Journal of the Irish Christian Study Centre *Vol 4* *1989*

Contemporary challenges to Christian apologetics

(The Fourth C.S. Lewis Memorial Lecture, 24th October 1986)

by BASIL MITCHELL

C.S. Lewis was the greatest Christian apologist of his time and his works still have a wide readership. In paying tribute to his memory nearly a quarter of a century after his death it would be entirely appropriate to discuss some aspects of his own writings. I propose instead to look at contemporary challenges to Christian apologetics from the standpoint of someone who is primarily a philosopher and who belongs to a generation later that Lewis's. There is a genuine element of continuity here, for I had the privilege of succeeding him as President of the University Socratic Club at Oxford, which he founded, and which was for many years one of the liveliest undergraduate societies in the University. And like all thinking Christians of that period, I owe him an enormous debt of gratitude. Although he was very well grounded in philosophy and taught the subject in his earlier years at Magdalen, he felt increasingly after the war that he was not equipped to take on the professionals and turned away from technically philosophical topics to theological questions of wider scope.

So I want to consider, first external challenges, and then internal challenges to Christian belief as they have developed since Lewis's time.

External challenges

What I have in mind is this. In discussing external challenges to Christian belief we are concerned with providing a convincing

statement of Christian truth to our contemporaries. To be convincing it must be presented in a way that takes account of the problems and pressures that affect people in their actual situation. I say problems and pressures, because people's difficulties are not purely intellectual—even the difficulties of intellectuals are not: and even the problems that are intellectual generally receive their particular pattern and emphasis from people's social and personal life. But the convincingness of a case depends enormously on the context in which it is presented; it will fail to convince, for example, if the presenters behave as if they didn't themselves believe it, or if they disagree radically among themselves in such a way that the disagreements do not appear to be fruitful, or if they escape disagreement by avoiding problems which their potential audience can see manifestly arising. To put the issue in a crude commercial way, if one is trying to sell something to someone, it is wise not only to study the market and the competition, but also the product and its packaging.

At each stage in my discussion I shall try to distinguish the state of affairs in the academic world from that in the cultural world at large (in so far as one can make that distinction). So far as academic philosophy is concerned I think it is fair to say that the question of Christian theism has now returned to the status which it occupied before the logical positivist movement got under way in the 1930's. That is to say, the problem of God is seen once again as one of the great controversial issues of philosophy—together with the problem of free will, the problem of personal identity, the mind-body problem and so on. I should guess that more professional philosophers are atheists or agnostics than are theists, but it is distinctly less of a surprise today to discover that an able philosopher is a theist than it was twenty or thirty years ago. Then it was still generally believed that it was possible to draw a reasonably clear line between science and common-sense on the one hand and metaphysics (including theology) on the other. A.J. Ayer himself had gone

so far as to reject belief in God as meaningless. This whole movement has now petered out, and philosophical critics of Christianity, although still prepared to argue initially that the concept of God is logically incoherent, are not as a rule determined to hold that line, but instead fall back on the claim that, as an account of the nature and character of the world, theism is not very probable.

The reason for this change is chiefly that scientific explanation itself has proved impossible to describe and account for along positivist lines. Both the reliance of scientists upon models and their need to posit unobservable entities in order to explain phenomena reveal analogies with religious thinking; and the considerations that lead a scientist to prefer one explanation to another, such as simplicity, elegance, comprehensiveness, coherence, explanatory power, are recognisably of the same sort as are appealed to in trying to decide between world-views. Positivism could not give a convincing account of science; and a convincing account, when offered, failed to justify the positivist attempt to reject metaphysics and with it theology as a rational enterprise.

This means that when philosophers now attack Christianity they rely on arguments which are recognisably of the same general kind as the plain man uses. In particular they stress the difficulties for theism of accounting for the character and extent of the evil that there is in the world. This is far from being the sterile attack that the positivistic one was, leaving the Christian apologist merely bewildered; for he too can see the difficulty and has always lived with it: and a philosophical critique on these lines can actually help theologians to deepen and develop their understanding of Christianity. Some years ago I took the chair at a series of discussions about *The Myth of God Incarnate* (subsequently published as *Incarnation and Myth*), and I remember how the debate really began to become creative at the point where the participants seriously considered the question of

how far a doctrine of incarnation was required to give substance to God's involvement in human suffering.

The demise of logical positivism means also that rival world-views, that is possible alternatives to theism, are liberated from the positivist ban on meaninglessness. Materialism as a metaphysical system was as philosophically suspect to the positivists as theism, and people who were, in effect, materialists used to have to disguise themselves as positivists in their attacks on religion. Now there is no need for them to do so. So once again philosophers are in line with a general cultural movement, for everyone recognizes that materialism is the main alternative to a religious view of life. From the point of view of Christian apologetics this is a gain. For it means that the materialist alternative to theism (along with others) has to be spelled out and defended in detail and its implications made explicit. It is much healthier in every way for rival world-views to be recognized, and vigorously contested, for what they are, than for the sceptical critic to be free, as the positivists supposed themselves to be, to demolish the claims of religion without his own substantial views ever being called in question.

The main secular alternative world-views are, it seems to me, materialism (or scientific naturalism) and Marxism. In a sense, of course, they are not alternatives but variations on a single materialist theme. But both in theory and in their practical implications, and also in the attitudes that go with them, they are significantly different. Marxism has a quasi-religious character, which is apparent in its discernment of an immanent and inevitable purpose in history, and its demand for complete commitment on the part of its adherents; whereas scientific naturalism favours a pragmatic, sceptical, turn of mind and a utilitarian approach to ethics. To the Marxist the scientific naturalist is a typical bourgeois product, characteristic of the capitalist West; while to the latter the Marxist is heir to most of the vices of religion, especially dogmatism and intolerance.

Marxism has contributed something essential to our understanding of society, through its insight into the way in which economic and social conditions interact with moral and political ideas, but this insight provides no warrant for a total economic determinism. As a world-view (as distinct from a contribution to sociology) it has been largely discredited in the West (and indeed, increasingly, in the East too) by its totalitarian denial of human rights. This is not just an incidental feature of Marxist thought, but follows from its insistence upon viewing individuals not primarily as individuals but as members of a class. The working class has rights (which in capitalist countries are restricted or denied) but the bourgeoisie have not, since their claim to individual rights is but an expression of a false economic and political system, which is destined to be superseded: the belief in human rights is something which remains very strong in our culture and Marxist denial of them is an effective bar to the wider acceptance of Marxism.

Scientific naturalism or scientific humanism, meanwhile, has its own problems. They centre on the nature of man, and his freedom. The scientific naturalist has to hold that man, like everything else in the natural world, is a product of processes that are scientifically explicable; and it seems to follow that human choices could, in principle, be predicted, if only we knew enough about natural laws and the state of the world at any given time. The mind is to be identified with the brain and mental events, including decisions, with physical changes in the brain. It is very difficult, both as a matter of logic and in imagination, to see how genuine freedom of choice can be ascribed to men so understood; and, if it cannot be, not only is moral responsibility threatened, but also rationality in general. This whole issue is one of intense philosophical controversy, and of enormous difficulty. How is the relation between mind and brain to be understood in the light of modern knowledge? and what are the implications for theory and practice of

alternative answers to the problem? This is, of course, the issue that C.S. Lewis addressed in his essay *Miracles*.

Clearly Christian thinking must come to grips with these problems and be prepared to attend carefully to the scientific evidence. And theologians with scientific expertise like A.R. Peacocke are in fact doing so. At the more popular level the discussion is still thought of as being about science versus religion, but the issues are a good deal more complex than that. Part of the problem is that the sciences do not speak with one voice—the unity of science is more pious hope than accomplished fact. Not only do psychology and sociology make assumptions about human motives and intentions which are not reducible to physics and chemistry, but they often raise problems about the objective character of scientific enquiry itself. So the natural scientists, for so long accustomed to providing the paradigm of rational thought, now find themselves, disconcertingly, treated in a deliberately objective way, as examples of a social group with common interests. And these, it is held, to some extent determine the direction and the character of their enquiries. At the same time historians of science are beginning to cast doubt on the legendary story of the growth of modern science which was the guiding theme of Bronowski's television series, *The Ascent of Man* and Don Cupitt's *The Sea of Faith*. In retrospect the familiar representation of the great scientific thinkers as engaged in a constant and eventually victorious war with religious dogmatism and obscurantism is seen to be highly misleading.

It is very tempting for religious apologists to welcome these developments and to assume that anything which appears to weaken the authority of science must automatically restore the credit of religion. This seems to me a great mistake. There is mounting evidence, as I understand it, that Christian theology was influential in the growth of modern science. It inculcated the belief that the world obeys laws which, because they originate with God, cannot be discovered simply by inspecting

it, or simply by the exercise of human reason without careful experiment. The enormous labours of the early scientists were undertaken in the faith that the world has an intelligible structure which is there to be discovered. Christianity and natural science share a conviction that there is a truth which it is possible, although always incompletely, for men to attain. No doubt some spokesmen for science have maintained that there are no truths but scientific truths and no explanations but scientific explanations and we have a right to protest against such dogmatism, but to deny the possibility of objective truth altogether is as destructive of religion as it is of science.

Nevertheless, scientists do now find themselves threatened in an unaccustomed way. The foundations of science have been called in question and scientific method challenged in the name of cultural relativism. From this relativist standpoint our modern scientific world-view is only one among a number of possible options between which there can, ultimately, be no rational choice. Even our scientific medicine, which has the most dramatic achievements to its credit, is not, from this point of view, to be judged superior to 'primitive' magic.

In combating this kind of relativism, the scientist cannot simply rely on the authority of scientific method itself—for it is just this that is being challenged. He has to appeal to criteria of rationality of a very general kind—simplicity, coherence, comprehensiveness, and so on—and, as I urged earlier, the same criteria can also be appealed to in favour of the claims of a religious system of belief to explain the nature and character of human experience. I suggest, then, that in the intellectual world at large, Christian apologetics has a tremendous opportunity. Positivism has ceased to be the force it was, Marxism as as world-view has largely discredited itself, and scientific materialism is confronted with serious problems as to its own consistency and ultimate justification. The situation is no longer one in which there is a thoroughly coherent and agreed scientific world-view based upon an unchallenged scientific method, but

rather one in which the claims of science require to meet the same sort of sceptical challenge as religion has long been used to.

It is, therefore, much more difficult now to draw a simple contrast between the solid, common sense reality of the world disclosed by science and the speculative uncertainty of religious claims. At the same time, because of the intellectual and moral uncertainty of this situation, thoughtful people long to discern some meaning in life over and beyond what they as individuals choose to give it. So there is more willingness than there has been for a long time to take the intellectual claims of Christianity seriously. This does not mean that Christian apologists can expect to secure a clear dialectical victory over their rivals by producing straightforward solutions to the problems that perplex people. It is rather that, because people do not expect clear-cut answers to many of them, they are more content 'to see through a glass darkly'.

At the popular level my impression is that things are a good deal less favourable. The tide that in the intellectual world is running in is here still running out. There is still a great deal of popular 'scientism', which is taken to 'disprove' religion, and which, more insidiously, erodes people's capacity to appreciate and understand the language of religion. Either religious doctrines are regarded as cut-and-dried statements of quasi-scientific fact and promptly rejected as incredible, or they are treated as expressions of purely personal feeling. Scientism and relativism thus conspire to convince people that there is no truth in religion. Religion is either not true at all (because not scientific) or 'it's true for me' or 'it's true for him', a purely personal matter which no institution, and therefore no church, has any right to pronounce upon.

Sociologists of religion trace this phenomenon to what they call 'privatization'. Peter Berger remarks on the need people have for 'nomoi' or meaning-systems in terms of which to order their life.

> 'Nomos' activity may be expected to cluster around 'marginal' situations—death, loss, change of status, crises, etc. None of this alters in its fundamentals in the modern world except through the impact of differentiation, fragmentation and privatisation. The role of official bodies, and especially of churches and states, in providing and effectively purveying ready-made 'nomoi'...is greatly reduced because they lose their monoply in conditions of pluralist competition. Meaning systems, moreover, are not mere intellectual exercises, but must be lived collectively; constant interaction with other people who perceive and interpret reality in the same way as oneself is necessary if one's 'nomos' is to be automatically effective in imbuing one's everyday experience with meaning. But modern societies have largely dissolved these supportive systems...and among them the churches. This happens when the individual in his multiple and fragmented role exists partly inside and partly at a tangent to so many institutions and associations that no one of them addresses itself to 'meaning' throughout the whole range of his life experience, but only to snatches and fragments. So in the end the individual is in a certain sense alone with the task of making sense of the world and his own place in it out of scraps and oddments culled here and there in his differentiated life and contacts (*Young People's Belief*, p.47)

I suggest that this represents the greatest 'external' challenge to Christian apologetics in Western countries. There has been an increasing disintegration both of the older Christian culture and of the newer rationalist culture. This, for the time being at any rate, leaves many ordinary people, particularly young people, quite happy to adopt a pragmatic, utilitarian attitude to society at large, and to meet the crises of personal life with odd and often inconsistent scraps of 'philosophy' picked up from anywhere

and claiming no universal truth or even relevance. The more thoughtful, however, feel increasingly the lack of meaning and purpose in their lives and are to that extent readier to take Christianity seriously, but they, too, often have difficulty in identifying themselves with a continuing historical institution. The very conditions which create the need also make it extremely difficult to meet it.

Internal Challenges

I have suggested that the decline of positivism and its attempt to draw a very sharp line of demarcation between science and metaphysics (including theology) has enabled theism to emerge once again as a world-view with a claim to be taken seriously. Given that, for example, materialism and theism are again live options (as for a while they were thought not to be) it is not enough for the critic of religious claims simply to challenge them from the side-lines without in any way otherwise committing himself: he has to enter the arena and defend his own position, whatever it is. The Christian apologist, for his part, needs to decide where he stands in relation to 'modern knowledge' and to present a coherent statement of Christian doctrine which takes it into account. This does not mean, of course, that he has to solve all the problems—the present age is conspicuously one in which many problems have to be left unsolved—but it does mean that he has to know what the unsolved problems are and why it is reasonable to adhere to Christian belief in spite of them. Reflective people are, I think, readier to listen to such a statement than they have been for a long time.

My own impression is, however, that, often when given the opportunity to explain Christian doctrine and its implications to a potentially receptive audience, theologians have little definite or distinctive to say. This is not at all surprising, for the 'acids of modernity' have been at work here too, and the intellectual problems facing theology are considerable, as are the social and

psychological pressures upon the clergy. In a situation in which the foundations of science are thought to be problematic, the foundations of theology are unlikely to be undisturbed. Whatever the reasons, and however understandable they are, the fact appears to be that there is a broad divide between conservative and liberal (or radical) opinion, which is the source of considerable weakness. Neither party adequately meets the external challenges to Christian apologetics. The conservatives fail through not addressing themselves sufficiently to the task of relating the historic Christian faith to modern knowledge, including the results of a critical study of the Bible. Hence their apologetic, though vigorous and uncompromising, and worthy of respect on that account, is of limited appeal, and strikes many reflective enquirers as intellectually inadequate and even at times dishonest. The liberals, on the other hand, have been too much inclined simply to take over what they suppose to be the 'modern scientific world-view' which reduces Christianity to a sort of deism. Religion is thus seen, as it was in the TV series *The Long Search*, as the story of 'man's religious quest' and concepts such as those of 'revelation', 'grace' and even 'incarnation' are reinterpreted entirely in terms of human religious experience. This evokes from the interested non-believer the sort of response that was well expressed by a philosophical colleague of mine: "The trouble with Christianity as presented in so much modern theology is that it isn't worth disbelieving!" The reflective non-Christian feels intuitively that Christianity, if true, radically transforms our ordinary view of the world and of human possibilities. This trend in liberal theology has been greatly influenced by the philosophical legacy of Hume and Kant or, more broadly, of the Enlightenment. They were believed throughout the nineteenth century (and well into the twentieth) to have undermined theism as an explanation of the existence and character of the world and of man's place and purpose in it, so that Christianity had to be understood as an expression of man's religious experience or of his existential

decision to endow his life with meaning. The names of Schleiermacher and Bultmann illustrate these approaches. One might say, in very general terms, that theology drew heavily upon the categories and attitudes of the Romantic movement with its emphasis upon authenticity and its suspicion of claims to objective truth. Anglo-Saxon theology has been, characteristically, less extreme in this respect, but it too has been reluctant to countenance any notion of God's activity in the world other than through the naturally explicable processes of nature and of human cultural history. Here the decisive influence has been the discipline of Biblical criticism, which has led theologians to suppose that only those influences can actually have been at work in the history of religion which an entirely secular thinker is prepared to discern. Hence it is very widely believed that a theological doctrine, such as that of the Incarnation, can in no way be based on historical evidence. The historian *qua* historian, it is said, can take account only of purely natural events and can offer only entirely natural explanations of them. Hence explanations in terms of divine activity must either be disallowed altogether or, if introduced at all, be based upon faith alone. The possibility that the whole episode might, when carefully and sympathetically studied be such as to make a theological interpretation more convincing than any entirely naturalistic one on offer, is not even brought into the reckoning. Underlying this is an unspoken assumption that a "scientific world-view" is mandatory upon the theologian.

Now it *may* be the case that, when all things have been considered, the naturalistic explanation *is* to be preferred, but, for reasons that I gave earlier, it is no longer possible to rule out a more definitely theistic interpretation from the start. The strictures directed by Hume and Kant and other thinkers of the Enlightenment against theological explanations have turned out to be equally fatal to scientific explanation; and there does not, at present, exist a scientific world-view possessing the

unchallengeable authority that many liberal theologians wish to give it.

I do not want to give the impression that the theological task is currently an easy one and that only certain philosophical inhibitions or prejudices prevent a contemporary Summa from being developed. But I do think it is a weakness of what I have broadly called liberal (as distinct from conservative) theology that it is not prepared to explore more boldly the conceptual possibilities for a distinctively Christian metaphysic that modern philosophy affords. So I would myself like to see Christian theologians stop for a while reflecting on how difficult it all is and actually address themselves, in specifically Christian terms, to the questions their unbelieving contemporaries so insistently ask, as in his day C.S. Lewis did.

A corollary of this is that conservative theologians should be more prepared to enter the general theological debate. Their reluctance to do so is to a large extent due to a suspicion that, once criticism is admitted on any terms, it will eventually take over, and the essentials of Christian faith will have been surrendered. And, in the light of some trends in 'liberal' theology, this suspicion is not wholly unreasonable. It is, in fact, the reverse of the coin. Both sides tend to assume that criticism can be exercised only in a secular way leading to sceptical conclusions. But, once this assumption is challenged, the way is open for a critical conservatism—an element which is not entirely unrepresented in the present theological scene, but is nevertheless somewhat under-represented.

Nor, I think, can the conservatives claim to be themselves entirely free from the influence of the scientism which has so markedly affected the liberals. It appears, as James Barr has argued, in the extremely literal manner in which the language of Christianity has often been interpreted, a literalism which is in contrast to the readiness of the church in earlier ages to recognize the symbolic and poetic character of much religious language. Here is another case in which theology can benefit from closer

contact with the world of secular thought, in this instance that of literary criticism.

But it has to be recognized that freer and livelier debate between Christian theologians, radical and conservative, is not likely to result in a consensus. And the question has to be asked, how far this absence of consensus must reduce the effectiveness of Christian apologetics.

A great deal must depend on the character of the debate. It can be fruitful given two conditions. One is that it can be seen to concern things that matter; so long as this is so, lively controversy is a sign of health and its presence helps to persuade potential believers that they are not being asked to leave their intellectual consciences behind if they come into the Church. The other is that the Church (I am using this in its broadest sense of 'the whole company of faithful people dispersed throughout the whole world') has itself some *rationale* available of the differences within it. At present we have no such *rationale*. We are liable to regard it as a scandal that Christians do not entirely agree as to the content of their faith or as to its implications.

Obviously there are, and always have been, differences due to lack of charity or lack of thought, but it may be that there are two kinds of difference that are not attributable just to these causes.

Firstly, if it is conceded, as I think it must be, that attempts to formulate Christian truths and to put them into practice can never be entirely adequate—the transcendent cannot be wholly captured in finite terms—theologians are bound to draw upon the most suitable philosophical systems available; and the practical implications of Christianity are bound to be worked out in relation to the prevailing social and economic possibilities. (This can be avoided to some extent by the faithful withdrawing into small communities cut off from the intellectual and moral influence of the world, but this is not an ideal solution either.) This situation encourages the development of variant traditions, each of which emphasizes some features of Christianity at the

expense of others. It could well be that a fuller and richer approximation to the truth is achieved in this way than by an attempt to reconcile these different traditions by means of some compromise formula. This does not mean that genuine reconciliations are not sometimes possible (and should be sought as far as possible); only that a certain tension between variant traditions may be of positive value.

Secondly, there is another distinction within the Christian church which needs to be recognized and understood, viz., that between the main body of Christians and the advanced guard of theologians or the 'scouts'. If it is true that the Christian faith needs to be brought into relation with the best thought of the day, it must be someone's task to do this, and this task is bound to be to some extent exploratory and experimental. It is debatable how much freedom the 'scouts' ought to have, but, unless they have a good deal of freedom, they cannot do their job. It is worth remembering that even St. Thomas Aquinas's massive development of Christian theology in terms of Aristotelian philosophy, later to become an established orthodoxy, was at the time regarded with considerable suspicion. No doubt there are risks attached to theological exploration, but, unless the risks are accepted, the result will be ossification and that is worse. The fact, then, that there are these differences within the Church ought not to be regarded as a weakness, but as a sign of vigour. To develop the military analogy, the scouts and the main army ought not to be attacking one another, but rather concentrating upon the defeat of the enemy.

When one acknowledges these two sorts of division, between different traditions and, within each tradition, between the main body of the faithful and theological explorers, another image suggests itself, that of a river. The main stream sometimes divides into several large streams and a number of smaller ones, some of which later feed back into the main stream, while others continue to run parallel to it indefinitely.

Some of these streams represent secular currents of thought which have Christian origins and which later contribute once again to the main flow of Christian thought. The 'secular thought' of a culture deeply influenced by Christianity is unlikely to be entirely secular and it is possible that certain ideas that are genuinely Christian may be, for a time at least, preserved and developed better in a secular medium than in the mainstream of Christian theology.

I conclude, then, that lack of full agreement in the interpretation of doctrine need not weaken the apologetic stance of the Church and can strengthen it, so long as church members themselves learn to appreciate the value of diversity. Having said this, however, it is important also to insist that *diversity should not be accepted for the wrong reasons*. Earlier in this lecture I mentioned the relativism that is so striking a feature of contemporary culture. People are very much inclined to say 'it's true for me' or 'it's true for him' and to resist the idea that truth is independent of the beliefs and attitudes of individuals. Sociologists associate this with the conditions of modern life, in which social arrangements are made in a purely pragmatic, utilitarian way and the search for meaning and truth becomes a purely private affair.

The prevalence of this attitude is, as I said then, one of the greatest threats to any Christian apologetic, and we ought to be wary of it. My impression is, however, that many of the more articulate Christians, those who belong to synods and equivalent bodies, are themselves strongly tempted by it. It appears in the ready welcome they give to the concept of 'the plural society'.

The philosophy underlying the plural society is generally this. There is a distinction to be made between, on the one hand, a basic social morality, which can be justified pragmatically—society could not survive if it were not observed—and, on the other hand, a morality of individual ideals, which is purely personal in inspiration. The basic morality is founded upon certain broad non-controversial facts

about human beings and what is capable of harming them; personal ideals derive from 'visions of life' which have no objective basis but which owe their existence to the creative imagination of individuals. Religion, on this showing, belongs to the realm of personal ideals, and has no claim to objective truth. It follows that there should be complete freedom for people to preach and to practise their religion, so long as they do no tangible harm to others or to society at large, and so long as they do not seek to influence the basic social morality. Different religions, of course, reflect different 'visions of life' and all are to be tolerated, and indeed up to a point welcomed, so long as they are prepared to accept the purely private status they are offered.

This philosophy of the plural society fits very well into the sociological framework I was mentioning earlier, and it is entirely understandable that Christian apologists, especially those in exposed positions, should be inclined to take it over. Faced by a social situation in which it is increasingly difficult to persuade people to accept any religious or moral authority, it is reassuring to learn that it would be morally and religiously improper to claim any such authority. It is nice to be able to say 'In our increasingly plural society the Chritian cannot claim any special authority or influence'.

But, if the sociologists are right, it is the felt unsatisfactoriness of just this sort of 'plural society' with its increasing 'privatization' and its restricting of meaning to the purely individual realm that affords the Christian apologist his chief opportunity. Simply to embrace the philosophy underlying it and to offer the Christian gospel as one among a range of possible options, none of which has any serious claim to truth, is to add to the patients' malady, not to cure it.

This means, of course, that we need to re-think the Christian basis for a *liberal* society, in which the rights of individuals and communities are founded upon a Christian understanding of man which is widely shared by non-Christians. It is not adequate to

regard Christianity as a purely personal matter having no social implications. The case for freedom is based not upon the absence of any reason for preferring one ideal to another but upon the positive conviction that men have the right and the duty to follow their consciences and to promote the common good. It is no more likely in politics than it is in the institutional life of the Church that we shall achieve a Christian consensus. Christians will continue to differ in their political emphasis and it may be a good thing that this should be so. But in each case there is an overriding demand for the exercise of charity, not only out of consideration for others but also out of concern for the truth which transcends our best endeavours to define it.