God: Some Conversations

How do you speak about God?

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The relevance of ecclesiastical law in today's church – theory verses reality: perceptions from within the last twenty years

Introduction

As a basis for my essay "the relevance of ecclesiastical law in today's church – theory verses reality: perceptions from within the last twenty years". I am going to look at aspects of liturgical law, consider the relevance of its regulation and think about what that has to say to us about the relevance of our Ecclesiastical law today.

I intend to examine the appropriateness and the practicalities of the parish as the centre of liturgy in the 21st Century through consideration of why some liturgical duties are placed on parishes and through the response of some clergy to these responsibilities.

The Parish in the Church of England

"The Church of England has always been territorial … the parochial system has been, 'a statement about God's concern for nation as well as church, communities as well as congregations, daily life as well as worship'[1]… the parish priest came to regard himself as the whole local population's servant"[2].

Liturgical law in the Church of England reflects this basis of ministry and places certain obligations on parish priests regarding certain liturgical duties within the parish.

[1] *Church Times,* 3 February 1989 quoting Archbishop Runcie
[2] Hinton M., *The Anglican Parochial Clergy: A Celebration,* (1994, SCM Press Ltd, London) p139

The parish has traditionally been seen as a unit of mission within the Church of England. In the past this system has been open to abuse and there has been a history of absenteeism by parish priests often through their holding of parishes in plurality[3]. Historically this was dealt with by the Pluralities Acts of 1838 and 1850. However, "in recent times absenteeism has again become a feature of church life, as priests have been required to look after several parishes, of which they can only reside in only one. The sense of identification with the local community has been attenuated, and attempts to persuade disparate communities that having a priest in common has in some way united them have been only modestly successful"[4].

Today's absenteeism has been caused by a combination of dwindling numbers clergy and church goers able to sustain the full-time ministry of a priest resulting in the combination of parishes through various schemes like united benefices and parishes held in plurality[5].

Parochial clergy cannot always fulfill the liturgical requirements laid upon them, I also ask if these are relevant in the context of 21st century society.

In introducing the report 'Mission-shaped Church' Bishop Graham Cray says "The nature of community has so changed that no one strategy will be adequate to fulfill the Anglican incarnational principle in Britain today.

[3] An example of how residence has even been an impossibility if we look at 1835 where 2878 parishes had no parsonages and 1728 were deemed unfit to live in. A further example of absenteeism from parish can be seen in the example of Robert Hawker who was the first resident incumbent of Morwenstow for a century. (Information obtained from Hinton M., *op.cit.* p142)
[4] Ibid p143
[5] The most recent legislation governing such schemes are the Pastoral Measure 1983.

Communities are now multi-layered, comprising neighbourhoods, usually with permeable boundaries, and a wide variety of networks, ranging from the relatively local to the global. Increased mobility and electronic communications technology have changed the nature of community … the existing parochial system alone is no longer able fully to deliver its underlying mission purpose… A mixed economy of parish churches and network churches will be necessary, in an active partnership across a wider area"[6]. The Report identifies a changing society which affects traditional church-going and a post-modern society in which core values revolve around people's personal choice and says that we can no longer have a 'one size fits all' Church and that we need to recognize that. The difficulty that this poses some centres around just how much embracing networks, post-modernism and consumerism can lead to compromising Christian principles.

It seems that problems of plurality and absenteeism led to canonical insistence that certain liturgical acts be regularly performed in parishes but there is now a lack of available staff and the parish unit is no longer being truly seen as the context for mission. I suggest that today's real thinking on parishes by policy makers in the Church of England could be summed up as "The parochial system which for centuries has been the delivery-system of the conviction of 'Church for the nation', might be compared to a vast slab of Gruyère cheese. Its nature is to present as one solid reality, but examination shows that by its nature there are lots of holes where there is no cheese"[7]. Given clergy numbers and the Church's thinking on the Parish as a base of

[6] *Mission-shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context (*2004, London, Church House Publishing for the Archbishops' Council) pxi
[7] *Mission-shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context,* op cit. p35

mission today one has to question whether legal requirements to perform, or not, certain liturgical acts in the context of the parish can any longer be realistic and justified.

Propriety of the Parochial Liturgical Requirements in the Church of England in the 21st Century

Hill, commenting on the particular liturgical requirements in parishes, says "Anecdotal evidence suggests that the … obligations are not infrequently overlooked in practice"[8]. Here I set out to test some of this anecdotal evidence with the help of 30 clergy (from 26 benefices[9]).

The Obligations Relating to Morning and Evening Prayer and Holy Communion

Under Canon B11 there is no requirement for a parish priest to personally say Morning and Evening Prayer in (each of) his parish church(es) every day. However, there is an obligation for him/her to delegate the saying of these offices in the parish church(es) or for him/her to cause the offices to be said in these parish church(es) on ordinary 'weekdays'. In the Canon there appears to be considerable flexibility as to where the offices may be said on 'weekdays' I consider this does not include the parish priest saying the offices privately at home because of the "corporate spiritual life of the parish"

[8] Hill M., *Ecclesiastical Law* (2001, Oxford University Press, Oxford) p124
[9] Here I am using "benefice" to denote a group of churches or parishes under the responsibility of one parish priest.

requirement in the Canon. I would suggest that the parochial church council could agree that, where a parish priest serves more than one parish, it would still be possible for Morning and Evening Prayer to be said in any one parish church in a benefice provided that it is clear that it was for all the parishes and that due notice is given[10]. I consider that, under Canon B11, there is a requirement for Morning and Evening Prayer to be said in every parish Church on Sundays, Feast Days, Ash Wednesday and Good Friday and that appropriate provision should be made for the corporate saying of the offices on 'weekdays'.

"The Holy Communion shall be celebrated in every parish church at least on all Sundays and principal Feast Days, and on Ash Wednesday and Maundy Thursday"[11].

The provision of Morning and Evening Prayer and Communion in parish churches may be dispensed with on an occasional basis by the minister and PCC acting jointly or on a regular basis by the bishop on application from the minister and PCC acting jointly[12]. There are limitations put on this and in exercising their powers the minister and parochial church council or the bishop whichever the case may be "must be satisfied that there is a good reason for doing so"[13]. The decision maker "shall have regard to the frequency of services of Morning and Evening Prayer or the celebration of Holy Communion … in other parish churches or places of worship in the

[10] See also Canon 14A(2) with necessary consent and agreement of the Bishop which would then remove any doubt as to the possibility of my suggestion which I believe would stand without recourse to the Bishop.
[11] Canon B14
[12] Canon B14(A)
[13] *Id.*

benefice"[14] and they must "ensure that no church ceases altogether to be used for public worship"[15]. Specific regulation is made in relation to cases where there is more than one parish church or place of worship in a benefice[16]. In such cases "the minister and the parochial church council acting jointly shall make proposals to the bishop as to what services of Morning and Evening Prayer or the celebration of the Holy Communion (as the case may be) are to be held in each of the parish churches or places of worship and if the bishop is satisfied with the proposals he shall authorize them accordingly. In default of the minister and parochial church council making satisfactory proposals, the bishop shall make such direction as he considers appropriate"[17].

The ways in which the obligations may be obviated clearly recognize the practicalities of one parish priest seeking to fulfill parochial liturgical obligations in more than one parish.

In order to see if priests ensured that the obligations were met in relation to Morning and Evening Prayer and the Holy Communion I asked questions designed to elicit the extent to which these obligations are fulfilled.
Clergy from 23 benefices[18] indicated that provision was not made for Morning and Evening prayer to be said or sung in every parish church within their benefices on every Sunday. In the 3 benefices that were fulfilling the canonical requirements there was a high proportion of 'staff' to churches. On

[14] *Id.*
[15] *Id.*
[16] Canon B14(B)
[17] *Id.* See also Doe N., The Legal Framework of the Church of England: A Critical Study in a Comparative Context (1996, Clarendon Press, Oxford) p294f
[18] Out of 26.

all other weekdays only one small, well-staffed benefice managed to hold Morning and Evening Prayer. To the question "… have you and the PCC either jointly sought dispensation from the obligation or agreed a pattern of services with the Bishop?" there were no affirmative answers.

When asked about Holy Communion provisions 14 benefices indicated that a celebration of the sacrament took place in every parish church on every Sunday whereas 12 said that it did not and in all cases except one there was at least one priest available per church based on 'normal' staffing. All except one benefice answering in the affirmative had less than 4 parish churches to serve. Nine benefices said that Holy Communion is celebrated in each of its parish churches on every principal feast day, one did not know and 16 said that it is not. Thirteen of the benefices had not sought dispensation from the obligation from the Bishop and the other 4 did not know if they had.

The realities of 'plurality' and post-modernism have affected parishes in their ability and desire to offer what canon law requires. I would suggest that if the Church is to live with reality it needs to amend its canons or, if it wishes that they be adhered to, act to enforce them.

Residency and Marriage

Prior to 2008, unless granted an Archbishop's Special Licence[19], there was a strict limitation as to which Church of England Church(es) a couple could

[19] See Ecclesiastical Licences Act 1533 s3, , Canons C17, B34

marry thus putting a legal limitation on the venue of a liturgical celebration. This did not suit people who wished to choose the church where they wanted to marry[20].

Residency requirements were not imposed by the Church but seem to have been borne out of the idea that people look to their parish church as the place where they go for spiritual guidance, the sacraments and the offices. However, when we live in a mobile, consumer society the requirement became practically unworkable. There was a major tension between the desire of some people to be flexible for mission and outreach and the resistance to the relaxation of the residency requirement on the part of others who do not wish to have the church used as a consumer commodity or who wish to continue to emphasise the importance of the parish. One respondent to my study indicated his wish to embrace the spirit of the consumer age, saying "Now with competition we should encourage church weddings by allowing you to marry in **any** church, provided you pay a higher fee eg 3 times the rate of people in the parish". Another respondent said that residency requirements were "a nuisance, taking much time to explain and still not understood by the parties involved! And an inappropriate way for the church to seek to make extra money out of wedding couple, given the cost of the Archbishop's Licence and the time involved".

The Church of England Marriage Measure 2008 relaxed the 'qualifying connections' with the parish "in the interests of encouraging couples to marry

[20] This legal requirement causes much difficulty and may be circumvented by worshipping regularly in the Church, getting an Archbishop's Special Licence or by taking up residence for a very temporary period (7 days for a Superintendent Registrar's Certificate or 15 days for a Common Licence)

according to the rites of the Church of England… Given the changing patterns of people's lives, including increased mobility, and the less restrictive requirements for a purely civil marriage, the rules for Church of England marriages … were seen by many people as legalistic and restrictive"[21].

Through the Marriage Measure 2008, both parishes and the General Synod have given wider, but not total, access to the liturgical right to marriage. The move for greater access may have been borne out of a desire for mission, a desire to help the economically disadvantaged or to 'cash in on' the economically advantaged. Irrespective of the motives of parishes and Synods there seems to be a generally held opinion that the pre 2008 residence requirements were unworkable if strictly adhered to but there are still considerable limitations.

In its approach to allowing marriages to take place in its churches the Church of England needs to continue formulating its thinking in order that rules relating to residency requirements can be truly equitable. I consider that ultimately the only way in which this may be changed is the abolition of any need for a qualifying connection along with the 'right to marry' in a parish Church being removed so that clergy who are familiar with the individual circumstances put before them can act in line with their conscience and guidelines as may be laid down by the Church.

[21] See Draft Church of England Marriage Measure Memorandum at www.cofe.anglican.org/about/gensynod/agendas/gs1616x.rtf

Services of the Word and Liturgical Law

The Common Worship Service of the Word introduction says "A Service of the Word is unusual for an authorized Church of England service. It consists almost entirely of notes and directions and allows for considerable local variation and choice within a common structure"[22]. This is designed to enable Churches to involve themselves in more experimental forms of worship in order to attract people who currently are not reached by the Church.
The only requirements of a Service of the Word where a service is not 'required' by canon law are that there should be a clear beginning and end, that there should be at least one Bible reading and a Psalm in some form. Even here the word 'should' is used rather than 'must' so it would not be easy to fall outside of the basic requirements for the service[23].

Services of the Word form an interesting contrast to liturgical law in a parochial context as discussed in relation to Morning and Evening Prayer, Holy Communion and Marriage where the clear thrust of the law is to compel certain things to happen **in a parish**. Services of the Word were designed to allow for gatherings going beyond traditional parish boundaries. I can appreciate the desirability for the 'mixed economy' but I find it difficult to understand the seemingly stark contrast of the rigidity of one part of the economy with the apparent total flexibility of the other.

[22] www.cofe.anglican.org/worship/liturgy/commonworship/texts/word/sotw.html
[23] There are additional requirements when the Service of the Word is used as a principal service on a Sunday.

Conclusion

The Church of England Marriage Measure 2008 and Service of the Word are examples of how the Church of England is attempting to respond to people's liturgical needs in today's society partly due to market forces but also to the missionary opportunities provided through these services. In respect of residency requirements of marriage I consider that greater flexibility needs to be given to clergy to make the determination. I also believe that there is a need to review the current Canons in respect of the parochial requirements laid on clergy in respect of Morning and Evening Prayer and Communion. I consider more realistic requirements need to be laid down so that the Canons[24] give a clearer acknowledgement to what is practical.

[24] And other legislation.

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Stella Bailey

In what way does scripture offer a lens through which to interpret the research and findings on the impact of income inequality by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett in their book Spirit Level.

The Venerable Stella Bailey – Windsor Course July 2024

In what way does scripture offer a lens through which to interpret the research and findings on the impact of income inequality by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett in their book Spirit Level.

Introduction

In 2009 two social epidemiologists Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, published the results of their findings around inequality in society with their book Spirit Level. It was further published in 2010 addressing some questions raised by critics and in a form more widely accessible away from academic circles. It has since been translated into 23 different languages and continues to have an influence in the social and political discourse around the world today. The basis of their conclusion is that where inequality has flourished to drive up economic growth, then the impact has been to worsen outcomes for everyone, rich and poor, in relation to objective parameters such as life expectancy and subjective well-being outcomes such as mental health, educational outcomes, obesity etc.

Their book has sparked debate in political and academic fields. Those who find a mirror of truth in their findings call for it to influence a change in economic and political policy. Whilst those for whom the finds are uncomfortable, question the legitimacy of their conclusions. In the preface of their book Wilkinson and Pickett state "We live in a pessimistic period. As well as being worried by the likely consequences of global warming, it is easy to feel that many societies are, despite their material success, increasingly burdened by their social failings. And now, as if to add to our woes, we have the economic recession and its aftermath of high unemployment. But the knowledge that we cannot carry on as we have, that change is necessary, is perhaps grounds for optimism: maybe we do, at least, have the chance to make a better world." [1]

Within this essay I seek to raise the question that if the theories of Wilkinson and Pickett are true, in what way might a scriptural lens change the way in which we practise our faith in the political and charity sectors of society.

The spirit Level.

Wilkinson and Pickett theorised that society has got close to the end of what economic growth can do for it. For thousands of years the best way of improving the quality of human life was to raise material living standards. Growth was seen as the primary driver for positive social change. This led to a consensus between policy makers that we shouldn't worry too much about growing income inequality's, instead we should focus on redistributing the benefits of economic growth to the advantage of the poor. What has been dubbed trickle down economy. But if it is inequality itself that damages society then simply spending more on public services that supposedly benefit the poor will not address the increased effects of inequality on society.

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[1]The Spirit Level: Why equality is better for everyone. Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, second edition Penguin books 2010. Page XI.

If life is a question of how to feed the family their next meal, good times are simply times of plenty. But for most people in affluent countries the difficulties of life are no longer about filling our stomachs, having clean water, and keeping warm. Economic growth, has, in the rich countries, largely finished its work. Not only have measures of well-being and happiness ceased to rise with economic growth but, as affluent societies have grown richer, date tracking shows increased levels of anxiety, depression, and various other social problems.

For economically poor countries, economic development continues to be important for human flourishing. The research shows that continued growth in material living standards still result in substantial improvements in life expectancy and happiness. But as nations transition into being affluent developed countries, further rises in income fail to add value. This is a predictable pattern. As you get more of anything each addition to what you have, whether loaves of bread or cars, contributes less to your well-being. If you are hungry a loaf of bread is everything, but when your hunger is satisfied, more food fails to help you. Wilkinson and Pickett state that sooner or later in the long history of economic growth, countries inevitably reach a level of affluence where diminishing returns set in and additional income buys less and less additional health, happiness, or well-being.

Wilkinson and Pickett went on from comparing health and well-being across nations to look at the comparison between wealth inequality in individual societies. Within their findings they went on to say, “it has been known for some years that poor health and violence are more common in more unequal societies. However, during our research we became aware that almost all problems which are more common at the bottom of the social ladder a more common in more unequal societies. It is not just ill health and violence, but also a host of other social problems. Almost all of them contribute to the widespread concern that modern societies are, despite their affluence, social failures.”[2]

They investigated various social problems for which they could find reliable data such as level of trust, mental health, life expectancy and infant mortality, obesity, educational outcomes, teenage pregnancy, murder, and imprisonment rates.

The overall conclusion of their research was that health and social problems are more common in countries with bigger income inequality's.

There are perhaps two widespread assumptions as to why people near the bottom of society suffer problems.

I. Social inequality limits the ability of individuals to change their circumstances resulting in lower outcomes.
II. The individuals own physical or intellectual limitations result in economic instability causing them to have lower outcomes.

The question Wilkinson and Pickett raise is that while such things as poor health, reduced educational outcomes or having a baby when still a teenager all load the dice against your chances of getting up the social ladder, individual limitations alone fail to explain why more

[2] The Spirit Level: Why equality is better for everyone. Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, second edition Penguin books 2010. Page 18

unequal societies have more of all these problems than less unequal ones. Social mobility may partly explain why problems congregate at the bottom, but not why more unequal societies have more problems overall.[3]

Their finding suggests that what matters is where we stand in relation to others in our own society.

Dignity and humanity in scripture

In the first letter of John, the author writes, "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another".[4] It's a well-known passage of scripture and on the surface sounds like John is asking us to be willing to die for one another. After all, that's what Jesus did. But I'm wondering what it might look like to view this passage more expansively.

In his book silence and honey cakes Rowan Williams talks about our need to die to ourselves so that the other person might live. Laying aside our own wants needs and desires for the benefit of the other. We lay down our lives when we put someone else's needs above our own. When we stay up late to look after a sick child, or cook a meal for the family, even if we're not that hungry. We lay down our lives when we say "yes" to service in some way, giving our time and talents for the purpose of something beyond ourselves.

Rowan Williams points out that laying down our lives is hard because it challenges our sense of ego. We lay down our lives, when we give up control in shaping something for our own gain, and instead to shape something for the greater good of the community and society we are in. In many ways to be part of society is to live out this discipleship principle. As a person who does not have children, I am happy for the taxes I pay to go towards our education system so that everyone has equal access, and the philosophy behind the NHS lives out this aspect of generosity in the way that we have access to free health care at the point of need. From a church leadership lens, this search for equity, to narrow the gap between those who have many resources and those who have little, offers much pondering to attitudes and methods of calculating the common share so that the whole of God's church can flourish.

Our instinct and intuition tell us that inequality is corrosive to society, it cannot be good that a few hold wealth whilst others struggle. It is an understanding that has probably been shaped by an unconscious bias towards a Judeo-Christian lens on the world. It is a narrative behind the parables in scripture such as Luke 12 and the Parable of the Rich Fool, or in Matthew 19 where Jesus instructs the enquirer to sell his possessions and give to the poor. "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. [24] Again I tell you; it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for

[3] The Spirit Level: Why equality is better for everyone. Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, second edition Penguin books 2010. Page 25

[4] This passage echoes the gospel of John 15 v12-13. The concept of laying down your life for your friends. This would, as Bultmann would suggest, point towards the use of a single source used by the singular or duel authors, or suggest that at the time there was a Johannian school of faith articulation working to challenge the hearsay of dualism.

someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."[5] . Yet despite the capitalist western culture being shaped by this Judeo-Christian understanding the moralistic theory has not fully permeated into how society understands and behaves around personal wealth and its benefit to society.
By combining research from across the globe and date tracking since 2011 the world inequality database recognises the damage a capitalist culture has placed on society, resulting in vast amounts of wealth (and thereby control) sitting in the hands of a few, whist at the other end of the spectrum, those who have the least are the majority of those that walk the earth. Following the 2023 update their research showed that the top 10% control 76% of the world's wealth whilst the bottom 50% control just 2%.[6]

The prologue of John paints the poetic picture of Jesus (the word) becoming flesh and dwelling amongst us. The litmus test of belief, that Jesus the Messiah came in flesh, fully human is the theme and intention of the Johannian school of writing which seeks to define between those who truly believe and those who hold false teaching. This image of Jesus' full human offers us a lens by which to understand what it means to see the image of God in each other and offer dignity and worth. When Jesus preaches a gospel that repeatedly seeks to give dignity to those he encounters, which repeatedly seeks to break down the barriers that oppress the vulnerable in society, calls us to a new form of discipleship where we live not for our own benefit but the benefit of the other. In Matthew 25, the author links our own judgment as sheep or goats not by doctrinal proclamations but to how we have lived out the calling to feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, and clothing to the naked. How we have shown hospitality to the stranger and visited those who are in difficulty.[7]

The understanding and belief in Jesus sharing our humanity places God into the context of one who does not just have sympathy for the plight of humanity but has empathy as well, so when we understand the calling to challenge the unjust structures of society the calling is one of recognising the image of Christ in the valuable and oppressed and to see them as God sees them and for our heart to beat to the same rhythm that Gods beats, to have a desire to reorder society to enable equity and flourishing for all, regardless of the personal cost.

Our Ego
As already suggested in the teaching of Rowan Williams, our own humanity brings with it limitations. Moltmann highlights in Theology of hope[8], that we place limitations on ourselves, when faced with the enormity of our calling to look out for the valuable and oppressed we declare, who am I, hiding behind the limitations of our weakness, fragility, and humanity. Therefore, Moses asks in the face of his call to lead the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt 'who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt.

[5] Matthew 19 v23-24
[6] https://wid.world/news-article/whats-new-about-wealth-inequality-in-the-world
[7] Matthew 25 v31-46
[8] Jurgan Moltmann Theology of Hope SCM press 1967

Moltmann goes on to point out that "Self-knowledge here comes about in face of the mission and call of God, which demand impossibilities of Man. It is knowledge of self, knowledge of man and knowledge of guilt, knowledge of the impossibilities of one's own existence in face of the possibilities demanded by the divine mission. In his call Man is given the prospect of a new ability to be. What he is and what he can do is a thing he will learn in hopeful trust in Gods being with him"[9]

When we enter an understanding that we are partaking not in our own agendas or desires but the mission of God in this world[10], as Bosch would understand the continued action of God in shaping activity of the church in mission, the divine mission transcends the bounds of human possibility. We are called to lay aside our own ego, our own limitations and to lean into the possibility of Gods future.

In the synoptic gospels all the law and the prophets have been distilled into a narrative of loving God and loving our neighbour, as ourselves.[11] To love God is to seek out the dignity and humanity of the other person over and above ourselves but in a way we would want others to see and seek the dignity and humanity of ourselves. It is Luke's gospel that explores the question 'who should I love',' who is my neighbour'.
Jesus answers this question in its fullness with the narrative of the Good Samaritan which at its core has the conclusion that the love we offer, and give is as wide and deep as the need might be. Therefore, at the point of deepest inequality, where the division is at its vastness then greater sacrifice and love is required of those who find themselves to be the person with the power and wealth to make a difference. So maybe the call to give fully of ourselves, to die as Christ died is to answer the moral question of poverty with intuitive grace and generosity.

Bultmann suggests that this call to lay down our lives in 1 John comes within the shadow of schism between two Johannine groups, surrounded by a Christological division the duty to love has been narrowed down to those who believe in and share the same doctrine as ourselves. The line by which 1 John calls the people to share is between the true and counterfeit Christians.[12] How often do we see this in the public discourse of our national politics which divides between the deserving and undeserving poor, those who really deserve social care and those who shouldn't, the immigrant, the disabled, those who struggle to settle into employment. Or how often have we heard, within provincial or diocese divisions that there are some church communities, those who agree with my doctrinal truth that I will support in comparison to the others whom we will not support. So the dualism of 1 John extends from faith to ecclesiology and morals. 1 John 3v16-17 calls us to examine ourselves as to our readiness to live a life after the model of Christ and the terms under which we practise our generosity.

The author of 1 John is clear, if you refuse to help a brother or sister in need then Gods love cannot be in you. The Greek here is interesting as it speaks more of "closing you heart to".

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[9] Jurgan Moltmann : Theology of Hope SCM press 1967 page 285/286
[10] David J Bosch : Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1991.
[11] Mark 12 v30-31, Matthew 22 v26-40, Luke 10 v27.
[12] Leslie Houlden and John Rogerson A Scripture Commentary SPCK 2002

The heart is so often the symbol of our place of compassion and mercy to others. Time and again we hear of Jesus having compassion for the crowd. Therefore, in using Christ as our model for what it means to love, our motivation for our actions to seek equity finds its source in the action and mission of God. The fullness of our understanding of love comes from our knowledge and experience for Christ laying down his life for us. Self-giving in its purest form. This is not just a doctrinal truth but an action which demonstrates to us what it is to be Christ like in our own lives.

Our interconnected nature

Although 1 John focuses on self-sacrifice for those who reflect ourselves, a wider gospel narrative would challenges us to think expansively around who my neighbour might be. The premiss of Wilkinson and Pickett is that the wealthy are not immune to the social impacts of inequality, both suffer when one suffers. The sociologist Thomas Scheff points towards the impactful emotion of shame that is placed on an individual by society.[13]Shame is the driving emotion for those who have little, in a society which praises the ownership and consumption of products. Shame includes a range of emotions including foolishness, stupidity, ridicule, inadequacy, incompetent, exposed, vulnerable and insecure. All of these emotions are rooted in the feedback loop through which we internalise the image by which others see us and can lead to the strong emotions of jealousy and anger For Wilkinson and Pickett the result is that the individual will behave in ways that seek to mitigate these emotions resulting in issues of mental health, violence in society, high homicide rate and the other factors forming part of their research.

Rowan Williams address this in Silence and Honey Cakes where he talks about the greater sin being the times I have acted in a way that has caused by neighbour to sin. When my actions illicit within another strong negative emotions that impact their life and outcomes.

No Man Is an Island is a poem that explores the interconnectedness of humanity and the impact of loss. The speaker asserts that no individual is isolated, but rather an integral part of the broader human collective.

No man is an island,
Entire of itself;
Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.[14]

Conclusion

The renowned liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez reminds us “But the poor person does not exist as an inescapable fact of destiny. His or her existence is not politically neutral, and it is not ethically innocent. The poor are a by-product of the system in which we live and for which we are responsible. They are marginalized by our social and cultural world. They are the oppressed, exploited proletariat, robbed of the fruit of their labour, and despoiled of

[13] Thomas Scheff, Shame and conformity: the defence emotion system. American Sociological Review 1988

[14] John Donne Meditation XVII Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions 1624

their humanity. Hence the poverty of the poor is not a call to generous relief action, but a demand that we go and build a different social order."[15]

In 1995 the charity Oxfam produced an advert with the line 'give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach a man to fish and you feed him forever'. Their desire was to move away from addressing the immediate need of the individual as a symptom to making sustained and progressive change to the cause of poverty.

Gutierrez suggests "Charity is today a 'political charity.'. . . it means the transformation of a society structured to benefit a few who appropriate to themselves the value of the work of others. This transformation ought to be directed toward a radical change in the foundation of society, that is, the private ownership of the means of production."[16]

In chapter 4 of their book Wilkinson and Pickett demonstrated that a society that is more equal is more responsive to poorer nations, paying a higher proportion of their national income in aid. They also stipulate that unequal nations are more belligerent internationally with worsening scores on the global peace index. They also found that more equal nations make trade decisions or enacted policies to reduce carbon emissions in a way that is beneficial to developing nations. Therefore, the culture and political policies that impact how people view and treat those within their own society, also impacts the expectations they bring to international relationships.

The challenge for those nations who find themselves on the extreme of inequality, USA, UK Portugal, and Australia, is that to bring about better outcomes for all involves a transformation not just in political design but also to the self-perpetuating mindset which has shaped the society to begin with. Bill Kerry from the Equality trust suggests that what we need is "not one big revolution but a continuous stream of small changes in a constant direction. The aim he suggests is to make everyone feel that a more equal society not only has room for them but also that it offers a more fulfilling life then is possible in a society dominated by hierarchy and inequality."[17]

Who is the Zacchaeus in our society we need to call down and eat with, who is the woman at the well we can ask for living water from. Who is the rich man we need to challenge to sell their possessions and who is the person whom we are prepared to lay down our life for, so that they might flourish.

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Suzanne Cousins

How do we talk about God?
God and Allah: one God or two? Speaking of God in diverse communities

How do we talk about God?

God and Allah: One God or two? Speaking of God in diverse communities

Suzanne Cousins

Outline and synopsis

> 'If [….] they ask me, "What is his name?" what shall I say to them?' (*Moses, in Exodus 3:13-15*)

To talk about God with integrity necessitates reflection on how God speaks about God's self in Scripture. Christian understanding of God rests heavily on such self-revelation in the Bible, interpretation of which is moderated for many Anglicans by Tradition, Reason, and a healthy sprinkling of Experience. The Church's context today typically and increasingly multi-religious and pluralistic, and so consequently, several questions become pertinent if not urgent, for example: How then do we speak about God meaningfully and with equity in contexts of cultural and religious diversity? Might we gain insight from humble consideration of the theologies of other faith traditions?

This essay considers these questions. It derives from one chapter of an MTh dissertation, published in 2017, *Generous Love in Multi–Faith Ireland.*[1] Although time has passed and context and demographics have evolved since the book's publication, the dialogue it represents bears continuing relevance, I believe, in the quest to better understand who God is and how God may be spoken of today, with integrity. It was written to address an area of ministry within the Church of Ireland, which at that time at least, was receiving little academic attention – inter-faith and specifically Christian-Muslim engagement. My interest was more than academic, however, stemming from curiosity and inter-faith affection and friendships, in particular with Muslims. The chapter, 'God and Allah: One God or two? Contemporary and historical debate', is situated in a text which has as its central themes the attractive theologies of the kindness of God, of friendship, hospitality, pardon and embrace, superabundance and gift – evident in the Trinity, Incarnation, Cross, and the Eucharist – themes supported by the work of Jürgen Moltmann, Miroslav Volf, Paul Ricoeur and Janet Soskice. The book straddles the fields of Missiology and History of Religions, and is influenced by Moltmann's Theology of Hope, Volf's Theology of Embrace, and by the biblical hermeneutics and theological ethics of Ricoeur (- inhabiting the text, equivalence, superabundance and economy of gift). And it reflects on the creative approach to theology of fourth century Ephrem the Syrian.

This essay examines Volf's answer to the question 'God and Allah: One God or two?', and considers critiques and counter-critiques of his position. With Volf, I consider the approaches of St John of Damascus, St Francis of Assisi, Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa, and Martin Luther. I consider the effects on Christian-Muslim relations, of the 2005 *Jyllands-Posten* satirical cartoons,[2] of Pope Benedict XVI's subsequent Regensburg speech and theology, and of the Islamic response to Regensburg.[3] Normative Catholic belief as represented in *Nostra Aetate*, statement on inter-faith belief of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), is also considered, and for the purposes of this essay, a section on pluralist, inclusivist and exclusivist approaches to the same-God question has been reduced, along with reflection on Panikkar's Trinitarian pluralism as viewed by former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams.[4]

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[1] Suzanne Cousins, *Generous Love in Multi–faith Ireland: Towards mature citizenship and a positive pedagogy for the Church of Ireland in local Christian–Muslim mission and engagement*. Church of Ireland Publishing, Braemor Studies No.8, 2017

[2] See, e.g., David Keane, 'Cartoon Violence and Freedom of Expression', *Human Rights Quarterly*, Volume 30, Number 4, Johns Hopkins University Press, November 2008, 845 – 875, cited in Volf, *Allah*, 36.
Cf. Martin Asser, "What the Muhammad cartoons portray", BBC News Channel, 2 January 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4693292.stm (accessed 10 December 2015.)

[3] In *Open Letter* and *A Common Word Between Us and You.*(October 2007). For a summary of *Common Word* , see David F. Ford, *The Future of Christian Theology* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 137-138.

[4] On Panikkar's theology of the Radical Trinity, see, e.g., Raimon Panikkar, "All Reality is Trinitarian: God-Man-World", http://www.raimon-panikkar.org/english/gloss-radical-trinity.html (first accessed 24 March 2015).

God and Allah: One God or two? Speaking of God in diverse communities

The question, God and Allah: One God or two?, is key to dialogue in diverse communities, but also controversial.[5] Christianity, Judaism and Islam are monotheistic and Abrahamic faiths. Each claims to worship the One God who is creator of all.[6] This essay explores the question posed by Miroslav Volf: Is the God of Christianity 'whose final self-expression is found in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ the same God as the God of the Qur'an?'[7] Christians, Jews and Muslims share in their sacred texts the essential commandments to love God and neighbour, and few Christians would argue that the God of Judaism is not the God of Christianity.[8] What, for many Christians, prevents the name *Allah* from being *coterminus* with 'God'?

A proper response?

Volf maintains that how we speak and a proper Christian response to the God of Muslims holds extraordinary promise for easing animosities and affords the possibility of lasting peace.[9] What is this proper response to the key theological difference for Christians and Muslims, which is Christological?[10] To Muslims, Jesus is a Prophet, so holy that God did not permit him to die but transported him to heaven, from where he will return as Judge.[11] To Christians, Jesus is God Incarnate, who died as 'the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world' (John 1: 29), rose, and will return to judge the earth. In spite of this fundamental difference, Volf's answer to the 'same God' question is affirmative. Volf does not resolve the differences but sets out to reinstate the centuries-old 'same-God' understanding, which previously represented normative Christian understanding.[12] He stands with John of Damascus (675-749), Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464) and many modern and contemporary Christian theologians, in maintaining that the terms 'God' and 'Allah' refer to the same creator God.[13] He summarises the foundation of his argument as follows:

'Muslims and Christians have a common God and partly overlapping understandings of God and God's commands – above all that God is one and that God is benevolent and commands us to love God with our whole being and our neighbours as ourselves.'[14]

Volf's stance has been criticised by some influential evangelicals.[15] However, it finds strong support from

[5] On the controversial nature of the question, see, e.g., Bob Smietana, 'Wheaton College Suspends Hijab-Wearing Professor After "Same God" Comment', *Christianity Today*,12 December 2015, http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2015/december/wheaton-college-hijab-professor-same-god-larycia-hawkins.html (first accessed 16 December 2015). For a summary of the views, following the Wheaton College debacle, and for the debate's possible future bearing on inter-faith and intra-faith/ecumenical relations, see Noah Toly, 'Reflections on the "Same God" Thesis, by Bruce Lindley McCormack', blog post, 12 January 2016, http://noahtoly.tumblr.com/post/137130607348/reflections-on-the-same-god-thesis-by-bruce (first accessed 14 January 2016). Also Vinoth Ramachandra, "Pocket-Sized Gods?", blog, 30 December 2015, https://vinothramachandra.wordpress.com (first accessed 3 January 2016).

[6] Isaiah 42:5; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 4:11. Cf. Shayk Dr Umar Al-Qadri, 'Christianity in light of Primary Islamic Sources', *Search – A Church of Ireland Journal*, Volume 39.1 Spring 2016, 49.

[7] Volf, *Allah*, 36.

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] Volf, *Allah*, 2.

[10] See Miroslav Volf, 'Response to DeVan's Review Essay of *Allah: A Christian Response*', *Christian Scholar's Review*, 41.2, 2012, 188, http://search.proquest.com/openview/70f23d1b8fe918801bfdbf70c7dc2ce6/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=48911 (first accessed 19 March 2016).

[11] This common Muslim understanding is expressed in Interview D2 in *Generous Love in Multi-Faith Ireland*

[12] Volf, 'Response to De Van's Review Essay of *Allah: A Christian Response*', http://search.proquest.com/openview/70f23d1b8fe918801bfdbf70c7dc2ce6/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=48911 (first accessed 19 March 2016), 188- 189.

[13] Volf, *Allah*, 24.

[14] Volf, *Allah*, 97.

[15] See John Piper, 'A Common Word Between Us?' in *Desiring God*, 23 January 2008, http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/a-

others.[16] His defence begins with an historical overview of the debate. The contemporary debate, as Volf shows, is set within the context of the international controversy that erupted following publication of the Danish *Jyllens-Posten* satirical cartoons in 2005.[17] This was between Muslims who were affronted by the depictions of their Prophet, and others who argued for journalistic freedom. Pope Benedict intervened with his famous speech, appealing for peace and respect for the sentiments of religious others.[18] However, he unwittingly added Christian insult to Muslim injury, by quoting the 14th century Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus suggesting that Islam is an inherently violent religion and that its violence derives from its Prophet and from the character of Allah.[19] Further, Benedict depicted the Christian understanding of God as 'Reason and God-as-pure-will', and Islam's God as 'a completely arbitrary deity'.[20]

The Regensburg speech evoked an angry reaction from extremists and moderate Muslims.[21] Benedict had 'articulated what the cartoons depicted.'[22] An international body of Islamic scholars responded with an *Open Letter*, then a year later issued *A Common Word Between us and You*, addressed to Benedict and Christian leaders worldwide.[23] Most significant is the argument in *A Common Word* that the in-common commands, to love God and love neighbour, 'unite Muslims and Christians much more than they divide them.'[24] 'Properly understood, God does not widen the chasm between Muslims and Christians as Benedict XVI suggests, but bridges it.'[25]

In substantiating this view, Volf surveys the major theological disputes, from the early crusades, the Ottoman siege and conquest of Constantinople, to recent colonialism. His assessment of the conciliatory approaches of Francis of Assissi and Nicholas of Cusa are helpful.[26] Francis is ambivalent as to whether or not Muslims and Christians worship the same God, yet his aim is eirenic.[27] Luther is similarly ambivalent, at times categorising Allah as a false deity rather than as 'partially incorrect perception of the One True God.'[28] John of Damascus is significant in representing orthodox Christianity, his *De Fide Orthodoxa* summing up early patristic teaching, and influencing Western and Eastern theology.[29] He closely followed

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common-word-between-us (first accessed 8 March 2016). Volf supplies an able and charitable counter-critique to Piper's. See also, C. Jonn Block, *The Qur'an in Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Historical and Modern Interpretations* (Abington: Routledge, 2014), 204, note 70.

[16] Scot McKnight. 'America's New Public Intellectual: Miroslav Volf.' 25 January 2016, http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2016/01/25/americas-new-public-intellectual-miroslav-volf/ (first accessed 27 January 2016).

[17] David Keane, 'Cartoon Violence and Freedom of Expression', *Human Rights Quarterly*, Volume 30, Number 4, Johns Hopkins University Press, November 2008, 845 – 875, as cited by Volf.
Cf. Martin Asser, 'What the Muhammad cartoons portray', BBC News Channel, 2 January 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4693292.stm (first accessed 10 December 2015).

[18] Volf, *Allah*, 22f.

[19] See Volf, *Allah*, 22-25. Cf. FB Henry, 'Understanding Pope Benedict's Regensburg Address.' Roman Catholic Diocese of Calgary, http://www.calgarydiocese.ca/blog-archives/631-understanding-pope-benedicts-regensburg-address.html (first accessed 6 December 2015).

[20] Volf contests this depiction of God. See Volf, *Allah*, 25. Cf. De Van's summary and critique of Volf, in Benjamin B. De Van, '*Allah: A Christian Response* – A Review Essay', Atla (first accessed 19 October 2015), 176.

[21] E.g., a branch of al-Qaeda vowed to conquer Rome and to "break the cross and spill the wine." See Volf, *Allah*, 21. Cf. FB Henry, 'Understanding Pope Benedict's Regensburg Address', Roman Catholic Diocese of Calgary, http://www.calgarydiocese.ca/blog-archives/631-understanding-pope-benedicts-reg'nsburg-address.html (first accessed 6 December 2015).

[22] Volf, *Allah*, 20, cites Ana Belen Soage, 'The Muslim Reaction to Pope Benedict XVI's Regensburg Address', in *Cross Currents*, January 2007.

[23] See Volf, *Allah*, 21. *A Common Word Between Us and You*, October 2007. For a summary of the text, see David F. Ford, *The Future of Christian Theology* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 137-138.

[24] *Ibid*.

[25] *Ibid*.

[26] See 'Icon of *St Francis and the Sultan: A reading*', Appendix A.

[27] Paul Moses, *The Saint and the Sultan: The Crusades, Islam, and Francis of Assisi's Mission of Peace* (New York, London: Doubleday, 2009).

[28] Volf, *Allah*, pp. 60-67, 73. Cf. Benjamin B. De Van, *Allah: A Christian Response*, 176. The approaches of both Francis and Luther bear some resemblance to Elijah's confrontation of the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18). I examine this narrative and its relevance later.

[29] Anglican Communion, Lambeth 1998 Report, *Embassy, Hospitality and Dialogue*, http://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/127653/Embassy-Hospitality-and-Dialogue-Christians-and-People-of-other-Faiths.pdf

Muhammad chronologically and was a defender of Christian orthodoxy within the early Islamic world.[30] His *Writings* and meeting with the Caliph in Damascus reveal that his theological dialogue is sometimes highly polemic.[31] He suggests, for example, that the Kaaba[32] takes its name after a pagan goddess, and he denotes Islam as an Arian heresy.[33] Nevertheless, he assumes that he and his Muslim dialogue partners are discussing the same God, a position still typical of many Christians in majority Muslim countries.[34]

'Allah so loved the world'?

Volf's questions 'Two Gods or One?' and 'How do we decide?'[35] are important because clarity in doctrinal matters builds theological confidence and enables competent inter-faith conversation about God. Addressing the first question, he examines Qur'anic testimony that Muslims, Jews and Christians worship the same God.[36] Qur'anic passages such as 22:39-40 and 29:46 challenge militant Muslims who censure Arabic-speaking Christians for calling God 'Allah.'[37] 'Allah' is simply Arabic for 'the God' (الله, *al ilāh*) just as (*ο Θεός*, *ho Theos*) is Greek for 'the God'.[38] It is a noun, not a proper noun, but a descriptive term.[39] More, use of 'Allah' by Arab Christians and Arabic-speaking Jews to refer to God substantially pre-dates Muhammad.[40] Thus, all known Arabic Christian Bible translations of John 3:16 say 'Allah so loved the world.'[41]

Simultaneously, the debate about the proper designation for God is indeed, rather futile and ultimately about language.[42] The question of 'referent' is more important. Christians and Muslims are monotheists; for them there is only one God. So the question of whether they worship the same God is about whether they refer, with the word "God" or "Allah," to the same 'object.'[43] Volf argues convincingly that there is 'sufficient similarity' between Christian and Muslim descriptions of God to affirm that they refer to the same object, 'the one God, creator of all...'[44] This can be argued through three approaches, which focus on: a general knowledge of God; common or overlapping scriptures; and sufficient similarity in belief about the deity.[45]

(first accessed 28 December 2015).
[30] *Ibid*.
[31] St John of Damascus, "Writings", in *The Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 37 (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1958), 153-160, in 'St. John of Damascus's Critique of Islam', Orthodox Christian Information Centre, 26 March 2006, http://orthodoxinfo.com/general/stjohn_islam.aspx (first accessed 2 March 2016).
[32] , *al-Kaʿbah*الكعبة
[33] *Ibid.*
[34] See Anglican Communion, *Embassy, Hospitality and Dialogue*, Lambeth 1998 Report, http://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/127653/Embassy-Hospitality-and-Dialogue-Christians-and-People-of-other-Faiths.pdf (first accessed 28 December 2015).
[35] Volf, *Allah*, 79.
[36] E.g., Qur'an 22:39-40, 29:46.
[37] As has happened in Indonesia. For a helpful summary of Volf's argument, see Benjamin B. De Van, '*Allah: A Christian Response* – A Review Essay', 80.
[38] Cf. Volf, *Allah*, 81- 82. Cf. Interview D2.
[39] Contra Imad Shehadeh, '*Allah*: A Christian Response by Miroslav Volf', review in Biblical Missiology, blog, 10 October 2011, http://biblicalmissiology.org/2011/10/10/book-review-allah-a-christian-response-by-miroslav-volf/ (first accessed 31 August 2015), 14.
[40] Andrew Saperstein, Rick Lowe, and Joseph Cumming, 'Answers to Frequently asked questions Regarding the Yale Response to 'A Common Word Between Us and You'', in Volf, Ghazi bin Muhammad, and Melissa Yarrington, eds, *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbour* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 182, cited in Volf, *Allah*, 82.
[41] Volf, *Allah*, 82.
[42] *Ibid.*
[43] *Ibid*, 83.
[44] *Ibid*, 82.
[45] See Appendix M, *Generous Love in Multi-Faith Ireland*, for Volf's outline of the three approaches. See also, McKnight, "Is the God of Christianity and Islam the same?" Interview, in *Kingdom Roots with Scot McKnight*, podcast, https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/kingdom-roots-scot-mcknight/id1078739516?mt=2&i=364586750 (first accessed 12 March 2016). Scot McKnight's interview clarifies Volf's nuanced use of the word 'same'.

An authoritative statement, similar descriptions, and similar commands

For Christians, *Nostra Aetate*, the Vatican-issued document influenced by Pope Paul VI and drawing on the mediaeval writings of Gregory VII (1015- 1085), represents 'the nearest thing to an authoritative statement' on the same-God question.[46] It assumes that normative Christian belief is that Christians and Muslims worship the same God.[47] Volf suggests that all Christians can confidently embrace this belief, on the grounds of, first, similarity in Christian and Muslim descriptions of God, and second, similarity in God's commands.[48] He identifies four shared descriptions:
There is only one God (Mark 12:29; Qur'an 47:19);
God created everything that is not God (Genesis 1:1; Qur'an 42:11);
God is different from everything that is not God (1 Timothy 6:16; Qur'an 6:103);
God is good (1 John 4:16; Qur'an 85:14).[49]

He lists ten Qur'anic injunctions as equivalent to the Mosaic Decalogue,[50] and suggests that 'love expressed in care for others, particularly the underprivileged' is the underlying message of the commands of both faiths.[51] De Van summarises well Volf's position:

> Muslims and Christians worship the same God even if they hold mutually exclusive notions of the nature, character, and activity of God. After all, Calvinist and Arminian Christians refer to the same God but sharply disagree about the nature, method, and character of God's sovereign activity […].[52]

Confident Christology?

For some Christians, Volf's same-God argument (and with it *Nostra Aetate*) remains unconvincing because, first, it underestimates the significance of the theological challenges to the argument.[53] *Nostra Aetate* asserts that Christians and Muslims worship the same God, although it also acknowledges that Muslims 'do not acknowledge Jesus as God.'[54] For experienced practitioners such as Nickel, such lack of Christological clarity hinders Christian witness.[55] On the other hand, as one commentator states, all the distinctive Christian truths are paradoxical.[56] A sign of the Church's maturity is its ability to hold these in tension.[57]

Second, Volf's approach appears to underestimate the ethical difference inherent between the two faiths' conceptions of God. For example, whereas Allah loves those who do good and does not love those who do evil (Qur'an 2:190, 195, 222, 276),[58] God loves unconditionally. This becomes apparent in Jesus' reworking

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[46] Vatican, *Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, 28 October 1965, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html (first accessed 27 November 2014). For text, see Appendix E in *Generous Love in Multi-Faith Ireland*.
[47] See Vatican, *Nostra Aetate*, point 3, in Volf, *Allah*, 95. See also, *Ibid*, 97.
[48] *Ibid.*
[49] See *Ibid*, 97 - 101.
[50] Christians will baulk at the punishment in the Islamic ninth (Qur'an 5:38). See *Ibid*, 106 – 107.
[51] Qur'an 2:177 supports this appeal. See Volf, *Allah*, 107 – 108.
[52] Benjamin B. De Van, '*Allah: A Christian Response* – A Review Essay', commenting on Volf, *Allah*, 90.
[53] That is, the fundamental doctrines of the Trinity, Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection, and the Christological issues. See *Ibid.*
[54] Vatican, *Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, 28 October 1965, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html (first accessed 27 November 2014). See Appendix E.
[55] Gordon D. Nickel, *Peaceable Witness Among Muslims* (Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 1999), 70-77. See also, Ivana Noble, 'How to Avoid Grand Narratives in Christology: A Challenge of Postmodern Hermeneutics', academia.edu (first accessed 2 April 2016).
[56] Vinoth Ramachandra, "Pocket-Sized Gods?" blog, 30 December 2015, https://vinothramachandra.wordpress.com (first accessed 3 January 2016).
[57] See NT Wright, 'Towards a biblical view of universalism', 1977. Republished chapter, http://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-documents/journal-issues/4.2_Wright.pdf (first accessed 7 February 2016), 55, where Wright warns against *sachkritik*, 'the criticism of one part of Scripture on the basis of another.'
[58] See Ida Glaser, "Reading the Bible with Islam in Mind", *Anvil*, Vol. 31, No. 1, March 2015, http://www.degruyter.com/view/j/anv.2015.31.issue-1/anv-2015-0003/anv-2015-0003.xml?format=INT (first accessed 1 March 2015).

of the Golden Rule, with the admonition to love (also) one's enemy (Matthew 5: 43-48).[59]

Critiquing Volf and critiquing the critiques

Volf's argument is persuasive, but not all are convinced. The concerns of some are represented by Imad Shehadeh's critique.[60] Shehadeh commends Volf for championing respectful Christian-Muslim dialogue and co-operation.[61] He praises Volf for defending the doctrine of the Trinity while underlining God's oneness, and for explaining the doctrine, especially in terms of 'the divine attribute of love.'[62] His first criticism, however, though sweeping, warrants attention:

> Volf fails to acknowledge that by Islam's claim to believe in the God of the Bible, while denying not only the Trinity but all the theology behind it, they end up attacking the very God they claim to believe in![63]

His second criticism is that Volf compromises Christian uniqueness and elevates peaceable relationships over truth.[64]

Cameron West is more sympathetic, acknowledging Volf's nuanced reasoning and that he does not minimise theological differences such as the Trinity, "or whether the adjective merciful (as Muslims) or the noun love (as Christians) is the most accurate description of God's primary orientation towards humanity."[65]

In his response to DeVan, Volf admits that his stance differs to that of many Christians, who focus on 'what is negative and false in Islam.'[66] He insists that the latter approach is "unworthy of the followers of God, who out of love created all human beings, and of Jesus Christ, who out of love gave his life for the salvation of all."[67] Volf's contrasting approach is to focus on commonalities and the positive, grounded in the loving character of God, while retaining awareness of theological incompatibilities.

Love, attention, friendship and listening

Not dissimilarly, Soskice rightly sees the generous giving of love and attention as reflecting the essence of God. [68] This essential divine quality and activity is often by-passed by Christians in the pursuit of theological truth, but 'There is no "arguing" with a baby',[69] says Soskice. Similarly, God nurtures primarily through the lavishing of loving attention on his children rather than through information and correction. Reflecting on Luke 10:38-42, and on Ricoeur's theories, Wierciński makes a similar point on hospitality and attention.[70] And with similar insights on God as 'the One', Max Warren chose to write 'A Theology of Attention' over

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[59] However, Volf devotes a whole chapter to this objection. See Volf, *Allah*, 148- 162.
[60] Imad Shehadeh is President of Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary. See "Meet Dr Imad Shehadeh is President, Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary", 28 March 2013, Dallas Theological Seminary 2016, http://www.dts.edu/media/play/meet-dr-imad-shehadeh-president-jordan-evangelical-theological-seminary-shehadeh-imad/ (first accessed 31 March 2016).
[61] Imad Shehadeh, 'Allah: A Christian Response by Miroslav Volf', review, in Biblical Missiology, blog, 10 October 2011, http://biblicalmissiology.org/2011/10/10/book-review-allah-a-christian-response-by-miroslav-volf/ (first accessed 31 August 2015).
[62] *Ibid.*
[63] *Ibid.*
[64] *Ibid.*
[65] Cameron West, **'**Review of Miroslav Volf's *Allah: A Christian Response*', *Euangelion*, blog. August 20, 2012, http://www.patheos.com/blogs/euangelion/author/mbird/ (first accessed 4 December 2015).
[66] Miroslav Volf, 'Response to DeVan's Review Essay of *Allah: A Christian Response*', Atla, (first accessed 19 October 2015), 187.
[67] *Ibid.*
[68] Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, 25.
[69] *Ibid*, 25.
[70] Andrew Wierciński (Lublin), 'Narrative Mode of Understanding: Education as the Building of Humanity of the Human Being', *Ethics in Progress Quarterly*, Volume 1, 2010, http://ethicsinprogress.org/?p=242 (first accessed 3 February 2016). On Ricoeur's theories on textuality, meaning and poetic discourse, see, e.g., Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Theory of Meaning* (Fort Worth TX: TCU Press, 1976).

'A Theology of Dialogue.'[71]

Pluralism, exclusivism, and inclusivism, and Trinitarian pluralism

Christoph Schwöbel rightly notes that with the growth of multi-religious societies worldwide has come a multiplication of military conflicts, civil wars, and displacement of peoples.[72] This reality creates an urgency to our theological conversations. Schwöbel provides a helpful assessment of the essential theological debate, which concerns Christian uniqueness versus a pluralistic theology of religions.[73] Conservatives in the Church may present Christianity as 'an exclusivist faith in contrast to which all other religions appear as forms of paganism.'[74] The object of theological engagement in this light is conversion. This may be a legitimate aim, but a position in which God is represented as exclusively at work in Christianity risks, as Schwobel suggests, reducing the universality of God to the extent that God is depicted as "the tribal deity of a rather imperialistic form of Western Christianity".[75] Exclusivism, then, undermines 'the message of God as all-encompassing, creative, reconciling, and redeeming love.'[76] In contrast, Rowan Williams applauds Raymond Panikkar's inclusive Trinitarian pluralism as providing 'guidelines for an authentic theology of interreligious engagement.'[77] Panikkar presents the Trinitarian theology as the foundation for pluralism, because in his theological vision, 'logos and spirit, the concrete and the universal, remain in tension until the eschaton.'[78]

Last word

A salient point similar to these theologies of Williams, Panikkar and Ramachandra has been drawn from CS Lewis's *The Last Battle*, and the story of Emeth, soldier of Aslan's enemy, Tash. Emeth transfers his allegiance to Aslan, who represents Christ. Aslan reassures the new recruit that he accepts his former service done to Tash, as if it had been for Aslan himself, because it was done in good faith, and rooted in love of justice and truth.[79] The point is that perhaps we will be surprised at how in the end, God reconciles the apparently irreconcilable. On this note I leave the last word to Ramachandra:

> All the distinctive Christian truths are paradoxical. Christians, therefore, should be at home with paradoxical thinking and not shun it. […]. So, do Christians and Muslims worship the same God? Yes and No. To use Frege's terminology, the same referent but different senses.[80]

[71] Max Warren, 'A Theology of Attention,' in Church Missionary Society, *Face to Face: Essays on Inter-Faith Dialogue* (London: Highway Press, 1971), 16-32.
[72] Christoph Schwöbel, 'Particularity, Universality and the Religions,' in Gavin D'Costa (ed.), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1990).
[73] Schwöbel in *Ibid*, 30-31.
[74] *Ibid*, 31.
[75] *Ibid*.
[76] *Ibid*, 31. Cf. John Hick and Paul Knitter, 'Preface,' in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, viii, and John Hick, 'The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity,' in Hick and Knitter, 22, quoted in Schwöbel, in Gavin D'Costa (ed.), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, 31, n.1.
[77] Rowan Williams, in D'Costa (ed.), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, xi.
[78] Williams, in *Ibid*, xi.
[79] Interview B1, Appendix C, *Generous Love in Multi-Faith Ireland.*
[80] Ramachandra, "Pocket-Sized Gods?", 2015, https://vinothramachandra.wordpress.com (first accessed 3 January 2016).

Lucas Dorion

The Shrinking of Moderate Spaces in American Religious Life

The Shrinking of Moderate Spaces in American Religious Life

Reverend Lucas Dorion

June 14, 2024

For some time now, I have been concerned about the shrinking of the available common ground for collaboration and cooperation in American life. This center space, which is often occupied by those individuals and organizations who hold moderate or centrist political views, seems to have less square footage available every passing year. We can read and watch this in our news coverage of current events, but the place I have seen and experienced this first hand is in the evolution of my own work these past 10 years. In a lot of ways, it feels as if we are living in a different world than when I began my work with the Alabama Cooperative Baptist Fellowship back in April of 2014. In these next few pages, I would like to explore the shifts I have observed and use snapshots from the lives of the ministers and churches I serve to both illustrate and suggest possible causes for this contraction of moderate space in American religious life. Obviously, the events that cause this type of change and shape any culture over a 10-year period would be too numerous to consider in 3,000 words. This reality combined with the fact that I am neither an anthropologist nor socialist, should be kept in mind as the reader considers my evaluation. I should also acknowledge that while I believe my opinion to be well informed by personal observation, experience and research, my education and professional exposure has been entirely limited to the southeastern region of the United States. Now, with my disclaimers out of the way, I would like to spend some time sharing and analyzing the impact that three specific events have had on American religious life and the way they have contributed to the reduction of the middle spaces in our society, where common agreement is found and cooperative work is done. We will discuss each of these further below, but I believe that in the last decade, the combination of changes in our marriage equality laws, the rise of Donald Trump and his right wing “MAGA”-Make America Great Again” movement, and the stresses inflicted by the COVID-19 global pandemic have coalesced into the current situation of extreme poloration of belief and intolerance of the other.

In this discussion, as with most things I believe that “context is king”. Before we go further, I’d like to provide a little history and background that may be helpful in understanding both my interest in this topic and the importance it has on the shared work I do. I serve as the coordinator of the Alabama Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. We are a small voluntary network of churches in the state of Alabama, in the southeastern United States. We are funded through contributions given by each of our partner congregations and a handful of individual donors. Each of our 30ish congregations in the state of Alabama choose to partner with us and while I am tasked with providing leadership to the organization and our collective efforts, I have no governance responsibilities nor authority over our ministers and their congregations. Alabama CBF is one of 17 state and regional networks that coordinates our efforts with a Global CBF office. Like our partner churches, each of these 17 state and regional networks does so voluntarily but has no connection to CBF Global for governance purposes. As you can probably already imagine, this kind of system is absolutely dependent upon goodwill, trust and shared common ground for financial security and decision making. The reason CBF is setup in this potentially precarious manner is twofold. First, it is part of our core values as Baptists. CBF claims four essential “freedoms”: Soul Freedom, Bible Freedom, Religious Freedom and Church Freedom. It is the last of those “Church Freedom” that insists on the autonomy of the local church. “We believe Baptist churches are free, under the Lordship of Christ, to determine their membership and leadership, to order their worship and work, to ordain whomever they perceive as gifted for ministry, and to participate as they deem appropriate in the larger body of Christ.”[1] The second reason has to do with our origins in and in some cases, continued connection to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). The existence of CBF is the result of a split with the SBC in the early 1990’s triggered by a conservative “take over” of several key areas of SBC life, including the leadership of seminaries, colleges, influential congregations, and the convention itself.[2] The fear of something similar happening again, caused CBF to lean into the value of “Church Freedom” as it set up its own governance structures. The list of reasons for the split is long and sometimes disputed, but at the center of the

[1] https://cbf.net/who-we-are
[2] The Way We Were. Dr. Fisher Humprey

disagreements were issues of pastoral authority, scriptural interpretation, and the role of women in church leadership.

As CBF took shape just over 30 years ago, its emphasis on freedom in biblical interpretation and church leadership allowed for a diversity amongst member churches in how they individually decided to affiliate. From the beginning, the churches and ministers who elected to be part of CBF occupied a spectrum of political and theological positions. They were anchored in both their identity as “Baptists” and their commitment to cooperate in mission. Especially in those early days, nearly all of CBF’s partnering congregations were “dually aligned,” which meant they maintained a connection with both CBF and some other Baptist denomination. While the majority of these churches shared ties with both the SBC and CBF, there is a smaller but not insignificant number who partnered with CBF and a more progressive Baptist group, such as, the Alliance of Baptists. Because of these dual relationships, it necessitated that CBF occupy a moderate lane on most issues. This allowed churches with vastly different theological positions to support the shared work of CBF as a mission sending organization. Because of this history and structure, CBF partner congregations and ministers are free to take stands on various theological and social issues, while CBF maintains its neutral status as a place of connection and support of churches and clergy. This strategy has served us well in times when the common ground of collaboration and cooperation was vast, but in these days of extreme polarization institutional security shrinks along with the moderate spaces we have come to depend on.

As I admitted earlier, while there are a great number of changes and events we could focus on to explain the diminishing cooperative spirit in American religious life, I would like to briefly look at three from the past decade. The first major shift is the national recognition of same sex marriage following the June 2015 decision handed down by the Supreme Court in Obegefell v. Hodges.[3] The high court’s 5-4 decision simultaneously made marriage equality the law of the land, while pushing the conversation front and

[3] https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/06/26/417717613/supreme-court-rules-all-states-must-allow-same-sex-marriages

center for every denominational governing body in the country. From the vote of United Methodist Church this past spring to the decisions of the Presbyterian Church (USA) in 2018[4], we see the divisive impact this issue has had as it washed through our mainline denominations. Even with its firm stance of neutrality, CBF's leadership was faced with mounting pressure from churches and clergy on both sides of this argument. In 2017, the governance board of CBF Global was forced to take up this matter. They chose to do so through what it called the "Illuminations Project[5]." The question for CBF centered mainly around a pre-existing hiring policy that prevented the employment of any LGBTQIIA+ individuals. Months of surveys, study, interviews, and data analysis resulted in a "splitting of the baby." Moving forward, LGBTQIIA+ individuals would be eligible for non-ministerial employment but they remained barred from serving in any ministerial role. As with any good compromise, very few were happy with the results and the organization saw the withdrawal of fellowship and funding from churches on both the left and right. The decisions reached as a result of the Illuminations Project continue to have substantial consequences, especially for those of us who lead our state and regional networks. Because of our governance structure, while we were briefed on both the project plan and its findings, we were not invited into the decision making process. The leadership of Alabama CBF had to lean on personal relationships with clergy and lay leadership as well as passions for ongoing shared work within the state. In Alabama, this monthslong exhausting process ultimately prevented churches on both the left and right from withdrawing their partnership and funding, but it most certainly still cost us. Frustratingly, because Alabama CBF is a separate non-profit governed by our own board of directors and bylaws, our hiring policy never contained the exclusive language that was at the center of CBF Global's discernment. In some cases, this aided us in conversations with our more liberal congregations and at the same time caused our more conservative congregations to begin questioning both our values and our value as a partner.

[4] https://www.hrc.org/resources/stances-of-faiths-on-lgbt-issues-presbyterian-church-usa
[5] https://www.baptiststandard.com/news/baptists/cbf-revises-hiring-policy-lifts-lgbt-ban-posts/

The second shift of the past 10 years that I wish to explore, took place at nearly the same time as the previous one. I do not think that it is an overstatement to say that the rise to prominence and power of Donald Trump, was a cultural earthquake for those of us who work and live in the centrist spaces of our country. Perhaps more than Trump himself, it was the enormous stack of ultra right wing policies reflected in his “MAGA" platform that caused the most distress. As we have already discussed, since its formation, CBF was made up of churches and individuals occupying all points on the social and political spectrum. We believed ourselves to be held together by similar (although not identical) interpretations of scripture, mutual respect, and the valuing of diversity. One of the “gifts” the MAGA movement and Donald Trump’s victory gave to the far right members of our coalition was permission to push back on, and in some cases, abandon those beliefs altogether. In fairness, Trump’s presidency and policies also enraged those on our left, erasing efforts to understand or even tolerate those who supported Trump and his views. The comfort once found in a fellowship based on a common way of thinking about scripture was replaced with mistrust for anyone, even one’s previously trusted spiritual leaders. There are numerous examples of this we could find in podcasts and books, that tell similar stories of ministers who found themselves on the left or right of their congregation’s majority view on some issue which led to their exit from their role. One interesting case study with which I am personally familiar was captured by Nicolas Casey in his New York Times article “The Walls of the Church Couldn’t Keep the Trump Era Out.” I encourage you to read for a fuller understanding of what I am attempting to describe. In his piece, Casey tells the story of a progressively minded rural church in the hamlet of Williams, that is just about 90 minutes east of Birmingham, Alabama. Through interviews with church members, theologians, and the church’s pastor, Casey lays out for his reader the unrepairable divide that opens up between their talented and once cherished pastor and some congregants as a result of conflict over Trump’s presidency. One of the examples offered in the piece is a sermon preached by the church's pastor on the Beatitudes, encouraging generosity to refuge seekers near a heightened moment of the Syrian refugee crisis. Normally the words attributed to Jesus are “safe places” for preachers, but in this case the pastor, Chris Thomas, shares an interaction he had with

congregants following his sermon. He remembers them saying in reference to the Beatitudes: "'*Those are nice, but we don't have to live by them,'"* Mr. Thomas recalls church members saying about the verses, a cornerstone of Christian scripture. *"It was like: 'You're criticizing our president. You're clearly doing this.' From thereon, my words were being measured.*"[6] As an Alabama CBF partner congregation, the church depicted in this article is a place I know well and a pulpit I have preached from often. Because I know that this community of faith is made up of extraordinary followers of Christ who are uncommonly generous to those most impacted by poverty in our state, I watched with shock as the ground shrank and shifted right from underneath their pastor. As I have watched and worried about the ground under my own feet, this experience and others like it give me great concern about the future sustainability of our entire fellowship.

The last of the three major events of the past 10 years that I wanted to include was the COVID-19 pandemic. From disagreements over mask wearing in worship to the appropriate timing of church reopenings following the lockdown, the pressure of pandemic related decision making demonstrated exposed all sorts of fault lines. These divisions were almost immediately evident both within our congregations and in our fellowship as a whole. As Alabama CBF attempted to approach reengaging the congregations in our network, we quickly found that there was very little middle ground where peace and agreement could be found. Our more cautious congregations accused us of being callous and uncaring as we began to reinstate programming opportunities. At nearly the same time, we would find ourselves being questioned about churches who were ready for a "return to normalcy" when we implemented any type of covid related policies, such as mask wearing or personal distancing. These examples are probably similar to ones most of us have heard, but what stands out for me is that this kind of divisive and almost reflexive rejection of the other's opinions, has not dissipated since COVID. A prime example is the distress in our congregations over the work of the SBC to further restrict the role of women's leadership in churches. Post COVID, this campaign began with state SBC conventions voting to eject any churches that associated with both CBF and SBC. Setting aside the cherished autonomy of the local

[6] https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/20/us/politics/evangelical-church-trump-alabama.html

churches, congregations were forced to sever relationships if they wished to remain in good standing with the SBC. In other states, where the state convention was unable to pass such rules, churches with ordained women clergy serving on staff were placed on lists and systematically presented for dissociation. Had the proposed bylaw change passed this June at the SBC national gathering, it would have forced separation of any SBC church who employed women for pastoral roles or forced the local congregation to alter the title of the female minister. The overall impact of this change, would have effectively made it impossible for any CBF church to also cooperate with the SBC. While the vote failed this year, it feels like one more bit of common ground is being eroded away before our eyes.

I acknowledge that there are any number of additional forces that have caused the polarization I have sought to explore in this essay but from my observation and lived experience, these three have played a major role. The Supreme Court decision on marriage equality in 2015 angered those who disagreed with it and motivated them to show up and vote in 2016. Donald Trump's election and list of populist grievances combined with his evangelical support, emboldened those who may have previously felt intimidated to express their more conservative opinions. This new found boldness has led to the expression of hesitations and objections to partnering with people with whom they deeply disagree. In the same way, the collective outrage of the left towards Trump and his administration caused a collapse of the goodwill and bridges once so valued. The COVID-19 pandemic with all of its financial upheaval, lock-downs, and prolonged uncertainty pushed us to a place of civil and cooperative exhaustion. In order for organizations like CBF to exist, we depend upon the communional agreement to focus on the things we have in common in order to do good in the world together. More and more, we face an unwillingness to take that first step. A desire for complete alignment in ideology and belief seems to be squeezing out the space necessary for collaboration. For those of us who are interested in continuing a cooperative style of mission and ministry, how do we form sustainable partnerships when the common ground seems to be smaller each passing year?

Barry Jackson

Building on Solid Foundations

Building on solid foundations

Barry Jackson

12th June 2024

1. Introduction

“Would you be willing to come in and teach year 4 about ‘The Fall’?”

I’d been chatting with the school RE coordinator in the staff room over lunch. I’d offered to some in to help with some RE lessons and she was quick to take me up on it. I’ve never been comfortable with the resources available for teachers on Genesis 1-3, and believe that the way it’s expected to be taught is one of the many reasons why children move away from faith as they grow older.

‘Creation and fall’, or the doctrine of original sin, is one of a number of paradigms that shape how people understand the big story of the Bible. It sets up the overarching narrative of paradise lost and the hope of paradise being regained at the end of this age. In the middle we have Jesus’ atoning death on the cross, through which God and man are reconciled; the barrier of sin between us and God is removed as Jesus takes the punishment that was due to humanity and so sets us free.

In other words:

1. God created all things good
2. Humanity brought sin into the world by disobeying God
3. A holy and perfect God cannot associate with sinful humanity
4. God’s nature demands justice for all wrongdoing, and his wrath is against us, but he is also completely loving
5. So, he sends Jesus so show us his love, and to take the punishment we deserve.
6. When we accept Jesus sacrifice for us (put our faith in him) then our sins are forgiven
7. God judges everyone’s hearts, and his judgement is on those who do not believe in Jesus
8. God is in control, and he has a perfect plan to bring his kingdom here on earth
9. The mission of the church is to lead people to faith in Jesus, so that they too can be acceptable to God and be saved from his wrath.

The above is a gross simplification, but it captures the main points. Each part of the argument is dependent on and reinforces the others, making a coherent whole. They provide the hermeneutical lens through which people understand sin, forgiveness, wrath and judgement. And that same lens influences the way in which they read the rest of scripture and live out their lives as followers of Jesus.

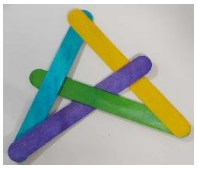
However, I believe that in teaching Christianity this way, in talking about God this way, we create a framework of interdependent paradigms, and when one fails, they all fall apart.

As students progress through school, the story of creation and the story of a garden, is replaced with an understanding of billions of years of evolution, mass extinctions and the gradual emergence of sentient beings in a brutal and unforgiving world. There is no perfect garden, no tree of the knowledge of good and evil, no original sin… and so that element of paradigm is broken… What then is the role of Jesus’ sacrifice? Where does the ‘wrath of God’ fit in? What is judgment all about if humanity never had a chance in the first place? If God is ‘in control’ how come things are still so messed up?

By teaching Genesis 1-3 in this way, we are also setting young people up to have to make a choice between science and faith. Creating a conflict where none exists.

Coming from a scientific background, and coming to an understanding of the reality of God and his love later in life, I have never taken the story of creation literally, and always seen it more as wisdom literature that helps us to understand the world as it is. Many scholars would argue that this has always been the position of the mainstream church, however, they way that Genesis 1-3 is taught in school, the material provided by the Coventry DBE, and just about every video resource you can find on YouTube, all frame Gensis 1-3 in terms of ‘Creation and Fall’.

But it is not just in education that we set up these paradigms; most of the popular enquirer's courses, the simple ways that people explain the gospel, much the liturgy we use in church, and many of the songs we sing all teach/point to/are based on/reinforce the framework outlined in points 1-9 above. And if any one of those interdependent paradigms falls apart, then the whole thing falls apart.



It's like the constructs you can make using lollipop sticks (like the 'boomerang' shown right). They are held together in tension (no glue is used), but if any stick is damaged, then the tension fails and the whole structure fails.

As a result, people are afraid to ask questions or probe too deeply into some of the doctrines they've been taught. They have learned them, and repeat them, and find comfort in them… but they are afraid to look too closely. I've had many conversations with mature Christians who have said that they were always uncomfortable with one or more aspects of their theology, but didn't like to ask questions, or were even dissuaded from doing so.

I believe that this may be one of the reasons behind why some people drift away from church… one or more of their paradigms about aspects of faith are challenged, and rather than exploring whether there is a different way of looking at things (or because their church is adamant that there isn't), they can't keep up the 'pretence' and they leave. They may still love the people and the fellowship, but feel that they can no longer worship God…

"I can't understand why a God who is love would command the Israelites to…"

"I can't believe in a God who would allow my friend (or anyone) to have Parkinson's disease."

"I can't reconcile my faith with what I understand through science and evolution."

"God's judgement on non-believers seems unfair"

And so on. There are 'stock' answers to these questions, but for many people they just don't add up, their framework of understanding falls apart and they walk away from church.

The process of growth as a disciple inevitably means having to rethink what we thought we'd already understood. So, I believe that we need to teach people from the beginning that faith and understanding evolve and change. That, whilst it can be unnerving, it's good to ask difficult questions and poke at the parts of our frameworks that don't make sense to us.

However, whether in school, in the pulpit or on courses, we also need to be teaching about God in a way that is true to what is revealed in scripture, AND is more robust for the challenges people face and more secure in the face of the questions they have.

So how might we look at the way we teach about things like creation, fall, wrath, love, atonement, justice, forgiveness, judgement, etc. differently? How might we help give people a more solid foundation for their discipleship journey? A paper of this length can't address all these in any detail, so I will focus mainly on the atonement and touch briefly on some of the others.

2. Metanoia – See things differently

I came to faith in an evangelical church, went to an open evangelical college, and did my curacy in and evangelical church. So, my understanding and the way I taught about faith were along the lines of the framework in points 1-9 in the introduction.

My understanding of the atonement that was rooted in penal substitution; God cannot associate with sin and the penalty of sin is death (final separation from God), so Christ came into the world to satisfy the justice of God. On the cross Christ took the punishment for all my sins and therefore I was free to

come into the presence of God. I remember that when I heard the analogy of the courtroom, the penny dropped and it really helped me understand and be grateful for all that Jesus had done; God as the judge passes the maximum sentence on the guilty party (us) and then takes off his robes, comes down and pays the fine himself.

During my curacy, I found that this courtroom analogy was the one that most resonated with people on Alpha. We worked with a lot of drug addicts and ex-convicts who had all been in court… they knew all about guilt and punishment. However, when I moved to be a vicar in rural Warwickshire, I found that the courtroom analogy left people cold. This wasn't just people on Alpha, but many long-term churchgoers did not relate to that model, or indeed any of the classic models of the atonement. So, I used my sabbatical in 2014 to explore the atonement again, and to find new ways of teaching it that I hoped would help people understand.

This led me to seeing all the problems with penal substitution. There is not the space in this paper to explore these completely, but they could be summarised as:

- Biblically:
    - PS is not as explicitly supported by the text as often is claimed. This model was more influenced by later theological developments rather than direct biblical evidence.
- Theologically:
    - How can we understand one member of the trinity (the Father) pouring out his wrath on another member of the trinity (the Son), when they are (together with the Holy Spirit) one God? If Christ died for our sins against the Father, then what about our sins against Christ? Penal Substitution implies either that God is pouring out his wrath on God (thus dividing the trinity), or that Christ is not God.
    - God appears to need satisfaction through violence, which is inconsistent with the message of love and forgiveness found in Jesus' teachings.
- Morally:
    - PS implies a transactional nature to God's forgiveness. God does not really forgive the debt, it is transferred; someone still has to 'pay the price for sin'.

The classic counter argument to some of the above from an evangelical perspective is to do with the character of God revealed in Scripture. Evangelicals argue that Scripture shows two key attributes of God's character at work on the cross; love and justice. In his book 'Systematic Theology' Wayne Grudem argues that no God who was truly just could forgive sins without a penalty. He cites Romans 3:25-26:

> ***…****God put forward [Christ] as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He [God] did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.*

in justifying his argument that God sent Jesus to die in order to satisfy his need for justice. He says that it is not helpful to decide whether God's love or justice is the more important because:

> *…without the love of God, he would never have taken the steps to redeem us, yet without the justice of God,* ***the specific requirement that Christ should earn our salvation by dying for our sins would not have been met****.*

However, the section in bold is a circular argument; Paul's words only mean what Grudem takes them to mean if you read those verses through a framework of faith that includes Penal Substitution.

In their book, recovering the scandal of the cross, Green and Baker argue that St Paul's writings are not consistent with the Penal Substitution model. They stress that St Paul's teachings say it was the world that needed to be brought back into relationship with God, not God that was estranged from the world.

They argue that although Paul's notion of the atonement takes sin with utmost seriousness, he is concerned above all with the restoration of the divine-human relationship, not with the mollification of a God angered by the misdeeds of humanity.

To help illustrate the absurdity of this they cite Robin Collins' rewriting of the parable of the prodigal son when he changes the character of the Father to be in line with a God who requires penal substitution:

> *When the son recognises the error of his ways and returns the father responds, "I cannot forgive you… it would be against the moral order of the entire universe… Such is the severity of my justice that reconciliation will not be made unless the penalty is utterly paid. My wrath – my avenging justice – must be placated."*
> *Then the older son offers to do work in the fields and pay his brother's penalty. Finally, when the elder brother dies of exhaustion, the father's wrath was placated against his younger son and they lived happily for the remainder of their days.*

One of the supporting arguments for PS, is that God cannot associate with sin, but this is not what we see revealed in scripture… Starting with the story of Adam and Eve, we see God constantly reaching out to people despite the mistakes they make. God walked with Abraham, who made frequent mistakes; he approached Moses, who was far from sinless; guided Jacob, who was an outright schemer; worked with David despite his failures; and so on.

God the Son, Jesus, spent most of his time here on earth, with sinners… telling them and showing them that, contrary to what the religious authorities had taught, they were included in the invitation to life in the Kingdom.

So, sin is clearly not a barrier to God. However, the consequence of sin is shame, and it's shame that makes us hide from God. This is the true cause of separation. Adam and Eve hide from God (Genesis 3:8), the Israelites fear to approach God (Exodus 20:18-19), Paul writes that "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies ***in your minds*** because of your evil behaviour" (Col 1:21) and Jesus said, "Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light, because their deeds were evil." (John 3:19)

God can (and does) always reach out to us, but we hide from him. God's love means that he will never force himself on us; just as the father doesn't chase the prodigal son all the way to the pigsty and drag him back home again.

God longs for his children to come home, but he has given them the freedom to choose. He can see the mess in their lives… he can see that they still don't get the idea that they are fully known and truly loved… he can see that they still misunderstand him.

Although love and forgiveness await us back home with the Father, we stay hiding in our pigsties… doubting that there is a loving father at all, and even if there is, certain that he could not love us.

As we hide from God the Father, God the son comes to:

- *proclaim the forgiveness of sins;*
- *associate with the unclean, the diseased, the poor, the despised, the outcast… anyone who's been told that they are 'out of God's favour';*
- *invite them into a community where all are welcomed and shown the love of God;*
- *demonstrate that, even when the closest members of that community abandon him, betray him and deny him, he still loves and forgives them;*
- *demonstrate for all time, even when humanity at its worst condemns the author of life to a shameful, brutal and painful death, that his forgiveness extends even to those that killed him*
- *demonstrate that God's love is stronger than death itself, and by his resurrection offer proof that he is who he says he is, and make clear God's offer of forgiveness*

A key verse in the parable of the prodigal son is Luke 15:17a, 'When he came to his senses'. Jesus comes to all people in the pigsties of their lives and helps them to come to their senses, he comes to whisper in their ears, 'Metanoia – see things differently… Come home. You are loved, you are forgiven, you belong. Come home.'

When we are open enough to believe that, and take those hesitant, penitent steps homewards, then the Father rushes to meet us, embraces us, and welcomes us home. There we find acceptance, healing, hope, belonging, life in all its fulness and more love than we ever thought possible.

Looking at it in this way, the cross is about shame and restoration/reconciliation, not about guilt, sin and punishment.

No single model of the atonement can capture the entirety of what Christ accomplished on the cross, but I've found that people relate to the shame/restoration model when I'm explaining the Gospel, and it provides a more solid foundation for an understanding what God is like.

This model of the atonement no longer requires a 'Creation and Fall' interpretation of Genesis 1-3. These chapters make sense if we re-frame them not as history, but as wisdom literature. A story that reveals how God is Lord of all and is always with us, and how humanity comes of age and loses their innocence (which is, I believe, how the story is interpreted by many Rabbis).

3. Conclusion

This short paper does not have the space to properly address how the above fits with other key doctrines like wrath, judgement, forgiveness, etc. But the list below outlines a different framework for talking about God.

1. God is behind all creation
2. Humanity hides from God in our shame
3. God never stops reaching out to us in love, but we continue to hide
4. God's wrath is best understood as God's anguish at humanity's actions, but he still loves us
5. So, he sends Jesus so show us his love is stronger than anything, even killing his son would not stop him loving and forgiving us
6. When we understand that we are fully known and completely and unconditionally loved despite our sins, we are open to receiving God's forgiveness.
7. God is a loving father who longs for all his children to return home. But we judge ourselves hiding in the darkness
8. God is not in control, but he is with us and will guide us. He calls us to work with him to bring his kingdom here on earth
9. The mission of the church is to proclaim the forgiveness of sins, and help people to follow Jesus; immersing them in the life of the Trinity and teaching them, in word and deed, about the love of God

I believe that by using a framework like this for talking about God, we give people of all ages a firmer foundation from which to explore what it means to follow Jesus.

Matthew Jackson

Speaking about God through Music

Speaking about God through Music

Revd Matthew Jackson, June 2024

A straw poll of clergy in the vestry of my church before Evensong found that 100% had sung in church choirs when they were children. Both of those clergy had found it formative in many ways including teaching them much about the church and its liturgical life, as well as theology which had seeped in.

Although this is far from a scientific study, anecdotally many clergy were members of church choirs in their childhood years. This is often also true of many members of our congregations, particularly it seems to me those who return to church later in life after a break, often of many years.

There seems to be something in music which connects with something deep in our souls. Church music can educate us in the ways of faith almost without us noticing that we are learning. This essay will attempt to present a rather basic theology of music and to explore how music might be a tool for mission in our day as it has been in the past.

I began to think about some of this on a sabbatical which I took in 2023 and I will share my experiences of some of the projects which I visited or researched during that time. I will concentrate mostly on the use of the human voice as this is the instrument we all carry with us in our daily lives.

"The Christian Liturgy was born singing and has never ceased to sing"[1] It is clear that there was discussion in the earliest day of the church about how much Jewish practice should be required by new converts[2] but there seems to have been a good deal of Jewish liturgical practice which was adopted into Christian worship, particularly the use of the Psalms which remains a central part of Anglican Worship today. "The Church used music and singing in its worship well before it began to ask questions about why and wherefore, and such questioning was at first sporadic and empirical… It is not till the modern period that we first meet any systematic attempts at theological reflection on the matter"[3]

The length of time taken for formal reflection on music in worship perhaps suggests how much it was taken for granted as a part of the everyday life of the Church. There is a biblical basis for the role of music in worship. I have already mentioned the Psalms which show the whole range of human emotion in relation to God; joy and sorrow, praise and lament. There are other songs recorded in the Old Testament. After escaping from the Egyptians and crossing the Red Sea, the people of Israel sang a song to the Lord[4]. Singing was part of Israel's formal worship in both tabernacle and temple[5]. Hymn singing was practiced by Jesus and his disciples[6]. Saint Paul instructed the Colossians, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And

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[1] The Study of Anglican Liturgy, SPCK 1978 p440

[2] cf Acts 15: 19-20

[3] [3] The Study of Anglican Liturgy, SPCK 1978 p441

[4] Exodus 15

[5] 1 Chron. 6:31-32, 16:42

[6] Matthew 26:30 *When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives*

whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him"[7].

People tend to remember the theology they sing more than the theology which they hear peached. I feel that the use of congregational singing is of critical importance in shaping the faith of the people. In this respect the words used are of more importance than the music used. Saint Paul seems to be referring this when he says "I will pray with the spirit, but I will pray with the mind also; I will sing praise with the spirit, but I will sing praise with the mind also."[8]

There are those who consider it important to maintain good theology in the music which we use in our worship. A headline from 'Premier Christianity' in May 2024[9] (following up on a letter by Lord Lisvane and subsequent article in the Times) read 'Rowan Williams wants to ditch 'bland' hymns.'

Lord Lisvane had sparked the debate with the comment, "We are fortunate in this country to have such a splendid repertoire of hymns…Why, then, do we have to suffer All Things Bright and Beautiful? It is chosen by about half the participants in the weddings I play for (though I am often successful in helping them to choose something better)…I find the saccharine doggerel, combined with the jingly tune (not that easy for congregations to sing, actually), deeply depressing — especially when there are so many wonderful alternatives."

Lord Williams said, "many of the hymns sung at weddings and funerals, including 'All things bright and beautiful', are comparable to "baby food". He fears that the hymn tradition is disappearing and he recognises that Christianity is vanishing more and more from the collective consciousness of Britain, and with it the knowledge of Christ and the gospel.

The Premier Christianity article contained a response from Dr Daniel Johnson[10], He argued that The goal of the Church is not to preserve particular traditions, but to see the gospel produce a worshipping congregation from every language and nation. When that day comes, I suspect we'll care very little about what we are singing, and be far more caught up in who we are singing with, and who we are singing to… If churches and church leaders want to reverse [the] shift, maybe the answer is to be more welcoming of those unfamiliar with our history, and less condescending of those who receive our hospitality."

During my sabbatical in 2023 there were two projects I particularly wanted to experience which are using church music as a means of connecting with children and young people. I'd managed to set up Zoom calls with both before my sabbatical began so I was really excited about going to visit. My interest in these projects is twofold. There is a value in the music and music education itself in connecting with children but there is also an important aspect in involving children in worship by giving them a serious role to fulfil. The same would apply to involving children as servers at the altar; including children and young people as 'part of the team', worshipping in the same service as the adults is often more effective at keeping children engaged with the church into adulthood. The alternatives are often putting on 'all-age' worship or, as is more often the case, sending children out

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[7] Colossians 3: 16-17

[8] 1 Corinthians 14:14-15

[9] 8th May 2024 premierchristianity.com

[10] who has a PhD in History from the University of Leicester, where his research concentrated on Isaac Watts.

to the hall for activities so that adults can have uninterrupted access to the 'real worship' in the church building.

The first project on my list I'd heard about on the Radio 4 'Sunday' programme much earlier in the year. St Mary's Church in Handsworth, a suburb of Birmingham, has managed to recruit a choir of children from the local community, which is largely made up of people of South Asian and African descent. The area is largely Muslim and Sikh but does have a Church School from where most of the children have come. I spoke online to Khadeem, the Director of Music who is in his early 20s and has the vision and, crucially, expertise to raise the funding for the project.

The Church is now in interregnum so when I asked if I could visit I quickly received an email asking if I would preside and preach at the Sunday Service. When I said 'yes' another email arrived asking if I could take the 8 o'clock service too. So while St Mary's Attleborough were celebrating their Patronal Festival I was worshipping at another St Mary's. I managed to get there in time for choir practice on Friday and enjoyed meeting the children and their parents, as well as Khadeem and Paul, a newly appointed assistant director of music.

After nearly a year the choir is still very much in it's infancy and as well as leading the 'Mass of St Thomas' and the hymns, are experimenting with adding an anthem into the service during Communion.

The other project I'd hoped to experience was a 'Choir Church' project. Choir Church began in London in 2016. It looks to build new congregations by establishing school choirs in partnership with churches. Tom Daggett of the Choir Church Foundation was reported in the Church Times in 2022[11] to have described the project as having "adapted the English choral tradition to open the whole word of learning and spiritual growth for children and families who would otherwise never have encountered it." £4.8 million from the Strategic Development Funding budget was used to was establish the project. In the same article it announced how a similar project was to be established in Blackburn Diocese. The Bishop of Burnley, Rt Revd Philip North, said: "This is a passion project for me as it's no secret that I came to faith through the choral tradition myself. Music can lift the soul and inspire people in so many ways and we now have the opportunity to test how the choral tradition, with its grounding in sacramental worship, can be adapted to a 'planting context'; connecting home, church and school in fresh new ways."[12]

Despite repeated attempts I was unable to get any response from the team leader in London so I thought I'd try my luck with Blackburn. My email to Blackburn Diocese received an almost immediate reply. I had a wonderful online meeting and found out loads about the project but, when the time came to arrange a visit, the trail went cold so my hope to go from Birmingham to Blackburn came to nothing. However, I think I learnt enough from my initial contact to get a picture of the project.

Choir Churches are new congregations which are separate to church's Sunday congregations. They meet in a Church School after the school day and the service includes music which is recognisably from the Anglican Choral Tradition. As well as hymns they again include Thorne's 'Mass of St Thomas' and an anthem such as 'Lead me Lord'. This Eucharist wouldn't feel unfamiliar to anyone in our churches. The significant difference is that the worship is taken into school. Only time will tell whether this leads to more people attending Church or if the school congregation establishes itself. I wondered what happens when the children leave the school?

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[11] 20th July 2022 p7

[12] www.blackburn.anglican.org/choir-church

The project also comes at a financial cost. The first year in Blackburn is covered by a grant from the Diocese. The percentage of the grant reduces each year until the parish is expected to cover the cost of a talented musician to lead the choirs and lead music in the school. Notably the musician's faith is as important to their appointment as their musical abilities.

With hindsight the summer wasn't the best time to look at projects working with children. All the projects I'd seen and heard about revolve around Church Schools so my task in cogitating was to see what we can take into our own context and integrate with our own Music Project.

St Mary's Attleborough has a long established choral tradition and is fortunate to employ an enthusiastic part-time Director of Music and Assistant Director of Music. Some years ago they came up with a proposal to make the church a centre of musical excellence for the young and old from Attleborough, neighbouring villages and the wider Breckland district.

Largely driven by the music team we set out to bring music of all types to a wider audience in a part of Norfolk which has little by way of concerts. We were fortunate to gain a grant from 'Youth Music' and currently employ a specialist worker to lead engaging music outreach activities with children, the elderly and disabled people in our local community. Sadly funding for this post runs out later this year although we hope to continue to run the successful children's choir which has begun at the church.

As well as a concert series, which this year includes a concert and a schools' workshop from the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, we started an annual Community Music Day featuring amateur musicians from the local community and we sang a Hymn Marathon in 2022[13]. The church organ needs a rebuild costing in the region of £400k and, following a feasibility study in 2019, has grown into a project to include new vestries, song school, extended hall and re-ordering of the church. The project would also further enable more inspiring concerts and recitals to be held at St Mary's over the coming years and create a space that can be used more flexibly for concerts and community activities.[14]

I am heartened that there seems to be a growing appreciation for traditional choral music within the church and the wider community. There are a few high profile 'cheerleaders' for this including Organist and director of music at Pembroke College. An interview with her was published in the Church Times in December 2022[15] "It's no secret that society seems to be becoming increasingly secular and occasionally I think people can be put off the organ because they feel like they don't belong in church." she said before continuing, "It's so great to see so many churches working to combat this, though, and organs and choral music are a great way to attract more young people. They might come for the music but the stay for the worship."

The approach of the Coronation in 2023 led 'Athena - Cultural Crusader' to 'Hail the *hymnpact* of church music'[16]. She notes, "Our tradition of church music is unique within Europe, by virtue of its

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[13] starting on the evening of the Friday of August Bank Holiday Weekend we sang all 847 hymns in 'Ancient and Modern Words Edition: Hymns and Songs for Refreshing worship'. We completed the book in the early hours of Monday morning.

[14] The project is currently paused for further discussion as initial costings were far higher than originally estimated.

[15] 23rd December 2022

[16] Country Life, April 26 2023, p142

extraordinary longevity and also by its eclecticism, drawing as it does on different confessional and musical inheritances… Such music-making lends life to the buildings themselves. A church with a choir is likely to be a vibrant one and that promises the bricks and mortar care. In return, the discipline of music has a remarkable power to forge communities, as well as to educate and enrich the lives of those who partake in it."

No matter where or how we worship, we come together for the same reasons—to feed our souls, to shape and strengthen our faith, to be reminded of who God is. We retell the stories of our faith, we remember God's promises, we claim God's victory over the world, we pray and praise and recite what we believe. And we can do it all, I assert, through music.

Becky Stephens

In light of feminist theology, do the words of the Eucharistic Prayers of Common Worship influence how we speak about God?

In light of feminist theology, do the words of the Eucharistic Prayers of Common Worship influence how we speak about God?

By Becky Stephens

Common Worship (CW) contains eight standard Eucharistic Prayers; A – H.[1] They tell the story of the Last Supper where Jesus asks his disciples to "do this in remembrance of me". They speak of Jesus' "sacrifice for all" which leads to our salvation and of the "eternal heavenly banquet" at which we all hope for a place.

This paper aims to discern how the texts of the Eucharistic Prayers, as set within Common Worship, portray God, particularly in light of a feminist theology.

Whose words?

The Liturgical Commission presented a report to Synod in 1988 entitled, 'Making Women Visible: The use of Inclusive Language with the ASB' (Alternative Service Book), which prompted The House of Bishops to instruct the Liturgical Commission to write new texts which would become CW.[2] Rather ironically, there were just two women on the Liturgical Commission out of eighteen at this time.

In 1996, six new Eucharistic Prayers were presented to General Synod but there was concern that the Prayers had not been changed radically enough.[3] A newly formed Liturgical Commission of 1996 saw the number of women rise from two to five out of nineteen.[4] Although women who were priests will have been elected to the House of Clergy for the first time, having been ordained in 1994, all five consultants to the Liturgical Commission were male and the House of Bishops remained entirely male.

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[1] https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/holy-communion-service#mm7c3

[2] David Hebblethwaite, *Liturgical Revision in the Church of England 1984-2004: The working of the Liturgical Commission*, (Cambridge: Grove Books Ltd., 2004), p22

[3] Hebblethwaite, *Liturgical Revision in the Church of England 1984-2004,* p37

[4] Hebblethwaite, *Liturgical Revision in the Church of England 1984-2004,* p45-46

A revised set of Prayers were approved by General Synod in 2000. Although Prayers A-C largely reflected those of the BCP and the ASB, Prayers D-H offered something new in a move to make them more Trinitarian. There was a greater emphasis on "thanksgiving" for what God has done in Creation[5] and an eschatological shift with the emphasis being on the heavenly banquet rather than looking back to the cross, "The anamnesis moves our mind onto Good Friday, to Easter morning and to the ascension, and adds, to complete the picture, a looking forward to Christ's coming again." [6] The emphasis of the epiclesis (the invoking of the Spirit to "touch the bread and the wine") [7] is also varied between the Prayers, giving greater choice to the president.

What is missing?

The Eucharistic Prayers might still be perceived as problematic as they do not tell the full story of Jesus' life. It is the same in the Creed; we say that we believe in the conception and birth of Jesus, where his mother is referred to as a virgin before she is named. We then immediately chant the story of his death and resurrection, missing the beauty of the miracles, healing relationships and emotions.

There is an argument that the liturgical development of the whole service includes readings from the bible and hymns where these stories may be heard. However, Marjorie Proctor-Smith declares a "fundamental critique of the Bible: It is a patriarchal and androcentric book, which has served and continues to serve the interests of men." [8] June Boyce-Tillman acknowledges a "systematic exclusion of women from the mainstream of music making" and thus women's experience is also missing from many of our hymns. [9] Even with so little female experience, the lectionary often misses the stories of the women, [10] particularly those in the

[5] Paula Gooder and Michael Perham, *Echoing the Word: The Bible in the Eucharist,* (London: SPCK, 2013), p28
[6] Gooder and Perham, *Echoing the Word*, p31
[7] Gooder and Perham, *Echoing the Word*, p29
[8] Marjorie Procter-Smith, *In Her Own Rite: Constructing Feminist Liturgical Tradition,* (Great Britain: Amazon, 2013), p107
[9] June Boyce-Tillman, *A Rainbow to Heaven: Hymns, Songs and Chants,* (London: Stainer and Bell, 2004) p xxii
[10] Janet R. Walton, *Feminist Liturgy: A Matter of Justice,* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2000), p42

Hebrew Bible. We are left then to rely on the preacher, who may not appreciate the importance of the female story.

The research of Nicola Slee highlights an invisibility of women in liturgy and points towards feminist liturgy as a resource to nurture the faith development of women. [11] Slee suggests that the structure of the service, as well as the texts, alienates women's experience. [12] Teresa Berger says that the "mainstream historical narrative of the liturgy has been shaped substantially by the invisibility and/or exclusion of women." [13] Therefore, if women are missing from much of the liturgy within worship, how can a woman see herself in God's story?

This exclusion did not necessarily occur in early Christianity. Indeed, the Bible describes Mary as the first apostle, Lydia's household as a place of worship and Pheobe as a deacon who took Paul's epistle to the Roman Church. Therefore, women were present and leading in the early Church. Why then, in the 21st century, does the Church still produce liturgies which hide much of women's experience?

Broken for you

In the Eucharistic Prayers we commemorate a violent death of the 'Son' as was the will of the 'Father' in order to 'save' the sin-filled human race. The use of the phrase "perfect sacrifice"[14] is one example of seemingly inappropriate language used within this sacred prayer which points towards a vengeful God who sees the violent death of Christ as 'perfect'.

The Prayers offer us a limited view of salvation. Each Prayer deems Christ's death and sacrifice as necessary with little focus on his life and resurrection. The Doctrine Commission state that, "He died the kind of death which symbolised God's verdict on sinful humanity: condemned

[11] Nicola Slee, *Fragments for Fractured Times: What Feminist Practical Theology Brings to the Table,* (London: SCM Press, 2020) p172
[12] Nicola Slee, *Fragments* (London: SCM Press, 2020) p179
[13] Teresa Berger, *Women's Ways of Worship: Gender Analysis and Liturgical History,* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1999) p5
[14] Prayer B: https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/holy-communion-service#mm7c5

to perish." [15] Indeed, "Atonement theology begins with violence, namely the killing of Jesus,"[16] but should it not begin with the incarnation?

Elaine Storkey asserts that none of the theories of atonement satisfy a feminist critique, "these traditional formulations embody concepts of God and of humanity which are reductionist and dangerous." The fact that the language for God has always been of a sovereign male, the theories of atonement "reinforce the image of God as a vengeful, mirthless, wrathful, dominating male deity, demanding payment for the fact that he has been disobeyed, and sentencing his only son to a violent death." [17] Penal substitution, satisfaction and ransom theories all point towards the vengeful God Storkey describes.

Weaver argues, "in traditional atonement doctrine, Jesus' death appears as a model of passive obedience to the Father's need to impose a mission of suffering… unjust or innocent suffering can never be redemptive or salvific." [18] Even within the Christus Victor model, where Christ's death overcomes all evil without the need for any payment to God, it is the death and sacrifice that saves us, and not the fact that Christ lived among us. [19]

The cross itself is deeply problematic because of the process of death. A symbol which is used as a sign of Christianity is a form of torture and capital punishment. Crucifixion was a method of torture which was deeply humiliating and unbearably painful. The process of stripping, mocking and beating eventually ended in nailing a broken, wounded, humiliated body by its bleeding hands and feet to a cross. All of this observed by onlookers, joining in with taunts of hatred.

Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker argue that the language Jesus used at the Last Supper was pointing towards his living body, an eternal body, not a broken one. [20] They suggest that the texts of the Prayers focus too strongly on the crucifixion, missing the joy of incarnation and the Resurrection. They claim this has "dangerous consequences" for how we

[15] Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, *The Mystery of Salvation,* (London: Church House, 1995) p103
[16] J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement,* (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2001) p2
[17] E. Storkey, 'Atonement and Feminism', in *Anvil,* Vol. 11.2, (1994), pp 227 - 228
[18] J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement,* (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2001) P125
[19] Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement,* P125
[20] Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Saving Paradise: Recovering Christianity's Forgotten Love for this Earth,* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2012) p160

might live as Christian people since this "perfect" sacrifice has been used to abuse and silence women.[21] Proctor-Smith highlights the problems for abuse survivors when "relationships of dominance and submission played out in the ritual at the table replicate abusive relationships, where rhetoric about innocent suffering and sacrifice and obedience to death spiritualize the remembered or ongoing suffering of male violence and abuse." [22]

Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza considers how we speak of Jesus' body, "How can we point to the eucharistic bread and say, "This is my body" as long as women's bodies are still battered, raped, sterilized, mutilated, prostituted, and used to make male ends?" [23] The blood shed and the broken body is too close to the abuse too many women experience. Gail Ramshaw notes that the salvific nature of the body and blood of Christ is androcentric[24] and excludes the experience of women's bodies. The maleness of Jesus' body has been used to exclude the experience of a woman's body, even though her body is "sacred" [25] since she has been made in the image of God.

Generally, for feminist theologians, the words of sacrifice and brokenness are problematic when placed within the Eucharistic Prayer. The words of the liturgy are "consecratory", [26] the bread and wine is transformed into what may be to us the body and blood of Christ. The body and blood that was beaten and battered, hung on a cross and died a horrific death. However, the body which we might better remember is the body of the risen Christ. This body was upright and strong, able to walk along the road to Emmaus, able to stand on the beach and call to those fishing, able to cook fish to share with others. This is the body that overcame death, the body that offers the mystical joy of Resurrection which leads to our eternal connection with God.

[21] Brock and Parker, *Saving Paradise* p161
[22] Marjorie Procter-Smith, *Praying with our eyes open: Engendering feminist liturgical prayer,* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) p117
[23] Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* (New York: Crossroad, 1983) p350
[24] Gail Ramshaw, *Liturgical Language: Keeping it Metaphoric, Making it Inclusive*, (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996), p29
[25] Nicola Slee, *Praying Like a Woman*, (London: SPCK, 2004), p92
[26] Procter-Smith, *Praying with our eyes open* p122

However, the bread we receive at the Eucharist is not the body that lived for us, but the body that is "broken" for us. Even the liturgical words used to place bread in the hands of the receiver remind us of the violence and sacrifice.

A new way?

Miriam Therese Winter aims to move away from the deeply prescriptive words of the Prayer noting that there is little in the words which describe the joy that the life of Jesus brought to many. If in celebrating the Eucharist we are to be giving thanks, then to give thanks for the joy in the life of Jesus should be a part of that. Winter cites the song of the Magnificat as Mary proclaims Jesus' empowerment of the powerless, poor and oppressed. [27]

John Henson considers *Other Communions of Jesus* and suggests that Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, "May have been responsible, perhaps unintentionally, for the strong emphasis placed on the death of Jesus in our celebrations of Christ's Supper." [28] Paul's letters and instructions were all contextual, thus writing in such detail was probably due to the fact their current practice was "blasphemous".

Henson shares the thoughts of Emma Percy that Christ's first Eucharist came from the body and blood of his own mother. [29] He works through the life of Jesus describing other meals shared which could have been seen as a Eucharist. He heralds the first Eucharist post resurrection as a communion we should take note of; the meal following the walk on the road to Emmaus. After all, this was a communion led by the Risen Christ.[30] Losing the other meals in Jesus' life is to miss so much of who God Incarnate truly is. By including more of the life of Jesus in the sacred prayer of the Eucharist, we can bring in the invisible and make them visible in ways that can empower and transform.

[27] Miriam Therese Winter, *eucharist with a small "e",* (New York: Orbis Books, 2007), p39
[28] John Henson, *Other Communions of Jesus: Eating and Drinking the Good News Way,* (Winchester: O Books, 2006) p xi
[29] Henson, *Other Communions of Jesus* p 140
[30] Henson, *Other Communions of Jesus* p 101

God language

Gail Ramshaw says that "liturgical language" is sacred and must be offered as such.[31] Ramshaw highlights the problematic current use of the Christian metaphor in liturgy, for example, "Christ is King when he ascends the throne of the cross." Metaphor could be used to enhance our understanding of God. Male language for God has been seen as problematic by feminists so an expansive use of metaphors is a simple alternative.

Historically, since God has always been male, and the Christian experience of women has been excluded, maleness has continued to be superior to femaleness. The women in the Bible are frequently portrayed as sinful, promiscuous or weak. Mary Magdalene cried when she saw the Risen Christ, where she should have been powerful and strong. The woman at the well was a serial polygamist, where in reality she could not have chosen divorce. Bathsheba cheated on her beloved husband, even though she was taken from her own bath. For centuries we have been led to believe that Mary Magdalene was a whore and sinner, but is now acknowledged as Jesus' friend and first to recognise the risen Christ.[32] Proctor-Smith declares, "A "public woman" is a prostitute. A woman who claims a place in the public sphere creates symbolic dissonance; she must be a "bad" woman, because a "good" woman is defined by definition marginal, supportive, silent, and invisible."[33]

Male God language perpetuates this since men are portrayed as being closer to the likeness of God than women. "Among other things, this has resulted in the denial of liturgical agency and leadership to women." [34] "For if exclusively male language about God is inadequate, then our liturgical encounter with God is being impoverished." [35] Proctor-Smith suggests that there is an ethical matter at stake here since our relationship with God informs our relationships with other humans, an impoverished relationship with God ultimately leads to an impoverished relationship with one another.

[31] Gail Ramshaw, *Reviving Sacred Speech: The Meaning of Liturgical Language,* (Ohio: OSL Publishing, 2000) p15
[32] Walton, *Feminist Liturgy* p42/43
[33] Procter-Smith, *In Her Own Rite* p5
[34] Procter-Smith, *In Her Own Rite* p73
[35] Procter-Smith, *In Her Own Rite* p73

"Feminist liturgies attempt to guard against limiting God." [36] In naming God, we need to take care not to neatly define God. The Bible contains many images and names for God. Titles such as King and Lord suggest a relationship of "dominance and submission", distancing us from our Creator. [37]

In conclusion

The Eucharistic Prayers are an important part of Christian liturgy. However, they convey God in ways which render women unlikely to see themselves created in God's image. They may perpetuate violence and focus too strongly on a sacrificial death.

As CW was developed, by a team that did include a few women, there was a recognition that women had been invisible in the texts, that the maleness of God was hugely dominant in the way God was named and described, and an acknowledgement that the life of Christ was just as important to salvation as the death and resurrection. However, these have not been fully addressed. There is only one line in Prayer G which points to a feminine nature of God and only two of the Prayers clearly highlight the life of Christ. Thankfully, 'humankind' now replaces all male pronouns.

has been an eschatological shift with the emphasis being on the heavenly banquet rather than looking to the cross. Within the structure of the Prayers, there are now options to choose alternative responses, as well as the option to choose (or even write) alternative Prefaces.

Even though CW was created to be flexible, Earey notes that the flexibility and the toolkit within Common Worship can appear complex, and creating multiple liturgies with all the available resources is time consuming. Nevertheless, we owe it to those who sit in congregations week after week to offer texts which speak into our contexts without excluding individuals or groups. Just as priests are bound by Canon Law to only use authorised texts, we are equally called to "proclaim the Gospel afresh in each generation." [38]

[36] Walton, *Feminist Liturgy* p35
[37] Procter-Smith, *In Her Own Rite* p76
[38] https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/ministry/declaration-assent

I highlighted the danger in the violence of the texts which perpetuates violence in society, particularly when there is little evidence of the salvific nature of the life of Jesus. Equally, the dominant and vengeful male God, who is too often depicted, can make the texts void of love and compassion. The Father being satisfied by the "perfect sacrifice" is too often the theme, neglecting the liberation and feminist theories of atonement. Elaine Storkey powerfully states that "these traditional formulations embody concepts of God and of humanity which are reductionist and dangerous." [39]

The voices, experiences and stories of women are shamefully missing or distorted. In excluding Jesus' life story, his relationship with women is absent. The women's gentleness, compassion and faithfulness are missing from the narrative, even where Mary is mentioned, it is as a "Virgin".

Change is slow, and necessarily so. For the Prayers to encompass a more inclusive theology, there needs to be another lengthy process, for which there appears little appetite. My hope is that in time, a new form of Prayer will be introduced such that violence is irradicated and the joy of the resurrection and life with the Risen Christ is central.

[39] E. Storkey, 'Atonement and Feminism', in *Anvil,* Vol. 11.2, (1994), pp 227 - 228

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