

11th July 2021

Real

“What is reasonable is real; that which is real is reasonable.”

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Philosophy of Right

In 1967 a little paperback was published in the UK which has had a lasting influence on me. I was seventeen, and going through several levels of adolescent turmoil, not the least of which was a struggle with issues of faith. My upbringing was Presbyterian, verging on the Calvinistic, and Church figured highly in the life of my family. But worship was dull and dark. Sermons were long and dense. Singing was mostly Psalms, and while we had an organ and a small choir, there was nothing that could in any way be labelled as “modern”. It was all very worthy and traditional, but, through it all, there was little that related to my teenage years.

It should be remembered too that this was the era of Beatlemania, Flower Power, Free Love, and all that threatened to overturn social and moral norms. Perhaps that’s why the Church sought to “hold the line” in the face of an onslaught against its traditional approach and style.

Then I found a book by Carl Burke called *God is for real, man*. It was an American publication, and for the first time I had a book that bypassed traditional language and imagery and spoke to me in the “hip” language of the day. Carl Burke was a chaplain in Erie County Jail in Buffalo, New York, and his little book of faith was a product of his engagement with people who spoke the language of the streets and not of the traditional Church. It was a revolutionary book for me. Here was a real world, closer to the world of my teenage years than the world of the Presbyterian Church. Here was real imagery that I could relate to. And here was a God who was “for real, man!” I still have a copy of *God is for real, man*, and I dip into it from time to time to keep me anchored in reality.

The world is very different now from the world I knew in 1967. But the task of the Church is surely still the same – to communicate in a language that relates to the culture of now and not of a past age. God *is* for real. It’s our task to make that reality appropriate to the living reality of people’s lives, here, now, and in the real world we inhabit. I think that, in Hagel’s words, that’s fairly reasonable, don’t you?

A prayer for today

Real, man? As much now and then – thank God! Amen.