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Editorial

Our 2021 symposium addressed the topic of ‘Future Church’. In many ways, the COVID-19 pandemic has thrust us into that future sooner than we might have thought, and churches have responded to huge challenges with creativity and energy as they have sought to maintain a faithful Christian witness when meeting together physically has not been possible.

Plans for 2022 remain somewhat uncertain. We are considering holding the Annual Symposium outside of London for a change, along with online streaming, and probably holding our AGM online-only once again. Please contact us if you have any thoughts about this, especially if you have any objection to the AGM being held online-only. Our email address for all matters is admin@faithandthought.org

Alan Kerry (Editor)

Rewilding the Church Ecosystem

Dave Gregory¹

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Abstract

Drawing upon growing awareness of the climate and environmental crisis, recent discussion of church structures and mission appropriate for the twenty first century have drawn upon the concepts of rewilding and ecosystems in a metaphorical manner. However, if the church is to engage in the Missio Dei through an era of climate change, a deeper reshaping of the idea of covenant community is needed, along with a rewilding of the gospel that embraces the whole community of creation.

Introduction:

In recent years, the issue of climate change has risen to prominence within the public square. High profile figures across the generations, from Greta Thunberg and to the iconic figure of Sir David Attenborough, who has long championed the need for humanity to be aware of the natural world, have highlighted the issue of the climate and environmental crisis caused by human activity. New groups, such as Extinction Rebellion, spurred by a sense of the failure of political leadership to respond to the urgency of the "Climate Emergency" have taken to the streets of major cities in many countries with direct action.

Within church circles too, these issues have gained new impetus. Climate Justice is a theme championed by various streams of the church together with mission agencies, and long specialist ministries such ARocha and the John Ray Initiative. Environmental concern has become embedded within the missional

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vision of many mainstream denominations, with the Church of England including it as their fifth mark of mission. The recent development of the Baptist Union Environment Network (BUEN) also indicates greater awareness by Free Church groups. The Climate Sunday initiative of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland is also challenging churches to engage with the issue of climate justice ahead of the COP26 UN Climate Conference in Glasgow in November 2021.

Yet, these are not issues that call for short term responses alone; a burst of campaigning ahead of what is seen as a crucial gathering of political leaders. Indeed, the second decade of the twenty first century is a crucial one. The Paris Accord of 2015 set an aim of limiting global warming by the end of the 21st century to 1.5 degrees centigrade above pre-industrial levels. However, while this will help moderate extreme climate change, people around the globe and in future generations will still need to adapt and take steps to live with changed weather patterns through the remainder of the century and beyond. There is a growing sense of anxiety among younger generations, highlighted by the recent YouthScape and Tearfund report "Burning the House Down"². Those of GenX and the Millennial cohorts lament not only the failure of political leadership but also the perceived failure of the church to address climate and environmental change. Already missing generations in many church communities, this raises the possibility that they will continue to see the church as irrelevant to their concerns, hopes and lives.

The issue of climate and environmental change is one that needs to be embedded with the thinking, life, and mission of the church as it navigates the future, continuing to respond to God's invitation to share in the Missio Dei. Here, this call is reflected upon through the lens of the terms "Rewilding" and "Ecosystem". These are common currency among environmental discourse, but more recently have been used in discussing ecclesiology, particularly within Fresh Expressions and Pioneering communities. While this is helpful, an adequate response of the church to the climate crisis needs a deeper engagement, including the re-casting of the idea of church as a relational

² <https://wearetearfund.org/burning-down-the-house/>

community that embraces what Richard Bauckham describes as “the whole community of creation”³. Alongside this, it will be argued that a broader vision of the gospel is needed, beyond the modern anthropocentric one that has so far limited the adoption of the environment as a central issue in church and missional thinking.

Life in a Changing Climate

The recent publication 6th Assessment Report of Working Group 1 of the IPCC⁴ has summarised the current scientific understanding of the impact of rising Green House Gas (GHG) emissions due to human activities on the Earth’s climate. Here, only a brief overview is given to provide context. In 2021, the levels of Carbon Dioxide in the atmosphere rose to 420 parts per million, fifty percent higher than pre-industrial levels. Observations show that the global temperature has continued to rise at an accelerating rate through the first two decades of the twenty first century, in 2020 reaching 1 degree Centigrade above the average between 1850 and 1900. Extremes weather events, some beyond those anticipated by climate models, are reported, impacting populations across the globe in various settings, particularly those in the developing world who, as the Stern Review⁵ on the costs and impacts of climate change noted over a decade ago, are those who have contributed least to climate change. Beyond human society, the natural world is also impacted with increasing biodiversity loss, acidification of the oceans and reductions in sea ice extent.

Looking ahead, if GHG emissions remain high, then global temperature will rise by 4.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels by 2100. Decarbonisation of human society to net zero carbon emissions by 2050 offers the hope of limiting the change in global temperature to 1.5 degrees by 2100, although this will entail removal of GHG from the atmosphere after 2050 using enhanced natural sinks of carbon and deployment new technological processes, the development of

³ Bauckham, R., 2010, *Bible and Ecology*, DLT, pp 64

⁴ <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/>

⁵ Stern, N., 2007, *The Economics of Climate Change: The Stern Review*, Cambridge University Press

which remains uncertain. To date, both current and promised reductions in GHG emissions by national governments will see a likely increase in global temperature of 2.5 - 3 degrees.

Ecosystems and Rewilding - Just a Metaphor?

The current changes in climate brought about by a 1-degree global warming are already impacting upon a diverse range of ecosystems across the world. "Ecosystem" refers to the way living organisms interact in any given context or environment, from a local to a global one. While many different types of ecosystems across the world are affected by human activity, here one example will suffice; the tropical forests straddling the equator across South America, Africa, and Far East.

These contain a vast array of species of trees and animal life in a chaotic yet interconnected matrix. Over the past 50 years many of these areas have been deforested for agriculture, either to provide pasture for cattle or to be replaced by managed forests or palm oil plantations. The ecosystem of such plantations might be described as an ecological desert compared to that which they replaced. The variety of trees is replaced by a monoculture, with single species being planted in a structured and well-ordered environment to aid harvesting and increase agricultural productivity. This leads to a dramatic reduction in the diversity of the wild eco-system, with the loss of animal and plant species along with a reduction in the vitality of the soil. Rather than the forest ecosystem storing atmospheric Carbon Dioxide in the bodies of trees and within the soil, plantations may transition to releasing historic stored carbon back into the atmosphere, so becoming a source of GHGs and enhancing global warming.

Rewilding in a sense, is an attempt to bridge these two scenarios. An attempt to correct how humans have shaped the natural world, "restoring ... land to its natural uncultivated state [and] allowing ecological processes to resume"⁶. A commonly quoted example is the re-introduction of wolves to the Yellowstone

⁶ Aisthorpe, S., 2020, *Rewilding the Church*, St Andrews Press, pp 7, drawing on Monbiot, G., 2013, *Feral : Rewilding the Land, Sea and Human Life*, Allen Lane

Natural Park in the USA, formerly hunted to extinction by humans⁷. Re-introduction led to a reduction in the number of Caribou, which were stripping bark off the trees and causing a reduction in biodiversity. With the population of Caribou restricted, an increase in the diversity of trees was found that led to wider changes in the landscape, including the diversion of watercourses. A less planned example is the region around the Chernobyl nuclear reactor in the Ukraine. Abandonment of the area due to high levels of radioactivity, including the evacuation of the city of Pripjat, led to the reclaiming of the urban environment by wild nature. Studies have shown an increase in the diversity animal and plant life within the region⁸.

Recently, the terms rewilding and ecosystems have begun to appear within Christian literature, particularly in connection with discussion of new shapes of ecclesiology and missional practice. In many ways, this use of scientific terms echoes the adoption of concepts such as vision statement and goals into church life from the business and managerial community in the later part of the twentieth century. Indeed, ecosystem is also used within these spheres to describe organisations.

In the recent "Rewilding the Church", Steve Aisthorpe "takes a recent idea in ecology and environmentalism as a metaphor for what God is doing in the Church"⁹. Drawing upon the concept and practice of rewilding, he attempts to "bring (the church) crisis into crisper focus and bring some paths to renewal into sharper relief"¹⁰. In particular, the need to shift from seeing the church as an organisation to a more organic, relational body which in the words of Rowan Williams, a previous Archbishop of Canterbury, is "what happens when people encounter the Risen Jesus and commit themselves to sustaining and deepening that encounter with one another"¹¹. In a similar vein, Johnny Baker and Kathy

⁷ Aisthorpe, Op Cit, pp 67ff

⁸ Ibid, pp 9ff

⁹ Ibid, pp 1

¹⁰ Ibid, pp 5

¹¹ Quote from Gray, G. (ed.), 2004, *Mission-shaped Church*, London: Church House Publishing, pp vii

Ross of the Church Mission Society in "Imagining Mission" draw upon the language of ecology and ecosystems; "Imagine the church is like a forest", "interconnected and interdependent" where "growth is not a technical or mechanical process ... (but) more likely to take place ... by trying to add diversity or reintroduce some ancient species ... the more interdependent it is the better" ¹².

There is much that is stimulating and to be commended in the use of such metaphors to explore how the church might re-structure itself and engage in new ways with the *Missio Dei*. Yet a concern remains, that largely the vision of the gospel remains anthropocentric. In a world where the climate is changing, bringing environmental threats to both human communities and nature, our engagement with the concepts of rewilding and ecosystems needs to be deeper than thinking about church structure, human communities, and missional techniques. There is a need to appreciate how human life and the community of the church is entwined with the whole community of creation, provoking a rewilding of the gospel.

A Bigger Oikos

Ecosystem describes the interconnection and interdependent nature of life. In some ways it is an unfortunate term to use of creation. Originating in the sphere of science with its reductionist ethos, it suggests the nature is a mechanism, a view that is an example of what Pope Francis in "Laudato Si" terms the Technocratic Imagination. Nature is approached from a rational viewpoint and "creation in all its glorious diversity is stuff to be manipulated for our satisfaction"¹³, partly the cause of the current environmental crisis. Ecology, however, from which the term ecosystem is derived, is derived from two Greek words. "Logos", meaning "word", well know from the opening of John's gospel where it is used to describe Jesus. And "oikos" meaning household. Applied to nature, this suggests a more relational view, speaking of the household of nature.

¹² Baker, J., and Ross, C., 2020, *Imagining Mission*, SCM, pp 4,5

¹³ Radcliffe, T., 2020, *Alive in God*, Bloomsbury, pg 302

The concept of household can also be found in descriptions of the church, flowing from the earliest Christian communities which were centred initially upon households. For example, Paul sends greetings to “the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord”¹⁴, while more broadly, Christians are described in the letter to the Ephesians as being “members of [God’s] household”¹⁵. This relational nature of the church, suggested by Rowan Williams as noted previously, is at the heart of Baptist ecclesiology, expressed through the language of covenant.

Within the Biblical narrative, the idea of covenant describes God’s relationship with a community or with an individual. Moses speaking to the Israelites following their escape from Egypt says “you are standing here in order to enter into a covenant with the Lord your God” a relationship between God and the whole household of Israel. Yet, covenant could also be between God and an individual, including their ancestors “Abraham, Isaac and Jacob”¹⁶.

Covenant is a relationship of mutual obligations aimed at creating shalom between God and the community. Following Jesus’ words at the Last Supper, where he described the wine shared as “the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you”, the term has long been applied to the relationship between God and the Church. However, early Baptists extended this usage, communal confessions of faith being “often associated with (a) ‘covenant’ by which the community renewed its pledge of faithfulness to its Lord and committed itself to a common life and mutual caring”¹⁷. An early Baptist leader Smyth defined the church as “a visible communion of Saints is of two, three or more Saints joined together by covenant with God and themselves”¹⁸. Early Baptist confessions such as the London Confession of 1644, picked up this

¹⁴ Rom 16v11, NIV

¹⁵ Eph 2v9, NIV

¹⁶ Deut 29v12,13

¹⁷ Fiddes, P., *Tracks and Traces*, 2003, Paternoster Press, pp 9

¹⁸ Smyth, *Principles and Inferences*, in Works, I, pp 252, quoted by Fiddes, Op Cit pp 29

emphasis with the church described as “a company of visible Saints ... joined to the Lord, and each other, by mutual agreement”¹⁹.

This understanding of church expresses a triangle of relationships; between God and the individual; God, and the church community, and between members of the church. This is extended beyond the local to the wider church, expressed in the recent terminology of the network of churches of the Baptist Union of Great Britain; “Baptists Together - Growing healthy churches in relationship for God’s mission”.

However, there are other hints in the Bible narrative that extend the idea of covenant beyond an anthropocentric oikos. In the story of Noah, following the flood, God enters a covenant relationship with Noah and his household; “God said to Noah and to his sons with him: ‘I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you’”. But the covenant is extended to include “every living creature that was with you – the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you – every living creature on earth”.²⁰

This suggests a wider oikos beyond individuals, communities and God that might refresh the Christian imagination in a time of a changing climate. An idea of the household of God that incorporates people and the wider creation; church as a community where God, people and creation exists in mutual, interdependent relationship. Richard Bauckham in “Bible and Ecology” expresses a similar idea in suggesting that “all God’s creatures ... including ourselves ... participate in an interrelated and interdependent community, orientated above all to God our common creator”²¹. Earlier, Wendell Berry also similarly suggested that humans as creatures of God were “members of the

¹⁹ Quoted by Fiddes, Op Cit, pp 31

²⁰ Gen 9v8-11, NIV

²¹ Bauckham, Op Cit, pp 64

holy community of creation"²², "inextricably joined to each other, indebted to each other, receiving significance and worth from each other"²³.

Both Bauckham's and Berry's language resonate with that of covenantal. A community of God, humans, and others - both human and non-human - joined to each other, indebted to one another, receiving significance and worth from one another. A shift from a triangular to a pyramidal concept of covenantal community. A wider concept of the oikos of God that stresses humans not as separate from creation but in an integral relationship with and within it. And in encountering one another and creation, a glimpse of God is caught. Perhaps this resonates with what Pope Francis describes as the Sacramental Imagination, where both people and creation have transcendent potential, with an emphasis of them being received and valued as gift. Such a foundational shift in vision of church as covenant community is needed in the twenty first century if the Church is to be able to respond to God's call to share in the divine mission to creation - human and other - in a time of changing climate.

Rewilding the Gospel

Such paradigm shifts, however, are not easily birthed. In modern, western societies the dominance of the Technological Imagination has long led to a disenchantment of nature for the majority. With respect to nature, even Christian communities have embraced this vision. Mircea Eliade suggest that urban forms of Christianity have lost "the mystery of nature's participation in the Christological drama ... (their) religious experience (being) ... a strictly private experience; salvation is a problem that concerns an (individual) and (their) god"²⁴.

As noted previously, rewilding refers to restoration of creation unhindered by human influence, shaped by its natural interdependency. There is tension here with the role of humanity envisaged in the Biblical creation texts. There,

²² Berry, W., 1993, *Christianity and the Survival of Creation in Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community: Eight Essays*, Pantheon Books, pp 106

²³ Berry, Wendell, 1987, *Two Economies in Home Economics: Fourteen Essays*, North Point, pp 72ff

²⁴ Eliade, M., 1957, *The Sacred and the Profane*, Harcourt, pp 178-179

created in God's image, they are mandated to "fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living thing upon the face of the ground."²⁵ A strongly anthropogenic interpretation of this suggests humankind is tasked with the role of bring order to an untamed world.

However, other parts of the Bible narrative counter this, suggesting that wild nature plays its part in the purposes of God. In the second creation story of Genesis, God curses "the ground ... it will produce thorns and thistles"²⁶, wild nature limiting human attempts to shape nature to their need. Indeed, rewilding is part of the agricultural vision that God gives to the Israelites as they enter the Promised Lands, with every seventh year being a Sabbath "of complete rest for the land". A sign of dependency upon the Creator and the gift of creation, but also providing for wild nature for "whatever the land yields ... will be food for you ... as well as ... the wild animals in your land"²⁷. Bauckham also notes that there are parts of creation which are not seen as being the dominion of humankind but are for other creatures. For example, Psalm 104, speaks of the trees of Lebanon being planted by God and "there the birds make their nests; the stork has its homes in the pine trees". While "the high mountains belong to the wild goats; the crags are a refuge for the conies"²⁸.

Held in tension, these two themes suggest that our role within creation is to live between the shaping creation but also respecting boundaries, seeking the flourishing of the wildness of the natural world along with human existence. However, the current climate crisis suggests that balance has shifted towards ordering the world. In a notable but controversial paper of the late 1960s, Lynn White contended that too strong a focus on subduing creation within Christian thought was at the root of an ecological crisis, already apparent over fifty years ago. A medieval historian rather than a theologian, some viewed such a critique as being too strong and simplistic, an opinion perhaps bolstered by

²⁵ Gen 1v28, NIV

²⁶ Gen 3v17, NIV

²⁷ Lev 25v6,7, NIV

²⁸ Psalm 104v16-18, NIV

White's paper being published in the journal *Science* rather than a theological publication. Nevertheless, in hindsight, this engagement of theology and science from a time a decade before climate change became recognised as a threat to the security of human society and nature as whole appears visionary.

White concluded that "we shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man".²⁹ White, in fact, did not critique the whole of Christian tradition regarding humanities relationship with creation, noting that Eastern Orthodox Christianity held a more nuanced view. His thrust of critique was primarily at the development of thought within Western Christianity, where for over five hundred years, it has been assumed that creation existed to serve humankind. The source of this was placed in a shift in theological perspectives in the 13th and 14th centuries, between Exemplarism and Nominalism. Charles Taylor in "A Secular Age" also suggests that the growth of science and its perceived triumph over faith is rooted in this change of perspective, the Technocratic trumping the Sacramental Imagination of the world.

Exemplarism, an expression of Realism originating in the work of Denys the Areopagite in the 5th and 6th centuries, saw creation as revealing signs and symbols of the sacred and presence of God, an expression of the Sacramental Imagination. Nominalism's more material view suggested that God's purpose was found through "examining what [God] has made", a shift towards the "mechanisation of the world" and the Technocratic Imagination. In Nominalism humanity's quest for God is expressed through being "agents of instrumental reason, working the system effectively in order to bring about God's purposes"³⁰, leading to an emphasis of subduing as controlling.

In the face of growing environmental concern, there has been a softening of view, from stewardship as control towards an emphasis on stewardship and

²⁹ White, L., 1967, *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis*, *Science*, Vol 155, pp 1207

³⁰ Taylor, C., 2007, *A Secular Age*. Harvard University Press, pp 98

creation care. Bauckham points out that in the Bible, human stewardship is envisaged between the poles of humanity's shaping of creation and letting creation be, as evidenced by the Sabbath years suggesting restraint. Yet, stewardship is an ill-defined word. What does it mean to steward the Earth and creation?

From a scientific perspective, we do not fully understand the ecology, the interconnectedness, of the living and non-living world. This limits human actions to nurture the wildness of creation. With such uncertain knowledge, acting within the bounds of what is known, the best of intentions may have unexpected consequences which cause damage. Such stewardship also tends towards a Technological Imagination, of manipulating creation for the sake of its flourishing. Too strong a focus on humanity's responsibility also limits the vision of God's stewardship as creator, as well as failing to recognise nature's ability to steward itself. This is the focus on Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, a very strong expression nature's self-sustaining power. While this remains a contested view, through the history of the Earth there have been five moments when most species have become extinct due to volcanic eruptions or asteroid impacts. After each, new species have arisen, nature renewing itself, from a religious perspective endowed by the creator with the pattern of Easter, with rising following a falling.

An understanding of creation care as stewardship is complicated by these issues. However, this ability of nature to give rise to new life in the face of death reminds us that the events at the heart of the Christian message are not solely for the flourishing of human life alone. As the Letter to the Colossians states, "for through (Jesus) God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things ... by making peace through the blood of his cross"³¹. We need to seek a new expression of the gospel for a century of changing climate that focuses upon humanity and creation, not humanity within creation or of humanity bringing redemption to creation. One that rediscovers the wildness of "the mystery of

³¹ Col 1v20, NIV

nature's participation in the Christological drama"³², beyond salvation being an individual experience. A rewilding of the gospel.

Final Reflections

The coming decade, the third of the twenty first century, will set the trajectory for those ahead regarding climate change. The recent 6th Assessment Report of the IPCC on the science of climate change informs the choices that individuals, communities, and nations need to make. Reduction of carbon emissions towards net zero by 2050 will mitigate extreme climate change and its impact upon human life, communities, and nature in which human life is embedded.

This discussion is stimulated by two recent books looking ahead to journey of the church through a changing cultural climate. Both, particularly Aisthorpe's "Rewilding the Church", show an understanding of the natural world and the impact humans are having upon it. Both books draw on the concepts of rewilding and ecology to reimagine mission and the shape the church needs to share in the *Missio Dei*. The use of such concepts, even metaphorically, is encouraging for it suggests that awareness of the climate and environmental crisis is rising in the Christian sphere as well as in public discourse. Indeed, there is acknowledgement that engagement needs to deepen beyond the metaphoric.

In "Reimagining Mission," Baker and Ross note that "mission is concerned with the world and its redemption ... made good and entrusted to us as gift to look after with love, tenderness and care"³³. They note that "in the [Anglican] Church, care for creation is one of the Five Marks of Mission ... [perhaps needing to be] at the front and centre of mission in the decades to come". Yet they add a caveat, that this should be "without losing the heart of mission that is Jesus Christ". Is there contradiction here? Is mission to be primarily focused on people, church engagement with the environment a "hook", like so many other church activities, allowing relationships to be built with people and

³² Eliade, M., *Op Cit*, pp 178-179

³³ Baker and Ross, *Op Cit*, pp 97

communities, so that “anyone who is concerned with the earth [might] ... find a soulful spirituality in which to be at home (within the Church)”³⁴. However, talk of a soulful spirituality suggests a deeper shift in understanding that creation care is at the heart of mission which is Jesus Christ in a changing planetary climate that will shape the cultural climate in the decades to come..

Jesus operated on the fringe of his culture. Aisthorpe, Baker and Ross, along with many others in the Fresh Expressions and Pioneering networks argue that renewal of the church will come from the fringe not from the centre. Perhaps too the re-envisioning a wider oikos of God and a rewilding of the gospel might come from traditions which lay at the fringe of Christian culture. From, for example, a reappraisal of the nature imagery of Celtic Stone crosses found across northern England and into Scotland, combining intricate, interwoven patterns of vegetation as well as animals within the shape of a cross. Or through a recovery of the Sacramental Imagination, becoming aware again of sacred signs within nature. Esther de Waal comments, for our Celtic predecessors in faith, trees were “majestic signs of the connectedness of the heaven and the earth”³⁵, symbolic of the death of Jesus on the cross which connects creation with the creator.

White in challenging the dominant motif of stewardship as control believed so. He commented that as science was “so tainted with ... Christian arrogance towards nature that no solution to our ecological crisis can be expected from [science] alone. Since the roots of our trouble are essentially religious, the remedy must be essentially religious”³⁶. Religion that in the West is at the fringe of culture and thought. And, he suggests, renewal will not come from the core of faith, but its fringe. Renewal arising, as expressed by the fresh Expressions and Pioneering movement, from the fringe of the fringe. White ended his essay saying that as “Saint Francis tried to substitute the idea of equality of all creatures, including man, for man’s limitless rule I propose St Francis as a patron saint for ecologists”³⁷. Perhaps too for the churches sharing

³⁴ Ibid, pp 112

³⁵ De Waal, E., 1996, *The Celtic Way of Prayer*, Hodder and Stoughton, pp 131

³⁶ White, Op Cit, pp 1207

³⁷ Ibid, pp 1207

in the Missio Dei as we travel deeper into the twenty first century through a changing climate.

Shaping the Future Church

Mark Collinson

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Thank you to Faith and Thought for the opportunity of contributing to this year's Symposium of the Victoria Institute. My contribution is entitled 'Shaping the Future Church' and I hope it complements those of the other speakers. Compared with the other speakers today I offer a contribution from an episcopal church, the Church of England, and I am framing much of what I say within the particular experience of one diocese of the Church of England, the Diocese of Winchester. That said, there is much that is common between confessions of the Christian faith, and the issues I raise are relevant for the whole church.

Since the publication of the 'Mission-shaped Church' Report in 2004, the metaphor of 'shape' has been prevalent in the Church of England's thinking of the church. I start way back then, because I suspect that we have not yet learned from some of the discourse that report initiated. In this paper I begin by outlining some of the confusion that I believe is dominating our understanding of the church, which has been compounded by the covid-19 pandemic, before looking, in the second part, at how the Diocese of Winchester is attempting to shape the future church. In the third part I suggest ways that might enable us to help the church be shaped by missiology.

1. Identifying the Confusion

For readers for whom the Church of England is largely an irrelevance, the 'Mission-shaped Church' (MSC) report was received by the governing synodical

body of the Church of England, the General Synod, in 2004. The report argued that the church should be 'mission-shaped', that is, shaped by the mission of God. It described Fresh Expressions of Church (FxC) as legitimate forms of church that complement the existing parochial forms of church.

The language of fresh expressions is drawn from the Declaration of Assent (found in Canon C15). Every licensed minister is challenged with these words when they take on a new position of responsibility: they are charged 'to proclaim afresh in each generation' the faith of the church. One of the recommendations of the report that was subsequently implemented, was the creation of a Bishop's Mission Order which is a legal instrument enabling the creation of a new church congregation within the territory of an existing parish, but outside the jurisdiction of the incumbent parish priest to whom the cure of souls has already been given by the bishop. For the established church to make this step was a significant departure from the centuries old pattern of parochial boundaries, by which every inch of England is allocated and accommodated. The report created a fierce backlash from traditionalists who argued that FxCs were not and could not be regarded as church. This illustrates one of the first areas of confusion we currently have about church: we confuse ecclesiology with ecclesial polity.

By ecclesiology, I mean the theological nature of the church. The World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission describes the nature of the church from its biblical foundations, in the *Nature and Mission of the Church* (published a year after MSC, in 2005) as the gift of God, created by God's Word and Spirit, 'the foretaste and instrument for the redemption of all created reality' (NMC §12). The church is the people of God, the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit because they each relate to the Trinity of God. The document also picks up the dominant ecclesiological theme of *koinōnia*, from Vatican II, the communion of God with his people expressed in the biblical images of vine, bride, God's house, flock, new covenant, holy city. This communion is expressed most supremely in the sacraments: union with Christ in his death and resurrection through baptism, and union through sharing bread and wine, Christ's body and blood, in the Lord's Supper. These are some of the ecclesiological terms that we use to describe the church.

When I talk about ecclesial polity, we're talking about how the church is structured. For us Anglicans the three ministerial orders of bishops, priests/presbyters and deacons is a central aspect of this church structure. Our governance is synodical, which brings together the ministry of clergy and laity, through General Synod, and at every other level of church: diocesan, deanery and parish (demonstrated by the Parochial Church Council, PCC). As the established church in England our governance is prescribed by law which is passed by Parliament: so changes initiated from a single PCC can move up the chain to General Synod, whereupon it becomes a Measure passed by Parliament much like Statute Law.

So, here's the first confusion: when we talk about the shape of future church are we talking about the theological nature of the church (ecclesiology) or how the church is organised, structured or governed (ecclesial polity)? Some traditionalists argue fuse ecclesial polity with ecclesiology, implying that parish is the nature of church. Proponents of FxC, argue that how the church is organised into deaneries, parishes and FxCs is a question of ecclesial polity and does not affect the theological nature of the church.

A second confusion that creeps into our thinking is that sociological descriptions of the church can unduly influence our understanding of the theological nature of the church. The MSC report starts by describing the sociological changes in society over the previous thirty years as an explanation for decline of the Church of England: there are more households and more owner-occupiers doing DIY on Sunday mornings; more people working on Sundays; increased mobility means people visit family on Sundays; increased divorce means divided families are often swapping children at weekends making Sunday church attendance more problematic by disrupted routines; more sports activities take place on Sundays than in the 1970s; these are all reasons cited why church attendance is changing. Living in a networked society, where consumer culture is dominant prioritising choice over the modernistic value of 'progress' all points to the demise of Christianity in the soul of the nation. This is reflected in the statistics of the Church of England: in 1930 13% (3,693,000 people) of the population were members of the Church of England (Archbishops' Council 2012, 24,26), whereas in 2019 there were

893,800 members, which is 1.8% of the total population of England (Archbishops' Council 2020, 29).

The more recent Kingdom Calling report (2020) falls into the same error of defining the context of secularisation prior to introducing theological responses. It says, 'Two related effects of the dynamics of secularization provide crucial context [...]; the perceived weakening of Christian influence in political, social and cultural life, and the progressive diminishment in church membership and material resources' (italics mine) (Faith and Order Commission 2020, 10).

I'm not defending or promoting the secularization thesis – it is a contested theory (and Kingdom Calling uses research based on the 1980s which must be considered as dated, given the arguments against secularization), but what I am exposing is the references to the social sciences (at least in these two significant reports) to describe both the context for mission, but more precisely their basis for a discussion about the future of the church. The same narrative is being told in virtually every diocese up and down the country: the church has been declining for the past century at between 1% and 2% per year. This has been compounded by the pandemic, where the national church believes about 20% of people will not come back to church, thus seeing at least a further 10 years' worth of decline in one year. The diocesan books do not balance, therefore we need change the ecclesial structures of the church, typically by reducing stipendiary clergy and changing the boundaries of the benefices they serve. The sweetener in the bitter pill that has to be swallowed, is, according to Kingdom Calling the release of the laity into ministry, to plug the gap left by declining clergy.

I have been listening to the discussions taking place with members of PCCs in our diocese as this narrative takes place. It is very difficult for committed people in parishes to recognise the difference between ecclesial polity on the ground – their parish, their beloved and significant church building (in the graveyard of which may lie the mortal remains of their ancestors bound up with the emotional significance of place), their PCC and the theological nature of the church that we understand as Anglican ecclesiology. It is hard to distinguish between ecclesial polity and ecclesiology, and to add to the confusion we are

saying because the demographics of church attendance has changed, we need to change the ecclesial structures. The narrative being communicated is that statistical decline due to sociological changes in society is forcing changes to parochial boundaries to address financial concerns. For those who fuse ecclesiology and ecclesial polity this is clearly threatening.

However, where ecclesiology can be distinct from how the church is organised we can recognise changes to ecclesial polity do not threaten the theological nature of the church. Where two or three are gathered, there is Christ in the midst of them. Communion with Christ is not affected by the name of the benefice in which the parish church sits, nor how many other parishes their priest is responsible for. When Christians take consecrated bread and wine they express their identity as the body of Christ. The temple of the Holy Spirit is not constricted by bank balances and declining attendance. But the fact is that in practice when people think about the future of the church, they are automatically restricted in their thinking by their experience of church. Our ecclesial polity is limiting our ecclesiology. Our institutional frameworks of the church are defining and influencing our understanding of the nature and purpose of the church.

It is that narrative that I seek to challenge, because not only does our ecclesial polity restrict our ecclesiology, it also limits our understanding of God's mission. When we think of mission, we tend to express it in terms of the 'mission of the church', in terms such as 'running Alpha', and hosting a toddler group or Messy Church, or provide a drop in for the homeless. These are all good expressions of the kingdom of God, but my concerns is that we think of what the 'church' does, and describe this as 'the church's mission'.

This relates to a debate that has been happening since the concept of *missio Dei* was first expressed in the 1950s. Karl Barth's great challenge to nineteenth century biblical criticism was to release the autonomy of God from *Sitz im Leben*, the contextual writing of Scripture, to recognise the revelation of God in every generation. Mission is not born out of what the church does. At the Brandenburg Mission Conference of 1932, Barth said that mission is found in the very nature of God, 'the divine sending forth of the self, the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit to the world' (Thomas 1995, 2003, 105-106).

At the Willingen Conference of 1952 it was the German theologian, pastor and missionary, Karl Hartenstein, who publicised his ideas of the *missio Dei* that had been percolating since he heard Barth's teaching. He said, 'missions are fundamentally removed from the sphere of purely human activity, characterized and understood as God's will and act, an inalienable indication of God's revelation.' (Hartenstein 1939, 6).

Over the following decades of the late twentieth century a debate developed about the role of the church in God's mission. Two views of the *missio Dei* emerged: the specialized way of God's work in the world was through the church, and the generalised way which takes a more eschatological view of salvation history which removes the church-centred motivation for mission, because God's agency reveals the Trinity through the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit both to humanity and in creation. This generalised view can be summarised by the sequence God – World – Church whereas the specialized way is God – Church – World.

An alternative narrative to our understanding and experience of a century of church decline is to recognise our ecclesiology is influenced ever more by our missiology, and that it is possible to organise and change our ecclesial polity in the light of a church shaped by God's mission. That, after all, is what the MSC report was seeking to be do, but as one critic summarised, because it emphasised church planting, 'We looked for a mission-shaped church, but what we found was a church-shaped mission' (Hull 2006, 36).

Church-shaped mission is illustrated at the moment, particularly with the church plants facilitated by the Church Revitalisation Trust, what the Church of England calls, Resource Churches, backed by funding from the Church Commissioners Strategic Development Funding. We have four of these resource churches now in the Diocese of Winchester, and they have been ministering to needs in their communities, and excellent at attracting students and young people, many of whom are coming to faith in Christ through the Alpha course. They are great examples of growing the church, with a clear vision of the kind of church they want to be. They are attractional communities, as evidenced by the number of Christians that worship there.

At the same time, they have been dynamic in the way they have served their local communities; one, for example, by serving the homeless and another by serving thousands of food parcels during lockdown in collaboration with the local council. These growing churches therefore illustrate the tension between the specialised and generalised way of seeing the church, because they are joining in with God's mission in the world whilst at the same time demonstrating the significance of an ecclesio-centric mission, as the sacrament of baptism plays as equally an important role as the sacrament of the eucharist.

Various ecclesialogists say that ecclesiology and mission are two sides of the same coin. How then might we shape the future church more by missiology, so that the coin is not so ecclesiologicaly weighted?

2. A Shape of Future Church

In the Diocese of Winchester the synodical processes have affirmed four strategic priorities:

1. Growing disciples
2. Re-imagining the church
3. Transforming society
4. Living generously

The first, growing disciples, is the foundation of the life of the church, the existential and individual transformation that comes from responding to the revelation of God through Jesus Christ. Entering the church through baptism and being sustained by Holy Communion and the Word of God in the power of the Holy Spirit is the essential basis for growing as a disciple of Christ. Our assumption is that every parish will be helping Christians recognise their vocation in the world and the gifts God has given them, and nurture their life of witness in the world.

The second strategic priority is the subject of this paper, how do we re-imagine the church in the light of our mission context, so that our missiology influences our ecclesiology, which in turn helps us decide how the church is structured and governed. In order to answer this question, I think we need to turn to the third priority, transforming society. The Bishop of Winchester has suggested

there are five areas that the church needs to take seriously to address the Christian contribution to society:

1. Economic injustice to address the inequality of incomes between rich and poor;
2. Epidemiological crisis presented by the covid-19 pandemic;
3. European relationships as businesses and social structures re-adjust to the consequences of Brexit;
4. Environmental challenge which Dave Gregory is addressing in another article of this journal;
5. Equality issues on two fronts; gender which Gale Richards is addressing in another article of this journal, and also the ethnic inequality illustrated, for example, by the Black Lives Matter movement.

I am arguing that current thinking is weighted towards the specialized way of seeing God work in the world, that is, through the church, (God – Church – World), whereas we should be seeking to be less ecclesio-centric and think of God's revelation of himself to humanity, particularly during this period of socio-economic shift that is happening due to the pandemic.

Paul Bendor-Samuel of the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies argues that the pandemic has accelerated trends that were already happening in the world: the marginalised are more marginalised, the vulnerable are more vulnerable, those who suffer are suffering more, those who were poor are becoming poorer as a result of the pandemic (Bendor-Samuel 2020).

If our missiology is going to influence our ecclesiology, then we see that church is not the answer to some of the biggest questions that society faces. The failures of the church, particularly, for example, around safeguarding the vulnerable, gender inequality and institutional racism – these failures must be enough to warn us that the visible church in its various institutional forms will not manifest heaven on earth in all its fullness. As Bevens and Schroeder say in the opening sentence of their seminal work *Constants in Context*, 'One of the most important things Christians need to know about the church is that the church is not of ultimate importance' (Bevens and Schroeder 2004, 7). The best

the church can be is a sign of the kingdom that is to come, a foretaste of heaven, an instrument of righteousness and an agent of justice, pointing towards the re-creation but also 'this day' being a sample of God's 'kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven.'

The Church of England will, I fear, continue to become ever more a specialist elderly white middle-class clique unless it orientates itself, or re-imagines itself, as contributing towards the five 'Es' identified above. Ecclesialogically speaking, it does not really matter if the church is large or small. But if joining in with God's mission is what drives the identity and purpose of the church, if seeing the kingdom come is what church facilitates, then biblical images of fruitfulness, plenty, growth and fullness of life imply that the church will be growing.

3. Shaping the Church through Missiology

If we are going to shape the future church by our missiology, we need to go to the core of what that missiology means – to return to the sending of the Son by the Father, and the sending of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son. The key Greek word here is 'apostolos', meaning 'sent', or 'missio' when translated into Latin. Being sent is at the core of the identity of the Trinity and it is reflected in the Great Commission, which for John the Evangelist is reflected in John 18:18 'As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.' Being 'missional' must therefore be part of the nature of the church: it is what the church is. Mission is not primarily what the church does in the world.

The question, therefore is, how does 'sending' relate to the life of the church? One way of answering this is to turn to Ephesians 4 and see the relevance of apostles, alongside prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Traditionally Anglicans have held to the apostolic succession as an expression of remaining true to the original biblical apostles. This takes two forms: the unbroken succession of the hands of bishops consecrating other bishops, and/or the teaching office of a bishop who guides the church to remain true to the faith of the biblical apostles. However, these are ultimately matters of church order, and belong in the realm of ecclesial polity. If we follow the stream of the generalised view of the church then the apostolate is not a function of the

church, but the church is a function of the apostolate (Hoekendijk 1964, 24-25). All this points to the conclusion that the MSC report was attempting to make, (through the introduction of Bishop's Mission Orders) that the ecclesial structures of the church, seemingly cemented in parochial polity, are nowhere near loose enough to respond to apostolate church as it engages with proclamation of the gospel in wider society.

How then, might the apostolate be reflected in the future church? I think we need to address one of the failures of the Reformation, namely the dissolution of the monasteries. I am not advocating a return of our Benedictine cathedrals to monasteries, but we should recover the apostolic dynamism that religious communities have contributed for centuries to the Roman Catholic church. The Jesuit missionaries, the Dominican preachers, the Cistercian pray-ers, the Benedictine orders that have served communities were all lost to the Church of England during the English Reformation.

In his paper, *The Two Structures of Redemptive Mission* (Winter 2009) Winter says the church has always adopted two structures: modal and sodal. Modal refers to the parochial ministry by which the incumbent of a parish is given the cure of all souls in the parish. The entry level for ministry in a modal form as a lay person is baptism. Sodal refers to an autonomous more mobile ministry, as exemplified by St Paul's missionary band, who went from place to place exhibiting apostolic, evangelistic and prophetic ministries. Sodalities typically plant churches, hence they replicate modal structures, but Winter warns that they should also initiate further sodal communities. Entry to membership of a sodality typically involves not just baptism, but a higher commitment to a Rule of Life. But given the rejection of sodal ministry during the Reformation, Winter says, that 'in failing to exploit the power of the sodality, the Protestants had no mechanism for missions for almost 300 years' (Winter 2009, 227).

My observation is that people with apostolic, entrepreneurial, pioneer, prophetic and evangelistic gifts do not sit comfortably within modalities. They want to push boundaries, they are dissatisfied with 'settling', they want to move on to the next place (like Paul's plans for his further visits at the end of the letter to the Romans ... he would pass through and see them, but only because he really wanted to get to Spain.) So how do we operate sodal structures today?

Perhaps hybrid church, the combination of onsite and online services, gives us a way of thinking out of the modal box. According to Hope UK, we have seen 4% of the population have attended online church who weren't previously attending church before the pandemic. This represents a large number of people in England – 2.2million. 52% of them were under 35. 13% of them were Christians who weren't going to church before the pandemic. 47% are seeking God in some way. Whilst recognising that these figures may reflect higher than reality self-disclosure, they still represent significant opportunities.

As every digital transformation strategy recognises, digital is real. We all operate in reality as much in person as we do online. As churches have gone online over the past year (more than ever before) they have discovered extraordinary reach: in Winchester Cathedral we had people regularly joining Morning or Evening Prayer from the USA, France, Canada and Spain. People join from across the country and they can even attend church when they go away on holiday. We are no longer confined by the physicality of geography. Online church is also more equitable. In offline church people have power and status, but online everyone is confined to same box. I know people who feel intimidated by offline church but emboldened and participative online (the opposite, of course, is also true). This represents the ecclesiological element of catholicity – that the church is open and available to all (who have internet access).

Conclusion

So the Church of England is now talking about a mixed 'ecology' of engagement. The Church of England strapline, 'A Christian presence in every community', according to the Archbishop of York, now seeks to operate in 4 spheres: home, work/education, leisure and online. That is a considerable shift from the idea that one can only meet with God 'around the buried bones of martyrs' (Milbank 2008, 125) of an ancient parish church building.

In the Diocese of Winchester, we are considering creating a mission society which would provide a complementary structure to parishes which would enable us to license ministers outside of the parochial structures. Such a society

provides an accountable way of promoting apostolic evangelistic and prophetic ministries. We need to find ways to develop these ministries.

In addition, I am an advocate of deconstructing our normal patterns of worship. Tempted though we have been to simply put onsite online, we might over the past year have more confidence to radically rethink what church is 'for'. If church is joining in with God's mission to bring social transformation, we are still learning what we need to do in when we gather as a church community to promote God's mission in the world.

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Musical Worship and Lockdown

Alan Kerry

Dr Alan Kerry is worship coordinator at Croxley Green Baptist Church and administrator of Faith & Thought. He has spent the last year producing a significant amount of digital content during the COVID-19 Lockdowns and has conducted a short observational survey looking at how other churches have responded to this challenge. Will our future church services be changed forever by what we have learned in going online?

Introduction:

Musical worship is, perhaps, an unusual subject for Faith & Thought. Located more in heart than head, it could be considered a somewhat ephemeral discipline of lesser importance than our usual concerns of how empirical scientific truths relate to the revealed truth of God through his Word as communicated to us in the bible. But if nothing else, sung worship does take up a fairly large chunk of the time we spend when the church gathers.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote:

*'It is the voice of the church that is heard in singing together. It is not you that sings, it is the Church that is singing, and you, as a member of the Church, may share in its song. Thus all singing together, must serve to widen our spiritual horizon, make us see our little company as a member of the great Christian Church on earth and help us willingly and gladly to join our singing, be it feeble or good, to the song of the Church.'*¹

As we consider the theme of 'Future Church' it is therefore fitting to consider our 'future sung worship'. The restrictions necessitated by the COVID-19

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer 'Life Together' SCM Press 1954 p45

pandemic have thrown us into that future a little earlier than some of us might have wished. How have we responded? Does this give us a glimpse of what future church worship might look like?

Impact of COVID on worship in UK churches

The novel coronavirus pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2 hit hard and it hit fast. The first cases in Wuhan, China emerged in November 2019 and by March 2020 the UK was already recording over 2000 daily cases. The government issued a 'Stay at Home' instruction on 23rd March and on 26th March the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 (SI 350) (the 'Lockdown Regulations') came into effect. These included a ban on public gatherings of more than two people, which included church worship services. The churches fell silent and here in Croxley we penned some new lyrics to an old Leonard Cohen song:

*It's hard these days to praise The Lord, I know you want to spread The Word
But you don't want to spread the virus – do ya?
It seems there really is no choice, we cannot stand and raise our voice
We'll have to sing a silent hallelujah...
Mmmm, mmmm, mmmm, mmmm²*

Over the summer, as the first wave of the pandemic receded, the regulations were relaxed and churches were allowed to reopen if they could do so in a COVID secure manner. However, a second pandemic wave meant that by 3rd November second lockdown regulations were passed, upgraded on 2nd December to a tier system of regulations. By the 6th January, all areas of England were moved to tier 4, effectively a third national lockdown. Although places of worship have been legally permitted to hold services since July 2020, many churches have chosen not to re-open until infection rates were lower.

² 'Silent Hallelujah' – words by Alan Kerry and Rachel Mead, music adapted from 'Hallelujah' by Leonard Cohen.

In the absence of gathered worship on familiar church premises, many churches have provided other ways to worship, often by recording or 'live-streaming' video of church services for their local congregations and beyond.

In April 2020 Savanta ComRes³ interviewed 2000 UK adults on behalf of Tear Fund to explore the role of church and prayer in the pandemic. 24% said they had watched or listened to a religious service since lockdown. Of those, one in twenty said they had never been to church before.

This study has been widely quoted, even the Guardian newspaper seemed to pick it up as a 'good news' story⁴, and in some Christian circles there has been much rejoicing at this sign of hope for the church. But the survey was conducted in April 2020, only a month into lockdown, when churches had only just begun developing online content. Were the results skewed by novelty value? Have churches maintained their efforts to move worship online, and if this is reaching new people then will this continue after the restrictions are lifted?

Since May 2020 Researchers from York St John University have conducted a further online survey asking churches and churchgoers how they have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and what they think the future may hold⁵. The survey has produced a wealth of data; amongst other findings it confirms that many churchgoers have accessed worship services from beyond their own local church or denomination, often in addition to their local church. Figures for overall 'online church' attendance need to factor this into their analysis of 'growth'. For instance the Church of England reports that their national online services alone have attracted 3.7 million viewers; the website 'A Church Near You' now lists over 20,000 online services and in light of this The Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell has remarked that "I think there has been

³ <https://www.tearfund.org/stories/2020/05/united-by-love>

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/03/british-public-turn-to-prayer-as-one-in-four-tune-in-to-religious-services>

⁵ <https://www.yorks.j.ac.uk/coronavirus-church-and-you/>

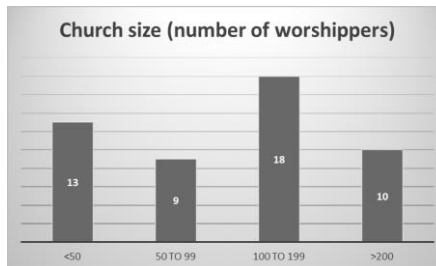
a digital coming of age."⁶ But if this growth is largely due to worshippers attending more than one church then the figures may be misleading.

Objective

The surveys quoted above did not specifically focus on the impact of Lockdown on the Musical Worship aspect of church, so to explore this further I devised a short online survey in February 2021. This was circulated to members of Faith&Thought, as well as other personal contacts, friends of friends and via social media. The survey comprised nine questions and was angled towards capturing qualitative more than quantitative responses.

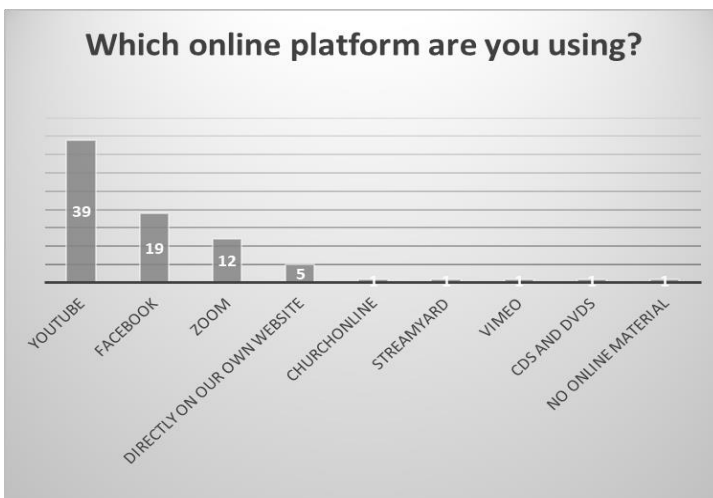
Results

Responses were received from 57 individuals, representing a range of churches. There were 13 churches of less than 50 worshippers, 27 churches between 50 and 200 and 10 large churches of more than 200. Denominationally the bulk of responses came from Baptist Churches at 57% followed by Anglican (19%), Ecumenical (8%) and others. This probably reflects the circles that the study author moves in.



93% of churches were providing online digital content, 7% were not. YouTube was the most popular platform, used by 39 respondents followed by Facebook (19) and Zoom (12). 27 respondents used more than one platform.

⁶ <https://www.churchofengland.org/news-and-media/news-releases/millions-join-worship-online-churches-bring-services-home-pandemic>



In response to the question 'Is sung worship a part of your services', 3 respondents were not including sung worship at all, 6 said it was much less than usual, 25 said yes but less than before lockdown, 22 said it was about the same amount as before lockdown and no-one reported an increase in sung worship.

Of those that were singing, 46 had produced their own material, 28 used 'professional' material from elsewhere, 10 used existing backing track software (iSing Worship) but only 5 had used material produced by other local churches.

Respondents were split as to how important they thought sung worship was at attracting people to view online services. 34 thought it was important, 12 thought it was not so important and 10 were uncertain. Comments included:

'Online can be 'less' excluding (e.g. for those with other commitments, shut-ins). 'Technological barriers certainly exist for a significant number', but others commented that these can generally be overcome with creativity (DVDs, printed material, shared iPad etc)

Another wrote - *'it is attractive provided there is a **variety** of genres.'*

Some respondents were very aware of their limitations and felt this meant that their music was not what attracted people to the services. There were 5

negative or self-deprecating comments about the quality produced in-house. One person said:

*'We were uploading our sung worship to our YouTube channel to start with but we don't anymore as the **quality** is not always so good. People have so much access to good recordings these days that we didn't feel ours stood up and made us seem amateurish.'*

Two respondents said musical worship is something we must do in obedience to scripture.

A number of respondents implied that online musical worship is a poor substitute for 'the real thing'.

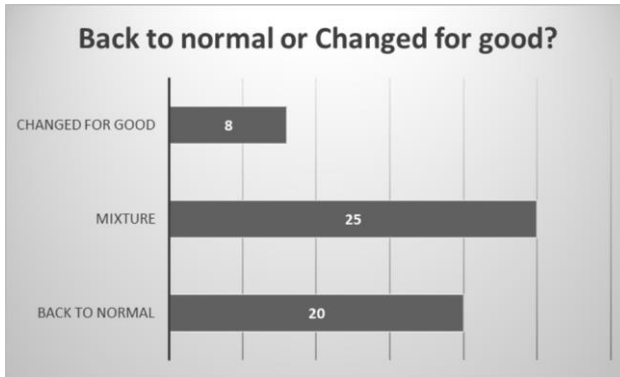
A few commented that including all-ages has been difficult, one saying:

'I don't think we've managed the all-age worship well at all'.

The style of worship was broadly unchanged for 34 respondents, whereas 10 said they were using more contemporary songs and 7 were using more traditional songs. Some remarked that it had been a good opportunity for learning new songs, others felt limited by what the musicians were able to produce. There were other comments here in favour of maintaining variety and balance.

Only one person mentioned that they had included members own compositions.

When asked about the future, 8 felt that it had 'changed for good', 20 thought they would go 'back to normal' but 25 were somewhere in the middle. This suggests that overall, most thought that they had learned things and developed new ways of worshipping which would continue in some form or another.



Comments here included:

*'Would be nice to keep some of the **creativity**'*

'very creative time, certain people have used their gifts in a new way and have been amazing at putting our online services together so well and creatively'

A significant number expressed a sense of hope that the improved online church presence would continue, and this was important for reaching people who cannot attend in person on a Sunday or who wished to catch-up later on in the week.

Most people seemed to be excited about the prospect of returning to 'live' worship, but one sounded a note of caution 'It might be difficult to recapture the mood and willingness for corporate singing as people have got out of the practice.'

Some respondents thought the shift in worship style was a positive thing that would continue, especially amongst those that had embraced a more contemporary musical worship style during lockdown. 'It needs to change. We need to get the young people involved somehow.'

Several respondents mentioned keeping an increased use of video in services, one mentioned how this helped with visual learning.

However, we should not ignore the significant number who thought things were more likely to revert to 'how it was before'.

There followed a more general question, inviting free comments. 15 respondents said they did join in with singing at home but 7 said they did not. 17 people mentioned that it had been 'hard work' to produce online content, and the technical demands were mentioned by 9. 22 respondents indicated that it had been a positive experience, but 12 people were negative about the experience. Positive comments included:

'A great opportunity to experiment musically and broaden our style'

'The team...have enjoyed learning new skills and we are still improving'

One especially gifted technical person said, *'I've loved it'*.

Other comments included:

'The ... word that comes to mind is 'incarnation'. So much of what the church is called to do and be is in the sharing of lives and being a body...We somehow need to embrace that new world and find patterns and prayers for a digital age and yet affirm our commitment to being present and attentive to one another and the rhythms of grace that flow out from that place.'

Another said:

'We need better teaching on worship. We need times of coming together and worshipping God that isn't about entertainment when this lockdown is over...our musical worship in our gatherings is vital for some members of church to connect with God.'

On the negative side, one musician who had been unable to participate in worship wrote:

'Personally, I have not been able to engage in worship at a heart level at all watching services online... I have found engaging in church services incredibly difficult, almost unbearable. I feel grief and disconnect from the church family and from God.'

Others mentioned a negative slide towards 'performance' and away from participatory worship.

*'Too much **performance** and lost the heart connection'*

Another said they had:

'Found it stressful to record things at home as feel like you are on show and people will hear the mistakes more and expect a more perfect musical experience despite people being just grateful to receive some worship at home. I have led worship for 30 years but found this much more challenging.'

After the survey was closed a detailed email was received from another contributor described as a 73 year old member of a large active Baptist church. He made the following points:

"Worship" in front of a computer screen is a poor relation to singing together in a full congregation. He makes the point that the digital experience leaves out many of the older generation, partly due to access to technology but especially because modern songs are suited to younger, higher-pitched voices. Mega-churches use songs similar to modern pop performances. This is OK up to a point, and he prays that God will use this to reach the younger generation, but for many 'all-age' congregations this is not appropriate, they are hard to sing and follow. This has led to a fall-off in attendance for some older members, which he terms 'digital fatigue'.

Conclusions

This survey was small and not fully representative of the denominational landscape of the church in the UK. Nevertheless it suggests that most churches have risen to the challenge to produce online worship services including sung worship. Some have found this to be a positive experience, others have found it hard work, or dispiriting for a number of reasons. While most people are looking forward to 'going back' to face to face worship, many accept that future church services will incorporate some of what has been learned from this time, including a continued online presence, and a good number could see positives in this.

As I collated the data from this survey, four key themes emerged from the comments which I believe are worth considering further. These are; variety, quality, performance and creativity. Online worship is not a new phenomenon.

Some churches have been streaming their services online long before the Coronavirus hit. In general this tended to be the larger more tech-savvy churches, perhaps with budgets to suit. Now, as many smaller churches seek to reach out to their local congregations online, there is a danger of comparing what we do with what they are doing. In my opinion this would be a mistake. Paying attention to the four aspects of variety, quality, performance and creativity can, on a practical level, help us to produce sung worship material which is attractive to our neighbours, builds up the faith of our congregations and strengthens our personal relationships with God himself, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So lets look at each of these four themes in turn.

Variety – I have a small bookshelf next to my piano with a series of well-used worship songbooks. At a conservative estimate there are well over 4000 different hymns and songs available on this shelf. But I haven't bought a physical hymn book for many years as I now use online sources for newer songs of which there are many thousands more available. It is a huge challenge for any worship leader to 'curate' such a vast resource. As we move to a 'new' way of worshipping (online) the temptation is to be drawn towards the numerous professionally produced videos of 'new' songs. I believe we risk overlooking a hugely valuable heritage if we don't make efforts to keep our worship varied, and many of our respondents seem to agree. Variety includes new and old songs, songs of praise and songs of lament, children's songs, songs of teaching, songs to encounter the presence of God (I believe the young people call this 'soaking'), but also perhaps our own locally written songs, maybe even being bold enough to include songs that might be of lower quality than others, it they truly express who we are. Which leads us to consider quality...

Quality – some churches have clearly relished the opportunity to produce content that they are rightly proud of to enable their congregations to worship. Others have felt inadequate, perhaps when compared to some of the professional glossy videos available online. But I wonder, does God use the same criteria when He hears our singing; is He in fact 'judging' our singing at all? As many respondents seemed to imply, what really matters is a genuine heart connection with the presence of God. A.W. Tozer wrote:

'True worship that is acceptable to God creates within the human heart a spirit of expectation and insatiable longing'⁷

Perhaps part of that longing is for the day when our worship is perfected. But the quality of musical performance should not be the main objective in worshipping. Tozer goes on to say:

'Worship is not some performance we do but a presence we experience'⁸

This brings us to our next keyword:

Performance – We all agree with Tozer that worship should not be about performance. However, I believe that in some churches the 'fear' of being seen to be 'performing' can stifle, indeed has stifled, the worship life of that church. I would say that 'performance' is actually quite rare in most of the churches I have visited, whereas only a few decades ago even most Baptist churches had choirs who would regularly sing FOR the congregation. In Cathedral worship it is still common for the congregation to only participate in a small percentage of the sung worship, the rest is performed by a choir. Recording and producing songs for online services presents a new dimension in all of this. Often our songs have been 'stitched together' from separate recordings made in individual homes on mobile phones. The solitary act of recording was therefore neither 'performance' nor 'corporate worship'. One hopes that at the time of recording, the singer or musician was 'worshipping' in their heart but this cannot be captured on film or MP3, and it's not the main objective anyway. The objective when recording is to produce a song that can *become* worship. We must allow that there is a technical aspect to producing songs in this way that involves editing, correcting, and shaping the song in order to 'get it right'.

Modern music production software is incredibly powerful, you can edit individual played or sung notes to correct the tuning and timing, and in this sense the 'performance' can potentially become highly polished. Most music producers are aware that over-polishing can in fact be as harmful to the overall song as a few human slips and wrong notes so there is always a balance to be

⁷ A.W. Tozer 'The Worship Driven Life', Lion Hudson 2008, p102

⁸ Ibid p183

struck. I have struggled to know how far to push this in the songs that I have produced during lockdown, but I tend towards viewing the production as a creative process of worship in itself; it seems right to me therefore to aim to produce 'something that's of worth' to quote Matt Redman⁹. Obsessive perfectionism is probably unhelpful, but removing obviously distracting errors is probably OK. Once again the principle to keep in mind is perhaps 'variety' – some of what we produce will be spontaneous, heart-felt 'warts and all', but sometimes it is right to spend a bit more time crafting something beautiful. The same applies to producing videos, there are numerous online sources of royalty-free images¹⁰ which can enhance our worship when used sensitively (and perhaps sparingly – too 'literal' an interpretation of a song can rob the viewer of the opportunity to participate imaginatively in creating their own worship). This leads us to consider our final keyword:

Creativity – Back in 1984 Grahame Kendrick wrote:

'God has given us creative abilities...he loves to receive from us offerings on which have been lavished loving care, time and attention to detail'¹¹

Recording and producing digital content for worship services may not be entirely new, but the pandemic has increased the quantity produced significantly, and we have discovered that this has provided a huge opportunity for creativity that we can embrace. The psalms repeatedly urge us to sing new songs, and in the age of the screen is it unreasonable to think that this exhortation extends to 'produce new videos'? Once again I would urge that this creativity should be rooted in the local congregation, by and for the people we are in communion with. It was disappointing that only one respondent mentioned using their own songs in worship, and only a few had used material from other local churches. Maybe next time we run out of suitable content ourselves, rather than searching the mega-churches for material to use we

⁹ From the Matt Redman song 'The Heart of Worship'

¹⁰ <https://unsplash.com/> or <https://www.pexels.com/> are two sites that I recommend. Be careful NOT to include images you've simply 'Googled' as you could be breaching copyright.

¹¹ Graham Kendrick 'Worship', Kingsway 1984 p127

might look to our neighbouring churches to share their songs which might just 'fit' our local context better?

The pandemic has been a time of great challenge for many, and in view of the appalling number of lives lost, grief experienced, hardship undergone and long-term illness resulting, the subject of singing feels almost inappropriate. Nevertheless, the biblical mandate to sing remains, and part of our witness to the world is that we are a people who don't just sing when we're winning. In a time of great suffering the church has found ways to keep singing and in putting this online we can invite many more to 'eavesdrop' our worship services and hear for themselves the gospel message of faith, hope and love.

In his book 'Virus as a Summons to Faith', Walter Brueggemann prays that we would embrace the new normal, and I will close with his prayer:

*'We want to return to the old normal that yield (for some) safety and happiness, but you dispatch us otherwise. Your new normal for us requires some adjustment by us. And adjust we will. We will live and trust and share differently. "All things new" is a huge stretch for us. But we know it is your good gift to us; with wistfulness, we receive it, we embrace it and we give thanks to you. Amen.'*¹²

Shifting Convictions: Women and Men's Equality and views from below.

Gale Richards

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¹² Walter Brueggemann 'Virus as a summons to faith', Cascade Books 2020 p60

Abstract

This paper considers how the convictions that shape differing views on women and men's equality, might be firstly better understood, and then secondly reformed. This is considered from a perspective of the Church needing to reorient its practices, to shift convictions, if it is truly to be good news to more women and girls.

1.1 Introduction: Women and men's equality under the microscope

Last year two sisters Nicole Smallman and Bibaa Henry were stabbed to death at a park in Wembley, London. Two police officers were subsequently suspended amid allegations they took selfies next to their dead bodies. Earlier this year, a police officer was charged with the murder of Sarah Everard in Clapham, London. These murders, together with the controversial policing of the vigil to mark Sarah Everard's death, have not only put British police under the microscope, but also the issue of women and men's equality.

The hashtag #ReclaimTheseStreets trended on social media as girls and women told of their everyday experiences of sexual harassment and discrimination. The Church should rightly be hearing these stories with horror and be asking how can it make a difference. The challenge however the Church has is that significant numbers of women and girls see the Church as the place where as one writer put it - 'Sexism and misogyny are explicitly woven into the dogma and traditions of all mainstream religions. God is personified as male and his representatives are male (Alba, 2019).'

How then can the future Church, as the Body of Christ, seek to truly be known as good news for more women and girls?

1.2 Christ laid the foundation for women and men's equality but how has it been weakened?

Two thousand plus years ago in a society where a woman's testimony was seen as lacking credibility, the Risen Christ chose to first reveal himself to women. In doing so, Christ made women's testimonies key to the telling of his resurrection story. Early in the 19th century African Methodist Episcopal preacher Jarena Lee

seized on this point, as she defended her right to preach in church as a woman, by declaring: "Did not Mary first preach the risen Savior (Lee, 1849)."

She is not the only one to see the Risen Christ's choice to first reveal himself to women, as another sign that the Church was to be built on the foundation of full equality between women and men. In reality however, the Church has found this principle of equality difficult to agree upon, and difficult to put into practice.

The Sophia Network's 'Minding the Gap' report in 2018 reflected on the experiences of more than 1,200 women surveyed on life within church communities in the UK and Ireland. This culminated in the Network encouraging churches to sign up to its 'Minding the Gap manifesto' – comprising eight commitments to make their church communities places of full equality between women and men. Notably two of those commitments were - 'calling out everyday sexism in our church wherever it takes place and challenge each other to do better;' and 'We will work hard to ensure that no woman in our congregation feels 'less than' just because she is a woman.'

In considering these two commitments, it has to be recognised that different Church traditions will hold different views on what constitutes sexism. The concept of complementarian views is of relevance here.

Allison-Glenny (2015) reflecting on the British Baptist context helpfully described congregations holding complementarian positions as having:

...the view that men and women are different to one another in a way that is essential to their biological sex, and these innate differences of man and woman are designed by God to complement the other sex and together reflect the 'imago Dei (Allison-Glenny, p. 7).

She continued to argue this principle can be used to determine hierarchy (i.e. men are designed to lead women). Alternatively, it can be used to frame an egalitarian understanding of men and women in ministry, whereby without the different gifts and styles of ministry that women bring, the Church cannot be seen as a full reflection of the imago Dei (Allison-Glenny, p. 8).

Whatever the differing views of Church traditions regarding the differences between women and men, in light of views held by individuals such as Alba (2019), the future Church urgently needs to consider the question; how can it truly be known as good news to more women and girls?

One of the high-profile areas where inequality has been experienced between women and men, and is thus worthy of attention is who the Church ordains, and how women and men who have been ordained have been treated differently.

In the British context, Congregationalists were the first to ordain women as ministers in 1917, Baptists followed in 1922, and Methodists and the Church of England not until the 1980s and 1990s, and there are still some Church traditions that have chosen not to ordain women. It is also apparent that opening the doors to the ordination of women in a Church tradition did not necessarily mean ordained women and men were treated equally. For example, it was only in 1975 that the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) put women and men on one singular accredited list for ministers, and offered women ministers the same benefits that men received. In the Church of England, it was not until 2014 that women were permitted to become bishops.

Furthermore, the timing of when different Church traditions adopted national policies of ordaining women did not necessarily correlate to a more equal treatment of women and men at grass roots level. Indeed, 2014 and 2018 statistics revealed that the BUGB despite being one of the earliest Church traditions to ordain women, had a consistent and exceptionally low number of women ministers in office in comparison to other Church traditions (Wood, 2014; BUGB, 2019, pp. 14-15). The British Baptist context accordingly serves as a particularly helpful source of reflection for this paper.

It is apparent from the research of Gouldbourne (1997, 2017), and Allison-Glenny (2015), that whilst national policies in the British Baptist context have articulated women and men's equality, the view from below, at grass roots level, suggests a conviction that women should not hold pastoral charge of a congregation, has persisted amongst Baptists.

Gouldbounne (1997) noted a history of women in British Baptist churches being categorised – women ‘whether by nature or socialization, are directed towards feeling, relationship and collaborative working, while men’s focus is more on action, thinking and competition (p. 32).’ This categorisation she argued was still shaping even contemporary discussions about Baptist ministry. Gouldbourne (2017) further articulated how historical records pertaining to the ministry of the deaconesses, showed their ministry had been accepted and affirmed by churches, precisely because deaconesses were categorised (even if this did not reflect reality) in ways that fitted the assumed role for women, namely:

‘...pastoral carers, they worked with the young people, they supported the ministers in the larger churches...and they were perceived as helpmates, not as ministers; that is, supplemental to (male, that is normal) ministry, complementing the gifts brought by the men and completing a function (Gouldbourne, 2017, p.67)’

Allison-Glenny (2015) analysed literature written from 1980 to 2015, that she regarded as the dominant narrative in the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) on women in ministry. This literature comprised documents arguing for women in ministry, from either a theological or a practical perspective, and had been commissioned or published by the BUGB, or written by British Baptist authors.

She argued that within these documents a language that men and women bring different gifts into ministry and lead in different ways, had perhaps limited the expressions of ministry that both women and men can bring. In the case of the BUGB between 1980 and 2015, she argued the vocation of women continued to be defined by their gender, which was intended to be positive, but in reality, continued to particularly limit women’s prospects in ministry (Allison-Glenny, p. 4).

Allison-Glenny’s reference to women’s prospects being limited, as supported by testimonies from women (BUGB, 2019, pp. 20–25) that some churches in the BUGB are unwilling to consider a woman having pastoral charge of their congregation, points to how some women and girls, might not feel the Church is good news for them.

The British Baptist experience also points to questions needing to be asked about the effectiveness of how Church traditions seek to convey their tradition's view of roles of women and men, and how at grass roots levels this might be being subverted.

The research into these issues to date in the British Baptist context at least, has not had a detailed focus on the images, symbols and stories, using the terminology of Conn (2006, p. 158) that act as the 'living carriers' for the convictions, held by people regarding women and men's equality. There has also perhaps been an underestimation of how deeply held some of these convictions are, and how they are woven into an individual's systematic understanding of the Christian faith.

"I will pray for your salvation!" That is one response a woman told me she had when announcing she was being considered for ordained Baptist ministry. It perhaps illustrates why the future Church needs to better understand, how someone arrives at a conviction that women and men are or are not to be regarded as equals, in church life and wider society. The future Church for the sake of God's mission will also need to consider how such a conviction might need to be reformed. For if women and girls cannot see how the Church, as the Body of Christ is good news to them, then how will they be convinced of the saving power of Christ?

The pursuit of answers to these questions around the forming and reforming of convictions needs to then consider the substance of convictions.

1.3 The substance and significance of convictions

A conviction according to McClendon and Smith (2002) can be said to be

'...a persistent belief...and it cannot be relinquished without making X a significantly different person (or community) than before (McClendon and Smith, 2002, p. 5).'

The process of arriving at one's convictions they in turn argue can be described as:

'...many choices made over a period of time, reinforcing one another, accumulating, developing in more and more definite directions until we find ourselves with a conviction set that we acknowledge as our own, as being the way of life, the outlook, that we have chosen (McClendon and Smith, 2002, p. 169).'

If McClendon and Smith's definition of a conviction is accepted, for individuals of a particular faith position, their convictions will be formed through their journeys of faith. A person's journey to faith (sometimes referred to as conversion) may also be relevant, in understanding a conviction if it is a long-held one, as is sometimes the case on the issue of women and men's equality. Consequently, both a person's journey to faith and journey of faith are of relevance, when considering how convictions are formed and might be reformed.

Different Church traditions have differing points of view, as to when someone can be regarded as a convert to Christianity (Smith, 2001, p. 80)

There is however some consensus that Christian conversion even when it appears to be sudden and dramatic, in reality is often less so. McClendon and Smith describe so-called dramatic conversions as, 'a symbolic concentration representing changes that either precede or succeed it, as well as the changes of the luminous moment itself (McClendon and Smith, 2002, p. 170).'

McClendon puts it this way:

'Conversions are not so much the introduction of new elements into the self as they are the rearrangement of elements already present, the shifting of the center of gravity; for the 'new' elements were present before the conversion, and the 'old' elements are still present after (McClendon, 2002, p. 32).'

A cross-section of the research on the stages of faith development draws its inspiration from the significance of developmental structures that are a feature of the work of Fowler (1980) and (1981). His work explores the concept of faith development being dependent on the meaning individuals prescribe to the twists and turns in the different stages of life they go through.

Conn (2006) considers a range of different understandings of developmental stages of life, and suggests the meaning attached to the twists and turns of different stages of life can impact a person in a range of ways, from moral, to cognitive, to affective, and religious. Further, he argues the impact in these different areas may also not necessarily be felt all at the same time (Conn, 2006, p. 27).

Following on from Conn's analysis, it would seem that any new meanings attached to a developmental stage of life, have the potential to shape or reshape a person's convictions. A person's collective convictions in turn inform what a person feels they can and cannot do in all good conscience, such as support or not notions of women and men's equality.

It is therefore the images, symbols and stories that act as the 'living carriers' for the convictions of people with different views on women and men's equality, in the different Church traditions, that need to be better understood.

1.4 Life-story accounts can reveal the images, symbols and stories that underpin convictions

McClendon (2002) offers some helpful insight into what types of 'images, symbols, and stories,' might potentially shape the convictions of Christian faith lives. He does this through examining what he terms the 'dominant images' in the lives of striking historical Christian figures (McClendon, 2002, p. 73).

McClendon builds on the work of Austin M Farrer on dominant images that suggested that primary revelation is in Jesus Christ himself. Further, this revelation is found in the dominant images of the Kingdom of God; the Son of Man; Israel and Sacrifice. McClendon also saw these images as evident in Jesus' teaching and actions, as well as in the way Jesus' teaching and actions interpret each other, and also in the events of Jesus' death and resurrection. Additionally, this revelation in Jesus is extended to the comments the apostles made through the power of the Holy Spirit, on these dominant images, as evident in Christ's life, death and resurrection (McClendon, 2002, p. 73-74).

McClendon (2002) argued that these dominant images were central to the writers of the New Testament and therefore central to the right reading of it,

and should therefore be central to the actual lives of people of that continuing Christian faith. McClendon did however recognise that Christians additionally draw on images from outside of Scripture (McClendon, 2002, pp.73,75).

McClendon (2002) then focused on picking out the dominant images in the life-stories of striking figures that grasped the person's central vision, which they applied to their theological concerns. In analysing Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s life-story, he identified the dominant image of Israel being used as an incisive metaphor (e.g. his use of terms of Pharaohs of the South in his day, and his use of the term 'I've been to the mountaintop' like Moses had been). He also identified the dominant image of Israel as emerging in part out of King's experiences of growing up in the Black religion of the Southern church, where he heard songs as a boy, such as 'There is a Balm in Gilead (McClendon, 2002, pp.64-65).'

McClendon and Smith (2002) also discuss others such as McFague (1982) who have also written about the potential impact of metaphors in church life on congregational members. McFague was one of the early writers on the potential impact of inappropriately dominant masculine gender models and metaphors representing God in a way that sponsors sexism and male domination in the Christian church (McClendon and Smith, 2002, p. 44).

If Conn, McClendon and McFague are right that images, symbols and stories play a key role in forming people's convictions, how then might someone reform such convictions.

1.5 How might convictions be reformed?

Is it as individuals like McFague (1982) have suggested about congregational members need to discover other feminine or gender-free models of God as metaphors in Christian tradition? That would appear to be too simplistic.

Conn (2006) more persuasively saw parallels to how a person changes their stance on a conviction with Paulo Friere's concept of 'conscientization.' An approach that suggests the process of reforming a conviction would need to involve a person becoming conscious of and questioning the 'living carriers'

(i.e. images, symbols and stories), which frame what they can or cannot agree with or do in all good conscience (Conn, 2006, p. 155).

McClendon and Smith (2002) offered practical methods as to how shifts in convictions might be possible. They suggested convictions might be relinquished through the use of three different methods; persuasive definition, parable/paradox, and interconvictional encounters (McClendon and Smith, 2002, p. 163).

The use of a method of a more persuasive definition, if applied to the issue women in ministry, might for example include constructing a definition of ministry for women, which restricts the functions they are permitted to perform in comparison to men in ministry.

The use of a method of parable/paradox to bring new insight if applied to the issue of women in ministry, might for example include a scenario of there being a want of men during war time, no ministry can take place unless women are permitted to minister.

If a method of interconvictional encounter were applied to the issue of women in ministry, it might for example involve someone that does not believe in women in ministry having to sit under the ministry of a woman minister.

All three methods suggested by McClendon and Smith seem to have the potential for reformation or revision of a conviction, or indeed a reorientation that it so radical it is akin to a new conversion.

In considering utilising concepts of 'conscientization,' persuasive definition, paradox/parable, and interconvictional encounter, if an understanding of faith development as being a gradual process is taken seriously, then there is arguably a need to consider the place of life-story accounts. For this will potentially be an important aid in establishing what the 'living carriers' (images, symbols and stories) and dominant images of the revelation of Christ (such as Kingdom of God, Son of Man, Israel and sacrifice) are for individuals, on the issue of women and men's equality, and when and how they were formed, and therefore might be reformed.

Further potential for convictions to be reformed might be found through McClendon's work on exploring the life-stories of striking Christian historical figures. McClendon (2002) argued:

'...there appears from time to time singular or striking lives, the lives of persons who embody the conviction of the community, but in a new way; who share the vision of the community, but with new scope or power; who exhibit the style of the community, but with significant differences. It is plain that the example of these lives may serve to disclose and perhaps correct or enlarge the community's moral vision, at the same time arousing impotent wills within the community to a better fulfilment of the vision already acquired. But the same example may serve also to stir up other convictions of the community – its understanding of God, its doctrine of human nature, its appreciation of the earth and all that is in it. These convictions, too, may be negated or enlarged, altered or reinforced, by the lives of such significant persons. Such lives, by their very attractiveness or beauty, may serve as data for a Christian thinker... (McClendon, 2002, p. 22).'

McClendon (2002) through studying the life of Martin Luther King Jr. argued that King's life showed, in those days the need for the doctrine of atonement 'to give room for a broader human scope than Christians had generally allowed, breaking down the lines of creed, tribe, races, caste and class (McClendon, 2002, p. 82).'

Such inspirational lives point once again to the potential scope for using life-story accounts for reforming convictions, but are there any potential limitations to them?

For the purposes of this paper, the term life-story account is being used to describe a narrative of lived experiences. The term narrative is being used to describe in the words of Bold (2012) 'the act of telling the set of events of human lives, which may take the form of a story or other forms (Bold, 2012, p. 15-16).'

Narratives can indeed be a useful tool in understanding how people make sense of the world and issues, but such narratives are not without their potential pitfalls.

The process of telling these sets of events of human lives has a number of potential variants to it. The narrator may recall or see the events in their life differently over time because of fading memories or re-evaluation of them. The context in which the narrator tells the events may affect what they recall or feel able or willing to tell. This might be because of whom they are telling the events to, or the place in which they are telling the events, or even because of the events that will proceed or have preceded the moment they are to tell of the events. All variables such as these needs to be taken into account.

The narrator might need help in recalling and structuring the narrative, such as being asked questions to help them explore their journey to a Christian faith and of Christian faith, to uncover their 'living carriers' (images, symbols and stories), and dominant images (Kingdom of God, Son of man, Israel and sacrifice) that underpin individuals' convictions (e.g. on the different sides of the debate on the issue of women in ministry). This is because the nature of convictions is such that they are often more unconsciously lived out (i.e. become gut reactions) as opposed to for example principles, which are often more consciously formed (McClendon, 2002, p. 163).

There is also a body of feminist writing that suggests participatory research methods (e.g. semi-structured interviews) might help women articulate how they make sense of and navigate the contexts they live in that are dominated by men (Slee, 2018, pp. 5-6).

If the aforementioned potential limitations of life-story accounts can be mitigated, then there is potential for obtaining greater clarity on how the convictions on different views on women and men's equality are formed, and might potentially be reformed.

This reformation might potentially come through the use of appropriate persuasive definitions, paradox/parables, interconvictional encounters. It might take the form of revised understandings of the doctrine of creation, with reference to understandings of womanhood and manhood. It might take the

form of revised understandings of soteriology, with reference to what 'self-fulfilment, self-sacrifice and self-transcendence' have to do with living in right relationship with God, as a convert to the Christian faith (Conn, 2006, pp. 19-20, p. 23).

Could the reality be that the convictions of girls and boys, women and men are underpinned by 'living carriers' (images, symbols and stories) and 'dominant images' (Kingdom of God, Son of Man, Israel and sacrifice) formed in Christian communities, that promote a self-fulfilment understanding of living in right relationship with God for men, and a self-sacrifice understanding of living in right relationship with God for women? Consequently, might it be difficult to reconcile the idea of God wanting a woman to hold pastoral charge of a congregation, with living an expected self-sacrificing life that enables men to achieve self-fulfilment. Might a life-story account approach to research shed some light on this?

Even if more were known about the substance of the convictions on women's and men's equality, there is still the 'small' matter of actually getting people with differing views to listen to each other. For it is through a willingness to listen and understand, that the required dialogue can take place that might lead to the reform of convictions

Jennings' (2020) reflections on the state of theological education might be helpful here, in understanding how this kind of genuine listening might take place. He suggests that:

'...the deepest struggle for all is a struggle for communion...we belong to each other, we belong together...Western education (and theological education) as it now exists works against a pedagogy of belonging (Jennings, 2020, p. 16-17).'

Jennings (2020) then uses the image of the crowd found in Mark 5:24b and Luke 5:1 as central to his argument that the Church (and theological education) should have belonging at the heart of it:

'It is the crowd – people who would not under normal circumstances ever want to be near each other...now listening to the words of Jesus.

Yet the crowd is not Christian, nor is the crowd exclusively Jewish...The crowd is the beginning of joining that was intended to do deep pedagogical work (Jennings, 2020, p. 18-20).'

If Jennings' reflections are applied to church life, it could be argued that where a sense of belonging to each other, and belonging together is evident in church life, then the genuine listening and dialogue needed, between people with different views on women and men's equality, should be possible.

Jennings (2020) argues that the daily operations of an educational institution need to be reshaped towards a new vision of edification that 'builds people towards each other not an isolating self-sufficiency (Jennings, 2020, p. 102).'

It could be similarly argued that the practices of the Church need to be urgently reshaped to facilitate genuine listening to each other, and dialoguing on critical issues such as women and men's equality.

1.6 Conclusion: Church practices must cultivate genuine listening and dialogue to shift convictions

To conclude, the Church as the Body of Christ by its very nature should be made up of members who share a connectedness. Church practices should therefore be cultivating a kind of connectedness in Church members, that orients them to a genuine listening to one another, and dialoguing with one another, not as an optional extra, but as core to being a member of the Body of Christ.

If Church practices are not cultivating that kind of connectedness, then perhaps they need to change. It is that kind of connectedness that will allow more of the Body of the Christ to engage in the genuine listening, that hears the experiences of women in churches (picked up in reports like 'Minding the Gap' in 2018), where they have been made to feel as though they are of less value than men, because they are women.

It is that kind of connectedness that will enable the required dialogue to take place about how the Risen Christ, who chose to first reveal himself to women, would firstly want no woman to feel of less value than a man, and secondly insist on a plan of action to rectify this.

It is that kind of dialogue that might help shift the convictions underpinning the differing views on women and men's equality. Such shifting convictions might just enable the Church to provide the wider world with a more accurate picture, of what the kingdom of God is like. Then maybe, just maybe, the future Church might truly be seen as good news for more women and girls.

Notes

The 8 commitments of the *Minding the Gap Manifesto*, 2018

- We believe that women, as well as men, have inherent value and dignity because they are made in the image of God.
- We will call out everyday sexism in our church wherever it takes place and challenge each other to do better.
- We will work hard to ensure that no woman in our congregation feels 'less than' just because she is a woman.
- We will strive for fair representation of both men and women preaching God's word in our pulpit.
- We will tell stories of the female heroes of the faith – Bible characters, theologians and church leaders – to provide our congregation with a holistic picture of the kingdom of God.
- We will encourage women in our church to step up into positions of leadership.
- We will be intentional about putting in place training, equipping and mentoring for those women who feel called to lead in our church.
- We will commit to championing the fully equality of men and women working together for the sake of the gospel.

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The Reality of God

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THEORIES OF DIVINE COSMIC IMPULSE

During my lifetime, denial of the existence of God was countered by what have become two non-Christian traditions: the pantheism of Alfred North Whitehead and the ancient Greek concept of non-personal Being as the substratum of all existing things expressed, for example, by Martin Heidegger.

ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD

For Whitehead, reality consists of an organized system of what he designates actual entities or actual occasions which, he says, are subjects or selves -- they are *"the final real things of which the world is made up"* (Process and Reality. New York: Social Science Gook Store, 1941, p. 27). There are also what he calls "eternal objects" which are the ideals, values, or abstract ideas of objects which are realized by the actual entities. He defines an eternal object as any entity whose conceptual recognition does not involve a necessary reference to any definite actual entities of the temporal world (p.70).

As subjects or selves, actual entities experience data or materials drawn from other actual entities at their demise by means of a process of prehension or feeling (p.35). The prehension of an eternal object he calls a conceptual prehension and constitutes the mental pole of an actual entity; whereas, the prehension of the concrete data of another actual entity is known as a physical prehension and constitutes the physical pole of the actual entity.

As guiding ideals the eternal objects govern the selection and absorption of a datum. Thus guided, the actual entity may prehend a datum positively or negatively (reject it) in accordance with a subjective aim that it has fashioned for itself from its prehension of particular eternal objects. This subjective aim is the ideal which the actual entity has selected for itself from the world of eternal

objects. It is a *causa sui* in this process. Its choice will determine its own nature, development, and character at the point of satisfaction. All actual entities endure for a finite period and at their death they give out concrete data for ingress by and into other actual entities.

However, there is an important difference between the being of God as an actual entity and other actual entities Whitehead says.

While it is in their passing away that actual entities provide concrete data for prehension by other actual entities, God abides. He does not pass away. As the store of values he provides from himself data for prehension by other actual entities. This aspect of God's nature in virtue of which He provides data for others is called by Whitehead God's Superject Nature. But, God also has a conceptual and a physical pole like other actual entities, which Whitehead calls the primordial and consequent natures of God (p. 521, 523).

Viewed as *primordial*, God is the unlimited conceptual realization of the absolute wealth of potentiality; He is the lure for feeling, the eternal urge of desire. That is, in His primordial nature God provides in Himself the order or arrangement of eternal objects as ideal possibilities for prehension by actual entities. God arranges the eternal objects in ideal patterns and he desires that they be received by actual entities to perfect their possibilities; but He does not coerce, He persuades.

God's *consequent* nature is his prehension physically of the concrete data of the evolving universe. Implied is that God is immanent and is continually developing. This is a core feature of the 'finite God theory.' Because of creative advance in the universe, the consequent nature of God is not complete (p.523-524).

Important for our use here is: (1) the concept of teleological, valuing, free, actual entities; (2) the eternal objects as objects of value to actual entities; (3) the fact that God conserves the eternal objects in the arrangement of ideal possibilities for actual entities in himself; and (4) that God acts not coercively but persuasively.

This is where Christ as the eternal ideal fits into Whitehead's system: the life of Christ is not an exhibition of over-ruling power. Its glory is for those who can discern it, and not for the world. Its power lies in its absence of force. It has the decisiveness of a supreme ideal, and that is why the history of the world divides at this point of time (Religion in the Making. New York: Macmillan Co., 1930, p.56-57).

While he places Christ at the apex of human development incorporating the eternal divine ideals, Whitehead's view is not based on the traditional Trinitarian and Incarnationist teaching of the New Testament. It is a highly original, divinity-concept inspired metaphysics which incorporates the realities of order, goodness, life-giving, and change in our world.

MARTIN HEIDEGGER

Heidegger developed a metaphysics of Being, first identified by Parmenides, followed by Aristotle. Parmenides' noteworthy lines are: *that which can be spoken and thought is ... For it is the same thing that can be thought and that can be.*

One's sense of the fundamental reality Being can be recovered by humans, but authentically only socially -- for Heidegger, within nationhood.

In his famous book Being and Time (1927) Heidegger argued that particular human reality (*Dasein; there-being, that-being, human entity, mode of human being, way of human life in community*) is buried in the inauthenticity of ordinary existence destined to die, which generates anxiety about one's own existence and purpose in life – existence (*Dasein*) thrown into the world. But his purpose was to transcend metaphysical abstraction. One can recover the sense of authenticity in this life through awareness of the source of all things, the mystery of *Being* – apparently a difference between beings (the way of existence of entities, individual things, creatures) and the veiled ontic Being (the Being of all beings, of an object, of a man, etc.) – the fountain of the spiritual core of all things -- that which makes beings intelligible as beings. For humans, this pursuit of authenticity entails one's awareness of one's own existence and the prospect of ceasing to exist (death) as primary concern. Apparently to be summed up as: recognition and acknowledgement of

finitude. Only humans can be open to and know what it means to be -- not as an isolated individual, but in the world each always shares with others, within idealized nationhood. This aspect points to his acceptance of Nazi National Socialism, the theory of the German people (*die Volk*) and their culture comprising a metaphysical reality, which was their spiritual mission to acknowledge and disseminate.

There was no ambiguity about this in his Rectoral Address in 1933 when he assumed leadership of Freiburg University following which he quickly became a member of the Nazi party. Most students of Heidegger regard this as deeply disturbing. His role as Rector lasted barely ten months when he resigned, refusing to implement some Nazi policies regarding academic personnel. It may well be that he regarded the Rectorship at Freiburg as the step to becoming, in effect, "spiritual" leader within National Socialism of the entire German higher-education system.

Fundamentally, his philosophy aspired to German ascendancy. That was his definition of a university's purpose, defined as *spiritual* leadership. I cite some scattered phrases:

Do we know about this spiritual mission ... rooted in the essence of the German university? Does this essence have genuine strength to shape our existence [*Dasein*]? ... Only if we fundamentally will this essence ... essence of the German university is the will to science as will to the historical spiritual mission of the German people as a people that knows itself in its state [*Staat*]. Together, science and German destiny must come to power in the will to essence ... The three bonds – by the people, to the destiny of the state, in spiritual mission – are equally primordial to the German essence.

Though he sought to ameliorate these sentiments after World War II, they remain as an expression of what Being is in the spiritual mission of a militarily and culturally dominant nation.

Thus God becomes the creating reality Being in human beings, not as an add-on, but as the core of what it means to be truly human and possibility seeking. Divinity is expressed in humanity. In his 1946 *Letter on Humanism* he wrote:

But the essence of man lies in the fact that he is more than merely a man, insofar as this is conceived of as the rational living thing. Here "more" must not be understood as <meaning something> added on, as if the traditional definition of man were to remain its fundamental determination and then experience an augmentation merely by the addition of something existential. The "more" means more original and thereby more essential in essence. But here something mysterious appears: man is in imminence. That is to say, as the existing counterpart of being, man is that much more than the animal rationale than he is less so in relationship to man understood in terms of subjectivity. Man is not lord over being. Man is the tender of being. Man loses nothing by this "less," but rather he gains, since he gets to the truth of being. His gain in this is the essential neediness of the tender, the dignity of whom is to be called on by being itself in the observance of its truth. This call comes as the utterance from which the givenness of man derives. In his ontohistorical essence, man is the being, whose being as existence is such that it lives in intimacy with being]. Man is next to being. (Translated by Miles Groth.)

RECENT ATHEISM

Recent popular atheists, like their ancient and modern predecessors, have been dismissive of any form of theism, including any form of pantheism such as Whitehead's, or the philosophical obscurity of a doctrine of Being such as advanced by Heidegger, which contemporary linguistic analysts would call utter nonsense.

JOHN GRAY

The views of recent atheists are no less difficult to untangle than the religions, especially Christian faith, they despise. In 2018 the British Philosopher John Gray, himself an atheist though contrarian, published a book titled Seven Types of Atheism. Of the seven he regards five as dogmatic and tiresome, though they are popular in modern secular culture. The final two he regards as more positive forms of atheism.

A brief summary of Gray's analysis:

First, the New Atheism of recent years is represented by the philosophies of Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett. Their views are primarily that in our modern scientific age religion is obsolete – we must outgrow the notion of God. They substitute humanity for God. Gray says that their views are tiresome Victorian era re-plays of the petty quarrels between science and religion. Gray insists that the significance of religion is not the claim to truth as primitive science but of meaning, such as the myths of the Genesis creation narrative -- that the true significance of religious beliefs is that they give a sense of meaning to life. Gray is simply dismissive of the New Atheists.

Second, Secular Humanism, defined as humans employing intelligence, skills and energy to ameliorate suffering and achieve shared goals, arriving at a sustainable earthly kingdom. This view is quasi-religious. It is akin to the Post-Millennial view of many Christians early in the twentieth century who sought to bring in the Kingdom of God. Humankind are the divine agents on earth seeking redemption, cures for our diseases, a better economic future for all, and conservation of the world God has given us. This is a secularized Christian vision of an earthly kingdom -- that a better humanly created future is possible. But Gray asks, are we better now than humanity ever has been? And adds, nothing guarantees a better future.

Third, Faith in Science as the ground of our being and the foundation of any action human beings take. Gray argues that this has become a pseudo-scientific perspective, supplanting the place of the transcendent, the non-empirical and eternity. It has become science elevated to a religion on grounds that are purely secular, natural cause-effect of everything that is, including human life, human welfare, and future. With the development of high grade technology, transhumanism has emerged, calling for the encoding of what human life is all about and projecting the data into cyberspace to achieve a form of immortality. Thus the possibility of the formation of a new transhuman species.

Fourth, Politics as a Religion. Most would define Gray's concept here as political ideology. Nevertheless, Gray points to the life-encompassing, religion-like ideologies such as Marxism, Leninism, Nazism, and Maoism, which encompassed vast segments of humanity with passion that outpaced religious

fervor. Lenin's communist revolution touted itself as the end of religion (i.e., Russian Orthodoxy) and the end of history. To this can be added some contemporary progressives, socialists and, especially, terrorists.

Fifth, God-haters. These, like Christopher Hitchens, contend that religion is contrary to nature and embraces contradictions, both as to the nature of the divine attributes and as to devotee outcomes. It's irrational, some say, that a sufferer and torturer should end up reconciled, in the same heaven.

Christopher Hitchens' brother Peter Hitchens, himself a former atheist who converted to Christian faith, said on Christopher's death: Death is the great reminder that this life is limited, and that it may not be the end. For most of our lives, we behave as if this is not so. It is only when death touches those close to us that we are forced into this understanding, especially in a modern world where death is kept at a distance, ignored, undiscussed, and shuffled off into corners.

Carneades is regarded by some as the father of logical atheism – that the concept of God is self-contradictory. He was the first philosopher in history to mount a disproof of God based on incompatibilities within the divine attributes. Here is a passage regarding God's virtues, attributed to Carneades, cited by David Sedley:

If the divine exists, it is certainly also a living being. If it is a living being, it is certainly both completely virtuous and happy (and happiness is impossible without virtue). If it is completely virtuous, it also has all the virtues. But it is not the case that, while it has all the virtues, it does not have self-control (*enkrateia*) and endurance (*karteria*). And it is not the case that, while it has these virtues, there are not some things that are hard for god to abstain from and hard for him to endure. For self-control is an insuperable disposition for things done in accordance with right reason, or a virtue which places us above the things thought to be hard to abstain from. For self-controlled behaviour, they say, is not that of one who abstains from an old woman on the brink of death, but that of one who is able to enjoy Lais or Phryne or some woman like them, but then abstains from doing so. And endurance is

knowledge of things to be borne and not to be borne, or a virtue which places us above the things thought to be hard to bear. For the person who uses endurance is he who is being cut and burnt but then endures it, not he who is drinking honeyed wine. Therefore there will be some things that are hard for god to bear and hard for him to abstain from. For unless there are, he will not possess these virtues, namely self-control and endurance. And if he does not possess these virtues, since there is nothing between virtue and vice, he will have the vices opposed to these virtues, softness and lack of control. For just as one who does not have health has sickness, so too one who does not have self-control and endurance is in the opposite states, namely vices, which is an absurd thing to say about god. And if there are some things that are hard for god to abstain from and hard for him to bear, there are some things that also change him for the worse and produce disturbance in him. But if that is so, god is susceptible to disturbance and to change for the worse, and hence also to destruction. So if god exists, he is destructible. But not the second, therefore not the first.

http://repository.edulll.gr/edulll/bitstream/10795/3526/2/3526_Sedley.pdf

Sixth, No-progress Atheism. On this premise the universe is irrational. It would be better if the world had not been created. In modern times this view springs from rejection of naïve beliefs generated by the Enlightenment, that we can all be changed for the better. There is no telos (end-in-view), no purpose to the existence and functioning of the universe, no meaning or purpose to life, no objective values. It all just is. We must be quietly realistic, meaning fatalistic. The name of the game is need-satisfaction – that is, follow Epicurus' and Lucretius' dictum: seek one's own good and satisfaction. No need to disturb one's equilibrium by asking the big questions about life, purpose, and the future: *when we are here death is not; when death is here we are not*. No-progress atheists tend to be tolerant of respectable religious people, regarding their faith as a natural part of human experience as they struggle to make sense of their pilgrimage through the passage of time.

Seventh, Mystical Atheism. This is the atheism of silence, an overwhelming sense of the ineffable, of the transcendent, while at the mundane level life

consists of drift, without purpose. However, it might be, they say, that a panentheistic Force pervades the world, or that the universe expresses the divine in the harmony of all that exists (God or Nature; *Natura naturans*), as the philosopher Baruch Spinoza and the physicist Albert Einstein thought. We just don't know. It is all beyond human conception.

Gray favors some form of the final two. He disdains the purely secular, materialist perspective, but remains an atheist, one that simply can't get himself to go to church. There is a spiritual reality to life which is best witnessed in the way we treat one another. Thus Gray is atheist and a skeptic when it comes to utopianism, whether religious or secular, but is deeply concerned that we reflect on the messages of the Old Testament prophets and Jesus to help the sick, provide for widows and orphans and the poor, relieve the oppressed, else humans have little prospect of a worthwhile future.

Secular humanism combined with dogmatic materialism is, for Gray a secular reiteration of the religious attitudes they despise. He is left with the feeling that there is more within himself and out there in this mysterious universe than matter in motion. He has turned to transcendence without being able to tell himself or us what it is.

Beyond Gray's conjectures and generalizations, consider some well-known people who have been atheist in outlook, either reluctantly, or as an act of resignation, or from deep-seated anger that life and the world are the way they are.

BERTAND RUSSELL

Bertrand Russell, 1872-1970, became a guru to non-believers beginning early in the 20th century until his death in 1970, followed by influence through published books and articles. Along with Alfred North Whitehead on the philosophy of mathematics, and G. E. Moore on rejection of Philosophical Idealism, he became famous as one of the founders of the Analytic School of Logic in England, for nurturing Wittgenstein at Cambridge, and for his frequent comments and articles on social, ethical, and political questions. As well, for his strident anti-Christian comments on death, life after death.

He described himself as an agnostic (I don't know!) when addressing a philosophic conference since no conclusive proof for the non-existence of God has been formulated, but as an Atheist to the man in the street. He maintained that religion is nothing more than superstition and for the most part harmful to people. He declared that where there is evidence, there is no need for faith, which is a substitute for evidence.

Nevertheless, without the kinds of proof he demanded, he inconsistently valued non-empirical, impalpable things as crucial to well-being in life. Of the three passions of his life: longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind, love and pity are not amenable to any form of proof. Beyond all he had achieved, he said the truly important things are not material nor fame, but friendships, trust, confidence, empathy, mercy, love and faith. In Western societies these (notably love) have been held fundamentally as key Christian virtues. He wrote that to fear love is to fear life, and that the good life is inspired by love.

In his passionate search for love he married four times, which included many affairs. The first three marriages ending disastrously. Sordid affairs that betrayed the true meaning of love became legendary. He suddenly decided he did not love his first wife Alys Pearsal Smith, an American Quaker, but continued in the hollowness of the marriage for years.

Russell's life reflects a widely-held perverse belief that intellectual and artistically creative persons are exempted from basic morality in their treatment of a spouse because of their contributions in other areas is so great. As a friend of mine said of this, himself a theologian, "Not for me".

STEVE JOBS

During 2011 Steve Jobs, the legendary co-founder of Apple Computer, was in the last stages of his life, suffering from pancreatic cancer. He had wanted to change the world. But the end was at hand following seven years of, often, painful surgery including a liver transplant. Experimental medication and procedures had often been long, painful and inconclusive. As colleagues and senior staff visited him during those final weeks they found that he was more interested in talking about the afterlife than software innovation. He had big

questions. What happens when we die? During his teens he shifted away from traditional Christianity.

He was born in 1955 in San Francisco. His twenty-three year old unmarried mother Joanne became pregnant with him by her boyfriend Abdul in Wisconsin where they were both students. Her German parents insisted that she break up with her Muslim boyfriend. Joanne returned to San Francisco to be cared for by an obstetrician who helped unwed mothers and counselled them about adoption. Joanne decided give up her baby for adoption.

Paul and Clara Jobs had been in touch with the obstetrician about adopting a baby. They were loving adoptive parents. Clara taught Steve to read before he started kindergarten. Their area was populated by high-tech people. Often Paul and Clara would invite one of them to talk about their tech innovations, or they would visit an engineer's home, with Steve listening. It was during those sessions that Steve saw his first desk-top computer in the home of one of the engineers. He fell in love with technology.

In his young adulthood he had travelled to India in search of some transcendental reality or ideal. Now, at age fifty-six, world renowned, near death, he recalled his life, recognizing that all the fame and wealth he had treasured so much paled into insignificance in the face of his own death.

In his last essay Steve Jobs wrote,

I reached the pinnacle of success in the business world. In some others' eyes, my life is the epitome of success. However, aside from work, I have little joy. In the end, my wealth is only a fact of life that I am accustomed to. At this moment, lying on my bed and recalling my life, I realize that all the recognition and wealth that I took so much pride in have paled and become meaningless in the face of my death.

You can employ someone to drive the car for you, make money for you but you cannot have someone bear your sickness for you. Material things lost can be found or replaced. But there is one thing that can never be found when it's lost -- Life. Whichever stage in life you are in right now, with time, you will face the day when the curtain comes down. Treasure

love for your family, love for your spouse, love for your friends. Treat yourself well and cherish others.

As we grow older, and hopefully wiser, we realize that a \$300 or a \$30 watch both tell the same time. You will realize that your true inner happiness does not come from the material things of this world. Whether you fly first class or economy, if the plane goes down -- you go down with it.

Therefore, I hope you realize, when you have mates, buddies and old friends, brothers and sisters, who you chat with, laugh with, talk with, have sing songs with, talk about north-south-east-west or heaven and earth, that is true happiness! Don't educate your children to be rich. Educate them to be happy. So when they grow up they will know the value of things and not the price. Eat your food as your medicine, otherwise you have to eat medicine as your food.

The One who loves you will never leave you for another because, even if there are 100 reasons to give up, he or she will find a reason to hold on. There is a big difference between a human being and being human. Only a few really understand it. You are loved when you are born. You will be loved when you die. In between, you have to manage!

The six best doctors in the world are - sunlight, rest, exercise, diet, self-confidence and friends.

Maintain them in all stages and enjoy a healthy life!!

Steve Jobs, The World's Six Best Doctors:

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/worlds-six-best-doctors-steve-jobs-patrick-guan>

Those words compel soul-searching. They are plaintive, longing, questioning, and fearful. Is there more to say by any other human being?

THOMAS NAGEL

Thomas Nagel was an atheist, in my view dedicated to atheism but somehow wishing there was more to say than he had the power to say alongside his

trenchant criticisms of philosophical materialism. He was a notable critic of those who in our time reduce mind to the physical functioning of brain.

He argued that consciousness is non-physical reality, extending from but different from the early biological processes from which it emerged and essential to the unfolding universe. It was a huge shift – as an alternative to a religious miracle – toward a natural teleology, either as an improbable fluke or (what he rejects) a divine intervention of the natural order. This shift ended up creating a structure that enabled choosing a path to the future, a structure comprised of consciousness, knowledge and the power of choice.

The great cognitive shift is an expansion of consciousness from the perspectival form contained in the lives of particular creatures to an objective, world-encompassing form that exists both individually and intersubjectively. ... Each of our lives is a part of the lengthy process of the universe gradually waking up and becoming aware of itself.

Despite this non-material reality, he eschews religious commitment, not merely because of evils perpetrated by religious establishments, nor their frequent acceptance of superstition. Rather, deep down within himself he wants atheism to be true. In his book he writes:

I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that." *The Last Word, 1977*

But he doesn't know what to do with people he knows who are very intelligent and well-informed and, as well, are Christians.

He falls back on teleology; that in the universe there is a teleological bias yielding possibilities that the natural process can exploit (which sounds very much like Alfred North Whitehead's metaphysics):

Teleology means that in addition to physical laws of the familiar kind, there are other laws of nature that are "biased toward the marvellous".

Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False*

In this book he castigates modern psycho-physicalist scientific jargon. The conclusions we reach in a few years cannot now be predicted, he says, but whatever direction science and philosophy take, the materialist form of explanation will come to be seen as dead ends. The world is ready for "replacement" he says – this is where, for me, the key to progress of knowledge is falsification of current paradigms that distort the significance of the data we think we are interpreting correctly, as Karl Popper argued years ago.

Nagel is left with speculating that a proper world picture entails acceptance of a modest form of transcendence, teleologically oriented. Thus the universe is governed in more than one way; that is, more than by material cause-effect relationships. For some form of teleology to be the case, naturalism is inadequate, and theism fails to take sufficient account of what our consciousness and abilities amount to.

In the end? *Even if life as a whole is meaningless, perhaps that's nothing to worry about ... Do we fall back on absurdity, as one of the most human things about us?... Or finally and tragically, I should not really object to dying were it not followed by death.*

Horror of death. Mummified body of a woman.
Amazon region, Chachapoyas tribe; c.1400 A.D.



WHAT CAN A CHRISTIAN SAY?

What can a Christian say regarding belief in God? I turn to the Apostle Paul and the philosopher Anselm: fundamentally the issue is, acknowledge God in light of the immediacy of his presence and the collectedness of mind to discern that presence.

But before that, in the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible, the most direct comments about disbelief in God are framed as satire and in rhetorical questions.

The following translations cited from the Psalms are by Robert Alter in his splendid three-volume commentary *The Hebrew Bible* (2019).

In *Psalms* 2 unbelief is satirized as mindless vanity, in particular of rulers who set themselves up as gods, to which the divine response is, *He Who dwells in the heavens will laugh, the Master derides them*. And, the form of address in Psalm 14 is a verbal stiletto, *The scoundrel has said in his heart, "There is no God"*; though I prefer the King James translation fool, or senseless, or silly, or of reckless mind, rather than scoundrel.

In Isaiah chapter 40 the rhetoric soars beautifully:

18 To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?

25 To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him?
says the Holy One.

26 Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these?
He who brings out their host by number,
calling them all by name;
by the greatness of his might
and because he is strong in power,
not one is missing.

28 Have you not known? Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.

29 He gives power to the faint,
and to him who has no might he increases strength.

30 Even youths shall faint and be weary,
and young men shall fall exhausted;

31 but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint.

English Standard Version, 2001

But back to the Apostle Paul.

In his *Epistle to the Romans* the Apostle Paul argues that the one, true, personal, living God is Lord of both Jews and Gentiles (3:29-30) -- there is no other. There are not diverse gods among the diversity of humanity.

Paul's theological specificity is breath-taking (1:20-21). There are truths to be known about God, he says, which sinful humans ignore or distort. Even through nature His invisible attributes (NEB), invisible nature (RSV), invisible qualities (NIV) lie plain before human eyes. These are His everlasting power and deity (NEB), His eternal power and deity (RSV), His eternal power and divine nature (NIV). This sampling of translations exhibits the struggle translators have in conveying the force of Paul's declaration: God, who is invisible, has furnished data to humans about himself in a public manner through the things which he has made, which ought to be clear to the eye of reason. This has been the case since the world began, he says. That which is essentially invisible has been (Paul does not say "might be") visible. If God's footprints in nature yield information about him, how much more may be expected from his revealed word? At issue is not whether God's works may yield valid insights into his nature, but human distortion of their significance. Human beings are bearers of the divine disclosure.

In Acts 17:16-34 Paul addressed Epicureans and Stoics, the most prominent atheists and panentheists of his day ... little different in core respects from atheists and panentheists of our time. If one should demur that the Epicureans were not really atheists, it should be borne in mind that while they agreed that hypothetically gods might exist; but if so, they had nothing to do with us. The Stoics held that the material universe is pervaded by an impersonal rational force or mind, the *Logos*, just as modern panentheists, similar to Whitehead's argument that a rational principle pervades the universe.

The creator of all things, he says, is not bound by, or restricted to, human images of God and the shrines of human religions. God gives life to all creatures and providentially relates himself to humanity in such a manner that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. *Yet he is not far from each one of us.* The quest need not be an uncertain, unending search *because he is at each person's elbow.* We who are his offspring need only stop to think of the one who made and sustains us in order to realize that he is at hand and that he is truly revealed in a man whom he has appointed, and authenticated by raising him from the dead.

Within ourselves this begins as a process of falsification and lurking aspiration for truth. It begins, says Paul, with the suspicion that the gods of religious pluralism are silly imaginings (17:29), as the rational reflection of Greek philosophers such as Plato had long since concluded. It is urged forward in its quest by the inner conviction, already noted by pagan poets, that God is an inevitable and necessary part of our experience: *for in him we live and move and have our being* (17:28). We are his offspring. We have our existence in him.

There is a delicate balance between the longing which propels us beyond our ignorance and conjectures (*representation of the art and imagination of men. the times of ignorance God overlooked*), the root conviction that there is a righteousness which must surely judge our easy relativist self-justification (*he has fixed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness*), and the light of new understanding because the ever-present, self-revealing one, has called the world to a news conference about a decisive event. He who has been making his presence felt all along has now made himself known in Jesus Christ concretely, historically. But this briefing is not only the cure for our ignorance and distortions, it is a call to repentance.

ANSELM ON THE REALITY OF GOD'S PRESENCE

I believe Paul's presentation to be the thrust of Anselm's so-called, and derided, Ontological Argument for the existence of God. I think Anselm is saying that God is present to us today as he has been to all generations of humanity, as Paul stressed to the atheists on Mars Hill in Athens.

I suggest that Anselm's argument has more to do with a primal datum of personal presence than logical necessity. The necessity or inevitability of the conclusion lies in the immediate awareness of God's presence. Commonly, in our experience there forms a conviction about the truth of self-evident immediacy. By saying that thinking about God involves awareness of the reality of God is meant a primal intuition. Interpretation of the significance of that intuition is critical. I owe the basic insight in what follows to H. D. Lewis (*The Experience of God*, 1959) who argued that the experience of God has the immediacy of a primal datum. I see a correlation between the claim to immediacy and Anselm's argument from necessity.

The conviction of God's reality comes as one leap of thought; as an immediate intuition; as a root conviction. The historical situations and experiences of people in the Bible are not used to prove the existence of God; rather, God is the inescapable ground of the experience and of the whole world.

The experience of God occurs within the context of wonder. This was in sharp contrast to the noise and tumult of pagan worship where the attention of the gods must first be secured, or who must be awakened out of slumber. It is disturbing wonder, sharp and disrupting, which leads to the conviction that the whole of our existence and the world stand in a relation of absolute dependence upon the transcendent reality, God. Such experiences are not confined to special moments of illumination, nor are they triggered spontaneously, without fail, *ex opere operato*, by formal religious exercises.

Wonder comprises the backdrop to the experience of God. The experience of God is not detached from other experiences. Wonder reinforces moments of special awareness though it is not confined to them. Wonder does not evacuate or numb the mind. There is a heightening of self-awareness, not detachment from the self. There occurs a sharpening of awareness and the critical faculties.

God speaks in stillness. The wonder gives opportunity in stillness to sense the presence of God. In stillness the powers of perception gather the data of the experience and one's historical context toward awareness that God is present. Awareness of his presence generates expectant waiting for his word. Lord

speak, for your servant hears. Such situations are providential, they are not contrived or induced by us. God speaks unobtrusively and, often, surprisingly.

In face of earthly tumult the Psalmist declares, *Be still, and know that I am God* (Psalm 46:10), and in another place *Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him* (Psalm 37:7). As the prophet Elijah sulked in the wilderness following his escape from Jezebel, God spoke to him (1 Kings 19:12). God was not in the terrible storm, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire. His presence was known by the *still small voice* -- a voice which evoked wonder, worship and obedient response.

God is experienced as personal from the start. God's transcendence does not entail the logic that God is impersonal. It means that though present he cannot be identified with any feeling, creature or object, including developing nature. He comes quietly, insistently, convincingly as the transcendent, personal, self-disclosing Creator. He addresses us. The address is pressing and inescapable.

The course of the Old Testament historical disclosures led finally to Jesus Christ. Climactically, he has spoken to us by a Son (Hebrews 1:1-2). Christ himself is the authentic measure of the knowledge and experience of God. Who and what Jesus Christ is, is who and what God is. The presence of the incarnate Lord coheres with the primary conviction of God's personal presence to us.

I cite the early Christian comments of Athenagoras (c.175 C.E.) as a follow-up to Paul in his defense of Christianity, written to the Emperor and Stoic philosopher, Marcus Aurelius. God's unity, he says, is not a compound of deities. God is uncreated, impassible and indivisible. He does not, therefore, consist of parts (Plea, 8). *I have shown*, he adds, *that we are not atheists* (by denying the reality of pagan deities) *since we acknowledge one God, who is uncreated, eternal, invisible, impassible, incomprehensible, illimitable. He is grasped only by mind and intelligence, and surrounded by light, beauty, spirit, and indescribable power. By him the universe was created through his Word (Logos), was set in order, and is held together: I say "his Word", for we also think that God has a Son* (Plea, 10). He then goes on to describe the reality and glory of the Holy Trinity. Here is sophisticated argument as to the nature and

attributes of God the Father, the *Logos*, the Holy Spirit -- the reality and truth of the Holy Trinity.

THANKFULLNESS AND FAITH

My dear wife Jessie died on September 28th, 2018, at the age of one-hundred, plus six months. We were married sixty-eight years. Four children, all college graduates. Years of ministry together to others. Faithful homemaker. Competent proof-reader, and gentle critic of my scribbling. For the last eighteen months of her life illness overcame her causing severe body weakness. She had to be lifted into a wheelchair for movement around the house. Thankfully, three mornings a week I had hospice help for her – showers or bed bath, and other general care. To ensure that she did not try to get out of bed on her own we secured an adjustable hospital bed with protective racks on both sides, which we put in the living room. I slept in a lounge chair next to her to be ready to help her. This went on month after month as her strength and life ebbed away. I would do it over and over again a hundred times and more.

On the morning of her death I leaned over her, brushed her hair back, kissed her again and again murmuring “I love you” as she left me for the life beyond. I closed her eyes and folded her hands. My darling Jessie. At home with the Lord.

AFTERTHOUGHT

He stood at centre stage holding the microphone, his body gently waving back and forth unsteadily. Ten-year-old Christopher Duffey. Small, frail, blind, autistic. His mother was a drug addict who gave him up at pre-mature birth. He was adopted from foster care by his loving uncle and the uncle’s wife. Little Christopher sang from the heart, quietly, gently, plaintively:

Open the eyes of my heart, Lord, Open the eyes of my heart.

I want to see you ... I want to see you ... I want to see you.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-F_W_zl61bI

As the prophet Isaiah wrote centuries ago,

And a little child shall lead them.

Particles of Faith

ECLAS

<https://www.eclasproject.org/>

ECLAS stands for 'Encouraging Christian Leadership in an Age of Science'. They are UK based and through 'Science for Seminaries' they provide funding to help integrate science into the core curriculum of UK Seminaries. Through 'Scientists in Congregations' they are funding a further 22 projects to 'creatively change the conversation between the church and the scientific world.' Details of projects they have supported to date are on the website and are very inspiring.

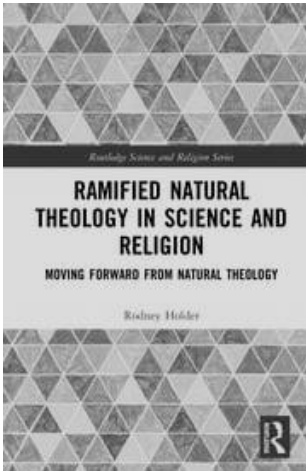
GENEXIS 2021

Following a successful series of talks in 2019, Genexis has a number of new speakers lined-up for 2021, including Prof Tom McLeish, Dr Andy Bannister, Tom Holland and Rev. Stephen Foster. Sharon Dirckx, John Lennox, and NT Wright will also return with new presentations. For 2021 the events will be held in Coventry and London, each consists of three thought-provoking evenings exploring evidence for a creator and pondering some of life's biggest questions. Tickets are available here and there is a promo video here <https://tinyurl.com/37b6vrvs>

Tickets are available here: <https://tinyurl.com/3t5jyshn>

Book Reviews

Rodney Holder *Ramified Natural Theology in Science and Religion: Moving Forward from Natural Theology* Abingdon/ New York: Routledge, 2015, 246pp, Hb. £120.00. ISBN 9 780367 373191



In this significant work, Revd Dr Rodney Holder utilises Bayes's theorem to rationally analyze the probability that specific historical, revelatory claims of Christian faith are true. He particularly considers the credibility of documentary evidence for Jesus' miracles, his fulfilment of Biblical prophecies, and his resurrection from the dead. The author is a mathematician, astrophysicist and theologian who

has published widely on the intersection of science and religion. He is a Fellow Commoner of St Edmund's College, Cambridge, and Emeritus Course Director of the Faraday Institute.

Ramified natural theology—'evidence for the particularities of the Christian faith' (66)—is here brought into conversation with modern cosmology and historical-critical Biblical studies. Holder argues persuasively that revelatory Biblical data can be rationally scrutinized by Bayesian confirmation in a *similar* way to scientific data, through 'inference to the best explanation' (24). Methodologically this follows in a similar vein to Richard Swinburne's probabilistic arguments for Christ's resurrection. Formalized statistical analyses are interwoven throughout and more than incidental, however non-mathematicians should not be overly deterred, since Holder takes great care to introduce Bayes's theorem comprehensibly.

Engaging richly with the historical development of natural theology, he moves eloquently from Augustine's *theologia naturalis* to Aquinas, Francis Bacon, William Paley and late modernity, where he is clearly influenced by Wolfhart Pannenberg's appeal to evidence for faith. Consideration of Paley's design argument (famous for his analogy of a pocket-watch found on a heath) is more sympathetic than Alister McGrath's, who recalls John Henry Newman's excoriating assessment of it. Holder somewhat downplays the severity of reputational damage for natural theology and apologetics resulting from Paley's devastatingly incorrect inference. Critically comparing approaches of contemporary advocates, he claims a tension exists between McGrath's definition of natural theology as a dogmatic Christian enterprise presupposing divine revelation, and his apologetic use of 'bare' natural theology, concluding 'McGrath's version [...] ends up being very close to the traditional kind of natural theology which he rejects' (22). However in recent correspondence, McGrath remarks that 'both starting points [from

theology and from observation of nature] are entirely defensible, and I simply maintain we can work with both, rather than having to choose. [...] I don't really reject the definitions of Barr and Alston; I rather set them in a broader referential framework'. Indeed, in *A Fine Tuned Universe*, McGrath speaks approvingly of Swinburne's inductive inference from observation. Does the real disagreement here perhaps concern the task of apologetics?

Holder's case begins with 'bare' natural theology—cosmological and fine-tuning arguments. Critically engaging with the Hartle-Hawking 'no boundary' proposal that the universe has 'no beginning in time, and therefore no need for God' (39); Krauss's spontaneous existence of the universe from 'nothing' due to quantum vacuum fluctuation; and, multiverses, Holder rightly defends the Christian doctrine of creation which provides *ultimate* explanations where naturalism cannot. His discussion of multiverse theories (that attempt to circumvent fine-tuning) provides an excellent synopsis of reasons why these remain problematic, not

least being their current non-falsifiability (53). Holder concludes that 'the argument from fine-tuning [...] makes [the probability that God exists, given the evidence for a complex physical universe] very close to 1 indeed' (62), whereas Swinburne is more circumspect ($P \approx 1/2$). Holder is therefore proposing much stronger inference from the evidence. But does this place excessive confidence in fine-tuning? Could making a rational case for Christian belief somewhat dependent upon a teleological design argument transpire to be an ingemination of Paley's error if a quantum 'Darwinian revolution' occurs that accounts for fine-tuning? Contrastingly, McGrath's 'convergent' approach which seeks explanatory unification (without requiring particular observations for a veridical apologetic) avoids this potential jeopardy. Additionally, Nick Bostrom (*Anthropic Bias: Observation Selection Effects in Science and Philosophy*) has demonstrated with the Serpent's Advice paradox that serious problems may occur with Bayesian analysis of Observer Selection Effects. Holder's

application of Penrose's calculation to reach an infinitesimally small probability that our universe is fine-tuned given a multiverse ($P[E'|M] = 1/10^{10^{123}}$) does not appear to address Bostrom's challenge.

In building upon 'bare' observations from nature, Holder identifies, in Joseph Butler, a forerunner to ramified natural theology; Butler's adjoining of multiple pieces of probabilistic evidence to strengthen the cumulative case informs his methodology. This section might also have benefited from a discussion of Grosseteste's application of the scientific method to theology (*intelligo ut credam*). The following chapters construct the 'ramified' case by examining particularities of Christian faith. Holder impressively interweaves historicity and breadth of scholarship throughout. It is well researched and includes: a successful Bayesian critique of Hume's argument against miracles; analysis of documentary evidence for Jesus' miracles in dialogue with modern Biblical criticism; evidence that Jesus fulfilled Biblical prophecy, which whilst not

intended as exhaustive, provides a robust overview of key texts; and, most importantly—evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. In this latter analysis, both supporting extra-biblical sources (Josephus, Tiberius, Pliny etc.) and the NT eyewitness accounts are examined with a persuasive rebuttal of alternative explanatory theories, followed by further comparative analysis of an earlier Bayesian approach *sans* natural theology.

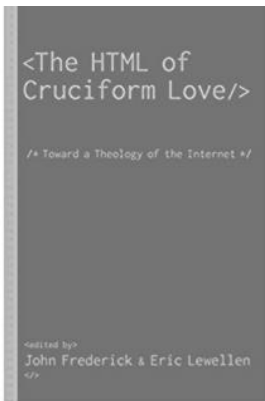
Concluding his enquiry, Holder begins (following Swinburne) *with* 'bare' natural theology and ramifies, drawing on his earlier arguments. Taking account of the historical evidence of multiple testimonies of Jesus' miracles, prophecy, the resurrection, and lack of evidence for another candidate, he first analyzes each independently, before determining—in his final cumulative assessment—that it is 'highly probable that God became incarnate in Jesus Christ' (217). The case is carefully made, however a question persists: can these evidences be treated entirely independently given many originate from inter-related documentary sources? And if not,

does a chain of inference exist when combining probabilities such that Alvin Plantinga's concern about dwindling probabilities comes into play?

Notwithstanding, this engaging work is an outstanding contribution to the field of ramified natural theology, with prodigious scope, reflecting the author's multi-disciplinary expertise. I highly recommend it to analytical theologians, those examining the compelling documentary evidence for Christian faith, and to anyone interested in the history of natural theology. However, it is unclear to what extent probabilistic inferential arguments persuade. Holder asks 'how do I commend my faith to others?' (68); few will reply 'statistically'. Yet the apologetic task is undoubtedly vital since faith requires the rational conviction of truth. Holder rightly notes that Jesus did not condemn Thomas for requiring evidence before believing (Jn 20:24-29). Nonetheless, those sceptical of 'traditional' natural theology may question whether a probabilistic confirmation from first principles is requisite for rationally held belief.

Reviewed by Dr David E. Watkis - David is a postgraduate theologian currently completing an MA examining divine temporality and William Lane Craig's argument for a neo-Lorentzian interpretation of Special Relativity.

John Frederick & Eric Lewellen (eds), *The HTML of Cruciform Love (Toward a Theology of the Internet)*, Pickwick, 2019



This book was recommended to me by Dr Sally Nelson, who remarked how helpful her students found it. It is a truly prophetic book, in all senses of that word.

It began life as presentations at a webinar conference, based in St Andrews, in 2015. Unfortunately, some of the participants were

rather tardy in providing papers for publication. In view of the high quality of those they did have, the editors commissioned six new ones, to produce this volume in 2019. It therefore arrived just in time for the massive shift on-line resulting from Covid lockdowns, a shift it foresees and analyses. This is 'cutting edge' theology, but one of the joys of this book is the way some writers demonstrate how ancient theology can become relevant anew in these times.

As an example, the first chapter questions Christians' consumption of on-line images, in the light of patristic sermons against Christians attending the public spectacles in the arena. (I am astonished that Christians should have wanted to join the audience where, only a few years before, their fellow believers were being fed to lions, but in view of the number of sermons being preached against it, they must have done!)

Similar warnings come from a later paper, based on the teaching of Levinas, a Jewish ethicist, who comments on Talmudic teaching on 'the temptation of temptation'.

A chapter by Frederick looks at internet personae in the light of ancient demonology and Walter Wink's teaching on 'the powers'.

The other nine chapters all throw up equally fascinating links.

In an Introduction, Frederick claims that running through all the chapters are the interlinked themes of community and character-formation.

The other editor's name is not misspelt, even though it might appear so to someone like me, with Welsh links. His role in the project appears to have been purely administrative.

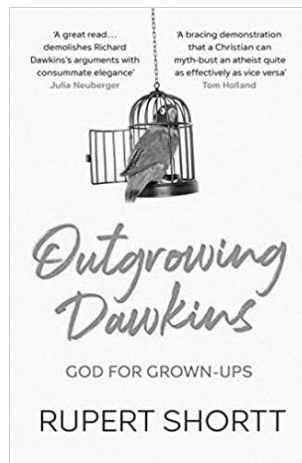
This is certainly one of the most stimulating collections of essays that I have read recently. Like Dr Nelson, I strongly recommend it.

Although I bought my copy from Amazon in this country, it is the American edition. There appears to be a British edition published by James Clarke.

Reviewed by Bob Allaway

Rupert Shortt *Outgrowing Dawkins* – 2019 SPCK Publishing
118pp. ISBN 978-0281084104

Shortt by name, short by nature, this very brief book nevertheless packs a great deal into its economical and entertaining prose. I think I read it in one sitting as it is an extremely engrossing rebuttal of Richard Dawkins latest effort to persuade people like him of the non-existence of god.



Many of the arguments will be familiar to our readers, but the author expresses them with refreshing clarity and a welcome dose of good-humour. Of course, much of the argument hinges on which 'god' we don't believe in, and Shortt does a good job of

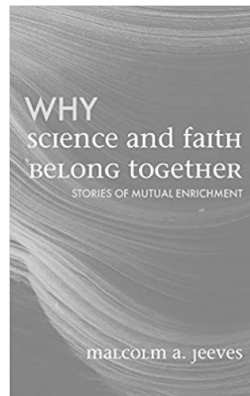
dismantling the claims that Dawkins non-existent god is the same as the one found in a mature grown-up reading of Hebrew and New Testament scriptures.

A nagging question remains however, which is highlighted in one of the many polarised book reviews found on Amazon; namely ‘which god does the average pew-dweller actually believe in?’ Is there enough good preaching and teaching out there to help move congregations on from simplistic beliefs in a god of the gaps, or the fictional despotic Zeus-like character as portrayed by Dawkins, towards the true, awesome, all-loving, self-sacrificing, self-revealing yet elusive and indescribable triune God who, for now, we know only in part? This question is at the heart of Malcolm Jeeves new book which I review below.

Reviewed by Alan Kerry

Malcolm Jeeves *Why Science and Faith Belong Together – Stories of Mutual Enrichment* – 2021
Cascade Books Wipf and Stock
274pp. ISBN 978-1-7252-8619-1

Emeritus Professor of Psychology at the University of St Andrews, Malcolm Jeeves says his book is ‘an invitation to the reader to sit beside me as I reflect on the current landscape of contemporary debates about how properly to relate faith with an informed scientific understanding of the world we live in’. It would be hard to imagine a book more in tune with our own humble objectives here at Faith & Thought, and many of our familiar friends make appearances as we are taken on this journey of exploration – Alan Millard, Colin Humphries, Denis Alexander and Keith Ward to name a few.



Jeeves’s principal concern is for young people, some of whom have written to him expressing anxiety about the mismatch

between what is preached from the pulpit and what is taught at University. He believes that too often the church is selling 'shrunken gods' who are 'not taken seriously by educated young people because they feel they are asked to commit intellectual suicide'. The book focuses on the topics of human origins, human nature, miracles of nature and miracles of healing as examples of subjects where an integrated faith is essential to true understanding. This integration involves embracing both advances in knowledge from science and also advances in interpreting Scripture. Time and again he shows us how a non-integrated faith leads to belief in a god-of-the-gaps, a shrunken god who 'intervenes' occasionally, rather than the moment to moment divinely

upholding and divinely emptying God of Scripture.

There is some occasional repetition in the text, which sometimes appears to be due to editorial oversight rather than deliberate authorial intent, but this is a small quibble in an excellent book. It presents a very timely call for young Christians not to feel they have to choose between faith and science but to roll their sleeves up and join in the debate. As he writes – 'If you are a Christian with the gifts and skills to make a contribution, be sure you are there to make your contribution. We need Christian participants in the laboratories down where the action is, not uninformed spectators up in the stands.' Highly recommended.

Reviewed by Alan Kerry

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 a short note describing the author, in about 25 words, should be included.

Minutes of Annual General Meeting for 2021

Saturday 8th May 2021

Held Online via Zoom during Coronavirus Pandemic lockdown.

Council members present: Rev R Allaway (Chairman), Rev J D Buxton (Hon. Treasurer), Dr A P Kerry (Hon. Secretary) Mrs J Mead.

40 individuals attended the Open Forum of the 2021 Symposium. 9 members remained for the AGM.

OPENING Rev. R Allaway welcomed members to the meeting and opened the meeting in prayer.

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING Copies of the minutes of the 2020 AGM were available on the website. These were approved as a correct record and signed by the chairman.

ELECTION The meeting agreed to the re-election of:

- 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 and Prof. Meric Srokosz (ex officio) as Council members for a further three years.
- e) Council were pleased to announce that Rev Dr Sally Nelson was prepared to join Faith & Thought Council. It was proposed that she should hereby be elected as a Council Member and Trustee and this was unanimously approved by the meeting.

ANNUAL ACCOUNTS The annual accounts were presented by John Buxton. They are available on the website along with the annual report. These have been independently examined and approved. The year-end deficit is £884.07, the end of year cash balance is £10,089. There will be additional expenditure next year due to an increase in S&CB costs having moved to a new printer. There is still in excess of £100,000 in share accounts so it is reasonable for us to continue to allow the reserves to reduce by about £1000 per

year in line with charity commission advice to use resources for the benefit of members rather than simply held in reserve.

John has been working as our treasurer for 16 years and would be happy to hand on to a replacement at the age of 83. He was thanked for his long and valuable service.

- The financial situation is satisfactory.
- The accounts were accepted.
- Jean M Gill Book-keeping Services were approved as independent examiners.
- The treasurer was thanked for the time he devotes to these matters.

**SYMPOSIUM
2022**

We are planning our next symposium to consider the theological implications of modern technology, especially the internet.

Alan said that the dates and format were yet to be decided, Council has an additional meeting planned in June to finalise plans. He suggested considering individual lectures throughout the year, in different locations around the country rather than the Symposium format? JR said that venues outside London may not be as easy to access. PW was in favour of the meetings being a mixed economy of online and in person. JR suggested we could consider inviting others from outside the church (e.g. Tim Berners Lee) to attend. Librarians are now 'information scientists' and may be interested in the proposed subject?

CLOSE

The Chairman closed the meeting by inviting all present to say 'the Grace ...' together.

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.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscribing to Faith&Thought is now simpler than ever. To receive the journal anywhere in the world is just £10 per year for Faith & Thought or £20 per year to receive both Faith & Thought AND Science and Christian Belief. Both journals are usually published twice a year (April and October) and membership also entitles you to FREE admission to the Faith & Thought annual symposium. Join online today with the PayPal button.

<http://www.faithandthought.org/membership.html>

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

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I enclose a remittance* for £..... being the current year's subscription payable on 1st January and consent to my particulars being included in the record of members.

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Signature.....

Date.....

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