

FAITH IN THE FUTURE

I guess you're not looking for a quiet life. Not yet anyway. Life has too many opportunities.

If you're young in the West you have a bewildering range of choices – all the way from a life of dissolute hedonism at one end, to a life of selfless idealism at the other (with my one-time goal of being a wealthy lawyer somewhere in between - whatever happened to that?) So how do we decide on these basic life-choices?

It depends, doesn't it, on what we want to live by, on what we adopt as our foundational world-view.

A man went into the doctor's surgery with a penguin on his head. 'What can I do for you?' asked the doctor. 'Well,' said the penguin, 'I seem to have a growth on my foot.'

We look at life from different standpoints. We have different world views, and they colour everything we do. So choosing our world view, whether we do it deliberately or allow it to take shape, is one of the most important decisions we ever take. If we don't choose it, it will choose us. So let's take it seriously.

Of course world-views can be liberating or demonic. There are plenty of examples of the latter – the world-view of the Nazis, of white supremacists, of Stalin or Mao or Pol Pot or religious extremists. And there are plenty of non-religious world-views that are liberating – those that see politics as a way of shaping a just and peaceful society, or the humanist world-view that sees hope for the future in human potential and the common good. Christians would have lots in common with such approaches, but would want to root and ground them in the Source of all goodness and love.

So being confirmed is, among other things, *choosing a Christian world view*. It's taking up a position alongside Jesus Christ and saying, 'What does life look like from here?' One of our problems is that we're so used to standing on our heads that when God shows up we think he's the one who's upside down. But confirmation is saying to Jesus Christ, 'From now on, I'm with you.'

And this is what one old foot-soldier has found from taking up that position.

1. God is not somewhere else. God can only be present to us at this moment, at this time, in this place. God is always present if we are – the problem being that so often we're the one who's not at home.
2. God is inexhaustible. As someone said, 'The truth about God is not so much that he is omnipotent as that he is inexhaustible, and for that reason he will always succeed.' God never gives up.
3. God is always more. God is no small-town deity struggling to keep a foothold in society or get a mention in the weekly newspaper. God is always more – more in

scale, more in generosity, more in grace, more in forgiveness, more in ambition for humanity, more in uncalculating love. Just 'more'. Don't box him in.

4. God loves life more than religion. Jesus didn't say 'I have come that they may be more religious' or 'I have come that they may be more moral,' but 'I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly.' Amen to that!
5. God is grace-full. That's the melody line of the New Testament, what we see in Jesus. God's graceful touch in our lives is like the first touch of a skilled footballer, who brings a ball down, controls it and distributes it, all in one elegant, flowing movement. That's what he does with whatever we give him.
6. God is Christlike. You can look at the life and character of Jesus and say, 'That's God for you. Like Father, like Son.' 'God is Christlike, and in him is no unChristlikeness at all.'
7. God is obsessed with justice. To read the press or to listen to internal church debates you'd think God must be obsessed with sex (as if society isn't!), but the reality is that God is obsessed with justice. That's the bell note that sounds constantly through the Bible. The cry is always, 'Let my people go.'
8. God is always on our side. Nothing will shake him off. He is for you – without hesitation or deviation, but with endless repetition. That's the message of the cross.
9. God suffers with us. That's another message of the cross. The fourteenth century mystic Julian of Norwich said, 'God did not say you will not be troubled, you will not be belaboured, you will not be disquieted. But he did say you will not be overcome.' God does all that love can do – he stays with us, to heal or to hold.
10. God is always rising again. That's the amazing bit. You can't keep a good God down and the aftershocks of the resurrection keep happening in millions of lives as God redeems apparently hopeless situations. God is always on the job – characteristically raising the dead.

Those are some of the things I've discovered by taking a Christian world-view and trying, however inadequately, to stand alongside Jesus Christ.

In the reading from Colossians Paul too gives us a glimpse of what a Christian world-view is like. He says, 'Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.' That's been a key verse for me, something I often say at the start of the day. Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. Like when you fall in love with someone and you want to 'do everything' for the sake of the one you love.

As I said, I guess you're not looking for a quiet life. Being a Christian isn't. I sometimes liken it to extreme sport. Following Christ isn't for the faint-hearted. When I was here as an undergraduate I was trying to find a sufficiently energising world-view for an exhilarating and rewarding future. And I found it in a Christian world-view, which opened up a world of discovery and challenge, and lots of enjoyment.

But it's a choice. In Yann Martel's book *Life of Pi* the ship in which young Pi and his family are sailing sinks in a storm and the young hero has an incredible voyage in the company of a Bengal tiger called Richard Parker. He barely survives, but in his hospital bed he has to give an account of what has happened to two insurance agents. He tells the story of his remarkable voyage and his relationship with the tiger but finds his listeners totally disbelieving. So he tells them an alternative, much more conventional story about what happened. At the end of the two accounts young Pi poses the vital question to his listeners: 'So which story do you prefer?'

And that's the question for everyone is a sense. Which story do we prefer? Is it God or no-God? Which story makes most sense? Today you who are being confirmed are saying you prefer the Christian story, the Christian world-view. It makes more sense of more things more of the time than the alternative. So you're going to try and live by that story, that world-view.

Great! You're joining 2 billion others who feel the same. Enjoy!