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Beautiful Witness: evangelism

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BEAUTIFUL WITNESS

This edition of Anvil explores evangelism. We have taken this theme from a research project entitled “Beautiful Witness: Practical Theologies of Evangelism in the Church of England” funded by Durham University, and the Whitaker Fund through the Archbishops’ Evangelism Task Group.

This project involved interviewing eight practitioners around the country about their understanding and practice of evangelism. You can see the results of this in the videos that follow the articles. They are wonderful snapshots of contemporary evangelism – heartening, warm and encouraging – beautiful witness indeed.

Evangelism is a tricky word. Some are happy using it, others not so. Perhaps it invokes a certain type of faith, or a certain type of practice. Sociologists of religion have noted, that as values of tolerance and civility have taken preference in post Christian societies like ours, Christians find the notion of evangelism increasingly uncomfortable. It has an uncomfortable connection to colonialism, to TV preachers and religious wars. Perhaps

something to be feared, associated with intolerance and superiority. This raises questions for the church, her place in society, and how the church engages in faithful witness.

Alongside this increasing reticence about evangelism, the Church is placing more emphasis on it. Pope Francis’ apostolic exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*¹ has been influential across church traditions and within the Church of England active encouragement from both our Archbishops, with initiatives such as *Thy Kingdom Come*,² have reinstated the value evangelism.

Whilst the practice of the Church is being rejuvenated in this area there are significant gaps in the academic discourse. Paul Chilcote

¹ Francis, P., *Evangelii Gaudium: Apostolic Exhortation to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World* (Vatican Press); available from http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium_en.pdf.

² See www.thykingdomcome.global

and Lacey Warner's³ comprehensive study of evangelism, written in 2008, explored the missional practice of the Church, and sought to bring the practice and theology of evangelism together by identifying key texts and landmark studies. Here the lack of input from the UK is particularly noticeable. Contributions from British authors are scarce, and highlight the absence of contemporary landmark research in the UK. Chilcote and Lacey also note the disconnect between the practice of evangelism and the theology of evangelism. With such a lack of breadth and quality within the academic discourse, and with little notable work written from this context since, there is a noticeable gap offering the Church little alternative to the prevailing cultural narrative of tolerance.

We hope this issue of ANVIL, in a small way, highlights current research, raises questions, and moves the discourse on. There is a mix of longer articles and shorter reflections on practice through which we hope to bring theology and practice together. Our hope is that held together with the longer articles these shorter reflections on practice help to ground some of the ideas and theory.

The issue begins with findings from a small scale ethnographic study exploring attitudes to evangelism. The study investigates a Street Angels and Club Angels project and highlights the complexities Christians face in holding together values of tolerance and Christian soteriology.

The second article, written by Cate Williams discusses the perceived dichotomy between the social gospel and individual salvation. Here Cate helpfully tracks the historical development of evangelism, from the early evangelicals through to modern developments, critiquing the influence of individualism and consumerism, and arguing for a holistic evangel which emphasises the Kingdom of God.

Similar themes are explored in Cathy Ross' article, *The Joy of the Gospel*. In this article, Cathy uses a series of interviews with practitioners as the back drop to the piece. These are used to unpack the messiness of following the Spirit in mission and in being alongside people as they journey in faith.

These are followed by three shorter reflections on practice. Jamie Klair's article is particularly useful in offering a different cultural lens in which to think about evangelism. Jamie contrasts evangelism in Nigeria to evangelism in Nigerian Pentecostal churches here in the UK. The questions posed here bring into sharp focus the extent to which culture influences our understanding and practices of evangelism, driving us back to reflect on how the church engages in faithful witness. Beth Rookwood reflects on bringing the disciplines of evangelism and listening together. In the final piece, Ben Norton writes about creating environments which help people to talk about faith. We hope this edition of *Anvil* can be a small contribution to the discourse and would love to hear from you in response.

Beth Keith, guest editor.

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³ Chilcote, P. W. and Warner, L. C., eds., *The Study of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).



EXPLORING ATTITUDES TO EVANGELISM:

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF STREET ANGELS AND CLUB ANGELS

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Beth Keith

EXPLORING ATTITUDES TO EVANGELISM: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF STREET ANGELS AND CLUB ANGELS

Along the wall was a row of boxes containing flip flops, bottled water and spikeys¹ which we loaded up into bags. Plastic gloves were handed round and I was shown to a cupboard where various yellow high-vis jackets hung. I chose the smallest one, it was heavy, awkward and way too big. Unaccustomed to having my beliefs displayed so visually, I felt self-conscious. I took a selfie. I didn't look like me. Fortunately, there was little time to ponder, as we collected together in a huddle, one big bundle of yellow, to pray for the night, and for safety on the streets.

It's almost 11pm as we split into groups of two's and three's and begin our patrols. Most people we meet recognise us. Some cheer, some ignore us, and a few join us for a while to hear more about what we're doing. It's a quiet night, we talk to bouncers and members of the police. We hand out our supplies of spikeys and walk a few miles round the streets. With not much going on Luke explains that now he would normally prayer walk; "pray and walk, walk and pray". He knows I'm here to do research, he doesn't pry into why I am doing this or whether I have any religious affiliation. Does he offer the opportunity for us to pray? I'm not sure. If it was offered, I don't take it up, so instead of praying Luke recalls other evenings, with stories of rapes averted, injuries patched up at the resident ambulance, vulnerable drunks reunited with friends or sent home in taxis. Alongside these seemingly normal events Luke talks about the more occasional times when parents write into the project to say thanks, or when a person contacts the Street Angels to ask for support to change their lifestyle.

We turn a corner and Luke points to an imposing Church building which is now called Halo, he explains that several club venues have sacred names or theme nights; "Heaven and Hell, Communion, Transcendence". Luke finds this poignant. The radio² cuts through our chat, Angels are needed to help a vulnerable woman who has drunk too much and lost her friends. But, she's not in our area so other Angels respond. Later, we find a young woman, heels in hand, walking out of town alone. We approach and ask if she needs help, or at least some flip flops. She seems confused and incoherent. She's

lost her friends and is trying to get home but is walking in the wrong direction. She's got no money, but has a phone. Eventually one of the Angels gets through to her Mum. We find her a taxi and ensure the driver knows where to go, and that Mum will be waiting.

Another night, another uniform. This time black t-shirts with the Club Angels logo on the front and printed across the back:

CHAT

HELP

LISTEN

CARE

ps. we're Christians (ask us more if you want)

This team is younger, with everyone between eighteen and twenty-five. Stories are shared about last week's club night, coffee is drunk and the evening prayed for.

We arrive at Tiger Tiger just after 11pm, the bouncers are friendly and we walk to the back of the venue to the quiet room which the Angels work from. One of the volunteers, who used to work behind the bar, shows me round the venue. I lose count of the number of bars, six or seven, with dance floors for different music tastes. The atmosphere in the front room is overpowering, the music deafening. We squeeze through the crowd, and get some looks as people read the backs of our t-shirts. In the office, three women sit in front of a wall of security monitors. I'm introduced as someone who's coming to see what the Angels do. "Ooh the Angels are amazing", "We love love love them being here, they're fantastic", "Can't praise them enough."

We make our way back to Angel base, when through the radio a bouncer asks for assistance. A few minutes later a girl appears, half walking, half carried by her boyfriend and a club angel called Sarah. They sit down, she's given water and promptly hurls into a vomit bucket, as Sarah holds back her hair and helps her up. Over the next hour the three of them sit at a table, as the girl continues to vomit, cry and have a minor panic attack. Sarah calms her down, looks after her, and holds the bucket. After a while the boyfriend starts asking "Who are you angels? Why do you do this?"

¹ A plastic stopper which protects a drink from being spiked with substances.

² Angels work in partnership with other safety agencies using the Businesses Against Crime radios.

EXPLORING ATTITUDES TO EVANGELISM

Evangelism has seen something of a resurgence in recent years, invigorated by Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, *The Joy of the Gospel*,³ and within the Church of England by the active encouragement from both Archbishops. In setting evangelism within their priorities, and introducing initiatives; such as *Thy Kingdom Come*, which actively encourages Christians to pray for evangelism between Ascension and Pentecost, the Archbishops have reinstated the value evangelism within the Church of England. This renewed interest comes after a period during which contextual mission took centre stage, and suspicion or reticence towards evangelism and evangelistic language grew amongst some wings of the evangelical church in Britain.

My interest here was to take an in-depth look at attitudes towards evangelism, amongst evangelicals, and amongst the recipients of their evangelistic practices. To do this I engaged in a small scale reflexive ethnographic study of an evangelistic mission project: Street Angels and Club Angels.

Before turning to discuss research methods and findings, a brief discussion of some aspects of the background context is necessary. To do that, narratives about evangelism within the Church of England are discussed, noting an increasing reticence towards evangelism amongst some evangelicals, which has often been associated to societal changes as Britain develops as a post-Christian society. Attitudes to tolerance and civility are explored and responses within evangelical

churches to these cultural changes are discussed. This highlights the shift to contextual models of mission over proclamatory evangelism, and the ambiguity encountered as evangelicals seek to balance values of tolerance, understandings of salvation, and contextual mission practice.

CULTURAL CHANGES AND EVANGELICAL RESPONSES

The decline in church attendance⁴ and the rise of pluralism and secularization have contributed to post-Christian culture within Britain. Some see this as a substantial move towards secularization, with the prediction that Britain will be a secular society by 2030.⁵ Others offer a challenge to secularization theory pointing to residual beliefs and new forms of spirituality.⁶ Stringer argues that the decline in Christianity reveals other kinds of religiosity previously hidden beneath the dominant Christian discourse.⁷ Examples can be found in studies on club culture,⁸ which support the view that new social forms of religion are developing through emotional and alternative spiritual expressions. Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas have contributed much to the discourse by documenting the rise in spirituality, and discussing the how the turn to the subjective within modern culture undermines traditional religion, placing the self as the centre of meaning.⁹ These studies of new spiritual rituals, alongside studies on the persistence of belief,¹⁰ suggest it is more appropriate to view Britain as post-Christian rather than secular.¹¹ In this post-Christian and pluralistic environment an ethic of tolerance and civility takes

³ Francis, P., *Evangelii Gaudium: Apostolic Exhortation to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World* (Vatican Press, 2013); available from http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium_en.pdf.

⁴ Peter Brierley, *The Tide Is Running Out*, (Swindon: Christian Research, 2000).

Peter Brierley, *Pulling out of the Nosedive*, (Swindon: Christian Research, 2006).

⁵ Steve Bruce, 'The Demise of Christianity in Britain', in *Predicting Religion*, ed. Grace Davie, Paul Heelas, and Linda Woodhead (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003),

⁶ B. Meredith McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context*, (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, 2002), 285–325. Peter Berger, 'The Desecularization of the World', in *The Desecularization of the World*, ed. Peter Berger, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), Grace Davie, 'The Persistence of Institutional Religion in Modern Europe', in *Peter Berger and the Study of Religion*, ed. Linda Woodhead, (London: Routledge, 2001), Aldridge, *Religion*, 100–128.

⁷ Martin D. Stringer, *Contemporary Western Ethnography and the Definition of Religion*, (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008), 110–11.

⁸ For example G. St John, 'Electronic Dance Music Culture and Religion: An Overview 1', *Culture and Religion* 7, no. 1 (2006). K. Moore, 'Exploring Symbolic, Emotional and Spiritual Expression Amongst 'Crasher Clubbers'', in *Religion and Youth*, ed. S. Collins-Mayo, and P. Dandelion, (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), G. Lynch, and E. Badger, 'The Mainstream Post-Rave Club Scene as a Secondary Institution: A British Perspective', *Culture and Religion* 7, no. 1 (2006).

⁹ Paul Heelas, Linda Woodhead with Benjamin Seel, Bronislaw Szerszynski, Karin Tusting, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 77–128.

¹⁰ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

¹¹ Mathew Guest, *Evangelical Identity, and Contemporary Culture*, (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), 2.

precedence compelling not just a 'tolerance of others' beliefs but of being 'tolerable to others.'¹²

Understandings of contextualisation shape the extent to which Christians and churches view themselves as counter-cultural or enculturated, shaping both the gospel proclaimed and the means of proclamation. Contrasting positions across evangelical wings of the Church of England could be characterised in the work of Rico Tice and Steve Hollinghurst. Tice, in *Honest Evangelism*, advocates resilience and the proclamation of truth in an increasingly hostile culture.¹³ In contrast, Hollinghurst in *Mission-Shaped Evangelism* advocates for a fully enculturated approach.¹⁴ These stances emphasise the polarities of understanding, whereas many evangelicals and evangelical churches hold their faith in the tension between resistance to modern culture¹⁵ and accommodation to it.¹⁶

Christian Smith, writing about American evangelicalism, uses a subcultural approach to argue that evangelicals have flourished in this tension; neither accommodating fully nor entirely resisting modern culture. He refers to this as engaged orthodoxy,¹⁷ here the theology of a counter community sits in tension with the missiological drive to engage. Accordingly, evangelicals can capitalize on culturally pluralistic environments, socially constructing subcultural distinction and engagement, emphasizing connection and tension between themselves and others.¹⁸ This tension can be summed up in the phrase 'in the world but not of it'. Mathew Guest, writing from a British perspective, draws on Smith's concept of engaged orthodoxy to critique evangelical developments,¹⁹ showing the ways in which evangelicals have embraced some cultural norms, whilst retaining some cultural distinction.²⁰

Several writers working within the discipline of

sociology of religion address attitudes of reticence towards evangelism. Hunter describes the ethic of tolerance and civility in post-Christian environments²¹ as standing in direct opposition to the exclusivism of Christian soteriology: that salvation is found through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Evangelism, standing in the shadow of the shameful history of colonialism, TV preachers and religious wars, may be perceived as something to be feared, associated with intolerance and superiority, an embarrassment for Christians and offensive to non-Christians.

Evidence from sociological studies on evangelicalism show that as evangelicals embrace a code of civility and tolerance,²² discomfort about evangelising is reported and models of evangelism embrace social action, popular culture and play down conversion.²³ Guest writes

It is no longer seen as acceptable to openly affirm views that are socially offensive or which emphasise the radical difference between those inside and those outside of the faith.²⁴

Guest identifies evangelical developments in the UK, arguing that incarnational mission has brought a radical accommodation of beliefs through which traditional understandings of the gospel are being reconfigured.²⁵ He argues that ecumenism, social action and engagement with popular culture have liberalised evangelical values,²⁶ and so blurred concepts of evangelism. This raises questions for evangelical exclusivist soteriology and the practice of evangelism. In such an environment, mission practices which embrace culture may question previously held aspects of soteriology which emphasise differences between Christian and non-Christians.

The perceived failure of the 'Decade of Evangelism' in

¹² James D. Hunter, *Evangelicalism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 151-54, 183.

¹³ Rico Tice, R., *Honest Evangelism*, (Epsom, Surrey: The Good Book Company, 2015).

¹⁴ Steve Hollinghurst, *Mission-Shaped Evangelism: The Gospel in Contemporary Culture*, (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2010).

¹⁵ Zigmunt Bauman, *Community: Seeking Security in an Insecure World*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001).

¹⁶ Alan Aldridge, *Religion in the Contemporary World* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 126-8.

Peter Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1973), 156.

¹⁷ Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 1-19.

¹⁸ Ibid., 153.

¹⁹ Guest, *Evangelical Identity*, 17.

²⁰ Hunter, 183-4.

²¹ Ibid., 151-54, 183.

²² Ibid., 183-4.

²³ Guest, M., *Evangelical Identity*, 37-45.

²⁴ Ibid., 91.

²⁵ Ibid., 166.

²⁶ Ibid., 35-45.

the 1990s,²⁷ followed by the rise in contextualisation, and an increasingly post-Christian context which encourages civility and tolerance, have together contributed to the shift away from evangelism as proclamation. This shift is evident in the lack of literature written on proclamation in the UK since 2000.

During these years the number of books written about contextual mission far exceeds the number of books written about proclamation, with books written on evangelism tending to emphasise contextual factors, for example, *Mission Shaped Evangelism: The Gospel in Contemporary Culture*,²⁸ *Evangelism after Christendom*,²⁹ and *Evangelism in a Spiritual Age: Communicating Faith in a Changing Culture*.³⁰ Whilst these developments have contributed to the missional practice of the Church, they also reveal a possible crisis of confidence in the language and understanding of evangelism.

The shift away from evangelism and the rise of contextual theology and fresh expressions of church can be perceived as setting up incarnational mission in opposition to proclamatory evangelism, with the current renewed interest in evangelism within the Church of England seen by some as a step back from developments made in contextual mission. Whilst this is not necessarily the case, a lack of breadth and quality in theological discourse on the relationship between contextual mission and evangelism contributes to a lack of clarity in this area. Stone writing about the theology and practice of Christian witness writes of the crisis in evangelism, identifying a gap in the theological study of evangelism and noting that resistance to and avoidance of thinking theologically about evangelism is powerful. Those who think theologically rarely think about evangelism, and those who think about evangelism rarely take the discipline of theology very seriously.³¹

Paul Chilcote and Lacey Warner, in *The Study of Evangelism*, also note the false dichotomy between theory and practice regarding evangelism, the scarcity in scholarly literature, and the difficulties in locating landmark studies.³² They note that much of the literature on evangelism is practical “how-to” guides of

a particular form or style which tend to lack theological engagement. They also stress the increasing number of texts from the academy which address the biblical and theological heritage of the Church but offer little guidance in terms of application. The lack of breadth and quality within the academic discourse has left a noticeable gap offering the Church little resource to navigate the cultural challenges within a prevailing narrative of civility and tolerance. So, it is in this context that I wanted to explore attitudes to evangelism, with the hope of offering some insights into current understandings and practices.

RESEARCH METHODS

This small-scale study takes a reflexive ethnographic approach and draws on Smith’s work tracking subcultural narratives and theological rationales.³³ It is limited as ethnographic research due to the time constraints, however draws on ethnographic interviewing and participant observation methods, which have been used extensively in studies of religious practice and ritual.³⁴ The Angels project was appealing as a case study, because it interweaves practices of evangelism with social action, ecumenism and engagement with popular culture, in line with developing trends in evangelicalism.³⁵ In addition its relationship with secular partners within the city centre night-time economy made this an interesting case in which to analyse internal and external cultural discourse about the project. As such it offered the potential to reveal insights into how volunteers work within the tensions of engaged orthodoxy, how they engage with an ethic of civility and tolerance, and how recipients of the project perceived and evaluated the ministry.

I was interested in tracking the Angels’ practices, the rationale behind these, and how they were perceived by other secular organisations. To do this it was important to interview volunteers from the project, Church of England representatives who had oversight for the project, and representatives from the night-time economy. The fieldwork was conducted in May

²⁷ Bob Jackson, *What Makes Churches Grow*, (London: Church House Publishing, 2015), 28–30.

²⁸ Hollinghurst, *Mission-Shaped Evangelism: The Gospel in Contemporary Culture*.

²⁹ Bryan Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, 2007).

³⁰ Steven Croft, ed., *Evangelism in a Spiritual Age: Communicating Faith in a Changing Culture* (London: Church House Publishing, 2005).

³¹ Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, 17.

³² Paul Chilcote, and Lacey Warner, eds., *The Study of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), xiii, xix.

³³ Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 121–127.

³⁴ Charlotte Aull Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, (London: Routledge, 1999), 95.

³⁵ Guest, *Evangelical Identity*, 35–45.

and June 2014, during which I participated as a team member with the Club Angels and Street Angels. I also conducted six interviews with volunteers, interviews with representatives from the night-time economy (the police, a club owner and member of the city council) and an interview with an archdeacon who oversaw the project. The interviews were recorded, during which I made notes on non-verbal points of interests; hesitations, repetitions, and body language.³⁶ In analysing the data I combined notes from my research journal with interview transcripts and completed a themed analysis.

Interviewing is a joint process in which both interviewee and researcher construct knowledge and are together 'involved in meaning-making work',³⁷ therefore a reflexive approach is critical.³⁸ Whilst rejecting the notion of a purely constructed model,³⁹ I was aware that if interviewees felt I was either internal or external to the project (representing either Christian, or secular values) it could affect their responses. In reflecting on the potential social factors and power related issues which could affect the interviewee response⁴⁰ I decided to introduce myself as someone engaging in research for my studies as Durham University. I chose not to mention any religious affiliation, as I wanted interviewees to respond to me without perceiving me as internal (Christian) or external (non-Christian) to the project. In not stating my religious convictions the interviewees were given an element of ambiguity.

I began by asking a few introductory questions, partly to put interviewees at ease and to gather information about the project. This also allowed me to track whether perceptions about the project differed between internal team members and external recipients of the project. I then pushed interviewees' on whether the religious nature of the project made a difference, whether they had any concerns about the project and its Christian ethos.

FINDINGS

The themed analysis of data from the fieldwork was particularly revealing in four areas, which are discussed below, namely; the function of engaged orthodoxy as motivation and explanation, the tensions in using the in-group/out-group language present in this type

of approach, the differences in levels of discomfort in talking about evangelism between internal team members and external recipients of the project, and finally, the differences between internal and external interviewees in evaluating the added value of faith to the project.

ENGAGED ORTHODOXY AS MOTIVATION AND EXPLANATION

Evidence from interviews with team members demonstrated the ways in which the rhetoric of engaged orthodoxy shaped the practices of the project. The theological rationale of engagement acted as a recruitment tool, and as motivation to sustain what was a costly volunteering experience.

Jess: "Christians should not be people who sit in stone buildings and pray silent prayers to a God who may or may not exist. Christians are those who are wanting to be in the world serving people because that's what Jesus did."

Liz: "We can go back to God's people and say look there's a world out there, Jesus came for the world, let's turn up in it."

Team members, whilst having a rhetoric for engagement, also raised concerns about the tension felt in balancing their beliefs with engagement with the night time city centre culture.

Jess: "I wonder whether they [the Church] see something inherently wrong in the vision but I do think we manage to toe the line of being in the world but not of the world."

The rhetoric of being engaged and distinctly Christian appeared to envision and energise their practices and was used to recruit volunteers. However, there were suggestions that perhaps this project was more engaged than their fellow churchgoers could stomach.

THE USE OF IN-GROUP/OUT-GROUP LANGUAGE

Team members used in-group/out-group phrases in their discourse, such as 'the outside world' and 'bridging a gap', emphasising differences between

³⁶ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, 96.

³⁷ James, A. Holstein, and Jaber F. Gubrium, *The Active Interview*, (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 1995). 4

³⁸ Andrew Sayer, *Method in Social Science: A Realist Approach*, 2nd ed., (London: Routledge, 1992), 39-43.

³⁹ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, p.96.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 108.

Christians and other people. They saw themselves as a distinct group trying to connect with a different group of people and how they attempted to overcome the differences between them.

Jess: “When we first went in we were aliens, those funny Christian people, crazy Christians, there was the element of alienation, what bridged that gap was showing people that we’re normal people.”

Liz: “It’s about breaking their assumptions, we’ve turned up in their world.”

This was in marked contrast to those interviewed who were external to the project; representatives from the police, the city council, club owners and staff, who did not use in-group/out-group language, instead they talked about the project using the language of partnership and community involvement.

Team members returned back to this in-group/out-group language throughout interviews, defining themselves a culturally separate from the night-time culture of the city, whilst at the same time being highly uncomfortable with exclusivist soteriology. They appeared hypersensitive to the offense of evangelism in setting itself apart, whilst embracing a language which enhanced in-group/out-group dynamics. This posed a confusing mix of values, in which the values of being tolerant and civil clashed with their soteriological motivations to engage in evangelism and witness.

DISCOMFORT IN TALKING ABOUT EVANGELISM

All interviewees showed a wariness towards proclamatory evangelism, and gave evidence to demonstrate the importance of the values of civility and tolerance. Certain sensitivities, about evangelism were discussed by all interviewees, team members and those external to the project, with all interviewees keen to stress the pastoral aspects of the Angels’ practice.

Luke: “It’s making the city a safer place, and it’s protecting the more vulnerable people.”

Joanne: “they bring the pastoral, soft, and reassuring safeguarding approach to the situation.”

All interviewees were negative about any type of manipulative evangelism, or church recruitment.

Michael: “There should be no manipulation here.”

Joanne: “I know that they’re predominantly a Christian volunteer force they’re not forcing Christian approaches on people.”

One team member discussed her approach to

evangelism as her ‘personal ethic’.

Jess: “I will respond if asked, and the great thing about that is that I often am asked, ‘why are you doing this for free’? And I say ‘it’s because I’m a Christian’, and they say ‘what’s that got to do with it’? And I say ‘there’s a God that loves you’ but that’s not the first agenda.”

The value of tolerance and civility appeared to be the dominant value amongst team members shaping their practices and beliefs. This was made noticeably evident when a couple of Street Pastors visited the project. Street Pastors are a similar type of organisation to the Street Angels. In reaction, volunteers made defensive remarks, concerned that the Street Pastors might not be civil or tolerant. They were concerned that if the Street Pastors ‘evangelised’ it may affect the relationship the Angels had with their partners in the city.

Team members showed signs of discomfort in talking about sharing their faith with others. They also engaged in a hypersensitive and apologetic attitude to how the project could be viewed by others:

Liz: “I went in to the club fully expecting he’d say no... making every apology in advance for how bad it might go and he just said, ‘yeah that sounds great’.”

However, interviewees representing secular agencies were not opposed to people coming to faith through the project as long as the project complied with tolerant values. Furthermore, some saw it as a symbiotic transaction and vocalised it that way.

James: “Part of the agreement is that we are allowing them to be inside the venue and so they can connect with a younger crowd that may not necessarily be part of the church. And they get to have mutual conversations about their faith.

Joanne: “I think the role of the Street Angels absolutely fits with their Christian values, so it sound like a match made in heaven...we meet each other’s needs.

IDENTIFYING THE VALUE OF FAITH TO THE PROJECT

There were clear differences, between those internal and external to the project, in the way they talked about the value of faith to the project. This was particularly evident when interviewees were asked if the religious nature of the project affected partnership working and whether it was important the project retained its Christian ethos.

Team members seemed tentative and paused for some time before answering, referencing other perspectives or points of view, seemingly reticent to offer their perspective. This hesitant response was markedly different to their

responses to other questions.

Liz: “I think it would definitely depend who you asked.”

Luke: “For me the project is very much about... but that’s not necessarily everyone’s perspective so they won’t have the same views. There’s part of me that says it does [need to be Christian] and part of me that says it doesn’t.”

Some team members also had concerns about the suggestion that Christian projects brought something different, some particular added value by nature of their faith basis.

Michael: “As soon as you start talking about what particular things a Christian project would have it suggests others wouldn’t, and I wouldn’t want to suggest that.”

This was in marked contrast to those external to the project, who did not refer to others perspectives but explained clearly and confidently how the Christian ethos of the project brought added value, ensured accountability, and provided a hook for getting volunteers.

Joanne: “They don’t get seen as vigilantes, because you know who they are, they’re Christians. So you have a protocol and framework, that ticks the boxes in terms of safeguarding. It’s got reassurances built in because it comes from the church.”

James: “Because it’s Christian it’s less authoritarian. Yes it’s good to see the police on the streets, but that’s more from a security point of view, for aggression and things like that. But for those ladies that are going out and maybe have lost their friends, and need help in other ways, it’s a good reassurance that there’s people in the city centre who can help.”

DISCUSSION

The study showed that the rhetoric of engaged orthodoxy played a role in shaping the practices of the project. It acted as a recruitment tool and as motivation to sustain what was a costly volunteering experience. Whilst evangelism lay at the heart of volunteers’ motivation, it also posed a confusing mix of values in the social context of civility. This appeared to raise more questions for Christians volunteering within the project than other partners, with Christian interviewees being more tentative in promoting the value of a religious project than those representing secular organisations and businesses.

To consider these tensions further research on a 24-7 Prayer mission project in Ibiza by Sai-Chun Lau is used to compare practices and attitudes to engaged orthodoxy.⁴¹ This project aims to connect with club culture, firstly, by running club nights and secondly, by being incarnational in clubs by wearing similar clothes, joining in, but refraining from alcohol and drugs. They retain their cohesion and orthodoxy by grouping together for extended prayer and worship and suggest that through this they can be incarnate in the club culture and yet retain their subcultural Christian identity.

The Angels take a very different approach. There is little prayer or worship that creates the core values of the group. Their theology of being present in the world is the driving motivation, but in being present they are also identifiably Christian by their uniform, unlike the ‘incarnational’ presence of 24-7 Prayer team members. The Angels are fully engaged in the city centre through their commitment to work within the city’s values of tolerance and yet retain a distinct identity through their uniformed presence. In some ways this mirrors the distinct identity markers of other city centre agencies, for example, the Police, Paramedics, and Council Workers who each have a uniform. Even the bouncers, though less formal, wear a uniform of all black.

The wearing of uniforms provides identifiable markers showing the Angels are working in partnership with the city centre and that they are accountable and legitimate. The uniforms also act as public markers of Christian belief. Whilst not all volunteers are Christians, it is well known that the Angels are a Christian volunteer force. This takes belief out of the private sphere, so those encountering the Angels feel able to ask questions about faith. For volunteers, the uniform also has an effect on their confidence in talking about their faith. The presence of the uniform has, in effect, already ‘outed’ them as Christians, and so when opportunities arise to share their faith volunteers report feeling confident because the private/public divide about belief has already been crossed. In accommodating to the ethic of civility and tolerance, the Angels have been welcomed into the city, and given an identifiable role as Christian witnesses engaging in pastoral care. This has the effect of enabling a more orthodox evangelistic approach of proclamation and presence than is evident in the 24-7 Prayer mission.

The nature of the tension between engagement and orthodoxy found here, creates both uncertainty and

⁴¹ Sai-Chun Lau, ‘Churches Ibiza: Evangelical Christianity and Club Culture’, *Culture and Religion* 7, no. 1 (2006), 77-92.

opportunity. In developing a more engaged approach the Angels risk a less cohesive sense of orthodoxy, and yet this opens up the possibility for new modes of evangelism to form within the culture of the night-time economy. It is possible to see how this approach, balancing the tensions in accommodating to culture, has developed away from models of incarnational mission seen in the 24-7 Prayer club project, and perhaps offers a development on from incarnational mission to include a stronger emphasis on evangelism. This project appears in some ways to have also moved beyond mode earlier of evangelism which emphasised differences between those inside and outside the faith. Whilst the rhetoric of engaged orthodoxy proved a confusing mix for team members to articulate their practices are an example of witness as identifiable Christian presence, moving faith from the private to the public sphere, making itself known alongside other partners in the city.

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PIONEERING EVANGELISM:

SEEING THE
WHOLE PICTURE

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Cate Williams

PIONEERING EVANGELISM: SEEING THE WHOLE PICTURE

INTRODUCTION

What is the point of evangelism? This isn't an expression of exasperation, it is a real question. What is the point? What are we hoping to achieve? So often, the way evangelism is spoken about gives the impression that the ultimate point is to grow the church. We are concerned about the statistics about church attendance, so in order to reverse the trend we need to prioritise evangelism. Or perhaps we are concerned about the eternal destination of individual souls? But with less people, both in and outside the church motivated by thinking ahead in this way, we might need an alternative perspective.

In my work for Gloucester Diocese, I am concerned with the breadth of mission, from social responsibility through to evangelism. I am conscious that while I, alongside the pioneer ministers in the Diocese, integrate these things and understand mission holistically, across the church in general, social responsibility and evangelism often seem to pull in different directions. My concern in this article therefore is to explore why this might be and to suggest some ways that the Good News might be expressed that keeps social responsibility front and centre in the message that is being proclaimed.

This is less of a new project than I realised when I started. One hundred years ago, Walter Rauschenbusch wrote this: "But even today many ministers have a kind of dumb-bell system of thought, with the social gospel at one end and individual salvation at the other end, and an attenuated connection between them."¹ He advocated for a rounded system of doctrine able to hold the two together but the problem persists. There have indeed been developments in theology, notably Liberation Theology, that take this forward, however the division remains pervasive and the project needs further work. Perhaps the distinctive theology arising out of the work of pioneering will help us take

significant steps forward with the work of integration.

This article begins by outlining the nature of the problem of evangelism in our contemporary context. It explores the distinctive approach of pioneer ministry as an avenue for widening our evangelistic message and some suggestions are made about avenues to explore to take this conversation forwards. This forms a part of longer research project that is exploring 'earthed spirituality' within the practice of pioneer ministers and will take this question into ethnographic fieldwork.

Before I proceed I should state that evangelism is being defined here as any verbal communication of an aspect of the Good News of Christ. This sits roughly in the middle of the range of definitions, which range from the broadest which claim all proclamation of the Gospel as evangelism, whether spoken or rooted in action, through to the narrowest which only uses the term when there is a specific challenge to commitment.² I will also assume an approach which takes seriously the ethical questions associated with evangelism and is founded in positive principles of reciprocity, honesty, humility and respect.³

CHANGING CONTEXT, CHANGING LANGUAGE

Our changing context is in the background of the discussion that we need to have, in particular, the way in which our cultural realities of individualism, consumerism and post-Christendom change the way in which the same words are heard. The language that is assumed as the norm for evangelism is one inherited from a very different culture and context, in particular the Christendom context of the eighteenth century, the era of influential evangelicals such as George Whitefield and the Wesleys. Their use of language and turn of phrase were contextually appropriate, but when we use the same inherited language without regard for our changed context, we run into difficulties.

Within Christendom, church and society were conflated so that to invite an individual to take Christian discipleship seriously was also to invite them to participate in a more fully Christian way within Christendom society. The message we have inherited which has individual conversion at its heart was born within this context and had deep kingdom resonance. However, in our current context where the separation

¹ Walter Rauschenbusch, *A theology for the social gospel* (reprint by Martino 2011; New York: Macmillan 1918), 9.

² For examples of the range see Bryan Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom* (Grand Rapids MI: Brazos 2007), 21 and Philip R. Meadows, *Entering the divine embrace: towards an ancient-future Wesleyan theology of evangelism* Wesley and Methodist Studies Vol. 3 (2011), 3-30; 7.

³ Roger Greenway, 'The Ethics of Evangelism' *Calvin Theological Journal* 28 (1993), 147-54.

between church and society is significant and individualism rife, we cannot assume that the societal implications will automatically be understood.

The early evangelicals were working in an era that contained the early seeds of what became the individualism and consumerism that we know today. They contextualised the gospel successfully, in a way that was appropriate for their time. However, when we use the same language within our different context where the early seeds of individualism have become fully grown, we find that we are inadvertently proclaiming the 'gospel' of the individual. Philip Meadows, in discussing the early evangelical paradigm writes: "There lies within the paradigm itself the seeds of its own undoing, especially in its captivity to the individualistic bent of modernity."⁴ He discusses how easily within our own context, the invitation to personal salvation can become distorted into private spirituality, and how conversion can come to mean merely an inward journey rather than a visibly transformed life. He continues: "The danger here is that such anthropocentric goals can be attained with or without the activity of God, and made available for individual consumption with or without the summons to costly discipleship."⁵ The final danger, he writes, is the temptation for churches to downplay the cost of discipleship and think merely of the effectiveness of evangelistic practices in terms of making the kind of shallow convert that might most quickly fill our churches.

Societal transformation was in fact the aim of the early evangelicals. Their evangelism was deeply connected with a desire to see society transformed in the light of the Gospel. However, as William Abraham explains, the language they used laid the foundations which led to a disconnect between individual salvation and societal transformation, with aspects of transformation dropped from the priorities towards the end of the 19th century. The result is that "there is little left but a message of sin and salvation that has relegated eschatology to the last days of history, as we can see happening in the fragile theology of D. L. Moody. Modern evangelists for the most part inherit this anthropocentric emphasis."⁶

A solution to this problem, is to be explicit about the fact that kingdom rather than personal conversion is

the *telos* or end goal of evangelism. Abraham was the first to suggest this shift of focus. In his classic 1989 text 'the logic of Evangelism', he wrote: "Over against those who construe evangelism as the proclamation of the gospel and against those who construe it as church growth, the thesis presented and argued here is that we should construe evangelism as primary initiation into the kingdom of God."⁷ This is critical as we discuss individualism and consumerism, as the focus on kingdom automatically ensures that the gospel is communicated and received as something that is more than just about me. When received this way, as initiation into the kingdom rather than a gift for an individual to receive, then the dumb-bells referred to by Rauschenbusch are connected from the start. The societal outworking of discipleship isn't a difficult add-on but rather a part of the Good News itself.

If we are serious about having kingdom at the heart of our evangelism, then our language as we speak of the Good News of Christ, needs to change. We need to be careful not to be subtly reinforcing the worst habits of our society as we speak about what God can do for an individual. Sadly, too much of the evangelistic literature available falls into this trap. I cannot quote specific resources without naming and shaming respected organisations so I will leave the reader to explore what is on the market. What is evident is that too much focuses on how knowing God in my life is liberating for me, but lacks a community element. Too often, there is no mention of what sin might mean other than not loving God.

Stone, writing on this approach to evangelism considers that: "One of the enormous challenges of Christian evangelism today is that in order to learn once again to bear the faithful and embodied witness to the Spirit's creative 'social work,' it may have to reject as heretical the pervasive characterization of salvation as 'a personal relationship with Jesus.'"⁸ This isn't to say that our relationship with God isn't personal, but rather that the invitation is not into a one-to-one relationship but instead into communion with all creation in God. Our language needs to reflect this: the short-hand of "a personal relationship with Jesus" is all too easily co-opted into an individualistic agenda. In addition, the fact that I am not really liberated until I have allowed my relationship with God to free me in my relationships

⁴ Meadows *Ancient-future*, 5-6.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans 1989), 59.

⁷ Ibid, 13.

⁸ Stone, *Evangelism*, 17.

with others and my relationship to wealth and consumerism, is rarely included within the core evangel.

A part of the difficulty we are facing is how little is known of Christianity by the people around us. When Wesley and his contemporaries were preaching, there was better knowledge about what it meant to commit to Christ. Stuart Murray has reflected extensively on the implications of post-Christendom for Christian mission. In his words: “In Western culture, until recently, the story was known and church was a familiar institution. Evangelism meant encouraging those who already knew the story to live by it and inviting those already familiar with church to participate actively.”⁹

When the story isn’t known, our short-hand presentations can be heard in very different ways to our intention. Whereas a call to repentance and to return to Christ is heard positively by someone who has a background understanding of core Christian values and is being called back to taking them seriously, it is heard very differently without that understanding and against the background of the individualism and consumerism proclaimed by our society. The unconditional love of God needs to be known before repentance and forgiveness can be received as good news. Heard without this it feels like judgement and is frequently rejected as such. On the other hand, a message that speaks about the value in an individual’s life of personal relationship with Jesus, heard against the background of consumerism and individualism, easily becomes spirituality to aid personal wellbeing rather than a call to discipleship. All of this means that in our post-Christendom context, the evangelism that is needed to communicate effectively is very different from that which was appropriate within Christendom.

Finney, in exploring this question, writes: “The question many modern Christians need to face is, “Have we assumed that the good news which is rightly given to Antioch is also appropriate for Athens? Have we taken it for granted that a gospel whose content was suitable for the church is satisfactory when the message is taken out of the church?”¹⁰ He writes here of church, but might just have easily written of Christendom. Assertions of faith are heard differently when taken from a post-Christendom perspective. He continues: “Our ‘church’ gospel has focused on the great truths of incarnation and atonement, of human sin and salvation.

Indeed . . . in some evangelical circles it has almost been reduced to a formula. Church people and those who were brought up in the life of the church are familiar with the words preachers use and the worldview from which they speak. . . . But that seems to cut little ice with those not brought up in Christian surroundings.”¹¹

The full implications of our post-Christendom context are drawn out by Murray: “To re-configure evangelism for post-Christendom, we must disavow some expressions of evangelism in Christendom. Disavowal involves recognising that once effective strategies are no longer appropriate, repentance for attitudes and methods that were inconsistent with the gospel and rooting out vestiges that distort evangelism today.”¹² This means we face the complex task of disavowing much that is widely assumed and accepted within the practice of evangelism.

This change of approach is likely to be uncomfortable as, on the surface at least, it appears to challenge core beliefs. Many Christians have been exposed to the idea that faith should be expressed in particular ways, the formula that Finney refers to, indeed the same one that was quoted in the Scripture Union tract. It takes courage to face the question.

TOWARDS A HOLISTIC EVANGEL

Having outlined the nature of the difficulty we face, the remainder of this article suggests some potential ways forwards, new ways of speaking about the Good News of Christ which are more deeply life-giving, having avoided the traps of over-contextualisation. Pioneers have been significant in beginning to develop this new faith language. The contextual approach that is at the core of this approach to ministry means that pioneers are always engaged in a dialogue between the tradition as they have received it and the concerns, questions and thought patterns of those they encounter. This means that they are facing the difficult questions expressed above and seeking a way forwards. What follows is some themes that are beginning to emerge.

MULTIFACETED

Post-Christendom evangelism is not about seeking one new theme to replace one old one. Rather, as Murray puts it, we are: “searching for multiple contact points with the gospel in a culture no longer dominated (as

⁹ Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom* (Bletchley: Paternoster 2004), 2.

¹⁰ John Finney, *Emerging Evangelism* (London: DLT 2004), 98.

¹¹ Finney *Emerging*, 98-99.

¹² Murray *Post-Christendom*, 227.

Christendom was) by guilt, employing the full range of New Testament imagery and learning to relate the story to contemporary angst and yearnings.”¹³ That means flexible conversations with an awareness of the fullness of the evangel so that gospel connections can be made with the life stories people are sharing.

Bosch shares this perspective: We cannot capture the evangel and package it in four or five “principles”. There is no universally applicable master plan for evangelism, no definitive list of truths people only have to embrace in order to be saved. We may never limit the gospel to our understanding of God and salvation. We can only witness in humble boldness and bold humility to our understanding of that gospel.¹⁴

Post-Christendom evangelism therefore is often about responsive conversation rather than a fixed message. Conversation flows and connection points are sought between life experience and the gospel.

HOLISTIC

This study has a particular focus, which is to seek those strands that support the partnership of evangelism and social responsibility and avoid association with the anti-gospel messages inherent in individualism and consumerism. We are seeking the themes which keep kingdom as the end goal rather than the salvation of the individual. Even the broadening of connection points advocated above can so easily fall into the trap of offering each individual what they need in a way which is once again held captive to individualism. There are however multiple themes that avoid this divergence. Murray considers that:

Reconfiguring evangelism will also mean rediscovering the gospel of the kingdom: liberation rather than personal fulfilment, reconciliation rather than justification, transformation rather than stability; focussing on hope rather than faith . . . Who knows what good news a church on the margins might rediscover.¹⁵

The vision he outlines which ensures that we are clear about the telos, the end goal of evangelism helps enormously. When we understand that the reason we are concerned about evangelism is ultimately because

we are about the work of the kingdom of God then the rest falls into place. We are less likely to fall into the traps set by our cultural context if our goal is the kingdom of God rather than the salvation of individuals or church growth, and more likely to be motivated to participate in evangelism.

TRANSFORMATIONAL

Andrew Williams considers that the gospel: “cannot aim at satisfying rather than transforming people.”¹⁶ He discusses how peace and comfort in tragedy is a part of God’s grace, but only within the context of its being a word about the Lordship of Christ in all realms of life, then continues: “This personal response that is called for is a call to service. Jesus’ invitation to follow him is asking people whom they want to serve. Evangelism is therefore call to service – to win people to Jesus is to win their allegiance to God’s priorities.”¹⁷

The service of Christ can sometimes be expressed as if service was a burden, another thing on the to-do list for busy people, and therefore not something that can be received as good news. This perhaps is why it is so rarely front and centre in the evangel. Perhaps the metaphor that Brueggemann employs is helpful here. He writes of the invitation to participate in a different story:

Thus, I propose that evangelism is indeed to do again and again what Jews and Christians have always done, to tell “the old, old story,” but to do so in ways that impact every aspect of our contemporary life, public and personal. The stories themselves are vehicles whereby all things are made new.¹⁸

Against the background of the story of faith is the fact that we have been living life by stories which are less life-giving. He writes that: “we come with our imagination already saturated with other stories to which we have already made trusting (even if unwitting) commitment.”¹⁹ The implication for evangelism is this:

In the matrix of evangelism, we are prepared to notice that these stories we have embraced without great intentionality are not adequate. . . The reason they are less than adequate stories is that they lack the life-

¹³ Ibid, 229-30.

¹⁴ Bosch *Transforming*, 420.

¹⁵ Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 232.

¹⁶ Andrew Williams, “Re-experiencing Evangelism in the City”, *International Review of Mission* Volume 105, Issue 1 July 2016, 28.

¹⁷ Ibid, 28.

¹⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism* (Nashville TN: Abingdon Press 1993), 11.

¹⁹ Ibid.

giving power of holiness out beyond ourselves to which we must have access if we are to live fully human lives.²⁰

This then links service of Christ to liberation as we seek to live fully human lives, something which is undoubtedly good news.

LIBERATIVE

We are offered freedom in Christ: it is beneficial to stop and consider what this means and whether there are more freedoms offered than freedom from guilt, for all that the latter is part of the liberation. Freedom is also offered in all aspects of life which bind us, whether physical, emotional or spiritual.

Liberation theology is in the background of this discussion and informs the work of many who are working with those for whom economic poverty is a reality. Andy Freeman expresses how it resonates within society: “This commitment to the least in society is particularly resonant for a generation growing with an increased sense of commitment to justice.”²¹ This means that there is a readiness to receive as good news insight that speaks liberation into these situations.

Leonardo Boff, as a liberation theologian writes of how the gospel rightly prioritises the poor: “This comes from the essence of God who, being life, feels attracted to those who have lost life, because they are denied life by oppression. . . . No-one is for them, they are made invisible, that is why God takes their side, comes to liberate them, and they are the first beneficiaries of the new order that is the reign of God.”²²

Counter to the untruths of our society, this prioritisation of the poor is also liberative for those in better economic situations. When Christians can set aside society’s barriers between people, then we live free. Boff writes: “To live this dimension of love is to be free. Offense, humiliation, and violence keep us imprisoned in bitterness, and often with a spirit of revenge. Forgiveness frees us from these bonds, makes us fully free. Free to love.”²³

Richard Rohr shares this perspective, this time from the North American context: “Any overly protected life does not know deeply or broadly. So Jesus did not

call us to the poor and to the pain just to be helpful to them, although that is wonderful too. He called us there for fundamental solidarity with the real and for the transformation of ourselves.”²⁴ The result of this is liberation for all concerned: “The ones we think we are saving end up saving us and, in the process, redefine the very meaning of salvation.”²⁵

The process of liberation is not fast or easy as we are held tightly by the bindings of our cultural norms. Stone describes the process of moving into freedom in Christ as detoxification: “Given the intense and ongoing culture of conversion within which we live today, there is no reason to believe that conversion to Christianity will take place any faster. Indeed, there is every reason to believe that the process will resemble an intensive and sustained process of detoxification.”²⁶ There is little doubt that detoxification is liberative and can be received as good news for those with ears to hear.

Thus, the liberation offered in Christ is bigger and more wonderful than what is often expressed evangelism. The full message deserves to be heard.

COMMUNAL

This is one of those things that is both a calling and a blessing, but not easy in a society that doesn’t know how to do community. It is a thread running through all that has been said up to this point, with my liberation tied up with the liberation of others. We don’t do this alone, we live with others, in God. This is a radical message in an individualistic society, and once we have begun to let go of the hold our society’s narratives have on us, immensely life giving and very much good news.

Samuel Wells in his discussion of the difference between ‘being with’ and ‘doing for’ as forms of Christian service describes a community where all have something to offer, whether their starting point is that of privilege or that of disadvantage. He writes:

The abundant community believes that what we have is enough; we have the capacity to provide what we need in the face of sorrow, aging, illness, celebration, fallibility, misfortune, and joy; we organize in a context

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Andy Freeman, *Francis of Assisi*, in Cathy Ross and Jonny Baker (eds) *Pioneering Spirituality* (Norwich: Canterbury Press 2015), 86.

²² Leonardo Boff, *Christianity in a Nutshell*, transl Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll NY: Orbis 2013), 57.

²³ Boff, *Nutshell*, 58.

²⁴ Richard Rohr, *Dancing Standing Still*, (Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press 2014), 52.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Stone, *Evangelism*, 259.

of cooperation and satisfaction; we are responsible for one another, in that if one is not free, valued, or flourishing, none of us can be.²⁷

HOPE-FILLED

Hope is a much needed and rarely seen commodity in 2017. In the UK we are wondering about life post-Brexit in the ongoing reality of austerity cuts to essential services; there is uncertainty about Donald Trump's presidency; worldwide conflicts continue to devastate, and terrorism is on our doorstep. Christianity speaks hope which is beyond what can be seen, and rooted in the eternal purpose of God for the created order. Yet often we speak as if hope was merely about our eternal destination. Hope is essential good news for all, whether for a community worker dealing with the aftermath of cuts to services; someone struggling to make life work; or someone for whom life is comfortable but who is troubled by items in the news.

Stone links hope back, once again, to the debate about the end goal of evangelism. He considers that:

Evangelism lives by hope and is essentially a restless activity, called forwards by the promise of the end of our journey together as a church and, ultimately, by the confidence that the telos of the church is the telos of the world itself. Hope punctuates the practice of evangelism in much the same way that a final punctuation mark gives meaning to an entire sentence.²⁸

Hope runs so prominently through the gospel that sharing our faith is fundamentally about sharing the hope that is within us, bearing in mind that this hope has holistic consequences and is about so much more than the eternal destination of an individual. He writes: "While evangelism is frequently referred to as 'faith sharing,' it might just as appropriately be termed 'hope sharing.'" ²⁹

Hope is in one sense about the future, but also has implications for the present moment. Stone writes: "Hope is, of course, oriented towards the future - where things are headed and how they shall turn out, towards God's love as not only the source and ground of our lives but their ultimate aim and end. Yet hope

utterly transforms the present and reinterprets the past." ³⁰ Current struggles look different in the light of hope. Realities may not change in an instant, but work towards change feels worthwhile because we believe that God's future will ultimately prevail over the disconnect we are currently experiencing.

EARTHED

'Earthed' is a word that can be understood in two ways, ideally held together. It can mean 'down to earth' rooted in the realities of life, and alternatively can mean 'of the earth' referring to connectedness with non-human creation. All too often the language of evangelism presumes that humanity is the only part of the created order about which God is significantly concerned. It is however both a fuller expression of Christian tradition and better news when all creation is held together in our understanding.

Meadows considers the implications for evangelism: "The promise of the gospel cannot be reduced to personal salvation, but has the cosmic scope of the *Missio Dei* to renew the whole of creation." ³¹ He is joined by Woods in including all of creation in the gospel vision. Woods writes: "Similarly, with affirming life we need to take a larger eco-centric perspective to avoid a narrow self-centredness that diminishes our witness." ³²

Boff is especially concerned to ensure that those working for the good of humanity and those working on environmental concerns are having joined up conversations. He considers that :

If all comes from the same Father and all are brothers and sisters of God, then other creatures also have God as Father and are our brothers and sisters, from the snail laboriously crossing the road, to the sun, the moon, the most distant stars; that is why there is an earthly and cosmic kinship. Human beings are not shut up in their tiny human world; they live with the great community of life and include in their love all beings of creation.³³

He is in many ways outlining his understanding of the evangel in this text. There is joy in here, there is life, there is good news. Why would we exclude such joys from our evangel except because we have failed to think

²⁷ Samuel Wells, *A Nazareth Manifesto*, (Chichester: Wiley 2015), 254.

²⁸ Stone, *Evangelism*, 56.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Meadows *ancient-future*, 6.

³² Philip Woods, "Reclaiming Evangelism." *International Review of Mission* 105.1 (2016), 48.

³³ Boff, *Nutshell*, 40.

big enough? Finney puts it like this: “I believe that in our proclamation of the gospel we have too often made our wondrous God ‘too small’. The creator of the universe is more than just a Saviour, glorious though that fact is.”³⁴ The ‘earthed’ dimension enlarges our vision, offering breadth of good news.

ATTRACTIVE

Katherine Maxwell-Rose, within a week of Trump’s election success in the US, wrote of her need for something more than words about relationship with God, connecting with concerns and questions in wider society. She wrote: “I am increasingly struggling with songs which seem to focus entirely on a sense of an exclusive, insular relationship with God.”³⁵ She continues: “As I look back at a year rife with division, hatred and brutal conflict, I’m desperate for something that speaks to these times. Something that reflects the enormity of God and how he relates to every part of the world; something that speaks to our call to be part of the bringing of his kingdom of peace, love and hope.”³⁶ If Maxwell-Rose and others like her are longing from within the church for a fuller gospel, how much more in society in general.

This then is the final thing that needs to be said: not only is a holistic evangel truer to the gospel record, it is also more attractive. Ultimately, the worst habits of our society are cords that bind, and evangelism which itself is entangled, fails to set people free. In contrast, that which offers freedom from the pressures and stresses that are associated with individualism and consumerism enables participation in the life in all its fullness that Christ offers.

CONCLUSION

The intent of this article has been to begin a conversation rather than to produce definitive answers. Threads have been drawn together from theological, missional and spiritual resources which add depth to the gospel and which need to be a part of the evangel if we are serious about renewal of the practice of evangelism. The evangel that we have inherited can too easily find itself in service to our culture’s stories of individualism and consumerism, rather than truly in service to the kingdom of God. In order to achieve the latter, the breadth of good news needs to be taken from the realm of discipleship and church life and put front and centre, within the evangel itself.

While the process involved in changing our thinking is unlikely to be easy, the potential fruit is plentiful. We will aid Christians in finding a language that has integrity within their own experience of faith; we will make stronger connections between the work of evangelism and that of social responsibility; we will be better placed to build a church which demonstrates the gospel in lived example; and we will be communicating an evangel that can be joyfully received as good news.

The prevalence of language about evangelism that is profoundly caught up in modernist assumptions indicates that this is an area of church life which needs significantly more attention. As part of my ongoing work, I hope to take some of the questions raised here into ethnographic research on ‘earthed spirituality’ as expressed in pioneer ministry.

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³⁴ Finney, *Emerging*, 91.

³⁵ Katherine Maxwell-Rose, *Why I’ve given up singing worship songs*, <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/why.ive.given.up.singing.worship.songs/102601.htm> accessed 06/01/17

³⁶ *Ibid.*



THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL

FROM A THEOLOGY
OF THE BALCONY TO A
THEOLOGY OF THE ROAD

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Cathy Ross

THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL: FROM A THEOLOGY OF THE BALCONY TO A THEOLOGY OF THE ROAD

INTRODUCTION:

The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness.¹

These are the first two sentences of Pope Francis' encyclical, *Evangelii Gaudium*, *The Joy of the Gospel*. Immediately we find ourselves drawn in, introduced to Jesus and presented with an implicit challenge. Does the joy of the gospel fill our hearts? Do we experience the resurrection and the life? Have we encountered Jesus today and are we encountering Him on a daily basis? Archbishop Justin Welby issued a similar challenge in a paper presented to General Synod in 2013, entitled "Challenges for the Quinquennium: Intentional Evangelism".² He opens this document with two Scriptures and a strong statement on the place of evangelism in the life of the church.

The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. (Matt 13:45)

I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. (Phil 3:8)

His opening sentence is, "The Church is renewed in evangelism only through being renewed in love for Jesus Christ and love for God's world." So it is all about Jesus. Along with the writer of the gospel of Matthew, the apostle Paul, Pope Francis and Archbishop Justin Welby – we are in good company – it is all about Jesus,

capturing and recapturing the joy of our salvation and telling others about our first love – Jesus. It is about resurrection and life. Are we up for that? Are we up for the challenge of telling people about Jesus and the joy of the Gospel in our place and space?

Pope Francis has some great phrases and word-pictures. I particularly like this one:

There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter. I realize of course that joy is not expressed the same way at all times in life, especially at moments of great difficulty. Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved.³

Are we Christians who exude the joy of the Lord, not in a super spiritual, soppy self-righteous sort of fashion, but in a fresh and vibrant way, reflecting a vital and real relationship with Jesus, because we know we are "infinitely loved."

So I would like us to reflect on four ideas when we think about and engage in evangelism. They are:

- 1 As Bishop John Taylor, former Bishop of Winchester, said back in 1972, "Mission [and I would include evangelism, as a vital component of mission]... means to recognise what the Creator-Redeemer is doing in his world and try to do it with him."⁴
- 2 Coming to faith is a journey and it can be messy.
- 3 People in the world have real insights and can teach the church some truths and realities.
- 4 It is about being with rather than doing for.

1. "MISSION [AND EVANGELISM] MEANS TO RECOGNISE WHAT THE CREATOR-REDEEMER IS DOING IN HIS WORLD AND TRY TO DO IT WITH HIM.

Archbishop Rowan Williams was saying this back in 2003, "Mission, it's been said, is finding out what God

¹ http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html, paragraph 1.

² ++ Justin Cantuar, "Challenges for the Quinquennium: Intentional Evangelism". GS 1917, Oct 2013.

³ http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html, paragraph 6.

⁴ J V Taylor, *The Go Between God, The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission*, (London:SCM, 1972), 37.

is doing and joining in.”⁵ We have heard this said so often now that it has almost become a cliché. Archbishop Rowan was making a plea for new styles of church life –

Thursday night meeting for young people once a fortnight, the Sunday evening Songs of Praise in the pub, the irregular but persistent networking with the people you met at Greenbelt or Spring Harvest, the mums and toddlers event on Tuesday morning or the big school Eucharist once a term which is the only contact many parents and friends will have with real worshipping life. All of these are church in the sense that they are what happens when the invitation of Jesus is received and people recognise it in each other.

He explained that this is where the unexpected growth happens and that so often this is from the edges, from the margins; not from the centre. That was the way of Jesus – always on the margins, looking out for the little ones – the children, the women, the blind, the lame, the sick; those who were imprisoned physically or mentally. Jesus brought healing, wholeness and newness of life – salvation – to those on and from the margins. When he came near the centre, he was crucified.

Pope Francis offers a similar challenge:

I dream of a “missionary option”, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation.⁶

Imagine. Imagine – a skill we need to practise more – imagine if we could do that – rearrange our structures, our timetables, or ways of doing things to suit the world rather than us! This is the missionary impulse. This is the sent-ness of the gospel. This is what the incarnation is all about – being in the world as witnesses so people can become friends with Jesus.

So what might this look like? Let me give you some examples that I hope might inspire you to dream further. I was part of a research project entitled “Beautiful Witness: Practical Theologies of Evangelism in the Church of England” funded by Durham University and the Evangelism Task Group of The Archbishops Council.

The project has interviewed eight practitioners, lay and ordained, to ask them what evangelism means and how they engage in evangelism. All of them commented on how important it is to listen to their context. All of them know their contexts well, they live there – a great advantage of the parish system – and they listen to and observe what is going on in their contexts. They are attentive and observant – and they had researched their contexts. They know about levels of unemployment or affluence, housing statistics, demographics, the history of the place, industries and businesses coming and going, the people of influence as well as the underbelly and the unseen and powerless in their places and spaces. Listening, learning and observation – being attentive to the context. How much time do you spend loitering, walking around, getting to know people and places? There is no winning formula, there is no universally successful strategy, no neat typology or paradigm – it is all very contextual. We need to know our contexts and what is appropriate for each context.

They pray and wait for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. One woman prayed for a year before initiating anything. John Taylor reminds us, rather acerbically, of our lack of willingness to wait for the Spirit:

But while we piously repeat the traditional assertion that without the Holy Spirit we can get nowhere in the Christian mission, we seem to press on notwithstanding with our man-made [sic] programmes. I have not heard recently of committee business adjourned because those present were still awaiting the arrival of the Spirit of God. I have known projects abandoned for lack of funds, but not for lack of gifts of the Spirit. Provided the human resources are adequate we take the spiritual for granted. In fact we have only the haziest idea of what we mean by resources other than human wealth, human skill and human character.⁷

They all said it is about listening to the Holy Spirit, listening to where the community is at, being where people are, having relationships and discovering where God is already at work in people’s lives. It is about listening to the questions people are asking and as + Bishop Graham Cray has put it, resisting “the temptation to turn every tentative question into an excuse to preach

⁵ <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1826/archbishops-presidential-address-general-synod-york-july-2003>.

⁶ http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html, paragraph 27.

⁷ *The Go Between God*, 5.

⁷ Graham Cray, “Foreword,” in Croft, et al., ed., *Evangelism in a Spiritual Age*, (London:Church House Publishing, 2005), ix.

the 'right' answer, without giving evidence of attentive listening."⁸

I do not think that the current generation is content with ready-made answers. A recent *National Catholic Reporter* (USA) editorial asks, "Is it possible that 'nones' can teach us something about God? Or at least can we learn something from listening to their questions? The church's challenge is not to supply answers but to accompany people on their spiritual quests."⁹ A blog post by Annie Selak, a rector at one of Notre Dame's dormitories, asked the question, "What do young Catholics want?" her four points all revolve around listening and dialogue. "We want the church to ask the questions we are asking," she says. These are questions, she explains, that deal with some of the hard issues in today's world and church. "There is an urgency to these issues, as these are not nameless people on the margins, these are our friends, family members, mentors, and leaders." This generation of young adults has grown up with non-Christians, and Selak says that they are among "the holiest people we know." She asserts, "One of the things that draws young people to the Gospel is the inclusivity of Jesus;" and "We want the church to get its hands dirty and be engaged and relevant in our lives, helping us to share this good news throughout the world."¹⁰

So it is about being engaged, getting stuck in and doing stuff. It is not complicated or difficult - it is just about joining in where God already is. Let me give you some examples. One vicar who was getting to know Mums at the school gate started a group in the community lounge in the school - on a Friday morning after the Mums had dropped their kids at school. They came and had coffee, cake and conversation. She explained that they did not have to cross a threshold - not a spiritual one or a physical one - it was easy for them because this was a place they knew and a time they could manage. The conversations grew out of the questions these Mums were asking.

Another example is a group of young Mums who came together after they had had their first babies and wanted to explore spirituality. They grew very close but it fell apart when their babies became toddlers as it was too difficult to meet. However, a year later when one of the Mums had another baby and had difficulties, they started meeting again, began to pray for one another

and set up a children's church.

One of these practitioners talks about doing mission with "a twinkle in our eye" - so that there is a sparkle or a little joke - and that says something about God. One of her aims is to be out in the public square, to ensure that Jesus is represented in the public space - whether it is the raft race, the carnival, the flower show. She described how for three years they have made and given away non-alcoholic cocktails at the annual flower show. Each year they give their cocktails different names. This year they had names such as life in all its fullness, or forgiveness. So they had people come to their stall in the flower show and ask - "can I have some forgiveness please." People saw the little joke but it was meaningful for them. The forgiveness cocktail had the flavour of something that is fresh and clean and if they wanted to they could have a conversation about what it means to be forgiven. Brilliant! Something simple, gentle, invitational - representing who God is. It is not about pressurising or pestering people into buying something or signing up to something but rather it is metaphorically enacting something that is true about God and giving them a flavour of Jesus. This is counter to the consumerist culture. Here the church is giving away with no expectation of return modelling a generous God. So whether it is getting involved in English tuition for migrants and refugees, providing chaplaincy for the local chamber of Commerce, joining in a "Favourite Neighbour" award, packing the cupboard and providing the coffee at the local toddlers group, there are a myriad of ways to join in with what God is doing and to model God's nature. Let me conclude this section with a rather hard hitting quotation from + John Taylor again:

... we need to come off our religious high-horse and get our feet on the lowly, earthy ground of God's primary activity as creator and sustainer of life. We must relinquish our missionary presuppositions and begin in the beginning with the Holy Spirit. This means humbly watching in any situation in which we find ourselves in order to learn what God is trying to do there, and then doing it with him.¹¹

2. COMING TO FAITH IS A JOURNEY AND CAN BE MESSY.

⁹ Quoted in S Bevans, "DOING MISSION TODAY: Where We Do It, How We Do It, What We Do"

April 18, 2013, delivered to Oblates of Mary Immaculate Belleville, IL (unpublished), 5.

¹⁰ <http://www.faithstreet.com/onfaith/2013/02/14/the-church-young-catholics-want/16441>

¹¹ *The Go Between God*, 39.

I know journey can be an overused metaphor but this really does seem to be the case today – that it can take people a long time to come to know Jesus. All the practitioners in this research affirmed this – God will meet people where they are at and sometimes it can take a long time for people to come to faith. It can also be messy. One of the practitioners talked about people journeying towards or away from Jesus and for those who are moving away from Jesus, they talk about the old message of repentance and for those journeying towards Jesus, they encourage them to make specific steps such as prayer, reintegration into the community or baptism. In this research it seems that most make this journey because of presence and accompaniment – because people are alongside them helping their lives to be transformed. The stories were not of people coming to faith after hearing an evangelistic sermon – but rather in the context of relationships, being alongside and being a loving presence.

One couple who have been in a tough context for years, claims that even after people come to Christ, their lives may still be chaotic and difficult. People who suffer from addictions or people in prison, may not be instantly healed of their addictions or bad behaviour. They may still go back and get into fights in their cells or wings, they may still take drugs or suffer from their addictions, but they know they are loved by the outrageous love of God, so their lives ARE different from before. They are given a whole new identity because now they know who they are in Jesus. They gave one very moving example of a young woman who was an alcoholic and became a Christian... but she was still an alcoholic. She made a commitment to Jesus, she talked with God constantly, she was a person of faith and this changed her life hugely... but she was still an alcoholic and eventually it killed her. So this is not glib “come to Jesus and all your problems will be solved.” No this is a longer, tougher road. Some lives are beyond chaotic so for some this is indeed a longer, tougher journey but they know they have freedom in Christ – some will experience it in this life and others not until they die, but they know they are loved. God is love and Pope Francis reminds us that God is a “Father who loves all men and women with an infinite love [which] means realizing that “he thereby confers upon them an infinite dignity”.¹²

Yet, counter-intuitively, they tell of a young man, who as a teenager, was not ready to come to faith. They thought that he had so much going on in his life that he was

not ready to come to faith and to deal with all of that in his context. This is a brave and risky opinion to hold – normally we are desperate for people to come to Jesus but they could see that he was not ready. However, they journeyed with him and remained alongside him. They supported him through those difficult years and now that young man is a committed Christian. God is in the mess – there is treasure in the rubble and when we keep on trying to tidy things up, we may stop the flow and prevent things from happening because God is there, in the midst of the mess, the pain and the trauma. And for this I think we need to ask God for the gift of sight to help us see God there, to see the treasure in the rubble. This is a gift of the Holy Spirit as John Taylor reminds us. The Holy Spirit is the Go-Between God who opens our inward eyes and makes us aware of the other. ‘The Holy Spirit is that power which opens eyes that are closed, hearts that are unaware and minds that shrink from too much reality.’¹³

Another practitioner, in a different context, affirmed that when people know they are loved, they can begin to thrive rather than just survive. He spoke of the victim mentality that is a reality in his context where folk walk around with their heads down, refusing to make eye contact. However, he had noticed a difference when people come to faith they would begin to walk around with their heads up because Jesus is in control. Several of the practitioners talked about the work and prayer that was needed for people to free them from shame and feeling that they were useless. This might be in the form of prayer or even courses to restore people’s dignity and to begin build up their identity in Christ. One practitioner spoke of seeing people’s faces change as they embark on this journey.

Several of the practitioners referred to the Parable of the Sower either as preparing people’s hearts to receive Jesus or as not being able to see the roots grow and that it might take a while for the shoots to become visible.

Let’s just flip this for a moment and think of the journey metaphor from another point of view – that of the evangeliser. We too are called to be pilgrims on a journey and this involves taking risks. This idea is exemplified by what we are told of Abraham in Heb “By faith, Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.” Martin Robinson writes,

The need for the church in the West to begin a pilgrimage of discovery concerning its true vocation

¹² http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html, paragraph 178.

¹³ J V Taylor, *The Go-Between God*, 19.

is urgent. The missionary imagination of the church is best engaged when journey lies at its heart. As one writer puts it, 'The ship is safest when it's in port. But that's not what ships were made for.'¹⁴

Our life of faith begins with an invitation to participate in the *missio Dei* and this is essentially a lifelong pilgrimage. Almost by definition, a pilgrim operates at the margins of a culture – because they are wanderers, on the edge, out of step with the mainstream. Probably most significant changes in cultural life begin at the margins, not at the centre. Listen to these words from Rick Poyner, a professor in design criticism at London's Royal College of Art:

When you look at the important cultural makers, not just designers, but photographers, film directors, cultural people, over and over they are people who are preserving a position of some kind of independence, being able to pursue their own direction, which produces work which is of immense cultural value.... New ideas tend to originate in the margins where those makers are freest.¹⁵

So what new ideas do you have to evangelise in your context? How is the Holy Spirit calling you to be creative and imaginative to introduce people to Jesus in your place and space? Recently I read a book by Will Gompertz, BBC Arts Editor, entitled *Think Like an Artist... and lead a more creative, productive life*. It sounds like one of those ghastly self-help books doesn't it? Well, I have been recommending it to all my students because I think this is exactly how we should be thinking when we engage in evangelism, church planting, mission. He claims that creative talent is something that we all have – he wants to harness it to help us solve some of the major world issues, I would like to harness it to help us become more effective witnesses. He has ten points – replace artist with witness or evangelist – and they are:

- 1 Artists are enterprising.
- 2 Artists don't fail (in other words, they learn from their mistakes and try again.)
- 3 Artists are seriously curious.
- 4 Artists steal (good ideas from others).
- 5 Artists are sceptics.
- 6 Artists think big picture and fine detail.

- 7 Artists have a point of view (the good news)
- 8 Artists are brave.
- 9 Artists pause for thought.
- 10 All schools should be art schools (!)¹⁶

One of the practitioners offered this, which picks up some of these ideas, and could almost be a framework for evangelism : love, courage, imagination and activism.

3. PEOPLE IN THE WORLD HAVE REAL INSIGHTS AND CAN TEACH THE CHURCH SOME TRUTHS AND REALITIES.

This is an important and vital truth for us to remember. This was a clear theme among the practitioners interviewed. One reminded us that so often we come thinking we need to tell the truth when sometimes people outside the church know what truth is. One asserted that the world knows that the gospel is about love and sometimes the world needs to remind the church of that because we can be very busy being the church and doing church things. Several spoke of how the church can be perceived as authoritative and hierarchical, preaching at people in an unhelpful way. Others spoke of how their community helped them to come to faith as well and helped them to "get God differently." They learned things about God from their communities – it is certainly not a one way street. This reminded me of a passing remark I heard from a Ugandan lecturer when I was teaching at UCU in 2003. I have never forgotten this comment although it was not one of the main points of his lecture. He was lecturing on what the African churches could offer to the world church in mission. He commented that the first missionaries to Uganda did not see anything of beauty to take with them back to Europe. They had come with everything to give and nothing to receive. Robert Moffatt, a 19th century missionary wrote,

Satan has employed his agency with fatal success, in erasing every vestige of religious impression from the minds of the Bechuanas, Hottentots and Bushmen; leaving them without a single ray to guide them from the dark and dread futurity, or a single

¹⁴ M Robinson, "Pilgrimage and Mission" in C Bartholomew and F Hughes (eds) *Explorations in a Christian Theology of Pilgrimage*, (Hants:Ashgate, 2004), 176.

¹⁵ Rick Poyner, *Obey the Giant, Life in the Image World* (Architectural Press, 2001), from http://jonnybaker.blogs.com/jonnybaker/2004/07/new_ideas_origi.html

¹⁶ Will Gompertz, *Think Like an Artist... and lead a more creative, productive life*, (London:Penguin, 2015)

link to unite them with the skies.¹⁷

Really? Sometimes I wonder if we have moved very far from that?!

We do not approach other contexts with a ready-made Gospel and with God in our pocket; rather we go in all humility and gentleness. Max Warren, former General Secretary of CMS, expressed it beautifully,

Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on people's dreams. More serious still, we may forget that God was here before our arrival.¹⁸

Another image is of entering another's garden where we can learn much from someone else's garden. This can only be done by developing a relationship of trust and respect.¹⁹ How is Christ understood and to be understood in the new context? How might the gospel best be expressed in this new soil? How will the gospel flourish in this new soil? And how may this new soil enhance the understanding and depth of the gospel? One of the key things that was learnt from the reception of Christianity in Africa, for example, is that it was not what Western missionaries said that mattered in the long-term but rather how African Christians appropriated Christ in ways that made sense to them, utilising African spiritual maps of the universe. This is a lesson for us here and now when we consider evangelism and mission. Are we able to engage in ways that are truly contextual allowing faith communities to flourish in local soil using local spiritual maps? And, conversely, do we find our **own** understanding and appropriation of the faith challenged and enhanced by deep engagement in this particular context?

Are we able to be in the context 'birthing' theological ideas and insights without imposing our own expectations, agendas, assumptions? Are we able to find the treasure that is already there? We need to study local maps with care to find the local treasure. As Bevans and Schroeder remind us, '[we] need to befriend people, engage them as guides, be taught by them.'²⁰ Can we allow the 'locals' to develop their

own cartography, their own local maps to make sense of their own particular universe to find their own way home?

So it is about listening and learning, giving and receiving, mutuality and reciprocity. We too need to listen, learn and receive. The practitioners spoke movingly of how important it is to make ourselves vulnerable and to allow people to serve us.

So often in mission and evangelism the receiving person or culture is seen as needy, vulnerable, in need of help. We have to turn this on its head. We need to be in relationship with them and learn to see the resources and spirituality inherent in that community and context. Jean Vanier reminds us of this. He writes, 'it will take decades to see all the consequences of listening to the least powerful among us and allowing ourselves to be led by them.'²¹ Vanier again,

Befriending a person with a disability or alcoholism isn't going to provide an instant solution to their difficulties. But this friendship can lead to a mutual transformation by touching the place where God lives in each one of us. We can then begin to work with people who are fragile instead of simply for them.²²

4. IT IS ABOUT BEING WITH RATHER THAN DOING FOR

Andrew Walls reminds us that mission

... means living on someone else's terms, as the Gospel itself is about God living on someone else's terms, the Word becoming flesh, divinity being expressed in terms of humanity. And the transmission of the Gospel requires a process analogous, however distantly, to that great act on which the Christian faith depends.²³

Are we able to do this? Are we able to be a winning presence, a witnessing presence, an evangelising presence that can be alongside, can live on someone else's terms and resist the temptation to fix everything and make them like us?

One practitioner asserted that we are not here to do

¹⁷ Quoted in D Tutu in "Whither African Theology", in E Fashole-Luke, (ed) *Christianity in Independent Africa*, (London:Collins, 1978)

¹⁸ Max Warren in J V Taylor, *The Primal Vision: Christian Presence Among African Religion*, (London:SCM, 1963), 10.

¹⁹ S Bevans and R Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*, (Maryknoll:Orbis, 2011), 76.

²⁰ Ibid., 32.

²¹ J Vanier, *Signs of the Times, Seven Paths of Hope for a Troubled World*, (London:DLT,2013), 10

²² Ibid., 119.

²³ Andrew Walls, "Christian Scholarship and the Demographic Transformation of the Church," in *Theological Literacy for the 21st Century*, eds. Rodney L. Peterson & Nancy M. Rourke, (Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 2002) 170f.

things to people; rather we are here to be alongside people and to be community with them. Moreover, programmes can be patronising. They can give the wrong message where people see things being done to them and themselves as a worthy project to be fixed, rather than being given the opportunity to grow, offer their own gifts and talents, to give back out of who they are and therefore to begin to flourish.

I recently read Sam Wells' latest book, *A Nazareth Manifesto*, where he claims that the most important word in theology is the word 'with' – Emmanuel – God WITH us. He explains that the story of Scripture is the story of God's desire to be with us, and only within this 'with' can we speak of a 'for.' He claims that we believe that the human predicament is mortality when in fact it is isolation. He illustrates this from the movie *The English Patient* where Laszlo leaves Katherine to seek help while she is dying, whereas she just wants him to be *with* her at her hour of greatest need. In chapter six he discusses the parable of the Good Samaritan:

Wells re-reads the parable not as one about how we help those in need, but as one in which we are the person lying in the ditch needing help, and the unexpected stranger saves us. Everything about Christian mission says we go to help others, Wells suggests that Christian mission is about finding out we need to receive the mercy of others.²⁴

This picks up the previous point that we too are in need of transformation. I think this does challenge our understanding of evangelism. I am not denying that there will need to be explanation, proclamation, invitation but this certainly challenges some of our methods and approaches to evangelism.

It also touches on how we understand and communicate who God is. We need to deconstruct the idea that God is a patriarchal, vengeful, capricious God who delights in punishment and judgement. For some, this may mean a healing of the imagination. We need to be careful that we do not communicate this understanding, even unwittingly, in our language and structures. If we want to know who God is and what God is like, we need only to look to the Cross. In a paper,

"Mission in Britain Today" Steve Bevans urges us to communicate an understanding of God "that inspires and excites."²⁵ A vulnerable God, a patient God and the more "we open ourselves up to this loving, vulnerable, patient God... the more we become ourselves."²⁶ As one theologian has eloquently expressed it, "Jesus is the body language of God."²⁷

Several of the practitioners claimed that the medium is the message. How you share your good news is the good news. Do we do this from on high or we able to be winsome, creative, engaging and involved? We need to live out this message ourselves and preferably in a loving community. It is about God being in the everyday. John Drane maintains that people are more interested in how to live well rather than in heaven or hell or sin. In fact John Taylor maintains that sin is the last truth to be told and that judgement is best brought about by the activity of the Holy Spirit. He writes, "For the evangelism that proceeds by listening and learning, entering into another man's [sic] vision in order to see Christ in it, does not start with assertions about sin but waits to be told about it. And usually the truth about sin is almost the last truth to be told."²⁸

Being with and being winsome are much more easily practised and lived out in community. Jean Vanier acknowledged this as a result of his experience of founding the l'Arche communities. He writes, "In years to come we are going to need many small communities which will welcome lost and lonely people, offering them a new form of family and sense of belonging."²⁹ Pope Francis reminds us:

An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives, it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others.;... Evangelization consists mostly of patience and disregard for constraints of time.... Finally an evangelizing community is filled with joy; it knows how to rejoice always. It celebrates every small victory, every step forward in the work of evangelization.³⁰

Each of the practitioners interviewed testified to the

²⁴ http://andygoodliff.typepad.com/my_weblog/2015/11/book-review-the-nazareth-manifesto-by-sam-wells.html

²⁵ S Bevans, "Mission in Britain, Some Modest Reflections and Proposals", *Holiness*, The Journal of Wesley House Cambridge Copyright, Vol I (2015) Issue 2 (Holiness & Mission); 167.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 169.

²⁷ Mark Oakley quoted in, *Reflections for Daily Prayer*, (London: Church House Publishing, 2015), 102.

²⁸ J V Taylor, *The Primal Vision, Christian Presence Amid African Religion*, (London: SCM, 1963), 167.

²⁹ J Vanier, *Community and Growth*, (NY: Paulist Press, 1989), 283.

³⁰ http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html, paragraph 24.

importance of community which allowed them to take risks, to tell stories, to follow their passions, “to play with God” as one of them put it. They try to find out what God is doing in the context, what is going on out there and that shapes the kind of community they want to be.

CONCLUSION

So, to conclude – very briefly. How are we engaged in evangelism? Can we recognise God’s Spirit at work in our contexts and join in with God as winsome witnesses to who God is? Can we allow people’s journey to be messy and are we willing to accompany them along that journey? Do we genuinely believe that we are evangelising in a “graced world”³¹ that has much to teach us also so that we too will be transformed? Finally are we humble enough, vulnerable enough, de-centred enough to be with rather than doing for? May the joy of the gospel impel us to leave the safety of the balcony and to experience and practise a theology of the road.

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³¹ “Mission in Britain”, 171.



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Jamie Klair

EVANGELISING IN THE CITY OF GOD

Imagine a City of God. A place bigger than Zwingli's Zürich, and more fervent than Dowie's Illinois. Not only is it a place of sanctuary, it is a city on a hill. People come from the North, the East, the South, the West. High-profile Christians from all denominations attend services there. Political candidates visit, heads of state come too. The city produces its own renewable electricity; it manages its own water supply. This city is not only a triumph of energy, but a vision of recreation: it has a theme park. Even more amazingly, this Christian city is a centre of education. The Bible College trains up pastors from a gamut of denominations, and is on the cusp of receiving accreditation from the highest ranked university in the country. Imagine too, that this super city hosts around 100,000 people. Spread out over a vast area, tracts of land are given to Christians to buy at cheaper prices than the national average, and once settled can start businesses, become self-sufficient.

Now, imagine evangelising in that city.

I was with a man in his mid-twenties who was training to become a pastor. He said that every month he would use some of the money he receives from his family at home to purchase tracts. We went to one of the bookstores in the city, and there were an array of different tracts: some cheaper ones on paper, other glossier ones on card. I looked at a few of them. They were titled 'Book of Life,' 'Big Loss,' 'Are You Sure?' and 'The Market Place.' These were not particularly remarkable in themselves, but they represented the market for evangelism. Every month, this man would walk in to the shop and buy a whole stack of various tracts. Then, he would walk around the camp handing them out to passers-by, hoping to engage people in conversation. A few weeks earlier, when I had first heard about a 'crusade' within the city, I asked: "But who would you evangelise?"

Before I provide his answer, I ought to give a little context. This City of God is built in reclaimed jungle off a busy motorway connecting two large cities in Nigeria. Other swathes of land have been apportioned off along this road, following from this first relocation. Now, a drive up this motorway reveals the shining gates and signs of

'Deliverance Camps' and private universities, of Christian and Muslim groups in the south of the country. Nigeria – of all the recently evangelised countries – has most vigorously brought Christianity into its public sphere in the last century. The faith-healing wave of Precious Stone in 1918, the work of Joseph Babalola in the 1930s, and the contemporaneous Aladura movement, all mark important moments in twentieth century Christianity in the country. The moment that marked the beginning of the current state of Nigerian Pentecostalism was 1979. During this time, the churches which have come to dominate the mainstream – Deeper Life, Winners Chapel, Redeemed Christian Church of God – were either: not-yet conceived, or numerically small, or existing primarily as prayer groups (i.e. they were not functioning as churches holding independent Sunday services). In 1979, a leader of one of these small churches took a trip with his translator to Tulsa, Oklahoma for a Kenneth Hagin conference. While there, the leader of this church was approached by a pastor who prophesied that "God has started a church through you, and the church is going to be known worldwide."¹ At the time, this church had only 20 pastors, spread over a couple of thousand members – all consisting of one ethnic group in South West Nigeria.

That same year, within the same church, another novelty arose. The church leader's translator – who had recently become a pastor in the church – ran a series of evangelism rallies. A student in the bible college within this City of God, writing a dissertation on the church, described this as "set up to reach out to the upper echelon of the society."² Through these two events, 1979 marked the year that young leaders in this burgeoning new move of Pentecostalism in the country began to strategise as well as evangelise. The result of this new approach was Christianity with an energetic, technically-literate, middle-class, urban edge. Thirty years later, these churches now wield great influence over their members, a broader Christian audience, and some main channels in the country too. The extent of the transformation this has caused is described by Noo Saro-Wiwa, a Nigerian who returned after having lived abroad, to write a travel book about her country of birth. After a few decades away, she notes, "After three weeks, I had resigned myself to Nigerian levels of religious fervour ... twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week we call upon his services, connecting with him, singing his praises, establishing dialogue with him (and extremely

¹ Anthony Ojoibukun, *The Redeemed Christian Church of God in Prophecy* (2nd ed., Nigeria: 2010), 17

² Lawrence Kolawole, *The Pen, The Pulpit and The Palm*, *RCBC 2010: unpublished), 30

loud dialogue at that.)”³ So, amidst the incredibly pervasive culture of public religiosity, within a Christian city, I asked that disbelieving question: “But who would you evangelise?”

His answer, “there are people who come from outside to work in the city, and they may not be Christians.” Indeed, I had noticed some people standing on the quiet corners of the gigantic city, with a microphone and amplifier, in the shade of the midday sun. What are they doing? “Afternoon cry,” he said. For evangelism to be continuous, men would, of their own volition, stand to declare the gospel, denounce sinfulness, urge repentance. Depending on the time, this could be ‘morning cry,’ ‘afternoon cry,’ ‘evening cry,’ and even ‘night cry.’ People like this pastor-in-training would hand out tracts. One evening I attended a film-screening of *irora agbelebu* (‘the agony of the cross’). This Yoruba-language film was played outdoors in the cool of the evening, with a hundred and fifty sitting on plastic chairs put out in front of the large screen. A pastor, with a microphone, would occasionally interject *Amen!* at suitable moments. Whether anyone present was a Christian or not was unclear. Nonetheless, the black, Yoruba speaking Jesus, whipped by cultists, calling to his mother in her Nigerian outfit, shone out in to the sodium, orange haze of the night.

As a brief aside, I should point out that compared to the influence and impact that these churches enjoy in Nigeria, evangelising in the United Kingdom seems a fraught exercise. To do ‘night cry’ is to cause a public disturbance; a church-run carol service and dinner for a homeless shelter receives not a single response to its invite; public evangelism efforts attract the rebuke of police officers and accusations of operating without the appropriate licence. ‘Secularism’ presents itself as a fatiguing combination of local council bureaucracy and public apathy. A church is comprised of more than its evangelism activities, however. Indeed, within the fieldwork I have carried out in the United Kingdom, evangelism comes under the same category as corporate Bible Study. These are extra evenings and weekends in the diary, they are necessary but cumbersome commitments. Those who are at Bible Studies comment that the numbers are fewer than at main services,

being more eager to chase their deliverance or miracle, than the mandated task of evangelising or studying the Bible. The Saturday and Sunday work of evangelism in the United Kingdom is constantly urged from the front, but with lukewarm enthusiasm from all but a core few. Sunday services, and special guest services, draw throngs fervent with prayers and loud with praise. This is to say, a thriving Nigerian Pentecostal church in the UK does not necessarily excel at church-organised, cold-contact evangelism.

So, what does evangelising in the city of God tell us about this church? I had heard a few times that they saw a connection between evangelism and the end times. Matthew 24:14 was quoted: “And the gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” Indeed, the relatively solemn, individual character of evangelism seemed at odds with the euphoric, high-drama corporate gatherings of praise, prayer and thanksgiving. Is it possible that evangelism is a performed piety as much as a church-growth strategy? While Nigerian Pentecostal churches have often become associated with their materiality – bright garments, desire for this-worldly achievement, and financial prosperity – does evangelism point to their expectation of a future-world more than as it does about this-worldly success? I think there is credence in this. The way evangelism is spoken of, as something neglected in favour of chasing miracles or comfort, it is a firm reminder of the coming judgement and conclusion of all things.

Evangelism in the City of God tells us that a self-sufficient city – designed as a kind of heaven on earth – is looking beyond itself, to the long-awaited return of Christ.

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³ Noo Saro-Wiwa, *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria*, (Granta, London: 2012), 62



SHARING FAITH AND LEARNING TO LISTEN



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Beth Rookwood

SHARING FAITH & LEARNING TO LISTEN

‘Evangelism’ and ‘listening skills’ are most often separate workshops on training schedules. Budding evangelists are tutored in speaking, declaring and telling the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Listeners are coached to enable others to tell their own story; to ask questions which clarify meaning and to journey with the speaker as they make their own discoveries.

Both practices are valuable for mission and ministry. Yet rarely, are they set alongside each other. Rarely are connections made between the two. Yet, also rarely, in my own experience, has any conversation, evangelistic or not, had any value, unless there has been listening.

SO WHY THE SEPARATION?

Much depends, as ever, on our tradition and formation. The evangelistic training I mostly received has been based upon the verse in 1 Peter 3: ‘Always be prepared to give an answer.’ Over the years I have been furnished with diagrams, set-phrases, defensive arguments, plans for how to share my testimony, and well-honed metaphors which all relay something of the biblical narrative. Some of these tools have been helpful, particularly when evangelism has been encouraged as part of a specific event or outreach; when ‘telling the gospel’ has been part of my own, and my hearers’ expectations. However, in everyday conversations, these tools have felt rather awkward as I’ve tried to shoe-horn them in. This style of training has meant that, for me, thoughts of evangelism are often accompanied with a level of fear – a sense that I need to revise my answers in case I get it wrong.

My training in listening, however, has nurtured a desire for openness and discovery – of the world getting bigger as I engage with another. It has taught me to respond to the other person, rather than direct them. To ask questions and wait for answers rather than be quick to give them. For me, walking with another and listening to them and to God with and for them, has felt like a more loving experience. Many involved in mentoring, coaching and counseling are promoting listening skills more than ever – recognising them as essential to transformative encounters in conversation and relationships.¹

In my own experience, applying skills of listening has fostered more discussion, respect, and depths of conversations and relationships, than my practice of evangelism ever has.

Which leads me to consider, **is there a way in which these two skills might be brought together as we share our faith?**

Three recent encounters for me highlight the need to explore this question more deeply – in thought, and in lived experience.

My first encounter happened during the middle of our 11pm – 1am churches together outreach where we give out hot drinks for free in the middle of our town. The team aims to be a consistent, loving Christian presence, and though not evangelistic in design, the prayers said before and after the outreach are for people to, somehow and eventually, come to faith.

On what was a fairly quiet evening, a man, who looked between 35 and 40 received his hot drink, and appeared to want to chat more. He began to share some of his current life situation. Some of it involved a dilemma of whether to send his child to a faith school or not. Some of it was reflecting on his own experiences of church as a child. Some of it was around how he and his wife were struggling a bit at the moment with three young children. Some of it was around how he isn’t really enjoying his job.

Whilst listening in to this conversation, I was startled by the way in which one of our team members responded to what had been said. It followed something like this:

Man: ‘I’m really not sure what to do about sending my kids to a faith school or not.’

Team: ‘Well it’s all to do with what you think about Jesus.’

Man: ‘Yeah I mean, I did go to church as a kid. There’s a good school down the road, or the faith school’s further away. My wife isn’t bothered, but...’

Team: ‘You mean, she has no faith? I guess you just need to pray for her, we’ll pray for her if you like.’

Man: ‘Yeah it’s a bit tough at the moment, we just don’t see each other that much’

Team: ‘We’ll definitely pray. Do you ever go to church? You might find some kind of support there? It’s so good to be somewhere you can learn more about God and who Jesus is, and what he did for us on the cross. I know that’s why I love church. You should go!’

¹ See for example Keith E. Webb, *The Coaching Workshop for Christian Leaders*, www.creativeresultsmanagement.com, 2015 used by Fresh Expressions to train Missional Coaches.

As I observed this dialogue take place, I felt increasingly annoyed by my team member – because he wasn't listening! And then a sense of shame came over me as I realised what was happening. Something that I have let happen to me, so many times...

The team member was in 'evangelism mode' – the mode where you are ready to give answers. The mode where you do all you can to say, tell, share anything which points towards Jesus – regardless of what the other person has actually said. My 'evangelism mode,' like the mode I had just witnessed, had come to be about speaking and giving an answer. I'd never clocked that it might involve listening.

So...what could be changed? Could evangelism still be evangelism if it was less a one way message out from the speaker to the hearer, and more of a two way dual-discovery of both persons and perhaps even of Christ?

I went back to the verse in 1 Peter to see if there was something there that could help me. I read the rest of the verse: *'Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.'*

Everyone who ASKS you. It dawned on me, that in order to know what someone is asking, you need to actually be listening to them – not preparing the message you are hoping to give.

And a penny dropped. Is that what I've been doing all these years? Looking for a successful sharing of the essentials of the evangelistic message whilst in a 'mode' – rather than just having a normal conversation with someone?

And was what I witnessed that evening, and what I've done so often, actually the opposite of 'successful' evangelism? It certainly didn't foster deeper personal relationships – nor, I don't imagine, a turning to Christ.

So what might it look like, to channel the desire to share my faith with others in ways where evangelism and listening skills are practiced together?

I wanted to intentionally try this out, and the opportunity arose recently with a lady I am getting to know. Her husband has started attending a local church, and has gone home talking about it. Whilst we were out jogging one day, my friend told me how she couldn't get her head around why he would be enjoying it so much – given that her only experience of church was one where it was rather dull. She said he also somehow seemed more calm and she was glad for him especially as they'd been feeling a bit lonely since moving up here

and his job had been really stressful. She left a gap in conversation which seemed to ask for input or my views on what she'd shared.

I breathed through my fear of the 'evangelism mode' and asked the Holy Spirit to help me listen, and to direct my words – words which I hoped would help my friend move closer to knowing God's love for herself. I said:

'I am so sorry you've been feeling lonely.'

This statement unlocked hours of conversation. It also unlocked a new friendship and, for both of us, new journeys of knowing Christ. She spoke of feeling alone and unloved. Of the challenges of being a new mother. Of being the wife of a busy husband. Of sometimes not knowing where to turn. I could relate to a lot of what she was saying. I listened. Nodded. Laughed when she laughed. Felt teary when she felt teary. When she spoke of not knowing where to turn, I felt that nudge from the Holy Spirit. Was this the question she was asking all along?

Me: I know this might sound weird, but that for me is what knowing Jesus is about. When there's nowhere else to turn I talk to Him. He speaks to me. It's like He comes to live inside of us when we ask Him to.'

She laughed, 'What like an invisible friend??!'

I answered sheepishly 'Well kind of! But a friend who is also God. I know that sounds a bit strange – but do you know what I mean?'

The conversation continued. We were both speaking of things of faith. We were both saying the name Jesus easily, normally. No clever one-liners. Just naturally. I didn't present the whole gospel. I didn't give her a run-down of the creed and lead her in a special prayer. I don't think I've described Jesus as an 'invisible friend' before, and I'm not sure I would again – but I listened. Listened to what she was asking, and I tried to listen to God. My friend is now, in her own words, *'warming up to God.'*

Evangelism and listening, leading to deeper relationship with Christ and each other. It felt good. It felt real. It felt full.

I continued to ponder.

I sat on the train the other day after a long journey. An older lady came to sit by me. I didn't really want to talk, but I prayed – *'Lord, help me share something of you.'* I felt that nudge of God to ask the lady how she was. She replied *'I buried my son yesterday.'* I replied, *'I am so sorry.'* The lady then spent the next bit of time telling me about her son. About the funeral, about his life, about

other family members. I tried to listen deeply.

At the back of my mind were the bible passages I speak on at funerals. The hope I could tell her about. The God who would 'walk with her through the valley of the shadow of death'. The events at church I could invite her to. The busy thoughts of how I could offer to visit her.

But rather than say anything. I listened. She wasn't asking me anything at all. I almost felt desperate – that I had to say something, give her something – what could I do? Pay her taxi fare and tell her it was to show her God loved her? Tell her I'd be praying for her? I waited again for that nudge of God to prompt me into word or action. But it didn't come. We got off at the same stop. I pointed her in the direction of the taxi stand. She turned to me and said 'Thanks for listening' and I watched her walk away.

Three encounters with three different people. Three people who I believe God loves and invites into friendship with Him. Three people who I believe God wants to experience the blessings of His kingdom. Three people, as with thousands of others, with whom God calls the Church to share the good news. How that is done will be a decision by those who come into contact with them.

Will it be in the 'mode of evangelism' – where a prepared message is preached regardless of what is being asked? Or might it be that those who have a message to share begin to practice everyday evangelism by starting with listening.

We are learning to listen to culture and context, and of course these are essential missiological skills. Perhaps we might also prioritise listening to God and to others especially when things of faith are spoken about. Listening for their questions with love and insight, seeking to discover what they are asking, then together, using natural and authentic words, moving towards an uncovering, a taste, of 'the hope that we have in Christ.' Perhaps that's what Peter wanted us to do all along.

Beth Rookwood. After pioneering amongst young people and in the night-time economy of Leeds, Beth Rookwood is currently serving as pioneer curate in the parish of Morpeth in rural Northumberland. In another life she'd like to be a wedding planner!





EVANGELISM

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Ben Norton

EVANGELISM

My name is Revd Ben Norton and I am a Pioneer Minister for the Church of England in the UK City of culture 2017, Hull. It is my home City, although I haven't lived here since I was 18 it feels fantastic to be back.

The context in which I minister is on a new large middle-class housing estate on the north side of the city. There are 3,000 houses now, and there will be double that by the time they finish in 2028. There is no inherited church here at the moment. We sit in the parish of a small nearby village. The diocese decided that there needed to be a fresh way of reaching and connecting with the predominately young professional families living here in Kingswood. So, they employed me as a Pioneer to do just that.

We have been here for 18 months now, listening, making connections and building both trust and relationships. Although I have been ordained as a pioneer for 10 years now there is still so much I am learning when it comes to evangelism and discipleship in a context such as this.

When it comes to evangelism one of the main issues I have found is that there is a tremendous amount of fear around. Although people are open and friendly when it comes to engaging and exploring faith people seem anxious about the prospect.

Through conversations I have had on numerous occasions with people, I have found that they are really open and interested in conversations about faith, more so than I would have thought. But the difficulty arises going any further than just a conversation. I think the fear comes from the fact that they believe that they are going to be judged for what they think or say. That they think that to explore faith it is going to be a one-way conversation. That the person with faith is going to tell them where they have gone wrong and what they must believe and how they must behave.

If we are honest with ourselves would we want to spend any time in a place like that? There is also the factor that they may feel stupid for not knowing enough. As someone put it, imagine exploring the works of Shakespeare for the first time. Now, I know of Shakespeare, I have even read a bit of Shakespeare, in fact I studied it at school so although I wouldn't say I was an expert I could hold a rough conversation if someone

asked me about the subject. But I would be totally lost if I wanted to go along to a group who knew it inside and out, who could quote it verbatim. I would fear I would look stupid, or say something that might offend someone. So, in the same way I can understand why some might feel uneasy about joining a group who are chatting about faith or exploring the bible. In a world where image is everything I wonder if we fully understand how people view us, the church, as well as beginning to understand God.

So, what do we do and where do we go and how do we do it? I believe we have to create the space for trust to be established. People have to trust us before they can begin to trust in the promises of God we know to be true. We have to start with people rather than programs or services. For us not having a church building is a gift because it forces us to ask that question every time we plan something. "What do we do, and where do we go, and how do we do it?" It makes us focus on what we are trying to do and who we are trying to connect with.

Last summer we ran 3 months of fun events for young families on a Sunday afternoon from 2-4pm. We went to the beach or the park or other local attractions. They were spaces to get to know people to develop relationships, to build trust. At times, no one came but we made a big deal about telling the local community what we were doing over social media. The reason for this is that when next summer comes around people will have heard and remembered what we did last year and will realise that it was something that can be trusted and come along. Once trust is established it is much easier to ask if someone is interested in coming along to an enquirers course such as *Start* or *Alpha*. Or you can ask the question "What would church look like for you and your family?" All of this is hit and miss, sometimes it works and other times it is back to the drawing board. Things work slowly and the Kingdom of God is full of surprises.

Last year we held a *Start Course*¹ for a few folks that I had met though different situations. We gathered in my front room and after the first nervous week of everyone turning up and working stuff out... "*What is this going to be like?*" "*Who are these people?*" "*What have I done!*" *Etc Etc...*" I explained that we could sit round and eat some good food and drink some good wine and talk about anything that seemed like a stumbling block to them finding faith. "

Over the weeks we got to know each other and the conversation flowed, people began to engage and slowly faith began to emerge. At the end of the course everyone

¹ See <http://www.leadingyourchurchintogrowth.org.uk/start/>

seemed genuinely upset that we wouldn't be meeting again. So, I explained that we could continue to meet but that next week rather than doing the course I would cook us a meal instead. I explained that we could sit round and eat some good food and drink some good wine and talk about anything that seemed like a stumbling block to them finding faith. We could also talk about what they wanted to do next and if they wanted to carry on meeting here at my house.

The Wednesday came and folks started to arrive, it was all very informal and relaxed and people had bought gifts of flowers and wine. Then Kelly and Simon arrived, they had both done *Start* and were really engaged. Kelly found me in the kitchen and handed me a bottle of wine and then said, "I have baked some bread, I have never baked bread before, but I know that you think bread is Holy so I thought we could share it with our meal."

It was a moment for me that totally blew me away. It was as if in the middle of all of my hopes and dreams, in the middle of me trying to get everything sorted and worrying about saying and doing the right thing for these wonderful people to experience the life changing, life giving God that I know. All my planning and seeking and making sure it was all right (whatever right is!) and all along God was already here, and it was Kelly, this brand-new Christian who introduced me to Jesus. It was a bit like her saying "I hope you don't mind, but I have invited someone else to come to dinner with us, his name is Jesus, have you met him?"

We had a great meal, with great food and great wine, with real honest and deep conversation and belly shaking laughter and we broke bread and we shared it. It was a lot of fun. It was Holy. It was Eucharist.

Starting a new Christian community from scratch isn't easy, but then neither is sustaining an established one! I have found that there are no quick fixes or formulas to follow. But that's where the joy is, God calls us to travel the road with him. Just as Jesus walked, talked

and invited people to come and join him. There were moments of total surprise, of highs and lows, of stories and food. Moments when Jesus revealed Himself to the around Him when they never expected it.

I would love to be able to say, 'This worked really well, or try this in your context.' But the more I do this the more I am convinced that God calls all of us to walk this faith journey into new places, new situations with new people. And in so doing we discover a God who has already gone before us and meets us in people who don't yet know Him. I am reminded of the Celtic prayer "Christ be in the mouth of each who speaks unto me, and in the Heart of each to whom I speak."

Ben Norton. Revd Ben Norton is the Pioneer Minister for the Church of England in Kingswood Hull. Ben has been ordained as a Pioneer for ¹⁰ years and has started and developed numerous emerging Christian communities across the North East. Ben is also Chaplain to the 4th Battalion the Yorkshire Regiment. He is the author of 'Espresso Scriptures' founder of the 'King City Revs' Podcast and the YouTube Channel 'Faith Shorts' all creative ways of engaging with faith issues for those doing so for first time.





ANVIL

BOOK REVIEWS

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1. RECOMMENDED READING

1.1 The future of Anglicanism

Day, Abby. *The Religious Lives of Older Lay Women: The Last Active Anglican Generation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

The Religious Lives of Older Lay Women makes for sobering reading. Day's basic thesis is that women born in the 1920s and early 1930s, those who are now in their eighties and older, are the last active generation of Anglican lay women. She argues that their activities are crucial for the maintenance and survival of the Anglican Church, but that this has gone largely unnoticed and unremarked upon by the Anglican hierarchy. As this generation dies, Day contends, the Church of England faces a precipitous decline as it will no longer be able to maintain its sixteen thousand churches because the women who keep them open will not be replaced by a new generation.

Day spent two years engaged in ethnographic fieldwork. She immersed herself "in the daily routines of one mainstream Anglican church in southern England" to identify key themes, and broadened the study through visits to other churches in the UK, the United States, Canada and Sri Lanka; she attended sixty-four services and numerous other mid-week events, visiting eighteen churches in total (p.11). Her data collection was primarily through participation; she conducted relatively few formal ethnographic interviews, but rather conversed while she worked, recording the data after the event.

The book is divided into three sections. The first one is largely orientation and scholarly positioning, including setting out her four objectives in the book: first to provide a detailed record of a vanishing group; second to offer insights and theory into why women engage in a particular mode of religious practice; third to reflect on the consequences of their loss in both religious and secular domains; and fourth to test, revise and introduce theories related to women, religiosity and generations (p.23).

The second section discusses the women Day engaged with, whom she called "Generation A." Chapter three explains how Generation A keep churches open, by simply being there when there are no activities going on ("Church sitting"); hosting coffee mornings; and attending weekday church services. Day argues that

by keeping churches open Generation A provide an invaluable service to people who have nowhere else to go, and that they perform, but do not discuss, their Christian faith. Chapter four discusses church cleaning, suggesting that the aim is not for efficiency, but community and that church cleaning becomes a form of meditation. Chapter five discusses theological engagement, noting the practice of Bible studies and other midweek services. Day contends that Generation A prefer male priests who they regard as part spiritual leader, part husband, part son (p.92). She also suggests that prayer is "emotional labour usually assigned to women" (p.103). Chapter six discusses what takes place on a Sunday, and how in comparison with the business of activity during the week, Sunday is the day when Generation A come to Church to rest.

Part three is more analytical, tackling the generational shifts that have taken place, the place of family and community, the social nature of church membership, the rituals of belonging and her analysis of Generation A. Day coins the term "pew power" to describe the power Generation A have to keep churches open and maintain the mission of the Church of England. She suggests that "duty" is a word that defines Generation A, whom she holds in high regard. Her discussion of bring and share meals includes the observation that "the generosity fuelled by often meager pensions is abundant" (p.165). In the final chapter, Day argues that Generation A are not resisting change, but resisting loss, the passing of church as they know and love it. She further suggests that they are particularly skilled at getting people to join, reflecting on her own reluctance to stop attending her main fieldwork site once the research was finished. She outlines seven effective strategies that Generation A employ:

- 1 Recognition: being greeted; remembering names.
- 2 Intimitization: details of lives recalled and discussed.
- 3 Integration: being included in events.
- 4 Routinization: church attendance and participation in events tied to church calendar become regular.
- 4 Obligation: being given a regular "job". As part of a "rota", knowing activities partly depend on you.
- 5 Ritualization: becoming a part of key "holy" events, such as Lenten rituals, Eucharist assistance.
- 6 Internalization: habits and practices

seem “normal” and part of regular life.

These seven strategies, she suggests, are the means by which Generation A have maintained church membership down the years (p.198).

I would recommend this book to anyone involved in ministry in the Church of England. Some of Day’s analysis may surprise; her suggestion that gay men will replace Generation A as the backbone of the Church of England is one I will have to think about at length. The book’s main weakness is that I felt it lacked the “thick description” I would expect of an ethnography. There is some, but it is a bit superficial and aimed at those with no understanding or experience of the Anglican Church. Readers of Anvil may expect more depth than they find here. But overall, the picture she paints is one I recognise. She does not offer solutions, merely stark reality. Recognising and understanding the scale of the challenge is, of course, the point of departure towards finding a solution.

Goodhew, David, Ed. *Growth and Decline in the Anglican Communion: 1980 to the Present*. London: Routledge, 2017.

Globally, Anglicans averaged a growth of a modest 1.5% annually, similar to global population growth over the same period. Overall the tradition grew fastest in Africa, averaging 4.8% per year. This growth is astounding considering British colonial history in many parts of Africa, and was encouraged by the adaptation of Anglicanism to African cultures and communities.

Anglicanism in Africa, Asia and Latin America was 19% of global Anglicanism in 1970. Now it is 60% or more. North American Anglicanism was 9% of global Anglicanism in 1970. By 2010 it had dropped to 3% and is now smaller still. But the picture is complex. The book documents how Nigeria, Congo, Kenya, Singapore and parts of South America have grown rapidly since 1980. But areas such as Ghana, South Africa, South Korea and the Church of South India have not grown or have grown much more slowly than their population or other churches in those nations. Studies of Australia, England and the USA show that the rate of decline in Western Anglicanism varies markedly from precipitous to modest. These chapters also show how Anglicanism is stable or even growing in a limited number of parts of the west. The idea of global cities of religious growth is documented through focus on Singapore, Sydney and London. Mention is made of surprising areas of

Anglican growth, such as Vietnam, Indonesia, Nepal and Thailand.

From a global perspective it seems more likely that Anglicanism will grow rather than decline in the next thirty-five years. There are theological controversies to be navigated, which will have a huge impact on the future shape of the Communion. The future is, like the present, entirely in God’s hands.

1.2 Theology outside of Europe and North America

Ezigbo, Victor I. *Introducing Christian Theologies: Voices from Global Christian Communities*, Volumes 1 and 2.

Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2016.

This two-volume text book is aimed at undergraduate students of Christianity with a particular focus on introducing the theological perspectives of Africa, Asia and Latin America. It is very accessible, the work of a lecturer who has honed his writing through countless hours of teaching and interaction with students.

Ezigbo’s motivation in writing is perhaps most clearly expressed in this paragraph, quoted in full:

In November 2011, during a conversation on a book project that will explore themes such as postcolonialism, colonial mentality, and mission, I was struck when a female theologian expressed in tears her internal struggles to please her male colleagues. She was responding to my earlier comment that some African theologians suffer from a colonial mentality when they are preoccupied with pleasing the Western theological guilds. I left the meeting wondering how Christian male theologians, knowingly or unknowingly, through their attitudes and writings, are dehumanizing women. I also pondered different ways people act in order to deny the dignity of others, especially people with disabilities, people of other religious faiths, and people of other cultures and ethnic backgrounds (Volume 2, p.23).

Volume One covers preliminary issues in Christian theology; God’s revelation; Christian Scripture; the Trinity; Jesus Christ; the Holy Spirit; and Divine Providence. Volume Two covers Christian Theological Anthropology; Salvation; Christian Theologies of Religions; the Church; Christian eschatological hope; and the Christian life. Each chapter begins with an overview, includes clear explanations of core points, exercises and questions for discussion, and concludes with a summary, a glossary of key terms, review

questions and suggestions for further reading. Ezigbo utilizes extracts from different theologians' writings to illustrate each point and each extract is accompanied by questions to stimulate discussion.

The stated aim of the textbook is to introduce theological perspectives students will not encounter in standard textbooks. But at the same time, Ezigbo has to cover the fundamentals, and so does spend a lot of his time discussing views any textbook would cover. Where he can he adds complexity; so for example the chapter on Jesus includes a discussion of ancestor, womanist and liberation Christology and the chapter on the Holy Spirit examines Yoruba pneumatology. The diversity of voices in volume two is much greater than volume one.

Written primarily for the North American market, there may be some challenges in adapting it to use in the UK, notably the encouragement at various points for students to write in the book, and the underlying assumption that a lecturer will simply work through the book chapter by chapter in a class setting. But any teacher or student wanting to engage with the core teachings of global Christianity could use it.

Mong, Ambrose. *A Tale of Two Theologians: Treatment of Third World Theologies*. Cambridge: James Clarke and Co, 2017.

The core aim of Mong's work is to contrast how the Vatican views the work of Gustavo Gutiérrez from Peru and Michael Amaladoss from India. The former was celebrated but the latter threatened with censorship in the same year, 2014, for doing, in Mong's view, the same thing; making "the Gospel message more relevant to the people in their respective continents" (p.2). His argument is that liberation theology is rooted in European intellectual tradition, as it draws on the thought of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. It is therefore more easily incorporated into Eurocentric Christianity than Asian philosophical and religious traditions.

Chapter one gives an overview of Gutiérrez's life and argues that he is a traditional theologian, chapter two examines his definitions of poverty and chapter three his use of Marxism. Chapter four contrasts Gutiérrez with the Russian Orthodox existential philosopher Nicolas Berdyaev, arguing that despite the reservations of the Russian Orthodox Church about liberation theology, the two theologians have a remarkably similar output. Mong then turns his attention to Amaladoss, beginning in chapter five with an overview of his life,

noting in particular his own Hindu cultural roots, what he believes Christians can learn from Hinduism and vice versa. Chapter six explains Amaladoss' key argument that the saving action of God is mediated through different symbols, which allows him to both hold his Christian convictions and also accept the validity of other religious traditions. Chapter seven extends this to Amaladoss' insistence on inculturation as part of evangelism and his view that evangelism is a dialogue between the Word of God (found in all religions) and the community. Chapter eight builds on Amaladoss' view that "Jesus is the Christ, but the Christ is not only Jesus" and outlines his attempts to portray Jesus in images that are relevant to Asians, such as engagement between Jesus the *Way* and Taoism; Jesus the *guru* and the Indian monastic tradition and Jesus the *avatar* and Hindu deities such as Vishnu, Rama and Krishna. Chapter eight draws conclusions. Mong reflects that while some Latin American theologians are subject to Vatican investigation and criticism, liberation theology has become orthodox Catholic teaching. He contrasts this with the greater scrutiny experienced by Asian theologians and the greater challenges of Asia, where Christianity is comparatively speaking a young religion that is not always seen as siding with the poor. *A Tale of Two Theologians* is an easy and accessible read, of interest to anyone who wants to learn more about world Christianity.

Sugirtharajah, R. S., Ed. *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* 25th Anniversary edition. Maryknoll: Orbis books, 2016.

This is a refreshed version of *Voices from the Margin* that maintains the six-part structure of earlier editions. With thirty-eight contributions in total, this short review can only give a very general overview of the contents. Part One, *Reading Strategies*, has nine essays covering topics including the use of the Bible in China, Dalits, the indigenous and Anglo-Saxon populations of Australia and the Pacific Islands. Part Two, *Subaltern Readings*, has seven essays. Two new inclusions, on reading the Bible with dispersed migrants and reading Ecclesiastes in response to the Malaysian courts ban on Christian publications using the word "Allah", were particularly memorable. Part Three, *Many Readings: Exodus* has six essays, and is unchanged from previous versions. The script for an Asian feminist play based on Exodus 1:8-22; 2:1-10 and the Palestinian perspective on the Land were the most memorable ones here.

Part Four, *Postcolonial Readings*, has four essays, two of which are replacements for earlier essays. The essay that used John 4 to propose power relations for international cultural relations and exchanges was the most engaging for me personally. Part Five, *Intertextual Readings*, has seven essays. The essay critiquing the use of John 14:6 to justify salvific exclusivism will be one I refer Christians to; the essay that proposes a liberation theology for Islam was fascinating, as was the one that cross fertilized the Bhagavad Gita, the book of Job and the Poems of Gitanjali. Part Six, *People as Exegetes: Popular Readings*, has five essays, and is unchanged from previous versions. I found the essay on using the Bible in non-literate cultures the most interesting; there is much there that modern British Christians could learn from for discipleship and mission.

As Sugirtharajah wryly remarks in his introduction, Biblical studies has become a minority discipline within the humanities, and the voices represented in this volume are marginal within that minority subject. As such they may not get the attention they deserve. Anyone who wants to relish the breadth of interpretations and understandings derived from the Bible and to grasp the multiplicity of ways it is used throughout the world would benefit from engaging with this volume. Any decent theological library should have a copy.

Tom Wilson, Leicester

2. BIBLICAL STUDIES

Barclay, John M G. *Paul and the Gift*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015.

John Barclay is one of the world's leading Pauline scholars. In this magisterial, ground-breaking yet highly readable book, Barclay sets out to offer a strikingly fresh understanding of Paul's theology of grace understood as the "gift" of Christ in his life, death and resurrection.

My first task is to provide an overview of the scope of the book. The first part is foundational. In chapter 1 Barclay examines the anthropology of gift in the Greco-Roman world which includes the Jewish world, showing both the importance of gifts in creating and reproducing social ties and the way they function in reciprocal relations. Chapter 2 expounds the perfections of Gift/Grace, referring to the drawing out of the concept to its endpoint. Six of these are examined. For example, the perfection of incongruity emphasises that a gift is supremely excellent because

unlike most gifts in the pagan world, such a gift takes no account of the prior condition of worth of the recipient. This brief but important chapter is followed by an equally important chapter which examines the way some key interpreters of Paul including Augustine, Luther, Calvin and Barth, have construed Paul's theology of grace and why they have adopted particular perfections of grace.

Part 2 explores Divine Gift in Second Temple Judaism. Barclay does this by analysing five texts representing five different voices from Second Temple Judaism. His purpose in doing so is to illustrate just how diverse were the understandings of Gift/Grace in these writings. At the same time, he lays the groundwork which will enable him to re-examine Paul's own understanding of the topic in Galatians and Romans, thus placing him as a Jew among Jews, but from the standpoint of faith in Christ. The five writings selected by Barclay are The Wisdom of Solomon, Philo, The Qumran Hodayot, Pseudo-Philo Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum, and 4 Ezra. Barclay's work here is both invaluable and essential to a proper understanding of how Paul in Romans and Galatians is wrestling with the same questions found to be significant in these other Second Temple texts. A good example of this is Romans 9 – 11, which is pervaded by a sense of crisis regarding the fate of Israel. This can be compared to the mood of pessimism found in 4 Ezra occasioned by the destruction of the Temple. Barclay's treatment of these texts is rewarding in its depth and sure-footedness. It undoubtedly enhances and to my mind justifies and strengthens his reading of Paul.

This brings us to Parts 3 and 4 which deal with respectively Galatians and Romans. First then, Galatians. Barclay's reading of this difficult and controversial letter lays particular emphasis on the incongruity of grace set forth in the Christ-event and experienced in the Spirit. Here he draws together Paul's previous life in Judaism and that of the Galatians in paganism to demonstrate that the Christ-gift neither recognised nor rewarded the worth or worthlessness of either. He is able to interpret the Antioch dispute in chapter 2 in the same light. In Barclay's words "Galatians drives toward *the formation of innovative communities* (italics his), which not only span the boundary dividing Gentiles and Jews, but practice a communal ethos significantly at odds with the contest-culture of the Mediterranean world." An important byproduct of this reading is that it repudiates any denigration of Judaism whilst demonstrating that the truth of the gospel questions the ultimate authority of the law. In sum, in this masterly exposition, Barclay is

able to apply the principle of the incongruity of grace as a master key which goes a long way toward the solution of many controversial points of exegesis.

To summarise Barclay's reading of Romans is beyond the scope of a short review. Once again, however, his treatment of what is, perhaps, Paul's most important letter, is a model of patient exposition. His interaction with other scholars is impressive but always courteous. What is also helpful and generally convincing is the way in which Romans moves beyond Galatians in a number of ways. For example, Paul's use of the Abrahamic story in Romans highlights much more clearly than Galatians the non-correspondence between human worth and divine gift. Indeed, Paul's treatment of the Jewish people and their place in God's providential economy is on an altogether grander scale. This illustrates well how important Paul's experience of the success of the Gentile mission was to his developing theological understanding of divine grace. This chapter was a joy to read but there is only space here to comment on Barclay's reading of chapters 9-11. What impressed me is his refusal to endorse the common view that in these chapters Paul somehow loses his way or contradicts himself. There are indeed considerable exegetical issues to address here, but Barclay shows to my mind, convincingly, that they are not insuperable. For example, his exegesis 9 vv 6-29 demonstrates conclusively, I think, that this passage is not about "predestination" in the classic Calvinist sense, but something much more immediate and relevant to Paul's own mission. As Barclay puts it: "God's plan is not a blueprint, but a promise. Those whom God calls are the product not of a pre-determined past, but of a purpose and promise." Time after time, Barclay sheds fresh light on disputed texts and passages which make these chapters richly rewarding.

On one point I remain uncertain. Barclay concludes his study of 4 Ezra by saying that final judgment will be on the basis of strict justice. Similarly, he says that in Galatians, God's grace is not perfected by being singular, so as to exclude the possibility of divine judgment or curse. This seems to imply that grace may not have the final word, but perhaps that is an enigma that cannot be finally answered in this life.

Finally, this book is clearly not only the product of fine scholarship, but also of deep personal faith. It should not deter anyone interested in pursuing this vital topic. It will remain a benchmark study for many years to come and I heartily commend it.

Howard C Bigg, Cambridge

Bird, Michael F. *An Anomalous Jew: Paul among Jews, Greeks, and Romans*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016.

This is a most enjoyable and stimulating book examining the Jewishness of Paul, and how he is seen with respect to other Jews, Jewish Christians and the Roman Empire: in other words, what sort of Jew was Paul? Answering this question requires interaction with the significant volume of scholarship over the last few decades, and in doing this Michael Bird is on his usual form: clear and insightful, sharpening the debate with insightful questions and answers. He settles on seeing Paul as an anomalous Jew, a Jew whose outlook is transformed by his view of the death of the Christ; he explores this in five chapters.

Chapter 1 examines how Paul understands the different salvation schemes in Judaism, discussing both the extent to which Paul's soteriology is in continuity with Judaism (as salvation comes from Judaism), and how he differs from Judaism (as he understands Christ as the climax of the salvation story). Bird considers the nature of Paul's mission as apostle to the nations in Chapter 2, where he makes a good case that there were not separate Gentile and Jewish missions, but rather "a number of interlocking missions" (p.102) that included work among Jews in the diaspora and Judea. Chapter 3 is a stimulating chapter tackling the debate over how apocalyptic relates to salvation history in Paul. Bird does not think they oppose each other, and offers a reading of Galatians where God's invasive activity in Christ is part of the story of scripture and the promise-fulfilment that it contains. This use of scripture and apocalyptic framework are typically Jewish, but the way Paul develops them demonstrates his anomalous approach. Chapter 4 examines Paul's relationship with other Jewish Christians in the Antioch incident (Galatians 2:11-14). Bird argues that the situation in Galatia was more fluid than usually accepted, and that the church had not completely separated from the synagogue at this time. This means that the Antioch incident is more complex than usually seen; while it shows Paul's commitment to the Gospel, Bird proposes that Paul lost the argument and became an outsider to the Jewish communities as a result. The final chapter turns to Paul's approach to the influence of Roman imperial ideology, arguing that Paul opposes Roman ideals where they stand against Christ, but that Paul is not forcefully anti-Roman.

The final chapter's discussion of empire did feel a little disjointed from the concerns of the rest of the volume, especially as it did not address Galatians. But

overall this is a stimulating book. In places I wished that Bird had expanded his argument a little (e.g., on the chronological relationship between Acts and Galatians; and the potential place of the imperial cult in Galatia), but this does not detract from the volume overall. The argument in this book is a helpful one, and generally persuasive; it deserves attention in considering the complexities of the relationship between Paul and Judaism. It is highly recommended for students thinking about Paul, and would form an excellent class resource—partly because of Bird’s helpful summary of the scholarship — but it also finds a place for thinking preachers and missionaries. It contains vital topics for the contemporary church — our improved understanding of the complexities of Paul’s relationship with Judaism can only give more sophistication to the church’s preaching and mission.

Dr Steve Smith, Tutor and Lecturer in New Testament Studies, St Mellitus College

3. ETHICS AND PASTORAL MINISTRY

Cherry, Stephen. *The Dark Side of the Soul: An Insider’s Guide to the Web of Sin*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016.

Cherry’s suggestion about the power of sin to trap us is an illuminating one. He likens it to the cords used to bind Gulliver in Lilliput. Each one is flimsy and insignificant. But together they have tremendous power. Each of our sins, Cherry suggests, are just as flimsy. But when we are caught in their web, we are truly captive. The stated purpose of the book is “honest self-awareness in the interests of taking responsibility for, and nourishing, your relational self” by becoming more aware of our darker side. Cherry begins by explaining the tendency in each of us to commit evil acts. The bulk of the book is concerned with six “nodes” of sinful behaviour. These are self-indulgence; “vicious regards” (ways of looking at, thinking about or appraising self or others in unkind or disrespectful ways); impossible ideals; our problems with time; our tragic desires; and our malicious tendencies (notably cruelty, spite, rage and revenge). Each gets a separate chapter, and then a summary chapter draws the threads together before Cherry offers seven tactics for “demon wrestling.” These tactics are: recognise sin is a serious spiritual issue; develop spiritual assertiveness; learn from others; seek humility; set time-wise and realistic goals; learn to love;

and identify what is not love-worthy.

There are many great insights in this book. I was challenged by the discussion of our problem with time, notably the arid nature of an overly-busy life. His comment on feedback is powerful: “The sort of feedback that really works is that which seems to the recipient to have come to the wrong person. Why? Not because the recipient is especially bad, but because the feedback will have brought to light things from the darkest corners of the dark side of the soul.” His suggestion in relation to tragic desires, that to be human is for your wants to outstrip your needs is a sobering one. I had to admit that at times I do indulge in what he terms “the intrinsic pleasure of irritation.” This book does shed a keen spotlight on some dark corners.

Cherry is right that the medieval lists of “seven deadly sins” do not really speak to our present situation. But I question his underlying worldview and assumptions. Although he gives tips on “demon wrestling” Cherry does not actually appear to believe demons exist. For a discussion on sin, the focus was primarily on the flesh, a bit about the world and nothing about the devil. In one sense I can understand that, but it does also result in only a partial diagnosis of the most intractable of all human problems.

Tom Wilson, Leicester

Everett, Laura. *Holy Spokes: The Search for Urban Spirituality on Two Wheels*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2017.

Having just treated myself to a new road racer as a retirement project, the idea of another book on cycling spirituality was appealing. Though Laura Everett came to cycling when her car died, and is a hard-core urban commuter, I can readily identify with that too: my two years commuting 30 miles a day from Wallingford to Oxford turned into a mobile hermit’s cave, a place of significant encounter.

It’s racily written: “That whole ‘love thy neighbour’ thing is a lot easier to do when you actually see your neighbours” (p.3). “There is spiritual wisdom to be gained by considering a pain in your ass” (p.36). I couldn’t put it down till I’d reached halfway through the book, and then it began to pall a little. I can’t quite put my finger on it, but it runs out of steam two-thirds of the way through.

That said, it’s only 161 pages long, and if you’re a

cycling aficionado, then this book is probably for you. I won't ever build my own bike, as I value my spare time. But there is much to be said for the slower way of life that complete dependence on pedal power demands, and "alternative, kingdom lifestyle" is one of the major themes of the book.

Laura is a United Church of Christ minister based in Boston, a liberal Christian, whose conversion to cycling has made her a key part of the cycling fraternity. There is an appendix with a "ghost bike" dedication service, a practice with which most readers will be unfamiliar, but which marks the site of a road death. That too is a worthwhile reflection, an incursion into liturgy beyond the walls.

Even the structure of the book is bicycle-based: chapter 1 is "frame: rule of life"; chapter 8 is "gears: pacing" and so on. Some of those titles work; others are forced. For me, the most useful structural theme is that of the bicycle as lending shape, order and discipline to life. It provides its own routines, and holds us in place as a kind of spiritual exo-skeleton. That I understand.

Where it falls down is in the spirituality department. It certainly offers guidance on spirituality as practical engagement in the world, with the world, a kind of urban incarnational theology. God doesn't get much of a look in, however, and (tongue in cheek) one might consider that a significant omission. It's not that it's a secular spirituality. Far from it. Clearly Laura has a profound faith, deep enough that all her life's rhythms and actions are shot through with God, but she doesn't articulate clearly enough for me the "being" aspect of discipleship.

To be fair, she's in her thirties, in the early days of her ministry, and I'm "retired", in my late 60s. "The way of wisdom is not to compete in every race to which you're invited, because not every race is worthwhile. Pushing harder and faster isn't always the height of cycling spiritual maturity" (p.143). True, but the bicycle for me is not just a means of travel and journeying anyway; it's a place of stillness, retreat, personal challenge and encounter with God.

If you're not a cyclist, don't be put off. Much of what she says translates into other life disciplines. On spiritual engagement with the world as the locus of God's Kingdom, Laura is at her best, and you won't be disappointed. It's a practical, not a mystical spirituality text.

Adrian Chatfield,
Honorary Fellow, Ridley Hall Cambridge

Harrison, Jamie and Robert Innes, Eds. ***Clergy in a Complex Age: Responses to the*** ***Guidelines for Professional Conduct of the*** ***Clergy.* London: SPCK, 2016.**

In 2015 the Church of England published updated professional Guidelines for its clergy, the previous and only version having been issued in 2003. As the subtitle suggests, this is a varied collection of brief responses, for the most part far more accessible and useful than the Guidelines themselves.

Of course, that's in part because they occupy different spaces. An attempt to provide comprehensive guidance on most, if not all, areas of ministry is bound to be different from short, pithy thought-provokers. But it does raise the key question: What on earth are the Guidelines for? They are portrayed internally as both a minimum standard of acceptable behaviour and as a set of aspirations to which none can ever attain. There is no clear sanction for their breach, yet their very existence makes them susceptible to use, for example, as a benchmark for clergy disciplinary proceedings.

By way of contrast, I found Paula Gooder's alternative guidelines based on the deceptively simple question "What would Jesus do?" especially evocative. She offers only five, whilst encouraging us to look for more, but, for example, "Don't hide your vulnerability" sits uneasily alongside the Guidelines' take on professionalism and confidentiality.

In his chapter on Staying Safe, Paul Butler highlights what he sees as the biggest shift in thinking since the previous edition of Guidelines was published in 2003, and who can deny that? He highlights the precarious balance clergy must strike between pastoral interventions that take them out of their depth and pastoral inaction that fails to fulfil a God-given calling.

The editors contribute the closing pieces, on Trusting Clergy and being Faithful Servants in a Complex Age. Space permits only two short quotes to give a flavour of each: "Building a trust culture is central to the work of the local minister" and "at a time of rapid change, clergy continue to be a source of stability and hope."

Guidelines is a necessary but complex and dry document that all clergy should have to hand. But having this collection of thought-provoking pieces to hand alongside them would be a great way to help a Chapter, a Team or indeed individual clergy develop a better appreciation of the contradictions of life for clergy in a complex age.

Pete Hobson, Leicester Cathedral, Chair of Church of England Clergy Advocates

Vasey-Saunders, Mark. *The Scandal of Evangelicals and Homosexuality: English Evangelical Texts 1960-2010*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2015.

In *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism*, Brian Stanley comments on “the stark reality that evangelical faith does not ... guarantee unanimity of view on ‘what the Bible says’”. This volume by Mark Vasey-Saunders might, at one level, be seen as an extensive outworking of Stanley’s observation.

Despite the superficially racy title anyone who is looking for salacious content in this book will be sorely disappointed! Instead the reader is treated to a scholarly, insightful and highly readable account and analysis of current contentions and disputes within the evangelical Anglican community. By way of chronicling and analyzing these differences Vasey-Saunders has used two currently controversial topics, homosexuality and, to a lesser extent, the penal substitutionary model of the atonement, as yardsticks.

Coincidentally reviewing this book in the aftermath of the Jesmond “consecration” has been an interesting experience, David Holloway having made it clear in both an explanatory press release and on Radio 4’s Sunday programme that it was attitudes to homosexuality that were a major causal factor in this illicit act. Though Holloway’s statements are a perfect fit for the media’s narrative that evangelicals are homophobic there is clearly a need for a much more nuanced and scholarly approach. This is admirably provided in this volume by Mark Vasey-Saunders.

Making use of the “Mimetic Theory” of René Girard, Vasey-Saunders demonstrates the inability of many evangelicals to enter into a debate on crucial issues without being “scandalized” (hence the book’s title) by the contrary view (or, indeed, any view other than their own) and seeking to demonize those who take other views. Girard had observed the tendency to rather crudely promote divisive subjects in order to compel an observable choice. He notes that part of this process is the naming of scapegoats upon whose shoulders is loaded the responsibility for the community’s woes. Jeffrey John has been used in this role over the homosexuality issue and, to a lesser extent Steve Chalke in the atonement debate. And there were others: the evangelical reaction to the appointment of Rowan Williams to Canterbury in 2002 being a case in point. It

subsequently came as a shock to realize the similarity of this “scapegoating” process with the “two-minutes’ hate” in George Orwell’s 1984.

Not surprisingly, since this comes directly from his doctoral research, Vasey-Saunders is a master of detail and observable errors are minimal. It is therefore all the more surprising when he states that Jim Packer wrote ‘*Fundamentalism and the Word of God*’ (1958) as a response to James Barr’s *Fundamentalism* (1977) (impossible in view of the publication dates, given correctly in the bibliography) when in fact it was Michael Ramsey’s 1956 article on “The Menace of Fundamentalism” in the Durham diocesan magazine to which Packer was responding.

As implied by the quotation from Brian Stanley at the opening of this review the understanding of Scripture is key. The evangelical insistence on the primacy of Scripture can only be a uniting factor in the Twenty-First century if it is accepted that there can be differing interpretations of the same text(s); a monolithic party line is no longer achievable and respect, tolerance and a willingness to listen to other interpretations is key. This concept is clearly understood in dialogue with other faiths, it is sometimes woefully lacking in intra-evangelical debate.

If the observations of a sympathetic evangelical scholar are so stark then just how must the evangelical constituency appear to the wider church and to the world? Though it does not make comfortable reading this book makes a significant contribution to the understanding of contemporary Anglican evangelicalism and as such should be widely read and reflected on by evangelicals. I come away from this book feeling that I know much more clearly what makes many contemporary evangelicals tick; it has not, however, increased my affection for them!

John Darch, Diocese of Blackburn

4. MISSION

Sudworth, Richard. *Encountering Islam: Christian-Muslim relations in the public square*. London: SCM, 2017.

Encountering Islam is the latest work by Richard Sudworth and deals with Christian-Muslim relationships in the public square, a key issue today in Britain and for modern pluralist democracies as well as for more restricted pluralist regimes. This academic study is blended with his experiences as a mission

partner with Church Mission Society and as parish priest in a majority Muslim area of Birmingham. It is an illuminating read, pregnant with apt insightful phrases, seminal quotations and an ambitious synopsis.

It charts both the early and evolving historical relationships between Islam and branches of Christianity both Roman Catholic and Eastern Christian to inform “What space within the body politic does the Church of England envisage for Islam?” Of course, this also reflects on how as the established Church within a political economy the Church of England accommodates or is “accommodated by” other Christian denominations and other religions and none. It also recognises the increasingly marginal position of the Church of England within British political and social culture. To its advantage the Church of England can draw on experience and wisdom of the wider Anglican Communion who have lived amongst Muslims with diverse experience of protection or persecution. Thus, there is considerable value at looking at Anglican-Muslim relationships through a wide-angled lens.

Likewise the book avoids recommending simplistic responses to a hugely diverse and evolving Islam. I appreciated the notion that Islam is what Muslims say it is and we have to deal with Islam on the terms of its own self-identities. This does also need to include responses to the pervasive legacies of British colonialism not least in Israel and Palestine and Jewish-Christian-Muslim relationships, although this is more recognised than explored in depth due to the focus of the book.

This book provides a selectively concise history of relationships between the Church of England and Muslims with significant contributions to engagement by Pfander, Gairdner, Padwick, Cragg, Taylor and Warren, Nazir-Ali and Williams. What is really encouraging is the blend of mission, an authentic desire to understand Islam, and academic rigour that is able to resource contemporary approaches to Christian Muslim relations in the United Kingdom today. An enormous debt is owed to those missionary Christians who have invested in Christian-Muslim relations.

The relevant formulations (and seminal writings and lectures) of the Church of England and its wider network are highlighted and often analysed and critiqued. The overview analysis of these documents together can help forge the future direction of travel and no doubt inform the relatively new ecumenical Christian-Muslim Forum, which has built upon the Archbishop of Canterbury’s initiative of 2001.

Sudworth’s chapter on the legacies of Kenneth Cragg and Rowan Williams shines throughout as providing a

genuine approach of sharing what it is distinctive about Christianity and for that matter Islam too, as well as sharing what we have in common in our different faiths. Cragg’s approach of seeing Christians as both host and guest in relations with Muslims is much needed with his emphasis on the need for embassy and hospitality as well as dialogue.

For people new to Christian-Muslim studies there is much to commend in this succinct volume of nearly 200 pages and nearly 50 pages of helpful references and explanatory notes. It is a challenging but rewarding read and deserves to be read by those seeking to find a political as well as an inter-religious way of creative co-existence between Christians and Muslims in the United Kingdom today.

Paul Thaxter, CMS

Yong, Amos. *The Missiological Spirit*. Cambridge: James Clarke and Co, 2015.

This collection of twelve essays is both autobiographical as well as theological, tracing the development of Yong’s thought over time, and giving him opportunity to recount his journey. Like many an essay collection it is something of a mixed bag; readers will find some essays are more relevant than others, and there while there is an general direction of travel, the overarching coherence and focus of a monograph is not present.

The book is divided into four sections: reluctant missiology; Pentecostal missiology; North-American missiology; and systematic missiology. Each section has three essays. In part one, Yong begins by critically engaging with the research of J C Ma, arguing for a theologically sensitive appropriation of pre-Christian heritage, and then in two essays explores a pneumatological paradigm for missional engagement with other religions. I found these two essays particularly absorbing as he outlines his understanding of the Spirit’s leading in encounters with those of faiths other than Christianity.

Part two, subtitled “pragmatic mission theology,” discusses hospitality as a paradigm for performative theology of interreligious encounter; provides an overview of Pentecostal theologies of mission and religions; and offers a Pentecostal vision of mission in a pluralistic world. Rooted in the British context, I found part three to be the weakest of the essays. Yong examines theology and mission in America after the Jamestown massacres; reflects on Buddhist-Christian relations in North America; and outlines John Howard

Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas' mission theologies. All the essays were interesting in and of themselves, but reading them in the UK, they did not have the same cutting edge as the first two parts.

Part four discusses the place of the Spirit in mission studies; utilises the classic Christological framework of King, Prophet and Priest to set out constants which the Spirit utilises in enabling encounters with Christ; and explains his vision of the "relational" and "Shalomic" nature of mission in a pluralistic world.

Certain themes run through the book, notably Yong's pneumatological understanding of mission and of engagement with the world religions. He rejects pluralism, problematizes exclusivism and raises pertinent questions about inclusivism, arguing that the world's religions must be engaged with first and foremost on their terms, and that while relationship with Christ is necessary for salvation, it is the Spirit who brings about that relationship and the Spirit blows where he wills. His five key theses sum up his approach neatly. First, a viable contemporary theology of mission and evangelization is necessarily pneumatological. Second, a viable contemporary theology of interreligious ecumenism can be understood in part as an outgrowth of a pneumatological theology of intra-Christian ecumenism. Third, a pneumatological theology of mission and evangelization in an interreligious context is able to safeguard the perennial tension which exists between dialogue and proclamation. Fourth, a pneumatological theology of mission and evangelization will also enable a truly crucicentric and, hence, liberative solidarity to emerge in the interreligious encounter. Fifth, on a practical level, a pneumatological theology of mission and evangelization in a religiously plural world will need to be especially alert for what the Spirit is saying in and through the churches, be sensitive to the presence and activities of religious others, and be discerning about the broader context of Christian ministry.

This is an essay collection that made me think about my attitude to mission generally and my understanding of the "what" and "why" of interfaith encounters. It also made me want to read and re-read some of Yong's monographs, where he develops his arguments in a more sustained and holistic fashion. A worthwhile investment for anyone wanting to think further about missions.

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