the case, the job hadn't yet been done. The day after, everything had changed, because something had been achieved, and being a Christian is simply entering into the victory.

You can see how different this is from a philosophy, or a set of timeless truths – philosophy and timeless truths don't in themselves do anything, they seek to educate people so that they will do something. There is no achievement internal to timeless truths, they leave the achievement for the devotees of the truths or philosophy.

Christianity on the other hand, is all about the fact that God himself has done what we couldn't do. That in the realm of objective history, God entered our world in the person of his Son Jesus and did the job. And there is all the difference in the world between a religion which fundamentally says 'Do!', and Christianity which fundamentally says, 'Done!'

2. Christianity has philosophical implications

- that's the first thing to say, that Christianity is the opposite of a philosophy. At the same time, it's also true to say that Christianity has philosophical implications, and so what I want to do now is a little compare and contrast with the 2 main philosophical alternatives that are available today.

- what then is a Christian philosophy. There are 4 points:

a) There is a real, independent, personal, active being – God. The specific name of God is a reflection of his specific being: Father, Son and Spirit.

In a sense, it seems almost silly to say it, but the starting point has to be the claim that there is a real independent, personal active being – that really does exist, whose existence is not dependent on us or on being known by us, whose reality is not changed by what we like or prefer. God is a reality, just like you are a reality, in fact much more real than you or I, real in a way that we are not, in that we come into existence and we go out of existence, but God always was and always is and always will be. When we speak of God, we are not talking about human experience, or a universal human feeling, although humans might have experiences and feelings in response to this reality, that's not the point.

- of course this is contrast to one of the great religions of the day, atheism, and it's methodological cousin, materialism or naturalism, the view that all things that exist, or at least all things that can be know, including things like love, thought, language, humor, art, literature and morality, can only be explained in terms of our continuity with the physical world, in terms of electricity and genes and random selection. This is science as a religion, scientism. I'll say more in a moment why that is both a religious choice, and also almost always a hypocritical one, but for now, I simply highlight the contrast.

- what's more, this reality is a specific reality; it has defining characteristics, just like you have defining characteristics. I am a male human being – I am not a horse, although occasionally my kids treat me that way, and for a time I exhibit horse like properties, deep down in the reality of who and what I am I am a male human being. You might not like that, you might hate males, you might think I am unworthy to be a human being, but all of that is irrelevant. It's what I am, I am one thing, and not another. It's the same with God. God is who and what he is, he is one thing and not another. And the reality of God is captured in his name. My name is Andrew, which comes from the Greek word aner or man, so my name is manly – it has virtually nothing to do with the reality of who I am, in that sense my name is accidental – I could just as easily have been Cedric. But God's name is an expression of God's reality, God's specific reality. And his name is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That is the name of God, according to Christians, because that is the nature of God's reality. You might not like it, you might not understand it, but then reality doesn't conform to what you like or understand, you have to conform your understanding to reality.

- again, this is in contrast to the other great religious slash philosophical option of our day, anti-realism. What I mean by anti-realism is the view that we are

fundamentally the creators of our own universes, by means of our perspective, our language, our experience, our a-priory categories, we structure reality. What started as a good but modest observation, the fact that we are active in the knowing process, then jumps a couple of logical steps and denies that there is anything more than our activity, in fact we are the creators of reality, as though the heavens and the earth somehow depend on us. But then, with another few logical leaps, noticing that different people have different constructions, you end up in a full grown relativism which says that actually, there is nothing as such to be known anymore, only interpretations to be suggested. Again, in my view this is a religious choice, and one which is only held hypocritically, and we'll come back to it.

- for the moment, hear this clearly, won't you. The fact is that God is specific, he is in his very nature Father Son and Spirit, and not something or someone else. The Christian claim includes necessarily that he is not Allah, and Muhammad is not his prophet; he is not the great ocean of being and Buddha is the one who leads to enlightenment; he is not Thor and he is not anything else other than what and who he is. It is simply foggy thinking to say that 2 things that are not the same, are.

Heart warming article in the paper a little while ago of a Christian a Muslim and Jew who visited a school to promote peace and tolerance. Very worthy goal; but the way go about that, or at least as they are reported, is ridiculous. The Muslim representative from the Forum on Australia's Islamic Relations is quoted as pointing out that Allah was another word for God, and later on a kid is quoted as saying that Christians believe in one God, just like Muslims and Jews. No we don't – we believe in one God, whose identity is specific and precise, Father Son and Holy Spirit. I'm all for social tolerance, and in fact it is often Christians who have been at the forefront of movements for freedom of speech and association and religion, including non-Christian religions. But social tolerance is a different thing from truth tolerance, as though the only way we can all get along is to pretend that

we all deep down think the same thing. We don't, and it's actually deeply disrespectful to say that we do.

That is the absolute heart of the Christian faith – three things follow from it.

b) God stands in a fundamental and asymmetrical relationship to all other things: creator to creation. The paradox of exclusiveness and universality.

Second then, this means that God stands in a fundamental and asymmetrical relationship to all other things: creator to creation. By asymmetrical relationship I mean a relationship which is not symmetrical, where what he is to us is not what we are to him. What he is to us is our creator; what we are to him is his creatures. All things, including all people, including you in this room now, are dependent on him for your very existence; he is completely independent of you. Were he to withdraw himself from you, you would cease to exist. Were you to withdraw yourself from him, he would continue to exist. When it comes to the question of personal identity, this is the most important thing of all to know.

This then leads to a second point – it's what you might call the paradox of exclusiveness and universality. That is, it's precisely because this God is the exclusive specific creator and sustainer of all things, that therefore all things, utterly universally all things and all people, owe their love and loyalty and trust to him. Can get the point by a contrast – imagine there were two gods, who got together and divided up the universe between them, like Spain and Portugal did to the world in the 15th century – then would be legitimate for 50% of people to entirely ignore god A, because they belonged to god B. God A couldn't touch them, because they weren't his. He is not the exclusive god, and so can't make universal claims. But the Christian claim is exactly not that – it is that this specific one true and living God, Father Son and Spirit, is the exclusive creator and sustainer God,

and therefore has an absolutely universal stake in the lives and affairs of all people. The contours of that stake are wonderfully loving faithfulness – that's God's stance to his people.

This then leads to 2 further points

c) God has the moral and spiritual right and authority to determine how creatures relate to their creator

There is a specific reality, who is our creator and sustainer, and therefore 2 other things follow. First, this one has the moral and spiritual right and authority to determine how we creatures relate to our creator. It's not up to us to decide what we believe about God, or how we go about responding to God. It's up to God. Another way to put this is that there is such a thing as idolatry – that is false worship of God. It doesn't change the fundamental relationship between God and such people – they are still his creatures whom he loves and is faithful to. But it is false worship – to name God as other than Father Son and Spirit, for example, does not just fall within the freedom of a person's preference, just as to name me a horse doesn't fall within the power of your preferences. That's not harsh, or narrow, or bigoted – it's just true – at least, it's true if the first point is true.

But there is a second thing which follows, namely that ...

d) God has acted decisively in Jesus to restore, establish, and secure a right relationship with all of his creation

- the place where God is known, where God has revealed himself, but more than that, the place where God has not just shown things but done things, is in Jesus of Nazareth, himself the personal presence of God with us. It is in Jesus, and only in Jesus, precisely because Jesus is not just a messenger who is delivering the

message from someone else, but who is himself God, that God can be known. It is Jesus himself who said, “no one knows the Father except the Son, and those whom he chooses to reveal him.”

In the same way, it is in Jesus and only in Jesus, precisely because Jesus is not just a good person but God himself, that we can be right with God. Jesus is God come amongst us, God come to us, God come into our place, God himself living our life, dying our death on the cross, rising to new life as the start of a new phase in the way God relates to his creation, where we live in forgiveness and grace.

- what’s more, this job comes in two parts – what God has begun in Jesus, God will complete in Jesus. Jesus is alive now, and will return to finish the job, to completely clean up this world, to eradicate evil and violence and hatred and death and sickness and pain. What else would God do but remain faithful to the world, his world, the world he created and loves. And therefore, Christians are endlessly, relentlessly active in trying to persuade other people to become Christians, to align themselves with reality, to know their origin and their destiny, and to participate in the word to come.

- that is the Christian faith in a very small nutshell; you read the source documents, and that is what they say. If you reject Christianity, make sure it is this thing that you reject, make sure you understand the inner logic of it, and see the coherence of it; don’t be merely prejudiced, or worse, ignorant, rejecting something that you haven’t grasped.

3. The religious function of philosophy

- I said earlier that most religions were really philosophical in structure, ideas about how things are, unlike Christianity, which I hope you can see is an entirely different beast. And I indicated that the reverse was true, also, that the two dominant philosophical alternatives to Christianity were themselves religious. In other words, there are very, very few non-religious people.

- what we called materialism, or naturalism, the view that the only things there are, or the only things that can be known, are physical events and their material causes, functions as a religion. What begins as good scientific method, to be applied within the limits of the realm of science, undergoes a kind of intellectual inflation, and becomes a presupposition, not about science, but about all of reality, a kind of scientific imperialism, as science were the key to all reality. You see the way this serves a religious purpose in a comment that the great defender of materialistic atheism, Richard Dawkins, once made to the philosopher, A.J. Ayer, : "Although atheism might have been logically tenable before Darwin," said he, "Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist." Do you see the link between the scientific theory – Darwinian evolution, and the religious commitment of atheism. Of course, there is no necessary connection whatsoever between the two. It is perfectly possible that God is the author of evolution, and whether that is the case is not something that the theory of evolution, or any scientific theory, can tell you. It's just beyond the capacity of science to make a determination. But what you see exposed in Dawkins comment is science sliding surreptitiously into religion, scientism.

- the same is true for anti-realism. Roland Barthes, the French philosopher, put bluntly the religious function of the view that we construct our own world and our own meaning:

Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing.... In precisely this way literature (it would be better from now on to say writing) by refusing to assign a secret, an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text) liberates what may be called an antitheological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases--reason, science, law.

- the point I'm making is that both of these philosophies turn out to be as much about religious commitment as Christianity. We are all religious. The question is not so much whether you will be religious, but in whose temple you will worship.
- and I want to suggest that there are good reasons to commit yourself to Christ, and equally good reasons to flee both naturalism and anti-realism.
- let me give you 2 reasons why Christianity is the most adequate philosophy

a) the testimony of the world God made

If God is the single, exclusive creator of the world, then it would make sense to think that he has left something of his fingerprints on the thing that he has made. In fact, there is a whole branch of philosophical and theoretical science, by major academics, that is grappling with the issue of the testimony of the world that God has made, under two main branches.

The first is to do with the origin of the universe; in particular, that it is not eternal. One of the main scientific developments of last century was the formulation of the big bang theory, that is, that the universe, including space and time itself, began or

came into being. Interestingly, it was primarily atheist scientists and philosophers who objected most strenuously to this discovery, and for good reason. For a simple argument runs like this: everything that begins to exist, has a cause. The universe began to exist. Therefore, the universe has a cause. But of course, the thing is that that cause must itself be not a part of the universe; not within space and time, be changeless and immaterial and unimaginably powerful. Even more, that cause must be personal, since there are only two types of causal explanation, scientific explanations which are to do with laws and initial conditions and so on, and personal explanations which are to do with agents and their intentions and so on. Since the universe can't have a scientific explanation, in that we are talking about the beginning of everything including science, then it must be personal. In other words, this cause sounds a lot like God. Notice one other thing – the point is not that everything must have a cause, so that you can then ask what caused God. The point is that everything that begins has a cause, and of course, from point a, the claim is that God never began, he always was, unlike the universe.

- and the religious commitment of scientism is clear when you look at how zealously they resist this conclusion. A 1988 edition of Newsweek magazine, praising a great leap of imagination, says that now “most cosmologists believe that the universe arose from nothing and that nothing is as certain to give rise to something as the night is to sire the dawn. Alan Guth, a brilliant MIT cosmologist, declared that the universe is a free lunch, that it came from nothing – that there was nothing, not God not energy not matter, simply nothing, and then suddenly and spontaneously the void of nothing gave rise to, or rather decayed into all the matter and energy the universe now has – not with a bang so much as with a pfft – ballooned accidentally out of the endless void of eternity, from a stillness so deep that there was no ‘there’ or ‘then’, only possibility. Alex Vilenkin, a Tufts University cosmologist, says “The universe as a young bubble had tunneled like a

metaphysical mole from somewhere else to arrive in space and time. That someplace else was 'nothing' Edward Kolb of the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory near Chicago explains: "even when you have nothing, there's something going on". But, the fatal flaw in all this, apart from its intrinsic nonsense, is that the entire scientific enterprise depends precisely on the assumption that nothing comes from nothing – or in the Latin phrase *ex nihilo nihil fit*, out of nothing, nothing comes. Maria, in the Sound of Music, sang it when she found out that Captain von Trapp loved her: 'Nothing comes from nothing, nothing ever could, so somewhere in my youth or childhood, I must have done something good.' Lousy theology, but great science – all experimental scientific inquiry depends on this assumption, that there can never be a totally new beginning that intrudes into the control area, but that it is caused by something. The reason I say all this is this: we live in the most spectacularly precise universe, with the most astonishingly finely balanced series of forces and so that make life possible. If you are a materialist, especially if you are scientifically minded, you have a real hard issue you need to deal with – why is there something rather than nothing, especially since we know the universe is not infinitely old. And why do you resist the obvious conclusion, that we are the creation of a mighty creator.

The second has to do with the nature of the universe, that is that the universe is so unimaginably finely balanced to create life, that it reeks of design and therefore of a designer, an intelligent and personal transcendent cause, and that argues persuasively for the existence of God. A fascinating and persuasive new discipline, called the intelligent design movement within the philosophy of science, is pressing this issue, pointing out that the universe is so wonderfully fine tuned for intelligent life, that the best inference is that of a designer. One writer said that to deny this is like finding a clock washed up on a beach, and saying that it just constructed itself by a random process of evolution over a few billion years. Can you really say that?

It strikes me that that takes far more faith, and in fact is pretty much a complete leap in the dark compared to believing in God.

b) the testimony of history

The second reason for taking Christianity seriously is the testimony of history, and especially the history of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. The claim that Christians have always made is simple but powerful. Unlike all other prophets, all others who claimed to speak for God, all other people who said that they had insight into the heart of reality, Jesus did not stay dead. God was perfectly happy to allow King David to stay dead and decay, that is what the disciples of Jesus said in the first Christian sermon; to allow Muhammad to stay dead and decay; to allow the Buddha to stay dead and decay. Death triumphed over them, and they were powerless in its face. Not so Jesus. God pulled back the fabric of the universe, reached in and raised him from the dead. He hauled him out of its grip, he vindicated him and abandoned all others; he demonstrated that Jesus alone is the one who speaks for him, because he is the Son of the Father.

This is not merely a claim about a miracle. This is a claim about the day God showed where he is to be found, and what he is doing decisively. There are 3 main pieces of historical evidence for the resurrection. The first is the empty tomb – that Jesus' body was placed into the tomb on the Friday afternoon, and when the women went to anoint his body on the Sunday morning, it was gone. What happened to it? Some suggest he never died – utterly historically implausible, that he staggered up, moved the rock, overpowered the Roman guards, and shipped off to the coast. Some suggest the Romans or Jews stole the body – no chance, since they could easily have crushed the early Christian movement by producing it; some suggest that the disciples stole it, and then set up this big hoax. But almost without

exception, they were martyred for their faith, and people aren't martyred for a hoax.

The second piece of evidence is that Jesus appeared alive to dozens of people, at one time, a group more than 5 times our size here. It was a certifiable, public fact.

And thirdly, the emergence of the early church can only be explained in terms of the resurrection. At the cross, they were a dispirited, broken group of losers. A week later they were courageous heroes, who led a movement that would within a couple of months claim 10% of Jerusalem for its membership, and within a couple of hundred years, the entire Roman empire.

Again, not claiming that this is a knock down argument – simply that if you have not investigated the evidence honestly, then should say to yourself that your rejection of Christianity is really just a matter of prejudice.

- origins and history, I submit, are good reasons for accepting, or at least investigating Christianity. But there's some negative work to do as well, since there is an overwhelming, massive gap in the alternatives.

I have in mind the complete inadequacy of both naturalism and anti-realism to have anything to say about evil. We live in a world in which things are not the way they are supposed to be. In a sense, this is a claim which needs absolutely no defending – it transparently obvious. Can you pick a day that does not demonstrate the truth of this fact. George Steiner, a philosopher and commentator who has the post of Extraordinary Fellow at Churchill College, Cambridge, writes in this way: "Inhumanity is, so far as we have historical evidence, perennial. There have been no utopias, no communities of justice or forgiveness" He goes on more specifically,

“for the whole of Europe and Russia, the 20th century became a time out of hell. Historians estimate at more than 70 million the number of men, women and children done to death by warfare, starvation, deportation, political murder and disease between August 1914 and ethnic cleansing in the Balkans.” He says, “it is not only that education has shown itself incapable of making sensibility and thought resistant to murderous unreason. Far more disturbingly, the evidence is that refined intellectuality, artistic virtuosity and appreciation, scientific eminence will collaborate actively with totalitarian demands, or at best, remain indifferent to surrounding sadism.” He concludes “To repeat: violence, oppression, economic enslavement and social irrationality have been endemic in history, whether tribal or metropolitan. But the 20th century has, owing to the magnitude of massacre, to the insane contrast between available wealth and actual misery, to the probability that thermonuclear and bacterial weapons could, in fact, terminate man or his environment, given to despair a new warrant.” If you resist the temptation to simply numb out, and take all this with full seriousness, it renders plausible the famous saying of the existentialist philosopher Albert Camus, “The only serious philosophical question is that of suicide!”

- and what has naturalism got to say about this – nothing, whatever, it’s just one of those things – Richard Dawkins, again:

“In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and we won’t find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is at the bottom no design, no purpose, no evil and no good; nothing but blind pitiless indifference. DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is, and we dance to its music”

- in a recent debate at Sydney Uni, Phillip Adams, perhaps Australia's best known atheistic naturalist, said much the same thing, in fact he has written to that effect in his book, Adams vs God – when it was pointed out to him on this view then that he had absolutely no reason to condemn horrific evils like the holocaust, he had nothing to say, all he could do was splutter and fulminate, “How dare you say that’, but incredibly, he couldn't and didn't answer the question – just shows how terribly hard it is to be a consistent atheist.

- likewise, relativistic anti-realism has only the brilliant insight that there are no absolutes, it's all relative, what's right for you is right for you, or in the words of atheist anti-realist, truth is what your colleagues will let you get away with, that's it. Well try telling that to the victims of the death camps and gas chambers. They are not so stupid, they know there is right and wrong and so do you.

Conclusion: You and philosophy - the unexamined life

- and my point is this – the only way not to be a religious hypocrite is to be Christian. There are almost no consistent materialist atheists, they keep thinking that human beings are valuable and worth serving and sacrificing for and loving and that that is a meaningful thing – hypocrites. And there are equally few consistent relativists, they mouth off about everything being relative until they hear about the 3 million people slaughtered in the civil war in the Congo, and if they have any shred of humanity about them, they dump their relativism like the shoddy self serving clap trap that it is, or else remain in hypocrisy.

- no my invitation to you today is simply this – avoid being a religious hypocrite – become a Christian, recognize what is obvious, what the overwhelming majority of

human beings have recognized, that there is a God; and see him acting in great power and even greater love in Jesus Christ, and commit yourself to him.

- or at least check it out as an adult. It was Socrates who said an unexamined life was not worth living, and an unexamined philosophy is not worth accepting either. If you have just swallowed whole the naturalism or the relativism of our society, it's time to do a bit of adult examining.

And if you do that, I am confident that you will discover in Christianity and the world view that it implies something that makes the best sense of the world. It takes with utmost seriousness the reality of evil; it takes with utmost seriousness the reality of goodness as well. It speaks of the power of love and grace, the significance of forgiveness and sacrifice. It provides us with an intellectually, spiritually, morally and emotionally satisfying meaning. It has a redemptive power which is seen in the loves of hundreds of millions of people across the world, and slightly fewer here at Sydney university.