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Editorial

This May’s Symposium on ‘Fake News’ was well received and enjoyed better attendance than has been the case in recent years. We are delighted to publish two of the papers that were presented on the day - Colin Humphreys paper on ‘Joshua’s Long Day’ will follow in a later edition. Both papers here encourage a questioning stance toward the assertions of others and our own beliefs. In addressing the role of ‘experts’ Philip McCormack notes that one person’s ‘eminent specialist’ is another person’s ‘old white man’.

The descriptor ‘Pale, Male and Stale’ has been used to indicate the lack of diversity that is often found amongst those given power and authority. Yet this was not the way of Christ; His is a Kingdom which subverts traditional power roles and crucial to this Way is a willingness to ask questions. Jesus himself is said to have asked 307 questions in the gospels, and to directly answer only three. Of course, we ask questions in order to improve our understanding, we are seeking absolute truth, even while we accept that our grasp of it is relative. It is our hope, that Faith&Thought itself, serves to encourage a questioning faith which resonates with the questions that our

neighbours and friends are asking, and that in doing this we might appeal to a wider demographic. When I first joined F&T I must confess that I thought the membership did rather fit the 'pale, stale, male' stereotype! I have since come to know many of our members better and recognise that they are anything but 'stale'. This was certainly true of Terence Mitchell, who passed away on Easter Sunday. Outwardly he may have appeared to be a dusty academic from another age, but those who knew him will remember a deeply kind man who embraced life, faith and work with a child-like enthusiasm and curiosity which serves as an example to us all.

Alan Kerry – (co-editor)

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'Is the Bible Fake News? The Verdict of Biblical Archaeology'

Prof. Alan Millard

Alan Millard is Emeritus Rankin Professor of Hebrew and Ancient Semitic Languages at the University of Liverpool. He has spent his career in research and teaching about the world of the Bible, especially languages and history. He has worked on archaeological excavations in Iraq, Jordan and Syria and held a Fellowship at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Hebrew University, Jerusalem in 1984.

Although the term 'fake news' is only a few years old, people have been circulating false, or biased, or imaginary information throughout history. It may be intended to create or sway public opinion, it may be a means of opposing particular views, or it may simply be mischievous.

Archaeology lends itself to 'fake news' because there are so many large gaps in knowledge that fantasists can easily imagine events to put into them. Who built the Great Pyramid of Egypt? If you believe such a structure was beyond human ability, you may declare beings from another planet came to do it. It is not hard to find books propagating that and similar propositions. The Bible, too, lends itself to 'fake news'. Since antiquity stories have been written to reveal more than the Bible tells about Joseph's marriage to an Egyptian, or the childhood of Jesus. In the latter case, the story about him making clay birds that flew away was absorbed into the Qur'an.¹ Writing such stories has continued.

There are two main types of 'fake news' about the Bible: the first is produced by believers who want to demonstrate that the Bible is 'true'; the second is produced by people who want to do the opposite. This paper will take examples from each type and then give examples of real discoveries.

¹ 'The Infancy Gospel of Thomas,' in M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (1924); Harold Attridge & Ronald F. Hock, *The Complete Gospels* (Harper Collins: 1992): verses 2-7; Qur'an Sura 3. 49; 5. 110.

1. Fake News: Noah's Ark Found!

More than once during the past century there has been a headline, 'Noah's Ark Found'. One man came back from Mount Ararat carrying a piece of wood he said was part of the Ark.² When it was subjected to the Carbon 14 test, the result showed it was less than two thousand years old! Another claim continues to circulate among Bible believing Christians: a boat-shaped feature which can be seen on a slope of the mountain is the Ark! Its dimensions are said to fit with the measurements given in Genesis! The protagonist of these claims, Ron Wyatt, alleged he found other elements agreeing with the biblical description. However, there are similar shapes in the ground in the region. Did Noah have a fleet of arks? No! Geologists explain the formations as the result of earthquakes and landslides pouring mud down the valleys of the mountain slopes and all of the other elements are explicable as natural formations.³

Why do people, especially evangelical Christians, want to find Noah's Ark? They answer, 'If we find Noah's Ark, everyone will have to believe the Bible is true!' They don't seem to be aware of the problems involved! If they did find a boat on Mount Ararat, how would they know it was built by Noah – unless it had a label, 'Built by Noah and sons'? It might as easily be the boat of the Babylonian Flood hero, Atrahasis, or the Greek Deucalion. They would need indisputable proof of its age and its place of origin. Then we should ask, 'What kind of vessel is it?' The Babylonian Flood hero apparently built a round one, according to a recent discovery, an enormous coracle.⁴ Noah's Ark apparently had a rectangular plan, it was not boat-shaped. In fact, it may have had a flat

² Fernand Navarra, *Noah's Ark: I Touched It* (Plainfield, New Jersey: Logos International: 1974).

³ For a helpful survey see Anne Habermehl, "A Review of the Search for Noah's Ark," in A.A. Snelling, ed., *Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on Creationism*. (Pittsburgh, PA: Creation Science Fellowship and Dallas, TX: Institute for Creation Research: 2008), 485-502.

⁴ See my essay 'The Babylonian Flood Story – A New Tablet and an Old One Misrepresented,' *Faith and Thought* 60 (April 2016): 25-30.

bottom and sides sloping upwards, like a pitched roof. One thing deserves to be recognized: the text of Genesis never terms Noah's vessel a ship or boat, but the Babylonian texts use those words for their 'ark'. Noah built a container for him, his family and the animals. He did not build it to take a voyage; it had no need of rudder or sail; it was simply to float on the water. Therefore, to look for a ship shape on Mount Ararat is probably a mistake! Furthermore, Genesis has the Ark rest 'on the mountains of Ararat', not specifically on the peak now termed Mount Ararat. Ararat is the ancient name for the area known as Armenia, now partly in eastern Turkey, a much larger area than modern Armenia. Other Flood stories point to the same region, but to different mountains.

Yet would the discovery of Noah's Ark make people believe in the Bible? Finding it would imply there was some truth in a story of a vessel used to escape from a flood, without telling anything about the reason for a flood or who escaped. Even if there were some way of relating the discovery to the biblical account, identifying Noah as the builder, that could not substantiate the theology behind it. Ultimately, anyone eager to find Noah's Ark thinking it would prove the Bible true, should recall the words of One who declared, "They will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" (Matthew 16: 31).

2. The Ark of the Covenant

The same Ron Wyatt went to Jerusalem to find the Ark of the Covenant which he believed was hidden in a cave there. Jewish tradition, in the Apocrypha, 2 Maccabees 2: 4-8, tells how Jeremiah hid it in a cave in the mountain from which Moses saw the Promised Land, that is to say, Mount Nebo, in Jordan. Wyatt argued that it should be interpreted to refer to Jerusalem. He hunted in part of an old quarry to the north of the Old City, near to Gordon's Calvary and the Garden Tomb. Inserting himself between rocks and boulders, moving some out of the way, he burrowed down and reached a remote cavern where, by the light of a torch, he saw the Ark of the Covenant and other equipment from the Temple of Solomon. The on-line report adds, 'Just inside the

chamber, by and near the original entrance which was now sealed up, he found a total of 7 oil lamps that [he] believes had to have been left behind by those who brought the items into the chamber. The soot on the lamps and the rocks they sat upon clearly showed the direction of the breeze that followed them into the tunnel. One of the lamps is very ornate and displays Assyrian characteristics, which is consistent with the cultural influence of Judea at the time just prior to the Babylonian captivity. The picture of this particular oil-lamp was not taken with a camera because the design on the lamp doesn't show up well in a photo. This picture was made by placing the lamp on a copier and it revealed a little of the design. The centre depicts a goat or a ram standing upon it's [sic!] hind legs, eating from a grape vine. This scene is very similar to the statue found in a grave in the Sumerian city of Ur. The suggestion has been made that this may represent the ram caught in the thicket at the very moment that Abraham was about to sacrifice his son Isaac ...' Anyone who knows anything about ancient lamps can tell at a glance that this one was made in Roman times, perhaps about A.D. 400, a thousand years or so after the Assyrians. It displays no characteristics of Assyrian pottery lamps whatsoever! It could not have been left by someone who brought objects into the chamber in the seventh century B.C! While one might argue that it was left by later visitors to the chamber, no-one has left a record of such a visit. Significantly, Wyatt failed to produce photographs of what he said he saw. His family stated, 'all his attempts to photograph anything in the chamber resulted in photos or slides that looked like a complete blur, so he concluded that he simply wasn't supposed to take any photographs'.⁵ In fact, he failed to produce a single piece evidence that independent investigators have been

⁵ <https://wyattmuseum.com/the-ark-of-the-covenant-special-article/2011-338>. In an advertisement for a book about Wyatt's discoveries, his company admits "Even so, at this time it is important to state however that Ron's account of his discovery of the Ark of the Covenant cannot be confirmed and that recent exploration reveals unexplained discrepancies in that account. ... Ron had no second witness and provided no conclusive evidence as to the location of the Ark of the Covenant; therefore, his account as follows is not an established fact. With that understanding, we offer this product".

able to substantiate to support any of his 'discoveries'. Beside Noah's Ark and the Ark of the Covenant, he located Sodom and Gomorrah, wheels of Pharaoh's chariots on the floor of the Red Sea, Mount Sinai in Saudi Arabia and an inscribed pillar erected for king Solomon on the shore of the Gulf of Aqaba. (When I inquired about the pillar because of my interest in ancient Hebrew inscriptions, I was informed that the Saudi Arabian authorities had taken it away and confiscated Wyatt's papers and photographs.)

The conclusion has to be that these are the delusions of a devout Christian who believed he should be able find anything the Bible described and so 'prove the Bible true'. Regrettably, they are still circulated in print and on the Internet, misleading many uninformed readers. They are fake news! They attract people who want 'proof' of biblical reports.

3. The Tomb of Jesus Family?

While some Christians search for 'proof' of the Bible, their opponents try to prove the Bible is wrong. In 2007 James Cameron and Simcha Jacobovici presented a programme on the Discovery channel 'The Lost Tomb of Jesus' and Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino published a book entitled *The Jesus Family Tomb: The Discovery, the Investigation, and the Evidence That Could Change History*.⁶ They presented finds from a typical high-class Jewish tomb of the New Testament period in west Jerusalem. Such tombs were chambers hollowed out of the hills around the city with benches and short tunnels cut in the rock. The body was placed in the tomb on a bench or in a tunnel, then a year later, the bones would be collected and placed in a box of wood or stone, an ossuary. Stone ossuaries often survive, some having the name of the dead person scratched or engraved on the side. This particular tomb yielded six inscribed ones. The names attracted the attention of film-makers Cameron and Jacobovici because they included Jesus son of Joseph, Judah son of Jesus,

⁶ New York: Harper-Collins, 2007.

Maryah and Mariame and Jose. Don't you see, they said, in effect, these are the names of Jesus' family: his father Joseph, his mother Mary, his son Judah and his wife Mariame (Mary Magdalene) and a brother Jose with another relative Matthew. The film *The Lost Tomb of Jesus* created a great deal of publicity because the discovery would prove that Jesus of Nazareth did not rise from the dead. Needless to say, both film and book have been subjected to critical reviews and refutations. Scholars have shown that the names were popular; one ossuary labelled Jesus son of Joseph has been known since 1931; Mary is among the most frequently occurring of women's names; Joseph, Judah and Jesus are common amongst men in tombs of the time. That Maryah was the mother of Jesus son of Joseph, Mariamme the wife of Jesus and Judah their son is wholly speculative. To be sure of these identifications, the relationships would have to be included with their names, as on examples from other tombs.⁷ Here is a case of people pressing evidence into a particular interpretation which it cannot bear, producing another piece of fake news.

4. Debatable News: A Town of the Days of David?

All sorts of uncertainties surround archaeology! There is a hill-top in the Valley of Elah where surveyors had found pottery sherds from various periods. Excavations were made between 2007 and 2013. They uncovered a town which flourished for a short time about 1,000 B.C., a period the surveys had not recognized at all. Remains of an encircling wall, two gateways and houses were found, with pottery and stone and metalwork. The site, Khirbet Qeiyafa, is clearly a town from the days of David. Hitherto, very few sites of that period have been found in Judah, so the idea has been propagated that David was a minor king, ruling a small area in the hills of Judah – the biblical picture of a strong kingdom is fake news! The excavator of Khirbet Qeiyafa argues that his site is evidence for a strong central control from Jerusalem, reaching the edge

⁷ A series of dissenting essays by highly competent scholars was published in *Near Eastern Archaeology* 69, no. 3/4 (Sep.-Dec., 2006): 116-131.

of the coastal plain and so attests David's power. That may be so - perhaps we would like it to be so - yet it is only a possibility; it does not prove David's existence. Again, without an inscription, there can be no certainty! Further excavations at sites in the western hills of Judah have identified two walled towns close in date, where previously none had been found, with similar artefacts in them, pointing to common circumstances and so, perhaps, a kingdom of Judah.⁸

One major find from a house at Khirbet Qeiyafa illustrates how it is essential to explore alternative interpretations. A potsherd carries five lines of writing in ink, but there was probably at least one more broken off at the top. The letters are an early form of the alphabet. Israeli scholars immediately read the first five letters as the Hebrew for 'Don't do' and tried to make sense of the rest as part of a message. More adventurous experts want to read it as a message about social justice and even the establishment of a monarchy. Regrettably, the writing is rubbed, uneven, and the same letters take different stances; the writer was not an experienced scribe! Despite the assurance of some who claim to read it, I am not convinced! It can also be understood as a list of people. The letters in the first line can be easily read as Semitic names, with nothing distinctively Hebrew. (An analysis of the writing by Artificial Intelligence agreed with that conclusion.) Given the broken and abraded state of this ostrakon, only suggestions can be offered about its meaning. The fact it does establish is that someone was writing with a document of several lines with pen and ink in Israel at a time from which no other examples had been known.⁹

⁸ See Yosef Garfinkel, Igor Kreimerman and Peter Zilberg, *Debating Khirbet Qeiyafa: A Fortified City from the Time of King David* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2016) with my review, *Strata: Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 35 (2017): 190-93.

⁹ "The Ostrakon from the Days of David found at Khirbet Qeiyafa," *Tyndale Bulletin* 62.1 (2011): 2-13; E. Levy and F. Pluquet, F., "Computer experiments on the Khirbet Qeiyafa ostrakon," *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* 31 August 2016: Oxford University Press on behalf of EADH. 1-2 at <http://dsh.oxfordjournals.org>; See also Matthieu Richelle, "Quelques nouvelles lectures sur l'ostrakon de Khirbet Qeiyafa," *Semitica* 57 (2015): 147-162.

5. Real and Questionable News: Hebrew Seals of King Hezekiah, Isaiah

Over the past fifty years scores of small pieces of clay imprinted with Hebrew seals have come to light in the Holy Land. They are about the size of a thumbnail. After a hoard of almost fifty of these bullae was expertly excavated in Jerusalem and publicized, treasure hunters produced many more for sale on the antiquities' market – nobody had realised their value previously. Doubts arose about their authenticity, were they ancient or modern? One bulla bore the name of Ahaz, son of Jotham, king of Judah and others the name of Hezekiah, son of Ahaz, king of Judah. Could they really be ancient? A number of factors favour their antiquity and the balance was tipped that way when another bulla of Hezekiah, son of Ahaz, king of Judah, was recovered during excavations in Jerusalem.¹⁰ The existence of Ahaz and Hezekiah is corroborated by Assyrian inscriptions which name them. The seal naming Jotham adds another king of Judah attested apart from the Bible.

Recently an archaeologist has hailed a bulla from the same excavations in Jerusalem as the seal of the prophet Isaiah.¹¹ Although the impression is damaged at the top, where there was apparently a picture of a grazing doe, the name below is clear: Isaiah. Below that is another word. On many seals the father's name stands there, with or without the word 'son of' before it; on a smaller number it denotes the occupation of the owner, 'the scribe,' etc. The letters below the name on this seal are *n b y* and probably one more. If the lost letter were an '*aleph*' the letters would spell the word 'prophet,' (*n b y*), giving 'Isaiah, prophet,' but the letter *he*, the definite article, should stand before the title, as in seals of 'Hananiah, son of Hilkiyah, the priest,' or '[X], son of Zakar, the healer,' for example. It has been argued that the *he* stood at the

¹⁰ Eilat Mazar "A Seal Impression of King Hezekiah from the Ophel Excavations," in Eilat Mazar, ed., *The Ophel Excavations to the South of the Temple Mount 2009–2013: Final Reports 1* (Jerusalem: Old City Press, 2015), 629-40.

¹¹ Eilat Mazar, "Is This the Prophet Isaiah's Signature?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* (March/April–May/June 2018): 64-73, 92.

end of the previous line, yet there is enough space for it at the start of the second line where it would be expected. Therefore, the identification of this seal's owner with the biblical prophet can only be speculative. The second line may contain a father's name, which could be restored as Nebai, a name found in the Bible and on other seals.

6. Real News: a. Jews in Exile

Treasure hunters unearthed scores of cuneiform tablets in Iraq during the disturbances of recent decades, among them two hundred or so now in private collections found somewhere in southern Babylonia, all written in the sixth and early fifth centuries B.C. About half of them have been published.¹² They are run of the mill Neo-Babylonian and Persian period administrative and legal deeds, dealing with property ownership, sales, loans and business ventures. They bear dates from the 33rd years of Nebuchadrezzar (572 B.C.) to the 8th year of Xerxes (477 B.C.). The majority (116) were written in the reign of Darius 1 (years 1-35). Many of them come from a place called 'Jewstown' and include dozens of people with distinctively Jewish names. They are identifiable because they include shortened forms of God's name, as seen in Jonathan, 'the Lord has given' or Hezekiah 'my strength is the Lord'. Names known from biblical texts are frequent, e.g. Jeho'ezer, Jeshu'a, Zechariah, Jeremiah, and there are a few names that are not found in biblical Hebrew, such as Galaiah, 'The Lord has redeemed', or Zapaiah = 'The Lord has kept watch'. These are all Babylonian tablets and the scribes all bear Babylonian names, although it is possible Jews might be assigned Babylonian names, as were Daniel and his friends, but there is no hint of the Jewish people writing cuneiform. However, Aramaic was evidently current where the tablets were inscribed because six of them have legible notes scratched on their edges in Aramaic letters and in one

¹² Laurie E. Pearce and Cornelia Wunsch, *Documents of Judean Exiles and West Semites in Babylonia in the Collection of David Sofer* (Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology 28; Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2014).

case written in ink. These letters identify one or more of the individuals involved in the transactions, as in other examples from these years. The number of names incorporating the name of Israel's God attests the continuing importance of their national deity to the Jews settled in these Babylonian communities and conforming to their laws. This new discovery adds considerably to the information given by the long-known archive of tablets recording the activities of the Jewish Murashu family in the city of Nippur in the fifth century, bringing real news of Jews living in exile.

6. Real News: b. Nazareth

For over a hundred years there have been repeated assertions that Nazareth was not occupied in the first century, so the Gospel narratives propagate 'fake news'. Over the past twenty years excavations have been made at two places in the modern town which have brought to light fragmentary remains of domestic houses which can be dated to the first century. They apparently had rooms built around a courtyard in a pattern existing at other first century sites. They yielded a few pieces of local crockery and Jewish stone vessels. In one case, a typical Jewish 'rolling stone' tomb was built over the ruins, a type of tomb favoured later in the first century. While no-one should claim the paltry stone walls as 'Mary's House' or 'Jesus' Home'; they are firm evidence for a village or town at Nazareth in the Gospel period.¹³

7. Conclusion

Archaeology deals with silence, for the most part. A ruined wall cannot reveal who built it unless there is an inscription on it, slaughtered bodies cannot tell who killed them. One building on top of another provides a sequence and changes between them may point to changes in society, then the same

¹³ Ken Dark, "Early Roman-period Nazareth and the Sisters of Nazareth Convent," *The Antiquaries' Journal* 92 (2012): 37-64; "Has Jesus' Nazareth House been found?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 41.2 (2015): 54-63.

sequence observed at a number of sites may indicate a new population. Links may then be seen in material remains from other regions suggesting related people, but only written sources can identify the inhabitants. That's why European archaeologists named one group after their distinctive pottery, the Beaker People, or called species of early hominids 'Neanderthal' after the German valley where their bones were first distinguished. Even when there are written sources it can be hard to relate them to facts on the ground. It's worth noting that the first events in British history have left no certain vestige, that is, Julius Caesar's invasions in 55 and 54 B.C., yet no historian doubts the commander's own boastful book! Repeatedly, ancient writers have been accused of peddling fake news. The Greek historian Herodotus was ridiculed for his account of large rat-like creatures that threw out gold dust when they burrowed in an area of north India. That marmosets do just that in northern Pakistan has been firmly established, so the reputation of Herodotus is much higher now than it was a century ago. The Bible has been unfairly branded in the same way. An Old Testament scholar discussing the Exodus recently declared, '... there is no way to salvage the biblical text as a description of a historical event,' because the current form of the story comes from the seventh to fifth centuries B.C., with some early elements, perhaps 'a distant - and distorted - memory of an actual event'. He asserts that the names Ramesses and Pithom were current in the first millennium B.C., so cannot be evidence for an earlier period. For Pithom he accepts its possible identification with Tell er-Retabeh, but follows a prominent American archaeologist in stating it was unoccupied until about 1200 B.C., too late for the time of Moses.¹⁴ That is wrong! The author is aware of a long-known inscription of Ramesses II from the site, yet he is unaware how Polish-Slovak excavations since 2007 have uncovered more material from the thirteenth century, which could suit the

¹⁴ Lester Grabbe, "Late Bronze Age Palestine: If we had only the Bible ..." in Lester L. Grabbe, ed., *The Land of Canaan in the Late Bronze Age*, European Seminar in Historical Methodology. 10; Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 636 (London and New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2016), 11-56, see 38.

time of Moses, as a quick check on the Internet will show. That author purveys fake news, not the Bible.

Archaeology has added enormously to knowledge of ancient times, so people expect it to tell us about everything in the past. When they see there is no trace of the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, nor any contemporary records of miracles performed by Jesus of Nazareth, many conclude that the Old Testament narratives were concocted in Persian or Hellenistic times to foster early Judaism and the Gospel episodes later in the first century to nurture the early Church. Should we conclude, therefore the biblical reports are 'fake news'? Such a conclusion would be too facile. Good reasons exist to explain the absence of footprints of the Exodus or Jewish or Roman documents of Jesus' activities. Here we simply note how groups of people trekking through a wilderness would leave little trace and how few documents survive from first century Palestine or Rome. There are cases where archaeology and the Bible appear to disagree, but both archaeology and biblical studies involve interpretation and that often produces mistakes or misunderstandings. It is sufficient to affirm that no archaeological discovery indubitably contradicts a biblical statement. Taking into account all archaeological factors and allowing for uncertainties, the Bible is not fake news!

'Fake News – Why Trust the Experts?

Rev. Prof. Philip McCormack M.B.E.

Philip McCormack is the Principal of Spurgeon's College, London. Previously, Prof. McCormack was an Assistant Chaplain General in the British Army and its academic lead on ethics nationally and internationally. He articulated the ethical foundation of the British Army and created a practical model of ethics widely embraced, taught and used within the Army and the Royal Marines. He is the Chair of an International Prize Committee for Military Ethics and is an Honorary Professor of Practical Ethics, in the Institute of Health and Society, the University of Worcester.

(This paper is a direct transcript of the presentation given at the 2019 Symposium.

The full presentation including PowerPoint images can be viewed at

www.youtube.com/watch?v=oBVbj0Q11Nw

'Fake News' has become such a byword that I think it basically stands for whatever somebody wants it to mean who holds the position that is different to the position that you may hold personally. And so I want to sketch out the landscape and to show that the word is a little bit more complex than is understood. I'm not going to go into the history of it, but I imagine that the majority of people have a misconception about the origin of 'Fake News'. It's not a very old phrase; I was in a taxi two days ago with somebody who confidently asserted that the originator and maintainer of 'Fake News' is Donald Trump; actually that's incorrect. It's more accurate to say that Trump or the Republicans did a hostile takeover of the concept of fake news and have used it as a weapon against their political opponents.

I want to illustrate a really simple concept that sometimes is forgotten. Charles Taylor, in his wonderful little book 'Modern Social Imaginaries' has a phrase that has been deeply influential for me. That is 'the taken for granted / too obvious to mention'. And often when we encounter news or opinions that we don't like, we tend to forget that we see with our minds just as much as we do with our eyes, and I will demonstrate that using a series of optical illusions to illustrate just how imperceptible the influence of the mind is on our perception

of what we see or we perceive to see. I will briefly touch on the notion of truth as a social construct, which is almost ubiquitous today among young people just to assume that truth is truth is whatever I choose it to be. And then I'm an advocate of Positive Realism – in other words that there is a truth out there that is simply unamendable to any social construct that anyone seeks to put on it. I will then draw some conclusions.

When I was doing some research a number of months ago into the subject of 'Fake News' I wanted to understand some of the history of it. 'First Draft' is often associated with the construction of the term 'Fake News' and I like this (Figure 1) as a kind of framework to approach 'Fake News' to try to scope the landscape, what exactly are we talking about?



Figure 1

Is satire or parody 'Fake News'? (Figure 2) Whenever there is no intent to do harm but there is an attempt to deceive. It's obvious that many of you are familiar with this but do you remember the impact that this had on society because this was done by one of the Dimbleby's and it was perceived as BBC truth and it did a lot of harm. When I did a presentation in South Wales on 'Fake News' I showed the video extract from the presentation and it's done very professionally, there is nothing in the presentation that this is one of the greatest April Fool jokes ever done. For example I think it's really interesting that they chose Switzerland and not Italy to do the parody on this.



Figure 2 - The Spaghetti harvest in Ticino, Switzerland 1957

Misleading content – this is the idea to frame the subject in a slightly misleading way (Figure 3).

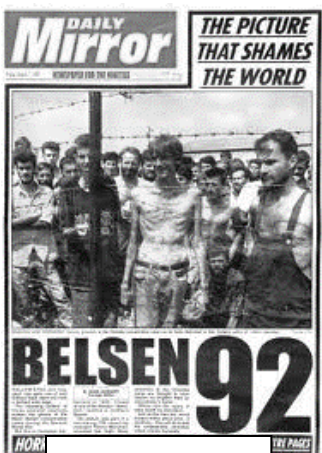


Figure 3

Anybody remember this slide? It's etched in my mind, I remember this and the reason why this is so personal to me is because I spent virtually a year of my life in the Balkans because of a lie. This was so powerful in public concept that the government had no option but to deploy British troops in the Balkans. Where it becomes very personal to me is having to tell my three year old son that his Daddy is going to have to go away to a place he has no concept of and he won't see him because children don't have the concept of time at that age. But I said to him 'son I'm going away to help children like you in a faraway place called Bosnia'. After four months of being away my

three year old son said to me 'I don't care about the Bosnian children Daddy' because he saw things through the lens of a child. The truth of this is that these emaciated people were not in a compound surrounded by barbed wire. The compound was actually for the guards. Now this is not a fun place, it's not a joy place there's nothing good about this place, I've actually visited this place. But in order to have an impact on audiences across Europe and the Western World the photographer had the original idea (actually not that original) of going inside the compound and photographing out, knowing that the image that people would see – we see with our minds as much as we do with our eyes – that people would assume this is a concentration camp and Europe promised itself that it would never have a concentration camp in Europe again and yet 37 years after the end of the second World War it looks like there's a concentration camp in Europe.

False Connections – when headlines, visuals or captions don't support the content. (Figure 4) This is during the presidential campaign, there's no truth in this whatsoever. I think we're now getting into the area of what most people would associate to be 'Fake News'. The Pope did not endorse Donald Trump in the Presidential election, so these are real characters, and these are actual hits but the connection is deliberately false or misleading.



Figure 4

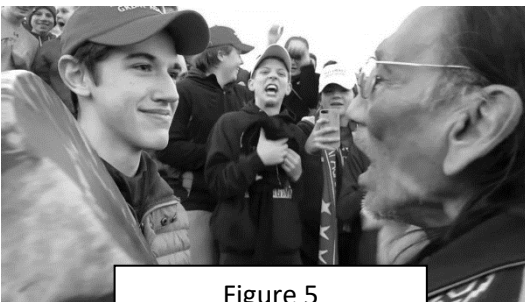


Figure 5

False Context – where genuine content is shared with false contextual information. (Figure 5) This was huge, literally just a few months ago, and when this became public it went viral and this young man

was ridiculed globally. Typical of a particular aspect of youth culture, utterly disrespectful to a native American individual. When the video footage was released of what happened, this young man was with a group of Catholic high school students and they were using the Lincoln memorial as a gathering point, as a reference point, and it was a melting pot of all different types of conflicting voices and opinions and conversations. He (the youth) stands still and does nothing, this individual (on the right) hones in on him and walks right up to his face and plays the drum in his face. But when the image was shown, the immediate interpretation of people around the world and the spin that is put on it by certain media formats is 'how insulting and disrespectful the youth of America is to an aged Indian American. Nothing could be more false.

Imposter Content – when genuine sources are impersonated. I apologise – I have an infantile sense of humour, and having had the presentations we've had I feel almost



embarrassed to show the next slide (Figure 6). Now we assume this to be self-evidently false but actually there's sophisticated work going on today in which one of the issues is called 'Deep Fake News' that we will be faced with in this form. So if you've never heard about this before, be very afraid because this is on its way. Really sophisticated computer algorithms that copy literally hundreds of thousands of facial expressions and tone of voice and it is impossible to tell a fake presentation today, because the computer programmes are so fabulous. You see the reality of this could be really distinct, so if a video of President Trump goes viral saying America has launched a retaliatory strike against North Korea. And it looks like Trump, it sounds like Trump, it's surrounded by CNN News or Fox News, and instead is generated

by computer. How do you think North Korea will respond to this? Will they think this is 'Fake News'? Very serious stuff.

Manipulated Content - where genuine information or imagery is manipulated to deliberately deceive. This is a good example of modern

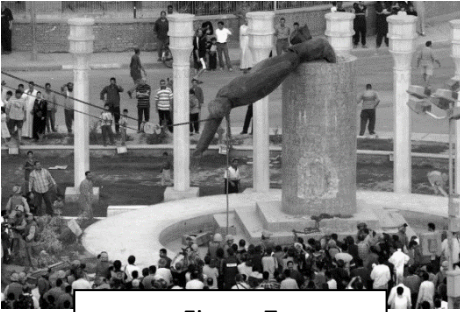


Figure 7



Figure 8

propaganda in my opinion (Figure 7). That's the image that the world saw. The allies wanted to portray the Iraq war in a certain way that they would be seen as liberators and welcomed as liberators and this is a carefully framed picture. I apologise that the next picture is not of high quality. (Figure 8) that's what it was actually like. All of the people seen in the first picture are here in the second, and you can see the area is ringed by tanks and armoured vehicles. It's true there was a group when the statue of Saddam was felled, what was not true is that Baghdad turned out to celebrate. What you have is truth that is carefully captured and carefully constructed to give a misleading content, that Baghdad was celebrating an event, when actually when you look at that picture you're talking about at most a few dozen people. But that was big news, that was a headline that people bought into.

Fabricated Content – new content that is 100% false designed to deceive and do harm. Now I think we're in the depth of 'Fake News'. (Figure



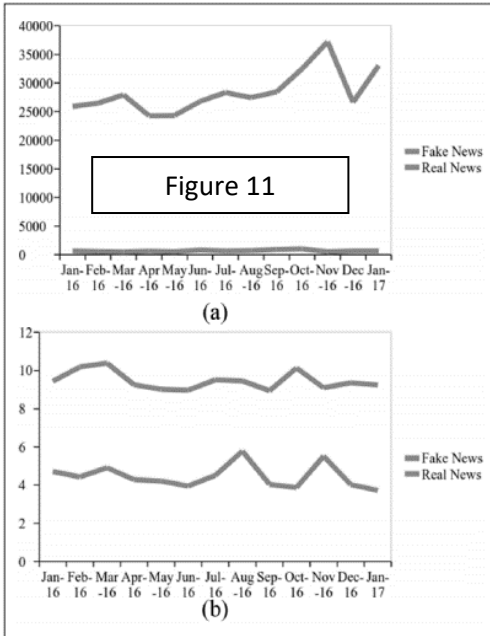
9) 'Hillary sold weapons to ISIS' so says Political Insider. 'Breaking News: Hillary files for divorce'. Actually, for a lie to be successful there has to be an element of truth. Who would have thought Hillary was acting unreasonably if she divorced Bill, given how we imagine the former president behaved?

(Figure 10) And this is only recently, this happened within the last two weeks. There was a WhatsApp message that suggested that Metro Bank had run out of funds and if you had money in Metro Bank you needed to get there instantly



to take your money out and somebody tried to create a run on the bank. Banks do not have the physical cash in their vaults to pay everybody that banks with them and neither are they expected to, no bank does. But you can create a run on a bank, it happened with Northern Rock. If you have enough people turning up demanding money to come out, and it happened in Cyprus, you can get a devastating economic effect.

So how prevalent is 'Fake News'? I think it is something that we really fear and therefore as with a lot of things we imagine that it is more prevalent than it is. Let me ask a question – now some of you may know the answer to this so I'm half expecting you to get it right. What percentage of UK public uses Twitter?



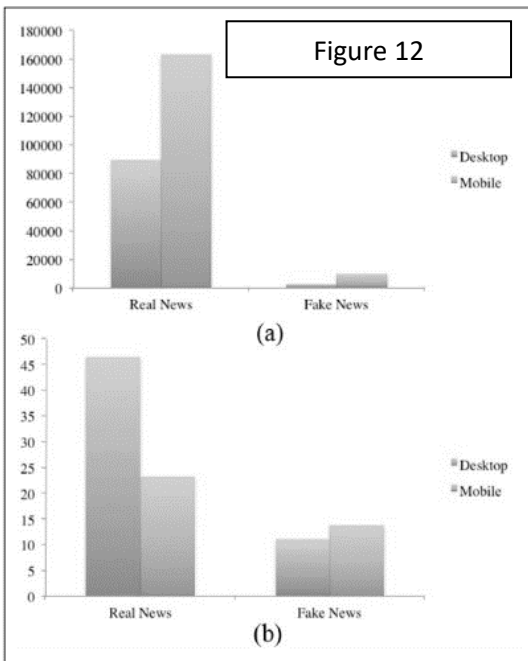
We've heard about Twitter storms, we've seen companies sack people, change policies, confess all kinds of wrongdoing. 8% - that's all. I'm basing this on a really interesting paper done by Nelson and Taneja¹. Now there's a note of caution that needs to be issued here and that is it's very difficult to take findings from one culture and simply import them into another. But there has been a consistent history of ideas and principles in the States filtering

their way across the pond, the pond is not that great in distance terms anymore, but nevertheless the findings are fascinating because when we think of 'Fake News' we think of the cultural wars that are taking place in the States. Key findings of the research 'Fake News audience comprises a small, disloyal group of heavy Internet users.' So contrary to public opinion, those who seek after this and live in this pool of 'Fake News' are incredibly small, they also tend to be disloyal, in other words they're like bumblebees, they move from thing to thing to thing, they don't stay.

(Figure 11) I think this is a really interesting graph. The top graph indicates the number of people, measured in thousands, that access what we would consider or would generally be considered to be reputable news sources. That is organisations that generally, by and large (there are always exceptions, both

¹ Nelson, J. L., & Taneja, H. (2018). The small, disloyal fake news audience: The role of audience availability in fake news consumption. *New Media & Society*, 20(10), 3720–3737. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818758715>

CNN and Fox get it wrong) that check their sources and seek to make sure that the evidence of the details of the story are correct. Look at how prevalent 'Fake News' is – it hardly registers on this particular graph. This (lower) graph indicates the amount of time those people seeking out and wanting to get evidence for a news story spend. It is a lot longer searching for news stories from reputable sites, much less for 'Fake News', and that generally tends to be on social media platforms.



(Figure 12) I think this really illustrates the huge disparity between the majority of the American public that seek their news from reputable sources because they recognize there's a process it goes through, and actually those who seek 'Fake News' or are involved in 'Fake News' and again there's a significant disparity in the amount of time that people on 'Fake News' sites spend.

I find this really interesting 'The fake news audience itself remains quite small and non-

exclusive'² It's much easier for fake news producers to flood the news media and here's the thing 'fake news in general could have a corrosive effect on the news media by making it more difficult for audiences to determine what is real and what is not'³

² Ibid

³ Ibid

Why does this persist - because often the 'Fake News' story is revealed for exactly what it is – utterly fake? I think this is the issue 'a lack of trust' a lack of perspective. So this morning as we were getting ready to come out I watched BBC News and every week there's a segment in the News in which it deals with complaints to the BBC. One of the main areas of complaints was last Sunday's interview by (Andrew) Marr on (Nigel) Farage. The primary distinction between comments on either side was that some thought the interview was biased and some thought the interview was fair. As Nelson and Taneja observed, only about a third of Americans have confidence in the reputable news sources despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of American citizens go to the main news sources.

I think a second contributing factor, at least to me is, most of us live in an Echo Chamber. Now let me ask you a simple question, what newspaper did you read this morning before you came out? I've spoken to people who say to me 'Oh I read six newspapers on a daily basis' and I think 'I'm not worthy, because I can't do that!'. Actually demographically you can, and I know that this is hugely sweeping, you can kind of categorize whole people groups by the newspapers they read. It was quite common to say that *Telegraph* readers were the Conservative party at prayer. So those who read *The Times* and the *Telegraph* tend to be Conservative, *The Daily Mail* - rightwing mentalists, *The Guardian* - sensible people on the left of the spectrum. But actually what the Echo Chamber represents is an environment in which our own ideas are continually fed back to us to reinforce our own perception of what it is that we think we believe. And so some of the scholars that have been mentioned today that have been challenged by our illustrious earlier speakers, I'm sure that they will continue to have a sustained audience, because the audience hears exactly what they want to hear. So for example if you want to believe that there is evidence of a boat shaped rock formation that could be aligned to Noah's Ark, well you see what you want to see and then someone tells you exactly what you want to believe. But I have to say that from my reading of

the Biblical text it was just a big box, and I think Alan's absolutely right, it wasn't designed to sail across the Atlantic!

A third contributor, I would contend, is that we see with our minds just as much as we do with our eyes. The Hermann-Hering illusion – I want you to count how many dots you can see on the screen for a few seconds (Figure 13) There aren't dots on the screen, it's the inter-relationship between the geometric shapes and the colour, black and white that creates it, the mind just fills in the blanks. This is a really good illustration of how we can add meaning where none exists. It's clear that the person who designed this

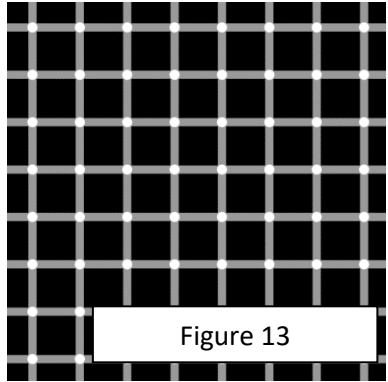


Figure 13

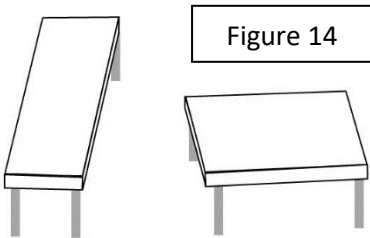


Figure 14

has done it perhaps with the intention to deceive but what you will see is not what is actually happening on the screen. What you see is an interpretation that your mind creates, and then when you see the evidence you will probably go 'Oh isn't that clever!' (*The Crazy Circle illusion is on Youtube <https://youtu.be/pNe6fsaCVtI>*)

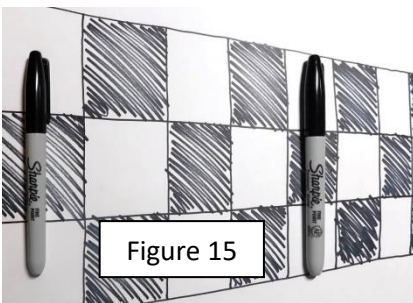


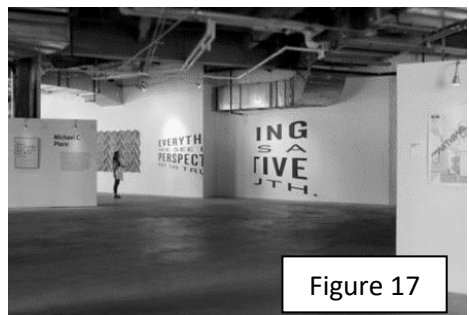
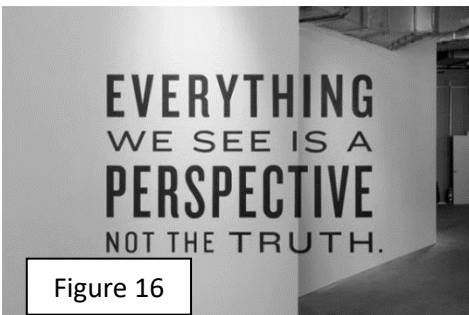
Figure 15

if I told you that the table on the left has exactly the same dimensions as the table on the right. Perspective can be really dramatic (Figure 15) the pens in

this image are exactly the same size, all that's different is that the background context has radically changed. (See also the Kanizsa Triangle illusion).

I think a fourth contributing factor to the continuing presence of fake news is the internet. I don't think we have fully come to terms with the impact of the internet, and I know I'm not the only one in the room who remembers the introduction of the internet. It has become completely pervasive and this is one of the most important ways in which modern people find information and communicate. Therefore 'A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on' (a quote often attributed to Winston Churchill but we don't think that is correct!)

Then there is perspective. (Figure 16) I like this type of artwork, it appeals to my infantile mind. When we see that artwork from a different perspective (Figure 17) you realise that perspective is everything. What makes sense in the first image, does not in the second.

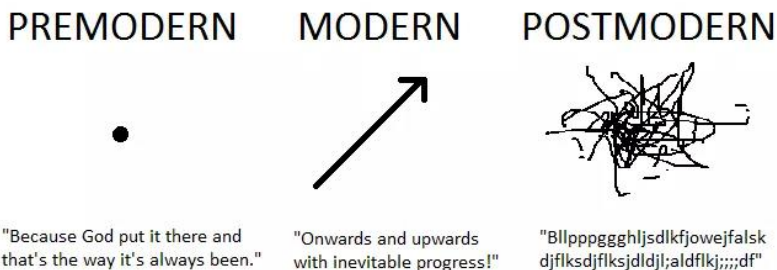


Now let me challenge you a little – do you recognize these two photographs (Figure 18). I'm going to be challenging here, how many took a lot of comfort in the left-hand image – satisfaction! Obama (the right) yeah! Trump (the left) just right!.



This is the official photograph (Figure 19) that's Donald Trump there with his wife and family. Look at the boulevard – there are two possible options here, that the first image was taken at a different point of time, or that the second photo has been doctored to create an effect – either way is not entirely sure but remember we see with our minds just as much as with our eyes.

One of the most significant contributing factors to fake news is the impact of postmodern skepticism. A personal confession – I am biased. I am a product of the enlightenment University system. I've been doing something in the University context now for over 30 years, I have doctorates from different universities and degrees in different subjects and so I've been the perpetual student involved in University level education. And so I am quintessentially classically modern. If you have ever read any A-level sociology books they divide history very simply up into premodern, modern and postmodern, and I must say this appeals to me. Pre-modern – God put it there. Modern period – onwards and upwards, with inevitable progress. Postmodern – gibberish (Figure 20)



I think that Foucault has a lot to do with this, one of the West Bank French intellectuals. Not everything that Foucault was arguing about was wrong, his critique of power is devastating and his insight into human nature, much like most existential thought, is really insightful. But as a coordinated theory it doesn't really hold much value. One of the children or offshoots of Foucault's thinking is the idea that reality is just a social construction, and that includes science. This is pervasive actually in a lot of educational settings – that truth is nothing but personal opinion. And so when you hear eminent specialists as we've heard this morning, all you're actually hearing is old white men saying 'I spent 60 years studying this, listen to me'. If truth is only a social construction you can actually come to such a ridiculous position.

It can get to this utter nonsense (Figure 21) – for those of you who don't know who Titania McGrath is supposed to be, she is the queen of 'woke' and if you don't know what 'woke' is then I don't have time to explain it but it is just being hyper aware and hyper sensitive. It turns out that Titania McGrath and even the photograph is a



Figure 21

Titania speaks the truth

composite, it's a lie, she doesn't exist and it turns out that the person behind it is a 40 year old PhD who was wanting to ridicule the kind of skepticism that you find when everything is a social construction.

So why should we trust experts? Especially if all knowledge is a social construction and not an ultimate truth. Few academics would contest that perspective is essential when you're looking at a subject. Alan this morning was saying that even when archaeologists do a dig, it still has to be interpreted, there is still a theory of interpretation and a framework that's built. Sometimes in science this concept gets lost, that underpinning science is a belief network that often scientists don't like to realise ... a lot of science is actually philosophy and belief. So I'm not convinced that oxygen is a social construct, if it was we would all be in trouble.

So why trust experts? Expertise may be defined as 'a special skill or knowledge that is acquired by training, study or practice.' I think that's a pretty fair dictionary definition and there's a tremendous amount of truth in that. But I think another way of thinking about this is that an expert understands the landscape of their field of expertise. In other words if you were wanting an answer on some aspect of archaeology, you wouldn't ask me, I'm a

philosopher, I'm a theologian, I have a visiting professorship in Ethics because of the work that I did in Ethics within the armed forces.

What I want to do is to give you a very visual metaphor for why trust in experts. I'll give you some of the background to this. I was giving a couple of lectures at a conference and I presented a notion on Ethics and the speaker following me utterly and completely smashed the concept of truth as nothing but multiple perspectives rendering any interpretation meaningless. Some of the people in the conference came to me and said they were having a crisis because they found it 'really really difficult' to listen to anything because the previous speaker had utterly and completely demolished any notion that truth could be identified. And so I came up with this idea, I don't know whether it's original, it probably isn't. Picture the visible electromagnetic light spectrum from red to violet. It's fuzzy, relatively ill-defined, but still you can probably pick out major colour blocks. If I asked you to pick out 'yellow' and then asked if it was the area between blue and indigo you would be confident to agree it isn't. Similarly we would agree that yellow is not within a region between green and blue or red and orange.

An expert not only knows a great deal about their field of expertise, they are also likely to have a substantial knowledge of closely related subjects. In other words, their knowledge of the landscape of their field of expertise most likely means that they understand the boundary points, those things which are clearly and objectively defensible and those bits that are genuinely open to legitimate conversation and debate. And in this sense the claim that all knowledge is a social construction is in my view excessive. If you're listening to an expert in science or archaeology talk about their field of expertise, Billy who knows nothing about it doesn't have the same voice because of the field of expertise that the expert has. This is where I am greatly attracted to the concept of positive realism as produced by Maurizio Ferraris, and this idea is based upon the notion that reality is 'unamendable' in other words it is resistant to human will. Are the Alps a social construct? No – the Alps will still

be an enormous mountain range long after the cultural wars that are raging in America and Europe have long ceased to be. There is a reality in the world that is unamendable to social constructs and so I like the idea of Genexis and engaging with those who can demonstrate that there is a truth that exists in the Universe that is not constructed, man did not invent it. I think one of John Lennox's most potent arguments is that if the mind is just the product of random occurrences, why would you trust anything that it imagines? But what is utterly amazing is that the mathematics that can occur in the brains of people like Lennox is found in the Universe out there. Not because we superimpose it out there but because we find the physical evidence that underpins the mathematics out there.

When Jesus was standing before Pilate he stated, according to John, that the reason he had been born and came into the world was to testify to the truth (John 18:37). What Pilate says has been asked ever since – 'What is truth?' In the age of 'Fake News' which is only going to become more complex, this question is incredibly relevant.

For those of us who are believers, this is truth, that Jesus said 'I am the way and the truth and the life' (John 14:6) He is not 'a way' he is no 'a truth' he is not 'a life'. This fundamental doctrinal belief can act as a fixed reference point in an ever changing and fluid landscape to those within the Christian community. Now I recognize that those who do not come from the Christian community may not have that doctrinal reference point but this is or should be a reference point to believers that is unamendable to whatever fluctuations society decides to invent. In other words there is no context, at least for me, and I would be prepared to burn at the stake for this, where Jesus is not 'The truth'.

In conclusion, the word 'Fake News' is actually a lot more complex than we often assume. There are shades and nuances in it, and it is an interesting point of discussion as to whether a statement is 'Fake News' or whether it is simply an opinion that we don't agree with. But if it is genuinely held, based

on the evidence they say they have, we may question the validity of their evidence we may go a long way to doubt what they're saying, but I'm not entirely convinced that it sits under the rubric of 'Fake News'. Secondly, and I hope this will give us some confidence, the audience for 'Fake News' is remarkably small. It is not as all-pervasive as perhaps is presented in the media. People are a lot more shrewd than they are sometimes portrayed. I genuinely believe that the vast majority of people sit in the region of 'what's common sense' which actually underpins English Common Law. That question is often asked in the court, 'what would the person on the Clapham Omnibus think of this situation?' It is embedded in the idea of a trial by a jury of our peers. The reason why we should trust experts is that actually if they are a genuine expert in their field they have spent years studying the landscape and they understand the contours of the landscape. So if you were to ask one of our two experts today a simplistic question they will probably give an answer along the lines of 'it's much more complex than you think' because of the level of research and study that's gone into this subject. And in a world cluttered by a bewildering array of claim and counter claim those who have a living faith in the Lord Jesus have an unchanging and fixed belief. So in an age of false news the last thing I want to say is 'Jesus is the way, the truth and the life'.

Capernaum and the House of Peter

Dr Pieter J. Lalleman

*Pieter Lalleman is tutor of biblical studies at Spurgeon's College, London. His recent publications include *In the Power of the Resurrection. Studies on the Book of Acts* (London: Faithbuilders, 2019) and *Enduring Treasure. The Lasting Value of the Old Testament for Christians* (London: Faithbuilders, 2017). This article was previously published on-line at *Christian Today* - <https://tinyurl.com/y59q82lu>*

At the time of Jesus the town of Capernaum had not been in existence for very long. It would have had some 1000 to 1500 inhabitants, among whom were Romans as well as Jews. The town was not destroyed during the Jewish rebellions in 70 and 132 AD, and from the second century AD it began to develop into a site of Christian pilgrimage, despite being hit by massive earthquakes in the fourth and seventh century.

Capernaum was only abandoned around the tenth century AD, and in 1866 the British Captain Charles Wilson identified the ruins as those of Capernaum. Few places in Israel have since been excavated as thoroughly as Capernaum. A large bath house from the second or third century is one of the testimonies to the presence of Romans in the town.

The synagogue

The synagogue in Capernaum has always been visible above ground and was already known to Wilson. The building sits on an artificial hill, overlooking the surrounding area. However, the present synagogue of white limestone does not date from New Testament times, but from the fourth or fifth century AD, as evidenced by the coins and pottery found in it.

Yet underneath this white synagogue remains of an older building were found. This was probably also a synagogue, although little more is left of it than remnants of black basalt walls dating back to the first century AD or even a little earlier. Because of Luke 7:1-10 this building is also referred to as 'the Synagogue of the Centurion'. Apart from its location, little would indicate that

it is indeed a synagogue. The building was quite large, 19 by 25 metres, and the walls were up to a meter thick.

Peter's house

In the centre of the old town, some 30 metres to the south of the synagogue and equally far from Lake Galilee, are the remains of a housing block from the first century. Originally it consisted of typical small fishing houses such as one would expect in this port. Tradition says that one of the houses in this block was the home of the apostle Peter.

This house probably dates from around the time of Jesus' birth. Originally just a simple dwelling, in the second half of the first century it was thoroughly renovated. One of the rooms became remarkably big, about 7 by 6.5 metres. Its floor and walls were rendered with thick plaster, something unique in Capernaum and thus indicating a special treatment. In this room archaeologists did not find the usual fragments of pottery, but rather remains of oil lamps.

What was it that made this house and its development special? On the plaster we find graffiti from later times, mainly in Greek but also in Aramaic, Latin and Syriac. The word God occurs. It is said that the name Peter occurs twice.

Pilgrims

The fourth-century pilgrim Egeria claims that she had visited the home of Peter in Capernaum; in her travelogue she writes: 'In Capernaum is the home of the Prince of the Apostles, turned into a church but with the original walls retained. Here the Lord healed a crippled man.' Archaeologists have concluded that at the time of Egeria around the original house there was a rectangular wall of about 27 metres long and almost as wide. It seems that the simple house had been turned into a kind of church. (In Rome there are also ordinary houses beneath many of the old churches.)

Around the year 570 a later pilgrim reports that the 'House of Peter' had been replaced by a large church, a basilica. This claim too fits with the archaeological data, because on top of the original church there is an octagonal church built

in the fifth century. Already in 614 AD, however, this building was destroyed as the Persians invaded Galilee and left a trail of devastation.

Bethsaida or Capernaum?

In the New Testament Peter and his brother Andrew are not only associated with Capernaum (e.g. Mark 1:21, 29) but also with Bethsaida (John 1:44: 'Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida'). John's Gospel appears to contradict Mark's. The usual solution to this problem is to assume that Peter and Andrew had been born in Bethsaida but had at some stage moved to Capernaum. Likewise, Jesus was from Nazareth but ministered from Capernaum (Matthew 4:13), yet he was always known as 'Jesus of Nazareth'. Alternatively, Peter had business in Bethsaida although he lived in Capernaum, as Bethsaida seems to have been a centre of the fishing industry. In any case, the commemoration of Peter in Capernaum is much older than that in Bethsaida, where recently a church was rediscovered, which was given the pretentious name 'the Church of the Apostles'.

The name implies a great claim – but it was typical for the summer season, and I have deflated it almost completely elsewhere.¹

Evaluation

So how do we evaluate claims that we can identify the 'House of Peter' in Capernaum? It seems that very early on the followers of Jesus regarded this first-century building as very special. This makes it likely that there was a continuous tradition that Peter had lived here. This is in contrast to many other 'holy places' in Israel where no continuous tradition exists and which were often only identified at the time of Emperor Constantine in the fourth century. Of course, in this case there is no scholarly proof that the tradition is correct and that this simple house, which was first converted into a church hall and then into a full-blown church, goes back to Peter himself. On the other hand, there

¹ See <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/the-newly-discovered-church-is-neither-biblical-nor-apostolic/132984.htm>

are no convincing reasons to doubt the traditions. It is therefore entirely possible that what we do indeed have is the House of Peter.

Is this then a proof for the existence of Jesus? Maybe indirectly. Peter, the simple fisherman from Capernaum would have remained unknown if he had not connected his life and work with that of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah of Israel. The fact that Christians made pilgrimages to this house as Peter's house is an indication that Jesus may have lived. No more and no less.

PARTICLES OF FAITH

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

ink: (Tyndale House Magazine)

The work of Tyndale House is probably familiar to many of our members, but it is worth pointing out that they publish an excellent free magazine called 'ink' (Tyndale House INK = THINK, clever eh!). Now up to issue 3, the Summer edition carries a helpful piece by Dr Peter Williams concerning the work of Bart Ehrman entitled 'How scepticism became a bestseller'.

You can sign up for 'ink' at tyndalehouse.com/magazine

Christians in Science – Forthcoming lectures

CiS host regular lectures on Faith and Science around the country throughout the year. You can see the programme of events on their website: www.cis.org.uk/events/

The Brexit Challenge: Brexit, second Corinthians and Baptists, what a combo.

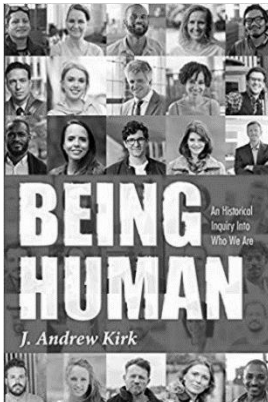
<https://www.bmsworldmission.org/product/mission-catalyst-europe-3-19/>

This article by David McMillan appeared in the BMS magazine Mission Catalyst, Issue 3 2019. Using Paul's own description of his shift from angry young man to loving pastor the piece

encourages the church to be a place where 'from now on we regard no-one from a human point of view...' In particular, our tendency to label other people and ourselves (e.g. 'leave' or 'remain') should be resisted. He writes, 'We need to heal ourselves of the labels that divide in order to learn the process of neutralising the divisive power of labelling that is crippling our society'.

Book Reviews

J. Andrew Kirk, *Being Human, An Historical Inquiry Into Who We Are*, Wipf & Stock: Eugene, Oregon, 2019, 404p + xii, available in various formats



Many of us know Andrew Kirk as a missiologist. In this book, he demonstrates his ability as an apologist. Many secular opponents of our faith have no interest in arguments for God, as they have already discounted such. They might, however, consider arguments about what it means to be human. This is Kirk's way in.

After an introductory chapter, he considers the view of humanity in Renaissance Humanism, John Locke, the Enlightenment, Hume and Diderot, Marx, Darwin,

Nietzsche, Freud, and Secular Humanism, pointing out their weaknesses. In a penultimate chapter, he outlines the alternative views of five twentieth century Christians: William Temple, Jacques Maritain, Reinhold Niebuhr, Juan Luis Segundo and Jürgen Moltmann. (Curiously, he says of William Temple, "The former Archbishop of Canterbury undertook ..." [p312] Should that not be "the later Archbishop of Canterbury"? Or was he confusing William's time as Primate with that of his father, Frederick?) Finally, he suggests "'Inference to the Best Explanation" (IBE) (technically designated abduction)' as a means of enabling dialogue between the secular and Christian worldviews, and attempts to explain what this means. Each chapter concludes with a series of questions for discussion.

The idea behind this book is a good one. I did not find it difficult to read, and, so far as I am able to assess them, his summaries of thought are fair. My problem with it is that I believe Kirk has chosen

the wrong dialogue partner. All the above points of view, whether Christian or secular, are philosophically 'modernist'. But what we increasingly have to wrestle with is 'Postmodernism'. His only reference to the latter is in a footnote to his final chapter, where he says, "I ... am aware that adherents of a postmodern reading of culture disclaim any notion of grand-narratives ... postmodernity cannot escape so easily from the accusation that it too offers a grand-narrative, for, in spite of its relativistic rhetoric, it certainly stands for a number of universal values." (p381) This may be true, but it needs to be argued, with examples.

He recognises, in passing, one way that the postmodern world view is already having a major impact, when he says, in the same chapter that "the personal opinion that a person can change their biological sex by merely asserting they now wish to be recognized as a person of the opposite sex" is a "mental fiction". (p379) I remember some politically progressive, secular

minded women, who were deeply distressed to find that their local authority (not mine) was allowing men who simply 'self-identified' as women to use their female changing room, even though such men had undergone no surgery or hormone treatment and were 'not even sitting to urinate'! It seemed self-evident to the women, as to me, that this was putting a 'politically correct' view of individual rights above elementary biology and plain common sense. Yet people in authority had evidently gone along with such absurdity.

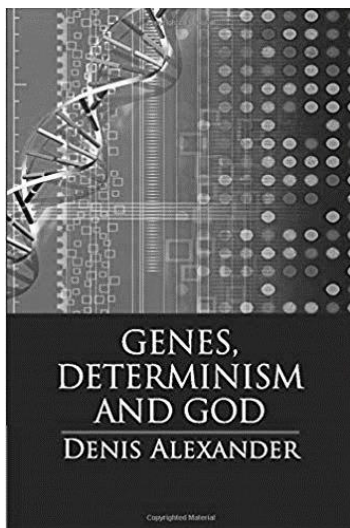
I am on good terms with a secular Humanist, who sits on a committee with me. After one meeting, we got into discussion with someone of 'new age' type views. To my delight, I found that my Humanist friend sided with me, and spoke in support of my arguments. Whatever our differences about God, we both believed in logically reasoned argument, based on objective facts that could be discovered in the real world around us. Kirk's book should

speak to someone like that Humanist. (I must lend it to him, when I next see him.) I fear, though, that a Postmodernist would find it as alien as the 'new ager' found our arguments.

Reviewed by Bob Allaway

Bob Allaway did lend Andrew Kirk's book to his Humanist friend, who has offered to contribute his own brief review of it to our next edition.

**Denis Alexander. *Genes, Determinism and God.*
Cambridge University Press 2017
Pb. 385pp. ISBN 978-1-316-50638-7**



Many of our readers will be familiar with Denis Alexander in his role as the former editor of 'Science and Christian Belief' and the author of several books including 'Rebuilding the Matrix' and 'Creation and Evolution, Do we have to choose?' The present volume is an amplified version of the Gifford lectures which he gave in 2012 in which he details how genetic variation as well as our environment makes us the people we are and how this can so easily be misrepresented. The book can be divided into three parts: A potted history of the Nature/nurture debate, a detailed study of genetics and the relevance of all this to important modern issues.

In the first two chapters Dr. Alexander looks at the way the nature/nurture debate has fluctuated throughout the centuries from ancient Greek times to the present and what implications it has had on our treatment of individuals through the centuries. Some like Plato believed that we are born with knowledge and innate ideas and that each has their place in society. In his utopian republic ruled over by benevolent dictators

(the philosopher kings) individuals belonged to different classes ranging from the ruling classes to the working classes. Throughout subsequent history the belief was that children inherit their parents' genes (although the word 'gene' was not used) The offspring of the lower, working classes were feeble minded, idiots and likely to develop into criminals, who could threaten the 'fitter' children of the middle classes. This led to the belief that the working classes should be sterilised to prevent the birth of such undesirables (the doctrine of eugenics) which was supported by many intellectuals and found its climax in the Nazi eugenics programme. By contrast philosophers like Locke and J.S.Mill believed that children were born with no innate ideas and that character is the result of habit and education.

The central section of the book (chapters 3-7) deals with the 'new genetics', development and determination in animals and humans and behavioural genetics. The author points out that the genome is not the ruler over the functioning of the cells but rather

that the genome in each cell is slightly different. He notes that one million of our cells die every second and that genes generate several different proteins. He discusses how changes come about and what is meant by terms like epigenetics and transposons and how mutations develop through cutting, splicing and editing. Alexander shows in his chapters on animal and human development that both genes and environmental factors influence the organism, for instance in humans smoking, alcohol and drugs taken in pregnancy as well as malnutrition, anxiety and depression can affect children in their early years. Similarly, defective genes are responsible for some 5000 unfortunate conditions although, as he points out in later chapters, this information is often misused. A lot of the research to determine what causes defects relies on the study of identical twins brought up in equal environments. Alexander asks whether identical twins are truly identical and what is meant by an identical environment. Much of the material in these chapters is very technical and those of us with little or no genetic

knowledge will find it hard going. The chapters dealing with genetics and intelligence, criminal responsibility, sexual orientation and religious beliefs are much easier to understand.

Differences in intelligence, criminal responsibility and sexual orientation have been attributed to various genes found in different individuals. It is claimed that there is a gay gene, a warrior gene and even a god gene. Obviously, it is important to know why people are different especially when differences affect a person's well-being as it does with sexual orientation, intelligence and criminal activity. Dr. Alexander discusses each of these in detail. He points out that there is no single gene responsible for the existence of same sex attraction and of the environmental factors only two seem to have reasonable support, that is exposure to elevated levels of androgen in women and birth order in men. High or low intelligence is relevant to what form of education a person may get which, in turn, can determine his or her future status. In the U.S.A. where the death penalty still exists, proof of low intelligence could

affect the outcome of the trial. It is difficult to know how much intelligence is due to heredity. The same applies to criminal justice. Defence lawyers sometimes try to prove that criminal activity occurred because of insanity or the inability to distinguish between good and evil acts which were determined by factors outside the control of the individual.

The two final chapters are devoted to the topics of freewill and determinism and how all of this can be related to a belief that mankind is created in the image of God. Alexander uses the philosophical concept of dual aspect monism to defend freewill and points out that the brain functions at two levels – the unconscious where determinism dominates and the conscious in which we are able to make free choices.

The final chapter 'Made in the Image of God' will particularly appeal to Christians. It brings the book to a satisfying climax. The concept of the image of God is placed in the context of the Ancient Middle East where the king is made in the image of the god and

mankind as his slaves. By contrast in the Bible humanity, both male and female, are made in God's image and act as his agents on earth. Alexander believes that the Bible teaches that humans are whole persons, not bodies with a soul as Plato taught. Acceptance of the biblical view means that all human beings, whatever their intellectual or physical status are all created in the image of God. This is an antidote to the modern equivalent of eugenics characterised by Hitler's adoption of the image of God concept as applying to the pure Aryan race whose duty it was to eliminate the mentally defective, the disabled, hereditary criminals and undesirables like gypsies, homosexuals and Jews. Unfortunately, some scientific ethicists, like Peter Singer, have argued on their understanding of genetics that it is justifiable not only to abort but also to kill 'defective' infants. Although Alexander totally dismisses this, he does see there is a place for medical intervention if this will prevent a child being born with serious inherited defects affecting

the quality of life. However, he is sceptical of attempts to genetically alter individuals to create 'designer' persons. He writes, "The complexity of the human genome is its own best defence against meddlers." In his concluding remarks he asks that because of the breath-taking advance of genetics, ethicists and theologians should work together to outlaw certain procedures and lines of enquiry.

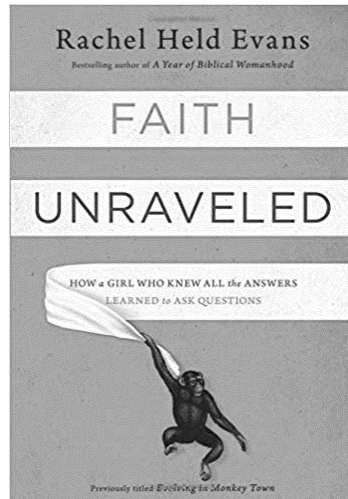
This book is a veritable *tour de force* in which the author uses insights from science, philosophy, history and theology to establish his thesis. The book is detailed, comprehensive and well researched (the bibliography spans 44 pages) It is a scholarly book which is not easy to read but is rewarding for those who persevere with it!

Reviewed by Reg.Luhman

Rachel Held Evans, *Faith Unravelled, How a girl who knew all the answers learned to ask questions*, Zondervan 2010, ISBN 978-0-310-33916-8

My wife has been telling me that Rachel Held Evans is an important

contemporary theological voice for some years now, but I had never got around to reading her.



Tragically, Rachel died from an allergic reaction to medication in May 2019 which prompted me to explore her work further.

The (somewhat tenuous) reason for including this book in Faith & Thought is that the original title 'Evolving in Monkey Town' refers to her formative years spent in Dayton, Tennessee – home of the famous Scopes Monkey Trial held in 1925 concerning the teaching of human evolution in state-funded schools. I say 'formative years' because in many ways this is the focus of her attention. She details how her faith, and her beliefs were

formed at an early age, having been born into a Christian family, and then details the journey of unravelling some of these beliefs as her faith has matured.

Along the way she is challenged to rethink her learned assumptions concerning politics, gender roles, suffering, poverty, other religions and the nature of salvation. One issue that is not addressed in detail is biological evolution – but of course, that’s not really the point.

A recent term coined for millennial Christians who have been through similar intellectual journeys is ‘Exvangelical’. It is certainly true that Rachel rejects much of what she was taught in her conservative southern US evangelical upbringing, but importantly she remains generous and loving towards those who shaped her early Christian life. This is not so much a ‘moving away from’ traditional faith as a ‘moving towards’ a deeper faith, embracing an attitude of wonder and questioning towards the usual too-easy answers. She writes:

‘I would argue that healthy doubt (questioning one’s

beliefs) is perhaps the best defence against unhealthy doubt (questioning God). When we know how to make a distinction between our ideas about God and God himself, our faith remains safe when one of those ideas is seriously challenged. When we recognize that our theology is not the moon but rather a finger pointing at the moon, we enjoy the freedom of questioning it from time to time.’

This is a short book, written in an easy-going style without pages of references. This may give the impression of being ‘light-weight’. In reality, it is a careful, highly thoughtful and very relevant book for so many people today who struggle with the faith they grew up with, but who still love the good news of Jesus Christ. In this sense, perhaps it is not so much a book for ‘ex-vangelicals’ but is rather a call to be ‘re-vangelical’ – good news people who are not afraid to ask questions.

Reviewed by Alan Kerry

Obituary - Terence Croft Mitchell

Former chairman of Faith & Thought Council and long-standing Council Member, Terence Croft Mitchell, died on 21st April 2019 at the age of 89. A well-attended memorial service was held at Westminster Chapel, London.

Alan Millard wrote the following memories.

'Terence was converted while a student at Cambridge, reading Archaeology and Anthropology. He came to the attention of Donald Wiseman, then at the British Museum, who was always on the look-out for young scholars to work in biblical archaeology and languages. I am not sure of the exact sequence, but Terence did research for the Australian Institute of Archaeology, Melbourne, a project of an evangelical businessman there, whom Donald knew. That resulted in a few publications, including 'Archaeology and Genesis I-XI', Faith and Thought 91.1 (1959) 43f. and the entry 'Flood' in the New Bible Dictionary. I hope the volume of essays being prepared to mark his 90th birthday - now a memorial volume - will contain a full bibliography. He was appointed as an Assistant Keeper of the Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities at the British Museum in 1959 and became Keeper 1983-89.

His book *The Bible in the British Museum* (British Museum Press, 1988, reprinted several times) is a helpful guide for the seriously interested visitor. He was a faithful member of the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical Research, which is where I met him, with Kenneth Kitchen. Others in London can tell of his regular attendance at church services and his work with the Gideons. Terence was a modest man, as you know, not afraid to state his convictions. It is a tribute to his character and his faith that he was well-liked by colleagues across the world.'

Dr John Curtis, subsequent keeper of the Middle East Department, British Museum wrote:

'Terence was much liked and greatly respected in the British Museum where he worked for his whole career and even during his long retirement. His book

ANNUAL ACCOUNTS

The annual accounts were presented by John Buxton. A summary sheet was circulated, and the full accounts were available for members. The balance is healthy, and has meant there is no need to increase the subscription charges, and has allowed us to put on the Symposium free of charge to attendees.

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- a) **Terence Mitchell** – 1929-2019. The recent death of our former Chairman Terence Mitchell was announced, a memorial service will be held on Friday 24th May at Westminster Chapel.
- b) **Academic Grants** – Council had received an application for an academic grant, which had been discussed at the last Council Meeting (Alan Kerry absented himself from the discussion as he knew the applicant personally). Council recommended that the award of £1000 should be awarded to this applicant.
- c) **Messy Church Does Science in Schools** – a funding bid had been received from BRF which was available to members and had been discussed at the last Council meeting. Council recommended awarding a grant in the amount of £3000. This was agreed.
- d) **Genexis 'Imponderables that Point to God'** – the membership were informed that this series of apologetics talks will be held at

Coventry Cathedral in September and the resources made available afterwards.

- e) **Symposium 2020 'The Christian Approach to Catastrophe'** – members were advised that next year's symposium is planned for Saturday 16th May 2020, with papers to be presented by Simon Woodman (apocalyptic scripture and end times), Ruth Valerio (environmental catastrophe) and John Day (medical catastrophe).

CLOSE The chairman closed the meeting.

Join Faith & Thought Council

We are looking for new Council Members to help direct the activities of Faith & Thought. We usually meet for Council Meetings in January, May and September, normally in London. We are particularly looking for women or men with an interest in biblical archaeology, but applications would be welcome from anyone. Our constitution requires that Council Members sign a short declaration of faith i.e.:

1. I declare my faith in Jesus Christ as my Saviour, my Lord and my God, whose atoning sacrifice is the only and all-sufficient ground of my salvation.
2. I will seek, both in life and in thought, to be ruled by the clear teaching of the Bible, believing it to be the inspired word of God.

If you are interested in applying, or know of someone who might be please contact our administrator on admin@faithandthought.org

Instructions for Authors

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

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

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

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:

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

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First Names.....

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Please enrol me as a Member under:

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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.

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

Signature

Date

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