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# ANVIL

Journal of Theology and Mission

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CHURCH  
MISSION  
SOCIETY



*Pioneering on estates and  
new housing developments*

**VOL 33, ISSUE 3**



# WELCOME TO THIS EDITION OF ANVIL

ANVIL: Journal of Theology and Mission  
VOL 33, ISSUE 3

**Andrea Campanale**

## WELCOME TO THIS EDITION OF ANVIL WHICH HAS A THEME OF PIONEERING ON ESTATES AND NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS.

**It has emerged out of an event of the same name that was held at Church Mission Society in Oxford on 18 July. Over 100 practitioners gathered to listen and respond to 13 contributors who spoke for seven minutes each on one of four topics – estate culture, estate power, estate wisdom and estate networks. As the speakers only had sufficient time to introduce their reflections, it made sense to give some of them a further opportunity to expand and unpack their thinking by writing an article. This is the result.**

Pioneering on estates and new housing developments is a rapidly expanding area of pioneer ministry and one in which the church is willing to invest people and resources in order to do something new and create fresh expressions of church. I wonder if this is because it's easier to understand what pioneer mission is seeking to achieve when there are geographical boundaries and the end result resembles a parish. Or, perhaps, it's just that the desperate need for millions of additional new homes is well documented and we're frequently confronted with the disruption caused as developers seek to meet the overwhelming demand for additional properties. The recent tragedy at Grenfell Tower in West London has forced the diverse composition and lack of investment in existing social housing stock onto the news agenda, literally overnight.

I've very much enjoyed reading the submissions that are included in this publication. There are a number of common threads and repeated appeals to the biblical motifs of incarnation, the importance of the equality and value of all

human beings as made in the image of God and the desire to secure justice for the stranger, the alien and the outcast. There's also a concern for empowerment and giving a voice to those that have been disregarded and dispossessed. A move from 'doing for' to 'being with' in community engagement and transformation is very much in evidence. It's clear particularly in Al Barrett's exploration of what he calls 'flipping the christological axis' from 'what would Jesus do?' to 'what would Zaccheus do?' and in Cathy and John Wheatley's experience of starting with a base, but finding a home on the Bournville estate. Ali Boulton draws on her practice to articulate the radical shift from being Christians primarily defined by belief to those seeking to 'enflesh the Word'. Bart Woodhouse addresses the manipulation of house builders and planners in presenting a vision of 'ideal community' that is unreal and cleansed of conflict, difference and difficulty in order to serve the interests of capitalism. Penny Stradling wonders what the implications of gentrification will be for residents whose homes are earmarked for demolition as they resist relocation to a mixed new development with luxury apartments. Lastly, Chris Baker considers authenticity, which is an unspoken yet underlying concern for all our pioneer ministers in their varying contexts.

I hope that whatever your engagement in mission, you will find ideas to stimulate deeper theological reflection and inspire more meaningful engagement with the 'other' whether you're located on an established housing estate, brand new development, rural idyll or market town.

**Andrea Campanale** is a lay pioneer in the Diocese of Southwark and does mission to spiritual seekers and steam punks, as well as leading a missional community called Sacred Space Kingston. She has recently completed an MA in Theology, Ministry and Mission. She is also employed part-time by Church Mission Society to animate the network of pioneers that have been through its Pioneer Mission Leadership Training and to deliver the learning in new hubs for pioneers in locations around the UK.



# WHERE'S THE PASSION

CHRISTOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS  
ON MISSION IN THE MARGINS

ANVIL: Journal of Theology and Mission  
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**Al Barrett**



# WHERE'S THE PASSION? CHRISTOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON MISSION IN THE MARGINS

**Abstract:** In the face of the 'web of poverty' in socio-economically marginal places, Christian missional pioneers are often tempted to 'heroic' expressions in the name of love. Jesus' own resistance to those temptations, and Mark's subversions of Jesus' own 'heroic' narrative, offer us a model for 'giving up activism', in able to receive the transforming gifts and challenges of our neighbours

## IN "THE WASTELAND"

In one corner of the Firs and Bromford estate where I live and work, almost underneath the M6 motorway as it stretches on stilts away from Spaghetti Junction, is what we locals call "the wasteland". In the 1960s, Birmingham City Council built three tower blocks on the land, which instantly started sinking into the mud – it was, and still is, a flood plain. The tower blocks demolished in the 1990s, the land has been abandoned ever since, even though many local people walk through it every day to get to shops and schools.

One wintry April afternoon in 2013, framed by the concrete pillars that support the motorway, we crucified Jesus, in the very first Bromford Community Passion Play, an initiative not from the church, but from one of our passionate and gifted neighbours. "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me," cried the dying man. Finally, out of the silence that followed the crucifixion, these defiant words of Maya Angelou sang out:

Now did you want to see me broken  
Bowed head and lowered eyes  
Shoulders fallen down like tear drops  
Weakened by my soulful cries  
  
Does my confidence upset you  
Don't you take it awful hard  
Cause I walk like I've got a diamond mine

Breakin' up in my front yard

So you may shoot me with your words  
You may cut me with your eyes  
And I'll rise, I'll rise, I'll rise

Out of the shacks of history's shame  
Up from a past rooted in pain  
I'll rise, I'll rise, I'll rise<sup>1</sup>

## POVERTY OF IDENTITY?

Something about that passion play seemed to resonate deeply with the collective story of the Firs and Bromford estate, among Christians and non-Christians alike. From its utopian beginnings, as a green and spacious paradise for those who had previously lived in inner-city Birmingham's "back-to-back" terraces, much of the estate's history has been one of being overlooked, let down, and abandoned. Overlooked quite literally, by those who drive up and down the M6, and more metaphorically, for example, when a multi-million pound regeneration investment went to the neighbouring Castle Vale estate. Let down, often, by organisations coming in promising the earth, and then promptly leaving when their funding ran out. Abandoned, repeatedly, as over the years employment opportunities in local firms (mostly heavy industry, like the Jaguar factory and Fort Dunlop, just across the motorway) have been pared to the bone, while the local Council, even before the post-2010 government austerity regime, has gradually withdrawn neighbourhood offices, place-based officers, and community facilities from the estate. At the same time, rapid demographic change with the growth of Somali, Nigerian, Romanian and other recently-arrived communities, has left many local people with a sense of living "parallel lives": side-by-side in their homes on the street, but rarely coming face-to-face.

In the language of the Church Urban Fund's "web of poverty", residents of the Firs and Bromford have experienced not just a poverty of resources (financial, educational and health, among others), and of relationships (the CUF report names fear of crime, isolation, family breakdown, and lack of trust in others), but also a poverty of identity. Whereas in CUF's report that is understood mostly in individual terms (poor mental health, lack of wellbeing and self-worth), however, I would want to highlight also a communal dimension. Wider discourse, among politicians and media commentators, about estates like ours rarely portrays

<sup>1</sup> Ben Harper, 'I'll Rise' (1994), from the album Welcome to the Cruel World. Original words by Maya Angelou, 'Still I Rise', in And Still I Rise (New York: Random House, 1978).

them other than with crushing negativity: as “sink estates mired in welfare dependency, drug abuse and a culture of joblessness”, to take just one example.<sup>2</sup>

As sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant have noted, such descriptions inflict “symbolic violence” on those they describe, a violence which is internalised within those who are subjected to it.<sup>3</sup>

## THE TEMPTATIONS OF THE “PIONEER”

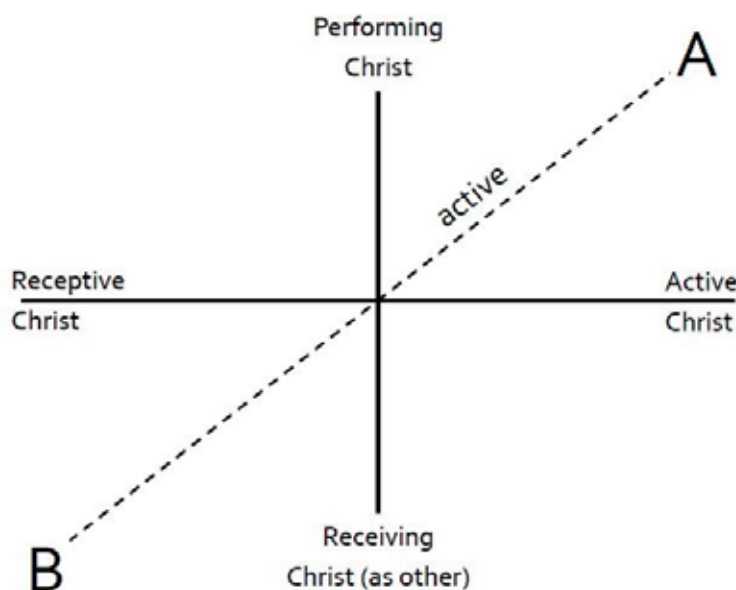
How, then, might a local church engaged in “pioneering” mission respond? An obvious step would be for church-run initiatives and projects to seek to “fill the gap” in service-provision left by the retreat of the state, feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, in the spirit of Matthew 25:

“for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me” (Matt 25:35–36)

Another common theological justification for the same practical response might be to ask ‘What Would Jesus Do?’ – or, if we prefer more ‘incarnational’ language, we might perhaps lean towards Teresa of Avila’s words:

“Christ has no body now but yours.  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours.  
Yours are the eyes with which he looks in compassion on this world,  
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,  
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.”<sup>4</sup>

What is striking about both of these well-used christological rationales is that, whether they identify the Christian or the neighbour with Jesus Christ, it is the Christian, and not the neighbour, who is engaged in activity. Our neighbour, on the other hand, is imagined, explicitly or implicitly, as passive, receptive, “in need” – reinforcing precisely the kind of descriptions that have inflicted symbolic violence on estates like ours, in the words and actions of powerful outsiders.



**Fig 1 An ‘active’ christological axis:**

A = ‘What would Jesus do?’ / ‘Christ has no body but ours...’ (Teresa of Avila)

B = ‘I was hungry and you fed me, a stranger and you welcomed me’ (Matt 25)

Bishop John V Taylor, in his *The Christlike God*, links precisely this temptation to those faced by Jesus in the wilderness (Matt 4:1–11): temptations to “the power of the provider” (“Tell these stones to become bread”), “the power of the possessor” (“I will give you all the kingdoms of the world”), and “the power of the performer” (“Throw yourself down from the parapet of the temple”). None of these kinds of power is essentially evil, Taylor argues, but they are all seductive, and that seduction can quickly corrupt. The power of the provider can make us feel good about our generosity, at the expense of the self-respect of those on the receiving end. The power of the possessor can quickly slide into a control-freakery that imagines it always knows best, always has to be in the driving seat, always has to be the one taking the initiative. And the power of the performer can become an obsession with being seen and heard, being “successful” and convincing others of your significance.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> An Independent leader column in 2008, quoted in Kjartan Sveinsson, ‘Introduction’, in Kjartan Sveinsson (ed.), *Who Cares About the White Working Class?* (London: Runnymede Trust, 2009), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Bourdieu & Loic Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), 167, quoted in Lisa McKenzie, *Getting By: Estates, Class and Culture in Austerity Britain* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2015), 8.

<sup>4</sup> Teresa of Avila, quoted in Ian S Markham & Oran E Warder, *An introduction to ministry: a primer for renewed life and leadership in mainline protestant congregations* (Chichester: John Wiley, 2016), 124, in a section entitled ‘The Christological Basis of Pastoral Care’.

<sup>5</sup> John V Taylor, *The Christlike God* (London: SCM, 1992), 261ff.

All three temptations readily find concrete examples in my experience as a minister seeking to re-engage the local church with a multiply-impooverished outer estate. The inequalities exacerbated by austerity can make “the power of the provider” a seductive calling – but what are we saying to our neighbours if our primary relationship with them is one where “we” are giving and “they” are receiving? For largely middle-class Christians (and perhaps Anglican vicars especially), having “a place at the table” at neighbourhood meetings, chairing committees, running projects – “the power of the possessor” – all of these can often go without saying as part and parcel of the church’s role within a neighbourhood, but what are we saying about our confidence in our neighbours’ abilities to make decisions, develop initiatives, take the lead? And finally, is “the power of the performer” perhaps the most pressing temptation of those of us who get labelled “pioneer” ministers – a pressure coming less from our neighbours, than from the church structures of which we are a part, with their strategic prioritising of “going for growth”, developing “fresh expressions” and “new initiatives”, and requiring us all to both measure and demonstrate our “impact” on a regular basis?

Jesus’ temptations are rooted in a questioning of his identity (“If you are the Son of God...” – an identity that had been so clearly spoken to him in his baptism just days before (Matt 3:16-17). There may well be multiple reasons (at personal, local and national/institutional levels) behind our own anxieties and insecurities of identity, but when we are seduced by the temptations to power, it is the image of God in our neighbours that is eclipsed, as well as in ourselves.

## MISSION AFTER COLONIALISM?

“To missionize is to colonize and to colonize is to missionize.”<sup>6</sup> The link between the two, dating back at least to the conquest of the Americas, has been well documented in mission studies.<sup>7</sup> But even though Christian mission thinking has largely recognized and renounced its colonialist past, Joerg Rieger argues, it does not always see its risk of entanglement with a present-day neocolonialism – as much, if not more so, a pernicious way of thinking (and therefore of relating to others) as it is a visible, structural arrangement of power. “We know what is right for the world”, is the neocolonial motto, and it is subtly embedded in global financial

networks, political projects, and culture-shaping media corporations. Rieger’s analysis of neocolonial attitudes is largely focused on the international level, but it is, I would suggest, no less relevant for a local missiology on a Birmingham outer estate. I introduce his thinking here, before grounding it in my local context.

### Mission as Outreach

Identifying mission as “an ‘outreach’ activity of the church” is, says Rieger, “a huge improvement over the common self-centredness of the church. It takes into account the fact that the church does not exist for itself, [but] ... needs to go out into the world” – with both words and actions. Asking “What can we do?” rather than “What is going on?”, however, usually leaves “the missionized ... on the receiving end” and “the uneven distribution of wealth of the neocolonialist system” unchallenged. Even “learning about the perceived needs of the other” rarely gets as far as asking the question “How might we be part of the problem?” Rieger argues. Mission as outreach is ultimately service not to our neighbours, but to the system itself:

“[a]s long as we are preoccupied with helping others – with all the temptations of trying to shape them in our own neo-colonial image and make them conform to our world – we will not raise nosy questions about ourselves. As long as we continue to celebrate our own generosity, nothing can really challenge us”.<sup>8</sup>

### Mission as Relationship

If mission as outreach is “a one-way street”, much recent missiological work has emphasised mission as relationship as an alternative which allows for a greater mutuality between missionaries and “the missionized”. It might be easy, over-reacting against the outreach model, to fall into the opposite extreme of distanced indifference, Rieger suggests. “Mission as relationship recognizes that we are all connected” and that we cannot simply “leave people to themselves”. But when much talk of “mission as relationship” rejoices in the “enrichment” that can come from engaging with and learning from our “others”, we should be cautious about a metaphor, Rieger argues, that “has undertones of economic gain that are not unfamiliar in neocolonialism”. Asymmetries of power in such relationships often remain in place, or are even reinforced in the encounter. It is not that we do not mean well, says Rieger.

<sup>6</sup> German Roman Catholic missiologist J Schmidlin writing in 1913, quoted in Joerg Rieger, “Theology and Mission Between Neocolonialism and Postcolonialism”, *Mission Studies* 21:2 (2004), 201-226.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> Rieger, “Theology and Mission”, 212-5

“Just the opposite: because we do mean so well, because we really want to see the other as equal, we often fail to give an account of the deeper inequalities and differentials in power”.

Even behind much “empowerment-talk” (“It is better to teach people to fish than to give them fish”, for example) lies the assumption that “those of us who have the power [or expertise, or authority] can pass it on to the people in need of it”. What if there is a power, an expertise, an authority, that has been in their hands all along?<sup>9</sup>

### Mission as “Inreach”

What is needed, Rieger argues, is more than mere reference to the *missio Dei* – to what God is doing beyond what we are doing. Even that can be “pulled into the neocolonial force field: God can be claimed for almost anything”. We need to undergo “a radical reversal”: rather than seeking “to bring something to others”, the first task of those who consider themselves to be in mission is “to give up control, to commit things to God, and (as a result) to leave things in the hands of those to which the mission is directed”. “[A]s a reversal of power takes place, a reversal of authority happens as well”, and this “forces us to take a deeper look at ourselves”, “to reflect on how we have come to be (and still are) part of the problem” before we can even contemplate becoming “part of the solution”. We need “mission as inreach”, as Rieger calls it, “in order to inform us about where we are and about the invisible ‘principalities and powers’ that use even the most well-meaning efforts at mission for their own purposes”.<sup>10</sup>

## FLIPPING THE CHRISTOLOGICAL AXIS

Rieger highlights three different theological presuppositions undergirding the different approaches to mission outlined above. Mission as outreach assumes, deep down, “not only that God is on our side, the side of the established churches, but also that God is introduced to other places through us”. Mission as relationship is clearer that “God is everywhere, not just on our side”, but without taking into account the asymmetries of power in the world that we live in, we are left assuming that “God is with those who mean well”. Mission as inreach emphasises that “God is never limited by the powers that

be”, and takes more seriously the possibility “that God may be in places where our common sense logic least expects it – one of the constant surprises of encounters with God reported in the Bible”.<sup>11</sup> In christological terms, I want to propose that we Christians who find ourselves on the privileged side of imbalanced power-relationships seek to ‘flip’ the axis from that described earlier (see Fig. 2, below).

Instead of asking ‘What Would Jesus Do?’ we might instead dis-identify with Jesus, asking ourselves rather ‘What Would Zacchaeus Do?’ As critical white theologian Jennifer Harvey reminds us,

“[w]hat we know about Zacchaeus is that when he encountered Jesus he did so as someone who had been utterly complicit with the powers that be... he had forsaken brotherhood and sisterhood, and been seduced into allegiance with death-dealing power structures. He had been massively and unjustly enriched by way of this allegiance... When Jesus challenged him, however, Zacchaeus did not remain overdetermined by his oppressor location. In response, Zacchaeus chose radical conversion.”

Asking “WWZD?” Harvey argues, enables us to avoid the dangers of evading the power-imbalances in our relationships, while also avoiding placing ourselves as “the central actor in the story”. “Perhaps most importantly, WWZD? models what humility and repentance look like ... and provide an example of what is required to turn away from complicity”.<sup>12</sup>

Alternatively, instead of expecting to encounter a ‘hungry’ Jesus on the receiving end of our generosity (cf Matt 25), what if we were to find common ground with a Jesus who, in Mark’s gospel especially, repeatedly finds himself challenged and changed in his encounters with others. Writing as a male theologian, it is especially poignant for me that the most significant of these transforming encounters are all with women: with the woman with a haemorrhage who interrupts Jesus’ journey (Mark 5:21–34), with the woman with the ointment who interrupts a private meal and anoints Jesus as messiah (Mark 14:3–9), and perhaps most strikingly with the Syro-Phoenician woman who challenges the apparent limits of Jesus’ imagination and wins healing for her daughter (Mark 7:24–31). In this last encounter,

<sup>9</sup>Ibid, 215–9

<sup>10</sup>Ibid, 219–22

<sup>11</sup>Rieger, “Theology and Mission”, 223

<sup>12</sup>Jennifer Harvey, “What Would Zacchaeus Do? The case for disidentifying with Jesus”, 98–9.



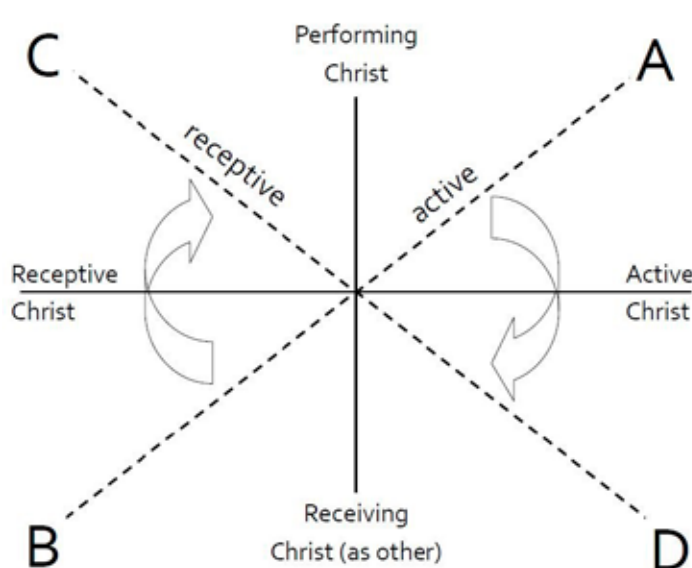
in the narrative hinge of Mark's gospel, we witness Jesus apparently experiencing a change of mind, a change in his direction of travel (he literally, geographically, turns around after this moment) and a change in the whole horizon of his ministry (his sense of mission extended from the people of Israel alone to also include Gentiles). 'What Would Jesus Do?' looks quite different, I would suggest, when we identify with a Jesus on the receiving end.<sup>13</sup> To return to the temptation story explored earlier, we might remember that after Jesus has resisted the three temptations to power, "angels came and ministered to him" (Matt 4:11). Who, we might ask, are the strange "angels" in our neighbourhoods, who come to us bringing gifts, invitations, and challenges?

## WHERE'S THE PASSION? RETURNING TO "THE WASTELAND"

If there is one question that guides our work in Hodge Hill more than any other, it is this: "Where's the passion?" Passion can mean suffering, of course: Where is the pain? Where does it hurt? But it also means: What fires you up? What are the things that make you get up in the morning? What are your deepest loves? What brings you to life?

In Hodge Hill, we have been on a "treasure hunt" over the course of at least seven years now, seeking out our local "unsung heroes": those ordinary people who make a big difference in our neighbourhoods, in quiet, often hidden ways. They are usually people who lead from the middle, not from the front – people who are well-connected to their neighbours, and well-trusted by them, not necessarily the "usual suspects" that outside organisations like the council seek out as "the voice of the community". They are people with passions, gifts and skills that they are willing to share more widely with their neighbours. We find them often because other people tell us about them. Sometimes we find them because we are out every week, knocking on doors, asking people what they are passionate about and what they would want to do in their community if they could find a couple of people to join them.<sup>14</sup>

Phil was one of our early "unsung heroes". He works in one of the few remaining local factories, but his real passion is theatre: putting on a performance, making people laugh. The Bromford Theatre Group was Phil's baby. He started it from scratch. From Christmas pantos to Halloween ghost walks, from Mad Hatter's Tea Parties to the Community Passion Play, the theatre group gets people involved, draws out their passions and gifts, gets them doing stuff they would never dream of. It nurtures confidence, it builds community, and it energises people for all kinds of action. It was Phil who sat in my living room and dictated to me the words of a five-act passion play, and it was the Bromford Theatre Group which performed it on that wintry April afternoon. Phil presented the passion play to our largely middle-class church as an invitation to get involved, an interruption to the church's regular patterns, a challenge to our tendencies to want



**Fig 2 'Flipping' the christological axis**

### 'Active' axis:

A = 'What would Jesus do?' / 'Christ has no body but ours...'

(Teresa of Avila)

B = 'I was hungry and you fed me, a stranger and you welcomed me'

(Matt 25)

### 'Receptive' axis:

C = Jesus and the Syro-Phoenician woman (identifying with a 'challenged' Jesus)

D = 'What would Zacchaeus do?' (dis-identifying with Jesus)

<sup>13</sup> See e.g. Al Barrett, "'You Have Anointed Us': De-centring Good Friday from the Edges of Holy Week", in Stephen Burns, Nicola Slee & Michael N. Jaggesar (eds.), *The Edge of God: New Liturgical Texts and Contexts in Conversation* (London: Epworth, 2008), 153-70; Al Barrett, "In Persona Christae: Towards a feminist political Christ-(-)logy of presiding; or, how presiding with children trains us to challenge 'the powers that be'", in Nicola Slee & Stephen Burns (eds.), *Presiding Like a Woman* (London: SPCK, 2010), 166-77.

<sup>14</sup> Much of this instinctively follows the principles of asset-based community development: see e.g. Al Barrett, *Asset-Based Community Development: A Theological Reflection* (London: Church Urban Fund, 2013).

to lead or host or own, and a gift that continues to enrich and deepen our sense of what it means to be both Christians and neighbours, passionately present and engaged in the life and longings, struggles and joys of our neighbourhood. What on the surface can look like a “wasteland” has turned out to be teeming with life.

## “GIVE UP ACTIVISM”

Geographer Paul Chatterton has written an article entitled “‘Give up activism’...”. He reflects on how environmental activists blockading an oil refinery unintentionally cast the petrol tanker drivers as their “others”, on the “opposing side”. Instead, he argues for giving up the moral high ground of “activism”, to “learn to walk with [our] others on uncommon ground”.<sup>15</sup> We are learning something similar in Hodge Hill: that the only meaningful way we are going to address the urgent challenges of poverty (of resources, relationships and identity) is by letting go of our need to always “take the initiative” and instead to seek to “hear to speech”<sup>16</sup> the gifts and challenges of our neighbours – and to open ourselves up to be changed by them. This kind of change can only ever happen slowly, at “the speed of trust”<sup>17</sup>, but it is a kind of slowness that has never been more urgent. Rieger’s “mission as inreach” offers us one lens through which to understand the paradigm-shift required of us. I have suggested a similar shift needed in our christological thought and language. How can we hear Maya Angelou’s defiant “I’ll rise” in the often-unheard voices of our neighbours? Only by an increasing awareness of the power-imbalances in which we

ourselves are entangled and complicit, and by becoming aware of our own need for liberation, in intimate connection with our neighbours.

“If you have come here to help us,  
you are wasting your time.  
But if you have come because your  
liberation is bound up with ours,  
then let us work together.”<sup>18</sup>

**Al Barrett** The Rev Dr Al Barrett is Rector of Hodge Hill Church, east Birmingham, and a co-convenor of the locally-rooted Common Ground Community. He has recently completed a PhD, developing a radically receptive political theology in the urban margins, and regularly contributes to teaching and training in theology, urban mission and community development. He tweets @hodgehillvicar and blogs irregularly at [thisestate.blogspot.com](http://thisestate.blogspot.com).



<sup>15</sup> Paul Chatterton, “‘Give up Activism’ and Change the World in Unknown Ways: Or, Learning to Walk with Others on Uncommon Ground”, *Antipode* 38:2 (2006), 259–81.

<sup>16</sup> Nelle Morton, *The Journey is Home* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), p.205

<sup>17</sup> A phrase often used by my friend and community-builder colleague Cormac Russell.

<sup>18</sup> Quote attributed to Lilla Watson, an indigenous Australian (Murri) artist, activist and academic.

# MAKING A HOUSING ESTATE A HOME

ANVIL: Journal of  
Theology and Mission

VOL 33, ISSUE 3

Cathy and John Wheatley

# MAKING A HOUSING ESTATE A HOME

**We're in the park. The sun is shining. Eighty young people, children and their families are lounging around on the grass. We're shelter building. We've got sticks, tarpaulins, netting, and we're creating a tepee. My group huddle inside – "We could live here!" exclaims one of the children.**

We are writing to you from (usually-not-so) sunny Weston-super-Mare. We moved in 2010 to a local housing estate here to start a youth project. When we arrived we concentrated on meeting young people: doing street work, starting clubs, organising trips, opening our home.

The thing is, we were so engrossed in the 'work', that we didn't really think about what it means to have a home to open in the first place. Our whole team moved from reasonably leafy and affluent parts of the world, putting down roots somewhere quite different. Bournville – that's our estate, and home now – is a fairly typical 1960s-built council estate. It's got about 1,500 homes, a row of shops, a wonderful community centre and some lovely parks. We feel very fortunate to have been called to an estate that has so much life. But the life we've found here is not like the life we left behind.

## BASE FOR YOUTH WORK

We've kind of grown up on the estate. We arrived here as graduates in our early 20s; seven years on we're different people. When we first came, having a home meant having a house. We didn't do much to make it homely, we just used it as a base for reaching young people. Home is such an ephemeral idea – we didn't feel at home on the estate but we no longer felt at home in our other previous haunts – like the church, or with our peers. Placing yourself on the margins can dislocate you from the mainstream, but it doesn't mean you'll naturally fit on the edge either. We found friends at Church Mission Society and with Frontier Youth Trust. The people there understood us. In many ways these places became our surrogate homes. But with time, as our work and relationships progressed in Bournville, we turned our attention to building a home where we can put down roots.

We've always had a reasonably open-door policy – young people are free to pop round whenever they feel. We get teenagers coming to borrow tools to fix their bikes, to

get help filling in forms, to get a glass of water or use the toilet, or to simply say hello after too-long an absence. This culture that we allowed to establish has made us feel very welcome and needed. It can be very frustrating to have the door go, late at night in the cold, just to pump up someone's tyre; but there is something affirming about having young people come to you for help. One of the things we've learnt, however, is that meeting needs creates a dependency culture. It's not empowering, and it assumes people are problems to be fixed.

This is an interesting subject in relation to community work – and there is lots of helpful insights from the field of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD). But for us, this revelation has had a massive impact on how we understand our concepts of home.

When we first moved here our home was a place from which we would run a project – this perspective accentuated our perception that we were different from residents and that we had something unique to offer. Our calling was about 'going to' the community. We talked lots about doing things with people but always out of the context that we had intentionally relocated. The challenge of our shift was to wrestle with the idea that we all have something unique to offer and that our calling is not 'to' but about 'being and doing with'.

## FINDING A HOME

When you think of yourself as 'going to' somewhere you also think of where you are 'from' – of how you are different and what separates you. You have somewhere to return to, to escape – but when you think of somewhere as 'home', as a place to be and to do, there is no escape. In fact, why would you escape? Home is a place of belonging, of warmth, of growth. The shift from 'mission to' to 'being/doing with' has been significant in our understanding that everyone has an equal and important part to play in the life of the Bournville community and that it is not our role to rescue, fix or lead. But correspondingly it has also been very freeing to our ownership of the space, especially our ownership of our own home. We have unexpectedly discovered a freedom to build a home-space, and to be active participants and leaders in community life.

To put this new perspective into action I invited a group of young people whom I had known for a while to come round for pizza. I apologised for how we had worked in the past and asked what could we do together? Now we're starting micro-businesses and raising money to go on a foreign holiday. This has been a phenomenal experience, and I think the young people have learnt more with us in the last six months than we had done in the previous six



years – and we’ve all grown, ourselves included.

The unexpected challenge has been to accept the rough with the smooth. One of our recent endeavours has been car-booting. We decided this could be a family adventure, so we took our one year old daughter Samantha with us along with the teenagers. There were some really special moments – for example where one young man sat down with Samantha and played tea-sets while we waited for our goods to sell. Later in that same day, however, that same young man rudely shouted in Samantha’s face that she couldn’t have any of his chocolate bar.

## A SUBTLE BUT VITAL SHIFT

When we were doing mission to another place our home was simply a base – a place from which we could run our project. We were very incarnational, very relational, very cross-cultural but our self-understanding of our difference made accepting the challenges of life here much easier. They were part of our missional task to ‘resolve’. But they were abstract because our home wasn’t really home. As we’ve changed perspective to understand ourselves as simply part of this community, then the challenges of it have seemed harsher – and our responsibility to address them has become personal. They are no longer a ‘project task’ but a personal one as residents and community members.

We arrived in Bournville thinking we were agents of the Landlord. Turns out we’re owner-occupiers! (Or co-owner-occupiers to be exact.) We’ve gone from thinking we should do everything, to contemplating doing nothing, to realising we need to play our part. If we’re not talking about a mission project but about our home – then those relocating to housing estates must

consider this tension: home is somewhere that needs to be firstly habitable and ideally nurturing. We must think fondly of it and speak well of it. For this to be the case, we must protect ourselves from anything damaging and act to address it. But our energies and focus are not redevelopment, nor gentrification – they are pro-active care and tending for the place we call home.

The day-to-day work on the ground might be very similar – but the heart and relationships are very different. At one of the best talks I have ever heard at Greenbelt, the speakers asked, does God love my child more than he loves other children? His answer was an emphatic no. God wants the best for all children and if things aren’t good enough for my children, they’re not good enough for any child. The same must be true of our communities and our homes. If the places we call home aren’t good enough for us, we must be putting in the work to make them habitable and nurturing. But they must, first and foremost, be our homes.

**The Wheatley family** live in Bournville, Weston-super-Mare. We run a youth and community project from our doorstep, meeting children and young people in the parks and on the streets of our estate. We are both graduates of the Centre for Youth Ministry. John works for Frontier Youth Trust and has an MA in Pioneer Leadership from the Church Mission Society. Cathy works locally as a Wellbeing and Work Coach based. We’re part of the StreetSpace Community of Practice that supports pioneer youth work ([www.fyt.org.uk](http://www.fyt.org.uk)).

We are both graduates of the Centre for Youth Ministry. John works for Frontier Youth Trust and has an MA in Pioneer Leadership from the Church Mission Society. Cathy works locally as a Wellbeing and Work Coach based.





# WHAT ON EARTH AM I DOING?

REFLECTING UPON THE  
PIONEERING CALL TO JOIN  
IN WITH THE MISSION OF GOD

ANVIL: Journal of Theology and Mission  
VOL 33, ISSUE 3

Ali Boulton

# WHAT ON EARTH AM I DOING?

## REFLECTING UPON THE PIONEERING CALL TO JOIN IN WITH THE MISSION OF GOD

**As a pioneer minister on a new housing estate, I am seeking to embody what it means to join in with the mission of God. Broadly speaking this has looked like living incarnationally, seeking to lay down my life and unconditionally bless the community. However, members of the team and I grapple with how to articulate this missional calling to others – something which is particularly important for those who are looking to join us on the journey.**

For the first year we simply lived in the area, unconditionally blessing people, making friends and sharing with people. However, as friendships deepened and spiritual curiosity developed, local unchurched people asked to be part of our church and meet with us, so The Gathering emerged. While I am delighted about this and the way that God has met and is meeting with people, I have become conscious of some of the effects it has upon the understanding and outworking of our calling.

### “GOING TO CHURCH”

Firstly, I began to notice that a short-hand of “going to church” was being used to describe what we were doing. Although the core team referred to us getting together as The Gathering rather than “going to church”, to indicate that it was just one aspect of what it meant to be church, the wider community, both those who came to The Gathering and those who didn’t, ascribed the term “going to church” to the activity. This threatened a shift from an outward community focus to an inward worship focus. I know that this isn’t the focus of our calling here, but we struggled to articulate that without devaluing the importance of either gathering together or of worship.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, as people came to faith and others joined us, questions concerning more explicit discipleship and

teaching arose. Should I be intentionally teaching a set of beliefs? This sat uncomfortably alongside a call to lay down our lives and agenda to journey with people – and felt like the work of the Holy Spirit.

### PRACTICE OVER BELIEF?

Stanley Hauerwas states that there is a fundamental misunderstanding about what Christianity is in our liberal democratic society as it encourages Christians to believe that being a Christian is “primarily belief”.<sup>2</sup> He critiques this stance, noting,

This is a deep misunderstanding about how Christianity works. Of course we believe that God is God and we are not and that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit but that this is not a set of propositions—but is rather embedded in a community of practices that make those beliefs themselves work and give us a community by which we are shaped. Religious belief is not just some kind of primitive metaphysics, but in fact it is a performance just like you’d perform Lear. What people think Christianity is, is that it’s like the text of Lear, rather than the actual production of Lear. It has to be performed for you to understand what Lear is—a drama.<sup>3</sup>

“A community of practices” helpfully articulates what we are developing. This is not about rejecting beliefs in favour of practice but rather embodying faith in action in an authentic rather than dogmatic way. The metaphor of bringing a play script to life through performance is also helpful.

Jesus modelled this perfectly – the Word became flesh, the embodiment of all that God is: bringing good news to the poor, sight to the blind alongside forgiveness, redemption, loving our neighbour and acceptance of foreigners. This goes far beyond adopting correct beliefs and going to church to worship. But is also much more challenging. A set of beliefs and worship practices is much more manageable – and allows us to remain self-centred and god of our own lives.

During his earthly ministry, people also struggled to understand what Jesus was calling them to. When Jesus said that to be true followers, selfish ways had to be laid down and replaced with a cross, did they understand that he meant it? Or did they think that if all laws and religious practices were maintained was that enough?

<sup>1</sup> Michael Frost, *Exiles Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006) 275

<sup>2</sup> accessed September 2017 <http://brandon.multics.org/library/hauerwas/hauerwas2005bonhoeffer.html>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

Perhaps these issues were at the back of the rich man's mind in Luke 18:18–23 when he asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. You must keep all the commandments, Jesus told him. Perhaps the rich man was reassured as he had done that all his life. Maybe the rich man made to leave confident of his salvation. But Jesus had one more thing to add, "Sell all you have and give the money to the poor." He had go beyond following a set of rules and practices and embody God's heart. It was too challenging – the rich man walked away.

Authentically embodying God's heart remains immensely challenging. It's easier to pick through Jesus' teaching and construct a set of beliefs and religious rituals rather than lay down our lives and pick up a cross.

## ENFLESHING THE WORD

The way John 4:24 is quoted may be an example of this. This is part of a narrative where Jesus talks to a woman at a well. Within the context of the day, this is a shocking encounter. Jesus strikes up a conversation in a way that was culturally taboo. As a Jewish man, his society would have told him that he was superior to this person in every sense – racially, religiously, on the basis of gender and, the story suggests, morally. Jesus refuses to adhere to these prejudices and throughout the encounter respects, affirms and then empowers the woman with a revelation of who he is. During the conversation, the woman realises this man has some kind of spiritual authority so, also bound by her cultural context, she asks him something 'religious' about worship. Jesus almost dismisses it. That's not going to be important – worship will be about Spirit and Truth.

Essentially this story seems to be about Jesus enfleshing the Word by laying aside issues of gender, morality, race, religious tradition, worship practices and inviting someone to drink life-giving and transforming water. However, it is verse 24 "worship in Spirit and in truth" that I see quoted most often verbally, on posters and at the front of large gatherings. This powerful story of Jesus embodying the wonderful loving, inclusive and empowering character of the Godhead is reduced to a pithy statement about worship that isn't even central to the story. I wonder if God metaphorically has his head in his hands and says "Is that what you got from this story my children?"

And yet, I understand why we do! Laying aside issues of gender, morality, race, religious tradition, worship practices and inviting someone to join us in drinking life-giving and transforming water, even strike up a friendship with them, may be too challenging for us. It is potentially threatening or life changing. It's much easier to discuss which songs, readings, prayers and style of worship might most enable us to worship "in Spirit and in truth".

Yet I am not seeking to belittle our call to worship God or the importance of ascribing glory to God and place him at the centre of our lives, I simply want to understand how it fits into an outward looking incarnational calling.

## A CALL TO BE 'IMAGE-BEARERS'

Tom Wright, in his recent book *The Day the Revolution Began*, places worship within a wider framework of our mission, calling and purpose as human beings. Drawing on his understanding of "image" in Genesis 1:26–28, he argues that the purpose for which humans were created was to be "image-bearers":<sup>4</sup>

Part of my aim in this book has been to widen the scope of the "mission"... the New Testament's emphasis on the true human vocation, [is] to be "image-bearers," reflecting God's glory into the world and the praises of creation back to God.<sup>5</sup>

Understanding our call to this community as a bearer of God's image sits comfortably alongside Hauerwas's "community of practices". We bear God's image by embodying his heart in our practices. It also encapsulates worship as an important aspect of the outward mission,

We are created in order to reflect the worship of all creation back to the Creator and by that same means to reflect the wise sovereignty of the Creator into the world.<sup>6</sup>

Inauthentic, inward-looking, corporate worship which doesn't transform our day to day behaviour has no place in our calling here. However, true worship will be part of seeing God transform this community.

"Worship" was and is a matter of gazing with delight, gratitude, and love at the creator God and expressing his praise in wise, articulate speech.

<sup>4</sup> NT Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2016) 99

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 356–357

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 100



Those who do this are formed by this activity to become the generous, humble stewards **through whom God's creative and sustaining love is let loose into the world.**<sup>7</sup> [my emphasis]

In articulating how we embody the calling to join in with the Mission of God, it's useful to explain that we are developing a "community of practices" rather than a statement of beliefs and that we understand

our mission and purpose as bearing God's image in our neighbourhood. By doing this we are seeking to continue Jesus' ministry of enfleshing God's Word in our day to day lives. When we gather for worship our focus is on ascribing glory to God and being transformed to reflect his love out into the world. As I reflect upon this it is clear that this is not just a calling for pioneers but for all followers of Jesus.

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<sup>7</sup> Wright, *Revolution* (London: SPCK, 2016) 100



# COMMODYFYING COMMUNITY

THE USE OF 'COMMUNITY'  
AS A NEW HOUSING  
MARKETING STRATEGY

ANVIL: Journal of Theology and Mission  
VOL 33, ISSUE 3

**Bart Woodhouse**

# COMMODIFYING COMMUNITY

## THE USE OF 'COMMUNITY' AS A NEW HOUSING MARKETING STRATEGY

When reflecting on the house building industry, and its methods of marketing particularly, we have to face the ubiquitous presence and potency of capitalism. Any glance under the surface of this industry reveals the pressures and drivers of any other modern commercial operation, but these forces come to bear on uniquely fundamental elements of our social structures, the notions of 'home' and 'community'. How these ideas are massaged and manipulated in response to the pressures of the capitalist market space is of particular interest. How is the idea of community both understood and represented by the 'market driven' house builders, and to what extent is their narrative of community simply a cynical mimetic spin of a cultural memory that has little relation to reality?

The further question for this brief exercise relates to how the mode of marketing influences the expectations and relationships that the consumer of their housing product has towards 'community'. These are broad questions and require much more than the few words and pages here, but I believe becoming better acquainted with this discourse will help us understand the missional context of new housing better. The critique of these inquiries resonates (to a certain degree) with the arguments of thinkers such as Theodor Adorno and the controversial artist and revolutionary philosopher Guy Debord. It is these strands of thought that we will follow, while always recognising there are many other, and arguably more fruitful, ways to unpick these questions. Adorno's development of the idea of a 'Culture Industry' at work at the heart of a capitalist cultural drive towards complete domination and control provides us with a potent arsenal of critique to engage with the forces that wish to alter cultural ideas of 'community' to their profit making advantage. These themes are then powerfully, and playfully, expressed through the notion of the "spectacle" within Debord's seminal work *The Society of the Spectacle*. We can only touch on these points of critique,

which open up a far broader discussion about capitalism and culture that is far beyond the scope of this article, but we do examine some of their ideas and ultimately ask how the church's response to new housing either reinforces or counters the capitalist rendering of community within a new housing context.

## THE GAP BETWEEN PERCEPTION AND REALITY

There is a distinct difference between the sales pitch, presented within the glossy images of the sales pack, and the actual community that families and individuals are set to join. As the more mundane reality slowly becomes apparent, once the diggers and 'high-viz' jackets have moved on, the new house owner is faced with a far more difficult and onerous task than the sales pack had suggested. Since, once the dust settles the new community quickly solidifies into the usual routine of every established group of neighbours, and as such begins to soil its utopian hope with conflict, isolation, and unrealised promise. Here, the ordinary is again wrapped up to be something ideal, all in the interests of increasing market value, suggesting that money can purchase the fulfilment of our aspirations and longing for community. Community, as a feature of the product, sets up a similar relationship to the one suggested by certain male perfumes, the suggestion that an individual's chances of attracting members of the opposite sex will be instantly increased. Sex is commodified as a means of adding value and saleability to perfumes, community is commodified in a no-less cynical and manipulative manner to increase the market performance of the housing product. The suggestion that buying the new home will bring with it a certain ideal experience of community is seeded in the mind of the new owner every time they are faced with the images and narratives of the sales machine.

The high level of careful marketing associated with new housing evokes the already suspicious paradigms depicted by Adorno's "culture industry"<sup>1</sup>, which in this case, influence the perceived notion of the ideal community, creating a heightened expectation of the impossible through manipulative use of image, art, and the human aspiration to be 'at home', that is, at ease with oneself and the world. This is not the place to fully explore the implications of Adorno's (et al) insights into western culture, fuelled by capitalism and its bedfellow materialism, but some helpful observations will assist our questioning of the new housing industry.

<sup>1</sup> Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 78-80

## BUYING AN ILLUSION

The idea of the ‘new community’ is presented as a commodity in much the same way as every other aspect of modern life has also had its market potential realised; it is something that can be purchased by a compliant consumer. It is therefore already the experience presented and only awaits enjoyment when the purchase is complete, little different to acquiring any other service or product. A rather simplistic and unconscious set of beliefs are relied upon here; and these beliefs, that we have been taught, on most every other page and screen since before most of us could even talk, invite us in to the image (or imagination) of “becoming what we own” and “being what we experience”. The image of community as mediated through the marketing team of the house builder encourages the same imagining.

Representing ‘community’ as an image, and thereby, more easily constructing a commodity, evokes the words of the controversial Marxist Guy Debord when he argues, “the real consumer has become a consumer of illusions. The commodity is this materialised illusion, and the spectacle is its general expression.”<sup>2</sup> Here begins another moment of mass compliance drunk on the image, willing to play the game, despite its cruel postponement of the promised rest, of belonging, of safety, of identity, of real value, and authentic purpose. The house is sold to us within this same game, beyond the economic factors and the number of bedrooms exists the wider and often more subtle question of “who will I be” once I own and live in this fictitious place, in this illusory construct of community. We see that Adorno moves in a similar vein in his discussion of “culture” as now being defunct, in its true meaning, becoming instead a commodity of the capitalist “culture industry” when he writes,

Culture is a paradoxical commodity...it merges with advertisement. The more meaningless the latter appears under monopoly, the more omnipotent culture becomes. Its motives are economic enough.<sup>3</sup>

Community, in as much as it is caught in the idea of culture, has merged with advertisement within this new housing setting, becoming a fallacy, an abusive dream, but still functioning as a highly manipulative presence beyond the sales pitch.

## COMMUNITY CONFERS IDENTITY

Community is always an unconscious and highly complex moment, ever changing and responding, but still being founded a priori by a sense of identity and belonging. This moment requires the constant presence of a conceptual border maintained and informed by conversation, conflict, submission, desire, risk, and safe retreat. The commercially driven image of community within the glossy context of sales, will exploit an individual’s desire, or hunger, for this community, suggesting that the community that’s ‘for sale’ will be the kind of generous and affirming space that she feels safe to be the ‘self’ she hopes to be.

Moreover, within the house building industry and its techniques of marketing, this idea of community has been air brushed into an undemanding climax, nothing more taxing than the de facto experience realised on purchasing and living in their ‘mass’ product. Capitalism now lays a claim to the very idea of community directly in the sale of “homes” as image, or the illusion of the impossible communal existence, as something to be bought. Again, drawing from Adorno,

The culture industry endlessly cheats its consumers out of what it endlessly promises. The promissory note of pleasure issued by plot and packaging is indefinitely prolonged: the promise, which actually compromises the entire show, disdainfully intimates that there is nothing more to come, that the diner must be satisfied with reading the menu.<sup>4</sup>

The idea of community becomes the packaging of the new “home”, but ultimately leaves the new house owner with an unfulfilled hunger.

Through personal missional experience I would suggest that there is a moment of interest in this unfulfilled hunger. While only ever an anecdotal observation, during our initial few years living on a new housing estate the new residents seemed to be more open to forming a ‘community’ than later in its more established state. Is this more than simply a product of dislocation and the human need to make connections, and are there elements of a collective expression of an unfulfilled desire, a hunger for a promised meal? Do we find a craving for the real in the wake of the purchase, in the waking from the illusion for a moment of disappointment and hunger as reality resets, a quiet moment in the

<sup>2</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (London: Rebel Press, 1967), 24

<sup>3</sup> Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 131

<sup>4</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 111



consumer's rollercoaster to listen to another gospel? These questions would suggest there are significant benefits of early engagement within new housing, and that the engagement should be centred on community formation, inclusive, real, marked by encounter, and producing an expression of communal identity, a common story, that no longer belongs to the glossy brochure. The idea of community needs to be rescued from its servitude to the market, and rather rediscovered via an old route, one that puts to work the real dynamics of conflict (in the sense of honesty), hospitality, and conversation. A work that allows the shepherd's voice to be heard above the deception of mass culture and its images (John 10:7-18).

## COMMUNITY AS MEANS OF CONTROL

The other element of this commodification is the standardisation of 'community' as a reproducible form. The idea that, given the right building programme and planning infrastructure a community will follow suit, and that certain economic and social characteristics of a community can be controlled as a reproducible form. These elements of control better enable the market to function with more predictability, and are expressed in the maintenance of difference, or to paraphrase Adorno, this difference is simply a construct of consumer segregation and statistical divisions, reinforcing social categories as a mechanism of the 'culture industry',<sup>5</sup> but increasingly only ever offering the illusion of value difference as "the amount of investment put on show".<sup>6</sup>

This reinforcement does not seek to compound any 'real' difference, but rather affirm a narrative of difference that seeks to dehumanize the other, keeping the social strata layered appropriately for the market's benefit. The social housing must be slightly smaller, in an enclave to one side of the new housing area, making it clear that they exist in a different economic place, literally and metaphorically. This affirms the value and status of the privately owned homes and plays the capitalist game as it gives structure to the new community in the form of both physical and social borders. This game is played in many other settings, for instance, Bluewater (an out of town shopping centre) has not yet asked Poundland to grace its marble clad malls, nor has Harrods sought to open a store in Peckham, they are wooing an economic and social class that values a selective space and it is this

same strategy that grows the profit making capacity of 'house building plc'. Risking a caricature of the new house buying process, potential private buyers are often told how near (or far) the "social renters" will be to their new property, with discounts being argued for and premium statuses been given accordingly.

A moment to consider the more philosophical forms of cultural manipulation and invention within a capitalist society better places us to prayerfully consider a response, lest we risk unthinkingly advocating the same game but with different language. A theme for another day. However, on a simple practical note, when a church buys into a new development, perhaps with a view to establishing some form of incarnational presence, we need to be very mindful how our presence either unconsciously affirms or challenges this game. In this artificial construct of human value and difference, on which side are we more strategically effective, and more importantly, where does the gospel place us (Luke 5:27-31)? Our church plants and missional activity are always at risk of some form of compliance to the process of community commodification, using similar strategies of advertisement, image identity, conflict avoidance and social labelling to ensure a positive response from the target group.

As a brief aside, well-meaning planning authorities do try and offset this tendency towards social segregation within new housing estates, but more often than not some form of 'posh end' develops, usually at the end of the building process where maximum profits can be realised. Therefore, early incarnational engagement best places missional workers to become effective bridge builders, when these differences are still working themselves out.

## SOCIAL CLEANSING OF 'THE OTHER'

Community only ever exists as a moment born out of conflict in motion, conversation as relating and negotiating, risking the empowerment and necessity of the 'other'. The cost and work of community is found precisely in the moments of its greatest reward, that differences are understood and accommodated within relational networks. Both the investment of relating and the presence of the 'other' are not good marketing concepts, rather, in line with capitalism, what matters to the market and the culture produced by it is the eradication of conflict and the unsettling ideological

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 96-97

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 97

questions social conflict and negotiation might bring. Difference – as poverty, the immigrant population, the abused, dispossessed, those with mental and physical health issues, the domestic abuse victim, the paroled sex offender – is removed from any idea of the community set to arrive, these ‘others’ belong to another community which the buyer is conditioned to always avoid, a position unusually sanitised with a degree of unconscious apathy, in line with the wider culture industry. The new house builders have the opportunity to offer the sterile and conflict free community that the markets and the ideal consumers desire, sprinkled with carefully placed and conscience-alleviating social housing.

Again, the church’s mode of mission must not simply maintain the sterile environment, doing ‘nice’ things for ‘nice’ people within these new housing contexts. We need to consider, with some seriousness, what our role is in giving voice to the ‘other’, whether that is a deprived neighbouring community that feels forgotten and neglected, or disaffected young people, victims of the quiet alcoholism of ‘middle England’ or the isolated single mother with a nice new flat but living in an economic foreign land. The ‘other’ voice will be unique from context to context but in order that we resist the commodification of both community and the gospel we must facilitate and host the ‘other’ voices, which will bring honesty and subsequent conflict but is how a real community might be forged, in opposition to a capitalist agenda.

The Jesus model of community invites the ‘other’, the sinners, the prostitutes and the outcasts, as they must be invited if any true gospel community is to form. Our presence within new housing must confidently ask awkward questions that give voice to the other and truly present a counter cultural, counter capitalist, and counter commodification idea and experience of community, inviting people into a story they do not own; rather, a much wider history with complexities, conflict and character. This history invites participation in something much larger than the narrow game of superficiality and manipulation offered by the marketing suite.

## COLLUDING WITH THE ‘CULT OF THE INDIVIDUAL’

Lastly, Debord warns of a pseudo-community being engineered to maintain the supremacy of the individual, even mentioning housing developments as a specific example. He writes,

This reintegration into the system means bringing isolated individuals together as isolated individuals. Factories, cultural centres, tourist resorts and housing developments are specifically designed to foster this type of pseudo-community.<sup>7</sup>

Debord is making these statements out of a sense of revolution and resistance to capitalism as it is expressed culturally as well as economically, here highlighting the need of the system to maintain a high level of isolationism without losing entirely the notion of community. Isolated individuals make good and compliant consumers, but they need to be integrated into a larger system, which as he argues, can be achieved through modern urbanism, where individuals are brought together to exhibit and affirm their individualism through consumption and mass production. This pseudo-community becomes nothing more than an opportunity for exhibition.

The commodification of community colludes with the cult of the individual, creating a space where the community is a type of audience, making consumption more fulfilling, as the ‘show’ makes no sense without the affirmation of being seen. The marketability of the new build homes increases if a subtle element of envy provocation and status affirmation can be woven into the imagination when choosing where to live. New housing, like most other suburban settings, has had this element of consumerist life beating within its streets for many decades, but new housing contexts do tend to encourage and exaggerate these forms of behaviour, or self-belief and delusion. The Jesus life of self-giving humility, of being a “fool for Christ” is what must be evidenced by our presence in these contexts. How this works itself out may need careful thought and prayer, but I would suggest a countercultural movement that seeks to demonstrate the fruit of humility and the ‘better’ community, or someplace the individual can stop hiding in the perceived safety of his ‘castle’ and exhibition, where actions and activities make communal demands of the ‘self’ apart from the material clutter. Creating opportunities to serve the ‘other’ and, just as importantly, to be served, help make a mockery of materialism, and also speak of the servant Jesus, who, while Lord of all that is created, had his feet washed with the tears of a prostitute and then washed the feet of those who followed him.

<sup>7</sup> Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 96

## AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL OF COMMUNITY

The church can uniquely draw from many diverse levels of education, financial income, and life experience within the borders of its community, as one centred on the communal experience of grace and the presence of Jesus by the Holy Spirit. In this sense we model a community that counters and undoes the modes of manipulation necessary for the growth of profit and ever more invasive forms of commodification. We invite the very real potential of conflict, taking the holy risk necessary for love, so that the nature of true community can be most wonderfully evidenced, both as a work, as a commitment, and as an expression of Christ-like love.

Our moments of reflection regarding the missional mode of engagement with 'new housing communities' must be acutely self-aware of the persistent encroaching pedagogy of the 'culture industry'. Moreover, this self-awareness should push us into a far wider conversation where our reflective questions include an honest appraisal of what we mean by engaging 'culture' when,

in some quarters culture has become a way of not talking about capitalism. [And this] capitalist society relegates whole swathes of its citizenry to the scrap heap, but is exquisitely sensitive about not offending their beliefs.<sup>8</sup>

Capitalism and the markets that drive it are shaping our lives more and more, and as Adorno and Debord argued over 50 years ago, are dictating and manipulating the phenomenon we have obsessed over, namely culture. Community is now becoming a commodity, in as much as everything is being brought into some form of servitude and self-giving to the market. The message of Jesus and the community that follows him must evidence thoughtful revolution against the encroaching

commodification of life, culture, and even faith. The church must not become "exquisitely sensitive", but rather genuinely counter-cultural, opening up the power and potential of the gospel in opposition to, rather than in sympathy with, the industry of cultural consumerism, where there are no absolutes and the 'self' fearfully admires the emperor's new clothes. The church must be mindful to not keep talking about culture as a means of avoiding dealing with capitalism.

**Bart Woodhouse** is a Methodist Venture FX Pioneer missionary working on The Bridge development, a new housing context near Dartford, Kent. Bart grew up in the "Bible belt" of north Lancashire, and then after a powerful encounter with Jesus went to Cliff College to study Evangelism and Biblical Studies. He went on to complete his PhD. in Postmodern Biblical Studies at Sheffield University in 2009, with a continuing interests in the philosophy of culture, post-structuralism, contemporary Marxism, and "revival" studies. Bart will also be launching a new Methodist church plant in the Ebbsfleet Garden City development later next year.



<sup>8</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Culture*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016) 35.

Looking up, Stratford

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# GENTRIFICATION AND NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS

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ANVIL: Journal of Theology and Mission  
VOL 33, ISSUE 3

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# THE ISSUE OF GENTRIFICATION AND NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS

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**I recently found myself on a coach trip to the seaside with 150 residents from my local estates. The excitement was high as I heard children ask what the en-route service station would be like, as they'd never been to one before, and the delight at discovering that Burger King existed outside London! As we passed slowly through the traffic towards the East End I was startled by the huge number of new buildings that seemed to be popping up around me. Last time I had been in this area these had been streets of small shops and houses, each distinct from each other, but our coach was now surrounded by blocks and blocks of luxury flats. While on the surface these can appear to be signs of a growing economy, the excitement of a new neighbourhood or the end of some terrible brutalist architecture, to me they appear more complicated because of the story of my fellow coach passengers who are facing their homes becoming more of these luxury flats in the next few years.**

London needs more houses; anyone who's spent an hour talking to a Londoner cannot be unaware that this is a top priority. Those who followed even five minutes of last year's London mayoral election will have heard promises of new buildings, affordable flats and lower rent prices. But what happens when it is decided that these houses should be packed onto the site of current estates? What happens to a community when its few hundred houses are destined to be replaced by several thousand?

I currently work for a church in West London where a third of our parish is facing this situation. Two estates that have been homes to a few thousand people for the past 60 years are due to be demolished and replaced with 11,000 new flats. This decision was made behind closed doors without the residents' knowledge and only became public when it was well under way. Years later and the plans are still rolling on, accompanied now by cranes and concrete mixers, while the residents have a campaign to stop them.

I have at times felt on both 'sides' of this situation.

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On the one hand I have sympathy with the residents; disempowered and ignored while rich developers make obscene amounts of money at their expense. Joining their campaign can feel like following Robin Hood into a fight with the far better resourced Sheriff of Nottingham who comes accompanied by many well-heeled lawyers.

On other days, when I see the effects of our housing crisis, I can see that the local politicians have been chosen by us to make the difficult decisions about town planning and how to arrange our country's resources, including our land, and whatever decisions they make will inevitably upset someone. As I meet with the developers, they talk about their commitment to providing more housing so that everyone can have a home and not be left in substandard and neglected accommodation.

## THE HOUSING CRISIS

It is true that UK urban centres need new houses. The Mayor of London's office predicts in its London Plan that one million more households will need accommodating in London over the next 20 years and so the rate of housebuilding will have to increase. Eleven thousand new homes would certainly help towards that target, but is just building more flats enough?

London currently faces particularly challenging housing issues. Firstly a soaring homeless population and overcrowding in social housing, while multiple houses sit empty. Writing in Times Higher Education, Tim Hall states that, "in central London there are more bedrooms than people, many of them empty each night. At the same time, across the city hundreds are illegally housed in rented garden sheds."<sup>1</sup> Available housing is snapped up in a matter of days at unsustainable prices with rents regularly exceeding 50 per cent of a person's gross salary.

A huge stress on the system is investors who buy property and then leave it empty waiting for the price to rise. An asset that could be used as a home becomes understood on a purely commercial basis, further reducing the available housing stock and exacerbating the scarcity. Various policies are being employed by governments, both local and national, to tackle this with extra taxes due on investment and empty properties. However, these measures seem only an attempt to slow, rather than reverse the trend.

Some areas have been transformed through redevelopment, but with new buildings came higher prices and advertising targeted to those who can afford

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<sup>1</sup> Dorling, Danny. 'All That Is Solid: The Great Housing Disaster', *Times Higher Education*, 20 February 2014, accessed 21 September 2017, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/books/all-that-is-solid-the-great-housing-disaster-by-danny-dorling/2011337.article>

a more affluent lifestyle. There are frequently stories of outrage at the small number of social or affordable housing units that a new development may include. This leads to a change in the social fabric of the area and as middle class values and lifestyles move in, long term residents and small businesses are forced out by the rising prices. While areas that have developed in this way have arguably a richer local economy, there is a question about whether the price that is paid is too high.

“New buyers into the posher private housing, often portrayed as ‘the pioneers’, are sometimes a little bit guilty of making out that they are ‘opening up’ a new part of London as if thousands of people already living in the area have not had their own organic fabric of a community. It seems like the thousands of poor people in poor housing that sits cheek-by-jowl to redevelopment zones are often made invisible in the new shiny plans... Is the ‘regeneration’ of the area then simply a place to invest and profit from an over-inflated housing market or is it a scheme to develop renewal for all of the local population, old and new? First rung flats on the property ladder, Buy-To-Lets, corporate rentals – none of these add anything to the already existing community... None of this denies that where we have lived for a long time isn’t perfect. Far from it, it’s often harsh and sometimes unrelenting but at least it’s somewhere that’s been lived and grown according to the more simple needs of people and not pure individual or corporate profit. Community is not something you can consume, it’s something more common, organic and human than that.”<sup>2</sup>

When I consider the situation I find myself in, both in my local estates but also across London, many questions come to my mind. What kind of city are we building? Who are the people that we expect will live in any new buildings? What will the social fabric of their lives look like? Will they be homogenous communities or places of diversity? What happens to those who already live in these spaces? Who makes those decisions? What is the driving force behind the decisions being made – finance or people?

## GENTRIFICATION

Many of London’s new developments could be described as the driving force for the process of gentrification in their area. This process is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “the process of renovating and improving

a house or district so that it conforms to middle-class taste”. It affects long term residents deeply as they watch their communities being transformed into places they do not recognise. I have, on several occasions heard it called “ethnic or social cleansing” with questions about where poorer, and often immigrant, communities are supposed to live. At the same time it can turn areas with substandard housing, high crime and low employment into vibrant communities with new economic opportunities.

At the heart of the unease around gentrification, I believe there are two issues; the lack of recognition of the specific culture of the traditional population and the lack of power afforded to them to make decisions about their own area. In my own situation much was made by the local council of how they wanted more mixed areas of housing and to do away with struggling estates. While this sounded admirable and positive, it was always an outsider’s view of another group’s estate. For many local residents their estate is not and has never been ‘struggling’. For them it is a vibrant working class community with different values and challenges to those represented by the local councillors. Their feeling is that they are misrepresented and unheard. This was further shown through the consultation process with residents that is a required part of any planning application during a redevelopment. When 80 per cent of the estate residents opposed the scheme the consultation area was widened to include surrounding streets that would not be affected. This consultation process continued to grow in size until over 50 per cent of people contacted agreed with the scheme and it could be signed off. The decision of a person living several streets away who would not be losing their home was given as much weight as someone at direct risk of demolition. This further confirmed to residents the feeling of being undervalued, unheard and pushed out.

This situation was summed up for me recently in a comment made by someone who has worked on several redevelopment schemes across the south of England. I had mentioned that I was going to the beach with local residents and she replied that she had been part of the regeneration of that particular seaside town. I did not know much about the location but she commented that as developers they recognised the need to “put in some culture” so that the place could be improved. Perhaps it was shorthand for increasing opportunities, but it implied that this seaside town was devoid of any culture before the developers arrived.



<sup>2</sup> ‘Urban Pioneers Ride into Town’, *Southwark Notes Blog*, undated, accessed 21 September 2017, <https://southwarknotes.wordpress.com/the-elephant/>

I have learnt through working in estates that there is certainly a marked difference in the culture I encounter and the culture I bring from my middle class background. There are certainly times when I wish that people were more organised, used diaries, spoke more quietly and turned up on time. However, I find myself envious of a community where neighbours will sit out together chatting and watching their children playing, where residents band together to put on a summer picnic just for fun and where children grow up surrounded by their extended family. This is not an effort to idealise estate culture which also faces the reality of overcrowding, crime and violence, but the community I have begun to know is far from devoid of culture and life.

Gentrification seems often to be an almost subconscious process. I find it hard to believe anyone would set out to intentionally unsettle whole communities, but the drive to ‘improve’ large areas with the promise of better outcomes for all is hard for those in authority to resist. Even with the best intentions towards local residents, new properties inevitably will be higher in price than those they sought to improve on and when the only people who can afford them are richer ‘outsiders’ an area will begin to change. New businesses will come in to support the newer residents and over time the new culture will begin to dominate. This is also not straightforward for the long-term residents. As the area around my local estates has begun to gentrify, I’ve heard comments such as “I hate all this gentrification and rich people taking over, but I do like the new Waitrose opposite my house.” Improvements are not necessarily unwelcome, but the slow loss of voice and culture lead to an uneasy feeling.

## GRENELL TOWER

Returning to my seaside-bound coach trip and our driver took us past the now infamous Grenfell Tower, which never fails to produce a gut-wrenching response however many times you see it. This tower had housed many of the friends and relations of my fellow coach passengers and the stories and pictures from that night continue to haunt many. Watching the TV the morning after the fire I was struck by the message that survivors were consistently saying. Loudly and through their grief, they expressed how unheard and ignored they had felt for many years at the hands of those in authority who should have been serving them. “Social cleansing”, “not being taken seriously”, “ignored”; these were all phrases that I heard daily but

now they were being amplified across the country. This fire was one of those events that seemed to sum up a larger story, while the new local name for the council of ‘Klensington and Chelsea’ speaks volumes.

The issue that seemed to take the wider public by surprise, however, was that the building may have been made unsafe, through the infamous cladding, in order to appease richer residents who did not like the tower’s appearance. Within a couple of days of the fire emerged documents of residents’ highly organised campaigns to alert the authorities to their concerns about fire safety.<sup>3</sup> It appears these concerns went unanswered despite repeated attempts. With residents of Grenfell Tower expressing how sidelined they felt in discussions with the council and Tenant Management Organisation, it seemed to reinforce again how power was concentrated in the hands of those in authority and out of reach of those whose lives were directly affected.

## TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF GENTRIFICATION

“Gentrification is at our doorstep, and I do not know what to do. I can love my neighbors with my entire heart and soul, but what does that mean when every month more are driven away by increasing rents? How is our gospel good news for anyone but the gentrifiers themselves? I’ve come to realise that people like myself—white do-gooders, to be more precise—have not been taught adequate theology for our times. My neighbors do not care if you have a robust urban missiology. They would like secure, affordable housing and good schools for their children. They have practical, tangible needs that are altogether forgotten in a capitalistic, consumeristic society where those with plenty ignore the realities of others who would never buy a latte at the new corner coffee shop.”<sup>4</sup>

Working out a theological response to gentrification is a challenge. There are many different approaches to take which may help to build towards some sort of an answer, but there is much more thought and conversation needed.

## LAND AND ASSETS

One approach is to begin with land and housing, and explore how this has been viewed in the Bible.

<sup>3</sup> “Grenfell Tower Fire”, *Grenfell Action Group Blog*, June 14, 2017, accessed September 23, 2017 <https://grenfellaactiongroup.wordpress.com/2017/06/14/grenfell-tower-fire/>

<sup>4</sup> Mayfield, DL “Church Planting and the Gospel of Gentrification.” *Sojourners*, July, 2017. Accessed 25 September 2017. <https://sojo.net/magazine/july-2017/church-planting-and-gospel-gentrification>

If we go back to the Jewish Scriptures we see that at the heart of an understanding about land and housing lies the belief that everything belongs to God. “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters” (Psalm 24:1-2). All land belongs to God and principles for its use by human tenants were laid down in the Torah.

When the Israelites entered the Promised Land it was divided up between the tribes and then further divided between clans and families. This land represented an opportunity to create wealth and sustain a family. Everyone started with similar land resources and economically were comparably equal. Over time some clans would prosper and become wealthier, while others struggled with bad harvests or bad business sense. For those who struggled, this would lead to a reduction in wealth and the land would need to be sold to support family members. In turn, this would then reduce opportunities to create further wealth and would have a detrimental effect on multiple generations. To prevent this, in Leviticus 25 God lays out the rules for the practice of the Jubilee Year.

Every 50 years land was to be returned to the original clan, slaves were to be released and debts forgiven. Although there is no evidence that this practice was ever followed, these laws ensured,

“that constraints were built into the Mosaic law to put a sharp brake on the accumulation of property in a few hands. The Jubilee laws... were designed to prevent the development of a cycle of permanent deprivation. And behind this principle of periodic restoration of an equitable distribution of wealth was the idea that the people were the tenants of Yahweh.”<sup>5</sup>

This push towards an equal society where all have opportunities and no-one is left behind reflects the importance of all being valued as made in the image of God rather than on the basis of wealth and status. An equal community where all are protected and where everyone’s interests are served is at the heart of a biblical understanding of society.

Sadly, over time, the nations of Israel and Judah lost their way and became more divided into rich and poor. The prophet Isaiah cautioned the nation of Judah saying, “Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land” (Isaiah 5:8). To be joining house to house and field to field meant accumulating wealth, not enacting the Jubilee Laws

and thus depriving fellow Israelites of their living. Isaiah continues with a warning that the people will be overrun and defeated by surrounding nations as a punishment from God for their unjust behaviour.

While this might be difficult to apply to modern times and the mass redistribution of wealth can appear overly left-wing, perhaps part of the problem is that we have come to view housing, neighbourhoods and community space as a commercial asset rather than a human right. If we view a house as a commodity, then it will go to the highest bidder whose aim will be to maximise the money that can be generated from it. If the house is seen as a community asset that must be given to the one most in need as their human right, then different decisions would be made. Perhaps this distinction would be the first step in working out what the principles of the year of Jubilee may look like today. This would not necessarily stop redevelopments or gentrification but if people’s needs rather than financial gain were the driving forces behind these schemes, it is hard to imagine that they would not turn out quite differently.

## VALUING CULTURE

At the heart of gentrification is the supplanting of one culture over another; for some this is a sign of improvement, a lift to those who have been stuck in poverty. For those on the receiving end, the destruction and alienation of the values and community they have held dear is a distressing situation. Looking down on another’s culture seems alien to the way of Christ when we consider that Jesus was incarnated within a particular culture, choosing not to despise it despite its lowly estate compared to heaven, and how he treated Gentiles with whom he came into contact. Perhaps a clearer view on how the culture of others should be viewed is through Paul’s experiences in Athens in Acts 17. Paul finds himself in this great metropolis, at the heart of philosophical thought and is given the opportunity to engage. While speaking with the Athenians at the Areopagus he does not condemn their idols, poets or way of life despite the writer recording that Paul was “greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols” (Acts 17:16). Instead Paul engages with their culture and uses it as a way of explaining the message of Jesus. He begins to quote their poets, refers to their idols and tries to see the positives and potential connection points in their culture.

Affirming and finding ways of appropriately engaging with different cultures is essential for all to flourish. This is not to say challenge is a bad thing, all cultures have

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<sup>5</sup> Anderson cited in Holman, *Towards Equality* (London: SPCK, 1997), 7.



their blind spots and negative issues, but beginning with valuing others must surely be the starting point for a theology of gentrification. Within the process of redevelopment of an area, the difference this may make would be that developers would try and understand the local history, the people, what is important and through conversation, work out ways to bring about the changes needed rather than deciding plans from the outside.

## A VOICE TO THE VOICELESS

In the wake of Grenfell Tower, anger among the residents was understandably high. When those in authority refused to speak or visit with the people affected emotions ran even higher. A few days after the fire the local bishop, the Rt Rev Graham Tomlin, accompanied several local residents to Downing Street to meet the Prime Minister and support them as they tried to get their feelings across. While this was a one-off example of helping those who so often feel unheard, the principle of supporting the voiceless is a strong biblical one. "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed. Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless, and see that they get justice" (Proverbs 31:8-9).

It may be easier to see the voiceless when tragedies such as Grenfell happen and the wider situation is laid bare, but perhaps part of our theology of gentrification is to work out where the voiceless are in the midst of the redevelopments of our towns and cities and ensure that they are being heard. This takes more time, more listening and being prepared to hear different things than expected, before the challenge of then working out how to help people be heard and in what forums.

## SHAPING NEW PLACES

My final potential approach to gentrification is perhaps counter to all of the others. For some the constant redevelopment and upgrading of a neighbourhood is an inevitable process that began with the earliest humans and has kept going ever since. Did the Georgians think the Victorians were reckless with their expansion of cities and streets of terraces? Did the Stuarts upset the Tudors with their different ways of doing things? Perhaps some of the towns and cities that we know and which people

fight to save have the same founding stories as other modern redevelopments, that of unwelcome intruders? If gentrification is an inevitable force that cannot be stopped, then perhaps, instead, it should be seized as full of opportunities for mission.

If this approach is taken then the conversation moves to affecting the shape and culture of the place that is being developed, and ensuring it is done in a way that contributes to human flourishing and mission. Given that UK planning laws require developers to contribute to the infrastructure and community facilities of anything they develop, there is a lot of scope to engage and help them by offering a partnership in providing services. Getting access to a community building and then being part of developing a brand new neighbourhood can give a lot of opportunities for mission. This is part of the strategy employed by London Diocese across several large scale developments. These new buildings have led to new churches, organisations and projects which are a real blessing in new areas of housing.

While this approach can sometimes feel a little cavalier and jumping on the bandwagon of potential income streams and assets, there is a feeling that if the church does not shape new communities, who will? Developers may be expert at building houses, but do they know how communities function, what services may be needed to support the most vulnerable, or how to stick it out in a place for a very long time? These are all gifts that the church can bring.

## CONCLUSION

Gentrification is complex, slow moving, often painful and easy to miss if you're middle class. It is changing the make-up of our towns and cities and affecting the lives of millions who feel left behind and ignored. The church has struggled to respond to much of this, perhaps because we do not know how. I hope in this article to have highlighted some of the issues that gentrification brings up and perhaps provide some pointers towards areas for further theological thought. I hope that as churches engage more with this issue, we will see deeper engagement and commitment to our fast changing urban areas and the beautiful communities that live there.

**Penny Stradling** is a lay pioneer minister working in West London for an Anglican Church. Starting everything from scratch on two local estates has seen youth activities, English classes, health promotion days and lots of chats over cups of tea!





# MISSION AND AUTHENTICITY

ANVIL: Journal of Theology and Mission  
VOL 33, ISSUE 3

Chris Baker

# MISSION AND AUTHENTICITY

It was a privilege to participate in the Pioneering on Estates and New Housing Developments conference organised by Church Mission Society and Methodist Pioneering Pathways earlier this summer. Over 100 practitioners attended, working across a range of spatial and cultural contexts, many in localities of high deprivation but also in new areas of impending 'garden city' and new housing development. It was illuminating to hear of many examples of innovative and intuitive engagement in areas where familiarity with Christianity is in decline, and yet the search for belonging and meaning are still palpable.

The backdrop to this search for belonging and meaning has been thrown into stark relief by recent tragedies over the summer, including the Manchester and London terror attacks and the Grenfell Tower disaster. These events exposed the fault lines of poverty and inequality that are endemic in the structures of our public life, as well as the frightening rise in hate crime and overt intimidation of those perceived as 'other'. On the other hand, these events also showed a huge willingness to reach across cultural and ideological boundaries to do something practical for others in need, and to show a deeper allegiance to fellow citizens, other than that predicated on purely economic transactions. What became apparent, particularly in the immediate aftermath of Grenfell, was the increased absence of public space in which these impulses of *caritas* and solidarity could be expressed. Under the twin pressures of both privatisation and austerity, the availability of truly public space has sharply declined, which is why spaces and places curated by faith groups – churches, temples, mosques synagogues – are increasingly in demand in the wake of traumatic public events, as well as in the day to day delivery of welfare and care to communities.

Yet, as this conference highlighted, there is much more that needs to be done if connections of trust, faith and cohesion are to be re-woven and re-invigorated. The churches cannot simply rely on policy demands, or national tragedies, to make or re-establish connections

with their neighbourhoods. They also need to engage with a series of deeper social dynamics, of which one of the most prominent is the search of authenticity. In this article, I explore some emerging ideas of how the notion of authenticity is being played out in the public sphere, and its close links with ideas of re-enchantment and the postsecular. I then examine how this agenda challenges our assumptions about the nature of church engagement in both new and more established urban areas.

## SEARCHING FOR 'GOD' AFTER GOD – A NEW ERA OF POSTSECULAR RE-ENCHANTMENT

The American theologian Harvey Cox, in his seminal book, *The Secular City*,<sup>1</sup> written at the height of 60s secular optimism, premises his challenge to the church to act as an effective public agent of change and transformation on the assumption that we now live in a modern and therefore disenchanted world. Cox envisages the modern city as a Technopolis, founded on technological innovation, planning and progressive social change in which most challenges confronting human existence – poverty, want, education etc – will be met by the critical mass of human ingenuity and connectivity that the modern city can bring together. Cox's view of the city, and the radical new theology it generates, is directly influenced by Max Weber's thesis that as the world modernises, so it becomes 'disenchanted'; in other words, we reach a point in human knowledge and ingenuity, that 'we can in principle control everything by means of calculation'.<sup>2</sup> This new framework of knowledge, Weber predicted, would result in the elimination of all spiritual forces – including a sense of magic, enchantment, a sense of a deeper mystical reality rooted in the natural world, and the death of charismatic leadership that leads others through inspirational action to dare to dream the impossible.<sup>3</sup> Cox provocatively asserts that irreversible secularisation is willed by God to free humankind from superstitious and backward religion based on mystical and enchanted phenomena. In the modern secular age epitomised by Technopolis, Cox argues, religion and the church will have to adapt to living an authentic faith founded on prophetic politics and discipleship in a de facto religionless world. Cox's theology is deeply shaped by the work of German theologian Dietrich

<sup>1</sup> Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*, (New York: Macmillan, 1965).

<sup>2</sup> Max Weber, *Science as a Vocation*, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), 12-13.

<sup>3</sup> Max Weber, *Politics as a Vocation*, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004) and *Economy and Society*, (Berkeley: University of California, 1978).

Bonhoeffer. Back in the 1940s, before his execution by the Nazis for his role in the failed attempt to assassinate Hitler, Bonhoeffer talked about the emergence of a 'religionless Christianity' in what he called 'a world come of age'.<sup>4</sup> The Secular City, said Cox, following on from Bonhoeffer, is the new space for a more mature form of religion to emerge in which humankind no longer lives in servile humility to a controlling deity, but enters into a new covenant with that deity that is predicated on the virtues of stewardship and co-responsibility.

What is now clear is that the 21st century has not seen the unrolling of the processes of secular modernity as envisaged by Bonhoeffer and Cox, although this in no way diminishes the startling power of their theological ideas. Rather, the opposite has happened. Our current modernity is simultaneously intensely globalised, secular and religious. Religion and belief have stormed back onto the public agenda in a way that few had anticipated. However, the roots of this new visibility of religion first surface in 1979, just 12 years after Cox's seemingly unassailable logic surfaced, with the Iranian revolution against the West/US-backed Shah, followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 90s instigated by the Catholic-based Solidarity movement of the 1980s.<sup>5</sup> These events, including the global rise of Islam and Pentecostal Christianity, led to the emergence of the concept of the 'postsecular' at the turn of this century. The term was coined by the German political philosopher, Jürgen Habermas, who said that the new hyper-diverse, hyper-connected globalised modernity we had created required a new 'postsecular imagination' in which 'the vigorous continuation of religion in a continually secularising environment must be reckoned with'.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the postsecular is not, as some have inferred, a linear or teleological replacement of the secular by the religious, but rather an increasingly blurred and potentially contested public space, in which the two have to learn to coexist side by side.

## THE SEARCH FOR AUTHENTICITY AND RE-ENCHANTMENT – CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POSTSECULAR AGE

The philosopher of religion, Richard Kearney, I think has

a neat approach to unravelling some of the spiritual and political implications of this postsecular era. In a book entitled *Re-imagining the Sacred*<sup>7</sup> he suggests that we have become strongly 'disenchanted' with Weber's idea of disenchantment, and that a new search for re-enchantment is under way. This search for re-enchantment he labels as 'anatheism' – or what he calls the 'search for "God" after God'. The clue to this thesis lies in the small prefix 'ana' which is described in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* as 'up in space or time, back again, anew' (2015; 6). In other words, what is being proposed is a complex understanding of 'after', which includes both ideas of backwards and forwards, so that 'after' is not a simple return to what was before, but a radically different revisiting something that is neither captivated by a pristine past or controlled by teleological future. The clue, says Kearney, lies in the two a's of 'ana'; one a reflects the Latin adverb 'ad' which means a journey 'towards', whilst the other reflects the adverb 'ab' which means a journey 'away from'.<sup>8</sup> Within the movement of Western thought, the 'ana' of anatheism can be read as the third iteration of our journey with the divine. Theism reflects the era of high cultural and historical integration with a sense of God and the power of religion – for example western Christendom from the 5th to the 16th centuries. Atheism, or the Death of God, that emerged during the 18th to the early 20th centuries, reflects the cultural and historical integration of knowledge predicated on the emancipation of humankind from childish dependency on enchanted epistemologies and ontologies.

However, as predicted by both Nietzsche and Weber, the experience of atheism leads to a collective sense of abandonment, disillusionment and disorientation. Weber for example, predicts the destructive downside of an Enlightenment model of modernity in which the development of a modern bureaucracy, and a modern state, emerges as the secular object of worship and obedience, in replacement to the divine. In his book, *Economy and Society* Weber refers to the 'steel frame of modern industrial work that creates the shell of bondage that is characteristic of the "bureaucratic state machine"'.<sup>9</sup> This metaphor was famously paraphrased by the American sociologist Talcott Parsons as 'the

<sup>4</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, (London: SCM Press, 1971), 279–280.

<sup>5</sup> Christian Caryl, *Strange Rebels – 1979 and the Birth of the 21st Century*, (New York: Basic Books).

<sup>6</sup> Jürgen Habermas, 'Equal treatment of cultures and limits of postmodern liberalism', *Journal of Political Philosophy* 13:1 (2005), 26.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Kearney and Jens Zimmerman (eds.), *Re-imagining the Sacred*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>9</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, (Berkeley: University of California, 1978), 1403



iron cage of bureaucracy'<sup>10</sup> that traps not only our bodies, but also our minds and imaginations within a materialist and calculability framework.

What Weber didn't expect or predict is the current moment of 'turning around' – a potential era of anatheism, which contains within it elements of the preceding eras – namely 'both an atheist and theist moment' and yet which also 'exceeds them both'.<sup>11</sup> Kearney elaborates further:

In its atheist guise, adieu is a departure, a leaving, a farewell to the old God of metaphysical power, the god we thought we knew and possessed, the omni-God of sovereignty and theodicy. Adieu, therefore, to the God that Nietzsche, Freud and Marx declared dead. But in saying adieu to the omni-god, anatheism opens the option of a God still to come – or a God still to come back again...a supplementary move of aftering and overing.<sup>12</sup>

So it is with this grand narrative of re-enchantment in mind that we look to see how this trajectory is being played out in both secular and religious contexts within the public sphere, in which the church is called to define its mission.

## AUTHENTICITY AND 'THE NONES'

A recent update on the British religious landscape for the British Attitudes Survey<sup>13</sup> suggested that the number of people describing themselves as having 'no religion' was, for the first time, a majority in the UK, at 53 per cent. This trend was particularly strong among 18–24 year olds, of whom 71 per cent identified as no religion. However, other factors need to be read alongside these headline statistics, not least because they are at odds with a globalised trend for religion which suggests that by 2060, 86 per cent of the world's citizens will affiliate with a religious identity, with the numbers of those not affiliating declining to 12.5 per cent.<sup>14</sup>

One factor is that 'no religion', while clearly a personal identifier that expresses a desire not to be affiliated or associated with an institutional expression of religion,

does not however preclude an interest in religious ideas and experiences, spirituality, the transcendent and the mysterious. A major 2015 enquiry by the Pew Research Center into the spiritual hinterland of Millennials (namely those born between 1981 and 1996) in the US found a complex array of positions with regard to religion and spirituality. Although only 27 per cent said that they attended religious services on a weekly basis, 46 per cent say that they feel a deep sense of wonder at the universe at least once a week, 55 per cent think about the meaning of life on a weekly basis, 76 per cent say that they experience a strong sense of gratitude at least once a week, and 51 per cent say that they experience a deep sense of spiritual peace and wellbeing at least weekly.<sup>15</sup> This is clear evidence of the re-enchantment thesis outlined above.

Another piece of emerging research, also from the States, suggests there is a political dividend that is beginning to evolve alongside this search for meaning. This political dividend can best be described as the search for a politics of deeper connection and authenticity expressed in a series of new trajectories of civic engagement. These trajectories were first identified in the immediate aftermath of the tumultuous global events in the spring of 2011, including popular uprisings in the so-called 'Arab Spring' and Occupy demonstrations of public squares across North America and several countries in Europe. In a book entitled *Networks of Outrage and Hope*,<sup>16</sup> sociologist and economist Manuel Castells tracks these events in the immediate months after their happening, and notes in particular the way they deployed new technologies of communication and social media to create instant and fluid affinity groups and hubs, and networks of knowledge and learning, while circumventing the official attempts of the authorities to censure and disrupt them. However, beyond identifying what he called rhizomatic forms of political participation (i.e. horizontal forms of self-selecting communication that both root and shoot in new configurations), Castells struggles to identify a unifying or coherent political manifesto. Rather, the drivers of these events, he suggests, are not so

<sup>10</sup> Talcott Parsons, *Max Weber – The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, (New York & London: Routledge), 123.

<sup>11</sup> Kearney, *Re-imagining*, 17

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 17

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/news-media/press-releases/2017/september/british-social-attitudes-record-number-of-brits-with-no-religion/> accessed 29 September 2017

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/> accessed 29 September 2017

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/23/millennials-are-less-religious-than-older-americans-but-just-as-spiritual/> accessed 29 September 2017

<sup>16</sup> Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012)

much ideological, as emotional, aimed at addressing more fundamental and existential human needs that the internet and modern structures of society often struggle to meet. These include: the creation of community and togetherness as a fundamental mechanism for overcoming fear; the creation of spaces of symbolic meaning that evoke memories of previous uprisings and the attempts to regain back control; the creation of a space of deliberation, which can lead to a more enhanced and permanent sense of power and confidence, and a heightened sense of communal, as opposed to individual, autonomy.<sup>17</sup> At their best, Castells proposes, digital and social media platforms generated by the internet help coalesce an individualised search for autonomy into one that is shared on a public basis, so that digital sharing goes on to generate physical networks of 'outrage, hope and struggle'.<sup>18</sup>

## THE SEARCH FOR AUTHENTICITY AND THE NEW FORMS OF CIVIC AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Five years after Castells' book, which sometimes feels longer on rhetoric than substance, we have perhaps a bit more detail as to how these networks of outrage and hope may be cashing out in more sustainable expressions of civic and political engagement amongst Millennial citizens (although it is perhaps surprising that as a total generational cohort, 35 per cent voted for Donald Trump in the 2016 election). A longitudinal qualitative and quantitative survey of 3,000 millennials across the States entitled *The Power of Voice – A New Era of Cause Activation and Social Issue Adoption*<sup>19</sup> found a complex vernacular of terms and positions by which these 'new givers' engage with the public sphere, with a series of terms such as advocate, activist and ally.<sup>20</sup> For example, an upper-case 'Activist' is 'someone whose profession it is to be advocating, creating marches and rallies and co-ordinating groups to bring attention to policy'. A lower-case 'activist' meanwhile is someone who frequently thinks about addressing issues and thinking of ways to make them

better, this representing 'a more of a relaxed way of thinking about social change'.<sup>21</sup> Second, the research suggested that Millennials' interest in far-reaching social issues – what the report calls 'the greater good' – is driving their 'cause engagement' today, even when they don't have a personal connection with the cause they join.<sup>22</sup> The current top three social issues to engage Millennial activism, advocacy or ally-alignment are civil rights/racial discrimination, employment rights and healthcare reform.<sup>23</sup> This willingness to transcend narrow barriers of ideology, class or ethnic loyalty seems to be a defining strategy towards building this 'greater good', and is linked to a greater sense of authenticity – namely the direct linking of political and civic causes to one's own identity and set of beliefs in ways that complement and overlap more traditional and mainstream forms of representative politics.

This assertion is backed up by two telling recommendations located at the end of the report for those wishing to study or engage with Millennial civic activism further. Because Millennials are interested in causes/social issues relevant to the quality of life for the greatest part of the population, the report recommends that would-be engagers or employers,

'accentuate the humanity associated with your cause. Share stories of the individuals who benefit in a manner designed to strike an emotional chord and clearly indicate how a specific action will advance the group. Use social media such as Facebook Live to humanize your issue, allowing the individual to connect directly with those you serve.'<sup>24</sup>

Second, the report refers to the growing band of those who are 'uppercase Activists', who could be the future leaders and game-changers in the political and civil realm. The *Power of Voice* report recommends,

'pay attention to the level at which [these activists] want to engage, then use their unique characteristic and interests in ways that reward them with individual satisfaction, meaningful engagement and measurable advancement of the cause/social issue.'<sup>25</sup>

The report highlights the vicarious impact of the 'new

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 10–11.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 230.

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.themillennialimpact.com/sites/default/files/reports/Phase2Report\\_MIR2017\\_091917\\_0.pdf](http://www.themillennialimpact.com/sites/default/files/reports/Phase2Report_MIR2017_091917_0.pdf) Accessed 29 September 2017

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.themillennialimpact.com/sites/default/files/reports/Phase1Report\\_MIR2017\\_060217.pdf](http://www.themillennialimpact.com/sites/default/files/reports/Phase1Report_MIR2017_060217.pdf) accessed 29 September 2017 p.7

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 1

<sup>23</sup> *Voices Phase 2 report*, 13.

<sup>24</sup> *Voices Phase 2 report*, 34.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 34.

givers' public actions since they see their authenticity and identity linked to causes and people beyond their immediate circle or interest group.

'Remember that for millennials important causes/ social issues are only as compelling as the individuals they represent, and they are most concerned with the disenfranchised and marginalised. When calling on your audiences to act, don't single out those directly affected by the issue – or risk missing out on a large group of passionate individuals.'<sup>26</sup>

There is clearly the need for a similar in-depth study of UK and European Millennial experience, but if the American experience is indicative, then we see within this cohort a clear strategy that is exiting mainstream Protestant religion in order to discover a new set of spaces by which to create a sense of community, meaning, re-enchantment and authenticity.

## AUTHENTICITY AND BELIEVERS

My thesis is that the new postsecular public sphere, in all its liminal and contradictory complexity, is being populated by the arrival of 'no-religion' citizens experiencing an increasing disconnect with institutional religion, but who are nevertheless looking for a re-enanted and more authentic style of living. I believe they are being augmented by a cohort of religious Millennial believers, disenchanted with the cultural and materialistic trappings of their tradition and looking for more enchanted and challenging spaces and methods of discipleship and mission. In this analysis, I am following the work of American sociologist James Bielo who has explored the roots of the emerging intentional community/new monasticism church movement in the States.<sup>27</sup> These new emergent lay communities are planted in either poor inner urban districts, or in the cultural wastelands of the exurbs, by growing numbers of evangelical Christians. These believers are seeking a more authentic, challenging and embodied form of religious identity and discipleship. Bielo uses the concept of 'deconversion' to express this movement by some evangelicals from their own cultural and ecclesial roots. De-conversion involves a rejection of the cultural frameworks of evangelical Christianity: its obsession with materialism and maintaining inward-looking sub-cultures at the expense of transforming wider society. Some of the founders and joiners of these new monastic communities, Bielo claims, are also

de-converting from a narrow biblical literalism that represents a superficial form of Christian discipleship, devoid of challenge and engagement in the complexity of the world.

Bielo intriguingly suggests that de-conversion of Christians and other millennials from the cultural shell of their religious tradition is part of a wider social phenomenon that expresses late modernity's or postmodernity's search for authenticity. Charles Lindholm in his book *Culture and Authenticity* suggests that 'modern' obsessions with cultural phenomena as diverse as country music, sky diving, bungee jumping and slow food is the search to rediscover that which is 'original, real and pure'.<sup>28</sup> This obsessional search, it is suggested, comes from a number of different sources; the alienation and estrangement generated by urban industrialisation, and the ubiquitous experience of living with strangers; the over rationalisation of symbols which sees them subject to an instrumental manipulation rather than a deep engagement with our being; and the general postmodern desire for a 'real' freedom, that is no longer subject to false beliefs and fetishism that undermine our existential freedom.

## AUTHENTICITY ON THE MARGINS

For some American evangelical Christians, this search for authenticity in the form of new monasticism or intentional communities has potentially strong echoes to historically episodic movements in Christianity, beginning as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century with the desert fathers and mothers. Their journey into the purifying heat and solitude of the desert, beyond the built environment or towns and cities was driven partly by the inversion of Christianity as a mainstream rather than a marginal way of life, following the Constantinian settlement. The new experience of 'feeling at home' in the world of Empire was disorientating, and the appeal of material comforts and worldly status that came with it proved too much for some converts who felt the radical power of the Christian gospel had been blunted and compromised.

Within a UK context, there have been a series of recent volumes, most notably the *Mission in Marginal Places* series of six volumes (2016–18) edited by Paul Cloke and Mike Pears, exploring the journey from the centre to the margins undertaken by some Christians in the search for a more deep and authentic

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 36

<sup>27</sup> James Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals – Faith, Modernity and the Desire for Authenticity*, (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

<sup>28</sup> Charles Lindholm, *Culture and Authenticity* (London: Blackwell, 2008), 1.

experience of Christian praxis and mission. The thrust of the argument in these books seems to be that the church is transformed by the deliberate choice to embed itself in social change and radical expressions of social justice. In a volume exploring a series of case studies of intentional Christian communities entitled *Working Faith – Faith-based Organisations and Urban Social Justice*, Sam Thomas reflects on an Eden Project/Salvation Army project in Oldham, whose mission statement is to express their Christian faith by ‘working to improve their community through commitment, friendship, action, care, compassion, love and neighbourliness’.<sup>29</sup> The project’s core team of paid staff and volunteers, all of whom live in the locality, were running drop-in youth clubs, football clubs, a multimedia project that provides positive stories and depictions of the neighbourhood, a school cookery club, a schools’ learning and support project, and an educational project linking a local comprehensive and a fee-paying former grammar school. Reflecting on the highs and lows of the experiences of those working in this project, including personal symptoms associated with burnout and depression, Thomas suggests that the margins seem to be speaking back to the church in new and often challenging ways, which is prompting new learning and reflecting on its role of creating new ‘assemblages of hope’.<sup>30</sup>

In what Thomas calls ‘dialogical’ spaces and moments of exchange generated between the centre and the margins, the church learns what it is to ‘theo-ethically embrace the otherness of those that the unchecked spirit of capitalism drives us to dispel and write-off’.<sup>31</sup> In words that echo Bielo’s US research on disenchanted evangelicals seeking to authentically renew themselves in the culture of the world, Thomas articulates the renewed sense of purpose and discovery that emerges from this open dialogue between the centre and the margins. Instead of being ‘obsessed with self-enrichment and self-fulfilment’, he suggests, ‘these faithful Christians seem to be journeying into the wilderness in search of making the impossible possible, prophetically praying that dry riverbeds will run with crystal waters; a prayer that they are asking of themselves, as well as others in these disadvantaged communities’.<sup>32</sup>

This search for a more authentic form of Christian witness, mission and incarnational living is an attempt to live out a performative apologetics which highlights the potentially transformative power of religion and belief at an individual, locality and spiritual level. The implicit, but also increasingly explicit rationale behind this emphasis on self-reflective journeying and practical hands on engagement is the growing recognition that in this confused age of authenticity, re-enchantment, and the renewed interest in social justice and theo-ethics that goes with it, that faith is something that is ‘caught’ more than ‘taught’. To that end, mission needs to engage at an affective level of emotion, narrative and experience with people looking for a space to express both outrage but also hope, before it can perhaps also begin to engage at a cognitive (or intellectual understanding) level.

## CURATING SPACES OF HOPE AND CONNECTION IN BOTH MARGINALISED AND NEW COMMUNITIES

The complexity of the new social, cultural, political and economic landscapes in which religion and belief are now embedded are evident in the wide range of case studies that were shared at the Pioneer conference and which are highlighted in this volume – old council estates, inner suburbs, new towns and garden cities. Some localities are resource poor, but have deep connection and relationships. Others are materially affluent, but chronically poor in relationships and a sense of belonging. Perhaps one missional response to those searching for a sense of identity and community, and yes perhaps searching for a sense of God (and surprised that they are engaged in this searching), is to curate new spaces of action, and curate new sets of conversations about the nature of our society and what sort of flourishing locality we want to build with those with whom we share a physically proximate location.

By using the word ‘curate’ in this context I am interacting two levels of meaning. The first is the technical understanding of the term. It refers to the ability to ‘select, organise and look after the items in a collection or exhibition’ (Oxford Dictionaries Online). The second understanding originates in canon and

<sup>29</sup> Sam Thomas, ‘Re-engaging with the Margins: The Salvation Army 614 UK Network and Incarnational Praxis’ in Paul Cloke, Justin Beaumont and Andrew Williams (eds.), *Working Faith: Faith-based Organisations and Urban Social Justice* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2013).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 83.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 83.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 83.



ecclesial law, where the verb 'to curate' identifies the duties of the ordained priest who is entrusted 'to exercise pastoral responsibility' via the 'cure' or 'care' of all the souls in their parish, irrespective of church membership or allegiance (Oxford Dictionaries Online).

At their best, churches and other faith groups hold the cure of souls and the cure and transformation of social and material structures in a unique and creative tension.<sup>33</sup> For those citizens seeking a more authentic way of living that also 'does something about something' for the greater good, churches and faith-based organisations can offer structured, but also more improvised spaces in which to engage in either welfare provision, community building, or more radical and sustained projects of urban social justice. That authenticity is likely to be further nurtured by the chance to discuss the shared beliefs, values and worldviews that perhaps bring us into these new postsecular spaces of engagement and partnership.

In this way, churches create both public spaces of debate about what really matters, as well as then the opportunities by which to act on the impetus of those shared conversations. For those seeking re-enchantment, the creation of spaces of public ritual and memory making and narrative-making will need to be created, especially in new garden cities, town extensions and exurban communities built on the far-flung edge of established towns and linked only by dual carriageways and shopping hubs. The search for authenticity and re-enchantment is a growing phenomenon that sits uneasily and often oddly alongside a narrative of institutional religious decline and introverted agendas. A theology of mission must creatively and confidently engage this search for authenticity, both within and outside of the church.

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<sup>33</sup> Christopher Baker, 'Faith in the Public Sphere – in search of a fair and compassionate society for the 21st century', *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 37 (3), (2016): 259-272



# ANVIL

## BOOK REVIEWS

ANVIL: Journal of Theology and Mission  
VOL 33, ISSUE 2

**VOL 33, ISSUE 2**

## 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.

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### **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.

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**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.

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**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 or 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

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**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

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**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

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### **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.

Tom Wilson, Leicester



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