IT'S NOT ABOUT IGNORANCE

Posted on August 21, 2017 by Eddie

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Category: Observations

Every so often, when the media makes some egregious mistake in talking about the church, or the Bible or something, Christian commentators will lament the level of religious ignorance amongst the media in the UK.

I think they are wrong; the problem is not one of ignorance.

That isn't to say that the media a well informed about religious matters, far from it. Even those who are supposedly religion correspondents often seem to lack an understanding of the basic tenets and practices of the major faiths. However, I would like to suggest that this ignorance isn't in itself the problem, it is a manifestation of something deeper; it's about world-views.

To put it simply, your worldview is about the information that you know or don't know, it's about the grid through which you process that information. This is captured in a famous quote by C.S. Lewis:

> *I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.*

The worldview which is becoming increasingly prevalent in British society is one which I would term, individualistic, scientific materialism. Let me explain by taking these comments in reverse order:

- Materialism: this is not so much the classic Christian way of talking about materialism, as in trying to get as much stuff as possible - though it may involve that. Materialism basically says that this world is all there is. There's nowt else.
- Scientific: only those things that can be measured and quantified can be considered true. In crude terms, if you can't put a ruler up against it, then it doesn't exist (though the "ruler" may be a multi-million dollar instrument of one sort or another).
- Individual: the standpoint of the individual trumps everything; what you perceive as good is what really matters. Your biological gender is subservient to your feelings about your gender.

OK, I'm simplifying and big books have been written about what I've summed up in 150 words. However, my point is that this prevailing world-view does not leave space for religion, faith or revelation and because of that, it robs people of their ability to engage intelligently with religious topics. This is not because of a lack of intelligence; it's because people find it extremely difficult to understand different world-views to their own and to put themselves in the place of those whose thinking starts from very different presuppositions.

This is why, you'll often see Christians described as believing in sky fairies in the comment sections of online newspapers. The prevailing world-view reduces two thousand years of intellectual history to a rather silly sound-bite. It's not so much that people don't want to engage in serious thought about issues of faith, it's just that they earnestly believe that there is nothing to engage with in the first place.

This lack of ability to get to grips with different worldview is perhaps best shown in the response to Islamist terrorism. Because our media and authorities aren't able even to begin to understand what motivates these people, they are unable to respond other than by scratching at the surface.

One of the things we need to realise, as Christians, is that it is far easier for us to get inside the world-view of our society than it is for people to understand us. We are bombarded every day by messages which reinforce individualistic, scientific materialism, so much so that we can unconsciously absorb its values if we are not careful. However, most Brits rarely encounter things that make them question the values that they live by in any serious fashion.

There are a number of consequences of this situation.

I think evangelism is going to get much harder in the UK. There is a huge amount to unpack here, and I may do so in a later post, but I'll just leave this out there for the moment.

Life is going to get much tougher for Evangelical Christians. There are two things that concern me, here. The first is that because our society can't understand religious faith, it is unable to distinguish between different varieties of faith, different motivations and different outcomes. At some point, there will be some sort of crackdown on Islamic extremism in Britain, but that crackdown will also target Evangelicals, who will be termed "fundamentalists" and bracketed in the same class as suicide bombers (I know this sounds alarmist). Secondly, of all the faiths on the planet, individualistic, scientific materialism is the most absolutist and intolerant of other views. I don't know what form the suppression of the authentic Christian voice will take, but it will come unless there is a massive change in the direction that our society is heading. There will, of course, always be a welcome for believers and churches who are willing to trim their views and proclamation to society's whims.

This isn't the most cheerful thing I've ever posted. Let's hope that I'm wrong. In the meantime, the Gospel is spreading across the world.