

dare to engage

address by Bob Mayo || dare to engage symposium || march 2004

spirituality in youth culture

[Bob Mayo - Introduction]

We've been looking at how spirituality is expressed in popular art and culture. For two years we looked at 'Image and Advertising', 'Soap Operas and Films' and 'Music and Clubbing' – it was tough but somebody's got to do it! We're just at the start of another project.

We're going to be saying two things. For people like us, the joy of coming to talk here is that we can find out whether or not our thinking is correct. You're the people on the ground; it's like a conversation. We're not coming to you as the big 'I Am' or 'this is the way it is'; we're saying 'this is what we've found out'. We're sitting down, having dinner, it's a conversation, it's half past eight.

The first thing we're going to suggest is that a decline in religion has not been countered by a corresponding rise in spirituality. To say that people are interested in spirituality because they're less interested in religion, we're going to suggest isn't correct. There are people who've got disillusioned with religion – there are people who've gone into the church and gone out of the church again and have explored different spiritualities, but young people are not walking around with a God-shaped hole, looking for it to be filled. And in the absence of it being filled by the church, looking for it to be filled by spiritualities. That is the first thing that we're going to say – just hold that in your mind.

And the second thing we're going to say is that the knowledge base of Christianity is so low, ie people know so little about it, that they're often quite happy to talk about it. And within the Christian constituency there's sometimes an assumption that we've got to earn the right to talk about Christ, and we've got to somehow create these good, meaningful, valid, wholesome relationships when then they'll be able to reinterpret the Christian faith because they think differently from us. But in fact they know so little about it, they're often quite pleased and quite happy to talk about it. There's an assumed hostility that in the course of our research we haven't always found. And I look forward to chatting and seeing whether you agree or not.

(To Sylvia) So you're going to give an overview and summary position...

[Sylvia – Definitions of spirituality]

I've got copies of the slides if anyone's interested. I work as a sociologist: so my job is to collect data and make sense of it. So I'm going to spend 10 minutes on reviewing some of the sociological research that's been done on young people's spirituality.

One of the big problems that we have in measuring spirituality is actually defining it in the first place. Because it's a nebulous term that people use and assume everybody knows what it is, but there's not necessarily a tie-up. What we've got here and what the literature shows is that those working in the field of social sciences tend to use the word 'spirituality' as an existential term primarily associated with:

- Raised awareness of relationality, whether that be an individual's relationship to God, to 'other', to universe, even to the self; a kind of relationality that goes on.
- And then coupled with that a degree of mystery – sensing the ability to appreciate what's going on around them, maybe to trigger awe, wonder, even dread sometimes with some spiritual experiences.
- And then 'value sensing' – what do people delight and despair in? Where are their values placed? What is right and wrong? And so on.

So that's a very general term and applied in the social sciences.

Now as Christian educators I guess we want to move beyond that; I assume you would agree that everybody would have an inherent capacity for that kind of spirituality. What we're interested in is how that translates, maybe in relation to Christianity, or other world faiths, or some of the New Age types of spirituality, and in that I include things like Wicker, Paganism and so on. And that's what we're calling 'theological' spirituality, for want of a better word.

So we've got a sociological understanding and a theological one.

[Sylvia - Review of our recent research on young people's spirituality]

So I'll review very quickly some of the research findings. I'm sure some of you will have heard of the psychologist Leslie Francis and his colleague William Kay. They've done a lot of research in survey work looking at how young people relate in this case to traditional Christian beliefs.

There are two things to draw your attention to :

1) The selectivity that is sometimes used by young people. They still recognise these concepts and ideas but have a very selective use in relation to Christianity. And what we find with young people, and with adults too, is that they'll select out the nice bits: it's nice to believe in God but not in the devil; nice to believe in heaven but I don't want to believe in hell. So you get a big discrepancy in the numbers of people who would take those on board.

2) The high level of uncertainty among young people. They really don't know, or can't articulate, what it is they believe. From various interviews we get a sense that this uncertainty is not from exploring lots and lots of different avenues, it's because they haven't thought it through completely, not sure, or not particularly interested in some cases. A couple: Day & May, whom you may have heard of, refer to this kind of belief as a nod in the direction of orthodoxy rather than heartfelt conviction.

And these research findings were picked up by us in different ways. As Bob said, we did a lot of work on how things come through in popular culture. The images we used tended to provoke quite flat responses. We had various ones, eg Ali G on the cross. This Benetton one: the interviewer said, 'they've put the face of Jesus on a man dying of AIDS'. The young person's response was still 'I don't care about that'. Very flat, no real engagement. Interestingly, the only type of response we did get was young people saying 'actually that might be offensive to somebody else'. There was awareness of other people's spirituality but they weren't particularly concerned about being offended themselves.

The same thing if we look at belief and then look at spirituality expressed through religious practice, right from rituals. I'm sure you're familiar with the decline in church numbers over the years, and that's shown on this chart, particularly over the last 20 years in the age group 16-19 years it has gone down quite substantially.

So those types of spirituality don't really come through as being significant to the young people that we've looked at.

What is interesting however, and I've been doing some interviews with young people even last week, is the number who will pray as a type of spiritual practice. Obviously, committed Christians, the minority that there are, pray as way of relating to God, but what I call 'nominal Christians' find it's a very comforting to do, something they'll do in their bedrooms on their own, and maybe not tell anybody. But it does come through as something young people do, albeit in a very instrumental way. Quoting from one young person: 'I might pray if I was in car crash, or if I was ill, or if one of my family was in a car crash, or something, only if it was a major one but not if it was a minor incident'. So this young person would pray when the circumstances would demand it. Prayer does come through as an opportunity in terms of spirituality.

And then there's been a lot of press in the last few years about 'alternative spirituality'. To what extent are young people getting caught up with the occult? There was a moral panic going along with some of the more conservative evangelical churches about Harry Potter – that this was going to lead young people into some sort of occult practice. What we find is there's a kind of folk wisdom about these things, and again uncertainty. But when I and others talk to young people, we find that they use these things as entertainment rather than spiritual searching – it's just fun.

And we found that again with our study on popular culture – we showed young people images of things like 'Buffy the Vampire

Slayer', to see what response that elicited. It was very mundane – 'she's very pretty', 'my boyfriend fancied her'; that kind of thing.

So what we get a picture of is, yes, an awareness of spirituality – in some ways it's quite hard to miss because spirituality's very much in the marketplace, it's commodified. You go into Tesco's, you buy your own therapy etc. But from the research findings, it's not really young people who are engaging with that, it tends to be middle-aged women!

I've called this 'the spirituality of intimacy', which might not be the best term. From our research, we find that where young people are putting their spirituality – their raised awareness of relationality – is very much in family, in close friends and in the reflexive self: thinking about yourself making decisions. So quoting one young person: 'I love me and my family and my friends, no other Gods; I believe in myself'. Or, 'I believe in myself and my family, I am my God'. So spirituality has very much a concrete incarnation, grounded in their everyday lives. So the purpose of life then is personal happiness – they see that as what they want to achieve – happiness both for themselves and for those close to them. It's interesting, it's very much about the immediate family rather than anything else. And they're a very optimistic generation we find. Just to preface that – the research tends to be engaging with white young people and with very 'included' young people, as opposed to excluded young people – that's quite an important point.

Those who are 'included' – the bulk of young people – are optimistic that they can achieve this personal happiness in their everyday lives. They feel they don't need to look beyond now, the present, material wealth, happy experiences, popular culture or whatever it might be – happiness can be secured here, and therefore why look for anything else.

[Bob Mayo – definitions of spirituality – sociological versus theological]

I'm going to take that thinking now and try to nail it to a mast. I'm going to suggest to you first of all that with the collapse of a shared Christian narrative, the word spirituality can be taken to mean almost whatever people want it to mean. Let's have a think about what spirituality actually means.

- The Ministry of Sound brought out a double CD entitled 'The Karma Collection – a limited edition of spiritual chill-out vibes: Panjabi MC, Jakatta, Letfield, Moby, Koop, Oakenfield, Bent'. What's that all about?
- The woman's magazine Cosmopolitan has appointed a Spirituality Editor with a brief to respond to enquiries from readers keen to find out more about the range of spiritual choices on offer.

The word can still be said with a multiplicity of meanings. Because I'm a straightforward guy, I'd like to put them into two blocks, to pick up on what Sylvia was saying, because that sorts it out in my mind. I find these two different uses of the word so different in meaning, I like to call one 'nuts' and one 'bananas'. This makes the point that although we're using the word spirituality, we've got a different sense. One type of spirituality is what Sylvia called a sociological spirituality, and one type is a theological spirituality.

The sociological spirituality is a sort of meaning-making, value-forming, working out if something's significant or important, where does it fit into my life, does it add value to anything else?... But essentially an existential term.

The theological understanding of spirituality is some form of connection with the transcendent, that is maybe then expressed through some form of institution. I heard one great definition, that it was: 'an appropriate and intentional participation in the redemptive activity of Christ'. I don't want to go that far but you get the two sorts I mean – sociological spirituality: nuts, theological spirituality: bananas.

On the question of whether there is a spirituality of clubbing, of course there's a sociological-spirituality of clubbing – it's making your whole week come together, it's great fun, you're with lots of people, you're having a complete, utter buzz on the thing. However there is not a theological-spirituality of clubbing. To put it crudely, if someone is 'getting off their head' in a club then they are simply 'getting off their head'. Some people with a Christian understanding and framework will go into a club and they'll get a theological spirituality by going into the club, but that's because of what they take into the experience, not because of what they take out of it.

U2 singing, 'I Still Haven't Found What I am Looking For,' is spirituality in the basic sense that it is searching for meaning. But

there's not a spirituality of clubbing in the sense that people are participating in an activity which is giving them an understanding and experience of God.

What do you think when 'Pink' sing: 'God is a DJ, life is a dance floor, love is the rhythm, you are the music' (so I'm told)? That is not, I would argue, an expression of connection with the transcendent, even when the word 'God' is used. It's the clubbing constituency claiming that experience, it's enhancing their experience.

So that's how I frame the debate: a sociological spirituality and a theological spirituality.

There's a lot of wish-fulfillment going on in the Christian constituency, wishing with all our heart – and I wish it too – that the sociological spirituality was in fact theological spirituality. There's a lot of wishing when we hear the word spirituality, we read 'theological spirituality' into it and we think, 'Oh that's great, that's great, they're talking about God!' But they're not necessarily. Sociological spirituality can touch theological spirituality – one can lead to the other, they can overlap – but equally sociological spirituality can be a self-contained experience. One of my students at the moment is doing his dissertation on the spirituality of snowboarding. And snowboarding is clearly a very spiritual experience but it's self-contained; it's not going to lead on to anything else.

[Young people's attitudes to Christianity –hostility or indifference?]

And as I was saying there is a second point: the knowledge base is so low that we cannot assume judgement when people don't follow through an interest in Christianity. If they don't know about it, we can't assume they're judging it and deciding not to follow through with it, because they don't know about it! We can't assume hostility.

- I heard it in a sermon the other day – I had to check that I'd heard it correctly – he said 'people are turning away from Christ' - pause, dramatic silence – 'we have a responsibility in that' – pause, further dramatic silence – 'Jesus, after all, was rejected, so it's no more than what we can expect'. How much negativity is that putting onto our psyches as Christians? 'Oh my goodness me, I'm part of the process, 2000 years later, that resulted in Christ being rejected; I'm still doing it!' You can't assume rejection if people don't know about it.
- There's this quote from Fernando: 'the whole world is growing in its hostility to the doctrine of the uniqueness of Christ'. Great sentence. I can feel myself puffing up with a bit of pride, saying, 'Yeah, I'm there in the battle, I'm taking it on'. But if people don't know the doctrine of the uniqueness of Christ, they're not growing in hostility to it.
- The same thing was going on at Christmas by our good Archbishop. He referred to the fear of Christianity found in secular society. He said, 'it isn't all that surprising if a secular society looks on religion not only with suspicion and incomprehension but with fear'. The assumption behind his statement is that people view Christianity with hostility because they've got a past to live down. He referred to the fact that religion had too often become the language of the powerful and used for oppression.

The reality, we're suggesting, and this is open for dialogue, is that while some people will react with hostility to the Christian message, some will react just with indifference. They're open to talking about it; there's not this inbuilt opposition because they're not aware of it in the first place. People cannot be said to be reacting with hostility to something they're not aware of. It's a mistake for the Christian constituency to always assume that one comment is contingent on another.

- I had a conversation with a friend, who is the mother of a nine year-old. She was explaining that the marriage went through a period of unhappiness and then once they were back on an even keel she had to reassure her son that if Mummy and Daddy were arguing, it wasn't about him – it wasn't his fault. And in a way that's how we interpret events; we think it's always going to be about us.
- I went to a poetry group for about six weeks and I missed two weeks in succession. When I came back, someone thought they'd offended me, another thought they'd said something, but in fact I'd just been busy.

[Comment from female audience member: spiritual warfare]

You say that if someone hasn't heard the gospel then they can't be hostile to it. The other side of the argument is that there is spiritual warfare going on, and although they haven't heard it, they're in the dominion of the Evil One and he is very offended and hostile to the Gospel. And so if we are born in sin and saved through grace then people are hostile to the gospel whether they understand it or not.

[Bob Mayo]

I'm very happy to accept that correction and I completely agree with you: it is spiritual warfare. What I'm saying is that those of us in the Christian constituency sometimes put ourselves in a safe space by putting ourselves into an assumed hostility. There is hostility, there is spiritual warfare, but sometimes we make it safe for ourselves by assuming the whole world is against us. Thank you for that clarification. Any other clarifications?

[Another female audience member]

...So there is a difference between conscious hostility, eg issues with church authority, and hostility due to spiritual warfare.

[Bob Mayo]

I couldn't have put it better myself, perfect.

[Male audience member]

Is there a difference between young people who don't know about Christianity and therefore can't object, and young people who have a perception of church which they reject? Is there a link between the two?

[Bob Mayo]

What do you think?

[Female audience member]

Young people's view on church is not very surprising – they find it hypocritical and boring. I don't think the two equate. There's a strong belief that you don't have to go to church to be a Christian, and so there's a holding on to things... they don't necessarily equate: 'church is boring therefore Christianity is boring'.

[Bob Mayo- people are more receptive to Christianity than we think]

I think we're saying you don't necessarily have to equate the two. I'm wanting to talk about a situation where as a group, as a workforce, our morale is slightly low. We assume there are things we're not doing well. I'm saying A) maybe there's more opportunity than we realize, B) actually we're maybe doing better than we realized. That's the context of what we've found with the people we've talked to. I'll carry on if that's ok.

[Cultural / commercial expressions of religion are not necessarily hostile or provocative]

It's a mistake to assume that one thing is always contingent on another.

- If I go into Starbuck's before Christmas and 'Silent Night' is being played, it's not an evidence of Christian awareness.
- One of my students working in a church youth group in London – some of the young people painted a cross onto their hand and they put their name next to the cross. The youth worker thought 'Yeah, I'm there! - we've done what it is!' and said to the young people, 'Why have you put your name on your hand, next to the cross?' And the young person replied, 'Well it's the sign of the club, isn't it?' Simply akin to the Nike logo, this is not the connection to the transcendent that we might want it to be.
- If Victoria Beckham compares her husband to Jesus on the basis that they have the same hairstyles, she is not consciously trivializing the Son of God! She's simply making a comment on her husband's hairstyle.

There have been – I don't want to over-emphasise our case – deliberate acts of provocation towards the Christian faith, such as Madonna's songs in the 1980's, or Michael Jackson imitating the posture of Christ at the 1996 Brit awards after his performance. But my contention is that music videos showing religious iconography is more often a manipulation of cultural

artefacts rather than any disregard for the transcendent.

- My 'Bob the Builder' chocolate Advent calendar doesn't run up to December 31st rather than 25th as an act of reactive disdain to Christmas; it runs up to December 31st because it makes good commercial sense to put six more chocolates in and charge a bit more money to make it.
- A Kylie Minogue calendar that you might have seen this year calls itself 'Countdown calendar' and goes one day further to January 1st : you've got one more chocolate in.
- 'Vibe FM', a radio station in Suffolk, ran a phone-in poll over whether people preferred Christmas or New Year celebrations. The voting was 52% in favour of Christmas, on the basis that it was much more fun to have children included. It's nothing to do with the transcendent.
- Marks and Spencers near where I live replaced Valentine chocolates with Easter eggs overnight – not because they wanted to get ready for Easter but because it made commercial sense to go from one type of chocolate to another.
- The fact that I can buy a Jesus ashtray with 'Jesus hates smoking' on the base is not commerce kicking out against religion, it indicates nothing more than a business decision about what's expected to sell.
- I can go into Paperchase and buy a Jesus action figure with poseable arms and gliding action, and I can even buy a Jesus dashboard figure with a spring and an adhesive base entitled 'Enlightenment on a spring'.

I know what I think of those – I don't like them. Talk about spiritual warfare in the realms of the Evil One – I don't like them at all. In the name of Jesus Christ I stand against that and say 'I hate that'. But what do they think about it? – it's a pure commercial decision that says those things can sell.

- The Nativity play at my local primary school, in the middle of the politically-correctly named Winterfest season was called 'Who, What, Why, Where, When?' The programme notes informed me: 'The story begins when two time travellers arrive on Earth in the 21st century. Their mission is to find the true meaning of Christmas'. 'Surely, surely,' I say to myself, 'here we're going to get people touching the transcendent story'. Little do they know where their search will take them. However, even a Nativity play, I would argue, is a seasonal activity rather than a statement of belief.
- I'm sure many of you will have seen 'Love Actually' where Emma Thompson's daughter plays the seventh lobster at the Nativity, and Emma Thompson says 'I didn't know there were lobsters at the Nativity scene!' And the daughter goes, 'Duh!'

[Generational differences in interpretation]

So where does that leave us as practitioners? That's the set of generation-wide data that we've generated over the last couple of years. Where does it leave us?

In any research it's always the most difficult to write your conclusions, isn't it? You do your findings, but the conclusions are woefully complicated. We had to write our conclusions chapter several times. The first time we wrote it we realized that we'd written a generation-x set of conclusions to a generation-y set of data. We probably did that two or three times.

- The penny dropped when we went to see this Christian dance group who do dances like 'Creation'. And you go to that 'Creation' and you see Eve jumping around for joy, and you think 'My goodness, I didn't think of Eve as being so joyful'. And you reinterpret it. But if you go to that dance group with no understanding of the creation story, then the dance is just going to be a dance. It's not going to have any connection with the Christian story at all.
- On the lecture room wall where I lecture I've got a picture painted by a friend of mine Mel Lloyd, which she calls 'Creation'. And she's painted it in a Jackson Pollock style, which is seven different colours spread around on the canvas dancing for joy. The students come in and I say, 'That's a picture called Creation', and they say 'OK'. But if you've got no understanding of the story of the world being created by God, then the picture's just going to be a picture.
- And I was saying this to an ordinand at Ridley who's a generation-y ordinand and she said 'Yeah, Bob, Yeah! Let me tell you this – if you ask a generation-y person what a brick is, they'll tell you it's a brick! They're not going to say it's a metaphor for God, and they're not going to say it has a connection with God, a brick is simply such a brick'.

And at that point I draw in my Michael Pelagni who's such a guru to both of us, who says that how you look at something first, affects how you look at it from then on. He writes, 'the descriptive term 'cat' evokes the descriptive conception for which it stands. A complete chemical and physical topography of a frog wouldn't tell us it was a frog unless we knew it was a frog to

start with. If they've not got that first Christian thought in their head, they're not going to interpret it.

[More on interpretation: people with some knowledge may need a label first, alternatively they may have no relevant knowledge]

So in a way I'm standing in front of you as nothing more than a tub-thumping evangelical. I'm saying if you don't talk to them, if you don't say the name, you can go and get along with people and have good relationships and be by their side for all your worth, but they're not going to recognize it as Christ. So not only is there opportunity, space, to introduce the name, there's also actually need. So that they can then put a set of interpretations onto what they hear you say. Any interpretation will be shaped by what one's prior knowledge might be.

- When a builder looks at a wall he will see whether it's a hollow stud partitioned wall as opposed to a brick wall. Do you know what a hollow stud partitioned wall is? I haven't got a clue! When I look at a wall, all I see is a wall.
- When I see a Christian behaving kindly, I might see it as evidence of God's redemptive love. When someone unchurched sees a Christian behaving kindly, they'll see a Christian behaving kindly.

There's an assumption that there's a dormant Christian knowledge waiting to be activated. You make this good, meaningful relationship with them you get to know them, have beers with them, get alongside them, and you say 'you know that great relationship we've got, well actually I'm a Christian', and they say 'Aha!' and they reinterpret all that Christian knowledge they've got behind them and think differently. But I'm suggesting that that Christian knowledge ain't there.

- Debbie's a friend of mine, and in the house next door to her the mother died leaving a father and a daughter. And the father and daughter moved out of the house for a year because they didn't want to be in the house immediately on the death of the mother. A committed Christian moved in as a lodger and lived next door to Debbie. Then at the end of the year the lodger moved out, the father and daughter moved back in and Debbie was showing them back in. And this Christian lodger had left on the wall a picture of the footprints thing. And the young girl said, 'Oh look! – there is the same poem they had at my mother's funeral.' And Debbie was going, 'Yes, yes, yes....' and: nothing. That's all they knew about it.

We assume that when people talk about the Christian faith that they're on the edge of the map, and they're going to step into the country. But they're on the edge of the map in the sense that there's no more knowledge base there.

Any clarifications?

[Female audience member]

...We see that we have a divine spark but people outside faith don't recognise that.

[Bob Mayo]

If we had time I'd take you in another direction, that is to say the young people we've met with are generally quite happy, quite content, quite enjoying themselves. And I'd talk about this paradox of choice

[Another female audience member]

...The young people may have a history of RE teaching which is wrong, for example we know you don't have to earn salvation but they may think they do.

[Bob Mayo- distinction between de-churched & unchurched]

I would hate you to come and hear about the research we've done with 200-250 young people and assume we're talking about all young people in the country. The division made by Francis Richter, who's a friend of yours Sylvia, is: '10% church, 10% fringe, 40% de-churched, 40% unchurched'. Of the 40% de-churched, he suggests that 20% are church-friendly. He will say that a lot of work is concentrated on 'church',

'fringe', and 'de-churched friendly'. What we're talking about here is that unchurched group, who won't even have that framework of interpretation. It sounds like you're talking about a de-churched person who has some knowledge and a framework to interpret what you're saying. And you can say to them 'it's not like that, it's like this'.

I was interviewing one person a couple of weeks ago and she said, 'Look, are we made from God, are we made from apes, or are we made from man's left rib? I thought we were made from God, my friend says we were made from apes, and on television the other day I saw we were made from man's left rib.'

That type of person has free-floating bits of knowledge, and there's not a framework to interpret the knowledge. Within the context of these free-floating bits of knowledge, you do have space to talk about faith more than we thought. I was talking to one guy last night who was starting work in a further education college and he just knocked on the door and asked. People are quite welcome to do this because they know so little about us.

Do you agree?

[Man asks question]

...It's important to give young people the space to express & engage freely without any hidden agenda...

[Bob Mayo]

Yes there's a whole realm of literature in education which says you're the better educator if you're clearer about where you're coming from, if people have the sense to nail you as to what's going on. The big question is when are we saying too much, and when are we saying too little? When are you giving information overload, and you've squeezed people out, and when are you not giving them enough information. In detached youth work in inner city London I found myself using a completely orthodox conservative evangelical framework on the whole issue of sex before marriage. And I've talked to people and said that Christian ethics can be illuminating rather than adjudicating – here's a way of looking at it. But when do you say too much or too little?

[Another man asks question]

...Consumerism is a powerful religion in our culture. ...What is religion?...

[Bob Mayo]

I'll leave Sylvia to answer the question of what is religion....!

In this context here, what we would mean by religion is some form of institutional expression of our Christian faith. I said that it is incorrect to say that a decline in one religion – our religion, as we understand in this room – has been met by a rise in some other religion. The idea that if a divine spark is not expressed through church then it is automatically expressed through some other spirituality – on the basis of what we've looked at, that's not correct.

[Lady asks question]

...It's becomes difficult when you start calling everything a religion, a classic example is football - a lot of people call this a religion, but football fans shun that label.

[Bob Mayo]

Again it's the distinction between sociological spirituality and theological spirituality.

[Conclusion]

To finish:

- We're starting a new period of research in which we are distributing a minimum of 1000 questionnaires to young people – to evaluate their contact with eg chaplain, youth worker, etc. We would welcome your interaction, equally we are happy to come

and visit you and meet the young people you work with. In the youth work constituency, we're just as guilty of wishful thinking, so we want to get the actual views of young people.

- 20-25 page summaries of our recent research on 'The World View of Generation-Y Young People, expressed through Popular Art and Culture' are available if you'd like them.

- To pick up what Nick was saying, ie what are the frameworks that you use with your young people: is it looking for definitions of spirituality, is it looking for missiology, is it the incarnation, is it the image of God...? A good question because it's asking what is our mission statement and purpose. I've gone through a period of using the idea of mission, and another period of using the idea of spirituality. At the moment I'm finding the definition of spirituality so wide and difficult, that instead I'm using the idea of 'personhood', who am I? Everyone's got an opinion of who they are. And we've picked up on some of N.T.Wright's work, looking at the four existential questions of a world view: who am I?, where am I?, what's the problem? what's the solution? The most recent thrust of work has been in partnership with a programme called 'Theology through the Arts' and to develop teaching material with the use of video, images etc., to get people to reflect on who they are. You can get brilliant, quick responses about personal identity by showing people images, eg an ambulance, rather than by conversation. People were completely divided over the ambulance image. Fascinating how some young people said 'someone's in trouble' and some said 'the ambulance is going to help people'. With one use of an image you got straight to the core of how they see themselves and how they relate to the world.

- Two years ago when we started the research, there was a sociologist on the team, a psychologist and me a theologian... you'll be pleased to hear that the sociologist and the theologian got engaged and we are to be married in July...!