

Journal of Theology and Mission



Autoethnography: challenging narratives



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THE EDITORIAL

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY: CHALLENGING NARRATIVES

Perhaps the greatest challenge in producing an issue of Anvil dedicated to autoethnography is to persuade the reader to progress beyond the title. It's hard to avoid the conclusion that it may seem pretty esoteric, perhaps requiring a dictionary before you have finished the opening sentence. However, we hope we can convince you to delve into the articles and poems that follow, where the evocative telling of everyday experiences and challenging narratives form a creative resource for theological reflection and the exploration of diverse social issues. The origins of this particular issue lie in an MA class in Anthropology and Christian Mission, a fact that explains something of the uniqueness of the contributions, which, with two exceptions, are written by present and former students on CMS's MA in Theology, Ministry and Mission. The class in question was using autoethnography as a prelude to exploring contemporary realities of class, race and gender: the way these play out in society and the implications for mission. Blown away by the quality of their responses, we felt they deserved a wider audience, and out of that experience this issue of Anvil emerged.

Historically, anthropology has not always resisted the temptation to deliver experts in other people's lives. Postmodern anthropological approaches have called that into question, highlighting the subjectivity of our observations, challenging the distinctions between observer and observed and noting the fluidity and porous nature of the cultural categories we might seek to create. Autoethnography takes us beyond the distinctions between observer and observed, highlighting the importance of our own experience, the stories of our lives, in providing a valid and authentic place from which to explore culture and identity and, as we shall see, offering a rich source for theological reflection. Brene Brown once described stories as data with a soul. It is perhaps this soulfulness that is distinctive of autoethnographic writing: a form of writing or performance that is intentionally evocative seeking out ways of knowing that invite transformative responses - what Heather Walton terms emancipatory epistemologies.

In her article Heather Walton provides an introduction to autoethnography, highlighting the way it has emerged within the discipline of anthropology and, in particular, its application to theological reflection. She describes autoethnographic writing as a creative process of telling stories that shed light on wider issues, potentially leading us to be more prayerfully attentive to the world around us. She notes how this process of reflexivity asks difficult questions of ourselves, creating possibilities to engage with neglected ethical questions including our own complicity in silence, something illustrated in a number of the contributions. She points to how it encourages us to own and speak out of our own experience and in so doing challenges the way white western Christians so often speak of and on behalf of others. Within the article she describes the different forms that autoethnography can take, some of which are illustrated in the contributions that follow including performance autoethnography, which is illustrated in the poetry of Cathy Ross and Ruth Wells, and in the spoken-word piece by Luke Larner.

Walton notes the way autoethnography can communicate insights from perspectives that are often marginalised or silenced by dominant western narratives. This is particularly evident in Cathy Ross's poems, "Tobermory Laundry" and "I Wonder Why". Both these pieces, arising from epiphanic moments, use verse to explore the hiddenness of women's lives both in the ignoring and unmarking of their achievements and the "whitewashing" of generations of oppression.

Ruth Wells explores related themes with a use of language designed to challenge, question and subvert. This at times reflects Walton's observation that autoethnographic writing can be edgy and "in your face". Ruth's two poems formed part of an MA dissertation, wherein she reflected on her experience of formation and priesthood. The language is playful yet disturbing, challenging more sanitised, domesticated images of sacrament and priesthood while powerfully revealing both in the messy and broken realities of humanity and womanhood. Excerpts from Luke Larner's poem "Drowning in the Barth?" similarly challenge some of our understandings of formation and illustrate the pioneering gift of *not fitting in* and the impulse to push boundaries and reject easy answers.

A number of the articles explore the issue of social class and the sense of dislocation, of being out of place. Typically, for the Church of England, they reflect middleclass experience in working-class contexts. In capturing a moment near her home in Falmouth, Amanda Evans takes the more anonymous statistics of poverty and social exclusion in that town and illustrates those realities in an encounter with a mother on the beach. As is a feature of autoethnography, the simple narrative captures a moment that illustrates the complexities of power, identity, belonging and the challenge to express authentic discipleship in the midst of social division.

Similar themes are explored by Sally Taylor, where the complexities of moving into a row of former miners' cottages in Somerset provides the narrative around which issues of class, power, reconciliation and belonging are explored.

A very different sense of dislocation is narrated by Maria Casiero in an evocative piece entitled "Mortadella Sandwich". Here a childhood experience of the sights, sounds, smells and taste experienced on a train journey to Italy become symbols of a deeper journey and of a reconfiguring of her own sense of identity. Within that journey she reflects on the symbolic power of the meal within the Christian tradition, and its capacity to unite people across cultures.

Walton notes the rise in interest in performed autoethnography, the transforming of sacred places, where worship and ritual can be disclosive and prophetic. With great candour Natalie Burfitt examines the obverse of that, reflecting how the performance of liturgy can become an exercise in concealment, and where sacred places, by their very architecture, exclude and marginalise.

In the final piece, by Sophia Popham, it is the ambiguous title of "Church Lady" that provides a unifying thread to her narrative as she reflects on her efforts to assist Jan, a woman caught up in a web of homelessness and brutal poverty. Heather Walton notes Norman Denzin's description of autoethnography as using the words and stories people tell to imagine new worlds. In this piece hope begins with the imagination of a different future the possibility of sharing a cup of tea on your own sofa.

Yet it concludes with a deeper imagination of Church Lady and the church she represents.

In Writing Methods in Theological Reflection Heather Walton explores the use of autoethnography in theological reflection, seeing it as a way of conveying the complexity and ambiguity of our religious selves.¹ The poems and challenging narratives in this issue illustrate something of that ambiguity, but hopefully also challenge us to more faithfully reflect on the stories that make up our lives and the lives of those around us.

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¹ Heather Walton Writing Methods in Theological Reflection (London: SCM Press, 2014), 8.



WHAT IS AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY AND WHY DOES IT MATTER FOR THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION?

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Heather Walton

In this short article, it is my hope to present to readers of *Anvil* the key features of autoethnography and the main forms in which it is currently practised. I also seek to address why autoethnography is an important resource for theological reflection. In so doing I shall emphasise that autoethnography, as it emerged within the world of social research, was deeply implicated in the quest to find more engaged and participatory epistemologies (ways of knowing). It thus serves as a particularly valuable resource for those who are seeking to engage with contemporary life in ways that provoke an inclusive, justice-seeking and transformative Christian response.

APPROACHING AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Autoethnography can be defined as "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)".¹ The emphasis upon both "analysis" and "cultural experience" places autoethnography alongside the many other forms of social research that seek to observe and interpret cultural life.

The use of the word "ethnography" within "autoethnography" is an important signal as to the meaning of the term. Ethnography refers to the multilayered study of cultural forms as they exist in everyday contexts. Its use links the autoethnographic project back to traditions of social investigation developed by pioneering anthropologists such as Franz Boas (1858–1942) and Bronisław Malinowski (1884–1942). They developed traditions of inquiry based upon acute observation, and their detailed inscription of everyday events allowed them to analyse and represent the "ways of life" they encountered in their early ethnographic studies. A key part of this approach to research has always been the conscious use of the "self" as research instrument - indeed the perceptive skills of the attentive observer are what guarantees the reliability of data. However, autoethnography takes this process a good deal further. Instead of the researcher being a disciplined observer of social processes taking place "out there", the project is brought much closer to home. The focus in autoethnography is upon the analysis and communication of those experiences that have shaped the observer themselves. Personal experience becomes a data source for "a critically reflexive methodology... [that] provides a framework to

critically reflect upon the ways in which our personal lives intersect, collide and commune with others in the body politic".²

This recognition that particular, located and embodied experience matters – and can be an important source of new knowledge and understanding – is vitally linked to the development of liberative movements such as feminism, postcolonialism and queer theory. All of these have emphasised the importance of the standpoint from which we view the world; to a large extent, where we stand determines what we see. Instead of seeking to distance themselves from their context and observe from a neutral position, those who advocate emancipatory epistemologies have insisted that those who wear the shoes best know where they pinch. In other words, valuable understanding and, in consequence, insights for action come from attending closely to the voices of those who are most implicated in any issue of concern. This does not, of course, mean that their insights should not be tested and tried from a critical perspective and in wider conversation among stakeholders. Rather, it affirms that there is an "epistemic advantage" that emerges from the perspectives of those who care most and feel most about an issue - and that this is a crucial ingredient in any visions of transformed futures.

Although autoethnography has taken a defined shape only within the past 20 years, it has been enthusiastically embraced by an emerging generation of researchers who are keen to write themselves "into a deeper critical understanding... of the ways in which our lives intersect with larger sociocultural pains and privileges".³ One reason why it has proved so attractive is that it has sought to communicate these "pains and privileges" in strong, evocative ways that provoke empathetic responses. In so doing it has breached many of the boundaries between art and the social sciences and, in so doing, generated controversy and critique (see, for example, Denzin 2006).⁴ Indeed, because autoethnography is such a lively and creative movement, it is not surprising to see diversity and disputes within it. There are various autoethnographic "schools" emerging with distinct emphases in their work. Three of the main approaches are outlined below.

¹ Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams and Arthur P. Bochner, "Autoethnography: An Overview," in *Forum: Qualitative Social Research/Sozialforschung* 12:1 (2011), accessed 1 January 2014, http://www.gualitative-research.net/index.php/fgs/article/view/1589/3095.

² Tami Spry, Body, Paper, Stage: Writing and Performing Autoethnography (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2011), 54.

³*Ibid.*, 51.

⁴Norman K. Denzin, "Analytic Autoethnography, or Déjà Vu all Over Again," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35:4 (2006): 419–28.

FORMS OF AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Telling evocative stories

Telling stories that evoke response is the vision for autoethnography powerfully articulated in the work of two of the most well-known advocates of autoethnography: Caroline Ellis and Art Bochner. It was their joint essay in the second edition of the Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research, *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, that heralded the emergence of autoethnography onto the public stage.⁵ In this early "manifesto" they state quite clearly that the aim of autoethnography is to provoke feeling in order to generate an empathetic response to:

a self or some aspect of a life lived in a cultural context. In personal narrative texts authors become "I", readers become "you"... [and] take a more active role as they are invited into the author's world [and e]voked to a feeling level about the events described... The goal is to write meaningfully and evocatively about things that matter and may make a difference... and to write from an ethic of care and concern.⁶

It is important to note that Ellis and Bochner are not advocating a focus on the storyteller and their emotions and feelings. Stories are told in order to aid understanding of a "cultural context" and explore "things that matter" within it. Ellis and Bochner show a particular interest in those significant areas of social life that are rarely publicly narrated or addressed. But this cultural analysis is made possible through recounting experiences of personal transformation,

"epiphanies"—remembered moments perceived to have significantly impacted the trajectory of a person's life... times of existential crises that forced a person to attend to and analyze lived experience... and events after which life does not seem quite the same.⁷

The hope is that the constructing narratives of such life-changing events (including, for example, bullying, bereavement, work challenges, consciousness of ethnic identity, migration, sexual practice, abuse, childbirth, abortion, cancer treatment) will enable deeper perceptions to emerge. As generating such changed understandings becomes a major research goal, considerable attention has to be paid to constructing the autoethnographic text. They must be carefully crafted and are often written in an engaging narrative form, employing a variety of literary techniques, to move hearts and change minds. "Autoethnography wants the reader to care, to feel, to empathize and to do something, to act."⁸

This is not to say that the experiences being recounted and the events surrounding them have no significance beyond their emotive power. I think it is very interesting that, despite her frequent affirmations of the importance of literary style within autoethnography, Ellis is a very "realistic", no-nonsense sort of writer who wants to make very clear that people's actions and life choices take place within specific social contexts. It is rather that she seeks to draw attention to the importance of the writing process to research. Questions of the truth and reliability of an autoethnographic text are thus intimately bundled together with issues of style and representation. Those who advocate evocative autoethnography would argue that this has in fact always been the case even in traditional forms of ethnographic research. Ultimately we are always drawn back to questions concerning our trust in a narrator and our response to the narrator's voice.

I hope it will be clear that this form of autoethnography has a great deal to offer the reflective theological writer. Very often we will seek to speak out of epiphanic moments of transformation. Frequently these epiphanies will be linked to embodied experiences that are rarely voiced in institutional religious contexts but will nevertheless carry great significance for us. Evocative autoethnographic writing can also convey the complexity and ambiguity of our religious selves. Schooled in traditions of Bible reading, preaching and liturgy, we are already imbued with a sense of the purpose and power of evocative language forms. The challenge is to use these anew in expressing accounts of everyday selves and contemporary spiritual life.

ANALYTIC AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

While many autoethnographers are pursuing paths that take their work further and further away from the traditional forms of social investigation, there are others who believe that the autoethnographic pendulum has now swung too far in the direction of artistic creativity and emotional expression. These critics wish to harness its energies to serve a more conventional research agenda – namely the desire to investigate and theorise about the social world.

⁵ Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner, "Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject" in *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials (2nd Edition)*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 199–258.
⁶ Ibid.: 213.

⁷ Ellis, Adams and Bochner, "Autoethnography: An Overview."

⁸ Carolyn S. Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner, "Analyzing Analytic Autoethnography: An Autopsy," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35:4 (2006): 433.

This view was powerfully expressed in an influential article by Leon Anderson entitled "Analytic Autoethnography" (2006). Anderson stated that he wished to celebrate "the value of autoethnographic research within the analytic ethnographic paradigm".9 It was his belief that the standard ethnographic methods involving journal-keeping and note-taking have been reflective and accountable from their beginnings. Furthermore, insider perspectives have long been recognised and valued within dominant research traditions provided that the normal critical assessment is made of these and that personal experience is not seen as a simple guarantor of truth. The position he advocates is that autoethnography be recognised as making a valuable contribution, within proper limits and among other methods, to the processes through which we seek to accumulate data and analyse the world.

This approach might seem modest and sensible. However, Anderson is operating out of what is termed a "realist paradigm". He seeks to use autoethnographic material alongside other empirical data "to gain insight into some broader set of social phenomena than those provided by the data themselves".¹⁰ The processes of generalisation, abstraction and theory-building that constitute the analytic approach he espouses are anathema to some autoethnographers. They insist on retaining the focus upon particularity and see all social theories as constructed narratives masquerading as factual accounts.

I do not think it is necessary for the reflective theological writer to take up arms in this particular battle. Some of us will tend towards realist epistemologies, and indeed realist theologies; others of us will see the world as constructed and understand our theologies as similarly shaped by human hands. However, this does not mean that these world views should never communicate or that we should not see that there are social and political imperatives that require us at times to proceed in one way rather than another. I personally have supervised several doctoral theses in which autoethnography has been effectively combined with other forms of data generation that claim empirical credentials. Often this is the only way that the research would have been judged useful and trustworthy in the context it was intended to influence. I was happy to share in this research work despite the fact that I am personally suspicious of realist paradigms. Analytic discourses can be useful instruments for those seeking to promote political changes in the church and society at large. I am

perfectly happy to include my own autoethnographic reflections in articles that are otherwise written in more analytic or theoretical terms (see, for example, Walton, 2018).¹¹ In short, I think the reflective theological writer should understand what is at stake in debates between evocative and analytic autoethnographers but not feel that they need to be unduly restricted by these considerations in terms of their own writing practices!

PERFORMANCE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

The last form of autoethnography I shall refer to in this article is "performance autoethnography". The term "performance" is not used to imply it takes place in a theatre (although it may do so) but rather that speaking from experience can be a staged act, an intervention, a public and political display. It may be a display that takes place textually or in an educational context, or through preaching or prophetic action. In all such cases, the autoethnographer is hoping that the impact of their work will extend beyond the academic environment and "perform" some change in the world.

The understanding that lies behind works of performance autoethnography is that the social world itself is a *performed* world in which people act out their lives in accordance with the "big scripts" of race, economics, gender and so on. However, within the performance of personal lives there is always the chance to improvise, invent and change – or simply forget your lines and thus make involuntary adaptations. This is why the insertion of personal testimony into the social arena is so important. It challenges the idea that there is just one way to be, just one form of the "good life", and insists that experience is infinitely varied, particular and creative. As Spry writes, "Performative autoethnography is designed to offer stories alternative to normative, taken for granted assumptions that clog our understanding about the diversity of experience and the systems of power that hold 'a single story' in place."12

While there is a good deal of common ground between evocative ethnography and performance ethnography, it is the political commitment of the latter approach that is particularly significant. Performances are not simply retellings of personal narratives. Performance autoethnography also engages with dominant narratives in order to undermine them. "Performers" may use many different voices and often their "texts" are collages (including visual and auditory elements)

- ⁹ Leon Anderson, "Analytic Autoethnography," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35:4 (2006): 374. ¹⁰ *Ibid.*: 387.
- ¹¹ Heather Walton, "We have never been theologians: postsecularism and practical theology," *Practical Theology* 11.3 (2018): 218–30. ¹² Spry, *Body, Paper, Stage*, 56.

or bricolages combined of various resources (from childhood memories, letters, extracts from news items, school books, magazines and so on). These productions may lack the narrative coherence of evocative stories. However, this is a strategic move. The intention is to fracture our understanding of how knowledge works and how performances are enacted.

One of the most influential advocates of performance autoethnography, Norman Denzin, is unashamedly political in his vision for this work. He describes it as "a way of writing, hearing and listening... a return to narrative as a political act.... It uses the words and stories people tell to imagine new worlds."13 However, although Denzin is certainly a militant writer, he is deeply sympathetic to spirituality. He credits liberation theology as being one of the sources that has contributed to the participatory politics of resistance that inspires his work. He quotes the author Annie Dillard approvingly in relation to the mysterious and often tragic relation of creation to its creator.¹⁴ He insists that performance autoethnography must be a holistic process that attends to all aspects of life including our relations with the sacred.

A respectful, radical performance pedagogy must honor these views of spirituality. It works to construct a vision of the person, ecology, and the environment that is compatible with these principles. This pedagogy demands a politics of hope, of loving, of caring nonviolence grounded in inclusive moral and spiritual terms.¹⁵

There is a growing interest in this radical form of autoethnography within theological circles. It is one that allows a diversity of voices within a text and insists that the text must be publicly orientated – its place and work is in the world. For the theological reflector, this approach encourages us to think beyond the personal and therapeutic aspects of autoethnography and embrace its prophetic and disclosive potential. It also encourages us to see our sacred places as theatres in which worship and ritual may be "performed" as political acts.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

I have argued that autoethnographic writing, in all its forms, is a very creative resource for theological reflection. The term might sound technical but the practice of telling stories that shed light on wider issues or move the reader to empathetic understanding of social questions is one that closely resembles very familiar ways of finding theological meaning in everyday events. Such processes are particularly significant within Ignatian traditions of spirituality in which spiritual seekers, like autoethnographers, are taught to pay prayerful attention to the revelations that occur all around them in everyday life *and to learn from them* (see Sheldrake, 2003).¹⁶ Within evangelical traditions, sermons and testimonies are the sites in which autoethnographic "performances" are often located as people seek to communicate how their epiphanic encounters ("Damascus Road" experiences) carry meaning that they are compelled to share with others.

Readers of *Anvil* are likely to be particularly interested in the opportunities autoethnography provides for the communication of Christian insights from perspectives that are often marginalised or even silenced by dominant western master narratives. The practical theologian Courtney Goto writes of the transforming impact of encouraging her students, many of whom are people of colour, to construct their own narratives of lived faith experience has generated. Students become aware of and own their epistemic advantage:

a critical, perspectival edge created by experiencing oppression personally or empathically, enabling a knower to stand in multiple places, discern what others might neglect, and challenge ignorance or violence.¹⁷

They find voice to offer generative new interpretations (and critiques) of Christian traditions that present a profound challenge to received wisdom.

A concern for representation and voice is crucial within autoethnography and this challenges the way white western Christians speak of and on behalf of others. A sensitivity to neglected ethical questions, such as how do I understand my own complicity in silence, emerges. This challenge confronts those whose experiences are assumed to be the norm, those who dare to speak from radically different perspectives and all of those who seek to listen prayerfully to voices different from their own. Furthermore, the method encourages exploration and innovation. Autoethnographic writing is frequently iconoclastic and "in your face". It is not a bad thing for theological reflectors to embrace the edginess of this approach in their work. It helps us consider the modes of self-censorship under which we normally construct

- ¹⁵ Norman K. Denzin, "Performing [auto] ethnography politically," Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies 25:3 (2003): 262.
- ¹⁶ Philip Sheldrake, "Christian Spirituality as a Way of Living Publicly: A Dialectic of the Mystical and Prophetic," Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality 3:1 (2003): 19–37.
- ¹⁷ Courtney T. Goto, Taking on Practical Theology: The Idolization of Context and the Hope of Community (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 202; italics original.

¹³ Norman K. Denzin, *Performance Ethnography: Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Culture* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003), 105. ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

the stories of our faith lives – and challenges us to transgress many self-imposed restrictions that limit our response to God's action in the world.

I conclude this article by borrowing from Denzin's reflections on what constitutes good autoethnographical writing and adapting them (slightly) for my purposes here. Denzin states that this writing should:

- unsettle, criticise and challenge taken-forgranted meanings and socially scripted performances;
- invite ethical and spiritual dialogue while clarifying its own moral positions;
- create resistance and offer utopian visions about how things can be different; care and be kind;
- show not tell using the rule that less is more.
- be good enough to trust: show interpretative sufficiency, representational adequacy and aspire to authenticity;
- present political, workable, collective and committed viewpoints that provoke a response!¹⁸

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Heather Walton is a writer and theologian. She is Professor of Theology and Creative Practice at the University of Glasgow. Her recent books include *Writing Methods in Theological Reflection* (2014), *Not Eden: Spiritual Life Writing for this World* (2015) and *Theological Reflection Methods* 2nd *Edition* with Elaine Graham and Frances Ward (2018). She is a preacher and elder in the Church of Scotland

¹⁸ Adapted from Denzin, *Performance Ethnography*, 123–24.



TOBERMORY LAUNDRY

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Cathy Ross

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TOBERMORY LAUNDRY

Brightly coloured houses line the harbour Cobalt blue, sunflower yellow, tangerine red Dusky pink, burnt orange. White sun dusts the hilltops Lightens the wintry landscape.

A sweetly pungent smell drifts in the air Drawing us into the shop. Behind the arts and crafts on sale A woman is folding a large bedsheet. This is Tobermory laundry.

The sheet is pristine; virgin white Dazzling in its whiteness. For centuries women have handled sheets, Washing, ironing, starching, folding. Domestic toil, women's work.

Making things clean, removing dirt, Restoring order, upholding virtue, Guarding honour, maintaining purity. Blood on the sheets. Woman's virginity, Blood and tears, chastity confirmed.

The pristine white sheet Blinds us to centuries of oppression. Women raped, abused, silenced. Women as objects, chattels, property. Women abased, undone, spoiled.

A simple virgin-white sheet in Tobermory laundry Evokes women's blood, sweat and tears Throughout the ages.

St Beuno's, September 2018

I WONDER WHY

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Cathy Ross

ANVIL: JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY AND MISSION - VOLUME 36: ISSUE 1

I WONDER WHY

I discovered a world of women On Iona. Known for its restored Abbey and iconic saint Columba. Arrived in 563 with his twelve men. Six hundred years later a nunnery was founded, Dissolved in 1560. Now in ruins. I wonder why.

Nuns working and worshipping Their strict round of service and prayer Gathering daily in the chapter house To listen to the rule of St Augustine. Their nunnery now in disrepair. I wonder why.

Nuns living off income from their nunnery lands On Iona and beyond. Offering refuge to unmarried daughters, illegitimate girls, estranged wives, Hospitality to female pilgrims None of them remembered. I wonder why. The Abbey is flourishing. Visitors, tourists, audio-guides. The nave has stone effigies of two abbots, Dominic and John; in their vestments. Grave slabs of churchmen and warriors are legion, No nuns are honoured there. I wonder why.

Last stop is the museum. Wait! Prioress Anna MacLean is there! The last Prioress of the nunnery, The upper portion of her grave slab remains. Plans to restore the nunnery came to nothing. I wonder why.

I discovered a world of women on Iona. Women serving, praying, worshipping, Women working, studying, hosting, Women, managing their own affairs, Anonymous, unknown, forgotten, I wonder why.

Mull, 5 April 2018

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FORMATION FORMATION FORMATION FORMATION

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Ruth Wells

Formation Conformation of conformity Me squeezed into a too-tight, uptight, cassock-shaped mould, Hold on – who am l? Without wanting to wander into the hazy dazed realms of nostalgia, I remember, I was someone else once. Formation – anaesthetising the self out of me. Habitus, If I keep doing these things, your rituals, If I stick to the prescription – "take twice a day before meals" I'll be formed. Forged in the fire of the machine. The machine fed on the same fuel as centuries ago; Tradition.

Now I'm not saying there are no edges to be knocked off of me, On the contrary, I am a multi-faceted collection of rough edges. I am too much Too little Too feisty Too timid Too limited in knowledge Too quick to judge Too cruel to be kind Too much Too much

But maybe just one of these edges might cut through the s^{***} The same old that holds up the barriers That stops people in their tracks That acts like it holds all the answers That controls power with white knuckles clenched Entrenched systems Suffocating, stifling I don't fit in I can't fit in I won't fit in.

THIS IS MY BODY

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This Is my body This is My body This is my Body: Broken I trace the cross on my belly Vertical linea nigra This black line, marking out your expected arrival Then the horizontal one I barely dare to touch The "sun roof" as my sister called it Made for your quick escape Your great evacuation Made in haste. This is my body broken for you. This is my blood shed. The messy reality of new life Carnage The aftermath Blood for weeks That secret that nobody told me first time round The woosiness of the initial venture out of bed Tentative steps like learning to walk again The return of sensation to limbs numb The shock of it all.

This is my blood. And as I flit in between sleep and wake In the liminal hours The sound of your guzzling Lulling me into dreamlike trance I chance again upon the Eucharist The broken body The blood shed And I'm walking the line Placing your broken body into outstretched hands Some eager Others hesitant All broken And my brokenness My bloodshed Becomes all the more poignant The collision of humanity and the Divine And as I hold you to me Our heartbeats echoing I am caught up in it all The brokenness and the beauty.

Ruth Wells is an ordained Anglican priest and is currently serving her curacy in West Moors (Dorset) and part-time with the chaplaincy team at Bournemouth University/Arts University Bournemouth. She is a poet and is particularly interested in the theological connection poetry brings to heart and head.

DROWNING IN THE BARTH?

A SPOKEN-WORD PIECE

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Luke Larner

While we're on the subject of white-workingclass-man's rage...

I'll share a little bit of mine with you... But where do we start...

Good stories take people on a journey, A beginning, middle, and end, maybe a good lesson for learning, But this story isn't for you, it's for me, So I humbly propose that we, Plan the journey differently, And start with the Krisis.

Us students were hanging on every word, Until something unexpected occurred, In a manner really quite absurd, Excuse the turn of phrase – but it was like my brain filled its pants with t... – well you get the idea...

Our master for the day, a former monk, Told the story of his time cloistered in existential funk, Until he met the old man of Basel, and here's the twist – That according to Uncle Karl – God bursts out of religious life like a boxer's clenched fist.

(Spoken)

He said everything we offer on the altar, every act of service, every attempt at religion be it a primitive appeasement of the demigods, or the delicate ruminations of Kierkegaard and Dostoyevsky – is absolutely useless unless, like a grand vaulted staircase, it leads out of itself into the fresh, clean air.... (breathe) Our self-denial, doing "hard things for Jesus", our imaginary self-martyrdom, as the Apostle said, is all bull****.

This realisation came rushing in my mind, Some explanation, some framework, scrambling desperately to find A life boat, an oar or even some driftwood in the sea, Someone help me, I'm drowning in Cartesian anxiety!

I started to think about this G-D who'd had 18 years of me,

When I pray what does he look like, sound like, wait – why am I even saying "he"? Is God a man? Why does his voice sound so similar to my disappointed father when I read the Bible?

Barth says, "We press ourselves into proximity with Him: and so, all unthinking, we make him nigh unto ourselves" – holy **s***** I've been worshipping an Idol!

But if we twist our pencil and rewind the tape a little... Is this really news to me, or have I been wrestling for a while with a great theodicy riddle...

You see for a long time I've had this little itch in the back of my soul,

"I love God" I used to say, but his fan club leave me cold... My soul music is Guthrie, Dylan, Zappa, or a Cockburn guitar lick, That megabucks corporate worship[™] just makes me feel sick.

And I realise why -

It's all that annoying certainty – It never ends on a minor note,

You know what – sometimes there *is* no hope, God's answer is always "yes and amen"? What about all the times I got silence or a big fat "nope"?

God gave you a parking space while kids are dying in Syria? Your theology's a joke! I prefer some of the darker stuff, that the psalmists wrote...

You let Aidan, Rowena, Joe, Dog, and so many others die?

Has the right hand of the Lord lost its strength? Please tell me why?

Or maybe it doesn't work like that; here's a thought:

Maybe the theological musings of a proud monkey will always fall short.

You see – for Barth any claim to direct relationship or knowledge of God is at best dubious, If we bring God to earth God ends up looking suspiciously like us, What about the Bible? Infallibility? It just feels absurd! Is this collection of books a self-evident basis of truth – Or is the person of Jesus – the true word?

(Spoken)

People write him off you know, old Uncle Karl – they say his God is too transcendent – too far off – if you read his books you stop seeing the point of praying – one of our priests is always trying to convince me that the old man changed his mind in the end, like Darwin and Bob Marley – I don't know cos I haven't got round to finishing church dogmatics yet. Some letters came out that are starting to make some of Barth's personal ethics look a bit questionable, and the use of genderspecific pronouns in the translations of his work is a bit old hat.

But like that cantankerous old relative at Christmas time,

Who drops some uncomfortable truths after too much wine,

I often drop in on old Uncle Karl when I'm feeling a bit lost.

And yeah, you're right – thinking this way about things does come at a cost...

But as old Karl put it:

"To be pilgrims means that men [sorry ladies] must perpetually return to the starting-point of that naked humanity which is absolute poverty and utter insecurity. God must not be sought as though He sat enthroned on upon the summit of religious attainment. He is to be found on the plain where men suffer and sin. The veritable pinnacle of religious achievement is attained when men are thrust down into the company of those who lie in the depths." (End quote) Peregratio pro Christo (as the monks used to say) – Just because some of us wander for Christ, it doesn't mean we've lost our way.

Luke Larner is a pioneer ordinand in the Diocese of St Albans, training at CMS and Cuddesdon and based in Luton. His main mission contexts have meant spending time among marginalised groups such as the homeless and addicted, sex workers, and the outlaw biker fraternity; as well

as engaging with young people around the issue of violence involving knives. As a tertiary Franciscan he has also taken a keen interest in environmental issues, alongside poverty, marginalisation, and violence. Recent forays into spoken-word poetry and sculpture have awoken an interest in how the arts can be used in mission. As a former bricklayer, a key academic interest has been how the issue of social class intersects with other theological and political "hot potatoes". Due to be ordained in June 2020, Luke and his family will move to Bedford where he will serve his curacy.



ONE ROW BACK: THE HIDDEN FACE OF POVERTY IN CORNWALL

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Amanda Evans

Almost without exception, when I travel "up country" from my home in Falmouth and people find out that I live in Cornwall they are delighted to share with me their fond memories of childhood summer holidays, favourite secluded beaches and of a place set apart from the rest of the UK, which somehow escapes from the usual realities and preoccupations of modern British life.

Last summer Time Out magazine evocatively echoed this, saying that "Cornwall is a county of contradictions. There's myth and mystery, misty clifftops and sharp, rugged rocks rising out of restless waves, as well as peaceful coves, sleepy towns and vitamin D-soaked beaches packed out with surfers."1 Of course, it is a beautiful, special place to live and the county's thriving tourist industry is key to the its economic stability, but it is also a place of long-term deprivation, poor transport links and physical distance from the south-east; there is another story to be told and to be heard.

Just one row back from the elegant 1930s houses on the drive into Falmouth, and squeezed in above the now-gentrified captains' town houses overlooking the marina, are the serried ranks of "long, dense rows of grey

terrace houses and drab, low-rise flats" easily identifiable as the Beacon and Old Hill estate.² Once described as the "Beirut" of Cornwall, "blighted by violent crime, drug dealing and intimidation",³ the estate underwent a massive regeneration process at the turn

"As an Anglican priest living on the estate, this multi-layered reality of poverty informs my ministry and compels me to share the story of those who live 'one row back'."

of the last century and yet remains, in many ways, out of sight and out of mind of Falmouth's many visitors and, critically, many of its wealthier inhabitants. A recent summary provided by CAP (Christians Against Poverty) highlighted that Falmouth has more than double the

national average of households where no adults are in employment and, shockingly, "in Falmouth Penwerris [the parish containing the estate], the child poverty rate rises to the equivalent of around 14 children in each class of 30".4

This is in a country where the "poverty gap" continues to widen,⁵ and in a county where tourism is one of the main sources of income – ironically resulting in poorly paid seasonal work and a prohibitively expensive accommodation market. Many parts of the Beacon and Old Hill estate would seem to be caught not only in what the Church Urban Fund (CUF) identifies as a "Web of Poverty" (poverty of resources, relationship or identity)6 but also, as highlighted by the new bishop of Truro, the Rt Revd Philip Mounstephen, in his inaugural sermon, in a "poverty of aspiration". The reality is a hard one. As Lynsey Hanley reminds us in her book on respectability and crossing the social divide, "The essential problem is that, increasingly, we are born into geographical areas which ever more closely map a sharp social and economic hierarchy."7

As an Anglican priest living on the estate, this multilayered reality of poverty informs my ministry and

compels me to share the

"one row back" whenever

"Jesus invites us to share

the view of the excluded,

to embrace an outlook

story of those who live

I can; as Sedmak says,

on reality that is not the mainstream position."8 But in contrast to the closely packed terraces just over the hill, we have the privilege of a large detached vicarage set back from the road and surrounded by trees. This

obvious contrast with our neighbours, which Sam Wells has also identified,⁹ can at times be both theologically and personally difficult to reconcile. One day in particular last summer it was brought into very sharp

- ¹ Ellie Walker-Arnott and Lucy Lovell, "The best places to visit in the UK in 2019," *TimeOut* (31 July 2019), accessed 20 December 2019, https://www.timeout.com/uk/things-to-do/best-places-to-visit-in-the-uk-2019.
- ² Linda Jackson, "How the Beacon became a haven," The Guardian (15 November 2000), accessed 6 December 2019, https://www. theguardian.com/society/2000/nov/15/communities.housingpolicy.
- ³ Robin Durie, Katrina Wyatt and Hazel Stuteley, "Community regeneration and complexity" in Complexity and Healthcare Organization: A View from the Street, ed. David Kernick (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2018): 279.
- ⁴ Christians Against Poverty, "The Need for CAP Falmouth and Penryn" (2019).
- ⁵ Kevin Peachey, "Gap between rich and poor starts to widen," BBC News (26 February 2019), accessed 29 December 2019, <u>https://www.bbc.</u> co.uk/news/business-47370739.
- ⁶ "Web of Poverty," Church Urban Fund, accessed 20 December 2019, https://www.cuf.org.uk/learn-about/web-of-poverty.
- ⁷ Lynsey Hanley, *Respectable: Crossing the Class Divide* (London: Penguin, 2017), 208.
- ⁸ Clemens Sedmak, Doing Local Theology: A Guide for Artisans of a New Humanity (New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 100.
- ⁹ Samuel Wells, Incarnational Mission: Being With the World (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2018), 132–34.

focus for me in a story that also needs to be told.

It was a beautiful early morning and the sun streamed steadily through my bedroom curtains, swaying a little in the breeze – my day off, my sabbath, a day full of promise... Even the usual 4 a.m. frenetic and ear-piercing wake-up call from our resident seagulls hadn't dented my inner sense of anticipatory joy.

I stuffed my old, rather crumbly wetsuit and favourite large beach towel into my late mother's 1970s shopping bag – blue and white bold stripes on nylon, approvingly "vintage", say my two adult daughters – and dodged my way to the beach, weaving in and out of the usual randomly parked cars on my crowded council estate, travelling only a mile or so in real terms but a world from home in aspirations... from making-ends-meet families, every other household living below the poverty line (that's official), to second-home owners and visitors, with well-mannered children, buckets and spades and cool boxes, swelling the town to near-bursting like a ripe, ready-to-eat peach...

I love the sea. I love the beach. And, just for the day, I guess I longed to be one of "them".

There is no doubting that Falmouth in the summer is straight out of the glossy Sunday supplements... glorious gardens laced with Darwin-inspired pineapple-like tree ferns, cool beach cafes serving sourdough and slaw, and breathtaking beaches lapped by a gorgeous deep blue sea.

I settle down slowly and contentedly onto my towel – carefully tucking everything under my beach bag to deter the seagulls... and drift off into a dreamy sleep, nicely warmed under the hot summer sun...

The first jet of freezing-cold water hits me square in the back and neck. I wake up abruptly and – momentarily startled – my ministry autopilot kicks in, so I smile, admire the little lad's giant water pistol and agree that "Yes, the water is still surprisingly cold for this time of year", then I drift back to sleep.

The second time, both my tummy and the paperback I'm now trying to read are targeted. I appear less magnanimous but the mother is apologetic so I smile, and, admitting defeat, pull on my wetsuit and go for a nice therapeutic dip.

A little while later, back on the beach and drying nicely, the lad's rubber ball hits me heavily and squarely in the ribs and it hurts. I am really quite annoyed, and – much

to my additional annoyance – once I let that annoyance in, others start to tumble in too... the young woman in her bright pink shiny bikini cackling on her mobile; the large family in front annoyed by their children's repeated whinnying to "come and play"...

The mum of the little boy with the giant water pistol and the hard rubber ball threatens to take them away... but in that moment – when she looks at me with an expression that says, "I'm tired, he's a bit of a handful, you do understand, don't you?" – to my total and utter shame, I refuse her that compassionate response, and instead I look away.

Jesus didn't look away... but in that instant, the generous and genuinely inclusive "me" – the one constantly championing the place of many of those living in unacceptable poverty on my estate – chose to look away, to join the ranks of those faithful and lovely people in our churches whose language is often peppered with "them" and "us" and who just don't see that the "they" is "us" too: that we are all part of "we".

Many children living only a couple of miles from the sea in Cornwall will never be able to afford to go the beach and you'll not often see anyone from my estate down there; that is, apart from me.

This was how a trip to the beach full of promise ended for me that day. Of course, in painting a picture of a particular place there is an inherent danger in stereotyping the subjects, the culture and even the narrator themselves. As Gerald A. Arbuckle reminds us, culture is far from a multi-faceted concept: "No one definition of culture can capture the complexity of a culture."¹⁰ There will always be hidden assumptions at play. We inevitably bring with us as observers often unspoken biases and prejudices that can cloud our understanding and objectivity,¹¹ and, just as the person least likely to help the mugged traveller in Jesus' parable was the Samaritan,¹² we have a natural tendency as human beings to categorise people and communities into "them" and "us"; all too easily *we lose sight of "we*".

We all need a sense of self-identity and belonging within a given community to enable us to flourish, but what does it mean to be "born and bred Cornish" in deprived communities like the Beacon and Old Hill? In 2014, the UK Government officially recognised the Cornish as a national minority, but as Philip Marsden reflected in *The Guardian* a few years ago, "Retaining a sense of being Cornish has been made more challenging by the growing influx of visitors, many with their own strong

¹⁰ Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Culture, Inculturation, & Theologians: A Postmodern Critique* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 10. ¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Luke 10:25–37.

ideas of what Cornwall represents."¹³ Even in the 1930s, of the famous painters who made up the St Ives School, thought by many to epitomise the essence of Cornwall, only one of the more prominent artists, Peter Laynon, was in fact Cornish.

Indeed, what does it mean for my neighbours who have moved here from Poland or recently arrived refugees; where do we all fit in? Perhaps the most difficult aspect to talk about here is that of class and to what extent people self-identify, if at all, as middle, upper or working

class. As Tex Sample explains in *Working Class Rage*, "... the people of the white working class are a complicated people. The great majority of them bust their tails working at hard jobs that rack their bodies and don't pay enough."¹⁴

Writing about mission on estates, Tim Chester warns that "You will be crossing a deep cultural divide as you live among people on a council estate".¹⁵ There is a twofold assumption here: both that council estates are inherently working class and that the reader "Many children living only a couple of miles from the sea in Cornwall will never be able to afford to go the beach and you'll not often see anyone from my estate down there; that is, apart from me."

"I wonder more and more if the first thing shouldn't be to know people by name, to eat and drink with them, to listen to their stories and tell your own" [my italics].¹⁷ But, as the established church in unfamiliar places – at the last census, 53.7 per cent of the residents of Falmouth described themselves as being "Christian", and 35.6 per cent as having "no religion" at all $-^{18}$ we can run the risk of being seen as givers of "charity" rather than simply genuine hosts. There is often a middle-class churchy assumption that "if we put on something nice then

people will come", but in my experience, it is in *receiving* that we are seen as authentic. It was only when we held a garage sale in aid of Oxfam last summer, receiving donations from those on the estate, that we began to "learn the language"¹⁹ that was needed, to have the sort of dialogue and exchange of stories that meant real connection. It is from that, and our pancake party last February, that I think that our work with CAP can start to grow and flourish.

And it is with these authentic relationships that we can begin to

is *not* working class. Although I have lived in Cornwall for nearly 15 years, drive pretty ordinary cars and shop at Lidl down the road, as a middle-class well-educated white woman from "over the Tamar" I am painfully aware that I can often seem "different" to my neighbours. Interestingly, my greatest ministry tool is undoubtedly my two fairly badly behaved and scruffy class-neutral terriers because they make me and my neighbours equal partners in community; I become part of "us" not just "you" and "me".

It is, I think, in allowing ourselves to be authentic and open that we are able to genuinely connect on both a surface and deeper level. Jesus, of course, sat with people and ate with them,¹⁶ and Henri Nouwen beautifully said about his experience of ministering in Bolivia and Peru, understand a little of why for some people living on the Beacon and Old Hill, a day trip to the beach – and by extension a walk across town to our lovely trendy church-run coffee shop or new church service – might be just one step too far. By nature, we like to go places where our self-identity and sense of belonging is upheld, where we feel at ease, where we are able to feel socially and economically accepted – that's what community is, but Gylly beach with its award-winning café and bistro is a particular type of beach for students and visitors and second-home owners where it must be easy to feel excluded.

Falmouth was recently voted among the top five best places to live in the UK: "A buzzing beach babe that's

¹³ Philip Marsden, "Cornish identity: why Cornwall has always been a separate place," *The Guardian* (26 April 2014), accessed 20 December 2019, <u>https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/apr/26/survival-of-cornish-identity-cornwall-separate-place</u>.

¹⁴ Tex Sample, Working Class Rage: A Field Guide to White Anger and Pain (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018), 17.

¹⁵ Tim Chester, Unreached: Growing Churches in Working-Class and Deprived Areas (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2012), 158.

¹⁶ Mark 2:13–17.

¹⁷ Henri J M Nouwen, The Inner Voice of Love: A Journey Through Anguish to Freedom, (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 68

¹⁸ "Local Area Report – Falmouth Built-up area sub division," Nomis, accessed 20 December 2019, <u>https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/localarea?compare=E35000462</u>.

¹⁹ Wells, Incarnational Mission, 223.

[as] close as Britain gets to the California/Barcelona city-by-the-sea lifestyle."20 In many ways, that day on the beach at Gylly I wanted very much to be part of that Times lifestyle, so near and yet far from my estate. But in doing so, I found myself caught between these two worlds and, in looking away from the mum of the little boy with the giant water pistol and the hard rubber ball, I returned shamefully and almost unconsciously to that place where, once, I was probably most comfortable. And yet, living here as a priest has changed me: I am no longer content with "them" and "us". I want to do as Jesus would have done, to not look away but to continue to tell the stories that need to be told and the stories that need to be heard of those who live "one row back": to fully embrace "we".



Amanda Evans is a priest, mum and self-confessed fitness freak and lover of creation. She lives and ministers in the far south west of the UK with particular interests in identity and belonging "on the edges", church as community and whole-person spirituality.

²⁰ "Best Places to Live in the UK," The Times (14 April 2019), accessed 3 December 2019, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/falmouth-

cornwall-best-places-to-live-83d66zswg#.

EGGS: A NG, NESS RGIV IN SOMERSET

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CONTEXT

In this article I recall my seven-year seven-month experiences of living in a rank of former miners' cottages in a small Somerset town from 2005 to 2012. I explore the realities of communal living in an unknown and unfamiliar community. I attempt to examine the feeling of being the alien, the outsider, and the effects this had on my sense of identity and self. I aim to look at how the everyday experiences of life, family, friends and neighbours all weave into a pattern of life that enabled me to examine my identity, mission and calling.

Milk started our first conversation with our new neighbours. And eggs ended it. "We get milk delivered 'ere," said Betty, our new neighbour – matriarch of the rank of former miners' terraced cottages that we had just moved into that morning in April 2005. "I have already got you a form to fill in for the milkman if you like," she said. So, our new adventure into the hierarchy and cultural intensity and community living within a small Somerset town began.

We moved in a very warm April. And our first venture into our garden really put down the marker of how things were around there. Len, the husband of Betty (the milk instigator), greeted me with the unbeknownstto-us classic local area greeting of "Alright?" with an intonational rise at the end. Not knowing the cultural lingo and etiquette, I replied, "Well, thanks." What came next was the response that typified our experience in the next few years of our habitation in that road – "Oo not from round 'ere!"

I should have replied "Alright?" in the same intonation but I didn't yet know that this was the correct way to reply. This rebuttal by Len was significant. We realised then, and realise so much more now, that this summed up how differently we were perceived, and to some extent were, to the residents of that road. This kind of interaction initially and continually kept us on the back foot in terms of fitting in and being seen as a true part of that community. Looking back, it is interesting how power is manifested by people from the beginning when a new person comes in and potentially threatens to disrupt the cultural makeup of an area. "All cultures have a social hierarchy and methods of signalling social status."¹

I found that moving into a new area required a time of adjustment. In our naivety, however, we didn't realise

we were venturing into a different culture with different norms, expectations and dialects. "Alright?" was then followed in the next encounter with Len with "Albeyon?", which I learned sometime later from a friend who had grown up locally means "How are you getting on?" We gradually learned and negotiated our way around these new encounters.

We also soon realised that there was a distinct hierarchy in the road. Len and Betty ruled the street from the old foreman's cottage, exercising considerable control over the residents. This mining inheritance lived on in their mindset and expectations. Mining was what most people's relatives had done since the fifteenth century, with the pit in the town closing in 1973. Mining was in the blood even to the point of local names such as Shearn – meaning someone who comes from a dirty, mining area – making up large swathes of the local phone directory. In culture there is a sense that history is part of us, pumped around our bodies like blood through our veins. It is so integral to the way a place functions yet it is rarely spoken of or even acknowledged.

Something that started as meaning one thing in a specific time becomes a symbol of the past and its power carries on conveying "a meaning, not just about itself but about all kinds of relationships".² This is what happened with the foreman's cottage that Len and Betty lived in. It was a bit bigger than the rest of the houses in the terrace, thus in the past was seen as a symbol of power, "born" in response "to the subjective needs of people and their experience of life".³ But this symbol kept its power with Len and Betty adopting, by historical osmosis, the foreman role. The symbolic power they exercised we realised more fully after the dog encounter (which I will come onto presently) as it demonstrated that the residents in the road still subconsciously adhered to it. The residents didn't therefore stand up to Len and Betty about the dog, even though they would moan about it to us on the guiet – and even when the dog bit a neighbour, they were afraid to say anything to anyone, as if they were still miners and living in fear of the foreman. The control of the contemporary foreman in the flesh and blood of Len and Betty was further aided by the layout of the gardens in the road.

The gardens of those cottages, being ex-miners' dwellings, had a twitton – a local name for a

³ Arbuckle, Culture, Inculturation, & Theologians, 20.

¹ Kate Fox's observation arises from her research into the world of Englishness through her ethnographical participant observational research. She has examined the world of what makes us English in terms of habits, etiquette and hidden social rules. Kate Fox, *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2014), 114.

² Gerald A. Arbuckle, in *Culture, Inculturation, & Theologians: A Postmodern Critique* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 20, journeys into the world of and stresses the importance of symbols and myths in understanding and defining culture. His work deconstructs the nature of cultural assumptions and decodes surroundings. Our ability to grasp deeply and profoundly the nature of culture has a massive impact on the nature and effectiveness of Christian mission. For further reading on this see Anthony J. Gittens, *Living Mission Interculturally: Faith, Culture, and the Renewal of Praxis*, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2015), chapters 32–45.

passageway or wide path that ran along all of the back of the cottages. This separated people's houses from the start of their gardens so that, in the mining days, free coal could be delivered easily on carts to all the miner residents. The gardens therefore started away from your house, so you generally always saw someone else when you ventured outside your back door. This also meant other people had a closer and more intimate awareness of what was going on in your house and garden. This way of living wasn't something I was used to. Having been brought up in middle-class rural Sussex village life, a sense of privacy was something I took for granted. Even when I started going to the village church, which contained a lot of our neighbours, people kept themselves to themselves and didn't talk to me even though our gardens were adjacent to each other. Kate Fox's analysis of Englishness places this love of privacy high on what makes us English.⁴ She says this is typified in the notion that an Englishman's home is his castle. This certainly fitted my experiences of habitation up to this point. So, my class shaped me for an uncomfortable experience of this new way of more communal working-class living. "Class in England is so pervasive";⁵ with hindsight I can see that this was a norm that was deeply embedded in my bone and sinew and which consequently contributed to the culture shock of twitton-based living.

Learning to negotiate this new culture but also remaining true to myself was therefore key for my survival there. I believe "we have to fully grasp the implications of our own cultural traits and values.... before we begin to understand, appreciate and identify with a foreign culture".⁶ I had to therefore stay in touch with who I fundamentally was by having familiar cultural artefacts with which I engaged with daily as symbols of my own culture and personhood, and I also continued to do things that were integral to my identity. These included my home decor and belongings, my clothes choice and the music I played. Without this, I think when we enter different culture we can taste "the shock of chaos".⁷ I am reminded of the repeated experience that Israel underwent throughout the Hebrew scriptures. They found that there is always a tension between being at home and not being at home, between rootedness and the sense of being in exile. They found and made home in a place that wasn't naturally home. This can be seen as a useful analogy and lesson for inculturation.⁸

A few years into our time there, Len and Betty started to look after their daughter's dog – a massive American Rottweiler. It was chained up daily by their house in the twitton, so anyone who walked past it had to dice with death as it lunged out at passers-by. We listened to our neighbours' complaints and worries about the dog. No one was prepared to stand up to Len and Betty about it. The historic symbolism and mythology of the foreman retained its power.

During the time we lived there many people in the street moved out, and this was mainly due to the daily niggling and moaning of Len and Betty about the state of people's houses, gardens, pets and children! When you live in community like that, there is nowhere to hide or to get away. People got fed up with this and moved on. We tried to, but our house sale fell through. We sensed that God had more to teach us before we could go.

The dog saga rumbled on. Forgiveness and loving your neighbour rumbled on. It was challenging to constantly forgive and to be kind. To stand your ground but in love. I learned so much about how hard forgiveness is but also how hard it is on us if we hold onto bitterness and anger towards others. So, the dog issue came to a head. We decided, after much talking and trying to suggest to Len and Betty various solutions about the dog, we

- ⁴ Kate Fox (*ibid.*) identifies privacy as a key rule of Englishness and suggests that "the English all want to live in their own private little box with their own private little green bit" (185).
- ⁵ Nigel Rooms, in *The Faith of The English: Integrating Christ and Culture* (London: SCPK, 2011), 42, dissects our identity as English people and suggests that to get to the heart of Englishness we either look at the emphasis on "ancestry, birth and bloodline", "emphasize legal and political constructs" or go down "the more elusive route of myth, values and customs" (27). In reality he says that in engaging with Englishness, we need to interweave and overlap all these aspects to get to its heart.
- ⁶ David Sitton, *To Every Tribe with Jesus: Understanding and Reaching Tribal Peoples for Christ* (Sand Springs, OK: Grace and Truth Books, 2005), 12.
- ⁷ Arbuckle (*ibid.*, 20) writes that when we enter different culture we can taste "the shock of chaos" resulting from a culture that disintegrates us and distances us from our own identity and self.
- ⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *Reverberations of Faith: A Theological Handbook of Old Testament Themes* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 70, suggests "the exile, taken theologically, is presented in the Old Testament as the death of everything that gave identity to the life of Israel". Yet continually throughout the Old Testament, the Hebrew prophets spoke of the encouragement of God's hope and the fact their identity needed to be based upon him and not their surroundings. This enabled, at times, the Jewish community to be one "of hope" and one "that believed and trusted that the God who willed Israel's deportation is the God who will faithfully enact Israel's restoration to safety and well-being of its own proper place in Jerusalem and Judah" (71). This key prophetic message that runs through the life of God's people can be encouraging today. When I feel in the exile of mission (like I did in the miners' cottage life) in a foreign land of cultural assumption, I need to find and reconnect to God and to my identity in him and surround myself in the symbolic memory of what makes me, me and what testifies to the memory of God's prior faithfulness.

had to put a gate up. It was an openable gate so the neighbours could easily come through to their houses via the twitton but it would stop the dog if it ever got loose and threatened to harm our small children or others in the rank.

In the putting up of the gate, we became public enemy number one. Looking back, this was not only because we hadn't submitted to the mythical authority of the foreman but also we were seen to have destroyed the

communal access to the back of all the houses. We had disrupted a relic of local mining history – inadvertently standing and stamping on the toes of their mining fathers, grandfathers and great grandfathers.

The twitton symbolically represented the mining community, and by putting a gate up that, for obvious reasons, symbolised privatisation and division, we interfered "with a symbol and myth "I learned so much about how hard forgiveness is but also how hard it is on us if we hold onto bitterness and anger towards others."

without involving the people concerned". This "leads inevitably to unnecessary messiness, pain, and grief or chaos".⁹ We returned to our initial status as foreigners. Any gains we had made in terms of being part of the local culture and being accepted dwindled. We were ignored, not invited to street gatherings and made to feel bad by all the overheard loud conversations they had repeatedly in their garden about us.

Again, I wanted to move, but we didn't. I had to continue to learn how to love my neighbours who treated us like enemies – to actively pray blessings upon them and seek God about ways to rebuild and to not give up in negotiating local culture and follow God into it. I was praying for ways to reconcile with Len and Betty, and eggs were the answer to prayer God gave me! I sensed God saying, "Take round some of the eggs from your chickens." So that's what I did and gradually friendship started to happen again. I began to realise the need for deeper dependence on God's wisdom and guidance from the Holy Spirit in order to find creative ways towards reconciliation. I realise more now that wind of the Holy Spirit transcends all cultural difference and challenge and thus enables and emboldens us when we follow his lead. Kim suggests therefore that mission needs always to be spirit-shaped as he cuts through all human endeavour and lack of wisdom to the heart of the situation and the people.¹⁰ Taylor

similarly observes that "the relationship of the Spirit to the Christian believer... is without precedent and this fact must be central to our understanding of Christian mission".¹¹

This milk-to-eggs story showed so much to me about intercultural mission. It showed me that cultural difference matters. With each move to somewhere new and in order for me to live missionally, I had to learn and explore without judgement a culture that is

not familiar. I have learned it takes time to work out how things work in a different and unknown place. It takes time to integrate, and it was only towards the end of our time there that I felt part of the row of cottages and understood a lot of its culture, symbols and mythical hierarchy.

CONCLUSION

My story offers a reflection on the challenges we face as we seek to live missionally in new and diverse cultural contexts. It also shows me the way of intercultural negotiation: to meet and make friends, to know and own your identity, but be open to become an accepted outsider to the inside people.

The distinct insight gained from living in a rank of former miners' cottages in a small Somerset town changed me. I was not the same person who moved in on that warm April day in 2005 when I left seven

⁹ Arbuckle, Culture, Inculturation, & Theologians, 36.

¹⁰ Kirsteen Kim, *Joining in with the Spirit: Connecting World Church and Local Mission* (London: SCM Press, 2012), 12, Kim explores "how the unbound nature and unpredictability of the Spirit's presence and activity (John 3.8) cuts across human expectations and confounds our sense of geography" (1). She goes onto explore how local mission in this context links to wider worldwide mission in a sense of how what God is doing opens up into a wider more wonderful picture of activity worldwide. She doesn't lessen the importance of knowing and adapting to context but makes the point that "it is in the wider movement of the Spirit that" the church and we operate in and that the "<u>missio Dei</u>... spills over, crosses boundaries and is carried across the world by the wind of the Spirit" (284).

¹¹ John V. Taylor, in *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit & the Christian Mission* (London: SCM Press, 1972), 6, draws our attention to the activity of God's Holy Spirit within *missio Dei*. He suggests that all of our life experiences can be found in the direction and leading of the Spirit and that "the breath of life, the hovering wings, the unpredictable winds, the fire in the mouth – for all this and far more is included in the gift that should be ours" (7).

years and seven months later. There were "things we lost in the fire"¹² of refinement – in the challenges and self-deconstruction of miner-cottage life. But I gained so much. As we have journeyed on to another part of Somerset with another set of cultural and hierarchical norms, I have been able to put into practice this minercottage life learning. I learned the value of observation - in taking time to see how the culture works and in trying to learn the rules and expectations of it while remaining true to myself. I learned the need for atoneness in myself - that to know what we are about is crucial to enabling ourselves to accept and love others in their difference to us. I gained an understanding of the importance of being at home, in being the outsider and to own it.

I learned that the challenge of not fitting in, the challenge of being the alien is a gift, precisely because this feeling, this discomfort, this uncertainty weighs on God's heart - in his love for the outsider. By experiencing this we can crucially understand how it feels to be an outsider; to be one not on the inside, not "in the know", not knowing the language, the etiquette, the symbols and culture. If we can consequently grasp this and hold this feeling close to our hearts in mission, if we can use these cultural shocks and disorientations as an ideal environment to learn about what it means to be an alien, then we can start to understand more of the heart of God for the stranger and the outsider.

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¹² Lyrics from the band Bastille and their song "Things We Lost in the Fire" from the album "Bad Blood", released 4 March 2013 by Virgin EMI Records UK.

MORTADELLA SANDWICH

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Maria Casiero

INTRODUCTION

The background to this piece begins with harrowing images on the news of migrants trying to reach the shores of Italy. They are Africans, who are intentionally leaving elements of their identity behind, in order to embrace another "better" identity; one which has yet to evolve. This sparks my own deep memory of comparable cramped conditions and movement with Italian migrants fifty years ago, where I recognise that I was an observing participant. There is something about the vulnerability and unknowing identity crisis while in transition that elicits an authentic and passionate voice – recognising people's hunger to learn during lifechanging experiences.

The pivotal and symbolic power of a Mortadella sandwich brings some clarity to part of a five-year-old child's journey, when it seemed unclear at the time why I should be "returning" to a place where I was not born. The taste and smell become a symbolically powerful reminder of when I felt like "the other".

A CHILDHOOD JOURNEY

My personal experience was set, for the most part, inside a moving train and not on perilous open seas. However, to a young child of almost five years old, a three-day journey from the north of England to the south of Italy was no less than all the following: noisy, wobbly, screechy, smelly, hot, uncomfortable and very tiring. The noise of the overcrowded and jolting train is unlike the tumultuous invading roar surrounding a boat crammed with African migrants. However, the bumping of bodies and smells could be a similarity that attracts empathetic understanding. As I would occasionally feel protective hands swoop me up, preventing me from being sandwiched between jostling travellers and their luggage, I now imagine a rescuer's strong hands around an African migrant child today, swooping the child out of a dangerous boat. The constant movement of my train journey enforced unspoken rules of close contact with others as acceptable and to be expected. The same unspoken rules, when no one minds the fragility and temporary loss of dignity, are represented when human bodies are also pressed together in a boat.

The Italian migrants had waited 11 months for this "transitional-reversal culture" experience. They had not yet settled in their new culture and wanted to revisit the culture they had already left. Perhaps the African migrants may have waited much longer prior to making their transitional journey and most may never plan a return journey. I became a natural observer to both verbal and non-verbal communication in a train, where similar-minded people, including my mother, conversed for hours. Many of the conversations I witnessed revolved around work prospects and future consequential living conditions. "Is this really what all adults want to talk about?"

Slowly, I was filling my emotional reservoir, which I would tap into half a century later! Much like any other migrant child, many things about this journey left me feeling perplexed. Not only was I realising that I was a "first-generation child" of post-war Italian immigrants in Yorkshire, but I was also the "only" child on this journey. Not only was I not "returning" to my place of birth, like the other Italians, but I was also travelling "away" from the birthplace, where I did not fit in. During dialogue, not only was I being associated with an Italian father who had apparently abandoned us, but also my mother's tone of voice now appeared to alienate me.

I suddenly began to feel uncomfortable again. At this tender age, my senses observed and memorised through smells, sight, mannerisms and any experiences of "oddness". The "oddness" was when many "aunties" and "uncles" appeared at London's Kings Cross station. This drawn-together community, with unpolished accents, so typical of my grandmother's region of Puglia, trickled slowly from all parts of the country to unite like a river in London. We were heading to the south of Italy on the same train, which indicated that we would be in close contact for many, many hours. I suppose the bonding of numerous people closely together can manifest "relatives" by commonality and the African migrants on boats would adopt new "relatives" too, as they head for the south of Italy.

Perhaps these adults on my journey were not aware of how their glares, during discussions of the "unwanted daughter" of my Italian father, would be forever etched on my mind. It was child's wisdom to conveniently flop over some luggage and continue "wobbling" into the "hotter" country, where noises and smells soon began changing. The train's brakes screeched in the searing August heat as we came to one of its scheduled stops. I was soon taking my first bite of a *mortadella sandwich*, after a platform vendor waved his arms with some authority, holding up the enticing food.

An aromatic smell penetrated every space of the train as each person ate with some sense of achievement of surviving the cramped conditions so far. I felt truly "Italian" when I ate the tasty mortadella, but then felt like "the other" once again, as the adults began conversing in their native Italian language. This was a culture travelling together to the country they had once left. The symbolic power of my food represented my duality of being between two countries and two cultures.

I began picturing my grandmother waiting for me in the south of Italy, to share one month of my young life, after her 11 months of waiting to listen about her granddaughter's life in another country. The African migrants today may not have such symbolic luxury food on their sea crossing, but there may be some relative, already on the Italian mainland, who would be waiting to discover if they had "made it".

The symbolic power of movement with food brings with it a union with journeys in the Bible and receiving manna from heaven. The manna may be represented by any food that nourishes the body and soul; the "mortadella sandwich" is representative of identity - my own identity at that time, but also of everyone sitting together. It resembled achievement, comfort, commonality and communion. The power of smell and taste embraced the learning that could only take place in the seating of a particular journey, like Jesus feeding the people when they were sitting down. They would all take something different away from his teaching, but all were united symbolically by the taste of fish and bread. There is hope in the sharing of common food, which theologically can mean new life and experience in this cross-cultural encounter.





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Natalie Burfitt

My black patent brogues make a clear, sharp sound as I jog purposefully up the stone steps to the main entrance of the church. I'm here to conduct the baptism of a six-month-old boy. The baptism service is set for midday. I've been leading worship at another local church and this "out of usual hours" service is next on my mental tick list of tasks for the day. Inwardly, I'm gathering my depleted energies in readiness for being the person others will rely on to drive forward an event in which they are both deeply invested yet also the slightly bemused, passive recipients.

As I arrive, I'm warmly greeted by a few members of the congregation who are leaving after the 10 o'clock service. Some of them are clearing away disposable coffee cups and flask dispensers. The churchwarden is hurriedly filling the font that stands on its sharp-edged stone plinth in the area known by regular attenders as "the back of church". This is a space without pews in to which one first enters the building, having made it up a further step and

through a heavy wooden medieval castle-style door. This particular servant of the church has undertaken the office of churchwarden for nearly 20 years. She models robust practicality and nononsense efficiency. Her usual station is this part of the church, where she is regularly bustling about, making sure that proper order is maintained.

I exchange friendly but rapid greetings with departing church members. There's a lot to do – various props to set out, clothing to "In the midst of my concern to share baptism in to Christ, at a collision point between centuries of conflicted tradition and contemporary aspirations, he appeared to me in the brokenness of the church."

and a woman with three sons in their early teens. The man is concentrating earnestly on me, the woman is in a wheelchair and the eldest of her sons is offering sign language to her. My mind momentarily switches to my meeting with the baby's mum just a week ago. Our conversation covered faith, family history and practical arrangements for the service. It was mentioned that the parents of these three boys are both hearing impaired. A crushing recollection of this point returns to me. At that moment, I realise I've followed usual practice for this service and I'm not wearing a microphone. All the power and purpose that has propelled me forward through the morning thus far slumps to the floor like a several-sizestoo-large cassock that has been crudely attached but is suddenly undone.

At the end of the service I apologise to this couple, saying I'm sorry they have unnecessarily missed out. They are both generous and gracious, the man commenting as an aside, "All my life I've missed out." I see them out of the

building via an awkwardly narrow doorway that leads to a ramp.

Why did attending to the particular needs of this family fail to feature in my priorities? I think of Emily, a pale girl with severely cut dark hair and limited ability to socially interact. She was a student at the community special school where I helped with assemblies. Leavers' destinations were listed at the end of year prize-giving. Most were heading to another institution. "Emily", said the headteacher, "I don't know where she's going - I must find out." Where did she go? Where do people with physical and mental disabilities feature in my everyday encounters? They don't deliver my milk in the morning or teach at my children's

be put on, greeting the family and friends of the baby who is being baptised. They arrive looking slightly unsure. The men wear slim-fitting suits and narrow ties. The women wear dresses in soft fabrics and high-heeled shoes. The child's mum looks tense, her husband more relaxed, almost nonchalantly disengaged. There are older members of the family gathering too and I'm trying spot relational connections. I invite people to sit in the pews as I take to one side the four guests who are here as godparents to the boy. This is the first time I have met them and I'm anxious to give them a briefing. The time is about five minutes past midday.

Around 15 minutes in to the service, much of which is my voice instructing, explaining and reading, I catch sight of one family among the guests. They are a man school. They aren't my friends at dinner parties or playground pick-up time. Why doesn't anyone challenge me about this, particularly the church?

After the baptism party had left the church building, I retreated to the vestry and wept. The following morning at staff meeting, I felt unable to share the depth of this encounter in the midst of busyness and practical process. It remained with me, emotionally affecting in a way that was both bruising and healing. I thought over my conversation with the husband and wife – how concerned they were for me, how kind. How the husband had offered to me something profound from his own experience that was more vivid than anything else that had occurred that morning. In their humility and compassion, I had met Christ. Yet I had been so caught up in ecclesial practices
and status. I had taken it upon myself to bridge chasms of faith and understanding, the hurried, mildly patronising briefing I gave to the godparents being the excruciating pinnacle. In the midst of my concern to share baptism in to Christ, at a collision point between centuries of conflicted tradition and contemporary aspirations, he appeared to me in the brokenness of the church and its absorption of the prevailing culture that considers people with disability a low priority.¹

This is the starting point for transformation: the brokenness of culture and the church's unreflective incorporation of this prejudice. This bias is evident in the very fabric of church buildings, in the stone steps and narrow aisles, in the raised dais at the front

clearly signalling that only those who are independently mobile can have a voice, can lead worship and preach, can speak of God to God's people. The starting point isn't the "brokenness" of those who are termed disabled. Brokenness. or weakness, is a key strand in Yong's argument as he looks at Paul's theology of weakness as one

"This bias is evident in the very fabric of church buildings, in the stone steps and narrow aisles, in the raised dais..."

aspect of a scriptural basis for a disability – inclusive ecclesiology.² If church communities can be open to a critical examination of their own weakness in accepting attitudes to disability that marginalise, there is the possibility of change.

Who decides when microphones are used or not? Who tells Emily where she can go once schooling is completed and where she can't? It's a question of power. As I consider my responses to the people in these stories, I'm conscious of the privilege able-bodied power gives me to feel pity. Is my discomfort at the status quo driven by a desire to see everyone become "like me" in all things? Current theological perspectives on disability provide a helpful reframing of these motives. Jean Vanier writes on "the way of the heart", a guiding principle that undoes priorities of achievement and competition to focus instead on relationship and mutuality.³ His discovery is that in friendship and trust with those who are otherwise excluded, his own humanity is recovered and restored.⁴ However, as McCloughry and Morris point out, we need to avoid a reductionist view of people with disability that sees them simply as "those 'from whom we can learn".⁵ The larger vision was hinted at in my experiences that revealed an instinctive awareness that something is wrong with the way we do things, that there is an

injustice at work that limits the fullest expression of what it means to be human for all of us.

John Swinton articulates more specifically Vanier's critique of culture that preferences individual striving for narrowly defined success and status, thus excluding not only those who are unable to be "productive" but also the fullest expression of what it is to be human. For Swinton, it's about time. His analysis goes beyond "making things more inclusive". It's a

helpful agenda, he proposes, but it doesn't require us to relate to or ultimately love those being included. He argues that how we respond to disability is centred on how we perceive time since this will "tempt individuals, communities and cultures to demand certain tempos, rhythms, cadences, and timings as criteria for worth, value, meaningful participation, and belonging".⁶

As I reflect on the baptism, I realise how much temporal language features in my description. Perhaps some of this urgency is the breathy compulsion of Mark's Gospel – a pressing need to share the good news of Jesus

¹ Amos Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011), 10. In his introduction, Yong draws on the work of Kerry Wynn (who follows Rosemary Garland Thomson) in utilising the term "normate biases". This identifies "the unexamined prejudices that non-disabled people have toward disability and toward people who have them. These assumptions function normatively so that the inferior status of people with disabilities is inscribed into our consciousness" (11).

² Yong, *ibid*, 82–116. Yong suggests that Paul's insistence on weakness as the "platform for the manifestation of divine power" is a direct challenge to the normate bias that excludes people because of disability. He develops this Pauline perspective to include the imagery of the body with many parts and Paul's challenge to the Corinthian church's self-satisfied arrogance to instead view those who seem weaker as indispensable (1 Cor. 12:22). A disability hermeneutic of these passages suggests the church should be a place where those with disabilities are viewed as crucial to the healthy functioning of the whole, equally able to respond to the charism of God and to share those gifts.

- ³ Jean Vanier, *Becoming Human* (CBC Massey Lectures Series) (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1998), 89. EDITOR'S NOTE: This article was written prior to recent news about Jean Vanier.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁶ John Swinton, Becoming Friends of Time: Disability, Timefullness, and Gentle Discipleship (Norwich: SCM Press, 2017), 11.

⁵ Roy McCloughry and Wayne Morris, Making a World of Difference: Christian Reflections on Disability (London: SPCK, 2002), 30–31.

Christ in as efficient a way as possible. Why else would you arrange the baptism of an infant at midday on a Sunday? A time when families with young children are usually presiding over nap or lunchtime. My experience in parish ministry indicates that other concerns are the driving force and they are more closely connected with an anxious desire to prove the value of the church's existence, measured against the "busyness" rating that judges our worth.

If the church were to fully inhabit a countercultural confidence, we might discover what Swinton describes as "timefull" living.⁷ Objections to such as a mode of living might identify the pressures of things to do, a sense of the inescapable in our structures. There's a paradox here. We are both the powerful, the ones creating buildings and processes that exclude and marginalise, and the powerless, unable to free ourselves from slavish adherence to the "to-do list" functionality. If we ascribe power to God, and God's enabling of us, we might recover a sense of the church's capabilities to lead transformation.8





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⁷ Ibid., 87. He argues that our productivity view of time – and its closely related value speed – have lead us to an idolatrous view of our position in the world. God is both within and beyond time. Time is God's creation and God is the master of time. "To try to master time is to try to master Jesus, and that can never end well" (64). Rather, living aware that time is God's gift to us, we allow it to "shape and form our lives and communities in ways that will enable God's people to participate faithfully in Jesus' redemptive work in time" (64). We slow down, we engage in the gentleness of God that has time for others, no matter what their physical or cognitive capacities, and in this meeting are available to the work and presence of God.

⁸ Stephen Sykes, Power and Christian Theology (London: Continuum, 2006), 27. "Christians came to believe that the Church to which they belonged... was an agent in the cosmic dramas which patterned the world."

CHURCH LADY

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Sophia Popham

She started as a voice on the phone, one of the regular callers, a mild and clearly harmless one. I remembered her because of her fear of storms. I didn't know the whole story.

One week she phoned, and it wasn't to cancel the wedding again. He had gone.

She phoned again. She had to leave the house. The council were rubbish. I suggested Citizens Advice.

She phoned again one Sunday night. She was frightened, she had no food. A friend who was with me and I took a flask of coffee, some sandwiches, some Mini Cheddars. We had no idea.

She called me church lady. She was Jan. She was battling forces way beyond her. She was about to lose the little she had.

She phoned me because I was church lady. I answered the vicarage phone.

I went with her to the housing office the day she had to leave her house. Two days before, a harassed housing officer explained to me what would happen. It will be awful, she said. I really advise you not to come. *Don't get involved.* But I had to go, because I was church lady. I told my Advent group I was out of my depth. A quiet lady at church offered to come too in support. She was church lady, and because she was church lady, I

managed to be church lady that day. It was awful. Within a week, Jan was on the streets.

She has nothing, no home, no money, no food, and yet she trusts God. At night she sees angels, and comes to church lady to ask if this is okay. She gives away what she has. We give away what she can accept. We want to keep her safe in our house, but she cannot accept that. If "She has nothing, no home, no money, no food, and yet she trusts God. At night she sees angels, and comes to church lady to ask if this is OK."

she comes to us she will never have a home. We dream together of the day I will sit on her sofa, in her place, drinking her tea.

I have a voice. My speech is clear. I can read. I can walk from one building to another without pain. I can phone the council and be phoned back. I can go into buildings filled with strangers. They let me in. I hear a calm voice say firmly, "I am the vicar's wife," and doors open. I say over and over, but I saw her last house. It had no furniture, but it was so clean. She kept it so clean. I gaze into their eyes and do not allow myself to think of my own home, my own kitchen. I know nothing about clean! But they listen to me, because I am church lady.

When they want to help, listening to church lady gives them a way. When they do not want to, listening to church lady gives them pause.

She cannot face crowds. Only in an empty church can she stand, gaze at the cross, worship. I cannot read what is happening, but I can feel a holy moment. She lies down in the Lady chapel and sleeps.

It snows. For two nights she agrees to sleep in our ginnel, takes my boots, eats in the hall. She will not stay longer. I go to phone for advice and Jan slips off. I follow her tracks until they disappear, run through town in the whirling, wet snow looking for the tracks of her trolley. My feet are cold. I am wet and frightened. I can only go home and wait. For days we are convinced she is dead.

I can meet with the woman who can be her support worker. We can plan together. I have no professional standards stopping me phoning up other agencies asking what has happened. I can be a bridge to find possibilities. We all quietly bend our rules. Jan does not recognise workers and helpers. She recognises only friends.

There is a braver church lady than I am, the friend who was with me that first day. She goes out at night to find

her, she teaches me to accept Jan's choices, she teaches me to turn Jan over to God. But not everyone recognises her as church lady. She would be better at it, but I am called... church lady. I speak to the Mothers' Union about God using us in the place we find ourselves. I see God doing just that.

I have the keys to a church hall. I make endless tea, and cheese on toast. She insists I eat her chocolate. We laugh, cry, colour in. One day she draws me a picture, of our church building, labelled "my friend Sophie". I

leave her there in the office. It's against all the rules. When someone protests, I ask them to think of an alternative. It should not be, they mutter. I agree. But we **are** church ladies. We make tea in church. She meets a few others. They are alright, I say. They are church. Sophie church lady says I can be here, she tells them. They, of all people, know I have no authority. But they **are** church people, and they accept her.

We work together, cry together, grow together, learn together. He sends her the angels she needs. We cry with delight on the day the council admit they should house her. And one day, finally, I sit on her sofa, in her place, drinking her tea.

I kept in my purse, all the way through, an unused train ticket. I was on my way to visit my mother that morning. I had bought my ticket and was on the platform. And I suddenly knew I had to go back, to find Jan, to spend that day for her. The ticket becomes a symbol that God is in this. Sometimes I get it out to look at it.

And then gradually we begin to refer to the Jan effect – the right person who is there, the one who could possibly help, who unexpectedly answers the phone that day.

Jan becomes the symbol of God's active presence in the world.

For us, she is church lady.

When I wrote this, I was reflecting two years on, on an experience that at the time was focused on Jan and her story. In desperate times when she first became homeless she struggled to remember names, and gave us labels – mine was "church lady". Only much later am I able to reflect on that label she gave me, on why it made me uncomfortable, and on the others in the story who, while perhaps being better able to remember my name, had responded to the label. Including myself: being church lady drove me to do things I hadn't attempted before.

But who is church lady? We all had a different idea. I became church lady because I lived in the vicarage.

I was uncomfortable with the label, so aware both that a vicar's wife does not have any actual authority to speak in the name of the institution, and of my inadequacy and how much I didn't know how to help in this specific situation. But quite early on there was a moment when I realised that what was needed that day was someone to carry a letter between two professionals, someone whom Jan trusted. Without that, the professionals could not do their job that day. That simple thing got help moving again.

"When I introduce myself as "the vicar's wife" it is usually to help someone else to place me, as I am not so instantly recognisable as my husband!"

aware that the label can be enabling, and this was one of the occasions when I have used it as an accreditation.

For Jan, the label carried comfort – her own experiences gave the church label the power to allow me to give her comfort and reassurance. I have no idea who, but some church people in the possibly long past must take credit for that. So she could come to me for reassurance about her practical and spiritual experiences.

Jan isn't able to be with large crowds of people, so isn't a church member in the conventional sense. But I had a strong sense of her trust in God and bravery beyond my own. We prayed for each other (and still do). She trusted me because "Church people don't tell lies" (and I had to live up to that, however uncomfortable the truth).

Other people had ideas of who church lady was, and those ideas gave Jan a voice, a bridge to the help she needed, hope. The bridge was two-way. Back across the bridge came echoes *from another world*, glimpses of a simpler faith, a trust. A new understanding of how structures can be evil, and people can be trapped within them. Laughter, friendship, learning about who God is and what God can do.

People wanted to help, but were limited by their own boxed-in thinking and could ask us as church to do things that their systems assumed Jan would be able to do for herself, but she could not. They trusted us to do things that were right, but outside their criteria. They trusted that we would not get into trouble for doing the right thing outside the box, when they were afraid

that they would. I realised that other people trusted me, however frustrated by my inexperience. There was a sense that it was natural that the church should be in that desperate place with her. In some situations I felt that I was given a value, I was listened to sometimes when Jan wasn't, even when we were saying the same thing. Where class and education sit in this I don't know, but there were people who seemed to respond to me more than my more experienced churchgoing friend. I am sure that

When I introduce myself as "the vicar's wife" it is usually to help someone else to place me, as I am not so instantly recognisable as my husband! But I also use it on the phone; "I'm his wife; is it anything I can help you with?" nearly always leads the person to try me. I am perceptions of the vicar's wife led to my being seen as an authority on clean houses. I spoke the truth in that situation, but still feel bad about playing up to that false perception in order to convey that truth.

But being church lady meant I had a church, church people behind me and with me. I was never trying to do this on my own. Church prayed, church supported, church people who knew full well I had no authority gave space and resources in the way Jan needed and on her terms. I have played in the piece on the stereotype of church ladies as women who make tea in church, but that building, that tea stash, and those equally frail and broken men and women were the resources that made it possible for Jan's church lady to play the small part I did in the miracle. In 10 years of ministry in that place, men and women making tea were at the heart of God's mission in a profound way. Perhaps sometimes we lack the confidence to claim that label: to say here and now, in this moment, I am the church?

So what is church? I think maybe Jan taught me to see clearly that it is people depending on God. She said we were angels; maybe church is messengers from God. Maybe we are people sent to be messengers of hope, people who pray, sent with good news to help people, to fight wrong. I didn't solve Jan's problems; no one person did. The idea that one heroic person comes and solves problems is seductive, but not how it works. Often and often I felt out of my depth; I know this was also true of others involved. Professionals trapped as much as, though in less danger than, Jan. Paid clergy learning from Jan about God and trust. Jan wanted her church friends to be strong for her, and we couldn't always be, yet at times she was strong for us.

Jan has a way of seeing people as people, whatever role they are in when she meets them, which people can find wonderful or threatening. That seems to me to reflect Jesus, and what the church should be. But at the heart of this experience, and the thing I think that prompted this reflection, is that more and more I see, in Jan, church lady as the one who trusts God when everything else is gone.

I do not know if I can be that lady. But I discovered that there is never just one church lady. In need and weakness we hold each other up, and together we see the many small miracles, the big miracle. Together maybe we can begin to be church.



ANVIL BOOK REVIEWS

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1. RECOMMENDED READING

Fergus Butler-Gallie, A Field Guide to the English Clergy: A Compendium of Diverse Eccentrics, Pirates, Prelates and Adventurers; All Anglican, Some Even Practising (London: Oneworld Publications, 2018)

When I was first ordained, I was solemnly advised by someone much older and wiser than me that the marker of true success in the Church of England was that no archdeacon or bishop should ever know who I am. This book tells the stories of clergy who really ought to have been given such wise counsel, but to whom, alas, none was given or they rather spectacularly refused to listen.

Butler-Gallie has clearly had a whale of a time researching some of the most bizarre, and even disturbing, stories of clergy and their long-suffering congregations, dioceses and in one case a whole province. His compellingly witty prose makes this a laugh-out-loud tome in spite of the subject matter actually being fairly depressing. From the vicar who threatened his congregation with a shotgun from the pulpit, to an archbishop who refused to ordain or confirm anyone and was found to have a background of piracy, these tales paint a picture of a church remarkable in her resilience. Indeed, whenever I am now tempted to feel some element of discouragement about some matter of church politics, mission or training, then a flick through these pages definitely gives a distinctive long-term perspective!

In all seriousness, although this book was intended to be an enjoyably humorous self-examination of the most bizarre of Anglican clergy, there is quite a profound missional point being made, whether Butler-Gallie intended to or not. It is frequently tempting to view the shortcomings of the church with despair or even fear. Although it is clear that the vast majority of the stories told in this book were damaging to the spiritual welfare of the people living in the villages, towns, or cities served by these clergy, it speaks of the grace of God for his church that somehow a Christian presence still exists in these communities. For those of us who are practitioners of community mission, this laugh-out-loud funny little book provides a much-needed antidote to the pressures we so often absorb of doing everything "right" or that the future of the People of God somehow depends entirely on us.

I was surprised that this light-hearted read challenged my understanding of the grace of God for his church

quite profoundly: that in so much as we are called to faithfully follow him, this grace is enough to carry us through the most hideous and bizarre missional disgraces possible. It inspired me to continue to seek the most effective ways to minister in our changing social landscape with a renewed confidence that the Lord can handle his church, even with all of the mistakes, eccentricities and downright sin of his clergy. A recommended read for all!

Kate Seagrave Community of St Frideswide

Andrew Dunlop, *Out of Nothing: A Cross Shaped Approach to Fresh Expressions* (London: SCM Press, 2018)

Out of Nothing describes Andrew Dunlop's experience of planting a fresh expression of church (Berrywood Church) on a new-build estate on the outer edges of Northampton. It is a refreshingly honest account, which traces the stages of planting in ways that seem undramatic and realistic about potential challenges and frustrations along the way. However, the book is more than a narrative, a worked example of church planting. Dunlop tells the story as a means towards digging into some key questions about ecclesiology and about how the way we frame our ecclesiology can influence the way we examine the validity and fruitfulness of a new ecclesial community.

The first half of the book offers an account of the process of planting Berrywood Church. The narrative is interwoven with biblical and theological reflection covering key issues ranging from the practicalities of where to start to theological concerns raised by what might be perceived as mono-cultural churches. Dunlop responds to a critique of the homogeneity of some fresh expressions, pointing out that traditional churches can equally reflect a single demographic. Helpfully, he suggests that the central issue may not be about how homogenous an individual church is but rather whether the Church as a whole is engaging fruitfully with all sections of society (p.45). Considered this way, fresh expressions can be seen as a means to expand rather than limit the diversity of the church.

In numerical terms the success of Berrywood Church is, by the author's own admission, modest. A total membership of thirty-five adults and children after five years was certainly below his own expectations of growth, although not dissimilar to the experience of many fresh expressions. However, his concern here is to explore other avenues for measuring success. At the heart of Dunlop's argument is that the success and fruitfulness of a church, however defined, must be seen, as the book's subtitle suggests, through an understanding of the atonement. The second half of the book therefore begins to explore three different approaches to the atonement and justification and the way these shape practice in the life of the church. It is at this point that the writing seems to move into a different register as narrative is largely abandoned to give room for more abstract discussion.

The final chapter seeks to draw these threads together and Berrywood Church reappears as the author reflects on his own experience in the light of the preceding theological discussion. Critical questions are raised here regarding the size and sustainability of fresh expressions with a helpful interrogation of Venn's three-self principle. Dunlop concludes by returning to his discussion of the atonement to offer an alternative way of assessing validity and fruitfulness. This is done through a selection of stories from Berrywood Church which illustrate the outworking of approaches to the atonement in the life of this church community. A critique of these is that at times they feel a little forced and, as Dunlop himself points out, they could equally have been drawn from the experience of a more traditional congregation. There is little about the examples that are distinctive of a fresh expression of church.

Who is the book for? This is clearly a great resource for anyone in the process of establishing a fresh expression of church or seeking ways to reflect on an existing ministry. It is both practical and deeply reflective. However, while the book sets out to examine how to assess the validity and fruitfulness of new ecclesial communities, the conclusions it reaches are equally applicable to inherited expressions of church. From that perspective it is a valuable and worthwhile read for anyone wanting to reflect on what fruitfulness looks like in the context of a local church, however recently it began.

Colin Smith, CMS

Grant Macaskill, *The New Testament and Intellectual Humility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018)

In recent years philosophers, psychologists and others have been seeking to define intellectual humility and to understand the ways in which it is practised and cultivated. In this book Grant Macaskill draws this emerging field of study into conversation with the New Testament and wider Christian tradition in ways which offer rich resources for both academics and those concerned with the formation and flourishing of Christian communities. Macaskill begins with an exceptionally clear introduction to the current conversations in philosophy and theology, showing how the theme of intellectual humility has emerged from the wider resurgence of virtue ethics and research in virtue epistemology. This makes what is a detailed, scholarly volume much more accessible to those new to the field. This scene setting also means that throughout the book theological themes are developed with an awareness of, and with a sense of contributing to, ongoing philosophical conversations. This open-handed approach, in which Christian Scripture and tradition are unpacked and offered up as a resource to the wider world, embodies the kind of intellectual humility Macaskill advocates for.

But Macaskill is not only concerned with contributing to wider debate, he has much to say to those whose primary concern is Christian life and practice. In exploring intellectual humility, he seeks to move beyond abstract or negative definitions of the virtue (understood primarily in opposition to arrogance and pride) and instead seeks to construct a positive account rooted in Scripture, Jesus Christ and the triune God.

These themes are explored in a chapter on the Old Testament in which both an analysis of language and the story of Moses are used to define humility as a thick concept incorporating a right understanding of our place before God and creaturely dependence. In a collection of chapters exploring New Testament themes, Macaskill adds more significantly to existing conceptions of intellectual humility. He argues that humility is not a marginal theme in the biblical texts but a central one, concerned with core elements of human identity, Christ's incarnation and the mind of God. He suggests that as Christians receive their identity through Christ, live in a state of disruption between old and new and look to God's self-disclosure as the ultimate source of truth, they are called to live in a place of intellectual humility. Perhaps most striking is the way in which Macaskill roots intellectual humility in the mind of Christ, suggesting that Christians are called to follow the way of Jesus who shares wisdom with others, even when that invokes scorn, mockery or death.

In the second part of the book Macaskill explores the Christian practices which contribute to the formation of intellectual humility. He suggests that practices of patience and gratitude, and of participation in sacraments, remind Christians of their place before God and identity in Christ. Perhaps more compelling here is his understanding of the way in which Scripture is not a truth to be mastered and used, but wisdom which forms the reader and serves those with whom it is shared.

This is a well written volume. It makes both an academic contribution to debates around intellectual humility and offers a solid basis for practitioners to consider the role and formation of intellectual humility within their own communities. The themes reach beyond the specific areas of New Testament and intellectual humility; those with broader interests in formation, virtues or the life of the mind may find this a very valuable read.

Bethan Willis, Oxford Character Project

Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017)

Wolfgang Vondey is director of the Centre for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies at the University of Birmingham and, as co-editor of the series Systematic Pentecostal and Charismatic Theology, he attempts in this volume to provide an overarching theological schema for an inherently anti-critical series of movements. Those movements now have the coherence of a theological tradition, but continue to resist routinisation. Vondey's initial premise is that this stream emerges from the day of Pentecost as a theological symbol for "an immediate encounter with God through the Spirit of Christ manifested in discernible signs and wonders as evidence of God's transforming and redeeming presence..." (p.4). He claims - probably rightly - that most Pentecostal theology until now has not used the day of Pentecost as a key organising theme.

His theological method is one of play (spontaneity and improvisation), rooted in embodied experience, presented as a "full gospel" over against its perceptions of other Christian traditions. After this theological preamble, Vondey works with five narrative themes, each of which is rooted in worship and its rituals ("at the altar"):

- Salvation experienced as immediate encounter with God;
- Sanctification as a sharing in the life of God, what precursors had called the "second blessing" of holiness or entire sanctification;
- Spirit baptism, clearly linked with glossolalia. Pentecostal practice is profoundly cataphatic and expressive, which has not always been acknowledged with sufficient force. He proposes that we adopt a "sacramental interpretation of Spirit baptism" (p.97), recognising that this has ecumenical appeal but also that such a position resists the reabsorption of Spirit baptism into other theological foci.
- Healing, linked directly with the Atonement ("by his stripes we are healed") and worked out in a communitarian context. Like Spirit baptism, healing is experienced now but eschatologically fulfilled at "the end times".

Commissioning, which moves from the altar to "enact the coming kingdom". "All elements of the full gospel are apocalyptic visions of the church's mission thrust into a world confronted with the inbreaking of the Spirit in the last days" (p.149).

In the second part of the book, four further chapters apply these narrative themes as a "lens of the full gospel" to theological conversations about creation, humanity, society and church. So, for instance, the apocalyptic missionary vision of Pentecostalism engages ecologically with the renewal of the cosmos. In this part, Vondey begins to explore ways in which Pentecostal theology ought to reflect and act more fully if it is to be true to its birthing in the day of Pentecost: "The church does not exist as alternative city by virtue of its own practices vis-à-vis the power of the demonic but because it resists entirely the demands of the competitive potentiality and performance governing the demonic in the world" (p.204). The final chapter brings us back to the starting point: theology as doxology, God as the subject and source of all we do, and to whom everything must return.

The book is pleasingly structured and could be read as a continuous text or as a theological reference work. For me it has two key merits: first is the theological schema based around "the day of Pentecost" and, one might say, "the Day of the end", though Vondey does not make this particular point. The second is the conversation between this and other theological traditions in a genuine spirit of engagement and humility. I began reading with the sinking thought "Oh no, not another Pentecostal theology," but finished with a sense that here was a new, fresh voice that I, as a charismatic Anglican, needed to hear!

Adrian Chatfield, Ilkeston, Derbyshire

Rowan Williams, *Being Human: Bodies, Minds* (London: SPCK, 2018)

This slender volume completes a trilogy that also includes *Being Christian* (2014) and *Being Disciples* (2016). Those who have read the prior two works will not be disappointed, inasmuch as *Being Human* displays the same combination of virtues: theological acumen, philosophical deftness and succinctness of prose. Yet this book is also somewhat distinct from its two predecessors, inasmuch as it does not offer a direct treatment of Christian belief/conduct so much as a theologically oriented reflection on the nature of "true humanity". Williams's central concern is to grapple with "our current models of human life and human well-being," doing so in a posture that is both critical and constructive (p.vii). This endeavour unfolds over five chapters and is complimented by a brief epilogue comprising an Ascension Day homily.

The first chapter explores the nature of human consciousness and carries an interdisciplinary ethos. Here, Williams proposes that consciousness is *located* (i.e. bound up with a particular point of view), *relational* (i.e. linked with our dependence on others), *narratival* (i.e. our point of view is contingent on where it's come from) and *linguistic* (i.e. consciousness is tethered to our shared language with others).

Chapter two turns to the nature of the person, beginning with appeal to the prolific legacy of Vladimir Lossky. In this arena, Williams militates against a traits-based approach to personhood (i.e. it is the possession of certain qualities that make one a proper person) and contends instead that personhood is grounded *in every human's connection with God*. In advancing this theme, he makes use of St Augustine as well contemporary sociologist Richard Sennett. Central to the discussion is a forthright challenge to the conception of personhood that redounds in our culture, namely the tendency to link true humanity with various forms of perfection: having the perfect body, home, job, etc., all of which are underpinned by the specious promises of "Gestalt theory" (p.43).

Extending this rumination, the third chapter homes in on the nature of personhood with attention to recent scientific discussions – in particular the intriguing work of Iain McGilchrist. Along these lines, Williams suggests that the way our brains have been conditioned to think in late-modern Western culture is in fact dehumanising. As the chapter continues, he turns to the (underappreciated) role of *the body* in knowing, therein calling for the cultivation of "practical intelligence" (pp.60–61). What he has in mind is a way of knowing that is not reduced to the exhaustive analyses of objects but, further to this, seeks to learn from somatic attunement to the various stimuli that come at us.

Chapter four is one which this author especially appreciated. It reflects on the values of autonomy and self-direction that are ascendant in our moment. Williams is well aware of misgivings surrounding the idea of "heteronomy," which is to say, the notion that something outside of oneself (e.g, the Law of God or any other form of external convention) should govern one's path to true selfhood (p.69). In response to this misgiving, he provides a masterful demonstration of the fact that dependence on God as well as a determination to live within the limits of our given humanity can in fact increase rather than abolish our freedom. Dovetailing with this claim, he offers a lucid and compelling discussion on the importance of educating the passions (which draws inspiration from ancient Christians such as Evagrius) and of coming to terms with our mortality. In the end, Williams characterises deference/submission to God as

a form of "non-disabling dependence," which is to say that it is markedly different from the exploitative and dehumanising forms of submission with which we are all familiar (p.81–82).

In rounding out the bulk of the book, chapter five takes a practical turn, considering how acts of silence contribute to our capacity to "let go" before God. Of particular note is Williams's commentary on the silence of Christ (pp.95ff) and of the place of silence in worship (pp.98ff).

This is a book which I am glad to recommend. My only gualm is that certain discussions are shorter than I wish they might have been. For example, I would have appreciated an elongated treatment of the issues raised in chapter four on the role of external authority in conceiving of true personhood. While certain sections are a bit dense (e.g. chapter one, which grapples with the nature of consciousness), on the whole Williams manages to artfully distill many complex ideas and insights in a manner that does not trade accessibility for depth. Along these lines, this book is poised to stimulate conversation, something which is re-enforced by the reflective questions affixed to the end of each chapter. In this spirit, I believe the major strength of Being Human is not that it sets out a definitive agenda but rather that it invites us to theologically-interrogate some of the (problematic) assumptions about what it means to be a person that are widely and uncritically held in our culture and in ourselves. As I see it, the timeliness of such scrutiny cannot be understated.

Rev Roger Revell, Selwyn College, Cambridge

2. BIBLICAL STUDIES

John M. G. Barclay, *Paul: A Very Brief History* (London: SPCK, 2017)

I thoroughly enjoyed reading Barclay's introduction to Paul. In fewer than 100 pages he covers a great deal of ground, more in fact than I expected. It is possible to read the whole book in about a couple of hours but those who do will want to reread and think through the many important and challenging points Barclay makes.

The first section, chapters one to five, deals with history, setting Paul and his letters in their context, while the second part looks at Paul's legacy. In the first chapter, Barclay makes clear the impact on Paul of meeting the risen Jesus on the Damascus Road: for Saul the Pharisee, this event was nothing less than "a revolution in his understanding of the world, of himself, of right and wrong, and of the God he worshipped" (p.7). Everything in Paul's life, ministry and writing flow from this encounter. In chapter three, Barclay summarises his argument in his 2015 book *Paul and the Gift*, on the radical nature of Paul's understanding of God's grace in the light of Christ. Paul argues that in contrast to the culture of the first century, God's grace is given without any respect to the worthiness of the recipient; God pays "no regard to human systems of social, moral or ethnic worth" (p.28). In the first century this is deeply shocking, even disturbing. The fourth chapter looks at Paul's churches in the Roman world. Barclay is clear that Paul's writings and the churches that he founded challenge and undermine not only Roman religion, but also the social structure of the empire. My main problem with part one is that at the end of every chapter I wanted more. The book is called A *Very Brief History* and it lives up to its name!

Part two was for me the most interesting, looking at Paul's legacy: the influence of his letters on Augustine and through him on the western Church, the Reformation and Protestantism. In chapter seven he explores the influence of Augustine's reading of Paul on the western interpretation of Paul, and in chapter eight he builds on this showing how Paul has influenced the Protestant Churches in their thought, liturgy and spirituality. Chapter nine looks at the place of Paul in Jewish-Christian relations and Luther's reading of Paul in this regard. He takes note of the recovery of the Jewish Paul post Second World War with the "new perspective on Paul". The final chapter, Paul as social and cultural critic, explores Paul's radical challenge to Roman society and its hierarchies of values. Paul can help us to see reality from a new angle, but Barclay's conclusion is that in modern terms Paul is radical but not progressive.

This is probably the best short introduction to Paul on the market, though some will disagree with his chronology and with the letters he regards as authentically Pauline, and I thoroughly recommend it. I now want Barclay to write a long and full introduction to Paul.

Tim Gill, Sheffield

John Anthony Dunne and Eric Lewellen, eds., One God, One People, One Future: Essays in Honour of N.T. Wright (London: SPCK, 2019)

This substantial volume in honour of N. T. Wright marks the honorand's seventieth birthday. He is of course more generally known as Tom Wright, the author of the popular series under the title *New Testament for Everyone*. In the scholarly domain, Wright's reputation rests on a considerable number of works on the interpretation of the New Testament, culminating in the five-volume series, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*. This singular achievement is all the more impressive bearing in mind that for several years Wright served as bishop of Durham. The final volume of the series, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (PFG), is a massive study of the apostle Paul, a spin-off of which is Wright's popular biography of Paul. Those interested in reading Wright's work would find the biography a helpful and easily digestible introduction. It is Wright's work on Paul that has arguably aroused the most scholarly interest since its publication in 2013. In 2017, a volume of essays of over 800 pages was published under the understandably quirky title *God and the Faithfulness of Paul*.

The subtitle of the Wright Festschrift neatly encapsulates the substance of the position he holds as the outcome of 40 years' study of the letters of Paul. The book thus is structured on this basis. The front cover quotes Wright's own summary of his work: "One God, One people of God, one future for Israel and the world. Each is kept in place by the others, and each is partly defined in relation to the others" (PFG, p.611). The book is prefaced by an editorial introduction celebrating and summarising Wright's work, followed by a fine essay by Michael F. Bird comparing the theological achievements of Bultmann and Wright as scholars who in their different ways reset the agenda for NT interpretation. While being fair to both scholars, Bird is unequivocal in his admiration for Wright's work and particularly his ability to map out the big picture as few can.

The first main section, of six essays, is focused on Wright's Christological development of monotheism. The first essay, by Michael Lloyd, probes Wright's theodicy. He poses several questions aiming to clarify Wright's position and concludes with a provocative thesis of his own. James D. G. Dunn explores the important question of how the earliest Christology affects Christian understanding of God, which provides a framework for the following essays. The next two essays, by Richard Bauckham and Grant Macaskill respectively, in their different ways address the background of the Shema in 1 Corinthians. The final two essays in the "One God" section develop a Christological monotheism and provide a transition into "One People". The essay by Nicholas Perrin is particularly interesting in sketching out in John 8-10 a possible parallel to Wright's reading of Gal. 3:10-20 and the putative connection between the themes of return from exile, monotheism and ecclesial unity.

The second section "One People" contains 11 essays. There is only space here to comment on a few of these. The section begins with a framing essay by Michael J. Gorman on the traditional marks of the church: one, holy, catholic and apostolic. He utilises these as a framework for examining Paul's ecclesiology in 1 Corinthians. He unpacks Wright's emphasis on "unity" and "holiness" in PFG. Brian J. Walsh contributes a controversial piece on "Sex, Scripture and improvisation" where he pays tribute to Wright's improvisatory hermeneutic (see more on this below). The essay by Sylvia C. Keesmaat, "Walking with the oppressed: lament and new-creational hope", concludes this section. She addresses matters of justice, drawing a fundamental link between the pathos of suffering and the people of God's new-creational hope. This is a very engaging piece of historical imagination, throwing fresh light on the interpretation of Romans.

The final section, "One Future", comprises eight essays. First, Edith M. Humphrey focuses on the Atonement, aiming to show how God's One Future for the world is achieved. She approaches this by exploring how key Pauline texts were read by fourth- and fifth-century interpreters. She argues against Wright that atonement needs to be retrieved rather than reimagined. J. Andrew Cowan engages with Wright's contention that justification is the declaration that the believer is within the covenant. Such a reading has proved to be an insuperable obstacle for evangelicals, but Cowan in turn criticises them for failing to understand the broader conversation that Wright is engaged in. This is a most useful essay for anyone who wants to understand how Wright arrives at his position. The other essays in this section look at how Paul fleshed out "Newness of life in Romans 12–13" by S. A. Cummins. Next come two essays that address the fundamental question of the framework of early Christian theology, which in the view of some has entrenched false binaries: "Covenantal" or "Apocalyptic", characterised by continuity or discontinuity (Carey C. Newman and J. P. Davies). The final three essays aim to show how early Christian theology was deeply rooted in reflection upon the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). Scott J. Hafemann examines the significance of 2 Pet. 3:8, the maxim "one day is as a thousand years", quoting Ps. 90:4, which he reads as a truth about God's unwavering commitment to judge regardless of the timespan in view.

Wright has written extensively during his academic career about Rom. 11:25-27, Paul's statement that "all Israel will be saved". Richard B. Hays writes appreciatively about Wright's reading of this climactic statement, but concludes that it should be understood not only as referring to the mission of the church (as Wright avers), but also to the Parousia of Christ. The final essay, by Stephen I. Wright (Tom Wright's brother), examines the phrase "Beloved for the sake of their ancestors". Contrary to his brother's position, Stephen seeks to demonstrate Paul's affirmation of Israel's continuing place in God's purposes. Wright's lengthy exegesis of Rom. 9–11 concludes with the affirmation that the final reference to Israel is to be understood as the entire people of God, Jews and Gentiles alike. Indeed, Wright's previous exegesis of passages dealing with Paul's renunciation of his previous life in Judaism (e.g. Phil. 3:4–11) virtually obliges him to do so. Given that the majority of commentators read Rom. 11:26 as referring

to ethnic Israel, might this be a small but significant hole in Wright's seemingly watertight case?

Wright does of course have his critics. There is no space here to go into detail, but two criticisms spring to mind. The most obvious as referred to above concerns his departure from the time-honoured evangelical understanding of justification and his embrace of a version of the "new perspective on Paul" and all that flows from it. Responses like that of John Piper suggest that Wright has work to do to win converts. The other criticism as alluded to above is that of Richard Walsh. Whilst applauding Wright's improvisatory hermeneutic, he laments Wright's inability to extend that skill to embrace LGBTQ+ Christians. He regards "experience" as too "slippery" a concept to bear any theological weight. This seems to be an absolute no-go area for Wright, something visceral.

In conclusion, this is a worthy offering to a great scholar, and I commend it warmly, although at \pm 70, it may not get the readership it deserves.

Howard C. Bigg, Cambridge

Francis Watson and Sarah Parkhouse, eds., Connecting Gospels: Beyond the Canonical/Non-Canonical Divide (Oxford: OUP, 2018)

This is an impressive and stimulating collection of essays, written mainly for an academic readership. Its authors engage with both canonical and non-canonical gospels, noting convergences and divergences that may be seen when texts are considered part of one broad object of study: "early Christian gospel literature viewed as a single though differentiated field." (p.2).

The editors set the scene for the essays that follow in a sophisticated and stimulating introduction in which they note that the emergence of the fourfold gospel was a historical fact. Therefore, they observe, like all historical events, its coming into being was a contingent event; historically speaking, things may have turned out rather differently. For even if the four now canonical gospels were the first to be written, other authors continued to write books like them, apparently both before and after Irenaeus's explicit appeal to a normative fourfold gospel.

As Parkhouse and Watson observe, differences between these gospels may be noted; but all of them, canonical or otherwise, make "the absolutist claim that Jesus is the definitive and final embodiment of the divine purposes for humankind" (p.3). Yet they make that claim in different ways, some of which are more in keeping with early Pauline conceptions of the preached gospel than are others. Therefore, since the term "gospel" may be understood as the announcement of salvation through Jesus, it cannot be restricted to a single medium or format, which is why they argue that early Christian gospel literature may be studied as a single field. To do so, they explain, is not to question the significance or the integrity of the canonical boundary, or to promote the view that all early gospel texts are somehow equal in value. But it may lead to new perspectives on both canonical and non-canonical gospels, as the essays in the book set out to show. The content of each essay may be summarised briefly, as follows.

Simon Gathercole surveys a number of non-canonical gospels, analysing how they relate their presentations of Jesus to stories found in the Hebrew Bible or other accounts of the past, or how they present it as something new.

Dieter Roth finds points of both convergence and divergence within the narrative frameworks and theological conceptions of the *Gospel of Marcion* and the Gospel according to Luke in their portrayal of certain characters from the Old Testament. Thus, he points to contrasts in shades of grey where others might expect to see black and white.

Mark Goodacre discusses how the *Protevangelium of James* makes use of the Gospels according to Luke and Matthew, during on material both in their infancy gospels (as we might expect) and also elsewhere. He shows how although the *Protevangelium* makes more obvious use of Matthew than Luke, he has also imbibed Luke's style.

Christine Jacobi focuses mainly on the *Gospel of Philip* and its use of bodily metaphors and sacramental elements to portray salvation. She notes how it builds on and develops soteriological and Christological concepts that were found earlier in the Gospel of John and in the letters of Paul.

Matthew Crawford compares how Tatian, author of the *Diatessaron*, used his sources (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) with how Matthew and Luke used theirs. He argues that they each edited the work of their predecessors in similar ways, and that Tatian should be seen as a gospel writer, comparable to the earlier evangelists, and not merely as a harmonizer.

Tobias Nicklas discusses the Gospel of John and P. Egerton 2, and how they (and other gospels) present and position Jesus and his followers in relation to Judaism and the Scriptures of Israel. He finds that both gospels present Jesus in Jewish terms, and shows that they reflect situations that are more complicated than a binary understanding of Jesus as either "inside" or "outside" Judaism.

In what may be the most accessible essay in the collection, Christopher Tuckett compares the presentation of female disciples in the Gospel of Mark

and the *Gospel of Mary*, noting striking similarities. He finds that both gospels portray women in a more positive light than men, but also affirm the universality of human weakness, and show that failure in following Jesus can be overcome by forgiveness, acceptance and reconciliation.

Heike Omerzu considers Christology in the *Gospel of Peter* and offers an assessment based on the evidence of the Akhmim fragment rather than on what Eusebius said about what may have been an earlier version of that text. By means of a narratological approach she argues that in the surviving fragment Jesus is a surprisingly silent and passive character, although both the narrator and other characters reveal his divine status through the titles that they use. She makes only passing comparisons with canonical gospels.

Francis Watson compares the *Epistle of the Apostles* with the Gospel of John, noting both connections and divergences between them. He notes that the former always adapts rather than simply reproduces the latter, and argues that the author of the *Epistle* considered John as a helpful but malleable source, not an infallible authority to which he must accommodate himself. It is the *Epistle*, written in the name of all the apostles, that its author considers the authoritative source for the teaching of the risen Jesus.

Sarah Parkhouse considers eschatology in the *Gospel* of Mary, and argues that it is closer to the Gospel of John and the *Gospel of Thomas* than many readers have noticed, but at variance with the synoptic expectation of a returning Son of Man.

Jens Schroeter notes the theological stakes in the distinction between canonical and non-canonical gospels, and discusses the manuscript evidence for a number of fragmentary non-canonical gospels before addressing their content and relationship to canonical gospels. Of particular note is his short but nuanced discussion of the *Gospel of Thomas* in which he notes the need to move beyond a simple dichotomy that sees Thomas as either dependent on or independent of the synoptic gospels; its author likely drew on many sources for its interpretation of Jesus's teaching and activity.

Also noteworthy is his suggestion that some early Christian communities read non-canonical gospels as expansions and sometimes corrections of the earlier portrayals of Jesus in the New Testament. This leads to the following conclusion, which applies to other earlier chapters as well as to his own:

"The canonical/non-canonical divide may therefore not have been the most important aspect of the usage of these texts within the communities. The distinction of four canonical gospels from all other gospels was perhaps more a theological concept than a reality reflecting the reading practices in early Christian communities." (p.254). This is a valuable and often technical collection of essays. It recognises the centrality of the fourfold gospel, from the second or third century onwards, as an authoritative source for Christian understandings of the significance of Jesus. But it shows that in the early Church, as today, followers of Jesus interpreted those gospels in a range of ways, and did not limit themselves to their accounts.

Andrew Gregory, University College, Oxford

3. JEWISH STUDIES

Tony Bayfield, ed., Deep calls to Deep: Transforming Conversations between Jews and Christians (London: SCM Press, 2017)

This excellent essay collection is the product of over four years of continued dialogue between Jews and Christians on topics that both unite and divide people in the two faith communities. I would wholeheartedly recommend it as one of the best contemporary single volume introductions to contemporary relationships between Christians and Jews. Although I initially described the book as an "essay collection" it really is more than that, as each essay is not simply the product of that author's reflections, but the product of conversations between that author and the wider group of Christians and Jews whose tri-annual meetings between 2011 and 2015 were the place in which conversations were transformed. The production of this book thus models the approach recommended, of ongoing dialogue and discussion of complex issues.

Deep Calls to Deep does not shy away from the tough areas of relationships between Jewish people and Christians. There are eight main sections. First, Elli Tikvah Sarah and Stephen Roberts interrogate the question of engagement with modern Western culture, elucidating different Jewish and Christian stances. Second, Steve Williams and Jeremy Gordon build on their arguments, discussing the question of how Jews and Christians should live in a modern Western democracy. The third topic is coming to terms with the past. David Gillet and Michael Hilton offer four short essays that tackle "the Jews" in John's Gospel; the blood libel and its origins in the lies about the death of William of Norwich; Holocaust Memorial Day; and how to come to terms with the past. Fourth, Alan Race offers a Christian critique of religious absolutism and Debbie Young-Somers a Jewish view. Sixth, Wendy Filder and Joy Barrow discuss the nature of respect between people of faith. The seventh and eighth sections examine Christian particularity and Jewish Particularism respectively.

One strength of *Deep Calls to Deep* is the reflections from Tony Bayfield that conclude each of the sections. This allows the positions articulated to be nuanced and gives space for alternative views to be noted, although limitations of space preclude their being discussed in detail. A second strength are the range of views present; this is not one-size fits all, lowest common denominator interfaith discussion, but a genuine debate both within and between traditions. Having said that, it is noticeable that the more socially and theologically conservative elements of both faiths are not as well represented as they might have been. But this is an issue that is very common in all forms of interfaith work.

Christians who are just beginning to think about how to relate to Jewish people will find much to think about in this volume. Doubtless you will not agree with all that is said. I personally disagree with Michael Hilton's argument that *loudaioi* in John's Gospel is best translated "Judean", and my understanding of Christian mission is different from that articulated by Alan Race in his chapter. But all the essays made me think. Probably the most powerful was David Gillet's honest discussion of the history of the blood libel, a warning of how a Christian monk's unscrupulous search for power has impacted countless millions. This book is a resource for anyone wanting to think about how Christians relate to modern Judaism. It may not always be comfortable reading, but that is part of what makes it so valuable.

Tom Wilson, St Philip's Centre, Leicester

Alan L. Mittleman, ed., *Holiness in Jewish Thought* (Oxford: OUP, 2018)

This edited collection of 10 essays explores the understandings of holiness that were operative in different periods of Jewish thought, reflecting on what they say to contemporary Jewish philosophy and theology. Is holiness primarily related to moral actions, to ethical character; is it solely an ontological property of the divine; is it an evaluation of the people of God? What of those who are not Jewish, but whose actions are recognisably holy? Such are the questions this volume discusses.

In chapter one, Elsie R. Stern sets out a case for reclaiming the priestly theology of holiness. She focuses specifically on the Holiness Code of Leviticus 17–26 as a theological resource for contemporary non-Orthodox Jews, arguing that while the texts are difficult to understand on first reading, making the effort to do so yields great rewards. Stern proposes that for some nonhalakhic Jews, the Pentateuch presents three problems: first, the limited nature of anthropomorphic language about God; second, the problem of theodicy raised by the covenantal paradigm; and third, the disconnect between personal experience and the notion that God makes promises and acts to fulfil them. The Holiness Code, Stern argues, provides an appropriate theological resource for such people to develop their conception of the holy.

In chapter two, Tzvi Novick examines holiness in the rabbinic period. He argues that holiness becomes less important in the rabbinic period for two reasons: firstly, the law becomes more the dominant structural paradigm; secondly holiness continues to be thought of as a natural property, like mass. The first claim is explained as the natural outworking of the shift from temple-centred (cultic) holiness to a focus on the law as the framework for making sense of the world. The second claim counter-balances the first, emphasising that holiness remained an important category for the rabbis, especially as a paradigm for moral and behavioural restraint.

In chapter three, Martin Lockshin asks why the rabbis believed that holiness was not contagious when impurity was. He argues that this was not a primarily exegetical decision but rather a theological presupposition; for halakhic Jews, the idea that holiness could spread through contact was unthinkable as holiness can only be acquired through much effort.

In chapter four, Joseph Lifshitz discusses holiness and the land of Israel. He first discusses "spatial holiness" through reference to Moses' encounter with God in the burning bush and the encounter between God and the Jewish nation at Sinai, before introducing the notion that the land of Israel was, itself, holy. The land, he argues, is holy because it is the place of the presence of God, and at least some Jews must live there for Judaism to continue to flourish as a religious faith.

In chapter five, Jonathan Jacobs considers gratitude, humility and holiness in medieval Jewish philosophy. He argues holiness was believed to pervade the entirety of life, a way of imitating God while living in the world. This imitation was motivated by gratitude towards God for our existence and his benevolence in giving Torah; imitation is shaped by humility in the face of divine power, wisdom and benevolence; and imitation manifests a motivation to be holy as God is holy.

In chapter six, Menachem Kellner examines Maimonides' views on holiness, arguing that he understood holiness primarily as a status not an ontological or essentialist characteristic. Maimonides argues holiness includes obedience to the commandments, physical cleanliness and ritual purity, all of which are attained through individual effort. Holiness can, therefore be attained by anyone, Jew or Gentile, who obeys the relevant commands. The distinction comes in that Jews have received clearer instruction and strive more closely to attain holiness as divinely defined.

In chapter seven, Hartley Lachter discusses Israel as a holy people in medieval kabbalah. While this may seem an obscure topic, it has modern political ramifications, as the understanding of Jews as constituting a unique holy people can, in the minds of some, become a reason to regard Gentiles as inferior and less worthy of life. What was particular to medieval kabbalah was the notion that Jewish piety would influence God, drawing divine energy into the world in order to sustain creation and bring blessing to humanity. While in medieval times this remained primarily speculative, a small minority of modern Jews have used this thinking to justify violence against non-Jews.

In chapter eight, Eitan Fishbane examines views on Sabbath and sacred time in 19th and 20th century Hasidic mysticism, through a discussion of three teachers. Rabbi Zadoq argued that holiness in Shabbat is ontologically distinct from humanity, although humans do have a role of play in observing the Sabbath decree. Rabbi Yehudah taught that "the essence of Shabbat is the innermost divine point of stillness that dwells at the spiritual core of the Jew" (p.169). Third, Rabbi Shalom Noah Barzofsky argues that the Shabbat command is the paradigmatic command, which lifts the person beyond ordinary time into consciousness of divine Oneness.

In chapter nine, William Plevan considers the thought of Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber. Cohen argued that holiness originally meant separation in a cultic context, but that Jewish thinking had developed over time to regard holiness as God's "purposive action", which became paradigmatic for how humanity is to behave, primarily focusing on ethical choices. Rosenzweig built on Cohen's work, arguing for a distinct Jewish religious and cultural tradition (in contrast to Cohen's more assimilative approach). Buber, a spiritual Zionist, rejected ritual Judaism and focused on learning, work on the land and a compassionate Jewish society as the vehicles for display of moral holiness.

In chapter ten, Sharon Portnoff deals with the difficult topic of holiness and the Holocaust, focusing on the thought of Emil Fackenheim. For Fackenheim, holiness is an active search for God's presence, held in tension with a recognition that Jews must remain vigilant against threats to their survival, and so should rely primarily on themselves, not on divine intervention to save them.

The ten essays in *Holiness in Jewish Thought* range widely across the centuries and provide a rich stimulus for thought on an important topic. Essay collections such as this one tend to be the preserve of libraries and specialist scholars, and this one is no different. Specialist Christian readers will find it a useful volume for academic investigation but there is little here that will be of use to the general reader.

Tom Wilson, St Philip's Centre, Leicester

Jointly reviewed:

Adi Ophir and Ishay Rosen-Zvi, *Goy: Israel's Multiple Others and the Birth of the Gentile,* Oxford Studies in the Abrahamic Religions (Oxford: OUP, 2018)

Jennifer Otto, Philo of Alexandria and the Construction of Jewishness in Early Christian Writings, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: OUP, 2018)

Questions about how individuals and communities understand and construct their own identity, usually in comparison with other people from whom they differentiate themselves, are central to many current debates. They are prominent in public discourse, and pervasive in the study of the humanities. This academic discussion includes the work of historians and scholars of religion who investigate the origins and development of the movements or religions to which we refer today as "Judaism" and "Christianity". So questions about identity are shaping the analysis of how the formative thinkers in those moments defined themselves in contrast to other people.

Most readers of *Anvil* will be familiar with the letters of Paul and with the frequent distinction he draws between "the Jews" (who are in a covenant relationship with God and follow the Mosaic law) and "the Gentiles" or "the nations" (Greek *ethne*, Hebrew *goyim*), by which he means everyone else. So great is distinction between them that all humanity can be categorised into these two distinct and contrasting groups. Given Paul's frequent use of this distinction, and the work that he makes it do, it is easy to turn to the pre-Pauline writings of the Hebrew Bible, the Christian Old Testament, and find the same clear binary distinction there, and the same concept of Gentile on which it depends.

Ady Ophir and Ishay Rosen-Zvi challenge this belief. For although they find in the letters of Paul and in the writings of later Jewish authors a persistent understanding of the *goy* (the Hebrew singular of the plural form, *goyim*) as an individual non-Jew, they argue that this cannot be assumed in the Hebrew Bible. For there, they argue, Israel is often portrayed as one nation among many nations before God, and the difference between Israel and its others is neither binary nor stable. While those who self-identify as the people of Israel differ from other nations in many ways, it was only through the course of time that those who came to understand themselves as Judeans (Greek, *loudaioi*) in an ethnic sense came to understand themselves as Jews (also Greek, *loudaioi*) in a cultural and religious sense. Similarly, it was only through time that they came to see non-*loudaioi* not just as many different and particular non-Jewish nations, but in the abstract and in general as Gentiles.

Their co-authored book is a rich and rewarding (if sometimes demanding) study that discusses a wide range of ancient Jewish texts, and points to different ways in which ideas of otherness can be understood and experienced. It deals with ancient evidence, but questions of contemporary relevance are never far away, given the continuing influence of the Bible.

The letters of Paul are not the primary focus of their book, but the authors present Paul in his Jewish context and draw attention to his importance because it is in his writings that they find the earliest evidence for the distinction between Jew and *goy* that would come to be taken for granted in rabbinic Judaism and to remain significant ever since. Thus, although it is not their primary concern, they invite the question of whether Paul's ideas were important not only for the development of what came to be known as "Christianity" but may also have been and may also remain influential in the development of "Judaism" as well.

Whereas Ophir and Rosen-Zvi focus on how "Jews" conceived of "Gentiles" in order to understand themselves, Jennifer Otto analyses how three Christian authors (Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Eusebius of Caesarea) drew on the writings of one Jewish author (Philo of Alexandria, a prolific author who wrote in the first half of the first century AD). Her focus is on how they used Philo in order to understand themselves as Christians, and on how they used his work in order to draw distinctions between themselves and Jews (whether known only or primarily through representations in literary texts, or as real human neighbours and contemporaries).

Clement of Alexandria, writing in the late second and early third centuries AD, shows little clear evidence of significant direct contact with contemporary Jews and Judaism. But he drew extensively on the writings of Philo, to whom he refers as a Pythagorean. By doing this, argues Otto, Clement can approve of much of Philo's interpretation of the Jewish Bible, yet not associate him with what he considers to be Jewish misunderstanding of those Scriptures. Philo is a noble philosopher, although he falls short of reaching the true knowledge (*gnosis*) that is attainable only through faithfulness to the teaching of Jesus, the Word made flesh.

Origen, who was active in the early third century, likely interacted directly with contemporary Jewish exegetes, who may have included an influential teacher to whom he refers as "the Hebrew". Like Clement, he also drew positively on much of Philo's work. However, he distinguishes between what he considers the helpful insight of Philo and other "wise Jews" in their allegorical exegesis and what he considers their mistaken view of the Mosaic law.

Eusebius of Caesarea, writing both before and after the conversion of Constantine (when suddenly the church gained new political power), refers explicitly to Philo more frequently than either Clement or Origen does. As Otto notes, he is the first Christian author to label Philo as a Hebrew (Hebraios) and to place him explicitly in a Jewish literary tradition. As Clement and Origen do, he uses the terms Hebrew (Hebraios) and Jew or Judean (loudaios), but he uses them to make a much sharper and more consistent distinction between those whom he describes in these ways than either of those earlier authors did. Thus for Eusebius, as Otto notes, "Hebrews" are the ancient people who alone showed proper piety for God, from whom Christians claim descent. "lews" or "Judeans" are those who continue to follow the Law of Moses, and are therefore distinguishable both from the ancient Hebrews, and from contemporary Christians who are the true successors of those ancient Hebrews.

In making this distinction, Eusebius tries to claim the Jewish Scriptures for his own community, while responding to what he sees as unfounded charges that Christians should follow the Mosaic law if they truly follow Jewish Scripture. This distinction between *Hebraios* and *loudaios* fits neatly with Eusebius's presentation of the Jews as those who completely rejected Jesus, for which he says that the destruction of Jerusalem was their punishment. Thus, like earlier Christian writers, he characterises contemporary Jews not only as other than and distinct from Christians, but also as enemies of God. In so doing he contributes to and develops the underpinning in much Christian theology and apologetics of anti-Semitism and the terrible consequences to which it has led.

Otto's stimulating and very readable monograph is, like that of Ophir and Rosen-Zvi, a significant work of intellectual history. It sheds light on the development of some early Christian understandings of their own identity and what distinguished them from Jews, whom they othered in order to define and construct more clearly their understanding of themselves. Furthermore, like the work of Ophir and Rosen-Zvi, it offers considerable material on which both Jews and Christians might reflect today as they consider what they have in common, as well as points of difference between them and the need for mutually respectful relationships.

As Otto notes, Eusebius was "engaged in an ideological battle to legitimate his religion" (p.194), and in order to support his presentation of the emergence and development of Christianity he may sometimes have used Philo in ways that have been characterised as dishonest, opportunist and exploitative. His example serves as a warning of what can happen when apologetic zeal can lead a person who identifies in one way to denounce those whom they identify as different in order to strengthen the community to which he or she belongs, regardless of the cost to other people.

Andrew Gregory, University College, Oxford

4. OTHER

Michael Mawson, Christ Existing as Community: Bonhoeffer's Ecclesiology (Oxford: OUP, 2018)

Respected Bonhoeffer scholar Michael Mawson reflects on the often-overlooked doctoral dissertation of Dietrich Bonhoeffer – Sanctorum Communio. In this dissertation Bonhoeffer developed a form of Christian social theory that provided insights integral to his portrayal of the church as the existence of Christ in the world. Throughout, Mawson skillfully engages with the critical readings of key scholars as he argues persuasively for renewed consideration of this important work. His book is a must-read for Bonhoeffer scholars but interesting for others also.

The basic argument is as follows: Bonhoeffer is searching for an appropriate way of acknowledging the historicality of Christian revelation. He finds that Barth's emphasis on divine agency in revelation devalues the church as an empirical entity. By contrast, Ernst Troeltch's emphasises the church as an empirical human community, but renders Christian truth as an ideal that can be divorced from it. Bonhoeffer argues that rightly attending to the historicality of Christian theology requires recognition that reality is shaped by a dialectic between creation, sin, and redemption. In humanity's primal state we have an openness to God with deep relationship while also a closedness that allows freedom of will and action. This is broken in the fall that leads to selfishness and egocentricity, whereby humanity exists in atomistic individuality divided from one another and experiencing God as judgement and law. In Christ this fallen humanity is overcome through his vicarious representative action on the cross. When Christ steps into humanity and takes our place on the cross, he receives the judgement for sin on our behalf. In so doing he makes possible a new ontological reality, a new basic relation to God whereby he is experienced, not as judgement but as love. This new relation to God in Christ brings with it a new relation to one another - now others are also experienced, not as making claims and demands on us, but as the disclosure of God's love and heart to us. The work of the Spirit is to actualise this life-principle of vicarious representative

action in the community of the church, which is exemplified in self-sacrificial service, intercessory prayer or forgiveness of sin.

A major criticism often levelled at Bonhoeffer is that this identification of the church with the presence of Christ collapses Christ into the church, ignoring the sinfulness of the church. Mawson makes a key contribution to Bonhoeffer scholarship by seeking to show the significance of the concept of the "collective person" that is developed in Sanctorum Communio and largely ignored in reflection on his later work. This is the idea that the social interactions of a community generate a communal spirit or person that is dependent upon but distinct from these interactions - akin to when a football team may develop a sense of "team spirit". Again, this is understood, not as a general concept, but in the dialectic of creation, fall, and redemption. In the primal state this collective person was generated "from below" through the pure interactions of humans, but this is broken in the dislocation that occurs after the fall. Now, through Christ's work on the cross, this unity or collective person is established by Christ "from above" with each Christian being incorporated into it. This provides a means of understanding how the church can be considered identical to Christ as his body whilst distinct from Him as sinful and fully reliant on his gracious action rather than human works.

Finally, Mawson locates this understanding of Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology within broader scholarship, notably in relation to Stanley Hauerwas, John Webster, John Milbank and Pete Ward. He thus provides a valuable book, not just for those with an academic interest in Bonhoeffer, but also for the consideration of broader questions about the nature of church and the relation of theology to secular disciplines such as sociology.

Rev Sam Pollard, University of Bristol and Diocese of Chelmsford

Nancey Murphy, A Philosophy of the Christian Religion for the Twenty-First Century (London: SPCK, 2018)

This book by Nancey Murphy proves to be a useful resource for those wanting to explore philosophical issues specifically concerning Christianity – both historically and in contemporary debates.

Split into two main parts, Murphy begins by outlining the history of philosophy with a particular focus on key figures in epistemology in the western traditions – from the Pre-Socratics through the medieval and modern eras to the 21st century. In response to the intellectual movements of modernity, Murphy then focuses a great deal of her discussion in this first part on the responses to modernity's notions of rationality with reference to Wittgenstein, Plantinga, Feyerabend and MacIntyre. The latter of these thinkers becomes a reference point with which Murphy continues to engage with throughout the text. MacIntyre's description of "epistemological crises" describing the phenomenon of an intellectual challenge that "threatens the very mode or sources of rational justification that, prior to the crisis, one would have used to solve the problem" (p.111) and his account of rationality that counters the narrative of rationality in modernity continue to be reference points throughout the book. In this first section Murphy's argument demonstrates that both Christian and secular philosophies have faced numerous epistemological crises, which are enriched in discussion with opposing views and resolved in numerous ways (if not on occasion creating future problems), as well as how notions of rationality have changed based on the historical situation.

The second part of the book constitutes the majority of Murphy's work, in which Murphy describes several different epistemological crises and intellectual challenges that Christian philosophy has had to, and continues to, face. Here she explores three crises that Christianity has faced since modernity: epistemology, biblical criticism and religious pluralism. Murphy then goes on to discuss the other intellectual debates in divine action, theodicy, science and religion, Christian anthropology, and finally on the different forms of naturalism and Christianity. Murphy's discussions on Christian anthropology and theodicy stand out as highlights. Discussions on the former presenting a credible alternative to mind/body dualism that is prevalent in popular Christian thought, while in the latter Murphy makes a conscious turn away from anthropocentric theodicy seeking also to consider suffering within the rest of creation. The impressive nature of these sections is the result of the careful inclusion of relevant and significant contributions to these contemporary debates.

The developments in philosophy over millennia are articulated with clarity and precision, which are curated thoughtfully by Murphy in order to lead to the role of MacIntyre's philosophy. While this has enabled the inclusion of a few often neglected thinkers, it also leads to an oversight of schools of thought that, although they do not have a close connection to MacIntyre, would still certainly have an influence on Christian philosophy and relevance in some sections - such as phenomenology. Despite this, the book would be a helpful resource to those studying in an Anglo-American philosophy department at undergraduate level, or those wishing to study philosophical debates from a Christian perspective that go beyond apologetics – particularly with regard to the issues mentioned which feature predominantly in the second part of the book.

John Price, Wycliffe Hall, Oxford

David Robertson, What would Jesus Post? A Biblical approach to online interaction (Abingdon: BRF, 2018)

This short and accessible book applies biblical principles to online life, reminding the reader that being online is not "downtime" from faith, but an arena, rather, in which faith can be enacted, and in which it can also be tested. It is only towards the end that we discover that the book was written as a result of a damaging online experience.

The book is designed for individuals, parents, youth and church leaders, and could be used in a group or by individuals. It identifies three generations of online users: the tech-immigrants, pre-dating the advent of the World Wide Web in 1990, and more comfortable offline; tech-assimilators, who have learned to make use of online resources; and the tech-indigenous, who have never known anything else. The book is intended for all three groups, spelling out basic concepts to facilitate the tech-immigrants, but challenging the tech-indigenous to re-think their online behaviour. A key question is: are we being conformed to online culture, or prepared to be a transformative presence, reflecting counter-cultural Christian values?

The individual chapters spell out the nature of the online environment and its temptations and consequences, including such perils as trolls and digital porn, and offer helpful tools and biblical resources. Each chapter follows the same simple structure, combining reflection and action. The chapters begin by outlining a particular issue or challenge, then suggest specific Bible passages which address it, and finish with a set of questions, for discussion, reflection or to prompt action.

This is a book one would wish were not necessary, as its premises at one level seem so obvious, and yet, it clearly is. It encourages everyone to recognise online life as a powerful reality, but one that must be integrated into the greater reality of a life lived in God.

Rev Dr Mary Kells, St Faith's, Lee-on-the-Solent

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