

God: Some Conversations

How do you speak about God?

4 – 14 July 2022

Participant Papers

Syndicate Group Facilitator: Hueston Finlay



ST GEORGE'S HOUSE CONSULTATIONS

GOD: SOME CONVERSATIONS 4-14 JULY 2022

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Children and the Seven Sacraments

Children and the Seven Sacraments - Growing Church across seven villages

To become a Christian is to understand the Church's teaching and be Baptised. A large proportion of people come to faith before they are 18. This is typically because they are raised in a Christian family. And of course, many people come to faith later in life too, as a result of an invitation or interaction with a Christian or as a result of reading the bible. People need an opportunity to talk and experience what practising Christians do. For those who don't grow up in Christian families, life events, invitations to services and reading the bible are important factors in belief and commitment. (Talking Jesus Report 2022).

Many people who come to Church, especially if they are new, the concept or understanding of a Sacrament is absent or misunderstood. The same may be said of those who are already part of the Church across the broad spectrum of expressions and traditions. The teaching, emphasis and language differ across Evangelical to Catholic (as examples of Church types) as well as Catholic and Reformed (as theological positions). These types and positions are an oversimplification and used to make the point that there are a variety of ways that the Church express itself. The debate about the number of sacraments is not being discussed in this paper.

When we teach the foundations of our faith, be it Dogma, Doctrine or Tradition, it becomes a complex process of discerning where to start and deciding if you have the emotional permission to share the good news in ways that will change behaviours and the purpose of life. For the teaching to be comprehended, it needs to be seen and experienced as part of the life of the Church in worship and the programme of activities the community offers. What is taught needs to be seen for it to be felt as authentic by those coming to faith. It also needs to be repeated with consistency.

The starting or entry point may also make things harder for the disciple (the person who may be enquiring, learning and perhaps following Christ). The message needs to be relevant as seeds of faith are planted, and if the seeds are to flourish, we need to join with the work of the Spirit as we act as Christ's hands and feet in the world.

My context: I serve seven rural parishes next to the Market Town of Stamford (Cambridgeshire/Lincolnshire border next to the A1). It is affluent compared to the majority of Lincolnshire. The population of 2500 is mainly supportive of Church, and a small number are drawn to regular worship. On a typical Sunday, 70 people may gather across three services. Young and Old worship together and the more traditional services are supported by those who have been in Church for a long time. There is excellent support for new activities such as Messy Church (50-60 per service). We are limited by the number of active volunteers and the competition for time on Sundays. For special occasions, we gather hundreds of people, sometimes representing 50% of the village population. If a children's party clashes with Church, then the Children's attendance will drop from 25 to 0. A wide variety of worship styles and events are offered from All Age Services with Worship band through Prayer Book Evensong, weekly Eucharists and on occasion, adoration and benediction. The variety of services in the group means our attendance is growing both in the committed faithful and those drawn to occasional services. The increase in attendance is made up of the following; some people are coming more regularly, some are travelling to other

villages, new people are coming to regular worship, and new people are coming to occasional services and events.

During the first four years as their Parish Priest (50% in pandemic restrictions), the engagement with the Church of England Primary School has increased. I lead weekly collective worship in school and regular services for School in Church during the week (100 pupils plus 20 staff and parents). Slow progress has been made with the independent Primary School (350 pupils).

Infant Baptisms regularly take place, and two confirmation services have happened (6 children and 2 adults).

The heart of what we are trying to do is to help God build his Church by focussing on Children.

The priorities for our seven churches are:

- To engage with our children (the Schoolchildren and those who live in the area) in more meaningful ways.
- To create a plan that shows more people what the "people of God" do in terms of worship and loving their neighbours. [I set out to be, and also to help Church be, more visible, to be a blessing to the whole community, to help us grow (numerically and in our faith) and to create distinct ways to be the people of God].
- To ensure our plan is sustainable in terms of resources, especially with regard to increasing Parish Share.
- To lead and enable opportunities to worship and develop relationships with each other and God throughout the week.

These points act as a framework to shape what we do, but they have not been turned into a written plan that explicitly says what happens. This is the next thing to do. By focussing on Children, we can teach consistently and create opportunities for them to join the life of the Church with their families. It is also a sign of hope and commitment for the future of the Church. As we invite people to Church, we check that the services offered are as good as they can be, and we become more explicit about what we can offer. A variety of services are held to cater for the needs of the current and new worshippers.

To follow Christ means taking steps to be introduced to the faith and then taking the steps that lead eventually to the start of eternal life. A mnemonic about advertising, AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) may help us understand the approach being taken to help the children, and as a consequence, some adults understand more about the sacramental nature of the Church. We pray that by inviting people to Church, we help them to a place where they can get more involved.

We start by inviting people. We invite School to Church, we invite Baptism families to services before the Baptism, and we invite villagers to special services where we have involved children in delivering the service. The reason for focussing on the invitation is that it opens the way for a conversation about faith. For those who have come to faith, the power of the conversation is that 75% of non-Christians felt comfortable during the conversation. Even if people say no, something about faith is shared (Talking Jesus

Research). From the 2015 to 2022 research, there is increased hope that conversations lead to people becoming Christians. And the younger you are, the more likely you want to find out more (Talking Jesus 2022). Before we get carried away about how easy it is, only a third of those surveyed are open to an experience or encounter with Jesus and over a half say they disagree and were not open to an experience or encounter with Jesus. Whilst more may say no, than yes, the good that can come from offering the opportunity is multiplied as the more people feel confident enough to talk about Jesus grows.

The majority of those who come to faith and those who worship in our seven villages came to faith because they grew up in a Christian family. Perhaps for some, their faith is habitual and focused on Sunday worship and a lifetime of faithful worship has not fed them sufficiently or commissioned them to share the role of spreading the Good News. Therefore, prayer, invitation, conversation and teaching are essential areas to work on, as is the quality of services we invite people to attend. We hope that as we grow together in worship and faith, we feel more confident asking people to Church services and activities.

I felt and still feel called to this place to serve. I am responding to that parish profile that expressed a desire to grow the Church and suggested they wanted to see children as part of this growth. They expressed a fondness for Bishop Edward King and the stories of his ministry (Previous Tractarian Bishop of Lincoln). Parish Priests are becoming a rarer resource, and there is little that the laity cannot do that is exclusive to those who are ordained. The sacramental nature is at the heart of what I feel called here to do.

As we think about growing the Church here, there is a reluctance to embrace new practices by the majority.
To help more people join the Church here, there needs to be a bridge to the sacramental nature of worship.

For those new to Church and some regular worshippers, Baptism is seen as a secular rite of passage rather than a sacramental initiation into Christ's Church. A growing proportion of Baptisms are now held during regular Eucharists. The limited preparation now starts with attendance at the eucharist (often in our All-age or Sunday school setting).

The sacraments are occasions we encounter Christ when Christ reaches out to us. We flourish by being in relationship with God, with each other; the Sacraments bring into mind the presence of the crucified Lord - starting with Baptism as we are incorporated into his Church. By Baptising in our regular worship, surrounded by community members, we may slowly change minds and plant the seeds that something deeper is occurring. By inviting those present to join in with the fuller life of the Church, we are trying to help people join in with God's mission to feed his people.

The next step is to receive Holy Communion at the Eucharist. Confirmation preparation restarted with an invitation to those new families and those who did not receive communion. However, I think we need to reintroduce First Holy Communion at around 7. This may result in fewer people being confirmed, but those who are maybe more informed and better able to live out their faith more authentically.

Baptism and the Eucharist are thought of as generally necessary for salvation. By having a more significant number of people who are prepared and admitted to Holy Communion, more people will see Christ is made present for them and offers himself to them, and together we are fed to do his work.

Now you are the body of Christ, each one of you is a part of it (1 Cor 12:27). The age of reason - where we might start to be responsible for the difference between right and wrong is 7 - is a good point at which to be prepared to receive Holy Communion. This could be done through our Sunday Clubs, Messy Church Congregation and as part of our school activity. Until more people receive communion, the Church will be in maintenance, perhaps even decline. We are currently maintaining what we have and making changes as we prepare to grow (although we see many green shoots).

The Sacrament of Reconciliation, often called Confession, should be taught but is not required in the Church of England. Perhaps with increased visibility and preparation for this Sacrament of forgiveness, healing and freedom may gain popularity. In one of Jesus' miracles, Christ makes the mystery, the profound and hidden, visible. In St Matthew 9.2-5, Jesus heals the paralytic, the sins are forgiven, and the forgiven man is asked to walk away. The action reveals God's authority on earth. By teaching about healing, we are drawn closer to Christ and share the intimate touch as oil is placed on the skin through anointing. Extreme Unction is usually associated with the end of life, and like Sacramental Confession, the help provided as God's invisible grace is made visible can be a great comfort. To be healed after a traumatic event, to be helped to get over an issue, is all the more relevant in the time we live.

For Children, for our community to know that there is something bigger in life, that we are loved and forgiven, all come together in the Eucharist. We need Baptism to access these gifts from the Church, and in Confirmation, Confession and Anointing, we can go deeper to the master and deeper into our understanding as we teach and administer as a Church. In the work of the Sacrament, we should remember the work of Jesus, that it is from him, they flow and how our actions, as those who have been saved, are drawn into the world of that salvation.

Despite all the good our worshipping communities do, the centre of what we do as a church is about being saved - our salvation. Trying to make sense of a broken world, build God's kingdom and prepare for eternal life. Through the action of the Sacrament we are reminded of the work of Christ and built up to respond to the needs of the world.

The Church continues to work out its response to Marriage as understood by. For now, the teaching and law are unchanged, and Marriage is seen as the foundation or crown for family life. It is unrealistic to think that it is good to remain in a broken or unhealthy marriage; however, there is a desire for permanence to the relationship with the vows made to each other in the sight of God. Perhaps there is more joy to be found in understanding the work needed to live within a healthy marriage life with a reliance on each other and God. In teaching and preparing couples for Marriage, Children should at least see how it may be relevant to them as they witness marriages in Church.

If the Sacrament of Ordination is left till last, then vocations to the Priesthood are less likely to be prayed for and unlikely to be considered by individuals. On the other

hand, if the specific Sacramental role of a Priest is spoken about and witnessed, this aspect of Church life may be valued and thought of as different from Church Leadership. Of course, the Priest has to fulfil the roles of servant, shepherd, messengers, sentinels and stewards, but the Priest is often seen as just the local Church's manager.

The task of growing a Church is not straightforward when different locations and worship styles already exist. It's easy to do new things when what you have is failing. But, we aren't failing, and the energy needed to evolve, and change is considerable. More considerable than starting afresh. Many church plants progress quickly as they are vibrant replacements for failing, fast shrinking or static communities.

Of course, it is possible to attract more people to what already happens; if you are confident with what you do during a service. If enough people already gather, then there is a chance that if you invite someone, then they might feel welcome and come again. The number of things needed to align to make this work: The service must be of good enough quality for people to come back. Enough people need to gather to make the visitor welcome. If you are inviting families and children, then all of this becomes critical and harder to achieve. The regular congregation may well give up before those invited come, or decide to come regularly. By focusing more on Children's Ministry and teaching the Sacraments, we will find new disciples to be granted into Christ Church.

A limiting factor is the quality of the invitation. They aren't made often enough, with enough passion and not followed up. More effort needs to be placed on this than on the content of services, especially as the heart of worship here is driven by the liturgy (From All Age Worship, BCP and Messy Church). To start with prayer and make an invitation allowing the Holy Spirit room to work means we might be really interested in planning fantastic services and inviting great numbers rather than jumping straight to the outcome of how many people will come and how many of them are likely to say no. Those who say yes will, over time, experience all the ways the Church can help them and how they are suited up to serve the world. Together, one Baptism at a time, we will build God's Kingdom.

Fr Aran P. Beesley
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GEORGE BRIGGS

***"Who told you...?" The question of Pluralism,
Postmodernism and Redemptive Participation in Culture
and Ideology.***

**“Who told you...?” The question of Pluralism,
Postmodernism and Redemptive Participation in Culture and
Ideology.**

In the opening verses of Genesis we encounter God in a context which precedes all human experience: “In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth....” We are invited to imagine the earth as “a formless void”, the “deep darkness covering the face of the deep” and into this space and time God spoke and created life. But when we read these verses, we do so not in that moment awaiting creation, instead we read from a place of abundance and plurality, a world of many voices and narratives, millennia of history and knowledge and experience. So we receive the text of Genesis as both a narrative and a polemic, given to us to reveal the unique identity and creativity of God’s voice among a plurality of voices and narratives.

Our experience of plurality finds early expression within the text of Genesis 3, with the introduction of a narrative representing God to humanity with a different account of their relationship. A question heralds this: the snake asks “Did God say...?” (Genesis 3.1) and a choice must to be made – what to believe? Whom to trust? We see within the freedom of what God has made there is the possibility of misleading and being misled, being controlled or gaining control over another, and the possibility of misrepresenting God and of choosing what we will. With this comes our responsibility to reflect, to interpret experience, to recognize and discern the plurality of motive and narrative. God asks: “who told you...?” (Genesis 3.11) and the question becomes integral to our experience of the world.

Pluralism, which is to say the coexistence of different and even opposing narratives, is not new, it is not peculiarly modern or post-modern or ancient. Its presence in the biblical record reveals it is not a space from which God absents himself, but precisely the context in which he makes himself known. He is not trapped in the first three verses of the bible! God's speech persists, and is met with resistance, with fear, at times with yielded listening, obedience and faithfulness, whether in the Hebrew or New Testament Scriptures. The God who spoke the world into being continues to speak amidst the competing narratives that have filled the earth:

⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.

⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

¹⁰ For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,

¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

(Isaiah 55.8-11)

God's creative activity and power is presented in a world underway, and here in Isaiah 55 there is a note of joyful defiance in the redemption that is planned and will be offered, we gather, whether or not we comprehend it. 'My ways are higher than your ways', God says, not to put us in our place, but rather to exult in the

goodness of his plans, the grace that his hearers would never have the audacity to presume for themselves in the way he offers it.

Verse 11 describes an outworking of God's redemptive purpose: as salvation works its way into our experience, repurposing and transforming the world to which he comes: "my word... will not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and succeed in the thing for which I send it."

God's speech in the unfolding narratives of Scripture is an ongoing act of creation, interruption, redirection and renewal. All this takes place in a pluralistic context, and continues in the cultures and ideology of our day, in which scripture and the life of the church share the narrative of Christ's death, life and return for the transformation of all things – a polemic of grace and redemption.

We have challenged ourselves to consider what it means and looks like to speak about God today, to represent the God who is still speaking. Our ability to participate redemptively for others in any context requires us to pick up that question from the garden, "who told you...?" It prompts us to discern our relationship to what we see and hear.

To speak of God effectively, and so create the space to encounter God, demands our ability to acknowledge the contours of beliefs in a given context. For example we find Jesus bantering with the woman at the well, a dialogue which explores theological and cultural difference along with supernatural insight into her personal story. Paul cites the Cretan poet Epimenides and Stoic poetry before dividing the crowd with the idea of resurrection at the Areopagus. Irenaeus expounds the active renewing work of God in humanity, consciously rewriting the theological metaphysics of his day, and defying the heresies which fused them into Gnostic Christian teaching. He writes a dynamic orthodoxy describing our

experience of new life in Christ: "Where the Spirit of the Father is, there is the living man... flesh possessed of the Spirit, forgetful of itself, assuming the quality of Spirit, made conformable to the Word." (v.ix.2 *Adversus Haereses*)

We are in a cultural moment in which the question "who told you...?" has great currency, particularly in the post-modern interrogation of accepted truths and the power that they protect. The foundation of this cultural criticism emerged with the nineteenth century writings of Nietzsche: his criticism of religion and Christian morality, and the famous pronouncement God is dead, were a rejection of man-made structures of philosophy, metaphysics and the appeal to unchallenged absolutes. The legacy of his polemic was to shape post-modernism, not just specifically 'post-modern' thinkers but our cultural environment. "Nietzsche's philosophy makes marketeers of us all, for we are forced to face the radical selectivity involved in all our opinions. No position is without its ideology; every position requires a genealogy in order to understand the perspective it is coming from, the will to power that it represents." (p. xxx, *Postmodern God*)

I want to turn to two 20th century thinkers, chosen in part for their distance from the life of the church, to avoid the echo chamber of ecclesiastical life, and for what we learn from their reflections about critical engagement with the world around them. First we meet a German Marxist in fascist Europe, then a Postmodernist originator (French of course).

Our first guest is the critic Walter Benjamin. An idiosyncratic German philosopher and writer whose work grew around the critic's responsibility to illuminate the truth of a work of art. His lifelong project of *illumination* extended to diverse projects in which he examined aspects of his contemporary academic, political and

cultural environment. These included the organization and experience of life in a modern urban environment, the change in the value and function of art in light of mass production, the fetishization of objects in consumer society. Politically Benjamin was influenced by Marxist theories, and lived in the tumultuous early decades of the twentieth century: the first world war, Weimar Germany and the rise and grip of National Socialism in Germany.

We join Benjamin whilst he was on a trip to Florence which he recounts in a letter to his friend Gerhard Scholem in November 1924. Benjamin was intent on exploring and understanding the city, and writes of his own "inductive way of getting to know the topography of different places and seeking out every great structure in its own labyrinthine environment". This way of experiencing the city included not only its physical environment but also the cultural and political topography which he encountered on the streets:

"Fascism presented me with too much of a good thing here in Florence. During my few days here, there have been no fewer than three holidays featuring the greatest display of power. Processions that lasted for hours confined me in a small quarter in which there was nothing to see. Whether out of resignation or in an attempt to break out, I joined the throng of people lined up in rows. I did so each time at the crucial moment, the one for which those who were more knowledgeable had waited during many hours of standing at their post. Since I had pushed forward into the first row out of impatience, I recognized the moment as a completely hopeless constellation that I had to salute, however, given my exposed position. I at least got to see the military cap of

the king, who is very short.” (p. 253 *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*)

Benjamin rather wryly indulges some of the irony and pessimism that would colour his work in the years of European fascism's ascendancy and ultimately his tragic death in 1940. He finds himself caught on the front row trying to leave, a Jew obliged to salute at the “crucial moment”, exposed and compromised, participating in the scene that is unfolding before him. Benjamin's inadvertent collusion with the moment he describes invites reflection on our own unavoidable participation in the moments which are shaping history, and the struggle to determine the means and the end of that participation. Crucially, however, it was not an isolated experience for Benjamin on that trip and it illustrates the genuine intimidation and powerlessness of a critic in the face of totalitarian ideology. His experience of pluralism was not an equality of voices, but rather competing and lethal ideologies.

Benjamin's 1936 essay *The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction* is in part an ambivalent exploration of art and media. The positive potential of mass media, detached from the control of tradition and cult and heritage has proved to be a highly effective tool in the service of fascism's political cult. The pomp and politics Benjamin witnessed on the streets of Florence a dozen years earlier now shape and shake Central Europe. Stoking his faith in the class struggle to break the grip of fascism, he urges courage, cunning and fortitude, but in the final years of his life we find him buffeted, and finally penned in, much as he had been in Florence, on the French/Spanish border, where he chose to take his life unable to pass out of occupied France.

As the era in which Benjamin lived and worked passes from living memory, his life story, as much as his work becomes a sober invitation to recognize the growth of destructive or dominating ideologies, and consider what resistance and redemption may entail.

Our second critic is well known. Without any pretension to survey the work and impact of Jacques Derrida, I wanted simply to share a memory he offered in an interview with Michelle Stephens (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BSsDRf2wnOk>)

"... the feeling that I had when I wrote *Of Grammatology*, not the book but those first two articles in the summer of 1965, I actually had the feeling that something very unique for me took place.... I felt as though something had happened to me. I don't want to give this a religious sensibility – it wasn't an apparition or an ecstasy – but that something had taken hold of me and happened not by me but to me. Something that allowed me or put at my disposal an interpretive edge, a lever that was to be very powerful for reading the tradition – when I say 'tradition' this is the western philosophical tradition. I have the impression that I use the word 'lever', but I could also call it a kind of powerful thing, an apparatus [system] at the same time for thought and technique that allows me to formalise and economically decipher not every text but that which is dominant in our culture."

Derrida's comments about his experience of inspiration and excitement might help us to see the creativity and hope that was present at the inception of what we broadly term deconstruction. He admits to a profound sense of the importance of reading the tradition of modern thought in a way that queried the long formed ideas and beliefs that had long been foundations for ordering and

interpreting the world. "Postmodernism reminds modernity of its own constructed nature; the arbitrariness and instability of its constructions." (p. xxvi, *The Postmodern God*)

An example of Derrida's work in *Of Grammatology* was a patient and detailed analysis of *Tristes Tropiques*, (p.101-140, *Of Grammatology*) a work by anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss. In it Derrida's deconstruction is a sustained critical interrogation of the ideas, assumptions and values that shape the account of an ethnologist's examination of the impact of writing on a tribe with no previous written culture. Derrida carefully challenges the assumptions that frame the theories and conclusions in this field work, the declared but under-examined self-awareness of the researcher as a foreign presence, the unquestioned narratives of development and pre-linguistic innocence. Derrida is thorough and relentless in this dismantling, laying bear and questioning of the ideas which are assumed through the text. What is properly post-modern here, is the willingness to ask destabilising questions rather than protect and work for what is presented, to de-construct rather than inhabit the stories habits and systems, the man-made structures with which modernity presumed to sustain its ownership of the world around us.

The charge Derrida offers us, recalling his peculiar sense of empowerment that summer of 1965, is one of discovery – a willingness to see and interrogate the structures and legacies we are tangled within, and reveal self-serving mythologies and repressions. Benjamin and Derrida both exemplify a response to a crisis, an awakening, a questioning of modernity. Benjamin exposes a modernity that enshrines reason but hosts the fanatical religion of fascism. Derrida deconstructs modernity to reveal that it blindly hosts and reproduces its own mythologies to describe the

world around the privileged centre of its own history and tradition. Both anticipate the question which preoccupies post modernism: "who told you...?", the epistemological question of where and how we receive and experience knowledge, and pass it on.

How, then, is the God who is present to the plurality of modern life and post-modern culture to be known in the midst of these challenges? In keeping with the programmes of post-modern thought, we face a task much like that of the pre-modern theologians who examined, stretched and remade the thought worlds and cultures in which they offered and taught the dynamic presence of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

To work with the question "who told you...?" does not necessarily lead to encounter with God or redemptive participation in the culture. I conclude that the emphasis on knowing "Who told you...?" is insufficient of itself to enable us to reveal the God who speaks – though it is a powerful and necessary tool. I have tried to illustrate its importance as a bridging question which we share in common with the prevailing culture around us, and therefore also helpful gateway question. Our creativity ought to turn to the other questions which God asked in the garden at the inception of the pluralism in creation: "Where are you?" (calling us to God out of our hiddenness) and "Where is your brother?" (Turning us to one another.) For us the task of is one of creating spaces in any and every sphere where these questions can be heard. Jesus' 'answer' to our inquiry is likewise the task of making spaces which allow people to hear his questions for themselves: questions of experience "what are you discussing?" (Luke 24.17), of discernment "who do people say I am?" (Matthew 16.13) and of decision "who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16.15) His questions help us resist substituting encounter with theory,

knowledge, praxis or dogma, or an awareness of culture and narrative; they are the plainest of questions which draw us to a person, Christ, and free us to participate redemptively with God in the world.

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GOD: SOME CONVERSATIONS 4-14 JULY 2022

MARTYN EVANS

Financial Challenges Facing Today's Church

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Financial Challenges facing todays Church

Ten years after the publication of Lord Harries report on the future of the Church in Wales 2012, this paper looks at the progress of implementing one of its recommendations, the formation of Ministry / Mission Areas and its financial implications. It will consider are we being 'Good and Wise Stewards' and how does this fit in with the Mission of God, 'Missio Dei'.

Church in Wales

Writing recently in the Church Times, Pat Ashworth stated 'it is ten years since the Church in Wales accepted the findings of an external review that judged it to be in crisis, with structures no longer appropriate'.¹ She was referring to the report published in 2012 chaired by Rt Revd Lord Harries of Pentregarth, a former Bishop of Oxford. Its parish system, pre-dating disestablishment in 1920, was no longer sustainable, the review said. It suggested that the catchment area of the local secondary school was a guide to the kind of area that the Church should regard as natural for ministry. What was needed, it concluded, was 'a new, more collaborative style of leadership, modelled by the Bishops and reflected at parish level'.² Lay people's talents and willingness to serve needed to be used more fully. In conclusion, the reviewers said: 'We believe that the Church can only continue into the future if it taps into this human resource.'³

Most notably, the Harries review recommended replacing the parish system with ministry areas (MAs), each with a leadership team of lay people as well as clergy. It was not prescriptive. There would be no 'one size fits all'.⁴ A designated ministry area might have 25 churches or congregations and a leadership team with perhaps three stipendiary posts. A few large churches in urban areas might remain viable as single

¹ Ten Years on, Harries review has changed the Church in Wales, Church Times, Pat Ashworth, 11th March 2022

² Pat Ashworth, 11th March 2022

³ Pat Ashworth, 11th March 2022

⁴ Pat Ashworth, 11th March 2022

entities, because they had large congregations and were financially self-sufficient.

A decade later, as the Church of England confronts many of the same issues, the picture across the six Welsh dioceses is mixed. Bangor and St Asaph diocese have formed 'Mission Areas', Swansea and Brecon, Monmouth and Llandaff diocese 'Ministry Areas and St David's diocese 'Local Ministry Areas'.

Archbishop Andrew John states that 'the journey has been transformative' but even now, 'we still find the sense of localism can be paralysing'.⁵ The Bishop of St Asaph Gregory Cameron states 'The Church does not like change, so, while some embraced it from the start, and others were won over as things began to take shape and start working. There are still both clergy and laity saying, it's a dreadful idea, and we won't go anywhere near it.'⁶

In response to the title *Ten years on, the Harries review has changed Wales*, Clare Vickers and others add 'but not in a good way' and that in their experience, the bunching of parishes into ministry areas (MAs) or super-parishes, which the review recommended, has only deepened the 'crisis' in the Church in Wales.⁷ They further go on to say that at grass roots level, clergy are retiring early because of the onerous amount of paperwork and recruitment of new clergy is proving difficult and that 'the depersonalised MA now comes across as a finance-focused business, led by its CEO/administrator'.⁸

Lord Harries of Pentregarth, author of the 2012 Church in Wales Review recently stated 'It was very good to read that the Church in Wales has made such progress in implementing the recommendations of the review that I chaired ten years ago', but also acknowledged the frustration of the clergy who have found the new system has not

⁵ Pat Ashworth, 11th March 2022

⁶ Welsh Governing Body: Dioceses examine ministry for all and diversity, Church Times, Pat Ashworth, 23rd April 2021

⁷ Ministry Areas are no success story, Church Times, Clare Vickers, Revd Nansi Davies, and others, 18th March 2022

⁸ Clare Vickers, Revd Nansi Davies, and others, 18th March 2022

worked for them.⁹ Referring specifically to previous letters in the Church Times suggesting that Ministry Areas point to a lack of growth and even decline, he responds ‘we did not believe that the new structure would by itself bring about growth. Our concern, quite simply, was the sheer survival of the Church in Wales’.¹⁰ He concludes, ‘I believe that the Church in Wales is to be congratulated in facing up ten years ago, to the seriousness of the situation and that there are important lessons to be learnt by the Church of England from our recommendations, particularly in rural areas’.¹¹

The six dioceses in Wales are at different stages with the formation of their Ministry / Mission Areas. On the 1st January 2022 the Bishop of Llandaff June Osborne passed decrees that created 29 Ministry Areas from over 100 or more parishes, so their journey now begins. In their Diocesan ‘Handbook for Ministry Areas’ it states ‘the concept of Ministry Areas is to make us more effective in our service to Jesus Christ and that together we are stronger and that Ministry Areas can help to unlock our potential for a flourishing and more positive future where we can do so much more for our congregations and communities rather than managing steady decline’.¹² The diocese believe that they will be able to reach more people with fewer resources which is crucial as they begin their Young Faith Matters work and Vision delivery, Mission Enablers, Outreach Workers and Engagement Workers will only be truly effective if they can engage with as many people as possible. Ministry Areas they believe will facilitate a far greater reach, helping to achieve more local mission and ministry goals. By forming Ministry Areas, they claim that more resources and more volunteers will be available and outreach projects can be bigger, bolder, more diverse and have more impact than ever before. Resources / investments will therefore be allocated / targeted to Ministry Areas and not individual churches / parishes.

Financial implications – Llandaff Diocese

⁹ Maintaining ministry despite declining numbers, Lord Harries, Church Times, 22nd April 2022

¹⁰ Lord Harries, Church Times, 22nd April 2022

¹¹ Lord Harries, Church Times, 22nd April 2022

¹² A Handbook for Ministry Areas, Diocese of Llandaff.

The Covid pandemic confirmed how 'archaic' financial practices were in the church. Many depended on the passing of the collection plate for people's weekly offerings as their main source of income. The enforced closure of church buildings meant that for some their income literally dried up overnight. In the Llandaff Diocese, treasurers were asked to submit cash flow forecasts showing the effect of reduced income on their reserves. Many failed to do so either through lack of accounting knowledge and understanding along with accounts only being prepared once a year for the Annual Vestry Meeting and the financial returns to the diocese. The monthly receipt of 'Parish Share' by the diocese appeared to be the only financial visibility they had!

If parish treasurers can only manage to produce yearly accounts, how will they cope with the demands of becoming a Ministry Area! All Ministry Areas will have to register with the Charity Commission as their annual income will exceed £100K threshold and with that will come additional reporting requirements. Each Ministry Area is also expected to report its accounts using new accounting software, which I believe requires a far greater understanding of accounts systems than ledgers and spreadsheets! Some Ministry Areas have appointed a MA Treasurer while others have multiple treasurers from their old parishes. All require the same level of training and understanding, otherwise it will be 'garbage in and garbage out' (GIGO). Treasurers for a single church / parish can be very difficult to find yet alone ones who are prepared to oversee multiple churches / parishes. The role of the Treasurer has now significantly increased.

Initially the aim was for the Ministry Area to operate one set of bank accounts in the name of the Ministry Area. Early indications are that this has proven very difficult as local churches / parishes seek to keep control of their own accounts. Opening new bank accounts in the name of the Ministry Area has also proved very challenging with very few banks being prepared to open new Charity Accounts.

From 2022 onwards the principles of the Fairer Share (Parish Share) will not change. However the cost of ministry provided will be allocated to

the whole Ministry Area i.e. individual clergy will no longer be charged to specific churches / groups of churches. It will be for the Ministry Area to decide the contribution that each church will make to the overall Share. Previously the method of allocation has been based on a combination of Average Sunday Attendance and the number of stipendiary / curates allocated. Some parishes have built up arrears of Parish Share and these churches have been allowed to remain open with their debt being passed on to the newly formed Ministry Area which has also brought difficulties. Should the diocese have taken this opportunity to close those churches!

Finance and Buildings

Church buildings are a major challenge and Archbishop Andy John states 'What can be an asset in one Ministry Area is a dead weight around the neck in another' and that 'we do not want simply to offload buildings so they become a drain on the national finances of the Church, which they become if held centrally rather than locally'.¹³

It is in this context that I raise the question 'Are we being good stewards'? Are we using the financial assets in parishes and Ministry Areas wisely? Do our investment decisions really support the mission of God (Missio Dei) or do we simply want to fix things that are broken and put them back in the state they were previously! My experience is the latter. Given the decline in church attendance in both the Ministry Areas that I have served, the whole Ministry Area congregation could have been accommodated into one church building. Yet we continue to keep open, repair and heat six churches (three in 1.5 miles of each other). In the past seventeen months we have spent £100K (approximately) on buildings works with another £75K planned later this year. Add to this, church halls that are rapidly nearing the condemned stage and a cemetery wall that requires repairs estimated to be several hundred thousands of pounds.

At Aprils 2022 Governing Body Meeting of the Church in Wales they voted unanimously to endorse the set of measures and approaches to

¹³ Speak out, says Archbishop John, Church Times, Pat Ashworth, 29th April 2022

achieve Net Carbon Zero by 2030. Of the total carbon emitted by the Church in Wales it is estimated that that over half of the emissions is emitted by their buildings and they acknowledged that ‘the challenge may seem overwhelming’ and that the ‘whole Church must be active participants’ if they are going to meet this target.¹⁴ Both Alex Glanville (head of property services) and Julia Edwards (climate change champion) expressed concerns of how to incentivise people at local levels, the availability of trainers and where the money was to come from.

At a local church level adopting this environmental policy, meant that one churches oil boiler was replaced with electric under pew heating at an increased cost of £15K. How many churches could afford to do this?

Block Grant

Since disestablishment most of the financial and real-estate assets of the Church in Wales are held by the Representative Body (RB). The six Diocesan Boards of Finance are in differing financial positions but none have substantial reserves on the scale of the RB. A variety of grants are received each year from the RB of which one is the Block Grant. The block grant to dioceses has, in recent years, operated on a triennial basis and following an extension due to Covid-19 will come to an end on the 31st December 2022. The RB believes that the formula for calculating the block grant is no longer fit for purpose as the nature and variety of ministry has changed substantially since it was created.

As the current triennial comes to an end, the RB is reviewing the purpose of the Block Grant? Should it simply be a general support grant to dioceses to be expended by the Diocesan Board of Finance in support of diocesan vision and associated tactical plans or should it be the financial fuel to bring about radical, far-reaching change in the way they organise themselves for mission and evangelism, for governance and administration, for the care and development of their extensive church building estate?

¹⁴ Welsh adopt climate to-do list, Church Times, Pat Ashworth, 6th May 2022

Archbishop John does not minimise the challenges faced by the Church. He warned: 'There is no longer a steady stream of those who become the Church in Wales simply because that is what happened in previous generations'.¹⁵ Consequently, in what he described as 'an act of faith and courage'; on the Trustees part, the balance of resource expenditure was now to be 'tilted decisively towards the present generation...The three-year cycle of block grant agreements will no longer be the way assistance will be delivered'.¹⁶

Towards a Ten-year Financial Plan

Along with a review of the Block Grant the RB also state there is a need to be open-eyed and determinedly realistic about what the next ten years might bring. Limited data is available about post-pandemic church attendance, but it appears to be in the order of 25 – 30% lower than pre-pandemic levels.

A key decision for the RB trustees to make is how to use their investments most effectively and to hold in tension the needs of today's church with those of the church of tomorrow. That said the trustees are in discussion with the bishops and their senior diocesan colleagues, to develop expenditure plans for an additional increase in annual expenditure of £10 million each year for the next ten years.

Conclusion

Following the publication of the 'Harries Report' in 2012, the Church in Wales has responded boldly by creating Mission / Ministry Areas. How successful they will be remains to be seen as each diocese is at a different stage of their journey.

With the creation of Mission / Ministry Areas and the need to register with the Charity Commission, comes an increase in governance and financial regulatory compliance. Is there enough suitably qualified / experienced laity to fulfil these roles especially when it comes to the implementation of new accounting software!

¹⁵ Pat Ashworth, 29th April 2022

¹⁶ Pat Ashworth, 29th April 2022

The Church in Wales as it did ten years ago, appears to be at a major cross roads one which I believe is being taken very seriously both by the RB and DBF's and hence the necessity of a ten year financial plan that will need to address at least some of the following issues:

1. The impact of Covid and two years of disruption to their finances especially if church attendance has declined by 25-30%!
2. How to apply the 'Block Grant' or its successor?
3. Where will the money come from to achieve the Environmental goal of Net Carbon Zero by 2030 and what will be the financial impact on Mission / Ministry Areas!
4. Can they really hope to sustain all their church buildings and continue to allow Mission / Ministry Areas to spend money to repair or invest in multiple buildings which fewer and fewer people are likely to attend without a far more strategic plan! Can spending money this way be classed as being good stewards and furthering God's mission!

But as we slowly begin to recover from two years of disruption due to the Covid pandemic, have they missed a trick! Could now have been the opportune time to be even more radical with restructuring! Despite the creation of Ministry Areas the vast majority of our church buildings still exist and most people if asked probably think that the old parish structure is still lurking somewhere in the background, continuing to support the sense of localism be paralysing. Many would argue that we have too many church buildings and that we simply don't have sufficient resources to maintain them all, yet alone achieve Net Carbon Zero by 2030.

Ten years ago the Harries report was concerned about the survival of the Church in Wales if they didn't take radical action. The formation of Ministry Areas was recommended to avert a crisis and yet it appears that the Church in Wales may have sugar coated the tablet and attempted to sell the benefits of Ministry Areas. But has this resulted in 'mixed messaging' and dumbed down the crisis they still face!

From my own experience serving as a Ministry Area Leader in two of the diocese in Wales, local congregations appear concerned with their own survival. Even when the Bishop visited they were generally supported by the specific parish hosting the event and not the wider Ministry Area and the same can be said about mission projects, thus supporting the earlier comment made by Archbishop Andy that 'localism can be paralysing'.¹⁷ Targeting investment in projects at a Ministry Area level seems very logical from a diocesan perspective but will they be owned by the MA or just the parish that receives the investment! My experience suggests not.

As we look to form Ministry Area Councils (MAC), whilst people seemed content to be a member of a Parochial Church Council, responsible for the day to day running of the parish, there appears to be reluctance to become a trustee of the MAC overseeing the running of multiple parishes. Jobs and responsibilities look too big!

Ministry Area Leaders do appear to be like a CEO with much of their time consumed in governance, financial regulations and compliance along with many buildings issues all of which for some can be life draining and not life enhancing and certainly not the ministry they felt they were ordained to.

The Church in Wales has laid down the foundations by creating Mission / Ministry Areas, but how wisely they use their resources and investments over the next ten years will be critical.

¹⁷ Pat Ashworth, 11th March 2022

GOD: SOME CONVERSATIONS 4-14 JULY 2022

DANIEL FRETT

*An Introduction to Multivocal Conversations about God in
the Bible*

COLLEGE OF ST GEORGE – CLERGY CONSULTATIONS

An Introduction to Multivocal Conversations about God in the Bible

Introduction

For many conservative Jews and Christians it has been long held that the Bible speaks of God with a unified voice. Large sections of Rabbinical dialogue as well as many voluminous Christian books implement various arguments to show that apparent discrepancies are indeed not so, and a clear meaning can be arrived at. What I would like to argue in the paper is that there never was a unified voice, but rather a dialogue between different voices, which has somehow been lost in the shuffle. In order to keep within the parameters of this assignment I am going to limit myself to the Pentateuch.

In the 1800s, German biblical scholars of whom Wellhausen is perhaps the most prominent, came up with the Documentary Hypothesis which posited that the Pentateuch was a compilation of four main source documents which they labelled J, E, P, and D. The popularity of this hypothesis has ebbed and flowed, but tremendous work has been done in the last thirty years to make a compelling case for these four primal documents. I am drawing heavily on the work of Richard Friedman, Benjamin Sommers, James Kugel, and Joel Baden to show that these four sources have their own narrative and theology. They have different views on the nature of God, the nature of humans, how God interacts with humans and what is required of God's people. I am using the work of Joel Baden in *The Composition of the Pentateuch* to differentiate the work of our four sources.

Before I start, I want to give a context to what we know about the writing of the Pentateuch. Israel Finkelstein, a prominent archaeologist often uses the phrase 'the longue durée', by which he means stepping back and looking at the big picture. Based on archaeological finds and work done on the history of scribal activity in the region, the earliest possible dates that would support large-scale written Hebrew are around the 8th century BCE. This is about the time of Jeroboam II in Israel, and Uzziah in Judah. This means that the feats of David and Solomon occurred 200 years before and the Exodus over 400 years before scribal activity. This also means that the sources for each of our four authors were either predominately oral traditions or other writings based on oral traditions.

I would also like to note that although I am aware that for orthodox Jews, the divine name is never intoned, I feel it is necessary to do so in this paper for clarity. YHWH, however pronounced, is the name of Israel's God, as is Chemosh for the Moabites, Baal for the Canaanites, Marduk for the Babylonians, etc. *Adonai* (Lord) is an honorific and *Elohim* is a generic name for god(s). The revelation of God's name as YHWH is crucial to several of our authors and as such I will use it to avoid confusion.

When analysed, each author's work is internally consistent in its narrative, theology, and geography. I will look at each author in turn and then use the events of Sinai and the wilderness to contrast and compare them.

J (from the courts of the House of David)

We begin with J, our first non-priestly source. J is so named because the divine name, YHWH, is known to humans from the beginning (in German, the Y is a J). Already in Genesis 4.28 we read, "people began to invoke the name of YHWH." Scholars consider J and E are our two earliest authors with both being written around the 8th century BCE. J shows little interest in cultic activity and most of his stories occur in the southern kingdom of Judah. One of J's main motivators is for legitimising the House of David. How is it that

God's chosen king is David? His is from the tribe of Judah who is fourth eldest of the sons of Jacob. David is also the youngest of his brothers. Even further, Solomon is fourth eldest and Rehoboam is also not the eldest. We find in J's accounts many examples of the younger being God's choice instead of the elder, e.g. Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Judah's blessing from Jacob at the end of Genesis, etc. For J it is Judah who suggests that the brothers don't kill Joseph and Judah who offers himself as surety for the life of Benjamin. According to J, YHWH had a body and can be seen occasionally by special people. He walks with Adam in the cool of the day, he has lunch with Abraham, and appears to Moses on Sinai (more on that later). YHWH loves humankind, but also is irritated by us. What he seems to want is for us to behave and to be grateful to Him for what he has done for us. J is not concerned about 'the Law', even though he lists his own 10 commandments in Exodus 34. YHWH is always trying to find a way to have a relationship with humankind, can be argued with and will change His mind and strategy if the situation warrants it. YHWH starts with the creation of humankind in the Garden, but this goes wrong and He is forced to expel them. It gets so bad that he decides to destroy the human race, but Noah 'finds favour' in His eyes, so decides to start again with Noah. Once again this doesn't work and after the tower of Babel, He decides to concentrate on one family and nation with the choosing of Abraham which eventually leads to the nation of Israel. After being led by Moses, then various judges, YHWH chooses David to be their king and for J, the establishment of the house of David is the final state of affairs. All J's heroes are flawed; Abraham lies about Sarah being his wife, as does Isaac about Rebekah, Jacob tricks Esau out of his birth rite and is in turn tricked by Laban. Even J's Moses is full of self-doubt.

E (a Mushite priest for Shiloh)

E is our other 'non-priestly' source, although this isn't entirely accurate. Dr Friedman has given a convincing argument that originally there were two Levitical priesthoods, one from Moses (Mushite) and one from Aaron (Aaronic). With the fall of the north and the Zadokite movement in the south, the Mushite priesthood eventually disappeared. Scholars date E to be written in the early 8th century BCE. It also seems evident that neither J or E are familiar with each other's work.

It is clear from E's theology and focus that he is a Levite from the northern kingdom. E is given his moniker from the E in Elohim, which is the generic name for God as His real name, YHWH isn't revealed until the burning bush. E gives us the story of the golden calf, which is clearly linked to the author's disdain for Jeroboam's establishment of two new cultic centres in Dan and Bethel with golden calves instead of cherubim and the fact that he appointed priests who were not Levites.

We find the first text of E in the Abraham story, but it continues through to the end of the Pentateuch and gives us many of the important stories of the exodus and wilderness wanderings. E gives us the 10 Commandments and the Covenant Code in Exodus. It is clear from this that YHWH must be worshipped properly, but there is no restriction as to where His is worshipped as long as the altar is built according to YHWH's specifications and there is no directive for there being only one altar. E's 'hero' is Moses and we see the greatest development of Moses' character in E, from a leader full of self-doubt at the burning bush, to him confidently interceding with YHWH on behalf of the children of Israel. E also tells the stories of challenges to Moses' authority with YHWH always reaffirming Moses' unique place before Him. It is E who tells us in Exodus 33 that YHWH spoke with Moses face-to-face.

D (a priest at the time of Josiah)

Scholars have more confidence in the time and place of D's account. In 2 Kings 22, we read of the high priest Hilkiah 'discovering' *sefer hatorah* (the book of the Law) in the temple circa 620 BCE. Scholars are convinced that this was basically the book of Deuteronomy

(without additional material from the compiler). It is clear that D had access to E and J, but aligns himself more with E. Many passages and laws in D are direct copies of E, although he occasionally makes slight amendments. Stories in J, but not in E, are alluded to bolster his argument. The setting for D is Moses' final speech before the children of Israel cross over to the promised land. Structurally it imitates the a suzerain vassal treaty (covenant) where the conquering lord recounts his greatness and then lists the blessing for obeying him followed by the curses if the vassals fail to obey. In this case the conquering lord is YHWH and his vassals are the children of Israel.

D's political agenda is for a re-unified northern and southern kingdom, ruled from Jerusalem and its temple. YHWH can only be worshipped in His temple in Jerusalem. Of course, Moses would know nothing of the temple in Jerusalem, so all D's references are to a future place 'where YHWH your God will choose for you'. To avoid confusion, D never mentions the tabernacle/tent of meeting at all, even though E's account is full of references to it. In D, Moses writes down the law and gives it to the priests to carry in the ark. The children of Israel are to obey this law, even the king, and if they do so, they will be blessed in the land. If they don't they will be sent into exile.

P (an Aaronic priest)

P has the most overarching theology of our four sources. He begins with Genesis I where the cosmos is created in an orderly fashion. Laws are put in place to differentiate different spheres of influence and if the patterns of creation are honoured, all will be well. For P, the tabernacle/temple is God's dwelling place on earth and where earth and heaven meet. If the temple is kept pristine, the unity of the cosmos is honoured and all will be well. For P there are certain actions and states of being that corrupt this unity and if it gets too bad, God will be unwilling to dwell in His temple and things will go horribly wrong. Things that corrupt the unity are sins/crimes, certain types of animals or foods, certain illnesses, and bleeding to name a few. Also, for a priest to minister before YHWH, he must be from the house of Aaron only and go through the proper purification procedures or he will die. For P, this is not a moral judgement, just the way things are. If a priest were to not follow the purity laws to the letter and thus were to die, it doesn't mean he was a bad person, much like today if a person were to work with radioactive material without the proper protection and were to get cancer, we wouldn't consider them evil.

P is the most difficult to place. D seems to be completely unaware of P. P in turn, doesn't quote any of the other sources. His retelling of some common stories, such as the flood or the crossing of the Red Sea differ on so many points that he was either unaware of or unwilling to quote the other sources. Because Aaron is so central to P's theology as the father of the only legitimate priestly line, P inserts Aaron as a major figure into stories that the other three sources are either unaware of or where Aaron plays a bit part. For P, Aaron is Moses's brother, but for J and E he is Moses's **Levite** brother. D only mentions Aaron twice in his entire text, once regarding the golden calf and the other mentioning his death.

For P, YHWH cannot be seen by anyone (including Moses) and will only dwell with His people if they build Him a proper tabernacle/temple and keep it pure by offering sacrifices for the sins, illnesses, etc. and sprinkling the blood on the temple to keep it clean.

What happened at Sinai (Horeb)?

After a brief introduction to our four sources let us turn to the children of Israel at Sinai and see what happened there according to each source. To begin with, the mountain is known as Sinai to J and P, but known as Horeb to E and D.

J

For J, the purpose of Sinai is for YHWH to reveal Himself to the children of Israel in a Theophany, "YHWH will come down on Mount Sinai before the eyes of the people"

(Exodus 19.11). In J, YHWH gives the injunction that the people are not to get too near to the mountain (which assumes that they all wanted to). Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and seventy elders are able to go halfway up the mountain “and they saw the God of Israel. And below His feet it was like a structure of sapphire brick and like the essence of the skies for clarity. And He did not put out His hand to the chiefs of the children of Israel. And they envisioned God. And they ate and drank.” (Exodus 24.10-11). YHWH then tells Moses that He will send an angel to lead them the rest of the way as He might get too angry with them and destroy them. Moses then argues with YHWH and convinces Him to continue with them. Reluctantly YHWH agrees. YHWH then reveals Himself to Moses and gives His covenant to him, now that He is travelling with them. (Exodus 33-34). In Exodus 34.14-26 we get J’s version of the 10 Commandments which Moses writes on two tablets of stone.

E

For E, the purpose of Horeb is YHWH’s giving of the law. YHWH says to Moses, “And now, if you’ll listen to my voice and observe my covenant, the you’ll be a treasure to me out of all the peoples because all the earth is mine.” (Exodus 19.5). God then gives the 10 commandments and “all the people were seeing the thunders and the flashes and the sound of the horn and the mountain smoking. And the people saw, and they moved and stood at a distance, and they said to Moses, ‘You speak with us so we may listen, but let God not speak with us or else we’ll die.’” (Exodus 20.18-19) Notice that in E, the people are frightened to go near the mountain, unlike J. They hear at least part of the 10 Commandments, but are too frightened and ask Moses to intermedate the giving of the Law. YHWH then gives Moses the Law in chapters 21-23. YHWH then writes the commandments on the tablets (not Moses). (Exodus 24.12) The Horeb experience ends with Moses coming down the mountain and finding that Aaron had forged a golden calf. He grinds it up and makes the people drink the water. The Levites are then called to his side and he sends them throughout the camp killing about three thousand men. The passage in Exodus 32 ends with “And YHWH struck the people because they had made the calf, which Aaron had made.”

D

D follows E very closely in his account of Horeb. He wants to emphasise that actually the people only heard God’s words through Moses and didn’t hear any words themselves. “Face-to-face, YHWH spoke with you at the mountain from inside the fire (I was standing between YHWH and you at that time to tell you YHWH’s word because you were afraid on account of the fire, and you didn’t go up the mountain).” (Deuteronomy 5.4). He repeats the 10 commandments, but changes the rationale of the fourth commandment from creation (as in E) to being rescued from Egypt. The most important difference in D is that although YHWH gave Moses “the commandments, the laws, and the judgements” (Deuteronomy 6.1) on Horeb, they are meant for the land they are about to enter, so the children of Israel hear the Law for the first time in Moses’ final speech. According to D, they were aware that the Law had been given, but they never heard it until just before entering the promised land.

P

In P, “the cloud covered the mountain. And YHWH’s glory settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And He called to Moses on the seventh day from inside the cloud. And the appearance of YHWH’s glory was like a consuming fire in the mountaintop before the eyes of the children of Israel. And Moses came inside the cloud.” (Exodus 24.15b-18a). Notice that there is no fire or lightning. Also, P keeps within his structure begun in Genesis 1, with Moses entering the cloud on the seventh day. In P, no law is given on Sinai, only detailed instructions for the building of the Tabernacle. (Exodus 25-31). He concludes chapter 31 with “And when He finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave the two tablets of the Testimony to Moses, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God.” When Moses comes down from the mountain, his skin is transformed so that it

frightened Aaron and the children of Israel so that Moses had to wear a veil. (Exodus 34.29-35). P then has a lengthy description of the building of the tabernacle in Exodus 35-40. Only once the tabernacle is built, does Moses receive the Law. In P there is no sacrifice made by anyone in his entire account before the tabernacle has been built.

YHWH's presence with the children of Israel in the wilderness.

In what way is YHWH present with the children of Israel in the wilderness and how does he lead them?

J

With J, YHWH leads with a pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day. J knows nothing of the tabernacle/tent of meeting, but does mention the ark of the covenant. YHWH's original intention was to lead them to Sinai and then for an 'Angel of YHWH' to lead them the remainder of the way. On Sinai, Moses talks YHWH into staying with them, so He establishes a covenant with them and continues to lead them. On a side note, YHWH says that He doesn't want to lead them as He might get angry with them and destroy them. This indeed proves to be the case.

E

In E, YHWH leads them via an 'Angel of YHWH'. When they reach a new campsite, the tent of meeting is set up outside the camp. Moses goes out to the tent to meet with YHWH and He descends in a cloud and talks to Moses.

P

P describes his view clearly in Exodus 40.36-38, "And when the cloud was lifted from on the Tabernacle, the children of Israel would travel in all their travels and if the cloud would not be lifted, then they would not travel until the day that it would be lifted. Because YHWH's cloud was on the Tabernacle by day and fire would be in it at night, before the eyes of all the house of Israel in all their travels." For P, the Tabernacle is always at the centre of the camp.

Conclusion

I hope that I have been able to show that even from our earliest scriptures, there has been a variety of opinion on who God is, what He requires of us, and how we can have access to His presence. Elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures, we have differing views among the prophets, wisdom literature, and the psalms. For Christians, despite the efforts of Tatian to have one harmonised Gospel, the Church has kept four distinct Gospels. As we forge a new way for Christianity in the years ahead, we should view our Scriptures as a vibrant debate with many voices; a debate that we can join and add our own voices to.

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Is there a future for the small rural church?

In this essay I have tried to describe what life is like for a priest living in a rural parish today. The rural context is quite difficult to define. There is no nationally accepted definition though it usually means settlements of less than 10,000 inhabitants. In setting the context I have given a brief description of the Diocese of Hereford and its situation in regards to the Church of England. I have then gone on to describe life in the six parishes which make up the benefice of Ariconium. There is a small paragraph about the theology of creation. I have then gone onto look at four different ways in which evangelism has been successful in the benefice hoping to link that with the themes of this gathering as I understand it.

The Diocese of Hereford covers, Herefordshire, Southern Shropshire, a few parishes in Worcestershire and a few parishes in Powys and Monmouthshire in Wales. The Diocese is one of the oldest in England. The diocese has a population of 331,000 fewer than any other except Soder and Man. With 402 churches the population per church is 820. Average weekly Sunday attendance is 8,700. There are 72 full time Stipendiary clergy. The latest consultation shows that most of the people going to church are over 70 years old(43%). The church attendance in Herefordshire averages at about 3% of the population. There is a small area of growth through Messy Church and Open the Book.

We have a strong average attendance in our 420 churches compared to the national averages and recognise the privilege in rural areas of being the only community building available. However, we have weak attendance in our Market Towns and in Hereford City where attendance falls low in places less than 1% of population, and similarly in the poorest areas.

Some interesting statistics are, 97 regular worshipping congregations have fewer than 10 members. 257 have less than 20 out of 333. We currently invest clergy resources disproportionately into smaller congregations. Herefordshire has the most churches per Christian members of population. Since 2013 the membership on church electoral rolls has fallen by 15% and average weekly attendance by 7%. Recent analysis shows that only 30% of parishes are classed as Mission and Financially strong. The overall costs of mission are greater than what is offered through parish giving.

The benefice of Ariconium is in the Deanery of Ross and Archenfield. The Benefice was formed in 2008 when the Ross Team Ministry was reordered. It comprises six parishes, St Lawrence, Weston under Penyard, St Michael, Hope Mansel, St Mary, Linton, St John the Baptist, Upton Bishop, St John the Baptist, Aston Ingham and St John the Baptist, the Lea. The parishes lie in the southeast of the diocese, in an agricultural and partially wooded undulating area of outstanding beauty. They are situated to the east of the market town of Ross on Wye.

All six churches have one Sunday service weekly, on a four- Sunday monthly rota basis. There is a shared 5th Sunday service. Some Feast days are also shared, Ascension Day for example. There is a wide range of services to appeal to a broad section of the community. Both the Book of Common Prayer and Common Worship are used as well as some less formal services. As well as formal services quiet days, healing, bible groups and bible study take place. There are two Church of England Schools in the benefice at Lea and Weston.

The parish of Aston Ingham has a population of approximately 400 with a church electoral roll of 46. The population is of mixed age range, but a high percentage is retired. There are about 30 children in the village and there is a scout hut. Scouts join us for some of the major celebrations. The church has good links with other local active organisations such as the WI and the village hall committee. The monthly service of Evensong is the best attended service with 20 plus people there is a good music tradition. The weekly office is said on a Monday.

Hope Mansel is the smallest of the parishes. The parish consists of several small hamlets around a beautiful valley on the edge of the Forest of Dean. The places have some wonderful names Starve Beech, Kettle Bottom, Dancing Green, Bailey lane End and Hope Mansell. The village hall has a 'pop up pub' and other village activities are run there. The population is about 280, with 30 on the church electoral roll. The congregation averages at about 15 representing a range of ages.

The Lea is the fastest growing parish with lots of new housing because it is situated on the A40 which has been chosen by the council to build new houses. Open the book is very popular with the local school which is a very modern building, lots of community events happen at the school there is also a very good village hall. The church has a Sunday school with about 15 children attending once a month. There is also a large council estate with all the problems associated with rural poverty. There is also a village shop and a pub.

The Rectory is situated in Weston under Penyard which is only two miles from Ross. There are several other small hamlets, namely Ponthill, Bromash, Kingstone Bill Mills, Ryeford and Rudhall. There are approximately 1,000 residents in the parish. There is also a church school with 70 children, a pub, village hall and playing field with a football team. The congregation is 25 plus. There is a variety of services including a well attended family service.

Linton's claim to fame is that Michael Palin's great grandfather was the Rector there. It also has one of the oldest Yew Trees in England. The population is approximately 500 with about half being 'new comers to the area. The congregation is mainly elderly but new efforts are being made to attract younger people. The church roll has 47 members and the average attendance is about 18. Festival services can attract over 70 people. A new family service is bringing in younger people. Members of the congregation are involved in lots of local activities such as a community lunch, emergency transport provision, using driving volunteers. Birmingham Gospel choir performed at the church in May 2017 which made quite an impact on the village.

Upton Bishop has a population of about 560 people a quarter are under 18 years old. The village is again made up of several hamlets, Phocle Green, Crow Hill, Upton Crewe's and Hill Top. The congregation averages between 15- 20 and there is a variety of services.

The church buildings are ancient and in good repair. Aston Ingham was rebuilt in 1891 it has a good heating system and is reasonably warm. It has some interesting Stained glass windows. Upton Bishop dates from the 12th and 13th Centuries and is dark but welcoming. The Norman church at Linton is cold but beautiful. The Lea dates from the 13th century and has new heating and lights and an audio system. Weston under Penyard is recorded as Westune in the Domesday Book and has stood for eight hundred years or longer. In our churchyards we try to find a balance between tidiness and biodiversity. Caring for God's Arce has been involved in some of our churchyards.

The Benefice is named after a Roman centre of iron smelting situated between Weston under Penyard and Aston Ingham. The six parishes barely knew one another before 2008. The benefice has come together over the last few years through a variety of activities. Shared feast

days joint services on the fifth Sunday and The Holy Week walks, (we carry the cross round the six churches in the Benefice).

We are exploring, together and as individual parishes, new and interesting ways to extend our welcome to a wider circle of people. Our ministry team includes retired clergy and lay readers, some who live in the Benefice and others who come from further a field. Members of the PCC also lead services on occasion. The Benefice secretary prints a weekly pew sheet which includes a letter from the clergy. The secretary also prints a monthly prayer diary and service sheets for special occasions she also coordinates weddings, funerals and baptisms. The individual church treasures meet twice a year supported by the Benefice Treasurer, to cover the parish offer and any new projects.

We reach out to the wider community through parish magazines and Assemblies in-the village schools. Open the Book has been very successful in the schools. We invite people to Lent groups and prayer and bible study groups. There are lots of special activities around the big festivals that bring people together. Our Mystery plan successfully attracted people who were not churchgoers.

We support community activities such as the Ross community larder, local shops and Fair Trade and we have good links with the local Farmers helped by services such as Rogation walks, Plough Sunday Lamastide and Harvest. At Harvest we usually support an international charity like Farm Africa.

There are some differences between the villages, but the population consists of young families, locally raised seniors who have lived in the area all their lives, the farming communities who increasingly look to tourism at least as a diversification, and incomes. The latter are generally people who have semi- retired to the area and commuting professionals. There are also a lot of self- employed people and small businesses. Although a noted holiday location, little housing seems to have been lost to ' holiday homes'- people want to live here. The down- side is that housing is becoming extremely expensive, particularly to those employed in the local economy.

Whilst farming no longer has the dominance it once had, the land is still worked and agriculture is important, consequently the area has experienced an influx of agricultural workers from eastern countries of the European Union, with many workers returning year after year. The rural context is one that is constantly changing and is always interesting.

Having described each Parish and village's context we now consider how to address some of the questions posed by our consultation.

In 2002 the Methodist Church produced a report called 'Presence' which lamented the decline in rural chapels, it highlighted some key areas of ministry that could be useful to our church. First it considered the priestly ministry. Worship is worship no matter how many people are gathered for it. The priestly role is one of intercession on behalf of the whole community. Worship in a small group can be inspiring for example you know who has a good voice! Celebrating the story of God's self- giving and redeeming love in word and sacrament is much more intermittent in a small group. The Rector is known by the community. One of the most popular television programs recently was, ' the Vicar of Dibley,' the main character played by Dawn French, new her people and was much loved. The program gives us an interesting view of what people who don't go to church, think a vicar should be like. Charles Herbert, would have recognised that pattern of ministry. Today it is much more difficult for the country priest. The priest may not live in the village. Therefore, it can be difficult to understand everything that is happening in the community. Often it can be weeks before a priest might visit a particular church. Problems can occur that he knows nothing about. Local

knowledge is very important in the countryside. Reaching out to the wider community is very important but how much time do you give to the School, the village hall, and parish council?

Part of the priestly ministry is prophetic accepting and challenging others to obey the call to Christ-living, this can be hard in a place where everyone is very comfortable in their chosen lifestyle. The values of the kingdom of God are not necessarily the same as the Church. It is not always easy to make people recognise their responsibility to the wider world. Standing alongside and enabling the oppressed can be difficult in a relationship where there is a wide range of views within a small community.

Interpreting the story of God's love for modern generation is not easy when they have not heard that story before. The study of the bible must be part of our teaching. In our benefice we have introduced a 'Bible brunch,' we have breakfast and learn about the bible through a nurture course or DVD, this has proved to be very popular. We also have a monthly meeting in a home, where we have lunch and then listen to a bible reading, followed by a discussion and a time of prayer, anyone can come and join us. This has proved to be a good tool for evangelism. It is also powerful to listen to the witness of others, we have a variety of people with a great deal of Christian experience. There are other groups within the community that invite us to speak the WI meetings for example. The welcome people receive at a small church is much more important because there is no where to hide.

For those of us who live in the country, and for anyone who enjoys leisure pursuits in Britain, the seasons play an important part in our lives. In the country side you are always aware that God is 'the author of beauty' This glory is poured into the heart of the Christian by the Holy Spirit, who transforms us into the image of Christ. We need to remember that St Francis love for the whole created order came directly from his love of the Creator. The beautiful country gives us an opportunity to worship out doors, we regularly have services in the churchyards. People today are much more aware of the green agenda and we have a fantastic theology of creation.

Here are four examples of new ways of reaching people that have been very effective. Godly Play is a creative and imaginative approach to Christian nurture and spiritual life. It is a method practised in a variety of settings, with both children and adults. We have found it very useful in small congregations where there is a wide age range of people. Godly Plays origins are in the Montessori tradition. Over decades of research at the Centre for the Theology of Childhood, the US theologian and educationalist Rev Dr Jerome Berryman developed what is now called Godly Play. The creative use of the imagination in re telling bible stories using play and toys is popular with both adults and children and reaches parts other methods do not. It can also be done outside.

Perhaps not a new thing but something very old we have re discovered the art of Well Blessing. There were many holy wells in medieval Britain, a reminder that water is a symbol of grace. A good gift from God spring forth from the earth. Many country churches had a well it was used for baptism, holy blessings and sprinkling. At Aston Ingham we have such a well and once a year during the summer we have special service to bless the well, this has proved very popular and people come from other churches to join us in our celebration.

Living in the country side it is very easy to be parochial and to become centred on your own needs. We have found that having a good foreign policy can be useful. Tanga in Touch is a charity we set up in 2002 to help people in our link diocese of Tanga in Tanzania. It was originally a parish link between a place called Mapinduzi and Whitbourne. It has changed into an educational charity teaching computer skills and other vocational training to adults, and

helping poor children to go to school. We also support two other churches and a leprosy centre. The overseas link has been a good tool for evangelism encouraging children and young people to take part in fundraising activities. It also helps people to get a better understanding of their own needs and concerns, and it is truly amazing what a small group of people can do.

The Benefice has also created an LMDG a local ministry development group which is a catalyst for ministry in the local churches. There are currently six people in our group from a variety of backgrounds including a retired local doctor. The diocesan local ministry officer oversees training and provides extra support to the clergy. The candidates are selected and chosen by the local churches and have to undergo a period of training. Each group also has someone from another LMDG group as a Companion. The group has been very supportive and many of the team lead worship. They also help with parish visiting and admin.

To conclude, the churches in our benefice have re-discovered their mission to worship God and to serve their neighbour, in ways that are locally appropriate. Our rural churches are working to help people achieve their full potential. Partnerships with other denominations are very important we have good links with the Baptist Church and the Methodist Church. One of our church wardens is a Catholic. Recent events, in the country side have raised the profile of rural issues. The ways in which local communities came together to help each other during the COVID crisis, have had a very positive impact on the wider community and have given us a great opportunity to celebrate and engage with a wider variety of the population.

'Community is a place of generous attentiveness to individuals, a place where power is never exercised to diminish or humiliate, where humility is respected, yet where people are helped to grow by being challenged and having demands made on them, and where they are taken seriously enough to be argued with -where we both stand up for and stand up to each other.'

Quote from a Catholic priest.

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BARNABY HUIISH

***A Eucharistic Constitution? How the nation encounters
God in the Coronation rite.***

A Eucharistic Constitution? How the nation encounters God in the Coronation rite.

As part of my Post-Ordination Training, some years ago, we were taken to Hartlepool for a training session (probably under the heading of ‘local mission’). We were introduced to a local retired dockworker, who had very negative views of the church, government and local government in relation to his town, community and daily experience of life. Having spoken at length about his deep misgivings, he was asked if the Church of England was therefore, to his mind, completely and utterly irrelevant. ‘No’, he replied: ‘You crown the monarch’. That was in his opinion the one thing that gave the Church of England any kind of validity; and in his opinion it really mattered.

How do we speak about God? One of the more unusual ways in which the Church of England speaks about God is through the Coronation rite. A coronation is a rare event (inherently taking place once in a generation); but what it lacks in frequency it makes up for in reach. In 1953, when the service was televised for the first time,¹⁸ it was witnessed by unprecedented numbers of people around the world and left lifelong memories.

This paper will reflect on the coronation liturgy, as it currently stands, and explore what it says about God, our monarch and ourselves. It does not aim to offer a systematic study of the liturgical development of the ceremony (which has followed a recognisable pattern for over a thousand years),¹⁹ but rather to reflect on certain key moments or aspects of the rite.

1. Status of the event: ceremony, service or sacrament?

The Coronation is a sacred-cum-secular gathering. If you were to ask ‘who runs the show’ the answer would (by design) be complicated: the Archbishop of Canterbury presides; the Earl Marshal of England

¹⁸ Previously, in 1937, the coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth had been filmed.

¹⁹ The service in 1953 was recognisably the same in its essentials as that recorded by Archbishop Egbert in the 8th century (and subsequently revised in 974, 1100 and 1308). The order in which things take place has changed somewhat over time, but the main elements of the service have remained in place; moreover, the wording of some of the prayers and other texts has changed very little. It is not (*pace* Mary Beard) ‘a Victorian invention’.

oversees;²⁰ the Dean of Westminster guides; the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport²¹ provides... and so on: the ceremony is intentionally (inextricably?) a merging and blending of the sacred and the secular.

The most fundamental expression of this is seen in the fact that the coronation-specific elements of the service are framed within a regular celebration of Holy Communion. Theologically, the recognition of an individual as reigning monarch, their consecration as such, and the expression of their constitutional relationship with their people, is set within the overarching narrative of the Eucharist: by which sovereign and subjects alike are seen to be subject to God – as children of God in creation, and sinners seeking redemption.

This world-view is expressed in the imagery of the orb with a cross which, as well as being an item of regalia in its own right, is seen in miniature atop each of the crowns, rods and sceptres used during the service. The idea that the world and its people (kings included) are all subject to a higher power is a key overall theme to the service.

In a similar vein, the prayers, which accompany delivery of each item of regalia to the sovereign, tend to focus on ways of living and reigning which are to be pursued and aspired towards on earth, but which will only ultimately be fulfilled in God's eternal/heavenly kingdom. For example:

*God crown you with a crown of glory and righteousness,
that having a right faith and manifold fruit of good works,
you may obtain the crown of an everlasting kingdom
by the gift of him whose kingdom endureth for ever.*

The coronation Epistle and Gospel both emphasize the coexistence of divine and human realms, duly ordered and constituted. Regard is to be paid to both: 'Fear God, honour the King'²², the congregation is told; and

²⁰ 'of England' – nb the coronation is essentially an English rite – somewhat adapted (but not much changed) to recognise the union (first with Scotland and then with Ireland) and (in the 20th century) the status of other independent realms within what is now the Commonwealth of Nations.

²¹ or whichever cabinet minister currently embodies the ancient office of Surveyor of the King's Works.

²² 1 Peter 2.17

‘Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's’.²³

2. Recognition

Akin to a liturgical greeting, the opening rite of Recognition establishes a sense of relationship between people, God and monarch:

- The people are *told* (by the Archbishop of Canterbury) ‘I here present unto you King *N.*, your undoubted King’;
- they are then *asked* ‘are you willing to do your homage and service?’
- to which they *respond* ‘God save King *N.*’.²⁴

Interestingly it is the people, not the Archbishop, who first invoke the name of God in the service.

There are hints in this rather inscrutable exchange that (even though a monarch reigns ‘By the Grace of God’²⁵), popular consent is nevertheless desired (if not actually required). This liturgical ‘Recognition’ is sometimes seen as a relic of Saxon times when kings were to some degree elected.

In broader terms ‘recognition’ of the monarch has long been a vital preliminary to the Coronation taking place. In centuries gone by, a new sovereign would remain secure within the stronghold of the Tower of London until the day before their coronation, whereupon they would proceed in state through the streets of London so as to be seen by the people.

3. The threefold Oath: Peace ... Protection ... Mercy

²³ Matthew 22.21. Also heard throughout the service are several verses of Psalmody, and other portions of Scripture, set to music. It is well worth noting that the service begins and ends on a scriptural note of joy and praise: ‘I was glad’ (Ps 122) to begin, and ‘*Te Deum laudamus*’ to finish.

²⁴ cf 1 Samuel 10.24

²⁵ *Dei Gratia* – as proclaimed on every coin in the realm

This thousand-year-old formula could and should be an aspirational definition of who we are as a nation.²⁶ Unfortunately the oath was hijacked at the Reformation and is now hidden beneath a lengthy pledge to maintain ‘... the Protestant Reformed Religion ... the settlement of the Church of England ... the privileges of the Bishops and Clergy’ etc. The original ‘three precepts’ of the Oath were:

- That the Church of God and all Christian people preserve peace at all times
- I shall forbid rapacity and all iniquities to all degrees
- I shall uphold equity and mercy in all judgements

Notably (in the Saxon rite, at least) the monarch makes this promise on behalf of himself *and* ‘the Christian people’. It is a reminder that the person being crowned is there not simply as ‘head of state’ but also ‘head of nation’. It is ‘both/and’: the Oath is not just rules for the monarch to follow, but ideals for us all to aspire to.²⁷

The prominence of the Oath at the start of the service is also a longstanding reminder that in this country monarchy is not absolute, but constitutional; the monarch cannot just do as s/he wishes. Before being crowned s/he must make the promise and sign on the dotted line to say that s/he has done so.

The oath (in its classic form) is concerned with fundamental freedoms and guarantees: the maintenance of peace, the upholding of justice and righteousness, the teaching of mercy and equity. It is rooted in Biblical understandings; and it seems to me to be highly relevant for today (for example, contemporary discourse seemingly emphasizes justice but with very little room for mercy; whereas the oath enjoins us – along with the monarch – to be balanced in maintaining both).

The oath is symbolically represented later in the service, when the monarch receives a ‘Sceptre [...] of kingly power and justice’ in her right hand, and a ‘Rod of equity and mercy’ in her left; and continues to

²⁶ in place, dare I say, of the *post hoc* concoction of ‘British Values’ which are propagated in compulsory citizenship classes

²⁷ A reminder of the three precepts remains in a trio of swords which are carried alongside the monarch for the duration of the service; they are near-identical, except that one has a blunted point, one has a sharpened point and the third (the Sword of Mercy) has had its point cut off entirely. More might be made of their significance.

keep hold of them both as she is successively crowned, blessed and enthroned.

4. ‘Anointed with this oil and consecrated King’ – coronation as ordination?

Although ‘coronation’ means ‘crowning’, the anointing with oil is widely identified as the most important moment in the coronation rite. In 1953 it was one of two points in the service where the eye of the TV camera was averted.²⁸ It reminds us of the anointing of kings in the Old Testament (as recalled in Handel’s famous coronation anthem ‘Zadok the Priest’); but it is also one of several points in the service where the coronation is seen to be akin to an ordination (cf use of the hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus* immediately beforehand). After the anointing, as if to emphasize this, the monarch is vested in garments with which some clergy may be familiar: an alb (*colobium sindonis*), a girdle, a stole and a dalmatic (*supertunica*) – the latter being the distinctive garb of a Deacon).

Other symbols are also used: spurs (emblematic of chivalry) are briefly applied, but then removed; and there is a ring (‘the seal of Catholic Faith’); but the primary garb of the monarch prior to her crowning is that of a Deacon (literally a ‘servant’).

5. The significance of the Sword(s): a kingly kenosis?

Anointed and garbed, the monarch is girded²⁹ with a sword – and not just any sword, but the Sword of State.³⁰ Straight afterwards, however, the monarch ungirds himself of the sword, places it (still in its scabbard) on the altar and leaves it there. It is then immediately ‘redeemed’ by a peer (who is a member of the government), who immediately unsheathes it and carries it before the monarch for the rest of the service.

²⁸ The other was the moment when the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh received Communion.

²⁹ to be more specific: a king is girded with the Sword of State (i.e. it is fixed to his girdle or belt), a queen (regnant) simply places her hand on its hilt.

³⁰ there is room for a bit of confusion here: King George IV provided that the usual Sword of State (the one which is regularly carried before the monarch at the Opening of Parliament) should at this point in the service be swapped for an exquisite, jewelled version (more in keeping with the aesthetic of his own coronation) – an innovation which has since persisted.

This is a remarkably powerful liturgical expression of constitutional monarchy. It predates the business of the House of Commons shutting the door on Black Rod³¹ and is far more positive. The king is presented with an emblem of great worldly power (symbolically ‘the State’ is placed in his hands); but, instead of wielding it, he willingly lays it down; whereupon it is taken up on his behalf by a representative of HM Government (who ‘stands by’ the monarch). It is a rich piece of symbolism and encapsulates the relationship between the sovereign and those who govern in his name.

6. From Homage to Communion

Robed, crowned and enthroned, the monarch receives the homage of her peers³² and the acclamation of her people. But she then steps down from her throne and approaches the altar; the crown, rod and sceptre are removed and she kneels in preparation for the rest of the Communion service (which continues from the Offertory onwards). In the midst of everything else she finds herself a ‘member of the congregation’ before God, sharing in the General Confession, the Comfortable Words, the Prayer of Humble Access and the Holy Sacrament;³³ before again taking up her regalia for the final Collect and Blessing.

7. Conclusion

Our present Queen (whom God preserve) is rightly celebrated for the personal qualities which she has brought to the throne and for the values by which she has reigned: above all the value of ‘service’, which she singled out (with considerable prescience) on her 21st birthday, 75 years ago, and which has remained a consistent and relevant (arguably increasingly relevant) watchword all through her long reign. But her

³¹ at the State Opening of Parliament, the door of the House is slammed in the face of the Queen’s messenger; a ritual which has come to be seen as demonstrating the independence of the House of Commons.

³² namely the Lords Spiritual (Bishops) and Temporal. Historically all Peers of the realm have been present and paid homage, regardless of whether or not they are members of the House of Lords. Peers and peeresses are required to be robed and are seated prominently in the transepts on either side of the throne(s).

³³ albeit, in recent times at least, only the monarch and consort (together with the Archbishops and ‘officiating Bishops’) have received.

regnal values also represent, and are clearly rooted in, a deep and faithful understanding of the coronation rite itself and the role and character of monarchy that it upholds.

There is no guarantee that a monarch will be wise, understanding or scrupulous (we remain fortunate in that regard); but in any event the coronation provides something of a safeguard: an important foundation, framework and measure for kingship in this country (not least in the words of the ancient coronation Oath, the original sense of which is ripe for rediscovery).

In pre-Reformation times, the Abbot of Westminster prepared the king for his coronation (as is the task of the Dean of Westminster today) and the text given to the king for meditation on the night before the service was Ecclesiasticus 32.1: 'If thou be made Master lift not thyself up but be among them as one of the rest'. During the service, the dignity and power of monarchy is rightly represented by crowns and thrones and gold and ermine; but at the same time, and emphatically, the monarch is reminded that she is herself subject to a higher power. Beneath her 'robe royal' she wears the garb of a deacon – one who serves; and, in a constitutionally significant moment, the head of state (unprompted) divests herself of the symbolic Sword with which she has been girded, and intentionally lays it down, enabling it to be taken up by a representative of those who wield power in her name.

How do we speak about God? A primal answer to that question is: through Liturgy. The coronation service is an age-old liturgy which is seen (and to some extent experienced) by a very large number of people. As is established at the very start, in the words of the Recognition, the service is concerned with the formation of a relationship: the relationship between monarch and people, and people and monarch, and monarch and God, and people and God. The importance of how we order our society is emphasized, and the values by which we live; whilst at the same time the liturgy consistently reminds us that our aspirations will only fully be realised when we enter into God's heavenly kingdom.

The coronation rite is, it could be argued, a form of Constitution: not a written constitution so much as a ritual constitution. It speaks richly through symbols and rituals, scripture and sacrament: laying out the

rights and responsibilities of the monarch and (by extension) of the nation and its people (with the monarch embodying the dual constitutional role of both ‘head of state’ and ‘head of nation’).

In secular terms, the coronation (vividly) represents a meeting of past and present. Part of the narrative of the coronation is that there is security in continuity, and that there is wisdom to be found in values that have stood the test of time. The hereditary nature of monarchy is itself an expression of this.

In theological terms, the coronation presents us with the Eucharist: God’s faithfulness (and our fallibility) throughout salvation-history. This is the order of things, within which and in light of which we live and kings reign. During the service an individual is recognised as sovereign and ‘ordained’ as such. They are invested with emblems of kingship, each of which comes with a reminder that the ultimate kingdom is God’s, and that we would do best in this world to try to embody his teachings and values. In light of this, the people pledge their support (in words of prayer and homage) and are enjoined to take to heart those very same teachings and values.

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GOD: SOME CONVERSATIONS 4-14 JULY 2022

KATE STRANGE

Deliver us from Evil

COLLEGE OF ST GEORGE – CLERGY CONSULTATIONS

Outline for paper – Deliver us from evil: by Kate Strange

Introduction

The Lord's prayer appears in two forms in the New Testament: the shorter version in the Gospel According to Luke 11:2–4 and the longer version, part of the Sermon on the Mount, in the Gospel According to Matthew 6:9–13. The GCSE religious education syllabus states that, the Lord's prayer has an aim to help Christians achieve a deeper understanding of the bible, the life of Jesus and Christian teachings. It is recited in most Christian services and is a prayer which Jesus used to help teach his followers to pray. This is a fundamental starting point when we think about how we speak of God – and how God speaks to us, through prayer. Therefore, this paper seeks to ask the question 'what do we mean when we pray, deliver us from evil' in the context of the Lord's prayer? The paper will focus on three areas;

1. Deliverance

This section will discuss two gospel stories; The Gerasene Demoniac in Luke (8: 26-39)

And the women with the Pythian Spirit (Acts 16:16-38)

To begin with the words; 'deliver us' in this case and context it is used in the framework of prayer and the word 'from' is evil. To deliver someone is '*the action of being rescued and being set free*'. There are examples where deliverance is not in the context of evil. Nobel peace winner Rabindranath Tagore, a Bengali, poet, playwright, composer and philosopher, social reformer and painter, who reshaped Bengali literature and music within the context of modernism in the late 19th and 20th century, when writing about deliverance writes not of something being removed

rather of something being embraced. He writes in his poem Deliverance is not for me in renunciation. *"I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight"*. Here deliverance is not removing something but embracing it, it is seen as liberation.

There are examples in the bibles where Jesus exercised demons from people. Some denominations have a long history of deliverance ministry. This refers to practices and rituals to cleanse people of demons and evil spirits. This is done in order to address problems manifesting in their life as a result of demonic presences, which have authority to oppress the person. This paper will address two biblical stories demonstrating this.

The Gerasene Demonic

The first bible story is the Gerasene Demonic (Luke 8:26-39) the story is repeated in both (Matthew 8:28-34) and (Mark 5:1-20). The region of Gerasene's was a gentile region, southwest of the sea of Galilee. It was in the location of the Decapolis, or the Ten cities, a group of Greek cities that belonged to no country and they were self-governing. The story involves pigs. The man approaches Jesus and shouts at him – Jesus enters into a conversation not with the man but with the spirit, the demon. Jesus asks him "what is your name?" The reference to Legion, was the Roman army number which would have been between 3000 and 6000. They, the spirits seem to be asking Jesus to be sent into the pigs rather than the 'abyss' which meaning is a deep or seemingly bottomless chasm. Is the abyss the spirit is making reference to could be a generalisation or could it be a connection to the abyss which is mentioned in both (Rev 1: 9) which states, *The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of*

the Abyss. Also (Rev 20: 1-3) and I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended.

Is this a one dimensional story of Jesus delivering a man, removing an evil spirit or spirits possibly up to 6000 of them from his body to bring him mental peace? When we encounter the man, he is disenfranchised and alone. Orlando Patterson a historian of slavery called this 'social death'. He has been expelled from his community and stripped from everything that identified him with humanity. He may be alive physically, but socially and spiritual he could be described as dead or 'bound'. While grammatical ambiguities muddle and muddy our sense of subjectivity what is often overlooked is the story behind the story. While the focus here could easily be on the name of the demon, the number of demons or the pigs, where there is little focus is that the man was alone, naked, homeless and shackled living in the tombs. Luis Menendez Antuna writes on the subject of solitary confinement that people living in those conditions, are experiences of torture. The first words the man says '*What do you want with me Jesus' son of the most High I beg you do not torture me*'. The question then is where were the absent inhabitants of Gererasa? where are the people who shackled the man, left him without shelter and clothes to live a life of solitary confinement in the tombs? Was this for his own good? Or community safety? Where is the story of deliverance and liberation? In freedom from the spirit,

releasing from torture, or being reunited with a community who had shackled and left him naked?

The girl with the Pythian spirit

The second story is the story of the girl with the pythian spirit (Acts 16:16-18). Following a tour of Asian Minor and Macedonia, Paul and Silas find themselves in the Roman colony of Philippi. They are staying with Lydia. She is a newly baptised merchant who deals with highly coveted textiles (purple dye). They decided to remain at Lydia's home for some time, tired from their travels. One day they encountered an unusual girl on the street. She is an enslaved prophet who was possessed by a Pythian spirit. The term originally referred to a mythical serpent believed to guard the temple and oracle of the Greek God Apollo at Delphi. Why did Paul want or need to perform, an act of deliverance on this girl? It is believed that the girl's fortune telling ability came from evil spirits. Fortune telling was a common practice in Greek and Roman cultures. Her masters were exploiting her unfortunate condition for personal gain. Did Paul's act of deliverance liberate the girl? (Acts 16:18) *'finally he became so annoyed'* that's the point in which he performed the exorcism; was it out of compassion for the woman, or human irritability. We do not witness the demon in conversation with Paul, asking to be released from the woman and the woman herself although enslaved by her captives does not ask for healing for deliverance from this life or the demon within her. Her enslavers are enraged. Paul and Silas are thrown into jail. There's was a happy ending to the story but what for the girl? Is being released from a demon spirit better than being released from the bondage of slavery? Was Paul simply doing all that he could do for the girl? The

name Pythian spirit comes from the Oracle at Delphi. It was the most important shine in all Greece. The priestess Pythia was believed to give prophesies which were thought to be the most accurate in all Greece. The Pythia were young celebrate girls who served as Apollos spokeswomen. Though they were, by convention celebrate, usually virgins the mechanics of the oracle were suggestive; the oracle was a fissure in the ground through which divinatory steam was emitted. The Pythian would sit on a chair and as the steam rose from the ground, they would recount the predictions in a trance like state, answering questions that they had been asked, usually by men. If the invocation of the name in Acts suggests, it was likely that this girl was kept as a virgin, or while working as a prophetess as celibate and not used in the sex trade as many other women slaves would have been. Loosing that ability to fortune tell for her masters would have certainly not given her a life of liberation and freedom rather sent her to work in other areas of need for the wealthy community that lived there. The topography of Roman plays suggests that she would have ended up in the red-light- district. If deliverance is freedom from bondage and liberation what did this act that Paul performed out of irritation on the slave girl really achieve?

2. Evil

This section will discuss contemporary and historic understanding of evil with references to media influences

Evil, in a general sense, could be defined by what it is not—the opposite or absence of good. It can be an extremely broad concept, although in everyday

usage it is often more narrowly used to talk about profound wickedness. It is generally seen as taking multiple possible forms, such as the form of personal moral evil commonly associated with the word, or impersonal natural evil (as in the case of natural disasters or illnesses), and in religious thought, the form of the demonic or supernatural/eternal influences. While some religions, world views, and philosophies focus on "good versus evil", others deny evil's existence and usefulness in describing people.

Definitions of evil vary, as does the analysis of its motives. Elements that are commonly associated with personal forms of evil involve unbalanced behaviour including anger, revenge, hatred, psychological trauma, expediency, selfishness, ignorance, destruction and neglect.

In some forms of thought, evil is also sometimes perceived as the dualistic antagonistic binary opposite to good, in which good should prevail and evil should be defeated. The ethical questions regarding good and evil could be put into three categories

- meta-ethics concerning the nature of good and evil,
- normative ethics concerning how we ought to behave,
- and applied ethics concerning particular moral issues

Evildoers.

To explore the concept of the term evildoers we will look at a case study of two people that have had big media influences for their behaviour.

Adolf Hitler

Let us then take an example of someone from past history Adolf Hitler. Adolf Hitler was an Austrian-born German who was the dictator of Germany from 1933 until his death in 1945. He rose to power as the leader of the Nazi Party. During his dictatorship, he initiated World War II. He was central to the perpetration of the Holocaust, the genocide of about six million Jews. He was personally responsible for the secret euthanasia programme of the disabled T-4 in Autumn 1939. Thousands of people didn't see this man as evil. They saw him as a saviour figure. What does this situation tell us about the meta-ethics concerning evil? Was Hitler an evil man or did he really believe that what he was doing was going to save his people? The ethics of the great good. Many people thought it was normative behaviour. While many did not. There were those who carried out the orders, went along with the ideas and plans.

Evil as demonic forces

A long debated question is, the concept of evil as an outside force or something within us? There are focused arguments for both. The two gospel story examples previously have looked at evil as demons in the bible. These examples are of deliverance at first hand of 'demons' evil spirits within a person to be removed from them to give a sense of peace and liberation. Although an argument has already been established that removing what appears to be a demon within someone may not necessarily bring deliverance, peace or liberation per se. In both of the stories previously mentioned, the character presented with behaviour which was deemed unacceptable by the community, or who is 'evil' (demon possessed), while the other characters those who enslaved the girl with the spirit and the people of Gerasa who

shackled and left the man naked, in torture conditions, no mention of evil or possession is made. There is an equivalent argument perhaps to where was the line drawn with the Nazi soldiers to following orders to sending people into the gas chambers and doing nothing to help them? – Jung says *“the absence of good – is evil. It is of no importance whether evil is here or there, but one can deal only with the evil in oneself, because it is within ones’ reach, elsewhere one trespasses”*

Derek Chauvin

More recently we have seen the images of the murder of George Floyd being recorded across the world. A black afro Caribbean man being pinned down by the neck for 8 minutes by police officer Derek Chauvin. The story caused mass protests in both America and in England. The story behind the story when you look at the footage is why were there three officers that stood by as Derek Chauvin Killed George Floyd. We need to ask the question; Why did the three officers standing by not intervene? C.S Lewis on his writing on God and the problem of evil reminds us that God gave us free will. Lewis’ does stress that in every behavioural choice (normative ethics) there must necessarily be at least one possible alternative to the kind of conduct actually chosen. It is therefore contradictory to suggest that God might have made people able to choose without thereby opening up the possibility of their choosing disfavoured alternatives. Lewis quotes St Thomas Aquinas saying, *“Nothing which implies contradiction falls under the omnipotence of God”* Therefore God had to either make us with the ability to sin, or not make us at all.

3. Prayer

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This section will focus on how we speak of and to God in prayer using the Lord's prayer with the focus of the words 'deliver us from evil'.

To understand what we are praying for first we need to understand both the language of the Lord's Prayer and its origin. The prayer that this section is taken from in the bible is in the context of two gospels (Matthew 6:9-13) and (Luke 11:2-4). The version is different in Luke leaving out the line 'deliver us from evil, making the focus in Luke more on forgiveness. In Matthew, Jesus is giving directions on how to pray.

One of the Catholic Church's most outstanding theologians, St. Thomas Aquinas, known as the "Angelic Doctor" for his extensive writings about angels, taught and wrote voluminously about our faith in the 13th century at the University of Paris, as well as in Naples and Rome among other places.

In St Thomas's Catechetical Instructions, in the first of these, that St. Thomas discusses are the five qualities of prayer present in the Lord's Prayer. He writes *"Moreover, our prayer must be suitable, so that a person asks of God in prayer what is good for him. St. John Damascene says: "Prayer is the asking of what is right and fitting from God."* St Thomas uses the writing of Christian monk John of Damascus c.675 who was born and raised in Damascus who lived in a monastery in Mar Saba in Jerusalem in his reflections. It raises the question how many times our prayer is not heard because we seek that which is not good for us: *"You ask and you do not receive, because you ask amiss"* (James 4:3). If we take St Thomas's theory and reflect on that firstly we have to acknowledge that, to know, what one ought to

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pray for is most difficult; for it is not easy to know what one ought to desire. In this context what is the evil to which we wish to be delivered from? Is this good for me, or in the case of intercessional prayers good for the person/people/community to which we are praying for?

St. Augustine, of Hippo 354 AD, theologian wrote about prayer It must be noted that prayer brings about three good effects.

- First, prayer is an efficacious and useful remedy against evils. It delivers us from the sins we have committed: "*Thou hast forgiven the wickedness of my sin. For this shall every one that is holy pray to Thee in a seasonable time*" (Ps. 32:5).
- Secondly Prayer, also, frees one from the fear of future sin, and from trials and sadness of soul: "*Is any one of you sad? Let him pray*" (James 5:13).
- Thirdly, is all the good of a flourishing life, and opposed to this are troubles and adversities. And we seek to remove them when we pray: "*But deliver us from evil.*" (Psalm 145)

Conclusion

Prayer is how Christians communicate with God. Many Christians believe that it is through prayer that God's grace and guidance are given. Christians think of prayer as two-way communication that gives comfort, as God is listening and may send messages back. St Agustin's theory of Spirituality first combined with St. John Damascene theory that a person asks of God in prayer what is good for them. The challenge comes in knowing what that is. History has taught us that there are many

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different facets of storytelling, changing scenery and dynamics means that once patriarchal stories can now be retold through the eyes of liberation theology. We cannot pray the words 'deliver us from evil' without naming the evil in our world as evil as we see it with honest truth telling from all those who are in the story not just the main dominant characters. We cannot we rewrite history but we can liberate the future and change it through the power of prayer.

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GRAHAM WILKINS

***"He Loves the foreigner" – God's heart for the
Sojourners of the World'***

“He Loves the foreigner” – God’s heart for the Sojourners of the World’

The forced migration of human beings, whether directly transported or forced to seek refuge, food or freedom, has a long history. While it may be anachronistic to talk about refugees before the migration of the Huguenots to Britain in the 17th century the phenomenon of people needing to leave one area and be welcomed into another is unfortunately a much longer story.

Mass transport systems and improved communications have led to a shift in this phenomenon. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) states that at the end of 2020 82.4 million people across the world had been forcibly displaced³⁴. At the time of writing the world is looking on in horror at the invasion of Ukraine and the estimated 4.7 millions who have left that country due to the war along with an estimated 7.1 million internally displaced³⁵. How the world responds to these people will display a great deal about our priorities, or values and who we see ourselves to be. In the United Kingdom there seems to be a stark contrast between the 154,500 visa applications for Ukrainians based on sponsors opening their homes in welcome³⁶ and the UK government’s plans to send some migrants to Rwanda for processing and possible settlement ³⁷.

It is into this world where people are displaced through war, famine and repression that the church is asked to minister God’s love, to show his grace and to take part in his great mission of transforming this world. The rest of this essay will take the most cursory of glances at what tools the church might find in Scripture and wider theology to give us our bearings as we continue to voyage in this world.

The first question will be to ask “What does God think of these people?”. Although this seems an almost basic question it underpins the core of everything that comes later.

The first necessary starting point is the fact that migrants, refugees, internally displaced people, sojourners, foreigners, aliens are all people. Like all people they are made in the image of God³⁸. Whatever we say about ourselves and those of high estate we also must say about the person washed ashore in dover, hunkering under a lorry in Calais, sleeping in a tent in Lebanon or walking off a plane at Stansted. Although this seems obvious with UK headlines describing those

³⁴ <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html> (last accessed 09/06/2022)

³⁵ Ukraine situation flash update No 15 30 05 2022, UNHCR

³⁶ As of the 7th of June 2022 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ukraine-family-scheme-application-data/ukraine-family-scheme-and-ukraine-sponsorship-scheme-homes-for-ukraine-visa-data--2> (last accessed 09/06/2022)

³⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/memorandum-of-understanding-mou-between-the-uk-and-rwanda/memorandum-of-understanding-between-the-government-of-the-united-kingdom-of-great-britain-and-northern-ireland-and-the-government-of-the-republic-of-r> (last accessed 09/06/2022)

³⁸ Genesis 1:27

coming to this country as “illegals” & a “swarm”³⁹ let alone a columnist referring to migrants as Cockroaches⁴⁰ it needs to be reiterated.

Not only are they made in God’s image with all the consequences that that brings for humanity, dignity and connectedness but they are loved by him. Not just the general sense that God loved the world so much⁴¹ but we also get much more specific signs than that – almost as if us humans have the tendency to reject those who are dissimilar to us in any particular way.

How we are to treat those who sojourn in our land is a theme that God keeps coming back to in the Old Testament but one instructive passage on the theme is found in Deuteronomy 10:17-22. During this passage we see some key characteristics about God. He is a great God who shows no partiality⁴² suggesting that this is a God that although he has called a particular people his own in the Old Testament does not limit his grace to just one people. The outworking of this is that it brings justice for those who are often denied it.⁴³ He loves the sojourner and shows it by supplying what they need. The love for all people is made concrete with those who are so often unloved.

We also see that God’s people are to show the same love that he does⁴⁴. The reason is something of a shock though – we are not called in this verse to love them because God does but to empathise with them “for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.” It is instructive that the word used for sojourner usually in the Old Testament, גַּר, is used by Abraham of himself in Hebron⁴⁵ and Moses by himself – including leading him to name his son in a way which references that status as a sojourner⁴⁶. However this status as a sojourner, in the Old Testament best described as someone who is a temporary resident or is without inherited rights, the opposite of being homeborn, is not something historical for the first recipients of this message. God points out that they were still sojourners⁴⁷. Hebrews recognises the heroes of faith as being people who recognised that they were exiles on earth looking for a better country, a heavenly one⁴⁸. The church are still Sojourners and strangers in this land searching for a better one. The exhortation to care for those who do likewise still stands. As does God’s love for the sojourner and those who are so often denied justice.

³⁹ Front pages from ‘The Sun’ 22/10/2015, Daily Mail 31/07/2015,

⁴⁰ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/katie-hopkins-migrant-cockroaches-column-resembles-progenocide-propaganda-says-the-un-10201959.html> (last accessed 09/06/2022)

⁴¹ John 3:16

⁴² Deuteronomy 10 :17

⁴³ Deuteronomy 10:18

⁴⁴ Deuteronomy 10:19

⁴⁵ Genesis 23:4

⁴⁶ Exodus 2:22,18:3

⁴⁷ Leviticus 25:23

⁴⁸ Hebrews 11:13-16

Another key thing to consider when thinking about God's attitude to the displaced and dispossessed is to see how they appear within the annals of salvation history.

We have already mentioned Moses. Belonging to a people which had migrated due to famine in a previous generation and then fleeing due to fear of punishment he is none-the-less found by God, even in his double displaced predicament, and chosen to be an instrument of liberation for his displaced people⁴⁹.

Before that the patriarchs were wanderers to an extent that Israel were told to claim "A wandering Aramean was my father"⁵⁰. Relating to Jacob it couches the national narrative as both migratory and sojourning in Egypt. Joseph was a forced migrant trafficked by traders but through that trafficking God turned the intended evil into good⁵¹. Salvation is brought not despite the sojourner status of these people but because of it.

Ruth is often used as an exemplar of a righteous foreigner. This Moabitess is a daughter-in-law of Elimelech⁵² who had fled Bethlehem due to famine. On the death of both her Father-in-law and her husband Ruth commits to returning to Bethlehem with Naomi and to be embedded in a different nation with a different God⁵³. Through Ruth's marriage to Boaz we get David⁵⁴. Through Ruth's marriage to Boaz we get Jesus⁵⁵. Far from the sojourner being pushed to the margin of the story she is included as being central to the salvation narrative.

God has also used those who are displaced to speak for him to his people and to the world. Of particular importance is Ezekiel who while in a foreign land has a vision that God's glory is there as well⁵⁶ before he prophesies how God's people can be faithful even when they are removed from the land and the temple which had been such a sign of God's faithfulness in the past. The displacement of a people or a person does not mean a spiritual dislocation. Ezekiel shows God caring for the forced migrant, through the forced migrant, by giving them a way to worship and a validated way to live.

One of the contested spaces regarding theology and sojourners is whether we can rightly class Jesus as a refugee. A lot of the answers seem to be based around legal definitions of refugees and whether one could be classed as a refugee

⁴⁹ Exodus 3:10

⁵⁰ Deuteronomy 26:5

⁵¹ Genesis 50:20

⁵² Ruth 1:1-4

⁵³ Ruth 1:16

⁵⁴ Ruth 4:13-22

⁵⁵ Matthew 1:5

⁵⁶ Ezekiel 1

if you fled to another part of the Roman Empire⁵⁷. Whatever legal definitions and discussions on ancient empires, its individual provinces and equivalent modern day nation states there is definitely a sense in which God the Son had to flee political violence and persecution and be taken to Egypt⁵⁸. Jesus lived as a displaced person and whether that was as an internally displaced person or a cross border refugee makes little difference to the fact that Jesus taking on our human form specifically took up a form which would be forced from his home by a violent political regime. When Paul describes this incarnation as “but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant”⁵⁹ that nothingness includes the form of one fleeing for their life. If that form is exalted in Jesus it is a sign that God loves the sojourner and will exalt even such a status as is seen as nothing.

Having seen how God has a love for the sojourner and refugee we need to make sure that we don't fall in the trap of thinking that we can love without responding in action⁶⁰.

The Old Testament continues to be instructive on how to treat foreigners, sojourners and strangers. Overarching all the previous discussion is the fact that the Old Testament describes treating foreigners as those who were born into Israel⁶¹. We've seen God's love meaning he clothes and feeds the foreigner⁶² but we see it worked out practically with food⁶³ and shelter⁶⁴ given to both sojourner and Israelite the same. We need to make sure we treat those who come to our shores justly and not as second class citizens due to their point of origin. This might well be the most challenging point to proclaim currently in the United Kingdom. The treating justly of those who end up as part of Israel would therefore include the use of equal measures⁶⁵ which might now mean making sure justice and provisions are available. It would call for fair representation as with the call to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves⁶⁶. It would include not robbing them of security or shelter to make sure you get what you are owed⁶⁷.

In moving to the new testament we have to acknowledge that the liminal markers of those in the people of God have been redefined redefining the idea of nation as it redefines the nature of family⁶⁸. We still see exhortations to care for those who are strangers and of other cultures and countries. When someone tries

⁵⁷ <https://www.gotquestions.org/was-Jesus-a-refugee.html> (Last accessed 22/06/2022) as an example.

⁵⁸ Matthew 2:13-15

⁵⁹ Philippians 2:6

⁶⁰ James 2:17

⁶¹ Leviticus 19:34

⁶² Deuteronomy 10:18

⁶³ Leviticus 23:22

⁶⁴ Leviticus 25:35

⁶⁵ Proverbs 11:1

⁶⁶ Proverbs 31:8-9

⁶⁷ Deuteronomy 24:13

⁶⁸ Matthew 12:50

to clarify what it means to love one's neighbour as ourselves Jesus draws a much wider sweep of who a neighbour is than the questioner was imagining. The one who was described as a neighbour was a Samaritan – someone from a culture which the questioner would likely be less than fond of for historic and religious reasons⁶⁹. The call to love, with all its necessary actions, is between people groups, cultures, races and religions. When discussing the last judgement Jesus states that one of the judgements will be whether we welcomed him when he was a stranger⁷⁰ before stating that what we did to the least of these we did to him⁷¹. Although the Greek word for stranger here (ξένος) has not got a tight overall use in the New Testament it is interesting that this is the word the Septuagint puts in the mouth of Ruth when she is describing herself to Boaz⁷². Our Christian duty when we meet a stranger is to treat them as if we are treating Jesus himself.

This meshes with the general biblical injunctions on welcoming people. The exhortation in Hebrews to show hospitality as some have entertained angels unaware⁷³ hints at the long tradition of welcome. The word for hospitality there φιλοξενία isn't used often in the NT but suggests love for the stranger as an outworking of the familial love (φιλαδελφία) seen in the previous verse⁷⁴. We cannot love our brothers and sisters without welcoming the other.

However much we are called to welcome the sojourner we should realise that the best thing for them is to reduce the causes which force people to leave their countries in the first place. This might be war, persecution or lack of goods. There is an argument to be made that a just distribution of jobs and a more equal economic outlook across the world would reduce the amount of people who would be forced to travel. The world's usage of material goods could vastly change the need for forced migration. St. Thomas Aquinas has two competences which should affect our view of material goods – the first is to care for them and to distribute them justly and the second is to use them for the common good and to reduce need⁷⁵. In this the church has recognised the need to use what we have for the good of others which should subsequently cut down the numbers who need to move. The work for peace and the ongoing struggles to alleviate climate change have a role, which the church could be central to, in reducing the number of people who are forced to move through direct human sinfulness or its indirect effect on the

⁶⁹ Luke 10:36

⁷⁰ Matthew 25:35,43

⁷¹ Matthew 25:40,45

⁷² Ruth 2:10

⁷³ Hebrews 13:2

⁷⁴ Hebrews 13:1

⁷⁵ Rowlands, A., (2021). *Towards a politics of communion: Catholic social teaching in dark times*, London: T&T Clark.p.78

planet.⁷⁶ As Pope Francis says in Fratelli Tutti “ To care for the world in which we live means to care for ourselves.”⁷⁷

However sometimes even with all that we might try to do to limit the numbers of people who are forced to move there will still be some for which migration is the only possible option. I would argue that at this stage the church should be encouraging both safe routes to host countries as well as a welcome when they arrive - something we have often failed to do as with large amounts of the Windrush generation. Pope Francis in his homily at Lampedusa begins by saying “Immigrants dying at sea, in boats which were vehicles of hope and became vehicles of death. That is how the headlines put it.”⁷⁸ The church should make sure that there is life to offer after these migrants come through the baptismal waters of death. Then maybe we could say with a bit more fervency “Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus”.

But I’ve heard, from Godly people in my community as well as certain newspapers, that the country is full and we cannot possibly help anyone else. I’d like to recognise that this is a genuine concern for people; many of whom would be worried about the quality of life for newcomers as well as long term residents. Putting aside whether the country is full there is a theological question about if and when a line should be drawn. We have to recognise there is a right for countries to have borders and control immigration although this should only be able to make sure that a country is stable enough to continue to help both across the world in creating conditions that would reduce the need for forced migration and to make sure there are the resources to care for those who do come or are already here. With current arguments about how best to keep migrants safe and free from the clutches of people smugglers there is a conversation in the United Kingdom regarding how best to offer transit and refuge and just as importantly who to. I would argue that we should be as open handed and as generous as possible due to all the stipulations on hospitality while recognising that without common consent in the country the environment might become more and more hostile and that by having blanket open borders we might end up denying help to those most desperately in need of it.

⁷⁷ Fratelli Tutti §17

⁷⁸ Homily on visit Lampedusa, 08/07/2013

(https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130708_omelia-lampedusa.html last accessed 22/06/2022)

The city in which I serve, Norwich, used to show hostility to those fleeing persecution but over time that changed into a long history of welcoming people who are different. We have called them “Strangers” for 700 years and they have made an impact on our city to this day. It has grown to be a city which, in general, welcomes not just those fleeing persecution abroad but all those who don’t seem to quite fit in with others’ view of life. Maybe by renewing a commitment to welcoming the refugees from famine, flood and fire we might see our hostility decrease to others who don’t quite fit in – not just in the country but also in the church. What started as mistrust in Norwich turned into a blessing economically, culturally and spiritually. Maybe the church might find similar.

However our blessings are often clouded by our own sinfulness. In the case of those who flee here we have the sinfulness which has so often caused them to flee. The more direct persecution, maltreatment and war as well as the more insidious yet creeping unjust society, unequal economy and unyielding climate change. We also have what Pope Francis calls a “globalized indifference”⁷⁹ - a societal sin of uncaring echoing from that moment where Cain asked whether he was his brother’s keeper⁸⁰ and which has cascaded into a worldwide phenomenon – not caring about the plight of our sisters and brothers as well as using indifference to isolate ourselves from our own shame and the consequences of our own actions. The church needs to both confess these attributes and ask God for a change of heart that we might be a beacon to the world around us.

But the hope of the Church is in Jesus who in his resurrection shows that even the most bitter of events can become a source of blessing. We need to reclaim that belief in our hearts and homes, our churches and country. As Anna Rowlands puts it when commenting on the teachings of the current Pope “Francis continues to teach that even when migrant journeys are brought about by loss, disaster and evil God finds ways to wrestle blessing. God’s commands to love of neighbour require an openness to cooperate with that process of wrestling blessing from loss, beauty for ashes”⁸¹.

If the church can do that maybe we could continue to welcome refugees with the open arms of God and to recognise them as a blessing to church, community and country. Maybe even being willing to be blessed ourselves as we remember that the man on the road had the Samaritan as a neighbour⁸² and was blessed and rescued by someone who the world said he should hate. Then we might really love our neighbour as ourself.

⁷⁹ Homily on visit Lampedusa, 08/07/2013

(https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130708_omelia-lampedusa.html last accessed 22/06/2022)

⁸⁰ Genesis 4:9

⁸¹ Rowlands, A., (2021). *Towards a politics of communion: Catholic social teaching in dark times*, London: T&T Clark.p.91

⁸² Luke 10:37