

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Paper 1: Vampires in Eden? Towards a 21st century reading of Genesis 1 – 11, 'The Primeval History'

'Anthropology and psychology have thrown doubt on revelation and religious experience. Philosophy has mounted some considerable challenges against the meaningfulness of religious language in general and the concept of God in particular. The notion that basic reality is material and that all mental and spiritual facts are parasitic on this, has become the unexamined assumption underlying the world-view of most educated Western people, and has been through them diffused into popular culture.' (J Baker, 'Carried about by every wind?', 278.)

1. Following the statement above, how credible is it to maintain an idea of scripture and particularly the opening chapters of Genesis as the revealed word of God in the 21st century?
2. How might we do this if we are also meeting our obligation to intellectual integrity in the light of developments in the fields of science and technology?
3. 'Religious language, by definition, attempts to express something which defies expression and to evoke a perception of something which lies beyond the realm of human comprehension.' (M Ruthven, 'Islam', 91) What might this suggestion offer to our understanding of scripture?

Paper 2: Married with Children: dysfunctional families in Genesis

- 1 What is the difference between a wife and a concubine? Does it matter for the children? Does it matter for the woman?
- 2 When do we need to prove who we are? And how do we do it?
- 3 What do you think of a person who appears to prosper through cheating? What do you think of Rebekah or of Jacob?
- 4 What would you say to someone who wants to 'get back to a biblical view of the family'?
- 5 (to think about later) What are some of the patterns of behaving that have been passed down in your family?

Paper 3: Ties that Bind or Blind? The binding of Isaac in Jewish and Christian thought.

1. Discuss the feelings the women, Hagar and Sarah might have in the various situations that are described in this paper.
2. What might Sarah's response to Abraham be when he returns and tells her the tale of the Akedah.
3. Is there ever a circumstance in our lives, when faith alone might be sufficient, or, when the ethics that govern our daily responses might not be referred to?

Paper 4: A formless void? Genesis and antitheism

- 1 The story of Noah's Ark is one of the best-known of all children's stories in our society. How do you think Christians should present this story?
- 2 The book of Genesis is only one of the books in the Bible, yet it seems to be the most discussed and debated of all the books in the Old Testament. Do you agree with this analysis, and if so, why do you think this is the case?
- 3 Where do you stand on the idea that God has used the mechanism of evolution to create life on earth?