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Editorial

I was sorry to hear of the passing of Jonathan Sacks, the former Chief Rabbi. He was a superb communicator, and in many ways a better apologist for Biblical faith than many of our own. In his book “Radical Then, Radical Now” (London: HarperCollins, 2001) he traces the origin of synagogue worship to the Babylonian Exile, seeing a reference to it in Ezekiel 11:16. Up until then, ‘religion’ was about offering sacrifices in temples; the only unique thing about Judaism was that the temple became restricted to Jerusalem, meaning such worship was impossible in Exile. Synagogue worship may have started as a temporary expedient, yet its radical new way of relating to God brought many benefits. Consequently, although many of the Jewish people were keen to return and rebuild the temple, their religious life had changed forever. Having synagogue life at the centre enabled their faith to survive when the temple was finally destroyed for good, and also, as Sacks notes, provided Christianity with a model for church. (p150f)

During 'Covid lockdown', we have been forced to relate to one another as church in radical new ways. Many of us are keen to get back to church life as it was before. I know I miss having Communion (I consider 'virtual communion' to be a contradiction in terms) and singing together. But maybe we will find that some of our new forms of church life have unexpected benefits, so they will carry on, as synagogue did for the Jews, after the return from Exile. This is the sort of thing we can explore at our symposium in May.

Bob Allaway (Chairman)

The 2021 Symposium will once more be held online due to ongoing COVID19 restrictions. Videos of the talks will be released throughout the day and at 3pm we will hold an Open Discussion on the Zoom platform, to be followed by our Annual General Meeting. We will email the Zoom details to those on our mailing list a few days beforehand. If you have not received them please email admin@faithandthought.org and we will send them through to you. The videos will remain available for catch up anytime after the day of the Symposium, along with content from previous years on our website.

Alan Kerry (Editor)

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RELATING ADVANCES IN KNOWLEDGE TO FAITH WITHIN SOCIETY

Roger Penrose's conformal cyclic cosmology and the Christian doctrine of creation

Rodney Holder

Introduction: conformal cyclic cosmology¹

I was delighted when I learned that Sir Roger Penrose won a half share in the 2020 Nobel Prize for Physics for "the discovery that black hole formation is a robust prediction of the general theory of relativity." We are now certain that black holes exist and it was also excellent to see that the other half of the prize was shared between Reinhard Genzel and Andrea Ghez for confirming that there is a supermassive black hole at the centre of our galaxy.

Penrose, who started life as a pure mathematician, has had a glittering career applying mathematics to cosmology, proving seminal important theorems and producing a number of important books which disseminate his ideas more widely. However, some of his ideas are less "robust" than that which secured him the Nobel Prize, and one of these is a proposal called "conformal cyclic cosmology."

Basically conformal cyclic cosmology sees the end result of the vast expansion of the universe as providing the seed for another Big Bang.² This is because, if all the matter in the universe just decays into radiation, the sense of time is lost: photons get from A to B instantaneously. Penrose thinks that is like the Big Bang and by some subtle mathematics that the universe can be re-scaled (that is the meaning of "conformal" in this context) so that the infinitely large becomes infinitely small and it all starts over again.

Penrose doesn't think that the popular theory of inflation, whereby the universe expands exponentially fast during its first 10^{-32} seconds, solves the problem that the universe had to start out highly ordered, a view which now seems to be endorsed by one of the theory's pioneers, Paul Steinhardt.³ It turns out that inflation is itself highly improbable. A flat universe (one with zero spatial curvature), as is needed for life, is vastly more likely to arise if there is no inflation, but is highly unlikely in either case. However, Penrose recognises that black holes evaporate and remove information and thus entropy (disorder) from the universe, ideas originally associated with Stephen

Hawking, though Hawking changed his mind about information loss. In a nutshell, what this means for Penrose is that the end of the universe is now like its beginning.

It should be noted that this model applies to an infinite open universe in which all black holes have time to evaporate. It is quite unlike the more conventional closed cyclic models which oscillate between big bangs and big crunches where, as Penrose shows, the beginning and end are totally asymmetric, with an ordered beginning and a highly disordered end. Indeed, Penrose also shows that matters are much worse for the more conventional open infinite universe than they are for the closed model with a "Big Crunch." That is because the probability of selecting an ordered universe from all the possibilities decreases as the size of universe increases. Thus a vanishingly small fraction of conventional open infinite universes possess the order and structure our universe does.⁴

In terms of the universe's much discussed fine-tuning, there may be some room in the conformal cyclic model for varying parameters in successive "cycles," though this is not spelled out. However, it seems to me that the uniqueness of the physical laws and the fact that they give rise to a universe like ours at all still require explanation. If the universe has a highly ordered beginning which is repeated at each cycle, the question does not go away but is simply rephrased: why does the universe possess that property?

It has to be said that Penrose's theory is highly contentious among cosmologists, and his earlier statements about the asymmetry between the beginning and end of the universe seem much more robust scientifically. The statistical significance of observations which Penrose argues support his new model – putative 'Hawking points' resulting from the Hawking radiation from supermassive black holes in a previous cycle – is disputed, as is the theory itself. One point counting against it is that for the rescaling to work all particles have to lose their mass, whereas, as far as we know, the electron mass is stable. However, the main question I want to address in this article is not, whether Penrose's theory or some other theory in which the universe is "eternal" is true, but rather, what if such a theory *were* true? How, if at all, would it affect the Christian doctrine of creation?

The Christian doctrine of creation

Christians have traditionally affirmed that God created the universe out of nothing – *creatio ex nihilo*. The question is, does this imply a temporal beginning to the universe? But before we get to that, let us explore the development of this doctrine.

This doctrine of creation out of nothing stands in contrast to the pagan and Greek myths of creation. Many scholars believe that Genesis 1 stems from a priestly writer (the source "P") during the period of the Babylonian exile and is reacting against the Babylonian creation myth *Enuma Elish*. In this myth the earth and the heavens were made out of the divided corpse of an evil goddess destroyed in battle. Human beings were made from the blood of the evil goddess's consort in order to take over the heavy labour of the gods. Other ancient myths such as the earlier Babylonian *Atrahasis* epic tell a similar story and may also, or alternatively, have influenced the Biblical writer.

The great Greek philosopher Plato was a bit more sophisticated than the Babylonians and in the *Timaeus* had the world made by the so-called "demiurge" or "craftsman." Crucially the demiurge did not create matter, but only moulded matter to form and shape the universe. In contrast to the Christian story as told in Genesis this matter was resistant to the demiurge, and indeed the material world could not be said to be good on the Greek or any of the other pagan views.

Matter is denigrated in pagan views but in Hebrew and Christian thought the material world is pronounced good by God. Very importantly it is affirmed to be good by Christians on account of the incarnation, the fact that God took human flesh in Christ. But the main point I want to make here is that the Christian doctrine of creation can affirm that the creation is good because God made matter and did not just mould it. He made everything out of nothing.

As it happens, creation out of nothing is not totally clear from the Hebrew of Genesis 1:1. Indeed the interpretation of that verse is surprisingly controversial, although the goodness of creation is affirmed time and again in that chapter.

The first two verses of the Bible can be translated "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was without form and void." So the chapter may represent God as creating out of pre-existing chaos. Nevertheless, this chapter shows the effortless nature of the creation for God, who creates by simple command: God said, "Let there be ... and it was so." There is no cosmic battle of gods; there is no *resistant* matter.

If the doctrine of creation out of nothing is not in Genesis then it is a later development. It is first found clearly in 2 Maccabees 7:28, which was written in the second century B.C. The gruesome context is the arrest and torture by King Antiochus IV Epiphanes of a Hebrew mother and her seven sons for refusing to break the Mosaic law by eating pork. The mother of the Maccabean martyrs encourages the last of her sons to remain faithful in the face of torture with these words (Revised Standard Version translation):

"I beseech you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed. Thus also mankind comes into being."

In the New Testament the clearest passages are at Romans 4:17 and Hebrews 11:3:

"God ... who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist." (Rom 4:17)

"By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear." (Heb 11:3)

Those great passages which emphasise the role of the Son of God in creation would also seem open to interpretation as indicating creation *ex nihilo*:

"... all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made." (John 1:3)

"... for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or

principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (Col 1:16-17)

One of the earliest post-apostolic writings to assert *creatio ex nihilo* is *The Shepherd of Hermas*, dating probably from AD 140-155. Whilst this is primarily a treatise about repentance and forgiveness, we do read the following about creation in its first commandment:

“First of all believe that there is one God who created and finished all things, and made all things out of nothing.”⁵

Theophilus of Antioch (c. 115 - c. 181) makes this definitive statement, noting that even humans can do what the Platonic demiurge can do, in utter contrast to what God can do:

“And what great thing is it if God made the world out of existent materials? For even a human artist, when he gets his material from some one, makes of it what he pleases. But the power of God is manifested in this, that out of things that are not He makes whatever He pleases ...”⁶

Irenaeus (c. 130 - c. 200), Bishop of Lyons, cites the above passage from *The Shepherd of Hermas* as authority for his assertion of *creatio ex nihilo*. Irenaeus was a major opponent of the Gnostics, heretical groups who placed a complex system of emanations between the unknowable God and the demiurge who, as for Plato, created the material world. In contrast, Irenaeus insisted that God had no need of any intermediaries (he calls them angels) to create on his behalf. Rather, “with Him were always present the Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit, by whom and in whom, freely and spontaneously, He made all things.”⁷ The doctrine of the Trinity is as yet undeveloped, although Irenaeus anticipates later orthodoxy, that Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the three persons of the Godhead, are involved in creation.

The Dependence of the Universe on God

So *creatio ex nihilo* became fixed and entered the creed. However, it would be a mistake to think, as some atheists such as Stephen Hawking have done,

that this means that God is just the cause of a temporal beginning to the universe. The main lesson to draw from the doctrine of creation out of nothing is that the universe is totally dependent on God for its existence moment by moment, continuously. Furthermore, there is no resistant matter which is not under God's control.

Creation is not confined to, or even necessarily dependent on, a first moment. The doctrine of creation embraces the universe's dependence on God yesterday, today, and everyday, not just some moment 13.8 billion years ago. There is even some discussion in theological circles about whether creation is concerned at all with that first moment. A theologian such as Colin Gunton, who did think an actual beginning is important, nevertheless separated that theological question from the scientific story.⁸ Others such as Janet Soskice and William Carroll emphasise the ontological dependence of all that exists on God at every moment.⁹

In Scripture Christ the Son of God is described as upholding the universe and sustaining it in being. God does not light the blue touch paper at the Big Bang and then absent himself ever after. Were he to cease upholding it, the universe would collapse into nothingness. No, God sustains the universe in being, through the Son according to Colossians and Hebrews (Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3), and God interacts with his creation, bringing about his purposes within it. We might call this "continuing creation," *creatio continua*, not in the sense of Fred Hoyle's scientific theory of continuous creation (the steady state theory), though that would be compatible with it.

The idea that the universe would collapse into nothingness if God were to cease sustaining it in being is to be found in arguably the two greatest theologians of all time, St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas. Here is what Augustine says:

"When a builder puts up a house, his work remains in spite of the fact that he is no longer there. But the universe will pass away in the twinkling of an eye if God withdraws his ruling hand."¹⁰

And here is Aquinas, writing in the thirteenth century:

"For the *esse* [being] of all creaturely beings so depends upon God that they could not continue to exist even for a moment, but would fall away into nothingness unless they were sustained in existence by his power, as Gregory puts it."¹¹

Aquinas is here citing St Gregory the Great, who says this:

"For all things subsist in Him by Whom they were created, nor do the things that live owe their life to themselves, nor are those that are moved, but do not live, by their own caprice brought to motion ... For all things were made out of nothing, and their being would again go on into nothing, except the Author of all things held it by the hand of governance. All the things then that have been created, by themselves can neither subsist nor be moved."¹²

Furthermore, St Thomas recognised that God would be the cause of the universe's existence even if it had no beginning in time. He thinks that it can neither be proved nor disproved that it had a beginning, but he himself believed it does from Genesis,¹³ although, as we have seen, Genesis is not clear cut.

For a universe which is either temporally finite or temporally backwards-infinite, it is important to recognise that it depends on God for its existence, and for its continuing existence, since God is transcendent, outside time, and not part of the temporal sequence. Moreover, the Christian doctrine is much more correctly considered as an answer to the question "Why is there anything at all?" or "Why is there something rather than nothing?" than about the how of a temporal beginning.

This point can be seen in Thomas Aquinas's five ways.¹⁴ These are five arguments for the existence of God, or really five variants of a single argument, basically the idea that there must be a first cause of all things. But it is quite clear that Aquinas means logical rather than temporal causality in this context. For Aquinas there can indeed be an infinite chain of causes going back in time, but that infinite chain needs a cause for its existence. And

God provides the first cause because he himself exists by necessity as I shall explain in the next section. Aquinas did believe in a beginning of the universe, because that is how he read Scripture, but his argument is framed in logical, not temporal, terms.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, writing in 1697, also argued that an infinite chain of causes needs an explanation, using the example of geometry books copied from other geometry books:

Let us suppose that a book of the elements of geometry existed from all eternity and that in succession one copy of it was made from another, it is evident that although we can account for the present book by the book from which it was copied, nevertheless, going back through as many books as we like, we could never reach a complete reason for it, because we can always ask why such books have at all times existed, that is to say, why books at all, and why written in this way. What is true of books is also true of the different states of the world; for, in spite of certain laws of change, the succeeding state is, in some sort, a copy of that which precedes it. Therefore, to whatever earlier state you go back, you will never find in it the complete reason of things, that is to say, why there exists any world and why this world rather than some other.¹⁵

Ultimate Explanations—Why is There Something Rather than Nothing?

By an ultimate explanation I mean an answer to the question “Why is there something rather than nothing?” or “Why is there any universe at all?” Now the fact is that only God can provide the ultimate explanation. No scientific theory can do that. There is a universe because God freely created it. The theist would say that God wanted to bring about an environment in which free, rational creatures could flourish and have a relationship with him.

Aquinas and many other theologians since have argued that it is the idea of God as “necessary being” which provides a stopping point for explanation. To say that God is necessary is to say that he cannot but exist. He must exist.

He cannot not exist. This is at least part of what the concept "God" means. Another way of saying it is that there is no possible universe in which God does not exist.

It follows from this that God was not himself created. He could not have been or else there would have been a time when God did not exist but something else did, namely whatever or whoever created God. Anything created is not God. Someone could of course doubt that such a being exists (there are many who do), but it follows that if he does exist then he has always existed and will always exist and everything else that exists depends on him, as asserted by the doctrine of creation.

That is because everything else is "contingent." The word contingent means the opposite of necessary. Something which may or may not exist is contingent. It did not have to exist. It might not have existed.

Things are very different with the universe from the way they are with God. The universe might or might not have existed: it is contingent. Stephen Hawking put this very eloquently himself back in *A Brief History of Time*, when he wrote: "What is it that breathes fire into the equations, and makes a universe for them to describe?"¹⁶ That is the fundamental question. Cosmologist colleague of Hawking Martin Rees recognises that it cannot be answered by physics: "The pre-eminent mystery is why anything exists at all. What breathes life into the equations of physics, and actualized them in a real cosmos? Such questions lie beyond science, however: they are the province of philosophers and theologians."¹⁷

Interestingly the same point was made in 1978 by Dennis Sciama, who supervised the doctoral theses of both Hawking and Rees. I too had the privilege of being supervised by Sciama, who was a brilliant and inspiring cosmologist. Speaking as a scientist Sciama said this: "None of us can understand why there is a Universe at all, why anything should exist; that's the ultimate question."¹⁸

These cosmologists are right in seeing that science is powerless to explain why the universe exists. Just as geometry books cannot explain their own existence and need an explanation from outside themselves, so the universe

cannot explain its own existence. It cannot create itself, by lifting itself up by its own bootstraps, as it were, into existence. You might have the most wonderful physical theory, the theory which explains the whole history of the universe, whether temporally finite or infinite (it may even be Hawking's favoured M-theory or Penrose's conformal cyclic cosmology) But why there is a universe to which that theory applies is a question that science is simply powerless to answer. However, God, conceived as necessary being in the manner of Aquinas, does provide an explanation for the existence of the universe and for whatever physical theory applies to it.

To summarise, if the universe had a temporal beginning then God would explain that beginning. We have now seen, however, that God is required regardless of whether the universe had a beginning. This is a rather more general form of the cosmological argument than the *kalām* argument favoured by William Lane Craig.¹⁹ God can create a universe with an infinite past if he so wishes, and God is required to explain the existence of the whole sequence of events, whether infinite in the past or not. It also seems to me to make no difference whatever if we speak of a multiverse or a single universe, a universe infinite in extent or one of finite size. A multiverse or an infinite universe requires just the same kind of explanation—why does it exist when it might well not have done? What breathes fire into the “multiverse generator,” the set of equations which describe the multiverse?

The alternative is to give up on explanation. One would then simply have a universe (or multiverse) which is an unexplained contingent brute fact—and that ought to be deeply dissatisfying to any scientist, since scientists are generally motivated to find explanation and understanding.

Endnotes

¹. This article is based on sections from Rodney Holder, *Big Bang, Big God: A Universe Designed for Life?* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2013), where a much wider discussion of the relationship between cosmology and theology is to be found.

². Roger Penrose, *Cycles of Time: An Extraordinary New View of the Universe* (London: The Bodley Head, 2010).

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3. Paul J. Steinhardt, "The Inflation Debate," *Scientific American* 304 (4) (2011): 36-43.
 4. Roger Penrose, "Difficulties with Inflationary Cosmology," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 271 (1989): 249-264, 261.
 5. Hermas, Book II, "Commandment First," in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 20.
 6. Theophilus to Autolytus, Book II, ch. IV, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, 95.
 7. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, IV.20.1, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson (1994), 487-488.
 8. Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 79-92.
 9. Janet Soskice, "Creatio ex nihilo: its Jewish and Christian Foundations," in *Creation and the God of Abraham*, ed. David B. Burrell, Carlo Cogliati, Janet M. Soskice and William R. Stoeger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 24-39; William E. Carroll, "Aquinas and Contemporary Cosmology: Creation and Beginnings," in *Georges Lemaître: Life, Science and Legacy*, ed. Rodney D. Holder and Simon Mitton (Heidelberg: Springer, 2012), 75-88.
 10. St Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis (De Genesi ad Litteram)*, Ancient Christian Writers, vol. 1, translated and annotated by John Hammond Taylor SJ (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982), IV, 12, 22, 117.
 11. St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a. 104, 1, Blackfriars Edition (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, and New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974).
 12. St Gregory the Great, *Morals on The Book of Job*, trans. Members of the English Church (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1845), 253.
 13. ST 1a. 46, 2.
 14. ST 1a. 2, 3.
 15. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, 'On the Ultimate Origination of Things,' in Robert Latta (trans.), *The Monadology and other Philosophical Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1697] 1971), 337–351, 338.
 16. Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (London: Bantam, 1988), 174.
 17. Martin Rees, *Our Cosmic Habitat* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2002), xi.
 18. Helge Kragh, *Cosmology and Controversy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), xi.
 19. William Lane Craig, *The Kalām Cosmological Argument* (London: Macmillan Press, 1979).

Miracles That Employ Nature

David Instone-Brewer

This article is a reprint of a chapter from *'Modern Sciences & the Bible: Interpreting Two Sources of Truth'* by Dr David Instone-Brewer (Lexham Press 2020). There is an accompanying website at www.biblecontexts.com

God doesn't materialize things like a fictional wizard might. He tends to enhance or speed up nature when working miracles, as if he likes using the natural world that he has created.

There's something different about miracles in the Bible. In contrast to wonders performed by fictional genies or wizards, the biblical miracles are just ... more ... *natural*.

Take, for example, when one of Elisha's disciples was using a borrowed axe and the head flew off and landed in a deep river (see 2 Kgs 6:5–6). A genie or a wizard might have retrieved it by snapping their fingers so that it flew out of the water and landed on the riverbank or perhaps materialized on the end of the axe handle. God's method was to tell Elisha to chop down a branch from a tree, then find out from his disciple where in the river the ax-head had fallen in and throw the branch in at that exact place. When Elisha did that, the ax-head floated up to the surface, balancing on the branch, and they were able to lean over and pick it up.

When I read this, I ask myself: Why did Elisha have to cut a branch instead of throwing in something that was already available, such as a pebble or a twig? The answer is, presumably, that an ax-head can float on a large piece of wood naturally. But why did he need to lean over and pick it up? Presumably, because ax-heads don't naturally jump off logs onto a riverbank. And why did he need to inquire where the ax-head had fallen in? Perhaps it was to give him a better chance of thrusting the branch into the river in exactly the right place. Of course, even when he knew roughly where it was, it is still an impossibly small likelihood that the branch would hit the ax-head exactly the right way so that it flipped onto the branch then balanced there while they floated to the surface naturally. In fact, it is certainly miraculous. But this miracle involves nothing that actually goes against nature.

More from little

Even the biblical miracles that are impossible naturally are less contrary to nature than we might expect. For example, a genie granting the wish of a woman who was starving and had lots of debts would snap those clever fingers again, and dishes of food and bags full of money would materialize in front of her. However, when Elisha met a starving widow, he asked her what assets she had – only a small drop of oil left in her jar. He then told her to borrow as many empty jars as she could from friends and neighbors and to pour oil from her jar into them. Miraculously, the oil kept flowing into the other jars until the last was filled – and then it stopped. The widow sold the oil to pay her debts, with enough left over to live on (2 Kgs 4:1–7).

Again, this miracle leaves me asking questions. Why did Elisha need to ask the widow what assets she had? Presumably, it was because he didn't know supernaturally. Why did she have to go and borrow jars? Presumably, it was to save doing an extra miracle to create new ones. And why didn't Elisha just give the widow miraculous money instead of her having to sell the miraculous oil? Perhaps it was because creating oil helped the whole community, whereas generating more money would simply devalue all the existing money (something governments should know by now). Or maybe it was because God is in the business of making natural things such as food rather than manufactured things such as coins.

This miracle of multiplying had a deliberate limitation: after the last jar was filled, the oil stopped pouring out. A similar limitation happened when Elijah fed the widow at Zarephath: the food stopped being replenished when the drought ended (1 Kgs 17:9–16). Similarly, the manna and quail that God provided the Israelites was temporary (Exod 16). And I assume that when Jesus fed the thousands with bread and fish, the food stopped multiplying at some point; otherwise no one would ever have baked bread or gone fishing again. This suggests that God restricts miracles to fulfill a need.

Another interesting point in all these cases is that the meals were multiplied out of food that already existed. Fictional genies or fairy godmothers traditionally materialize things from nothing or from something quite

disparate – like Cinderella’s coach from a pumpkin. But God produced oil from oil, quail from flocks of quail, bread from bread, and fish from fish.

This kind of consistency in Bible miracles in different books – which were recorded by believers separated from each other by different centuries and cultures – is pretty impressive. None of them describe miracles of materialization or limitless growth. Skeptics might think this shows that God can’t actually do big miracles, but it would be hard for them to argue that these accounts were merely made up, because made-up miracles would be so much bigger and better.

Using creation

Let’s take the text seriously and ask what it is teaching us. Why do most miracles in the Bible occur in this natural and somewhat limited way? Perhaps it’s because it’s better for us that way. After all, powerful miracles could be dangerous. If you wanted to get rid of an annoying fly in the room, you could chase after it and swipe at it with a heavy shoe until you eventually squashed it, but you may well end up smashing up the room in the process. On the other hand, you could open all the windows and doors and wave something at it to help it find its way out. It may be that using more natural mechanisms (such as encouraging the fly to exit through the window) is less dangerous to the delicate mechanism of nature.

Or perhaps God simply prefers to do miracles this way. After all, he created nature, so he probably likes to use his creation. We often do the same: artisans like to use tools they have made themselves, programmers like to use their own algorithms, and teachers like to use their own lesson plans. God made wood that floats and iron that sinks, and so he enjoys using those qualities. He made food to grow for us, so he multiplies oil and fish, but not money or oil jars. God isn’t limited, but he does have his favorite methods.

His main method for getting his will done is to use his creation – the plants, the soil, and especially his people. Usually he can rely on us to see what needs doing naturally. But when we can’t see it (or when we don’t want to see it), he gives us a prompt. If we are listening, he could prompt us by his Spirit. But even when prompting us, God tends to use the most “natural” means (i.e., he uses

the creation he made) by getting other people to point out what needs to be done or by letting us discover it for ourselves.

Miracles are something that we can celebrate and give thanks for, but Scripture hints that they are actually God's least favorite option; he uses a miracle when all else fails. God's favorite means for carrying out his purposes, according to the accounts in the Bible, is to use people. When it comes to getting things done, we are in the top drawer of his toolbox.

A Church Growth Strategy for the 2020s and beyond

"It Starts With YOU"

Henry Ratter DMin, MTh, MRSC, FIChemE, CEng

About the Author - Having trained as a chemical engineer, I worked in one of the UK's largest chemical businesses, across a range of disciplines. I then ran my own consultancy concentrating on people development for about six years. In the Chester Diocese I was a team leader on their Foundations for Ministry programme for three years. I have been a Sidesman at Chester Cathedral for over six years. I am married to Barbara with two grown up children.

This paper is based on research which was supervised by The Revd. Professor Canon Leslie J Francis (Warwick University) alongside whom I was guided by Dr Steve Glowinkowski (founder and owner of Glowinkowski International, see www.glowinkowski.com).

Introduction

I began my doctoral research in autumn 2011 setting out to explore the relationship between the style of leadership at parish churches in the Chester Diocese and the variance in size of their congregations. My objective was to identify the causal behavioural factors that were producing growth or shrinkage in numbers of church members. I especially wanted the outcome of my studies to help Clergy and Lay leaders become more effective in their ministry roles. To achieve this, I intended to develop a development programme to train these leadership populations, participation in which would

enable them to become consciously competent in delivering the positively differential behaviours.

I was conferred DMin in 2015. The Church Times first reported my work on 29th July 2017.

A clear conclusion of correlation

Some churches' congregations are growing and developing new disciples in part because those individuals who lead or make a significant contribution to these church's communities exhibit an observable, distinct, headline leadership style that comprises a range of identifiable behavioural approaches. These approaches are far less visible in those churches experiencing static or shrinking congregations.

On the surface, this outcome may seem far too simplistic to be valid. However through working with over 170 Clergy and Lay individuals who received feedback from a range of different people with whom they worked, the data coalesced into the singularity of this conclusion. I said "in part" in the preceding paragraph because other factors will drive or stifle growth. However, many of those factors, e.g. use of technology to communicate with parishioners, the relationship with schools and colleges to raise the profile and relevance of the parish church to teenagers and young adults, are the consequence of behaviours. So, I am confident my conclusion is more than just correlation, it is also causal.

However, by itself the conclusion achieves little. I acknowledge more longitudinal, empirical data is required, which necessitates further work to be undertaken with church leaders. This article is my invitation to join in that work. I want leaders to commit to undertaking a personal development journey. In doing so they will learn about the broad array of effective behaviours and their ineffective cousins, which often challenges their existing leadership assumptions. There are three stages to this process:

Firstly, they obtain an initial quantitative data based feedback report.

Secondly, this is taken into a conversational process with trusted colleagues from whom they are receive feedback as well as provide it. Through ongoing

support from each other and, in some instances, external coaches, this exchange of feedback becomes a consistent and constant practice for everyone.

Thirdly, as understanding and appreciation of the feedback deepens, alongside an increasing commitment to serve each other, so the developmental actions suggested by the feedback actually occur which results in a more profound application of the servant leadership behaviours.

Additionally, of course, through prayer, participants acquire our Lord's encouragement.

It is important to appreciate that this programme has no definitive end point because it relates to ongoing, continuous progress (akin to the "marginal gains" advocated by Sir Dave Brailsford while leading the Sky cycling team); there is always further progress that can be made.

The *raison d'être* of the programme is, "*We need to learn to change ourselves first before we can expect our congregations to grow*".

What has been done?

Relying on the same support I received through the period of my studies from members of the team at Glowinkowski International¹ (GIL), I used data from my research to design an initial workshop that would initiate the development journey. Its aim was to create a nurturing learning process for church leaders to become competent at delivering the style of behaviour that attracts and retains worshippers.

This outcome is significant because the fundamental principle which underpins the workshop's aim is the model of *Servant Leadership* provided for us by Jesus Christ.

Leaders were taught:

¹ Dr Steve Glowinkowski, Gary Winter and David Physick

- To interpret critical factors that inform how we naturally behave.
- To understand a model of behaviour that is inspiring and objective.
- To appreciate how these natural factors help or hinder them to deliver the inspiring style.
- To recognise where, when and why they may “fall back” and deliver less effective behaviours.
- To understand how their behaviours affect others in respect of feeling involved and engaged in their Church, successfully contributing to its host community, to sensing that they are listened to (or not), to feel their ideas are welcomed and appreciated, and to understand why their ideas are adopted or not.

The first two-day workshop was held in May 2016; it involved 17 delegates. The feedback was very encouraging and positive. Using this feedback, the workshop’s format was reviewed and refined and a second workshop held in June 2018. This was positioned as, “Steps on the Journey to Servant Leadership” (SJS�). The workshops were run as a two-day event with one residential evening. 22 Clergy and Lay Leaders participated, from Chester Diocese and Liverpool.

The financial cost was met by a generous Christian Business Director, who is familiar with GIL’s work from the application of some of its methodologies within his own business.

Participants completed two questionnaires designed by GIL before attending the workshop. The first, GIL’s Global Predisposition Indicator (GPI™) explores an aspect of personality called “predispositions” (or traits); the second, GIL’s Engagement Style Indicator (ESI™) considers delivered behaviours observed through lens of other people with whom they work as well as their own perspective.

How did I choose to use GIL's instruments in my research and why? To determine what works practically, I often refer to the following model². This enables me to assess what is superficial and what has substance. To use a contemporary word, what is "fake" and what is reliable?

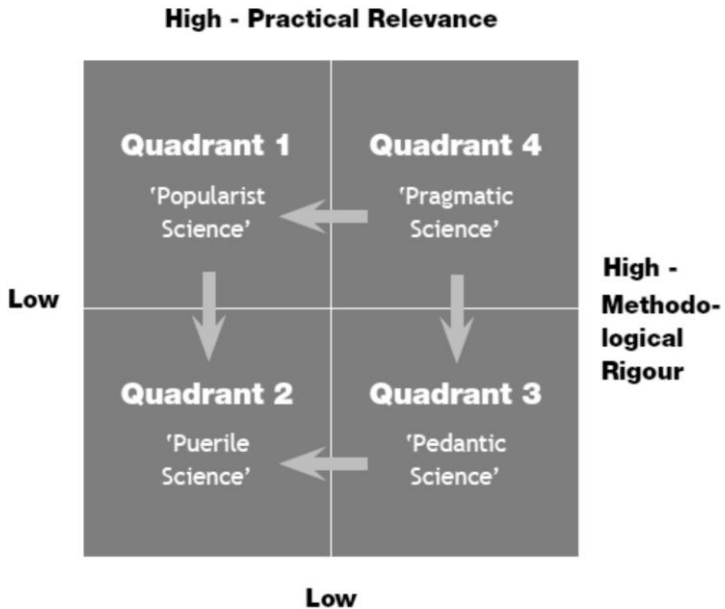


Figure 1

Undoubtedly, there is a lot of theoretical guff out there which this model helps me to sift out. The model should really be depicted with unequal sized quadrants. We are overrun by populist, puerile and pedantic ideas. Into

² Anderson, N., Herriot, P., & Hodgkinson, G.P. (2001). The practitioner-research divide in Industrial, Work and Organizational (IWO) Psychology: where are we now, and where do we go from here? *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 74, 391 – 411

these categories I place instruments such as Myers-Briggs³, Belbin⁴, and Enneagram⁵. None of these are positioned within a holistic organisational model such as the Integrated Framework. This means they provide their data, often muddled between personality trait or delivered behaviour, in an isolated bubble. They fail to transfer into leadership practice that creates, nurtures, and sustains an organisational climate that is psychologically safe, healthy, vibrant, inclusive, diverse, innovative, and genuinely stakeholder oriented (“One for all, and all for one,” as Daniel Defoe’s Three Musketeers shout out).

Using real data like this that distinguishes between personality and behaviour ensures the workshop is not merely theoretical and abstract; it also acts as a magnet to maximise attendance and engagement. The workshop’s sessions are designed to allow the delegates sufficient time to practise dealing with a range of different scenarios. Accordingly, the workshop is both valid, i.e. rooted in data, and practical, i.e. the newly acquired knowledge can be applied straightaway.

At the heart of the workshop was the clear intent to demonstrate that Christ’s own behaviours and other Biblical examples fit strongly with the characteristics of GIL’s Model of Leadership behaviour.

GIL’s Integrated Framework and Model of Behaviour

The Integrated Framework is GIL’s unique interpretation of the holistic organisation. It draws together organisational purpose and intent, organisational culture and climate, organisational design, process, procedure and policy, and the individual’s personality and behaviour. It portrays the interdependence between all these factors and unequivocally displays how individual leader’s contributions makes a real, sustained and positive impact.

³ See for instance <https://www.livescience.com/65513-does-myers-briggs-personality-test-work.html>

⁴ The validity and application of this are assessed here - Aritzeta et al (2007). Belbin’s Team Role Model: Development, Validity and Applications for Team Building. *Journal of Management Studies* 44(1):96-118

⁵ An interesting critique of The Enneagram can be found here <http://www.jaymedenwaldt.com/2019/01/the-enneagram-science-and-christianity.html>

The framework clearly differentiates the concepts of “culture” and “climate”. The former can be summed up as “How things are done here”, and deals with tasks and activities. The latter can be described as “How it feels to work here”, and is thus more people-focused.

The framework shows that climate is shaped by culture, which is represented by the three factors forming its waist. Leadership behaviours are the pinion of a values-based culture. They impact on all those around them, both inside and outside the church. They set the mood and timbre of the environment. They either make it a great place to work or one that is toxic and detrimentally affects mental health and well-being.

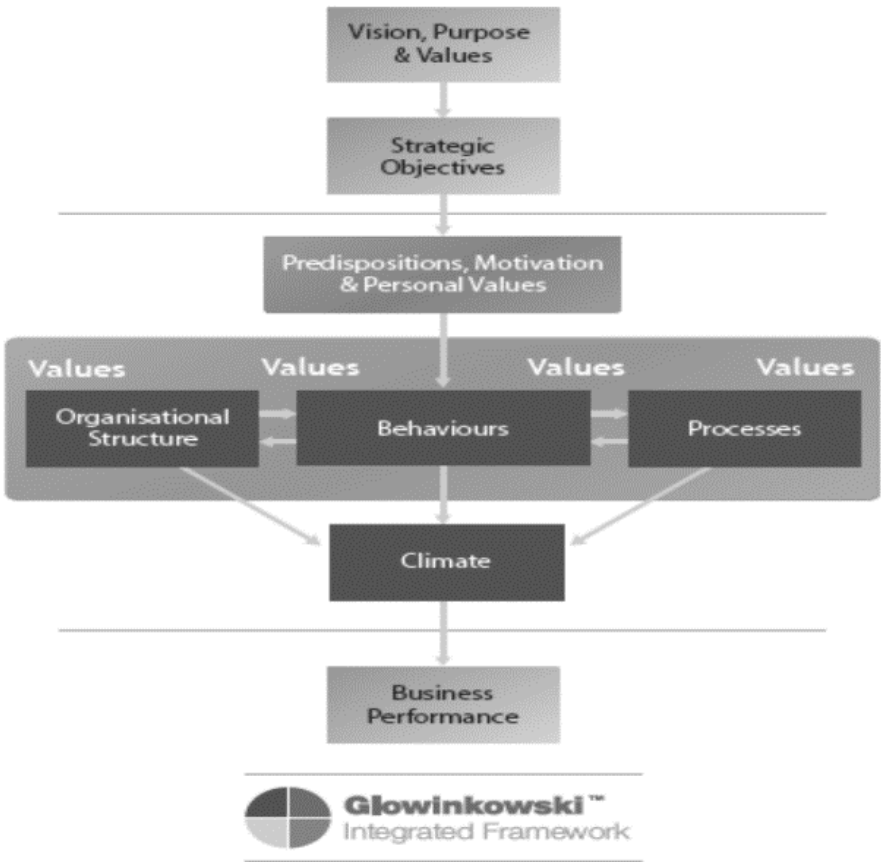


Figure 2

The “ologies”: binding together theology and organisational psychology

In designing the SJSL event, I developed a modified version of the Integrated Framework. This combines the key principles of our Christian faith with those relating to organisational functionality and people’s experience of the workplace. This approach and representation was seen as especially helpful for those who attended the workshop in 2018. My hybrid Integrated Framework is shown below.

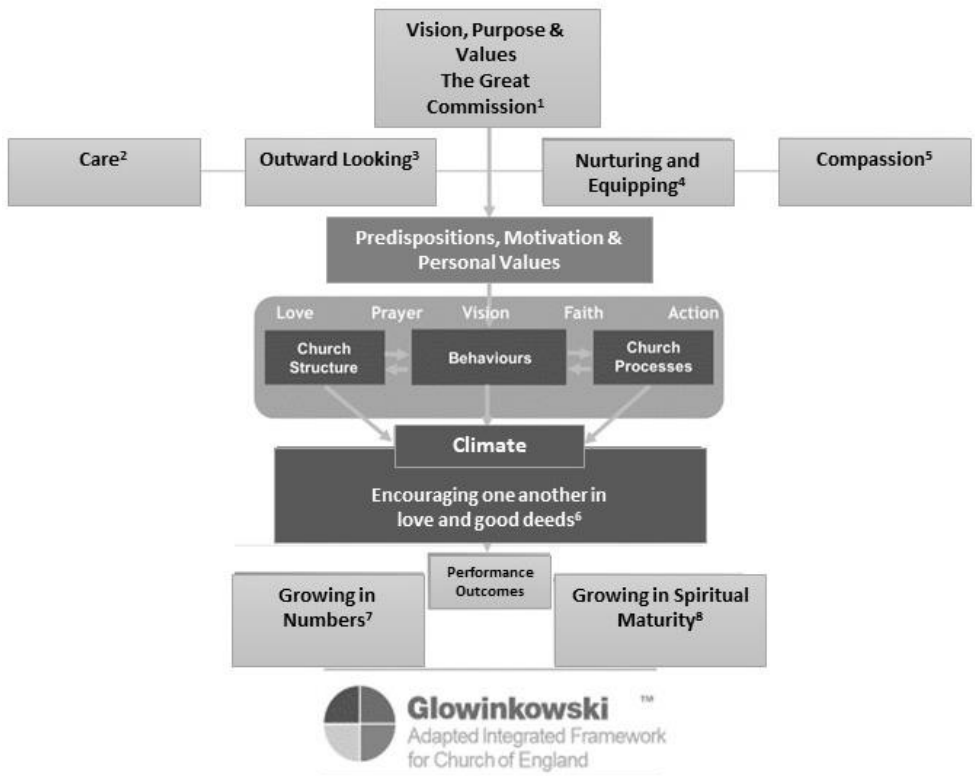


Figure 3

References for Figure 3:

1. Matthew 28: 16-20
2. 1 Peter 5:2 'Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care'

3. *Matthew 28: 19 'Go and make disciples'*
4. *Matthew 28: 19-20 'Baptise in the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teach people to observe everything I have taught'*
5. *Colossians 3: 12 'Clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and peace.'*
6. *Hebrews 10: 224-25 'And let us consider how we may spur one another toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.'*
7. *Acts 2: 47 'And the Lord added to their numbers daily those who were being saved'*
8. *Ephesians 4:15 'Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ'*

Organisations are nothing without the people: what about them, who they are and how they behave?

Another cornerstone of the learning provided in the workshop rests on a seminal finding by Organisational Psychologist, Kurt Lewin⁶. He posited that an individual's behaviour (B) is influenced by both stable characteristics of the person (P, i.e. predispositions) and the situation (S) they find themselves in.

This is known as Lewin's "environment formula", and can be expressed as

$$\mathbf{B = f(P \times S)}$$

The more individuals understand their Predispositions, the better placed they are to choose what they need to learn to deliver the appropriate behaviour in the different situations they encounter. Consider a vicar whose day may encompass contributing to a school's multi-faith assembly, to leading a funeral, to engaging with the parish's homeless, to checking in on the old or infirm living by themselves, to participating in a local radio broadcast. Each situation is different. Simply being oneself, i.e. "what you see is what you get" or WYSIWIG, doesn't wash. Some situations will draw on natural traits and

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lewin%27s_equation

aptitudes, others will demand the cleric to “act out of character”. Admittedly, this can be “winged” but such coping behaviour is rarely truly effective because it is draining and taxing to maintain over lengthy periods of time. Leaders attending the workshop were given varied real-life situations and the opportunity to play-out these simulations using the taught, effective behaviours.

GIL’s Servant Leadership behaviour

GIL’s model of behaviour has a thirty-year pedigree. It is both reliable and valid. One genetic root of this model is considered to lie in Blake and Mouton’s Managerial Grid⁷. Another is work conducted by the Kaiser Foundation and US Public Health Service in 1950s that built on work by Coffey, Freedman, Leary and Ossorio⁸.

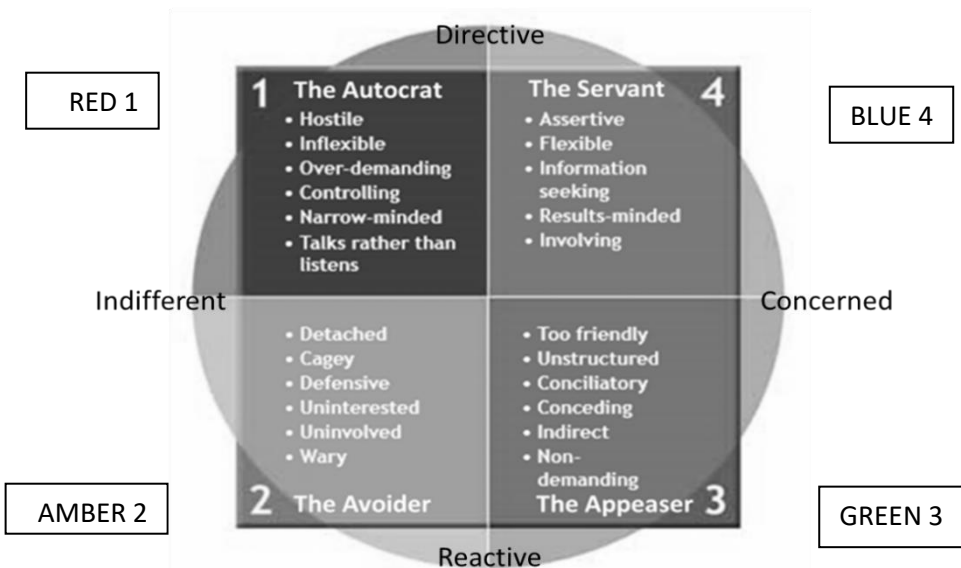


Figure 4

⁷ Blake, R. and Mouton, J. (1964). *The Managerial Grid: The Key to Leadership Excellence*. Houston: Gulf Publishing Co.

⁸ Freedman, M.B., Leary, J.F., Ossorio, A.G., & Coffey, H.S. (1951). The interpersonal dimension of personality. *Journal of Personality*, 20, 143 – 161.

As can be seen, the four quadrants represent a different behavioural style. Each style is *not* a unitary behaviour but, instead, comprises many variants that are born of an individual's underlying traits or predispositions, i.e. there are "different hues" of each behaviour. Some are subtly different, e.g. either side of the vertical between Red and Blue. In such instances, what is deemed "hostile" or "assertive" is somewhat subjective.

Consider the act of evangelism; what one person may consider subtle another may regard as brusque. The judgement and discretion to get the tone right takes time to master. Malcolm Gladwell⁹ has suggested it takes 10,000 hours' practice to acquire mastery of any skill or discipline.

As you travel further out across a quadrant away from the centre, the behavioural style becomes more starkly pronounced. What is unequivocal is that only Blue 4 is effective at nurturing and sustaining Climate. In numerous client interventions conducted by GIL, which must remain confidential, an increase in the frequency and intensity of delivering Blue 4 behaviour – in some instances measured at 40% improvement – saw the quality of Climate strengthen – by up to one-fifth in some instances – and bottom-line performance increase – by up to 10%. In churches involved in my study, where Blue 4 was the prevailing behaviour of the leader, church congregation has grown by 5% over the time period which was analysed.

Blue 4 behaviour aligns perfectly with Servant Leadership as outlined by Christ. The three other behaviours do not accord to Christ's teachings. Adapting the model to the work of ministers and lay people in the Church, taking each quadrant of the model in turn I established a definition for each and identified a number of scriptural associations.

Red 1 – The Autocrat

Definition: A Christian leader does not impose, bully or coerce. With "beauty being in the eye of the beholder", the threshold between Autocrat and Servant is often experienced in subtly different ways by different people. Appreciating where those lines lie comes through considerable practice and seeking

⁹ Gladwell, M. (2008). *Outliers : the story of success*. New York: Little, Brown And Company.

feedback. Putting yourself on a pedestal above others, expecting compliance, suppressing challenge and freedom to question is not Christian.

Scriptural associations:

- In Romans 12: 3, Paul says, *“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, in accord with the measure of faith God has given you.”*
- Consider the Beatitudes set out in Matthew 5 and, in verse 44, the idea of *“loving your enemy”*.
- In 1 Peter 5: 3, Jesus says, *“Do not lord it over those entrusted to your care.”*

Amber 2 – The Avoider

In considering this behaviour, we are not querying whether a leader’s faith is waning. Our focus is far more on their leadership being firm yet fair, making decisions in a timely and evidence-based manner, not fighting shy of raising a contentious issue, e.g. Black Lives Matter, gender equality, business practices that suppress customer service and employee engagement.

Scriptural associations:

- Colossians 3:23. *“Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters.”*
- Deuteronomy 15: 8-11 talks about being open-handed, including *“... give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart.”* This is very much the antithesis of being wary or uninvolved.
- The story of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10: 25-37, concerns overcoming cultural differences at personal cost.

Green 3: The Appeaser

These are not necessarily true Christian behaviours. Being nice instead of being honest and candid, sweeping issues under carpets where they fester and become harder to address and resolve, conspire and compound to lower standards which will result in poorer performance.

Scriptural associations:

- 2 Timothy 1:7. *For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.*
- Matthew 19: 16-24 Jesus challenging a rich, young ruler, *"... it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle..."*.
- John 2: 13-16 concerns overturning the tables of the traders in the temple.
- In Galatians 2: 11-21), Paul speaks about challenging Cephas, *"... I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned"*.

Blue 4: The Servant

The Servant strives to sustain collaborative internal and external partnerships.

They constantly seeking to improve and innovate. They lead by example, showing humility and fierce resolve (what renowned management author Jim Collins calls "Level 5 Leadership"), display vulnerability, and avoid justified criticism by being unhypocritical. They exert themselves to develop and others.

Scriptural associations:

- Matthew 28: 16- 20 describes Christ's commission to *"... make disciples of all nations."*
- Galatians 5:22-23 describes the fruits of the Spirit, i.e. *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness... gentleness and self-control," as opposed to Red portrayals of "discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions."*
- John 13: 12-17 describes Christ washing the disciples' feet, *"...very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him."*
- Matthew 20: 25-28 includes, *"He who would be great among you must be your servant"*.

Although the model is pleasingly simple in its design, it is not simplistic as it reflects the individuality of every person and the complexities that arise from those individuals attempting to attain consensus rather than compromise, which often leads to resentment.

The world has always been complex. Recently, management experts Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus adopted the phrase “Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity” (or VUCA) from the US Army War College to describe general conditions and situations. Yet, two millennia ago when Ecclesiastes was written chapters 3, 7 and 8 outlines the world’s complexity, “Who knows the explanation of things?”. It is a cornerstone responsibility of a leader’s role through their behaviour to create Clarity within climate; for a church leader this means explaining the role of the church within our contemporary, dynamic “VUCA” society and how its core purpose is achieved through every person – ministerial and lay – fulfilling the remit of their role.

As Christ walked and taught His disciples during the three years of His ministry, He was always concerned for individuals, the wider group and the communities that He impacted. He taught with authority, He was concise and precise, and, thereby, readily understood. Building on the point in the previous paragraph that there is little new under the sun, Sylvia Downs concept of pair working¹⁰ relates to Jesus sending out his disciples in pairs to preach and recruit new disciples.

The SJSJL approach provides sufficient time and a psychologically safe environment in which participants can reflect on their own data generated by the two questionnaires they completed beforehand. They are able to see and understand how their personality profiles help or hinder them in delivering the optimal Blue 4 behavioural style of Servant Leadership.

Furthermore, the workshop provides plenty of time for practice through which individuals learn how to increase the frequency and strength of delivery of Blue 4 leadership behaviour. This opportunity to practice within the safe space of the workshop consolidates and embeds the learning. Consequently, individuals are able take it back to their churches and start straight away to behave as Servant Leaders on a daily basis with those whom they work alongside. One critical skill the workshop teaches is the capability to solicit

¹⁰ Downs, Sylvia (1995). Learning at work: effective strategies for making things happen. London: Kogan Page

feedback from colleagues, so that they can capture their reactions to their new approach in a non-threatening manner.

Conclusions

The Blue 4 Servant Leadership model and the learning process adopted within the SJSL workshop resonated strongly with all who attended. Their feedback was overwhelmingly positive and encouraging. Participants went away committed to put their learning into practice commenting:

1. "This programme needs to be used across the whole church as one of the foundations of the Ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ."
2. "Always helpful to have the chance not only to reflect but to have the accurate feedback from my colleagues and friends as to how I come across to them."
3. "It really made me consider my behaviour towards others and the negative impact I can have on what would appear to be my natural responses."
4. "I have already been able to spot Red 1, Amber 2, and Green 3 behaviours in myself and others. More importantly, I appreciate the effect those behaviours have on my church and the congregation as a whole."

As indicated previously, the emphasis of attention is on behaviour not the person, i.e. play the ball not the player.

The Next Steps

So where are we now? The feedback cited just before evidences the positive reaction to the event. Furthermore, at a follow-up event in October 2019, many of the June 2018 cohort told me they had applied the learning they had acquired at the workshop to considerable positive effect in dealing with challenging situations with colleagues and contentious issues with congregational members.

Our plan for 2021 and beyond is to continue to deliver workshops to Church leaders, both Clerical and Lay, and stretch these to include leaders from adjacent sectors with which the Church works closely such as charities and schools. The external environment in which our Church belongs will not become any less challenging. We are confident the workshop equips leaders

with the skills to manage and overcome these challenges by virtue of the methodology having a clear link with Christ's teaching of Servant Leadership. By building a *consistent and constant* national approach to leadership, we can minimise the erosion of congregations and succeed in welcoming new worshippers to our churches.

The Covid-19 virus has tended to stall some of our face to face engagements with Church leaders, but we have been using on-line and digital technology to help teams look at how their individual GPI™ profiles come together to provide an effective team, or perhaps to explore gaps in behaviours or blind spots in their relationships which can potentially limit their effectiveness.

Our continued preference is to run SJSJ as a two-day event the cost for which includes all pre-work, materials and facilitation. As a contingency to the lockdown situation continuing for an extensive period, we are exploring options to run the workshops through a series of digital weekly "sessions", each lasting 90 minutes.

Additionally, it is possible to take leadership teams through their GPI™ data by providing feedback first to individuals and then in aggregated form to the team.

We wish to open up a dialogue with interested groups of leaders who would like more information about our workshop and associated tools. Please contact Henry Ratter at ratterh@aol.com or 01244 380827. We can provide a brochure that allows leadership teams to explore an overview of the approach and structure of the workshop and our "cost price" fee.

PARTICLES OF FAITH

In this section we provide a selective summary of some recent articles and other pieces appearing in the media which address matters of Faith and Thought. If something like this catches your eye please email the editor for inclusion in the next issue of F&T. admin@faithandthought.org

Spirituality During Lockdown

Christian Aid Poll May 2020

<https://bit.ly/30LaSYf>

Researchers from Savanta ComRes say 26% of British adults have prayed for an end to the COVID-19 crisis during lockdown. The study involving 2025 participants also found that faith in God had increased in 5% of respondents, particularly in the younger 18-24 age group. Overall, however, rates of unbelief remain high, 44% do not believe in the power of prayer.

Cannabis was used for religious rites at a biblical site in Israel

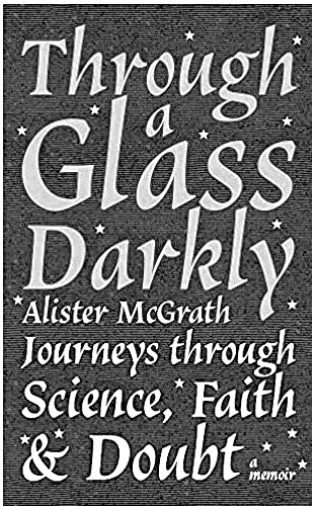
CNN May 2020

<https://cnn.it/3bQqkZC>

CNN reports that analysis of two limestone altars from the Shrine at Arad in the Beersheba Valley have tested positive for cannabis and frankincense according to a paper published in the Journal of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University. The shrine was dedicated to the worship of Yahweh. Although hallucinogenic materials have been found associated with many other cultures throughout history, this is the first finding of cannabis in the ancient near east and strongly suggests it was used as part of ritual worship.

Book Review

**Alister McGrath. *'Through the Glass Darkly – Journeys Through Science, Faith and Doubt'*
Hodder and Stoughton, 2020,
ISBN-13 : 978-1529327601**



Many who begin studies in theology to prepare for full-time ministry or lay roles will have titles by Alister McGrath on their bookshelves. However, how many of us are aware of his personal journey from atheist to Christianity? Alister as a young lad growing up amidst the Troubles in Northern Ireland, was a free-thinking atheist with a love of science. Yet his search for answers amidst a perceived fear of uncertainty forms

the subject of this title. It is not an autobiography but focuses on his own journey of discovery that led to him finding faith and go on to be ordained in the Church of England as well as be a high calibre academic in the field of theology.

The book is not a theology book, it starts with Alister as a young boy of ten years old captivated by the night sky. That fascination led Alister to develop an appetite for science in his quest to learn all he could about the universe. Alister was extremely bright and ended up at one of Northern Ireland's best schools – Methodist College where his love of science flourished. Alongside his love of science, his search for answers to the bigger questions of life also continued.

McGrath reads many great works by philosophers such as Kemp Smith, Plato and Aristotle. This book also documents McGrath's fascination with Karl Marx, all of which reinforced his conviction that the idea of there being a God was defunct. In McGrath's mind, science and religion were at war with each

other. Such ideas tie in with my own recollections growing up in Northern Ireland where science was often perceived as anti-Christian. Many Christians were still tending to read the Bible literally and many churches veered towards the conservative evangelical.

As McGrath went on to Oxford University, where he excelled in his scientific endeavour, he also finds some of his ideals not standing up to further challenge as he continued to feed his interest in philosophy and the history of science. For me it is the honesty with which McGrath faces the challenges of his earlier beliefs that makes this book such a good read. It is almost reassuring to read how McGrath makes the discovery that Christianity does provide an explanation for the meaning of life in a way that atheism could not, and the second half of the book is very much focussed on the journey of faith and discernment that followed, as well as describing his

work and personal encounters along the way. McGrath goes on to critique again his own journey of discovery through fresh lenses as his understanding deepens. McGrath embarks on the journey of embracing a more positive dialogue between science and Christianity. It also leads him to write his own response to Richard Dawkins' bestseller 'The God Delusion'.

Many people in our modern era have chosen to see Christianity as irrelevant, yet this book by McGrath shows us that atheism fails to have all the answers. Science fails to have all the answers. There is room for a more meaningful interaction between science and Christianity. As we look back on a year ravaged by the SARS Cov-2 pandemic, with so much uncertainty about the future – this book may indeed prove helpful for those seeking the bigger picture.

Reviewed by Joanne Mead

Obituary – Sir John Houghton CBE FRS

We are sad to report that Sir John Houghton, former president of Faith & Thought from 2001 to 2013, died from COVID-19 on 15th April 2020.

Sir John was a major figure in convincing governments of the evidence that global warming was a result of human activity, especially carbon dioxide emissions.

He grew up in a Christian home in Wales and committed his life to Christ as an undergraduate at Oxford. He served as director general, then president of the Met Office and went on to chair the scientific advisory group of the International Panel on Climate Change in 1988. The IPCC first warned about anthropogenic global warming in 1990 but wide acceptance and remedial action have taken a little longer to come about. In 2007 the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded jointly to the IPCC and US Vice-President Al Gore. Sir John Houghton visited Oslo as one of those accepting the award.

As someone who lived a life that integrated sincere personal faith and a deep scientific understanding he sought to encourage the church to engage more deeply with environmental issues. As a result, in 1997 alongside a group of like-minded Christians the John Ray Initiative was founded. Through publications and conferences this organisation continues to 'bring together scientific, technological and Christian understanding of the environment in a way that can be communicated and lead to effective action'.

Those who worked with Sir John remember him with deep fondness. He published an autobiography 'In the Eye of the Storm' in 2013. We extend our sincere condolences to his wife and family.

Bob Allaway, our chair, writes: "My wife and I knew John as a fellow church member, when we were first married. His widow, Sheila, had been one of our bridesmaids. We recall a humble man, who lived modestly. We have fond memories of him leading a group of us to sing carols to Chinese students in their hall of residence."

Instructions for Authors

We welcome contributions to the journal in the form of original papers, book reviews or short pieces for inclusion in 'Particles'. Please email any of these to admin@faithandthought.org

Do not worry too much about formatting, but the following points are helpful:

- We prefer footnotes to endnotes where possible
- A short note describing the author, in about 25 words, should be included.

Agenda for Annual General Meeting

to be held 8th May 2021 ONLINE

Please email admin@faithandthought.org if you have not received notification of the Zoom details to join this meeting a few days in advance.

1. Chairman - the Rev. Dr. R. H. Allaway.
2. The Minutes of the previous AGM.
3. To approve the re-election of the:
 - a. President (Sir Colin Humphreys),
 - b. Vice-Presidents (Prof. Malcolm A. Jeeves, Prof. Kenneth Kitchen, Prof. Alan Millard, Prof. J. W. Montgomery),
 - c. Honorary Treasurer (Rev John Buxton),
 - d. Council (Rev. Bob Allaway, Rev. John Buxton, Dr Alan Kerry, Mrs Joanne Mead, Prof Meric Srokosz (ex officio)
4. The annual accounts, which are available on the website, will be presented by the Hon. Treasurer, Rev. John Buxton, for approval and to appoint auditors.
5. Symposium 2022 - we are planning a symposium to consider 'Faith and Fiction'

Faith & Thought Academic Grants

Are you engaged in or planning postgraduate study of some form into the area of Faith & Thought? Perhaps you're planning a sabbatical or enrolled on a course already. Maybe you work for an academic institution and would like to pursue your own study or research area? We are making available two grants per year of £1000 each to support such work. Maybe you know someone else who would benefit from this? At the 2018 AGM it was agreed that:

- a) Faith & Thought (The Victoria Institute) invites applications for up to two academic grants per year of £1000 each.
- b) Applicants should be undertaking post-graduate study of some form which addresses the interface between contemporary thought and the Christian Faith.
- c) Applicants are required to submit a brief proposal of up to 1000 words outlining the proposed study regarding aims, questions, methodology and impact of the potential insights gained from this work. This should include details of how the grant might assist the applicant in undertaking this work.
- d) Applications will be considered by Faith & Thought Council based on the following criteria:
 - a. the relevance of the proposed study to Faith & Thought's overall objectives
 - b. the clarity and coherence of the applicant's proposal
 - c. the impact the study will have on Faith & Thought's mission and the wider field of knowledge in this area
- e) Before awarding the grant, successful applicants will need to have a named supervisor in place willing to give a reference for the applicant (though the supervisor need not necessarily be from an academic institution, for example those undertaking sabbatical studies may identify a senior minister, or other person willing to affirm the application).
- f) Successful applicants should make available an article based on their research / studies to be published by Faith & Thought.

The Application Form is available on the website www.faithandthought.org We look forward to hearing from suitable applicants.

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Alternatively, complete the form below and send it to the Treasurer at:

Rev. J. D. Buxton, 15 The Drive, Harlow, Essex CM20 3QD

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Please let me have a *Banker's Standing Order form / Gift Aid Declaration

Signature.....

Date.....

*Cheques should be made payable to '**Victoria Institute (Faith & Thought)**' – please include both names as the bank require this.