

CURIOUS QUESTIONS

A Study Guide for The Penultimate Curiosity Documentary

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In *The Penultimate Curiosity* (OUP 2016) the authors state that ‘our book does not venture into theological realms and leaves readers to fare forward or not as they choose’. This study guide is intended for those who have chosen to fare forward in such a way. It is designed to help Christians in particular think about some of the issues that might arise from the material that Wagner and Briggs present in their documentary.

The study guide could be used with classes in schools or colleges, or with church groups. It is divided into six sessions. In each session the group is invited first to watch a roughly 20-minute section of the film, to read a number of relevant Biblical verses, and then (using the questions provided) to discuss how they might relate. The guide indicates the chapters in *The Penultimate Curiosity* that relate to each session, and which the members (and especially the teacher or leader of the group) might find it helpful to read.

Although the verses chosen and the questions asked must inevitably reflect the thinking of the authors, the aim of the study guide is not to close questions down but to open them up, and above all to let the Biblical verses speak for themselves.

Session One

In the Beginning



Watch: Part One, The Routes of Curiosity, 9.00 – 19.00

(The relevant sections in *The Penultimate Curiosity* are Part I Chapters 1-7 and Part Nine chapters 38-44)

Read: Genesis 1 v 27
Ecclesiastes 3 v 11

Questions:

How might the anthropological term *Homo religiosus* relate to the Biblical concept of ‘the image of God’?

What does the importance of cave paintings in prehistoric cultures tell us about the nature of human beings?

What do you think Ecclesiastes means when it says of God, ‘he has ... set eternity in the hearts of men’?

Do you think the slipstream metaphor, which the documentary uses to describe the relationship of science and religion, could apply to other areas of human culture?

Session Two

On the Areopagus



Watch: Part One, The Routes of Curiosity, 19.20 -35.03

(The relevant sections in *The Penultimate Curiosity* are Part II Chapters 8-10)

Read: John I v 1-4
Acts 17 v 16-32

Questions:

Are there similarities between what Greek philosophers described as the *arche* or fundamental principle of the universe, and what John describes as the *logos* or word?

Are there differences?

In what way do the goals pursued by the different schools of Greek philosophers differ from the goal pursued by Paul?

Are there any respects in which their goals were the same?

Session Three

In Alexandria



Watch: Part One, The Routes of Curiosity, 35.0 – 51.8

(The relevant sections in *The Penultimate Curiosity* are Part III chapters 11 – 14 and Part Nine chapters 38-44)

Read: Mark 8 v 14 -16
John 2 v 19 -21
John 3 v 4
Romans 5 v 12-15

Questions:

Philoponus argued that 'the fact of God's creation is revealed but not how it all came about'. Do you agree?

The first three passages are all examples of people misinterpreting Jesus' language and imagery and failing to understand the meaning they are meant to convey. Is there a common factor in these misinterpretations?

The passage in Romans could be argued to teach a literal interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve. Is this the main point that Paul is trying to get across in his description of the differences between Adam and Christ?

The following paraphrase of Romans 5 12-15 makes some changes to the language and imagery:

Sin has been in the world from the start. Long before the giving of the law. It reigned from the time of Adam. Adam is an image - a pattern of the one to come. But the gift of Christ is utterly different from 'the trespass of

Adam'. For if the whole human family went astray when human beings first turned from God, how many will experience the grace and gift that overflows through the one true human being Jesus Christ? Again, the gift of God is not like the result of that primeval sin. In the story of Adam and Eve the judgement followed their sin and brought condemnation, but in the reality of Christ the gift followed many sins and brought justification.

Consequently, just as that crucial turning away brought judgement for all humanity, so the result of the crucial (cross-shaped) act of righteousness was justification that flows into all human life. For as in the story of Adam and Eve many human beings became sinners through one act of disobedience so, in the full reality of the one true human being Jesus Christ, many will be made righteous.

Do these changes to the language and imagery, effect Paul's essential meaning?

Session Four

On the Leaning Tower



Watch: Part Two, The Conflicts of Curiosity, 8.04 – 25.31
(The relevant sections of *The Penultimate Curiosity* are Part V chapters 22-26)

Read: Joshua 10 v 9-14
Psalm 19 v 1
Ecclesiastes 3 v 11

Questions:

Professor Boscaglia and Galileo's other opponents used the story in Joshua to argue that the sun rotated around the earth and not the other way round. Were they right to interpret the story in this way, and how might we make sense of it in a way that respects both the text and astronomical observations?

Galileo argued that verses like the beginning of Psalm 19 suggest we should study the heavens. Was he right?

Galileo argued that Ecclesiastes 3 v 11 should warn us against a false certainty in science, even where scientific ideas seem to confirm our interpretations of scripture. Was this a justified warning?

What lessons do you think can be learnt from the Galileo affair?

Session Five

Return to Oxford



Watch: Part Two, The Conflicts of Curiosity, 26.30 -37.30
(The relevant sections of *The Penultimate Curiosity* are Part VI chapters 27-30)

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5 v 19-21
Matthew 20 v 25 -26

Questions:

Seventeenth century scientists argued the injunction in Thessalonians to ‘test everything’ provides a model for the way for the way we should approach the ‘book of God’s works’. Are there differences between the methods we should use investigate religious ideas, and the methods we should to investigate nature?

Are there similarities?

Seventeenth century scientists also argued if we followed Christ’s command not to ‘lord it over one another’ it would help us to arrive at the truth. Why might this be so?

Can you provide examples?

Session six

Through the Laboratory Door



Watch: Part Two, The Conflicts of Curiosity, 37.31 – 53.41
(The relevant sections of *The Penultimate Curiosity* are Part X chapters 45-49)

Read: Colossians 3 v 23
Psalm 111 v 2

Questions:

Both Henry Acland and James Clerk Maxwell argued that all the work we do, including scientific work, should be done 'as working for the Lord'. What do you think this means in practice?

Can you give examples?

What do you think is meant by 'the works of the LORD', and how do we seek them out?

What part does faith play in science?