

# Monsters and voices

**Mike Ovey introduces this edition of Commentary, which focuses on issues surrounding the always difficult task of being in the world, but not of it**



One of the old Greek myths tells how the hero Odysseus has to navigate between two dangerous sea monsters, Scylla and Charybdis, who will threaten the lives of him and his crew. Which is the greater danger? How can he avoid being destroyed by one or the other?

Our task as Christians in this world sometimes seems to be like steering between Scylla and Charybdis: we are to be in the world but not of it. There is the Scylla of being so wrongly disconnected from the world that we can no longer fulfil the great commission with respect to it. Then there is the Charybdis of being so wrongly connected to the world that we have been assimilated by it and have then so lost touch with the great commission that we no longer call the nations to repentance and the forgiveness of sins through Christ.

Scylla: not really in the world. Charybdis: too much of the world. Both feature disobedience to the Lord Jesus and lack of spiritual love for our world.

Except our particular situation is even more complex than the one Odysseus faced. Not only are there the monsters of Scylla and Charybdis, there is another peril too – the voices. You see, on another occasion Odysseus has to listen to the voices of the Sirens, voices that lure unsuspecting sailors

onto the rocks while busily telling them all is safe and how there are no rocks there.

We have Siren voices, too. It's a real double whammy: not just the Scylla-Charybdis scenario, but simultaneously the Sirens. These voices sometimes say we're too close to Scylla, that we are in danger of being too disconnected from the world, when actually we're nowhere near disconnected enough and the reality is we're too close to Charybdis. Sometimes the voices say we're too close to Charybdis and too identified with the world, when actually for one reason or another we're being too disconnected from the world and the reality is that we're too close to Scylla. And no doubt the voices mislead us about where the real dangers are, or aren't, in other ways too.

The last year has certainly seen some obvious examples of voices saying we're too far from the world when in fact

**Both dangers feature disobedience to the Lord Jesus and lack of spiritual love for our world**

we're all too close to it. The rhetoric in support of the Same Sex Marriage Bill comes under that heading. Others are less blatant. Thus, I sometimes wonder whether the well-meant voices that downplay the skill of apologetics on the grounds of its worldliness don't disconnect us from the world.

This edition of *Commentary* charts some of the difficulties around being in the world but not of it and how we can be more discerning with the voices. Nick Tucker picks up that latter point as he looks back on the 1934 Barmen Declaration, where for German believers the question of 'whose voice?' was central.

Other pieces deal with other aspects of navigating these waters. Fiona Gibson writes about the subtle challenge of *acedia* and how in the world we can be not so much overtly hostile as simply indifferent to the voice of Christ. Matt Kottman deals with differences between the 'worlds' of the US and UK over risk-taking, while Matt Graham considers the pressing question of how evangelicals can stay in the Church of England without worldly compromise.

Hugh Bourne's piece on tweeting takes us to the way we interact and communicate with the world, while Efrem Buckle considers authentic engagement in the world of urban ministry. The College's Director of Free Church Training designate, Graham Beynon, tackles the place of emotions in a world which sets such store by them. Chris Green reflects on his 14 years at Oak Hill, and also on the importance of theological training for the future health of the church. My own article on the worldly pull of celebrity culture within the church completes the set.

We are all too aware that we have only scratched the surface of this question, so our prayer is that this edition does not just address the specific questions, but helps us think about how to re-apply some of the principles to fresh and different issues.

Let me close with one of the great thoughts from the 1934 Barmen Declaration: there is one voice we must listen to without compromise – the good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, not the competing voices of pseudo-shepherds. The trick is spotting they are pseudo-shepherds and where we are listening to them.

# Commentary

4 **The courage the church needs today**  
Nick Tucker



7 **To tweet or not to tweet?**  
Hugh Bourne

10 **Staying in without caving in**  
Matt Graham



14 **The noonday demon**  
Fiona Gibson

17 **When celebrity culture comes to church**  
Mike Ovey

20 **Faith and feelings**  
Graham Beynon

23 **So long and thanks for all the *ichthuas***  
Chris Green

26 **Taking risks for the kingdom of God**  
Matt Kottman



29 **Are you really real?**  
Efrem Buckle

32 **Books**  
Chris Green