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## **The Future of Faith: Being an Authentic Christian in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

### **Introduction:**

The Seminar Planning Committee has provided me with this wonderfully provocative title, *"Being an Authentic Christian in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century"*. I say provocative, because if we assume one can be an 'Authentic Christian' it automatically infers that there are "Inauthentic Christians". The term 'authentic' is often equated with "real" or "genuine", hence what do we mean by real or genuine Christianity? When we talk about authentic Christianity are we really alluding to a 'process of becoming', or a 'journeying towards' rather than having arrived? Are we talking about a process of change? In the latest edition of *Journey* the Rev Bryan Gilmore's review of WWT states:

*"As we move on in our faith walk by questioning, discussion and debate, we are progressing beyond the dogmatic straightjacket forms of Christendom, to new horizons of interpreting our faith, focus and values for our spiritually liberated journey."*<sup>1</sup>

Are there things that we no longer are prepared to do or say because we do not believe we are being true to ourselves or our understanding of the person of Jesus and therefore not 'genuine'? When Noel Preston writes, *"Why I can no longer say the Nicene Creed"* in WWT is he really making a statement about the authenticity of his faith and if so what evidence did he consider when arriving at such a position? I am captured by one of his closing remarks:

*"In what is often called the 'emerging church', the emphasis is on 'how we live rather than what we believe' (Harpur) Of course we continue to have beliefs and, collectively or individually, progressives may need to articulate progressive creeds, but they are likely to be simpler,*

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1 Gilmore B *Journey* Online The Uniting Church in Australia Synod of Queensland

*briefly and reflect a credible world view while emphasizing the values of the 'Jesus way'.*"P141. WWWT<sup>2</sup>

To be true to what we believe we may need to reshape our faith affirmations.

### **What does it mean to be authentically Christian?**

Is an important question because people are walking away from organized religion in significant numbers primarily because they claim they are seeking an authentic life. They are not prepared to live a schizophrenic existence, paying lip service to a set of beliefs that are incongruent with an understanding of our faith. Increasing numbers of people are questioning the authenticity of the orthodox Christian church, particularly when they compare its operation to the person, values, words and actions of Jesus of Nazareth. For some being authentically Christian means to go back to the 'basic teachings of Jesus' and to place these teachings in their historical context. They are relying on New Testament scholars and theologians to tease out an authentic picture of Jesus of Nazareth and they are testing this information against their own experience and knowledge. One such process of analysis relies on the theology of John Wesley and is referred to as '*Wesleyan Quadrilateral*'<sup>3</sup> Paul Alan Laughlin's article in WWWT page 82 ff has more information. I will refer to this concept a little later.

In the last decade there have been a number of books reflecting the concern people experience in determining what is authentically Christian. Robin Meyers' "*Saving Jesus from the Church*",<sup>4</sup> John Churches' "*Setting Jesus Free*"<sup>5</sup> are two such books. Prior to this Dudley Hyde's "*Rescuing Jesus from the Church*"<sup>6</sup> and Albert Nolan's "*Jesus before Christianity*"<sup>7</sup> draw our attention to the divide between

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2 Preston N "Why I can no Longer say the Nicene Creed" Hunt RAE and Smith JWH Eds "Why Weren't We Told" Polebridge Press.

3 Laughlin P A "Wesleyan Quadrilateral" Hunt RAE and Smith JWH Eds op cit page 82

4 Meyers R "Saving Jesus from the Church" 2009 HarperOne .

5 Churcher J "Setting Jesus Free" 2009 Winchester Books UK.

6 Hyde D "Rescuing Jesus from the Church" 1994 Minkara Press.

7 Nolan A "Jesus Before Christianity" 1976 Orbis Books.

the values of Jesus and the operational activity of the Christian Church. Quaker pastor Phillip Gulley sums up this dilemma most engagingly in his book *"If the Church Were Christian"*<sup>8</sup> where he contrasts ten values of Jesus with Christian church practice. These propositions are presented in the form of statements such as:

If the Church Were Christian:

1. Jesus would be a model for living rather than an object of worship.
2. Affirming our potential would be more important than condemning our brokenness.
3. Reconciliation would be valued over judgment.
4. Gracious behaviour would be more valued than right belief.
5. Inviting questions would be more valued than supplying answers.
6. Encouraging personal exploration would be more important than communal uniformity.
7. Meeting needs would be more important than maintaining institutions.
8. People would be more important than power.
9. It would care more about love and less about sex.
10. This life would be more important than the afterlife.

For Gulley 'authentic Christianity' means getting back to the basic teaching of Jesus, which he asserts has become buried beneath the layers of an imperial church.

The findings of the 'grassroots' research data as recorded in *"Living the Progressive Dream"*, reflect the characteristics of the people who are attracted to what we to call 'progressive Christianity' by the activities they have embraced.

*"The principle strength of these groups is that they are vibrant discussion groups, exploring contemporary scholarship in a safe open and inclusive environment. An atmosphere where nothing is 'taboo', where hostility and ridicule is not tolerated, and where open and frank exchange of ideas is encouraged."*  
WWWT page 203 ff<sup>9</sup>

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8 Gulley P *"If the Church Were Christian"* 2010 HarperOne.

9 Smith JWH *"Living the Progressive Dream"* Hunt RAE and Smith JWH Eds op cit

Simply, if we are to reshape the way people express their understanding of the sacred, to ensure that it has integrity and authenticity; we need to make certain that values that people hold such as autonomy, religious pluralism, inclusivity, a passion for living, a scientific rigueur, commitment to action, an adult faith and so on are accommodated.

Before we approach this challenge to mainstream Christian belief and practice we need to construct an analytical historical framework of the history of Christianity and to ask the question **why** are we facing this dilemma?

### **The Developmental History of the Christian Church**

Harvey Cox's book *"The Future of Faith"*, which Rex will also highlight, provides us with a way of placing the history of the church in perspective by suggesting there have been three discrete stages. Accordingly Cox states:

*"This three stage profile of Christianity helps us understand the often confusing religious turmoil going on around us today". Page 14*<sup>10</sup>

He further declares that this profile,

*"frees people who shape their faith in a wider spectrum of ways to understand themselves as authentically Christian, and it exposes fundamentalism for the distortion it is."* page 14<sup>11</sup>

Hence the stages are defined in this way:

**Stage 1** Cox calls stage 1 the *'Age of Faith'*, and suggests that this stage occurred from the time of Jesus until the latter part of the 4<sup>th</sup> century lasting approximately 350 years. This was a movement characterized by small independent house groups with little or no overall structure. They were people who were committed to a way of living, a way of sharing what they had and desire to support each another to understand the sacred. According to Cox and contrary to common belief, these groups were not similar in structure and method of operating. They

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10 Cox H *"The Future of Faith"* 2009 HarperOne

11 Cox H *Ibid.*

were localized in their interpretation of their faith and developed a practice that suited their particular situation.

**Stage 2** “*The Age of Belief*”. The significant point of change came with the resolutions of the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE and the adoption by the Roman Empire of Christianity as the religion of state. These decisions gradually changed the way Christianity was practiced. The church moved from being a ‘grassroots’ movement of people of the ‘Way’ to a rapidly developing hierarchical imperial power. As with political systems the imperial structure of the Christian church developed the trappings of top down decision-making and the chosen elite in this case were the bishops. According to Cox this stage lasted for more than 1500 years and moved the practice of faith from a ‘*commitment to a way of living to a belief system*’. The maxim became, what you believe is more important than what you do, encapsulated in the debate on “Faith and Works”.

During this stage we witnessed the development of creeds and doctrines to assist our unbelief. Many of us will remember learning the *catechism* in Bible class, which included the Nicene and Apostles creed. The doctrines of atonement, incarnation, original sin, trinity, the belief in the virgin birth and resuscitated body of Jesus as well as the Bible as the ‘the divinely inspired inerrant word of God’, were promulgated during this time. All aimed at encouraging us to believe that Jesus was the divine Son of God.

**Stage 3.** The third stage Cox suggests is just a few decades old and he calls this the ‘*Age of the Spirit*’. He sees a close parallel between the ‘*Age of Faith*’ and the ‘*Age of the Spirit*’. This stage is characterized by a searching for authenticity in faith and by stripping away the layers of belief that do not stand the test of one’s experience and knowledge. You will often hear the statement ‘*I am not religious but I am spiritual*’ from people who are turning their backs on organized religions. Spong refers to these people as “*The Believers in Exile*”<sup>12</sup>

While the term ‘spirituality’ is widely and often loosely used Cox suggests it is fitting in this sense as it is used as “*a protest*”, reflecting the disquiet with the formal structure of the Christian

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12 Spong John S “Why Christianity Must Change or Die” 1999 HarperCollins.

Church. The second point that Cox makes about this term is that it represents,

*“an attempt to voice the awe and wonder before the intricacy of nature that many feel is essential to human life without stuffing them into ready-to-wear ecclesiastical patterns.”* (p13 &14).<sup>13</sup>

The third important feature of this age is its embrace of religious pluralism and as Cox says like the early Christian movement it *“embraces the future rather than the past”*. The issue of religious pluralism, *‘the belief that religious truth is not found in any single faith, is an attitude typical of progressive Christians’*; is examined by Paul Alan Laughlin in his cameo *“Pluralism”*<sup>14</sup> WWWT page 61 ff.

In a recent presentation to the PCNV Rev Dr David Merritt spoke of the comparison between Rev Dr Phillip Hughes research on religious adherence and the census data between 2001 and 2011. It was interesting to note that while church attendances had declined, in some cases quite significantly, the census figures indicated an increase in people calling themselves ‘Christian’. From the 2006 to the 2011 census this figure had increased by 3.7%, whereas in other religions there had been an increase of 38.9%. In the same period there had been an 8.3% increase in the population, many were migrants from Christian fundamentalist cultures.

Many people are seeking ways of being more fully alive and integrated through communing with others who are on a similar search. Those who have grown up in a religious tradition seem to feel the need for group activity to openly discuss their spiritual needs. Issues of love, forgiveness, and particularly self-acceptance are helping people redefine the sacredness of life, however these people may not be attending the traditional Christian religious services. The grassroots research in WWWT appears to support this finding.

The core understanding of Cox’s approach to *“The Future of Faith”* comes from his firm conviction that the

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13 Cox H op cit

14 Laughlin PA “Pluralism” Hunt RAE and Smith JWH Eds op cit.

*“sacred can be experienced in the immanent”.* Page 2<sup>15</sup>

This of course is aligned with the central message of Jesus that the reign of God is already present and it is our task to reveal it where we see it. As with Jesus we need to look at the secular world to understand the ‘spiritual’ so that out of the ordinary events of life we find the sacred.

The Jesus stories are about the ordinary things of life revealing the spirit of God. Jesus speaks of everyday events, occurrences that his hearers are familiar with.

A mugging on a lonely road

Hiring labourers to work in a vineyard

The waywardness of a recalcitrant son

The baking of bread

Finding a lost coin

The planting of grain

Having dinner with a despised tax collector.

I recently met a man named Hugh who runs a small business building and selling amplifiers and his background has been in engineering in the armed forces. He asked what I did for a living and when I told him he then made this statement: *‘I could take religion more seriously if it allowed itself to be subjected to scientific rigor. Where is the scholarship that explains, and attempts to understand or at least puts in context the contradictions, variations and inconsistencies of the Bible?’*

There are many Christians who will question the need for a scientific rational approach to matters of faith, however there is also a growing number seeking answers to their many questions and concerns. The rise in ‘progressive’ Christianity although small compared to the traditional church is making some ground.

## **The work and Influence of the Scholars**

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15 Cox H op cit.

Where is this influence coming from and why has it been so well received albeit by a minority of faith seekers? What evidence do we have that the search for the historical Jesus has provided us with an authentic account of this man?

Firstly we owe a great debt of gratitude to the Jesus Seminar scholars and those scholars from the United Kingdom and the early pioneers in Australia such as Geering etc. More recently New Zealand and Australia scholars, practitioners and theologians both lay and clergy are making a significant contribution. Rex's initiative in getting the Handbook WWWT off the ground has placed the contributions of New Zealand and Australian scholars on the same page albeit with our own idiosyncrasies.

How has this contribution impacted on our thinking? Why has this critical scholarship resonated with so many people?

Rev Dr David Galston reports in the *Fourth R* <sup>16</sup>that the Jesus Seminar scholars started with the words of Jesus or as he explains it with a 'voice print'. The question they asked was, "*What did Jesus say?*" Because they believed that,

*"The quest for the historical Jesus starts not with a theory of history, but with the more unassuming task of hearing a voice."*

Galston also writes, "that the significant detailed research of the Jesus Seminar embraced the person – the historical Jesus and not a religious theme".

He even goes further to suggest that the Jesus Seminar's view compliments a post-modern understanding where Jesus is known by what he says and does and not who he is. This approach affirms that history emerges out of a construct of what is said and done.

Dominic Crossan a contributor to WWWT writes in his book, "*The Birth of Christianity – Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately After the Execution of Jesus*"

By quoting Marcus Borg:

*"The Gospels are literally the voices of their authors. Behind them are the anonymous voices of the community talking*

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<sup>16</sup> Galston D "Postmodernism, The Historical Jesus and the Church" *Fourth R* page 11 ff



*about Jesus. And embedded within their voices is the voice of Jesus as well as the deeds of Jesus. Constructing an image of Jesus – which is what the quest for the historical Jesus is about – involves two crucial steps. The first step is discerning what is likely to go back to Jesus. The second step is setting this material in the historical context of the first century Jewish homeland.”* Page 149<sup>17</sup>

The incredible detailed work of the Seminar in making an inventory and classifying all the words attributed to Jesus from the first three centuries CE is to be applauded. They collected more than 1500 versions of approximately 500 items. Not only did they examine the canonical gospels they also examined independent sources including those of Jewish Historians. In addition to the four canonical gospels the Seminar included all other known non-canonical gospels in their deliberations. (The significant find at *Nag Hammadi*, (Rex Hunt has written about the importance of this find in WWWT page 50ff *‘The Nag Hammadi Library’*<sup>18</sup> which included, *‘Sayings of Jesus’* and a complete *Coptic Gospel of Thomas*, added significantly to their research). Further the scholars that for a period of some years stories about Jesus were circulated by word of mouth assumed it and it is possible that more than 10 years would have elapsed before anything was written down. It was perhaps another ten years before they were collated into the gospel form of Thomas. The members of the Seminar agreed to review each of these 1500 statements with the aim of determining which of them could be ascribed to Jesus, with a significant degree of probability.

Greg Jenks has provided us with a personal and excellent summary of the contribution of the Jesus Seminar in WWWT so I will not go into detail about its methods. In his paper:

*‘Pushing Boundaries: The Jesus Seminar and New Testament Scholarship’* p127 ff

Greg explains the operation of the Seminar through its ‘Methodology, ‘Process’ ‘Outcomes’ and ‘Theological Implications’.

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<sup>17</sup> Crossan J D “The Birth of Christianity” p149 HarperCollins 1999.

<sup>18</sup> Hunt RAE “The Nag Hammadi Library” Hunt RAE and Smith JWH op cit

He also emphasizes its unique contribution to the understanding of what we may call 'authentic Christianity,'

Many of the contributors to WWWT have been inspired and challenged by the Seminar Scholars and other pioneers in their search for the 'historical Jesus'. As Dominic Crossan states in the DVD *"Victory and Peace or Justice and Peace"*: *"If we don't get the first century right then we won't get the 21<sup>st</sup> century right."*

It is important at this stage to make a qualification and to so I will use the words of Dominic Crossan;

*"..this research to achieve it's aim of portraying the 1<sup>st</sup> century Jesus required the removal of sedimented layers to find what Jesus actually said and did and to do this with scholarly integrity and some methodological validity? This does not in any way conclude that the layers removed are illicit, invalid, useless or detrimental. It would be a mistake to claim that the first layer is "authentic" as if the other two layers were inauthentic."* (The Historical Jesus" (p xxxi) <sup>19</sup>

A second and equally valid comment is that the message of the basic teaching of Jesus only has validity when we understand in the historical context in which it occurs or as Crossan refers to it as 'matrix'.

*'Matrix was the common knowledge available to everyone from which they could make sense of their world.'*  
(Quote from Sydney Conference 2012)

The multiplicative nature the elements of the matrix need to be understood if we are to put into context the life of the historical Jesus.

We need to read the basic teachings of Jesus within the political, religious, social and economic context of the time.

The implications of the original work of the Jesus Seminar over the last fifteen years has been and continues to be a valuable resource for exploring the historical Jesus. Scholars have taken up this scholarship from all around the world including New Zealand and Australia.

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19 Crossan J D "The Historical of Jesus" pxxxix HarperCollins 1992

Why is it that these scholars and writers have had such a profound impact on our understanding of Christianity? And why have some people in mainstream Christian Churches responded so positively?

The title of Marcus Borg's book *"Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time"*<sup>20</sup> captured for many the vision that grew from this research. People were indeed exploring the person of Jesus of Nazareth from a different perspective and for many it was a unique experience.

An examination of this material in its context revealed an interesting commonality that these stories were not intended to be considered literally true or even a reflection of history they were primarily metaphor. As Crossan reports in his book *"The Power of Parable"*<sup>21</sup> and repeated at the conference in Sydney last September, *"These stories were written as metaphor we were dumb enough to take them literally."*

### **Why was this approach so attractive?**

Primarily this approach raised for many the unresolved questions that had plagued them for many years. It was a great assistance on their journey for intellectual integrity. For some it was the first time that scholars were supporting the right to question long held tenets of faith, questions that people had harboured for years but were too apprehensive about raising.

The scholars portrayed the historical Jesus more as a revolutionary sage than a divine being. Jesus points to the saving power of God to transform and heal rather than to claim this ability for himself. He is egalitarian and inclusive in his table fellowship which Crossan refers to as *'Open Commensality'* (explain). He made forgiveness reciprocal and he advocated that the relationship with God does not require a broker which Crossan refers to as the *'Brokerless Kingdom'* (explain) The historical Jesus seeks a relationship with a God he calls 'Daddy' and he seeks an empowering relationship with those he meets. The mutuality of the term *'Companionship of Empowerment'* changes our relationship with the sacred.

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20 Borg M "Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time" HarperSanfrancisco 1995

21 Crossan J D "The Power of Parable" HarperOne 2012

The research also indicates that Jesus had to be set free from the confines of the creeds and doctrines, in particular the doctrine of atonement as David Clarke stated in WWWT page 3

*‘With Borg and Crossan (2006 ‘The Last Week’)<sup>22</sup> I will argue that substitutionary atonement is bad history, bad anthropology and bad theology. I will also add that it is bad psychology.’<sup>23</sup>*

Jesus death as a blood sacrifice was in reality a later layer of information that had no basis in the findings of the Seminar. The research portrayed a radically different figure of Jesus than the one presented by orthodox Christianity. It in turn challenged our understanding of God as portrayed in traditional Christianity.

A second, but equally valid reason for the historical Jesus scholar’s popularity is that they spoke and wrote in a language that could be understood by a wider audience. I believe the contributors to WWWT have more than adequately achieved this. Theology was not just for the theologians, in fact in the last few years with the growth of small groups the movement has become more lay driven.

Many who have embraced ‘progressive Christianity’ are people searching for an ‘authentic Christianity’. Keith Rowe in his article *‘Being a Progressive Christian’*<sup>24</sup> has much to contribute to people seeking an authentic Christianity. He states at the beginning of his paper:

*‘Progressive Christianity is a contemporary form of Christian existence that has deep roots in Christian tradition. We seek to contribute to the renewal of the Christian way and the human adventure through rethinking Christian belief in the light of insights and understandings not available to earlier generations and to the renewal of Christian living through capturing the radical social implications of the way of life embodied in Jesus.’ WWWT page 115 ff*

If in Keith’s article we replace the words ‘Progressive Christianity’ with *‘Being and authentic Christian in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’* it would read something like this:

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22 Clarke D “Atonement” Hunt RAE and Smith JWH Eds op cit

23 Borg M, Crossan JD “The Last Week” HarperSanFrancisco 2006.

24 Rowe K “Being a Progressive Christian” Hunt RAE and Smith JWH op cit.

- o We would be seeking an, ‘*escape from the coercive, heavily creedal and structural uniformity of today’s church*’.
- o A recognition that truth is larger than what the Christian church believes or does.
- o The life is not static change is ever present. (Beyond the Stable state)
- o We would value the Christian Bible and respect the holy books and traditions of other faiths.
- o We would go back to the basic teaching provided by Jesus.
- o We would value critical study of the gospels in seeking clarification of authentic Christian living.
- o Authentic Christian accept responsibility for the world in which they live and do not abdicate their responsibility to an interventionist God.
- o We would be seeking to working actively for justice while developing ways of living more deeply in the love of God.
- o We would recognize that we are a part of the Christian Church and are responsible to work for its renewal.

Traditional orthodox Christianity has placed little emphasis on our own ability to reason and to learn from life experience in any discernment of the sacred. In Paul Alan Laughlin’s article ‘*Wesleyan Quadrilateral*’<sup>25</sup> WWWT page 82 ff he records how John Wesley the founder of Methodism, believed there are four important resources available to us when we are attempting to touch base with the sacred. Firstly there are the ‘*scriptures*’ which record the human experiences of the sacred; secondly there is the ‘*tradition*’ of the historical development of the faith. To these two traditional sources Wesley adds two more and they are ‘*reason*’ our own and others and ‘*experience*’ both individual and communal. The seeking of an authentic faith requires all of these to be brought into play. I would also add that in the ‘*communal experience*’, we need to seek the sacred in the human interactions with others; classical writers such as Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Hugo record such activities when they reveal the sacred through human interaction.

Has our journey toward an authentic Christianity changed our relationship with God? Are we seeking what O’Murchu refers to as an “*Adult Faith*”<sup>26</sup>. A Faith where we are entering into an adult relationship with the sacred, a relationship which, demands

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25 Laughlin PA “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” Hunt R A E and Smith JWH op cit.

independent thinking and the acceptance of responsibility for our own actions or lack of them. I would refer you to Laughlin's article on *'Autonomy'* <sup>27</sup>WWWT page6. More needs to be explored in this area.

However all of the information derived from this disciplined scholarship could only have impact if the mood of audience is sufficiently in sync to resonate with it. On considering this matter I became aware of an interesting parallel between the information being supplied to the general Christian community and the growth in the individual's spiritual development which I have termed *"From, Doubt to Deconstruction to Discovery"*. Many of you have been questioning the orthodox interpretation of the life of Jesus you questioned the miracles, the virgin birth, the resuscitated body at the resurrection. These doubts have led to a deconstruction of an orthodox faith. Our search for authenticity has led us to new and exciting discoveries which have regenerated our faith.

The results of the grassroots research recorded in WWWT indicate a number of important matters that are currently being explored by people seeking an authentic Christianity. The small groups that have been established and which are continuing to flourish, even when their minister has banned them, have a number of similar characteristics but also many differences. It is interesting to note that some of the groups that have been prohibited from meeting on church property have actually flourished.

Some people who declared their doubts to members of their community of faith were ostracized for doing so, some were even forbidden to raise these matters in the confines of their church. Of course when people discovered that the theological seminaries had for many years questioned traditional interpretation of scripture but had not declared these doubts publically, they asked the question, sometimes in anger, *"Why Weren't We Told?"* or in some cases the anger was at directed to clergy, *"Why didn't you tell us?"* My special thanks to Peter Fensham he challenged me with this question.

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26 O'Murchu D "Adult Faith" Orbis Books 2010.

27 Laughlin PA "Autonomy" Hunt R A E and Smith JWH op cit.

## Summary

The Jesus Seminar scholars along with those from the U.K. and Australasia have offered us a way of “*Living the Questions*”, their scholarship has justified our doubts, encouraged us to discuss and debate even the most fundamental tenets of our faith and helped us deconstruct in a positive way. In fact their research gave us the evidence to openly declare the doubts we had harboured for years. More than this we discovered a clearer message of the historical Jesus after the layers of interpretation had been removed and this is a liberating and empowering experience.

So as we have travelled along our spiritual journey from Doubt to Deconstruction to Discovery the work of the scholars has supported, justified and enlightened us. Our companions and colleagues have been a powerful resource by affirming the importance of our journey, but most importantly the process has changed our view of Jesus and called into question our image of God.

So what does it mean to be an ‘Authentic Christian’ in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

Firstly, it means that if we are to get back to the basic teaching of Jesus of Nazareth we must strip away the layers of interpretation and examine his teaching within the context (*matrix*) in which it occurred. If you like we must deconstruct the image of Jesus as portrayed in the “Age of Belief”.

Secondly, we should be willing to examine in detail the findings of the scholars in their search for the Jesus of history.

Thirdly, we should be prepared to use own ‘reason’ and ‘knowledge’ in our search for authenticity through the information that is available to us and not just rely on what others provide.

Fourthly, we should seek evidence of God’s kingdom in the world around us; as Cox says to ‘rediscover the sacred *in the immanent*’ and the ‘*spiritual in the secular*.’

Fifthly, we need to accept and embrace a relationship with the sacred that is mature, where we are in a ‘*companionship of empowerment*’ rather than as ‘wretched and wicked servants’ who need to continually seek ‘forgiveness for sins done and left undone’

from a 'merciful God'. The matter of 'mature' or 'adult' faith with the sacred needs more discussion than we have time for today.

Our journey in search of a faith we can affirm will not be easy or smooth because, whilst some searchers are seeking a way of understanding their dissatisfaction with the faith of their ancestors others find it a gut-wrenching emotional challenge to embrace the new scholarship.

I conclude with a quotation from Rev Bryan Gilmour:

*"The thinking and scholarship of the vast array of Christian contributors will liberate, invigorate and expand the understanding of your beliefs and faith practice. It will provide a vehicle for rethinking your faith and your understanding of humanity in this 21st century."*<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Gilmour B op cit.



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