

Adult Faith in the 21st Century: Session One

“When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I gave up childish ways.” (1 Cor.13:11)

Two Models:

a) In the pre-evolutionary model, truth is invested in wise individuals, representing a parental, hierarchical system. What you learn as a child, You hold on to for the rest of your life. Truth comes from top down, seeking domination and control. In this model, truth is often static, unchanging, and monolithic.

b) In the evolutionary model, truth itself evolves as relational adults seek out the truth through a range discerning groups. Consensual process is considered to be a surer way to deeper truth.

Faith in Life Stages

Implications: - Growth in faith over entire life-span, most of which relates to ADULTS.
- Faith is not static, but becomes so when growth & development are neglected.
- Faith and the need for wise elders.

Stage 8: *Universalising faith: (ages 70+)* Two tendencies have been noted: a) Fearful at the imminent prospect of “meeting God” choosing the safe, conventional approach to faith. b) Altruistic, love-embracing sense of life; deep sense of gratitude whatever the circumstances. More widespread than we think, rarely recognised and one of the most serious areas of pastoral and developmental neglect.

Challenges for Adult Faith Today

1. Awareness of what is actually transpiring
2. Our world of mass information: questioning and questing
3. New wine – and old wineskins
4. Networking (small groups) – where genuine dialogue happens
5. Transformation from the ground up
6. Clericalism in irreversible decline
7. A Church for the Future – ecclesial community

Church for the World

“There is no infallible program for marching into the future. We will find our creative pathways by opening our minds, deepening our imaginations, and embracing evolution’s trial-and-error process.” (Brain Swimme, *The Story of the Noosphere*, 2024, 11)

ADULT DISCERNMENT

1. “It is my judgement that Church interpretation has tended to trim and domesticate the text, not only to accommodate regnant modes of knowledge, but also to enhance regnant modes of power. For many of us in the academy and in the church, it is now clear that we are in a quite new interpretative situation that constitutes something of an emergency, for which interpreters of faith in the West have not been well prepared. . . . We are in a new interpretive situation that requires and permits the interpreters to work at a different task.” (Walter Brueggemann).

2. “When you are confronted by evidence that the faith in which you were brought up no longer provides an adequate explanation for the nature, meaning and purpose of your life, you have three choices. You can refuse to accept the evidence and continue as before. You can abandon the faith you grew up with because it has proved to be inadequate. Or, third, you can accept the new knowledge and use it to develop a more mature understanding of what lies at the core of your beliefs.

The first response is intellectually dishonest. The second is intellectual laziness. The third is a stance of critical acceptance, leading to a reinterpretation of core concepts. . . . It requires courage and a plethora of other virtues that have been gathering dust in your spirit. Every advance in understanding invites us into a deeper faith.” (John Feehan).

3. “But the Church, with it’s excessive penchant for dogmatic certitude, and the academy, with it’s fascination with objective rationality, characteristically stop short of the evidence of communal obedience.” (W. Brueggemann, *The Book that Breathes New Life*, p.9)

4. *Outgrowing the monopoly of Logos Christology*

LOGOS Christology: Jesus is the one true Son of the Divine Father, Creator of the world “ex nihilo,” sent to rule over the earth as Messiah. Everything is governed from “on high”.

SPIRIT Christology: Jesus is anointed by the Spirit, who also energizes everything in creation, “ex profundis,” fostering the relational matrix in which all life flourishes

5. “Thus, Christianity’s manner of making contact with the most basic physical, biological processes, is through an inclusive radical interpretation of its doctrine of the Incarnation, not now merely in one human being, Jesus of Nazareth, but in the world as God’s body. . . . God is always incarnate, always bound to the world as its lover, as close to it, as we are to our own bodies, and concerned before all else to see that the body, God’s world, flourishes.” (Sallie McFague, 2013, 173)

“The Mission of faith is no longer to convert. It is to transform the world so that every life will have a better chance to live fully, and thus to commune with the source of life.” (John Shelby Spong).

Session Three: Belonging to an Adult Faith Community

IMAGINE A NEW EMPOWERMENT

*Imagine a Kingdom with no king at all, Empowering companions in charge.
Imagine the seed, the smallest by far, Producing a tree's entourage.
Imagine a farmer his wealth to forego To purchase a treasure so rare.
A new dispensation explodes in our midst: Imagine . . . Imagine . . . Imagine!*

*Imagine a vineyard with wine flowing profuse, The joy of a new celebration.
Imagine a banquet with no one left out, Disrupting the known segregation.
Imagine the sower with seedlings aglow, A harvest to relish the nations.
No more malnutrition to torture the soul; Imagine . . . Imagine . . . Imagine!*

*Imagine a woman with leaven and dough The hands that make bread to sustain us.
Imagine a table that's open to all, Where purity laws won't estrange us.
Imagine the workers for too long subdued, The struggle for justice is reaping.
From the least to the greatest let everyone sing: Imagine . . . Imagine . . . Imagine!*

*Imagine an end to the patriarch's reign, Collapsing the power from on high.
Imagine a circle empowering within, A freedom so new to employ.
Imagine the demons, controlling through fear, No longer command the high ground.
A new world order can break through at last; Imagine . . . Imagine . . . Imagine!*

*Imagine the challenge disciples embrace To model the new dispensation.
The old bureaucratic with power at its core Lies dead in the temple's ruination.
Imagine the courage and vision we need When the tomb of our hopes has been shattered.
And the new voice arising has another refrain: Imagine . . . Imagine . . . Imagine!*

1. "Groups gathered regularly for communal meals. These first two hundred years after Jesus are unintelligible without these vigorous and intense gatherings at meals. Such meals both held many differences together and also encouraged a great variety of ideas and expressions. These different meals created an extraordinarily creative set of cultures in the first two centuries – ones that were resistant, lively, and innovative." (*After Jesus Before Christianity*, 188).

2. *The Sacraments Belong to the People: Ritual-Making - Rites of Passage - Sacraments*

BAPTISM: A Sacrament celebrating birth / new life and welcoming the person into the family of the Church

EUCCHARIST: Celebrating God's universal gift of food; solemnizing what share at our daily tables

PENANCE: Celebrating Healing and Reconciliation – a communal celebration, whenever possible.

CONFIRMATION: A rite of passage, celebrating an adult appropriation of faith and a readiness to engage more deeply.

MARRIAGE (Ordination): Celebrating a serious life commitment, marking a substantial contribution to society's well-being.

LAST ANOINTING: Marking death and departure as another stage on a journey of expanding faith.

