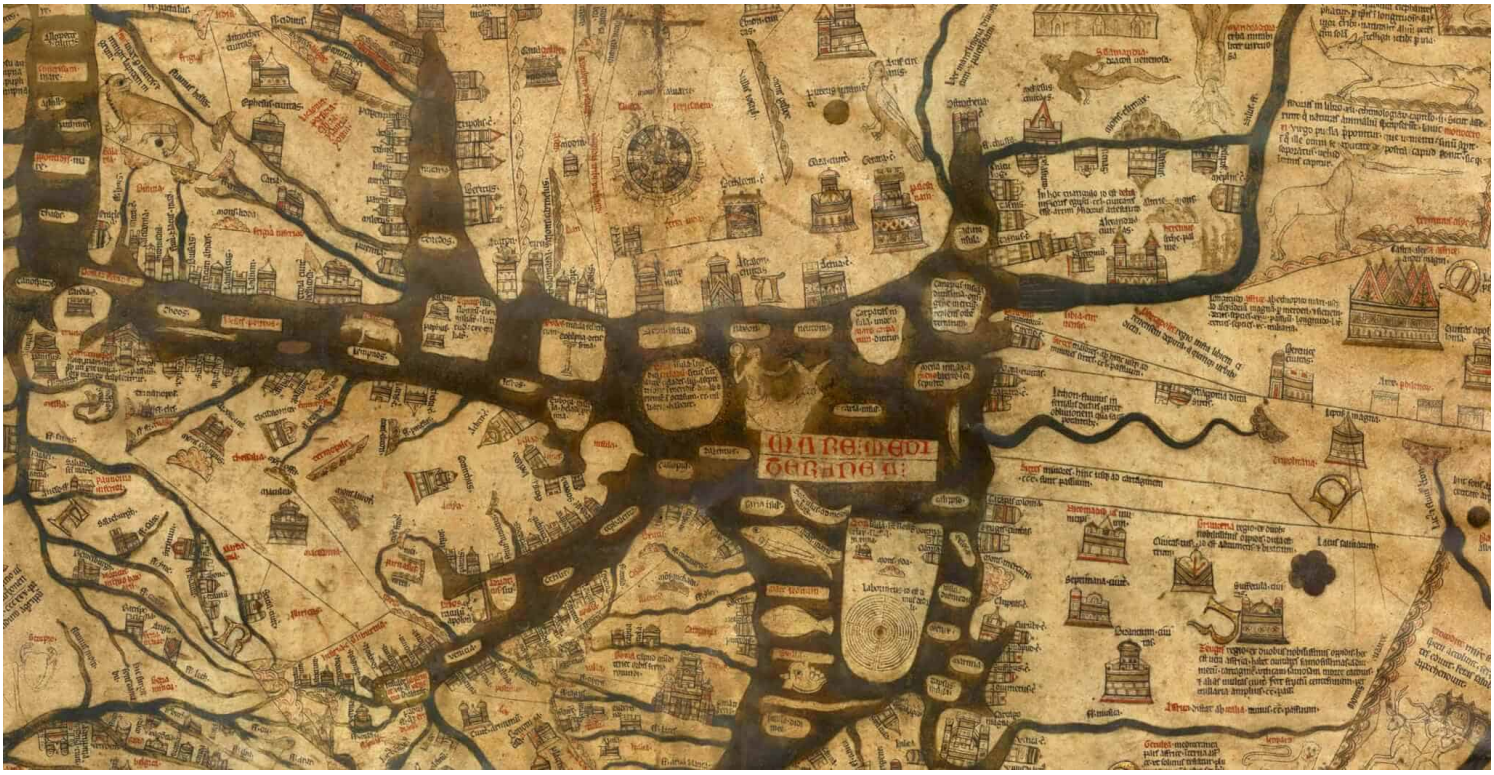
HOW MAPS SHAPE OUR MINDS

Posted on January 24, 2020 by Eddie

Perhaps if we could adopt a mental map of the world that shows continents in their true sizes, we could also get a better picture of the true situation for the church around the world.
Category: Observations

One of the most fascinating historical artefacts that I've ever seen is the Mappa Mundi in Hereford Cathedral.



The Centre of the Mappa Mundi

> ***Hereford Cathedral is home to the Hereford Mappa Mundi, one of the worldâ€™s unique medieval treasures.Â*** *Measuring 1.59 x 1.34 metres (5â€™2â€ by 4â€™4â€), the mapÂ is constructed on a single sheet of vellum (calf skin).Â Scholars believe it was made around the year 1300 and shows the history, geography and destiny of humanity as it was understood in Christian Europe in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.*
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> *The inhabited part of the world as it was known then, roughly equivalent to Europe, Asia and North Africa, is mapped within a Christian framework. Jerusalem is in the centre, and east is at the top. East, where the sun rises, was where medieval Christians looked for the second coming of Christ. The British Isles is at the bottom on the left.*
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> *From the Mappa Mundi website*

It really is a fascinating document and you can explore some of its features on the excellent

interactive website. Of course, to modern eyes, the Mappa Mundi is rather quaint, with its unicorns, and the way that Jerusalem is placed at the centre of the world for ideological reasons. We'd never allow a map to distort the world in this way, would we?

Except, of course, we would.



The Mercator Projection

The standard world map that most of us are familiar with is this one, the Mercator Projection. It has its strong points, for example, directions between places are accurately plotted making it useful for navigation (its original purpose). Not only that, but the shapes of the continents look the same as they do on a globe, which isn't always the case when a three-dimensional world is plotted on two-dimensional paper.

However, this map also has serious problems. In order to render the world on paper, it has enlarged

the northern hemisphere and shrunk the southern one. Greenland appears as big as Africa, which is a complete and utter distortion of reality.

Not only that, but the Mercator projection conveniently places Western Europe right at the centre of the world. In some ways, it's the Mappa Mundi all over again.

This wouldn't be a problem, except for the way in which images tend to shape our thinking in an unconscious way. It becomes natural for us to assume that Europe is the centre of the world and that it is bigger and geographically more important than it actually is. In reality, it is little more than a serious of peninsulas at the western end of the Eurasian landmass - but our maps and our mental models don't work that way.

For Christians, this is important. We are used to maps that show Europe and North America as being much larger than they really are. We also tend to have the conception that these historic missionary sending regions are still the centre of the church in the world, whereas this is far from the truth. Perhaps if we could adopt a mental map of the world that shows continents in their true sizes, we could also get a better picture of the true situation for the church around the world.