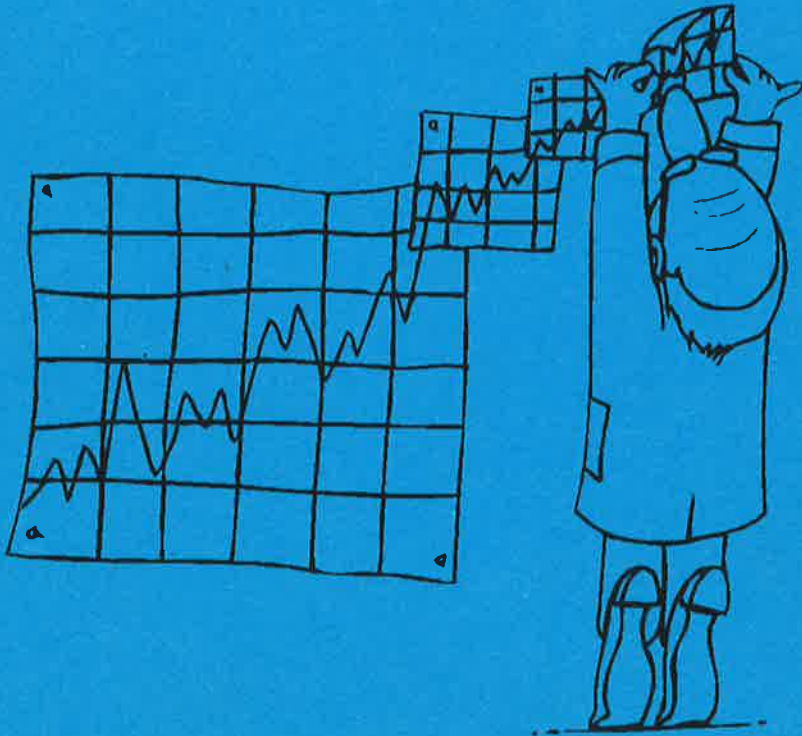


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CHRISTIAN THINKING ABOUT RESEARCH

Based on Bible Studies and a Paper
given at the
Second International Lausanne Researcher's Conference
High Leigh, Hoddesdon, UK
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CHRISTIAN THINKING ABOUT RESEARCH

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Christian Research aims to provide Christian leaders with factual information, surveys and other resource material to help them in the long-term in their planning for strategic evangelism and growth, and in the short-term with leadership training for greater efficiency, effectiveness, and cost-effectiveness. Christian Research also publishes and distributes related books and paper. The Christian Research Association is a registered charity, No 1017701 and a company limited by guarantee registered in England No 2792246. It is also a membership organisation.

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CONTENTS

Introduction	
About the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and the International Researcher's Conference	5
Spirituality for Researchers - seeing and hearing	6
Dr Bryant Myers, USA Executive Director, MARC	
Integrity for Researchers - eyes and sight	14
Rev Tom Houston, UK Minister at Large, Lausanne	
Wisdom for Researchers - seeing and discovering	24
Dr Peter Kaldor, Australia Director, National Church Life Survey	
Towards a Theology of Research	33
Dr Arnold van Heusden, The Netherlands Executive Secretary, Evangelische Alliantie	

STUDY 4

TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF RESEARCH **- summarised extracts¹** **from a paper by Dr Arnold van Heusden**

Art, music, literature and research all invite you to pay attention: pay attention to what is in this frame. Stop, look and listen to the particularities of this moment, of this person, of this incident, of this anecdote. It is what Jesus invites us to do - to see the life behind the eyes of the neighbour, to see the situation. "Consider the lilies"

Theology can be thought of in two ways: as a complete system - systematic theology, or with a modular approach - building blocks constructing a generative theology.

Systematic Theology

Systematic theology is the complete catalogue of, say, Aquinas, Calvin, Barth and so on. The period of the Enlightenment said the theology is all there but recognised the validity of reason and of rational thinking and said:

are we looking at it the right way?
are we seeing what is really there?
are we seeing it because it was really like that?

As a result, lower and higher criticism of biblical material developed.

Modular Theology

This is the theology of:

women
blacks
poor
research

Post modernity has a distrust of meta-narratives, of total systems and ideologies. Similarly, post modernity distrusts comprehensive stories with no moment of surprise, stories

which are repeated because they are holy scripture but when no intuition is applied, and there is no fresh insight. Post moderns have a love of the life story and the anecdote where meaning is shared between story-teller and listener.

Which Approach?

Which is appropriate for research - systematic or modular theology? Let us look at some of the dominant images and metaphors of various books of the Old Testament.

Genesis

Genesis is about nomads and wanderers. Abraham gains new information by going into new situations, by exploring the unknown in response to the call of God. What emerges is the view of the outsider, not the owner. The look from outside into inside is very different from the perception inside.

Exodus

Exodus is about slaves and warriors. It is about the underdog. The camera's view from a dog's level is very different from the human adult, similarly the view from a child's level. Even as liberated slaves and as nascent warriors the view is from a lowly position. It is a threatening position from which to base one's perceptions.

Joshua, Judges & Samuel

These books are about soldiers and settlers, an ownership approach with a new pride and identity. They describe the struggle between isolationists and integrationists. In holistic societies the gods are an integral part of life, so the question is what about the gods that go with the new technology and learning and sophistication of the surrounding peoples and the God of the Israelites?

Understanding the Images

The images are not in themselves authoritative but they give hints of the different perspectives possible: the way I look at things is not necessarily the only way possible.

From the situation people are in they may view things very differently. So what is the position or the angle we want to research from?

The Meaning for Researchers

The subject matter for research for Christians needs to include many aspects of the world and of culture as well as church and mission. Both the church and the world need to be included, not the one over the other and not the one to the exclusion of the other.

It is obvious not everything can be researched. If you want a real interface between people as they are in church and as they are in the rest of life, it is not enough to have internal church statistics. Similarly if you want a holistic approach to the problems most people are facing, it is not enough to look at Census statistics.

Do we want quantity or quality or both? If you have quantity alone you can get mass without meaning. Extrapolating meaning from the size of the mass is very hard to do. If you have quality alone you may have meaning but no perspective. The results are anecdotal. Quantity followed by a quality survey gives an in-depth view and also a broad data base.

Is the technique to be open or closed? It is important to avoid manipulation of those being researched and obscurantism on the part of those doing the research. There is a danger of becoming so specialised the findings are not understood and not seen to be relevant.

If research is on the interface between church and world, the researcher needs to have real contacts in the world that have nothing to do with the church agenda of mission and evangelism.

There is beauty and culture and relationships that do not point directly to accepting or rejecting Jesus. Music, art, reading, creative writing, spending time with family and friends, having

fun are all a great help in relaxing and providing an important counter to high tension as well as giving different perspectives on research.

I plead with you to be as open and transparent as possible and so to help people work with you wholeheartedly within an open system.

¹Abridged from an article by Rev Lorraine Francis, Christian Research Association, New Zealand.

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