

A New World:
Towards a Postmodern Pastoral
Practice.

A Study Leave Report for the Presbytery of
Nelson-Marlborough

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Preface

This work is the beginning of a much longer piece which will develop in the coming years. What were some of the triggers that sent me down this path. The first came through my parish visiting and being with people who when faced with some sort of trouble or calamity would respond with “It was just meant to be”. My gut response to that is that the world doesn’t actually work like that, that the scientific models have gone past a deterministic clockwork machine, and so on. Also, my friendship with a family who have a child with a range of disabilities has constantly challenged this sort of response. Was Jeff “meant to be” as he is? How do his parents make meaning of that?

The second was when I read a book *Chaos* by James Gleick. As I read this I found that the advances in science were describing a different world than that which I normally envisaged. At about the same time I reread Stephen Hawking’s *A Brief History of Time*. These, amongst others, provide new ways of looking at the world, and the question arises of whether it can be meaningful to talk of God, and if it is, in what ways.

The third strand has always been with me and that is the pastoral application of our ideas. What does this mean for prayer, preaching and counselling. As I have talked with people about this topic, I have found quite a bit of interest from all directions, professional theologians, fellow clergy, churchgoers and nonchurchgoers, young mothers. If you go into any large bookshop these days you can find whole areas set aside for popularisations of science and developments. The whole thing seems to be a new kind of search for meaning.

I am grateful to the Union Parish of Picton for allowing me the time and the resources to undertake this study project. I feel I have been enriched by the opportunity to do it and hope that that pays dividends back to the parish. Also I wish to acknowledge the love, support and encouragement I have received from Denise. Having someone disappear, reappear, and wander around with their head in a dense cloud of thought can be highly disruptive to anyone’s lifestyle. Yet through it all her comments and participation in my construction of the world I live in have been invaluable.

I. Introduction: Towards a Post Modern Paradigm

As I began this work I started with the intention of looking at scientific advances, how they have changed the world view and how one might understand God and our response to God as a result. I then discovered that the two areas seemed to be going in different directions with the result that I would need to write two essays, conscious as I was of my need to come up with some sort of pastoral theology.

Then I discovered a monograph by Jean-Francois Lyotard called *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* which provided a different set of links. Postmodernism is a movement in thought which looks at the world from the perspective of language and knowledge. It argues that all our knowledge is contingent and is derived from our linguistic and cultural environments. What the modern scientific enterprise has done has been to change the foundational images of the Newtonian and Cartesian universes and provide new ways of understanding how the world works. It has also attempted to provide a new Grand Narrative, and writers such as Paul Davies, Roger Penrose and Stephen Hawking have popularised these attempts. It is this which marks them out as “modern”. Modernist thought still looks to some undergirding narrative which relates to an actual reality behind it all as the basis for understanding. Postmodernist thought says that these narratives are our constructions and as such constrain the way we look at the world, and hence construct our own reality.

What I will do is work through some areas of science and how their findings impact on current world views and relate it to what I call a search for meaning within society. Following that I explore the idea of reality construction through language, focussing on metaphor and its use. This leads on to looking at models and metaphors of God and my own personal metaphor system. One of the important themes of postmodernism is how we fit together as individuals in community. This I explore in a section on community and personhood. Then I draw out some implications of all this for my own pastoral practice and thinking doing so under a number of headings. Finally I will draw together any loose threads, of which there will be a number, and put them in a bundle to await the next attempt at weaving a text out of my final vocabulary. There has been little attempt to draw directly on the Jesus story and how I see the relation between Jesus and God. That has been deliberate. One factor was that of time, the other that God-talk has been my prime focus, and how that might be intelligible in a postmodern framework. Perhaps a postmodern interpretation of Jesus will have to wait until next time.

II. Worlds of Science

We are living in a time that has seen great changes in the scientific world view, changes that have not crept into the public domain, and thus the implications of those developments are not consciously embraced. Certainly part of that is dependent on the scientific community itself.

To make sense of it all we need to revisit the so-called scientific revolution. The dominant world view for the purposes of the scientific enterprise developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries coming to fullest expression with the rise of classical physics. The image or model of nature that was used was that of the machine. The universe was perceived as a gigantic machine made up of myriads of smaller machines. This approach carried over into the biological sciences as well. This approach is more properly called the atomistic approach. Its method consists in subdividing up the visible world into its smallest parts. These parts or atoms (from the Greek *atomos*, meaning indivisible), were assumed to remain unchanged no matter what particular whole they constitute. The new science, having subdivided the universe, then set itself the task of rebuilding the whole. That reductionist principle of atomism led to the mechanistic perspective. The grand schemes particularly of Newton, Leibnitz and Descartes are atomistic and mechanistic. They perceived the universe in terms of inert matter moving through space according to deterministic laws. In this framework, once the initial conditions and laws are given all is able to be calculated. While that oversimplifies their thought, the mechanistic model has provided a fruitful framework for physics, astronomy, engineering and some areas of biology. It fitted well with an abstract deism which pushed God out beyond the things of the natural world, so that acts of God became defined as things that could not otherwise be explained. This idea of God inevitably has to retreat with the advances of knowledge. The further implication of such thinking was the reification of nature by science.

As the new science developed it attacked firstly the old organic world view which saw nature unhistorically and as essentially changeless in its structure. At the same time it recognised an interconnectedness in all things, that God was present in the world and the world present in God. However, it also was allied with mysticism, alchemy and magical elements which were able to be attacked by the more experimentally dominated mechanistic philosophies. Birch outlines the main thought patterns in this debate and also how the church allied itself to the mechanistic framework. The main lines of thought were first the voluntarist theologians Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, who thought that God had complete freedom and so was in no way tied to creation. The universe runs according to divinely imposed laws. The Catholic view of miracles lent itself to this as well. If God is in nature then God cannot be doing special things at special times, so if everything is a miracle nothing can be. Finally the Protestant reformers, like Luther and Calvin, took a legalistic view of God's relationship to the world and that fitted the mechanistic world view better than an organic one. Calvin took it further with his doctrine of providence. Chance played no part in God's universe. Yet Calvin's was no sterile deism, for him God was active in the world making things happen, albeit according to God's divinely appointed laws. Nevertheless, his thought laid the groundwork for the theological framework that the rational Protestants built, and which led to the division of the world into the material and spiritual realms, a rift which persists today. Now I want to explore briefly five areas that have cracked open this mechanistic world view. What I intend to do is pull out salient features in each area which will give us ideas to work on later. The five areas are Chaos, Cosmology, Quantum Physics, Biological Science and Chance.

A. Chaos

One of the fascinating developments in science has been the new study of dynamical systems given the shorthand title of “chaos”. Science has looked for regularity and order so that it might be able to measure and predict the world it observes. Much of this was dependent on the received model of the world built on the theories of Newton and Laplace. Chaos cuts away at this as did relativity and quantum physics. As one physicist put it:

“Relativity eliminated the Newtonian illusion of absolute space and time; quantum theory eliminated the Newtonian dream of a controllable measurement process; and chaos eliminates the Laplacian fantasy of deterministic predictability.”

The findings of chaos scientists apply at all levels but more importantly, and unlike quantum theory and relativity, they apply particularly to the universe we see, touch and experience, to objects at the human scale. Perhaps the best example of a system which touches our lives in a chaotic manner is that of the weather. There are clear patterns to the weather, yet it seems impossible to get an accurate prediction beyond a couple of days. The classical approach suggests that if we have enough data, enough measurements, and accurate enough models then we should produce accurate forecasts. This was Laplace’s dream. If we knew the initial conditions perfectly we can predict the rest. He even made the claim in relation to the evolution of the universe, which led to his famous exchange with Napoleon who wanted to know where God fitted it. Laplace’s reply is reputed to have been “Sire, I had no need of this hypothesis.”

However, the weather is not like that at all. Knowing the average August temperature for Picton is of no use to us for predicting what today’s temperature will be or tomorrow’s or any other day. What we have at our disposal are large patterns with no clear degree of predictability. As Edward Lorenz and his colleagues found when they constructed their models, even small initial variations created very different patterns. This was true even when they used extremely simple models. Simple rules give exceedingly complex results.

There are a growing number of areas in which chaotic models seem to have application. There are obvious one such as turbulence in fluids, but the biological sciences are finding them of use in looking at blood flow, heart beat and perception. Human social systems are found to follow chaotic patterns as well. As analyses of the two major Wall Street crashes in 1929 and 1987 show, even the forecastability of economic events is strictly limited.

An image which helps at this level is that of a railway station at commuting rush hour. At ground level the place seems in total chaos with everyone running to catch their train. With a birds eye view it would be seen that, despite the seeming randomness, the passengers would be moving in clear patterns as they move to the trains which start from different platforms. From that perspective, however, it would be impossible to predict which train a particular individual would be catching as they moved into the station.

This inherent unpredictability of open systems is seen to be one of the more important results of chaos science. In my view it does away with any notion of determinism. Dynamic processes once they have been started are not able to be stopped or predicted where they will end up.

The second area for me is what it shows us of the natural world. Chaotic systems are a mid-point between total order and complete randomness. As simple ordered systems, for example a dripping tap, are pushed by various forces, in our example more pressure, the systems move into chaotic patterns. Conversely when randomness is at work, it produces definite patterns. In other words, order and chaos far from being opposites as our mythologies make them to be, are on a continuum. The universe is, if you like, a monism, at least in terms of order and chaos. Such a discovery makes it difficult to sustain the thesis that Torrance does in *Divine and Contingent Order* where he says: “Certainly the Christian concepts of the salvation of the whole man and of the renewal of the whole of creation imply that there are elements of physical evil or disorder in the universe.”

Chaos science helps us see a third aspect to reality which is not always recognised, and that is that change is part of creation. Part of the attraction of the writings of Toffler and other futurologists is that they pick up on the popular fear of change and offer ways of adapting. As I reread *Future Shock* and *The Third Wave*, I find that Toffler also holds out a metaphorical carrot to the reader which allows them to think that after this period of rapid change things might just settle down again, that we can plan accordingly. “For, by making imaginative use of change to channel change, we can not only spare ourselves the trauma of future shock, we can reach out and humanize distant tomorrows.” Chaos theory shows that such planning is generally flawed particularly when done at the governmental level. Governments take action to alleviate situations, but do so on linear based models. Generally it is found when linear based action is taken in a non-linear world, more often than not the actions will be inappropriate, and situations made worse.

A case in point is the “New Town” model of urban revitalisation. This model developed in Britain, and sort of transported to New Zealand, involved the demolition of old slum areas in cities and transporting everyone to New Towns which had been purpose built. One of the unforeseen consequences was that the old people who had held the slum communities together by and large did not move. This left an unbalanced community with few of the skills of community building, of conflict resolution, of wisdom and guidance, and of family networking. Within a matter of five to ten years they found higher than national proportions of solo parents, delinquent children, health problems as bad as in the old areas and so on. In New Zealand, we didn’t do the clearances, but we did create satellite towns, places like Flaxmere, to service nearby cities and in doing so repeated elements of the British experience, no senior citizens, no skilled community builders, and the result was a complex muddle of good aspects and serious consequences. There is no “solution” either, for each time something is tried it changes the conditions with different results few of which will have been foreseen. What chaos theory leads us to is that we should be far more concerned and skeptical about long term predictions and forecasts about complex systems.

Order and disorder are inextricably linked and interplay with each other. Disorderly behaviour acts as a creative process, generating complexity and richly organised patterns, such is the nature of the world we live in.

B. Cosmology

In *On Purpose* Birch in the section on cosmic evolution quotes Whitehead saying “whatever suggests a cosmology suggests a religion”. He goes on to say that religion does not start with a cosmology, but rather with an experience that leads to a cosmology. However, the old cosmologies which the Church tied itself to, notably the Ptolemaic and Aristotelian systems, no longer match in any way the universe that is observed by science at present. Some wish to debate whether the more appropriate word is cosmogony, the theory of the origins, rather than cosmology, talking about the ordered universe, but the distinction is not as clear as it seems. Most modern cosmological theories now start with some notion of origin. Up until recently there were three main theories; the Big Bang, the Steady State theory, and the Oscillating Universe. The latter two try to preserve the notion of infinite time. However recent developments have shown that Big Bang theories are best able to explain the phenomena observed. Ian Barbour, in *Religion in an Age of Science*, provides a helpful summary of the developments in cosmological thinking. Having got the theory that matches observation though, there are now developments from the physical cosmology which raise questions concerning design, chance and necessity.

The argument from design has been revived recently by comparing our universe with the set of possible universes allowed by the laws of physics. Some of the phenomena which raise this issue are as follows:

1. The Expansion Rate. If the rate of expansion had been smaller or greater by minute differences, then in the first instant the universe would have recollapsed, and in the latter case it would have expanded too rapidly for stars and planets to form.

2. The Formation of the Elements. If the strong nuclear force were different either only hydrogen would have formed or it would have turned into helium. In either case neither stars nor compounds such as water could have formed.

3. A Fundamental Asymmetry. The ratio of protons to antiprotons was such that for every billion antiprotons there were a billion and one protons, so that when the billion pair annihilated each other there was one left over. Measurements of the temperature of the universe match up to the theory. Should the ratio have been different then the universe would have been other than it is.

These and other phenomena have led to the formulation of the Anthropic Principle. This has two forms, the weak and the strong. The weak principle is simply a statement that what can be expected to be observed must be restricted by the conditions necessary for our presence as observers. The strong principle asserts that the universe was made to fit life. This form is often picked up by theists as "proof" that God must be the cause of such a universe. However, neither form has any explanatory power. The weak form notes the limits that must exist, that is if a theory is propounded which does not allow for the existence of life then it has to be wrong. The strong version is almost a return to the idea that the universe was created for us. The existence of chance at the cosmological level leads to the many-world theories. There are four main variations: a) many cycles of an oscillating universe, so our particular universe has come up at the moment, b) many domains, that is a single Big Bang created a number of different domains, each with their own set of constants and laws, c) many quantum worlds theory which has branching happening every time there are alternative quantum potentialities, and d) quantum fluctuations which work on the fact that brief violations of the law of conservation can happen, and this may have been enough to start things off. All these give chance as the operative principle.

The third aspect is that of necessity. It undergirds the search for a fundamental theory which will show that the constants of our universe can only have the values that they have. There is the Grand Unified Theory, new inflationary theories, and the String Theory, also known as a Theory of Everything. However, the question can still be asked, Why that superlaw? and so on. Will that super law have any real meaning? For example, physics uses a combination of universal laws and particular initial conditions to make predictions. With a superlaw as a universal premise conclusions about particulars would be impossible to derive. While some situations will produce similar final states irrespective of initial conditions, in other situations the paths diverge because chance enters at a variety of levels. In fact chaos theory has now shown that even at the most basic quantum levels there is a basic unpredictability about the behaviour of particles and waves. This is important at the cosmological area because the Hawking-Penrose model starts with a singularity which must encapsulate within it quantum uncertainty. So right at the beginning chance exists.

One of the interesting themes that comes through the cosmological theories is the notion of a search for meaning. Hawking, Davies, Penrose and others talk about this in metaphysical terms. The best expression comes from Hawking in his concluding remarks:

"However, if we do discover a complete theory ... Then we shall all ... be able to take part in the discussion of the question of why it is that we and the universe exist.

If we find the answer to that, it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason - for then we would know the mind of God."

The God of these cosmologists is not a God which we would recognise easily and van den Beukel is highly critical of the way in which they set up a caricature to argue against. It is significant, though, that they talk in if not theological terms, then at least with strong metaphysical overtones. I shall return to this later.

C. Quantum Physics

I do not intend to cover all aspects of quantum theory. There are any number of popular books on the subject and they do the task more than adequately. Rather, I have picked out what I think are salient features.

One of the crossover points between classical physics and quantum physics is Einstein's work on relativity. What Einstein showed firstly was that light was different. It had a fixed speed which was the maximum speed of propagation of any signal generated anywhere in the universe. There are a number of implications of that discovery. The first being that the order and measurement of time are no longer absolute, and with that space also becomes relative. Instead there is a continuum of space-time. It means also that particles and bodies are now expressed in terms of events and processes. That is, an object is not a static thing, but changes with respect to space and time. The second was finding the relationship between matter and energy, so that these two are different aspects of the constituents of the universe. The final implication is that we must regard the universe as an undivided and unbroken whole. Where Einstein remained a classical scientist was on two accounts. One was where his work led to unexpected and unwanted results in the development of quantum theory. The other was his search for a complete description of nature. This has been developed more recently under the name of the Grand Unified Theory. Quantum physics took the next steps in destroying the Newtonian framework as an absolute explanatory framework. There are a number of facets which can be highlighted in this brief overview.

The first is the wave-particle duality theory of electromagnetic radiation. Under some circumstances heat radiation and light seem to behave as electromagnetic waves and at others they act like a stream of particles. Not only that, as particles they carried distinct levels of energy. There was not a continuous rise in energy levels. This was found to be true also of electrons found within the atom. In fact it has now been found that all sub-atomic particles have such a dualistic existence. The classical model held that these two aspects should be contradictory, but quantum theory developed around the hypothesis that these were complementary physical qualities.

The second facet is the development of probability theory. This essentially a recognition of the large numbers of particles involved. What it arrives at, though, is a change in the basic nature of reality. At the quantum level at least there is no longer any certainty about what any particular particle will do. There is an intrinsic uncertainty in the subatomic world. Einstein found this concept so shocking that he responded with the now famous quote "God does not play dice with the Universe!" I will return to this notion later.

The third facet arises from this complementarity and that is the choice by the experimenter of which sort of properties they might want to look at. Any description implies a choice of measurement, of measuring device, of question being asked. The answer received, however, does not give us access to a given reality. Rather each theory, and consequently each answer, will give us access to a certain aspect of reality which is relevant only in a limited context. Bohr's complementarity principle can be stated in such a way to say that each language can express only part of reality. There can be no final theory.

The last part to highlight is the non-local and non-causal nature of the relations of elements distinct from each other. This violates all ideas of separateness and independence which is basic to the mechanistic approach, and indeed to common sense observation of the world. This is because notions of order are pervasive in our framework. They involve our thinking, senses, feelings, intuitions, and our relationships with people and society. Order implies hard boundaries between entities, so that one can distinguish between them.

David Bohm instead speaks of the 'undivided wholeness' of the universe. As we penetrate matter we do not find isolated building blocks, but a whole web of relationships between the parts of a unified whole. A further implication is the recognition that there is no such thing as

empty space. Space is full, full of background energy, and matter is localised conglomerations of energy. So we now have a number of continua; space-time, matter-energy, mind-matter. At the quantum level as at others we find that the universe is constantly in a process of transformation, in which the idea of determinism no longer has sway.

Perhaps an analogy that Heinz Pagels uses will shed some light to what I am aiming at. The English language has 26 letters. The universe has a few fundamental building blocks, quarks, leptons and gluons. These are arranged in various configurations to form atoms, as letters are to form words. The analogy can be stretched at this level to include the uncertainty principle. We cannot guess just by looking at say an "a" which pronunciation it will have until we see it in its context, that is in the word. Grammar is like the quantum theory. It sets the rules for combining the various words to form meaningful sentences as quantum theory sets the rules for combining atoms to form molecules. The picture can be expanded so that the universe is like a library in which words are atoms and our own bodies are books in that library. We share the same constituents as everything else but we are put together in our own unique way.

D. Biological Science

This century has seen the development of the biological sciences move in two directions. At the turn of the century there were basically two models, the mechanistic and the vitalist models. The mechanistic approach considers organisms as machine-like. This may be done at the metaphysical level, asserting that that is the nature of living things, or at the methodological level which simply treats a living organism as if it were a machine. This was vigorously opposed by the vitalist school of thought which sought to explain the 'fact' that there is more to life than just mechanics by arguing that in addition to the physical components there is an additional principle or force. That was variously called 'life-force', *elan vital* and *entelechy* and was believed to be absent from non-living materials. This has been rejected as a serious model for a number of reasons, the first being the synthesis of "organic matter", urea in this case, from non-living chemical reactions. The second area was in embryology which many felt had no clear explanation. With the understanding of the way genetic instructions are coded in the DNA of the egg, and how they are communicated by chemical means during the embryo's development, this last defence of vitalism crumbled. A halfway position was developed by Lloyd Morgan called emergent evolution. Mechanistic evolution was the basis for this model interspersed with a number of miracles, in particular the emergence of life and the emergence of mind. The perception is that life emerged from the lifeless and mind from the mindless. To state that something 'emerges' does not solve any problem but merely restates it. The main problem with both these theories though is that they leave the basic nature of the mechanistic model unchallenged. In effect they state that this model at present cannot explain everything so we must posit some other concepts. It is rather like a scientific version of the God of the gaps hypothesis.

Part of the persistence of the mechanistic model has been its explanatory power. It is reductionist in its methodology. In other words, at whatever level it is working it breaks down the study to the simplest form at that level. It gives rise to a hierarchical approach so that what is true at one level will be true, though not necessarily as important at another, higher level. What it has been able to do has been to lay out from molecular biology through cell biology to eco-system studies, a whole range of mechanisms, ideas and concepts which have produced a new understanding of how living things operate. It also became the assumption behind the theory of evolution. Being mechanistic in its approach it was also deterministic in its outlook which came to full expression in the work of Jacques Monod, a biochemist in *Chance and Necessity*, and in the work of Richard Dawkins, a sociobiologist, in *The Selfish Gene*. They saw the process of evolution as being conceived solely by biological determinants such as molecular biochemistry or genes.

There is another approach which has been developed this century which takes a holistic approach, treating organisms as part of a total environment. It starts from the premise that the properties of each larger whole are found not just from the units from which they are composed but also by the new relations between these parts. The parts are recreated and redefined in the process of evolution from one level to the next. This approach is rather like the model of quantum physics. In certain limiting cases Newtonian physics offers a good approximation of what we see going on around us and these limit cases can be explained in terms of quantum theory. So the mechanistic approach to the biological sciences offers valuable explanations in limited situations, but when taken by itself it offers only a partial framework of meaning. The holistic or ecological approach can take up the findings and apply them in a broader context. Charles Birch in *On Purpose* shows how this applies validly in physiology, neural sciences, animal behaviour, sociobiology, genetics, developmental biology, microbiology and of course ecology.

This ecological approach leads to a perception of the unity of life, that life consists not of separate entities but of interrelated systems. These systems are internally related at the various levels, molecular, cellular, organ etc, but they are externally related to others of the species, to other species and to the environment as a whole. It understands that living things behave as they do only in interaction with the other things which constitute their environment. This model cuts through the dualism proposed by Descartes of matter and mind. A human being was a machine that had a mind attached, and as a result of that insight developed the doctrine which divided nature into mind and matter. However, as science has studied sentience, mind, consciousness or what ever one cares to call it, it is now clear that there is an observable continuity from simpler life forms through to the more complex. In other words, humanity is continuous with the rest of nature and this has implications for the way we respond to our environment in which we find ourselves.

Taking notice of developments in quantum theory, we once again find ourselves with the notion of undivided wholeness. This may require a change to the notion of evolution which in a sense is a product of the mechanistic model, and which implies progress, or change for the better. If life is enfolded within the matrix of the universe, then what we see is a creative unfolding, rather than a steady process of change. This means that the later members are not completely able to be derived from what went before, nor predicted from earlier forms.

E. Chance

With the development of statistical theory we have had to undergo a change in the way we think about chance. In the common mind chance is seen as something over which we have no control, yet mathematicians can talk of the "laws of chance" (more properly, probability). What they refer to are the relative probabilities of different outcomes. In other words the probabilities of throwing a 1, 2, or whatever on a dice when taken over a large number of throws come out to be 1 chance in 6. However, individual throws cannot be predicted. This is commonly misinterpreted with Lotto, where players are sure that their set of numbers must be due to come up. Anyone who inspects the tables of the number of times particular numbers have come up helpfully provided at Lotto outlets will find that with five years of playing, there is a relative evenness in the frequencies of each number.

"The notion of chance arises whenever a situation exists in which there is more than one possible outcome for an event, and one cannot predict, with certainty, which outcome will occur."

This can be understood in two ways. One is as pure chance where no causal explanation can be conceived of. The second is as accident; situations where two or more chains of events coincide in such a way as to determine the future course of events, yet there is no way to predict the outcome. A response to these is to try and argue that there is no pure chance, just that we do not have the full information. If it is a reflection of human ignorance, the result

would be to drive us back to a total determinism. However such a position is untenable, particularly in the light of quantum theory and the uncertainty principle. This in essence argues that there is a fundamental indeterminacy in nature, that chance is an essential ingredient of the cosmos. It attacks at its very root the notion that order is evidence of purpose and chaos is evidence against.

Chance is also seen at play in the theory of evolution. Monod talked about "blind chance". "Chance alone is at the source of every innovation, of all creation in the biosphere." What Darwin showed as he developed his theory was that existing views of design by an external agent were invalid. What chance does is open the door to creativity at all levels. If everything were totally determined, completely ordered, then all could be predicted and nothing new could occur. Prigogine's work on self-organising bodies and systems show that chance plays a strong part in the processes. There is an inherent creativity within the entities of the universe. This opens up the possibility that there are potentialities not yet revealed which as Bohm would say are there to be creatively unfolded from the matrix of the universe.

To reflect on Einstein's question of Does God play dice? again. Einstein's response was No. Others have responded Yes. Yet others have responded with Yes, and the dice are loaded.

However, I would respond No to the question but say instead like Lyotard, God plays bridge! Bridge relies firstly on a chance distribution of cards, but then there are a number of possible ways the cards may be played, with a variety of strategies requiring not just blind following of rules, but the deliberate manipulation of the rules to try and achieve ones end. Chance opens up potentialities within the universe. Chance as well as the role of choice and the role of purpose all come into play at the individual level as well as at the level of aggregates. Any model trying to reinterpret meaning must take into account the fact that chance and order, like chaos and order are part of the nature of the universe.

F. Concluding Remarks

In this brief look we find a number of things . The first is that the methods of science have yielded knowledge of many previously inaccessible areas of nature. This for some has been enough to undercut the credibility of religious beliefs. While some assert that religion has its own distinctive ways of talking about reality which are different from science, the success of the scientific method raises questions about the validity of religious knowledge.

The second is that as these explorations have occurred they have shown that nature has characteristics radically different from what has previously assumed. The third is that the languages spoken within each framework do share a certain commonality. In the past the different disciplines had their own separate areas. Now there is a great deal more overlap. Cosmologists for example are taking account of the evolution of life, and quantum physics has implications for molecular biology and so on. Each area also is starting to look at what their discoveries mean for the search for the "meaning of life". It is to that that we turn our attention.

IV. Search for Meaning

In the course of writing this piece I visited a number of bookshops. One left me with a particularly strong image. It was a “New Age” bookshop which had a wide variety of topics. On the main display, centre stage as it were, alongside holistic diets, books on spirituality and personal growth and betterment, were a couple of scientific books including Stephen Hawking’s *A Brief History of Time* and Paul Davies’ *The Mind of God*. The implication seemed to be that in their various ways, these were all books about the meaning of life and the search for meaning. Also, by implication, it seemed that the bookshop owners were treating them as all being at the same level. Rustom Roy commenting on the work of Capra and Zukav and similar books has this to say:

“Indeed, physics being seen as an ally of mysticism was about the amount of the learning... which occurred... One finds that the typical reader starts with sympathy for the mystical religious concepts, and the diagrams, terminology, and even the equations help make certain intuitive connections that science somehow reinforces these views. They do not... help form any kind of joint life-policy.”

Yet, it is precisely this that people such as Davies are starting to claim: “... in my opinion science offers a surer path to God than religion.” “A growing number of people believe that recent advances in fundamental science are more likely to reveal then deeper meaning of existence than appeal to traditional religion.” As one writer critically describes it: “physics is made a pseudo-religion of which the physicists are the priests.”

As I read this type of analysis I cannot help being struck by the direction the physicists thought goes, and derives from. Increasingly there is the overt presentation of the underlying presupposition which undergirds science and its theories. That is that it is searching for absolute knowledge which is linked with the idea that Truth is out there which can be captured and copied in language, in their language. Davies again, “...mathematical equations exist as a metaphysical reality.” Or Roger Penrose “The case for believing in some kind of etherial, eternal existence, at least for the more profound mathematical concepts is a good deal stronger ...such ‘God-given’ mathematical ideas should have some kind of timeless existence, independent of our earthly selves.”

He goes further than others though when he says, “Science seems to have driven us to accept that we are all merely small parts of a world governed in full detail (even if perhaps ultimately just probabilistically) by very precise mathematical laws.” Davies has as part of his concern what he calls the Big Four questions of existence:

Why are the laws of nature what they are?

Why does the universe consist of the things it does?

How did those things arise?

How did the universe achieve its organization?

Van den Beukel in his discussion of Davies’ argument has this to say: “Note that these are the main questions of existence. If people know the answer to them, existence no longer has any secrets. The possibility that these could perhaps be the main questions of physics is never discussed.”

What we have is a particular way of looking at the world being used to cover all aspects of meaning. If, as Davies argues, we are near to solving the last of the Big Four with the formulation of the super-law (the assumption being we have the answers to the other three), will its statement change anything about the way people live and relate to each other?

As Barbour and Birch develop their arguments we do need to be aware of the implications that the scientific enterprise has for what religion and theology can rightly say. Each of them are clear that a theology of nature can be developed which resonates with scientific knowledge and intersects with it in a critical way. Both warn, also, that theology can no longer link itself with a particular scientific interpretation of reality in the way it did in the past. But they are also

clear that the scientific model cannot provide the depth of meaning which men and women are looking for. What has quantum theory to say about love, evolution to say about free will? Science and religion, and other things too are concerned with the riddle of human existence, the world around us and the relations between the two. There are areas where science and the scientific method do have precedence in the explication of knowledge, areas of experimental evidence, and of theory and prediction, but these have limited application within a limited community (even though the derived technologies may be enjoyed by a wide range of people). In other areas science has no special place in the sense that it is 'objective' whereas religion is 'subjective'. But in the search for meaning and the destruction of the old cosmologies and world views, science has led people also to begin to doubt the moral principles which those traditional explanations of origin primarily contained. In the new cosmology there is no help for deriving an ethical code. Science and its counterpart, technology, has formed a very productive alliance, but they have become detached from many bonds and limitations, including those laid on them by wisdom and love of neighbour. These are areas of discourse with language outside the realm of science that we must now attend to.

V. Language and Reality

In 1967 Berger and Luckmann wrote *The Social Construction of Reality*. In it they argued that the reality of everyday life is presented to us as an intersubjective world, a world that I share with others. It is through the production of signs that we communicate our understanding of our world. G W Grace argues further that the social construction of reality is only achieved through the tool of language. It is how that happens that I want to explore at the moment. Grace presents us with two ways language is understood as working. The first is the mapping view and the other, what he calls the reality construction view. The mapping perspective takes the view that all languages are mappings of a common world, that is, for any object or thing that is in our environment there is a word to match. A consequence of this is that anything can be said in any language, and if we work hard enough we can find the right set of words in each language. In other words, all languages are assumed to be intertranslatable. This is matched up, in philosophical circles, by the search for the Universal language behind all other languages. In contrast the reality construction view looks at language quite differently. First it understands that what is said cannot be separated from the way it is said. There is also no clear boundary between the structure and the vocabulary of a language. Because language is shaped by its culture and a culture is given expression through its language it is not possible to say what belongs to language and what to culture. All this means that what can be said and talked about will be different for different language-culture systems.

Whereas the mapping approach takes language as a given and assumes a much more static situation for the development of language, the reality construction perspective recognizes that each language-culture system has its own conceptual world which is a product of its own history, and which is continuously creating language in new situations. The classical mapping approach talks about the drift of meaning, as if there is something not quite right about the process, whereas this approach recognizes that there is an ongoing interaction of words between the users of those words. There is no single universal language which exists waiting to be discovered. Such a view misunderstands and misrepresents the nature of language.

Reality construction is the primary function of human language in this view. Mapping gives precedence to the constraints of the real world and assumes that its representations through words and phrases are close enough to be direct reflections of the character of the real world. This has implications for the theological task later, namely, do the words we use represent some sort of Divine Reality that can be grasped by the right kind of language. Reality construction frees us from the notion of referential meaning, but it also implies that some concepts and ideas are non-translatable.

A simple example will suffice. Generally when we talk within a religious context we can agree on the meaning given to the words which divide reality into two spheres, those words being sacred and secular. In Maori there are two words which seem to have a similar role, those words being tapu and noa. Tapu is part of a complex system of rules by which objects, places or behaviours are placed under restrictions. Sometimes there is a clear link with notions of the sacred or holy, but other times there is the idea of pollution through contact with death, blood or hostile spirit. Some try to use a much broader definition so that all is contained under one roof as it were, but that damages the concept. Noa is the word for what is common, not restricted, boundless or without purpose.

A good example of how the two concepts interplay can be seen by looking at the marae. From outside, the whole marae is tapu, yet from within the marae grounds the whare tipuna is tapu but the cooking area is noa. There is a sense in which the two terms both complement and conflict with each other. What cannot be done though is to find a one to one correspondence between tapu and sacred, or tapu and holy, and between noa and secular, or noa and profane. Each set of concepts is used within each culture to provide ordering principles, a context for social integration and boundaries for behaviour, but neither set is congruent.

What I have tried to show with this example is that a culture creates by its language the reality around it. Part of the claim of the modern world is that science and scientific knowledge have been discovered. This position has been described as critical realism and takes the view that there is a one to one correspondence between the reality being described and the language used to describe it. Natural science discovers truth rather than makes truth, and science is seen as the paradigmatic human activity. What such a view does though, is that it does not recognise the contingency of language, that is that language could be other than it is. Any picture of language as a medium still preserves the subject/object distinction, and persists in assessing descriptions of the world as true or false.

Others see that science teaches no moral lesson and make a distinction between the world out there and the claim that truth is out there, as some metaphysical absolute. Such a view questions the assumption that we can find the 'right' language to 'fit the world' or 'be faithful to the true nature of self'. The world does not tell us what language to use, or what language games to play. Language is a contract between two or more players. Without any rules there can be no game, and every utterance is a 'move' in the game. In such a game there are two kinds of knowledge, the scientific kind and another kind, best described as 'narrative' knowledge. Scientific knowledge is not the totality of knowledge. It exists alongside, in addition to and at times in competition and conflict with this narrative knowledge. It is linked to what Lyotard describes as a grand narrative. A grand narrative is a way of talking about the world that we live in which tries to take up everything into a coherent whole. The great synthesis of Aquinas, the dogmatics of Barth are theological expressions of such grand narratives and Hawking's search for a Grand Unified Theory is a scientific example. However, we are at a point when all the grand narratives are breaking down and society can no longer see itself as a unified whole. It is at that point that various systems try to step in to provide the next grand narrative.

From the post modern perspective such a venture is doomed to failure. Language is the minimum relation required for society to exist. It is already the social bond. What is more, the use of language does not carry its own legitimation. Science, by using language of verification and falsification tries to presume that it has found "the rules" for presuming truth. It assumes that all other language games which do not match its standards are to be excluded. What it tries to deny is that knowledge is more than learning, which is more than science. Knowledge involves the question of competence which goes beyond the criterion of truth. Knowledge also involves the determination and application of other criteria such as efficiency, justice, happiness, beauty and so on. This sort of knowledge is what Lyotard characterizes as narrative knowledge. It involves knowing how to speak, knowing how to hear, and is the way in which a community relates to itself and its environment. It is the set of rules which constitute the social bond. The narratives themselves have authority within the community. It is the recognition that these language-culture systems are time and location bounded, and hence contingent which makes the search for a new Grand Narrative pointless. Who will decide what the narrative will be, its truth or its usefulness? Science has its own language game which is incapable of verifying itself, let alone legitimating other language games. On the other hand, neither can religion or theology claim that legitimating power.

What we must recognise instead is that we all carry within us a set of words which we use to justify our actions, beliefs and lives, a set the Richard Rorty calls a "final vocabulary". He outlines what he calls thin and thick terms. Words like true, good, right, beautiful and love are thin, flexible and all pervasive, while words like Christ, the Church, the Revolution and My Country, are thicker, more rigid and more parochial. There are three main approaches to final vocabularies. There is a naive realism which takes for granted that statements formulated in a 'final vocabulary' are enough to describe reality adequately, but beyond that it also assumes that it can describe and judge the beliefs, actions and lives of anyone else, particularly anyone who uses a similar final vocabulary. In other words, if you are talking about God and Jesus and

I am also, then a naive realist will presume that we will have the same basic final vocabulary in use.

The second form is that of critical realism, or metaphysics. This at least takes a more critical stance but still takes the question of what the intrinsic nature of justice, science, truth, God and so on, at face value and assume that they are referring to things with real essence. It is not a redescription of reality but rather an analysis of the old descriptions. Science in its present search for meaning has clearly set itself in this camp, as it were, and scientists might now be pictured as priests of the main final vocabulary that is operating in western society today. Most theological systems fit themselves into this framework as do other critical ideologies. The one common assumption that they have, and share with naive realism is the idea that there are absolutes that exist which by various means, revelation, experiment, observation, we have access to. The corollary of that is that at some point there has to be a truth claim which states this or that system is true, or more true, whereas these others are not.

The third approach has been described variously as non-realism, anti-realist, or ironic. At its base, it begins with the assumption that while there is something out there which we call Reality, we only have access to that through language which is contingent. The ironist, to use Rorty's term is aware of their own final vocabulary, but has radical and continuing doubts about it, doubts which arise through the encounter with other final vocabularies. Any argument phrased in the present set of words can neither underwrite the person's beliefs absolutely, nor dissolve their doubts. They recognise that neither vocabulary is closer to reality than the other, nor that it is in touch with any power other than the self. Further there is an acceptance of the fact that the final vocabulary, by which the person defines themselves, is always open to change and revision.

This approach seems to me to take seriously the wide range of uses that language has, and is able to justify more easily the valuing of non-scientific, or narrative thought forms. This is especially so in the area of metaphor. Traditionally there has been a battle between the Romantics and the Scientists or Platonists over the status of metaphor. It has focussed primarily on the distinction between the literal and the metaphorical, defined in terms of two sorts of meaning or interpretations, one of which is 'better' than the other. For the Platonist metaphors have to be paraphraseable or else they are useless for representing reality. By this standard metaphor becomes irrelevant because language for them represents a hidden reality outside of us. In contrast the Romantic has placed metaphor as a strange, wonderful and mystical image created by the imaginative faculty which lies deep in the heart's core. For them literal language is irrelevant because language is the means by which we express the hidden reality lying within us. In both cases, though, there is an assumption that there is a one to one correspondence of language, and this in the Romantics case has the tendency to push metaphor into the realm of allegory.

Metaphor does not operate this way, however. The primary distinction is between not literal and metaphorical but familiar and unfamiliar uses of language. A metaphor is a set of words used in an unfamiliar context to give us new insights. Using metaphor is rather like using italics or illustration in a text. There is no logical place for it in the language game. One suggested that using a metaphor is rather like getting up and slapping or kissing a person in the middle of a conversation and carrying on with the conversation. It is uttering something which is neither true nor false, but which carries a whole meaning which cannot be reduced to anything, nor paraphrased, but only substituted with another metaphor. It is not just a way of communicating, but a way of knowing, its expression and the knowledge communicated by the image cannot be separated. In this way, metaphor is the human method of investigating the universe, it allows us to connect the known of ourselves with the unknown of the universe, and in this interaction make new relational patterns, and redescrbing the self anew with each interaction. Also, it takes account of the shift in language, and of the shifts in world views. We talk of 'dead metaphors', metaphors which no longer have the power to open up reality to

new insights, and so we can look to theological metaphors in the light of where society and its language are now and make assessments as to the value of those metaphors. Language, through metaphor, and through the complex interaction within society is the way we create meaning within our world, with that meaning will also come the religious and ethical imperatives that we order our lives by. Our beliefs then are ours, and we must own them. When we come to share them we must recognise that there is a dual action happening. God talk is intimately applicable to our own lives for it is talk using our final vocabulary. At the same time it is also publicly meaningful because language is first and foremost public, and that is where our metaphors for God take shape. They take shape primarily within the context of a worshipping community of faith who share the same metaphor system which inspires and sustains their corporate life together.

VI. Models and Metaphors of God

I do not intend to canvas all the available images that seem to be available for God. Drawing on Brian Wren's work I want to look at the way metaphor works with God talk, and then using Ian Barbour and Charles Birch look at some models that relate particularly to God's role in Nature.

At heart, the issue relates to whether or not the words we use might refer to some 'objective' reality which we call God. The argument that I have been developing implies that in the end we do not have access to that reality apart from our own cultural bound experience. What we do when we have an experience is try to find appropriate images to represent the range of insights and emotions which that experience produced. This might seem to be a rather individualistic perspective, but for it to become an anchored experience, one which we draw on we have to give expression to it, to talk about it to others. That draws us into community as we use the language of our group to explain it.

Some metaphors which we use to describe our experience seem to have more effect than others, they offer a range of images which others can draw from. When we talk of God, we are trying to find those images which express the ultimate meaning, or the final vocabulary in a more coherent manner. Alfredo Fierro made a helpful distinction between theolal language and theological language. Theolal language is the language of poetic imagery and spontaneous expression. It is pre-critical. Theological language, on the other hand, is critical reflection upon theolal language. It takes those spontaneous expressions and metaphors and works them together into a coherent whole. Most of us most of the time use theolal language and that is no problem. The problem arises when we come to accord some sort of status to the language we are using.

There are roughly three broad ways to respond. The first is that of naive realism. It makes the assumption that theolal language actually corresponds to the nature and reality of God. Its strongest tendency is to literalize the metaphors it uses. "God is like a king" means "God is a king". The second position is that of critical realism. It works from the point that there is an objective reality "God" out there, and the task is to critically reflect on the language used so that the model of God that is constructed is the best fit possible. It shares with naive realism the idea that there is a correct way to talk about God.

Anti-realism, on the other hand, does not share this perspective. It is not saying that there is nothing out there, but rather is saying that language is the only access we have to reality, that language creates the way we can see reality, and that as language is constantly in flux so our metaphors for God will constantly be on the move. We talk about dead metaphors, where the power of the image has been lost through shifts in meaning or through changing social contexts. So then the creative and constructive task of language is to find the new empowering images and metaphors from which one's search for meaning is derived. When our experience of God changes, new metaphors will be needed to express the new interrelationships between the person and God, and between the person and others in the community.

One such metaphor system which Brian Wren analyses is the one he calls the KINGAFAP metaphor system. KINGAFAP stands for the King-God-Almighty-Father-Protector. A hymn writer, he analysed many of the hymns, creeds and services used in the United Reformed and Methodist churches in Britain. Overwhelmingly the themes of protection, fatherliness, kingship and omnipotence were predominant. While this metaphor system had meaning within particular social contexts, the images are beginning to lose congruence with our social reality today. For example, the notion of kingship has traditionally been extended to God as the King of creation. It carries with it the idea of the King's absolute control of his realm. This image sat quite well with most of the models of the universe until quite recently. As I have shown earlier, our view of the universe has had to be modified to take into account the

presence of change and uncertainty. The metaphor of God the King no longer fits with our present knowledge of the universe.

The idea of omnipotence also requires a rethink. Its classical expression was developed through Calvin's doctrine of special providence. An omnipotent king who loves his subjects will from time to time cause such acts to happen as will assist their cause. Let's take the example of the Exodus story where God caused an east wind to blow and part the waters (Ex 14:21). From what we now know of the way weather systems work, to have 'created' the conditions described, God would have had to interfere in the weather systems some months previous. That then raises the problem of getting the Israelites there on time, all at once as the waters parted. Once you get into this sort of game, there is no end to it and it leads to absurd positions being held. Perhaps we can get a clue from the Biblical language itself. The words used translated by the word "miracle" are the Hebrew word *oth* and the Greek word *semeion*. The main meaning each of these has is that of "sign". That in itself is significant for it gives us the idea of something pointing to something else. An event that happens is given religious significance by the shared experience of the community and the metaphors are created to give a framework of meaning. Further down the track, away from the event, the words begin to take on concrete meaning. We can see this in the gospels as they relate the baptism of Jesus. Mark's account is the simplest where Jesus saw the Holy Spirit come like a dove - a clear metaphor. Luke has the Spirit descend "in bodily form as a dove". The metaphor has been destroyed. This is what has happened to the KINGAFAP metaphor system for many. God is not "like" these attributes, God literally is a King etc, which takes the language away from its initial use and tries to place it in the framework of descriptive language, which is accessible to standards of proof and so on. This opens theological language up to the scrutiny of science which claims precedence in the analysis of description, and creates the arena for the demolition of meaning.

The metaphors we use do have to take into account the knowledge we have about the world around us. This becomes the theological task of constructing models of the concept of God. A model is never an exact representation of reality. It always simplifies some aspects of the reality it is trying to show. Here the task is seen differently according to whether one is a critical realist or an anti-realist. In the first case the critical realist is looking for the nearest description to the "objective" reality that is God. It tries to create a complete description that is true. It also entails making a judgement about competing models, for in the end there can only be one. Barth's Dogmatics would be a prime example of such an enterprise. The anti-realist recognizes that the modelling process will always be unfinished and transitory. Each new experience will change some aspect of the model, unlike the critical realist's project which tries to fit the experience into some already existing slot, or else has to reject it. New insights will help to reframe or reimage the model.

Ian Barbour looks at some of the current models of God's relation to nature and the way they are elaborated. He begins with classical theology with its dominant model of Ruler-Kingdom and God is spoken of as an omnipotent, omniscient and unchanging sovereign. Then there is Deism, which uses the Clockmaker-Clock model and God is the designer of a law abiding world. A third type is neo-Thomism, developed from the thought of Aquinas which undergirds the classical model. Here though the model is that of the Workman and a Tool. In God's hands creatures are like a tool in the hands of the workman. This is a development of Aquinas' distinction between primary and secondary causes. God is the primary cause who works through secondary cause, though it is not treated as a simple mechanical coercion, rather as something many-faceted. Each of these three systems or models depend to a greater or lesser extent on an ordered universe with which God is involved and the debate centres around how much or how little direct involvement God has.

Anglican theology picked up the question of God's omnipotence and developed what is now known as kenotic theology. The model that underpins it is the Parent-Child relationship.

What it tries to stress is the idea of God's voluntary self-limitation and vulnerability. Another influential theology is that of existentialism. This didn't have any dominant model of God's relation to nature. Bultmann considered nature to be a rigidly determined mechanistic order and so the only sphere God could act in is the sphere of personal life.

There are two other models I want to mention. One draws from the understanding of the human person as a psycho-somatic unity. This has the model of the world as God's body. The classical view draws some of its imagery from a dualism of mind/body or soul/body. This has a more holistic perspective. It stresses immanence over transcendence, but does not develop an adequate account of human responsibility and freedom. It also has tendencies to lapse into pantheism in which God is identified with the cosmos and is inseparable from it. The final model comes from Process theology. It envisages reality as a community of interacting beings with God as leader of the community. It is ecological and social in its outworking.

Interpersonal models best represent the combination of independence and interdependence that characterize the complex web of relationships.

Birch uses this model to show how it is possible to envisage God being involved in the universe but not identified with it, that is, panentheism. It has the advantage of viewing reality as part of a dynamic process in which God is involved. It requires a complete break from one of the basic concepts that undergirded the classical systems which is that changelessness is part of God's perfection. Change is always for the worse. If, however, we allow that change can be for the better, not as a general principle but as part of the overall description of reality then we get a more holistic picture of the world and of God's place in it. Creativity, for example, requires change and transformation. That process does not happen in isolation but is part of a complex network of relationships. The Darwinian thesis of survival of the fittest seems to imply that there is competition in the evolutionary process. The ecological approach envisages a range of influences some positive some not, and at the level of human interaction we have to take responsibility for our participation in the process. For me this model offers the most potential. It understands that it is a model created through the power of language and that it is open to change and transformation. Its key value for me is its image of integration. Birch sees cosmic evolution as a process of progressive integration which can be seen at all levels of the universe. He sees that it is this lack of integration within the human sphere which is this search for meaning, and understands this integration to be the task before humanity now.

A final word about the use of models and acknowledging them as such. The models to have any validity need to be capable of taking up the community's metaphors and final vocabularies and weaving them together coherently and meaningfully. Each model will express some facet of peoples religious experience which has evocative power for them. The model for church as community in an ecological framework provides an important role for the church. That is to provide the sort of environment where people can work out their solutions without the fear of final solutions being imposed upon them, so that the metaphors they use are valued as are their final vocabularies. Before I look at the way post modern thought looks at community and personhood and see how that fills out this framework further, I want to sketch the outlines of my own personal model of God.

VII. A Personal Construction of God.

One of the first images that broke the hold that the traditional metaphors had on me came while I was on retreat prior to coming to Picton. Its derivation is from music. There is a style of writing, more often for the organ, which is called Ground Bass. In it the bass notes are given and the player constructs the harmonies and melody above it. My mind fastened onto the richness of the images in the following terms. Quantum theory understands reality in terms of wave functions. It has worked out the equations for the simplest of systems, but recognises that the more complex systems can be expressed in terms of the interactions of all the individual waves with their subsequent sets of harmonics, creating a standing wave which has its own individual form. My metaphor has God as the creator of the Ground Bass of the Universe, above which all things interact to create harmonies and melodies. Admittedly this isn't a particularly personal image, but I was heartened recently while listening to Keith Ward. He argued, as a critical realist, that in classical terms saying God is a person is heterodox. God talk is acquaintance talk. It can only ever point the way. So for me, descriptions that say God is a spirit, and that a spirit is a person without a body, as I've heard some develop, are signs as to how they envisage their relationship with God, rather than being actual descriptions about the nature and being of God.

To go back to my metaphor. If one wants to use the transcendent/ immanent distinction then this is an immanentist position. However I find such a distinction unhelpful. "Transcendence" language is a language of distance; it literally means "to go beyond". Its thought is that there is a reality beyond that which we experience in normal everyday life, a reality outside of our grasp. There are two ways I view this. One is that we do use language to try to express this mixture of feelings and insights, and that while there is the understanding that the language is somehow inadequate, we persist in using it. The other is that the dual location, God beyond and God within, was part of the "three-decker" view of the universe. It was sustainable to some degree in the Newtonian framework, but with a more unitary view of space and time it is difficult to conceive a language which can place God beyond" a finite but unbounded universe. Ruth Page offers the language of presence and relationship as a different set of metaphors. The appropriate preposition she says is with; God is present with us and with creation. God is then to be envisaged as in direct relationship with all of creation. All this will inevitably be thought and spoken of in personal terms, "not because God is personal in his nature, but because this is how we apprehend God in categories we understand and value and can relate to him."

In my image God is a composer who invites the whole of creation to play its harmonies together above the fundamental Ground Bass of the Universe. It is not an individualistic model but much more an ecological model in which the various harmonies are in constant interplay with each other. Consonant with the scientific perspective of the world, the bass is still being written with all the possibilities and potential that that opens up. The idea of the composer also has overtones of passion and involvement with the elements of the composition. Music is created for sheer enjoyment, as well as to express feeling, to tell stories and a whole host of other things as well. Process theology has an ecological model as well, but at its heart lies the idea of purpose. Cosmic evolution is a process which involves, for Birch and Cobb, the evolution of order at successive levels from chaos through atoms, complex living organisms to the complicated structures of human society. It does that through a process of integration at each level, integration within the level and between levels. Chaos studies show that chaos exists at all levels, is complementary to order, and that creativity comes from the complex interplay of the two factors. Birch is clear that his interpretation is a model, that he is constructing an understanding of God. That for me provides a stimulus to go on.

I quote this model because I want to use their notion of integration within my context. As I have outlined elsewhere, postmodern thought is itself struggling with the aftermath of the effects of the individualistic modernist approach to reality. The interplay of language provides a model for us as humans to draw on in the search for identity and community. It is in this way that integrative factors and disintegrative factors can be discerned and evaluated. If we are partly dependent upon each other for both our sense of identity and our community then to be truly integrated as individuals we need to be at one within ourselves, to be at one with each other and to be at one with our environment.

The strength for me of this model is that it does not lead to a quietist position of accepting what one is, but rather by accepting that we are part of an evolving universe, and a reality which we create, there are yet more possibilities that may be realised within our lives and within our community. Nothing is fixed in the sense that it “has to be” or was “just meant to be”. The universe does not work like that, and our models of God need to take that into account.

There is no “purpose” in the sense that somewhere there is a divine plan, with script, players and conclusion. Rather, in the search for meaning, we create purpose. For me that purpose comes through the search for integration, integration of personhood which comes through the transactions of our language within relationships. Those relationships which build, create, unite and integrate people are those we use the word “love” for. It is love which through its self giving, its openness to receiving, and its ability to transform and create relationships, offers us the chance to be creative with all that the universe offers us. Love enables us to transcend the boundaries we and society place around each other. It is that sense of transcendence, of going beyond ourselves which draws us to be able to begin to talk meaningfully of God. God provides the context for the richness of creativity, the fullness of love, the valuing of each person and created thing as being of worth.

VIII. Community and Personhood

One of the key issues for the post-modern mind is that of community, its nature and how the individual is related to that. The modernist approach through classical sociology has been to create the dualistic model of the *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. This was first derived by Tonnies late last century. *Gemeinschaft* is understood as community and frequently used to refer to clear communities held together by kinship, focussing on home, village and culture. *Gesellschaft* on the other hand is related to industrialised and urbanised society and refers to ties through association, trade, business and is frequently referred to as transitory and superficial. Sociology generally commences its analysis from this perspective. The premodern view was clear about its communal and organic model. The community is society is the village, and this was subsumed by the modernist approach with the dropping of the organic perspective. Alongside this is the modernist celebration of autonomy and individuality, of which Protestantism is the religious expression of an individuals relation to God. A person is an individual who is put into the grand scheme of things, almost as a cog in a machine. That became the focus for the debate on freewill and determinism that still carries on without resolution. With the breakdown of the grand frameworks, and with the recognition of the role of language this model is no longer adequate to describe the world we live in.

For a start we as individuals are inextricably bound into society. That is our given as it were, nurtured by education and culture. But even though it is a given it is not determinative of who we are or will be. As we use language to shape our world, we also use language to shape ourselves so that who we are is not fixed, not some sort of given, but rather an achievement, a process. Our full potentiality is not ever realized. This in some way relates to the experience of futility that many feel in society at present. Society tries to work with fixed notions of order and givenness. Everyone has their place and identity, so when that does not happen through unemployment, redundancy, being part of a minority group for example, then their notions of self and identity are frustrated and made meaningless. This is capitalized on by the Self Improvement Industry who help people stay in this same model. If we can see beyond the fixed identity of Being to the fluid and open Becoming, then we begin to open up possibilities. The creative nature of language also requires that we be actively interrelated with each other, as individuals and as groups. If we accept Rorty's approach to language, we find that it opens up a different focus for the creation of community.

If no language or final vocabulary is absolute then in order to converse with others we have to value the diversity of views that are thrown up. In other words we have to hold our conversations with respect for the other person. Whereas the modernist view led to egocentricity, with this approach nonegocentricity becomes a key value. Separateness must also be acknowledged, nurtured and celebrated and not merely tolerated. This diversity, nonegocentricity and separateness is recognised as belonging in a community perceived in ecological terms. Using the ecological model we are able to look at the web of relationships between individuals and groups that constitute that community. It also disallows us from putting a hierarchy of order onto that community. There are many who wish to retreat from the pluralism that society throws up because it seems to them that they would have to give up their claim to 'rightness', to being the 'only way' or whatever, but this leads to a narrow and restrictive view of society.

Moltmann argues that the old principle of community derived from Aristotle, and which lay behind Tonnies analysis no longer holds. That principle broadly stated was that like seeks after like. This principle of correspondence does not lead to a gain in knowledge or understanding, but rather to the self-verification of what is already known. It leads to class and caste and destroys any vitality in society. Rather, he says, that it is knowledge of the Other which brings real learning. To learn is to get new insights and that is what brings change. The basic principle of a healthy society or community is the acknowledgement of others in their

differentness. To use a biblical image, love of one's enemy is the basis for a common life in the midst of conflict. This sort of understanding creates community in diversity. It is holistic thinking which leads us into a web of life which is connected with the greater organism of the earth, a new integration of nature and culture.

Such an understanding does not subsume the individual completely in the community or society as the socialist models did, nor does it leave the individual as an autonomous isolate as the modernist, capitalist models do. It recognizes that true community is necessary for our personhood to develop and flower.

But the old 'communities' are no longer there, community has to be created. In a sense, the old model of community worked within a hierarchical framework, which had as its operating energy coercive power. Kinship, class and hierarchy have a clear set of structures and ordering principles that the individual must fit within. Now community comes from a common commitment to a set of goals, ideals or ends. More than that though, it requires some sort of ritualizing activity which celebrates not just the community's purposes but the nourishment and building up of the individuals within that community.

Such a model sets up an ideal to which a community aspires. It needs to be consistent, so if we recognise the pluralist nature of society, the ideal is open and inclusive, valuing of the gifts of all people, and encouraging them to share the commitments and common tasks of the whole community. This ideal provides critical leverage to work against the parochialism of traditional communities and the complacency of the established social order. It also provides a basis for ethical judgements over against those who would say that such a model opens up to complete relativism and the acceptance of any sort of community. By recognising the interrelatedness of all people, then in celebrating community we must also affirm the ideal of community as being respectful to the whole of reality and to all members of the human community. So not every shared commitment or common task can be affirmed, just because they contribute to a sense of community for those within them. Through our shared human experience we find ourselves faced with the question of inclusion and solidarity. Previously, our societies worked on the exclusion principle. This, says Rorty, was primarily because our societies recognised first of all those of their own kind as human. We only have to revisit the arguments backing up slavery and the colonial conquest of the world to see that. Those who were other were not defined as "human", so ill treatment could be justified. It was not possible for "savages" to have "souls" and so on. By so defining others, those doing the defining lost the capacity to see their suffering for what it was. Even today the regional conflicts highlight the power of the exclusion principle. The turmoil in former Yugoslavia illustrates very well the inability to separate the question "Do you believe and desire what we believe and desire?" from the question "Are you suffering?" An exclusive community defines solidarity in terms of beliefs (final vocabularies). An inclusive one defines solidarity in terms of dealing with issues of life and death, namely Are you suffering? Are you in pain? Have you food enough? and so on. To be able to distinguish between the question of whether we share the same final vocabulary from the question of whether you are in pain requires the ability to see more and more that our traditional differences are unimportant when compared with the similarities of pain, suffering and humiliation.

The Christian community has as its focus for action, the life and death of Jesus. From that historical experience has come a story which has helped create and recreate meaning and purpose for communities throughout the ages. The story recasts God-talk in new ways. The righteous man is not one who is protected from all evil, but instead is one who suffers it, as do all other people. He does not claim special favours from God, but through love endures even death. The resurrection motifs that were developed by the early Christian community were all ways of telling about how the way of love endures even through death, of how the meaning of Jesus' life is not lost, of how God said "Yes" to this way and not to other ways. The formative experience of the Christian community is derived from addressing the question of pain,

suffering and humiliation, each of which threatens to pull communities apart in the search for meaning.

These are the bases for human solidarity and it is with these things in mind that we need to look at what this might mean for the Christian community as it tries to live out its faith.

IX. Implications for Pastoral Practice

One of the difficulties that I have struck in this area, although it was one which I suspected as the case, was that there has been very little work done directly on constructing a pastoral practice from a theological foundation. Indeed, a number of writers, both Catholic and Reformed start from the premise that pastoral theology takes up where ecclesiology and doctrine leave off, and so it focuses primarily on the training of clergy (and occasionally for some writers, the laity) in the pastoral tasks. Where they reflect on the theology it generally begins with the traditional language and move on from there. This is certainly the case with Clinebell in *Basic Types of Pastoral Counselling*. Others, such as Jay Adams and Wayne Oates, begin with the overt statement of the "old verities" of the faith. The closest writers have come to this sort of task are Alastair Campbell with *Rediscovering Pastoral Care*, John Cobb in *Theology and Pastoral Care* (from a Process perspective) and to a lesser extent Ruth Page with *Ambiguity and the Presence of God*.

As I have brought these reflections together I have become aware of the variety of tasks that make up pastoral practice. It has always seemed to me that the first task of the pastoral worker is being available to people in the crisis and grief situations. No theology can help sustain a person unless there is an adequate response to pain, suffering and evil. The second task is to find appropriate images for worship, with its corresponding foci on the community and the individuals within that community. Each of those have the related tasks of community building and personal development which need to be addressed. As well, some attention needs to be paid to the implications for spirituality.

A. Grief and Suffering.

One of the pieces I use in funeral services from time to time goes like this:

Death is an ending! It is a loss of everything! Death, though it comes to every one of us, is a tragedy of major proportions.

Using the reality construction model, life can be pictured as a series of interlocking conversations of varying degrees of importance. When a person dies, the conversations with those around them cease. Part of the problem for those still living is that that person's contribution to the conversation was part of the construction of reality for those in relationship with them. Their death now means that the reality they were building together can never be finished. There are occasions, it seems, when a person, aware of their impending death, is able to gather their family and friends around and bring the conversations to their close. That process is able to ease the grief that ensues, but it does not alter the fact that there now has to be a new reality in which to live, one which does not include the one who has died. In my view, there is a different task for the minister and theologian than what is normally perceived. Certainly there is the normal work of providing comfort and support, but that comes from our common humanity, our solidarity in suffering. The task is directed towards helping, encouraging and interpreting the new final vocabulary that the person will have to live by in their new reality. For some people that will require very little input, and for others quite a lot.

What do I mean by this? Perhaps some examples may help to explain. A family who has lost a son through a shooting accident some years back put all their grief aside and boarded up the cupboard in his room. There are a variety of psychological theories as to what might be going on, and what best to do. In talking with the father, at the very least he is unable to accept the new reality that his son's death has created. His solution is to put dealing with it on hold. Part of his problem is that in trying to find some sort of meaning for what had happened the old answers did not fit, and no one had given him the tools to create new ones. A second sort is familiar, in that when a partner, often of fifty or sixty years duration dies, the remaining person simply decides that they can not cope with a reality that does not include their loved one and

stop living either physically or in some other way. In these cases, nothing anyone can do will console them or offer them any reason for living that they would consider important.

There are other areas where grief is a factor, especially in the areas of divorce and the breakdown of long term relationships, and unemployment and redundancy. These areas can also be seen from the perspective of needing to create a new reality within ones life, and until the person can come to terms with that they are unable to move beyond grief.

Alongside this is the question of suffering. As I indicated in the section on Chaos, we can no longer hold rationally a picture of "evil" as something inherent in nature. I would agree that the devastation from an earthquake or monsoon or hurricane is disastrous for those hit by them, but to claim that the events are in some way "evil" is, in my view, to lay some deeper purpose on to them. As I reread the theological dictionaries and other texts I find that there are three characterisations of evil; "natural" evil, "metaphysical" evil and "moral" evil. The first two relate to the world as it is experienced. Natural evil is the realm of disasters and the like, while metaphysical evil is where human actions have resulted in results other than those intended. For example, the colonization of the Pacific brought diseases from Europe which decimated indigenous populations. Both these "evils" rely on a model which interprets change, chance and disorder as evil, that they are in some way breaking away from the divine purpose. The responses within that framework have included the positing of an actual power of evil, usually personified as Satan, and in a more benign form the statement that finitude and limitation are the marks of an imperfect creation, for only God is perfect. In the former case a harsh dualism can develop, and in the latter a passive quietism. We are either victims or spectators in an antagonistic or at least a neutral universe.

I find that these lead into blind alleys in which there never seems to be a way out, because they seem to highlight the problem of religion in modern society: the inability of an omnipotent good God to act in the face of evil.

My own position is that the starting point has to be human action, both individual and corporate. That is where those things we term evil originate. From my own perspective it takes in not notions of imperfection, as though we are somehow flawed, but the idea that we create the conditions whereby life is devalued, relations broken and personhood destroyed. Evil must be acknowledged as both an individual and corporate responsibility. We are responsible for the choices we make and for the language we use to justify those choices. There is always a temptation to reify evil, to give it a power that is independent of humanity, but that idea is becoming more unhelpful, as it erodes the responsibility we have for our decisions.

With that framework we can address the issue of suffering. Suffering which is the result of natural processes can no longer be interpreted as the result of divine punishment or the work of evil forces. Suffering caused by human action is no different, although there are other factors that need to be dealt with. Our legal system has not found an adequate solution in terms of recompense, retribution or rehabilitation, nor does our society seem ready to deal with offenders in any way other than incarceration, which only accentuates the disintegration of their personhood and self worth. Unfortunately this movement seems to be getting fed from the conservative churches with their harsh perspective on sin, evil and punishment. As a community of faith we need to look at our models of God and find out where the healing, reconciling images lie and reawaken them.

Suffering offers the complex possibilities of disintegration and exclusion on the one hand, but also the richness of integration and inclusion on the other. How we interpret those possibilities determines how we can respond to them. A quote from a book I read 15 years back has remained with me, and now becomes clearer in this context - "Suffering is the school whereby we put aside the God of our childhood..." Without an adequate basis for our understanding of suffering, life and God will take on less meaning and open up the way to disintegration. It is in

this context that we see grief having the potential to harm and destroy a person's self understanding.

This provides the framework for the work of pastoral care. It is about the "cure of souls", which in my understanding is about helping the person integrate their experiences into their interpretative framework, of helping transform and expand their final vocabulary so that it provides them with an understandable reality in which to live and celebrate life.

B. Worship

Worship is the gathering of a community to give expression to that which is of greatest worth to them. Within that simple definition lies a lot which impacts on what I have been saying. I used Brian Wren's book for the section on metaphor, and again here I draw from it. His perspective helps get a handle on what I want to do. By outlining the breakdown of the KINGAFAP metaphor system he highlights the need to create new metaphors that will relate to worship. For me, these have to relate to my sense of the "other", the "divine" or "transcendent", my environment, my own daily living, and my place in a community of people. It is the shared language which ties all this together. Like admiring a painting, it is when we need to share our religious experience, and to get encouragement and support from others that we find we have to use a common language.

As a Christian, I find within the Jesus story, images of creativity and liberation which ground me within a particular language tradition. This also needs to find appropriate metaphors for God-talk, that language of final vocabulary which inspires and sustains the community motif. Wren uses the biblical voices to show what a wide diverse set of images those writers used to talk about God, a freedom which seems to have been lost in the development of the KINGAFAP system. Our task, in our respective communities, is to use the resources around us to find the fresh, living metaphors.

Once that is taken as part of the community's role, it has implications for what follows. Freedom of images allows people to explore for themselves their own final vocabularies in the light of their particular community. This has always happened, though not usually consciously, when people have drifted away from church going because the language no longer makes sense and so on. With the use of a wide variety of metaphor, people will no longer need to be afraid of having someone else's final solutions and vocabulary imposed upon them.

Such an attitude makes for the creation of an open and inclusive community, one where diversity is not only accepted but celebrated. This sort of celebration can easily be built into the community's worship.

Another area which needs acknowledgement and further exploration is the use and purpose of prayer within worship. The themes of prayer in terms of adoration, approach, confession, supplication, intercession and thanksgiving all have their origin within the royal court model of worship. There are some important aspects within each which should not be overlooked, but the purpose to which they are put do need to be examined. For example, intercessory prayer often assumes a concept of God in control and able to interfere. Such an image is no longer tenable. Nor is intercession as an attempt to stir our individual consciences to awaken them to the horrors of the world. It is possible to view intercession as the attempt to direct the community's attention to the possibility that situations might be other than they are. This takes a performative view of language. By stating the hopes, the community directs its attention and activity to creating the new reality stated through the medium of prayer. Similarly, the preaching of the word takes on a different perspective. It does not lose its value, but in fact increases in value because it is now based on a clearer understanding of the working of language. The task of proclamation is the task now of analysing and reimagining metaphors, of creating new ones and of creatively using the old ones. This should be a dialogue for the worshipping community rather than a monologue from the leader to the led. "If belief is something we want others to hear, enjoy and join in; if it is a story, the story that moves and

inspires us, we want to tell it and hope it will speak as powerfully to others.” That becomes the preacher’s starting point, and by opening up a dialogue, they open up the way for the community to tell their story, drawing on the God images that have impelled it through the years.

Finally there are the rituals of joining and belonging, of birth, death and marriage, which act as the visual symbols of the celebrations of the community. I am not suggesting we strip away all the words and start from scratch. I am suggesting that there are elements which are tied to particular metaphor systems which are no longer appropriate. Images, for example, of the minister as the priest, the sole representative able to act for God and with power to wield similarly. The debate about transubstantiation in communion, while not a Reformed doctrine, does lay out the starting point for discussion within an antiquated world view. Or, the imagery behind the Giving away of the Bride, which while it has a nice touch to it, is no longer part of our social understanding of the place of women.

The implications for our worship, the way it is celebrated and the way it is conducted are far reaching if the open and inclusive sets of metaphors are actively embraced.

C. Creation of Community

As I outlined earlier, this aspect of living has become more problematic in post-modern society. With the disintegration of the foundations of individualism, the task of creating intentional communities gains significance. Some years back I heard a radio talk and subsequently got a copy of the text which looked at the disintegration, alienation and increasing isolation of individuals within New Zealand society. At the time I thought such an assessment unduly pessimistic. However, the New Zealand Values Today study by Alan Webster and Hyam Gold, published in 1990, showed that this assessment had developed into a definite trend.

The preferred activities away from the work environment tended to take people away from relationships, especially those forty and over. More solitary activities like gardening, watching TV, listening to the radio and music, and reading are gaining in importance. It is linked, I think, with their finding that at the time of the survey 61% felt that you can’t trust people. Our levels were similar to those, not of other comparable countries like Australia, Britain, or Denmark, but of Spain and Yugoslavia which had each had recent revolutions at the time of the international survey. Trust is at the heart of any cooperative community. It requires a high degree of acceptance of others different to oneself and an awareness of our interrelatedness as a community.

Exclusivist models of the church which come across through the use of images of power and control work against the building of trust. A shift in imagery can release a community from the necessity to provide final answers, and instead look for ways to encourage and support creativity and relationships. If the only models of relationship used in worship are hierarchical ones then there is no possibility of openly creating valid networks. The ecological metaphor offers the chance of valuing all people within the network for what they have to offer, for who they are, and who they might become. It also opens up a different perspective on the world around the community. Rather than being separate from the world, the community needs to recognise its interrelationship with it, and to offer ways of being community that might bring the possibility of trust, reconciliation, healing and liberation to the wider community.

There is no one actively promoting community in New Zealand as a lifestyle option outside of small sectarian groups, both Christian and other. Ruth Page offers the metaphor of God as companion as a model for people in Christian communities to build relationships. When we take family images as a model for the church we struggle with the reality that exists for many people, that of dysfunctional families and of different models of being family. If we are to celebrate the sense of community in our worship and our gathering we must also affirm an

ideal of community that is respectful to the whole of reality and to all members of the human community, and use words and models that match.

D. Integrity of Personhood

If our personhood is not fixed in some eternal manner, then we need to look for alternate ways of expressing this. The existentialist interpretation was that of Being. In the framework that I am offering the metaphor is that of Becoming. We are constantly at work bringing our individual personalities to life. This is done in interaction with the communities in which we live. What we could become as a person, rather than being fixed now can be left open. The task is to integrate ourselves as individuals and as members of a community. We live not in a dualist universe but a monist one, where all is integrated within each level and between different levels. It is here we look for integrating principles which allow us to accept ourselves and build and recreate that which is us. From the Christian perspective the primary principle would be that of love. Love has entwined in its makeup notions of relationship, of self-giving, of response and of change. It is in this context that we can begin to develop a notion of the integrity of each person. Each of us is unique, having our own personality, each with creative potential, and each with aspects which are potentially, or actually in some cases, disintegrative. In recognising our oneness with creation, we should also recognise our oneness with the rest of humanity and be prepared to work with them while they work with us to release the creativity within each of us.

E. Spirituality

I have never found a satisfactory definition of spirituality. The best one to date was given in a group of ministers in Britain all beginning a D.Min programme, all from different traditions. We were looking for an appropriate way to be in a group together “spiritually”. The director suggested we look at spirituality as “that which we need to keep going” and begin from there. That immediately freed us all, from the Scottish Episcopal priest in the Anglo-Catholic tradition to the West Indian Pentecostal pastor, to me a radical out of the liberal Protestant tradition. We did not have to conform to anyone else’s preconceived idea, and we were able to respect and participate each others spiritual traditions more freely. A similar definition has “the way a person understands their own ethically and religiously committed existence, and the way they act and react to this understanding.”

In the context from which I have been working I see there is a need to recognise that our portrayals of God represent choices we have made. We have to learn to take responsibility for our God, by learning to recognise and acknowledge that my identity and that of my God are not separate but are intimately related.

Spirituality becomes for me a discipline where by contemplation, reflection, action and prayer we work to integrate our images of God with our lifestyles. At one level this must always be the task of an individual, but at another level it has to happen in the faith community as well. This is not so that the community can control the person’s spirituality, but so the experience can be built on and integrated into the community’s life and worship. As we are, so too the community is an ongoing process of creation and recreation, but with a much richer and older heritage of faith experiences than anyone of us can embody. That opens up our private spiritual experience and expression to a living resource which connects us one to another.

F. Task of the Minister, Theologian or Pastoral Helper.

From the above, it is clear that I envisage a different set of tasks for the ministry. We are no longer the repositories of doctrine and ritual, nor are we the sole providers of comfort and succour. We do have tasks in those areas but their nature has changed.

The prime task is that of interpreter and poet. Even in times of grief and distress, people want more from us than a mere holding of hands. Death, loss, humiliation all threaten a person's self image and the image of the world and the way God is in their world. It is part of our common humanity to offer comfort, but it is our work to help them, if they want it, to begin the process of finding meaning in what has happened to them, and to recreate their new reality that they have to now live in. Part of that task is to be able to interpret their present situation and no doubt many of us do that anyway. The new task that this perspective offers is that of being "poet". That does not mean constructing poetry, rather it means making new images, creating new metaphors, and helping construct those "final vocabularies" that people live by. Those images need to be congruent with the world that people experience in their day to day living.

The secondary tasks are those revolving around worship, counselling, and community building. Recognising that one constructs reality through words, the tasks for worship and community building take on a different focus. There has always been a recognition that a match between a "conservative" parish and "liberal" minister, for example, is difficult to bring about. One reason for it is that they are operating on totally different understandings of reality, some of which are overt, but many more unspoken. So the worship of a community reflects their realities. There is always scope to expand that, but very little to totally alter a community's self perception. Thus a minister and congregation need to work together to find those expressions which allow the integrity of each person to be acknowledged and celebrated. With community building, the modelling of groups within the fellowship must also resonate with the purposes of the whole, and the minister must be able to facilitate those processes. Similarly in the area of counselling and support. The methods that are used must not negate the reality that is lived and proclaimed. In this way the ministers can offer coherent assistance with real integrity.

X. Concluding Thoughts.

In my reading I came across a story which encapsulates some of the ideas I have been working with. Ilya Prigogine found this Talmudic tale and used it to conclude his book on thermodynamics and nature called *Order out of Chaos*.

“Twenty six attempts preceded the present genesis, all of which were destined to fail.

The world of man has arisen out of the chaotic heart of the preceding debris;

he too is exposed to the risk of failure, and the return to nothing.

‘Let’s hope it works!’ exclaimed God as he created the World, and the hope, which has accompanied all the subsequent history and mankind, has emphasized right from the outset that this history is branded with the mark of radical uncertainty.”

It is this idea of radical uncertainty at the heart of the nature of things that has fed my search. My experience of the world is that nothing is fixed, nothing is certain. In my earlier years I tried adapting other people’s descriptions of reality but was always frustrated by the result, yet it seemed that that was the nature of the task that believing and being Christian required. The first conscious break from that sort of tradition came during study at Sheffield with John Vincent. His methodology provided a set of hoops to jump through, but in the process we had to come to our own theological consciousness, a consciousness that can say “I am the best person to do theology for me!” Since that time I have not worried about the search for orthodoxy in my thought, but rather have been concerned to express my faith in language that matches my experience of Life, God, the Universe and Everything Else (with apologies to Douglas Adams).

Two theologians that have influenced my thinking over this period have been Jurgen Moltmann and more latterly, Don Cupitt. Their insights have helped me develop my thought more consistently, though their books on my shelves show many traces of dialogue and argument with them.

There are a lot of loose threads left in that bundle titled ‘Implications’. I was aware as I began to explore each of those themes that I had left some out, and also that I wanted to expand some of them to book size then and there. That has not happened and it may leave a feeling of incompleteness. That is deliberate. If you follow my arguments about reality construction, the task will never be complete, I am making it up as I go along (in more ways than one). There is also the task of post-modern explorations of doctrine which could have taken me off in a different direction again.

Radical uncertainty in this time and age seems to be the condition of the world. Change is everywhere around us. My explorations into the world of science shows that with the present models change and uncertainty are built into the nature of reality. Our theologies from the past have been built up around notions of changelessness and certainty. How do we make the transition? Or are we constrained as Christians to stick to the old eternal Verities and not to reinterpret our faith in the light of where we are now.

J.B. Philipps wrote a book entitled *Your God is Too Small*. While he may not agree with what I am advocating here the implications for me are clear. A changeless God in a constantly changing Universe produces different answers to the search for meaning than the old model of a changeless God in a fixed, constant Universe did, or a God of change in a changing Universe might do. The language by which we choose to live our lives and to construct our realities is very important. I recently read something on the history of the Shakers. They chose to stay fixed in their doctrines and have all but died out. The challenge to the Church is to see whether it is possible to provide a coherent final vocabulary that will encourage people to live life to the full, being open to all, being able to celebrate in community and to continue the gospel story in words that are meaningful. There is a search for meaning going on around us, I’m going to join in!

XI. Bibliography

My reading has taken me into a wide range of areas so I will try to gather the books into areas of thought. Also, I have not attempted to cite authors throughout the text, even where I have borrowed direct quotes. I have however, acknowledged below those books which I have drawn from.

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