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The Editorial

By James Butler

The articles for this edition of ANVIL all come from our Pioneer Conversations Day hosted in hybrid fashion, at CMS in Oxford, at the Northern Pioneer Centre in Penrith and online. Through a mixture of talks and workshops, we engaged with questions of thriving in sustainable ways. In the planning of the Conversations Day, the team of Cathy Ross, James Butler, Richard Passmore and Lori Passmore had in their sights some of the assumptions around growth that are embedded in some approaches to mission and church. Growth is often assumed to be a good to which we must aim, and yet the climate crisis is one of many clear examples of where an assumption of continual and uncontrolled growth has led somewhere hugely problematic. We wanted to ask how we could thrive in pioneering and mission in ways that were sustainable without having to automatically assume that things need to grow and expand. What do healthy and sustainable approaches to growth look like? What are the theologies and practices that might help us as we seek to thrive in sustainable ways?

In planning the Conversations Day, the problem we faced was how to promote it. Such is the societal and cultural commitment to growth that giving an event a title of "sustainability" does not really capture people's attention. In fact, in terms of word association it is more likely to be related to words such as stagnation. We live in a society that expects things to be dynamic and fast moving rather than sustainable and stable. We landed on the title of "thriving" trying to maintain a sense of the dynamic without it immediately having to relate to growth.

The idea of growth as a response to decline is almost ubiquitous across the denominations. Everyone is looking for the means to turn decline into growth; churches that are declining are seen as the problem, and churches that are growing are assumed to hold the answers according to much of the literature. For example, quite a lot of writing around church growth warns church leaders about the period of stability because it is only one step away from decline, and all effort needs to be put in at this stage to moving it back to growth. But as Christians, we need to have a much more complex and theological engagement with these commitments to growth. Our hope is that the Conversations Day and this edition of ANVIL will do just that.

In his book *Church Planting in the Secular West*, Stefan Paas explores in depth the assumption of growth behind church growth theory and makes an important observation.

> If indeed the purpose of mission is the numerical growth of the church, the logical consequence is that the world must become church. After all, as long as there is world outside the church, the church can grow. And as long as the church can grow, mission has not reached its purpose. So, we must conclude that the purpose of mission is to erase the world, namely to turn it into church.[1]

[1] Stefan Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2016), 115.

For Paas this understanding is deeply problematic. Two assumptions in this understanding are worth highlighting. First, it assumes that numerical growth is the normal and right mode of the church and secondly, it assumes that the world has nothing of value for the church. The articles in this edition of ANVIL challenge these assumptions. The article from Israel Olofinjana demonstrates how African indigenous perspectives have much to offer western Christianity in the conversation about sustainability, and Alison Webster shows how community organising, and particularly the work of Citizens UK, offers means for faithful Christian action in a multicultural society. While Jesus talks a lot about the growth of the kingdom in the Gospels, it is interesting to see how our own cultural assumptions have shaped the interpretation of the parables. While models of church growth see growth as natural, it is interesting to compare it with fourth-century bishop Basil the Great's critique of usury – charging interest on loans – describing how "Everything that increases, when it reaches its proper size, stops increasing; but the money of avaricious men always increases progressively with time".[2] For Basil, growth in nature is about reaching the proper size, whereas interest has no limits and is therefore against nature. While we don't need to get into the details of the argument here, the point is that our reading of growth risks being determined by our neoliberal society's assumption without more complex engagement and reflection.

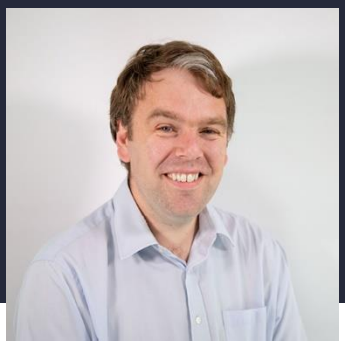
Throughout the Conversations Day our contributors drew on their practice, thinking and reading to help us to reflect on thriving in sustainable ways. There were three themes that we particularly want to highlight from the day that are also present in these articles. The first is relationships; the reflections were about the primacy of relationship and community as the basis for sustainable practices. The articles challenge individualism and offer communal ways of thinking, such as the African concept of ubuntu – I am because we are. Another key theme was justice; sustainability is deeply interwoven with justice. This is clearly seen in the climate crisis, where the effects will be most keenly experienced by the poor. The third theme was eschatology. How do we have a longer view that does not just hope for better but seeks a Christian vision of the world renewed through the coming of the kingdom?

This ANVIL edition is made up of three longer articles based on the keynote talks from the Conversations Day, and some shorter, more practice-focused articles based on the workshops. The first of our longer articles comes from Israel Olofinjana, who critiques western notions of sustainability and offers a different model for climate justice. The second, from Alison Webster, offers community organising as a model of challenging and changing our neoliberal society. In the third, Janet Williams has a conversation with Richard Passmore about her book *Seeking the God Beyond* and how the apophatic tradition may hold resources that can help us to thrive in sustainable ways.

The shorter articles turn more clearly to practice and the specific concerns of mission practice, pioneer communities and churches. Tina Hodgett explains why she resists the impulse to measure outcomes in pioneering in the innovator space. Tina presented a session with Paul Bradbury, who explores the proper context of the idea of measurement and claims that measurement should act as a servant and not our master. Alison Boulton reflects on her own practice and experience of seeking to develop spiritual sustainability within a local community on a new housing estate over the past 14 years. Caroline Kennedy offers practices that help her to sustain her own personal spirituality and reflects on how to "find the gold" and helps others to find it too. Finally, Rosie Hopley recounts her own experience of entrepreneurship in social business, seeing how all can thrive: entrepreneurs, employees, trainees and wider community.

We believe that sustainability needs to be a word that we are much happier and able to engage with in mission, and one that needs clearer theological articulation and practices that help us to live sustainably day in, day out. We hope this edition of ANVIL might contribute some important insights and practices to that ongoing conversation.

[2] Basil the Great, quoted in B. L. Ihssen, "Basil and Gregory's Sermons on Usury: Credit Where Credit Is Due," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16, no. 3 (2008): 419.



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Sustainability, African identity and climate justice: reframing the climate conversation

By Israel Oluwole Olofinjana

Introduction

As an African missionary pastor resident in the UK, the area of my scholarly research has been examining the reverse mission of African Christians in Britain. Reverse mission in this context is understood as a divine strategy to establish or usher in God's kingdom in the West. This is not to say that God's kingdom is not already present, but that the migration of Majority World Christians brings a missiological significance in terms of God's multi-ethnic kingdom. But a further question I have been wrestling with is: what crucial role does African identity play in the mission of African Christians in Britain? How does African identity impact their mission? Does it enhance or hinder it? Part of answering these questions has been to develop what I refer to as African British theology, which posits that confidence in African identity is essential for the success of the African missionary enterprise in a contested multicultural British society, but that this is not a substitute for a contextual approach to mission.[1] African British theology is essentially developing African theology in Britain as an intercultural missiology and public theology.

As a postcolonial theology, one of the major preoccupations of this theological thought is interrogating western public theology as it relates to racial justice and climate justice concerns. This paper therefore examines western notions of sustainability and offers new insights on how we can define and measure sustainability. It shifts the conversation on sustainability from an economic perspective to an anthropological perspective. The paper further proposes that we need a new understanding on how we tackle climate justice that incorporates racial justice thinking. This is in developing a brown theology that resonates with the brown agenda. This is different from a western green theology, which situates conversations on the environment in the green agenda. Too often our conversations on climate justice are rooted in ecology, but if we are going to tackle the intersection of climate and racial injustice, we clearly need an approach to climate justice that is rooted in anthropology: a theological anthropology that seeks the redemption of the collective notion of humanity through a reconciled community.

A working definition of racial justice in this essay is the strategic thinking and action to combat institutional, structural and personal racism that dehumanises people of colour created in God's image. Climate justice as used in this paper refers to our shared responsibility

[1] Israel Oluwole Olofinjana, ed., *African Voices: Towards African British Theologies* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Monographs, 2017). Also see Israel Oluwole Olofinjana, "Reverse Mission: Towards an African British Theology," *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 37, no. 1 (2019): 52–65.

to speak up and take action to safeguard the rights and dignity of those disproportionately affected by climate change. Climate change in this context is understood as the results from the impact of our actions and inactions on our world.[2]

Western notions of sustainability

The climate crises affect us all and we are increasingly seeing the impact on every continent, biodiversity and ecosystems. Coral reefs are declining, floods have increased in different parts of the world, bushfires are becoming rampant, famines are impacting people's livelihood, storms are accelerating, erratic weather conditions are becoming normal, and the levels of our CO2 have skyrocketed due to greenhouse emissions and other factors. As a result of the climate crisis, we now have climate refugees who are fleeing their countries because they have lost their homes, businesses and livelihoods to the devastating effects of environmental crisis. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warned us just before COP 26 (the global climate summit in Glasgow in 2021) in a report on the current state of the climate:

> It is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land. Widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere have occurred.[3]

In essence, humans have caused unprecedented and irreversible change to the climate. The recent report in April 2022 gave a starker and final warning that we need a radical step if greenhouse emissions must peak by 2025.[4] In the light of these warnings, what is the prophetic role of the church? Due to the climate and environmental crisis that faces humanity, one of the buzzwords that has gained ascendancy in our vocabulary is sustainability. In an attempt to survive by seeking alternative, reliable and efficient energy to power our planet, there are lots of conversations on sustainable development, sustainable products, sustainable energy, sustainable energy engineering, sustainable future, sustainable planet and so on. Western notions of sustainability embody three concepts that always seem crucial, namely the environmental, economic and social aspects. The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015 give us a better and holistic way of understanding how we can sustain our planet because they give a framework that balances social, economic, political and environmental sustainability. For example, Sustainable Development Goal 7 focuses on affordable and clean energy, therefore aiming to provide affordable, reliable and sustainable energy for all. Sustainable Development Goal 13 talks about climate action, highlighting the need to take urgent steps to tackle the impact of the climate crisis.[5] However, Sustainable Development Goal 8 focuses on decent work and economic growth with the aim to foster inclusive and sustainable economic growth. But economic growth sometimes has echoes of colonialism, with big western corporations extracting wealth from developing countries while leaving waste, environmental damage and health crises in their wake. The ongoing funding of fossil fuel extraction is manifestly unjust because the emissions from continued fossil fuel use are having the greatest adverse impact on Black and brown people in deprived communities across the globe who have least

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[2] My definitions of climate justice and climate change have followed that offered by the Christian Aid Working Group, comprising Black Majority Church leaders, theologians and activists.

[3] The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, "*Summary for Policymakers,"* in *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, ed. V. Masson-Delmotte, P. Zhai, A. Pirani, S. L. Connors, C. Péan, S. Berger, N. Caud, Y. Chen, L. Goldfarb, M. I. Gomis, M. Huang, K. Leitzell, E. Lonnoy, J. B. R. Matthews, T. K. Maycock, T. Waterfield, O. Yelekçi, R. Yu, and B. Zhou (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021, in press): 4.

[4] The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, "Climate Change 2022: *Mitigation of Climate Change*: Working Group III Contribution to the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report," *IPCC*, 2022, https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg3/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGIII_SPM.pdf; Fiona Harvey, "IPCC report: 'now or never' if world is to stave off climate disaster," *The Guardian*, 4 April 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/apr/04/ipcc-report-now-or-never-if-world-stave-off-climate-disaster, accessed 8 April 2022.

[5] "Take Action for the Sustainable Development Goals," Sustainable Development Goals, *United Nations*, https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/, accessed 8 April 2022.

contributed to and benefitted from the cumulative emissions that have brought us to this state of emergency.

The problem as I see it is that our idea of sustainability is still rooted in economic growth, so that even when we talk about sustainable development or sustainable economic growth, we are still preoccupied by how we address economic growth through efficient extraction, transportation and consumption of resources. It is ultimately ingrained. The other problem is that our idea of sustainability is still largely driven by the West with its history of economic dominance and exploitation, and it therefore begs the question: why should the world at large follow western notions of sustainability if at the end of the day it is communities from the Majority World that continue to suffer disproportionately from the impact of the climate and environmental crisis?

If western ways of measuring sustainability are so intricately bound to economic growth, are there other ways of measuring sustainability? An example of a different way of measuring sustainability that is not rooted in economic growth but in well-being can be found in the South Asian country of Bhutan, which measures sustainability through well-being and human flourishing. Their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is measured by the Gross National Happiness (GNH) index on well-being and happiness of its citizens. This was first introduced in 1972 by King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the fourth king of Bhutan. Is there something we can learn here on a different set of parameters of measuring sustainability?

African identity, enslavement and colonisation

To advance a different model of measuring sustainability, it is important to consider the complex history that fragmented African identity as well as the intersection of racial and climate injustice to better understand western economic exploitation and dominance. African traditional identity before enslavement was diverse with different tribes, kingdoms and languages. This traditional African identity, while not homogenous, has a shared root on the geopolitical continent of Africa. The transatlantic slave trade with its brutality fragmented African identity and dislocated it so that today we speak of an African tripartite identity:[6] African diaspora in the Americas as African Americans, in the Caribbean islands as African Caribbeans, and those who remained on the mother land as Continental Africans. This dislocation of the African family has done almost a permanent damage in the sense that while this tripartite identity is now fully accepted, nevertheless there are ongoing differences and tensions between Africans, African Caribbeans and African Americans. A further fragmentation of African identity took place with the colonisation and partitioning of Africa by seven uninvited European powers, namely Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal, Italy, Spain and Germany. The continent was carved out during the scramble for Africa in 1884–85 on new lines of European powers and languages, thus displacing traditional boundaries, ethnic languages and customs of the people of Africa. The consequences are that firstly, the African mind was colonised, but the land and its resources were also taken; however, far more insidious is that African identity was fragmented along European identity and languages so that today Africans are multilingual, speaking their indigenous languages but also the languages of their colonisers. While this makes us international and helps us navigate the global and transnational processes, the negative is a constant reliance on the West for its deliverance. This is part of the reason why the West has a large percentage of so-called economic migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, thus leading to a large diaspora community in the West.

[6] I ought to say something about the word tripartite here and how I am applying it. The word tripartite in theological circles is usually associated and used in conjunction with the doctrine of the trinity as it pertains to the nature and identity of the Godhead being one in essence, purpose and unity, but three distinct persons. It is also used in Christian anthropology to describe the composite nature of human beings in three distinct components but one: spirit, soul and body (see 1 Thess. 5:23). There are those who view and argue that human beings have two distinct natures: body and soul. I am using the word tripartite here to describe diasporic identities, firstly applying it to Hebraic/Jewish identity and then to African identity.

Theological reflection on Hebraic identity

A biblical precedence of diaspora community is the Jewish community, who, in similar fashion, has experienced and continues to experience fragmentation and dislocation of Jewish identities. A quick theological reflection on diasporic identity by looking at Hebraic identity in the Scriptures is therefore crucial to this conversation. This is in the true fashion of African theology, which takes its point of departure from Scripture. Hebraic identity in the Old Testament, while not homogenous, has a shared commonality in the centrality and worship of Yahweh (see Deut. 6:4). Kingdom politics and tribal loyalties among other things led to a divided kingdom around 900 BC with Judah in the south and what emerged to be Israel in the north. These two kingdoms had their distinctive identities in terms of government administration, religion and culture. Two centuries later, a powerful nation – the Assyrian empire – conquered and exiled the people of the north, repopulating it with people from other cultures; thus Samaria, the capital city in the north, was perceived by the southerners as corrupt and confused (see 2 Kings 17). Around 586 BC, the people of the south were also conquered and exiled by the Babylonian, later Persian, kingdom. This created a sort of tripartite Hebraic identity with Samaritans (people of the north), Judah or Jews (people of the south) and those in diaspora, who were exiled into Babylonia and later Persia. This tripartite Hebraic identity is seen at play throughout the inter-testamental period otherwise also known as Second Temple Judaism and the New Testament. For example, when the exiles from Judah returned to rebuild the Temple, city and city walls, they were opposed by the Samaritans, who did not share their loyalty (see Ezra 4–5; Neh. 4–5). We also see similar tensions in the early church in Acts 6 when the Grecian Jews (Jews born in the diaspora) complained of being marginalised by the Hebraic Jews (Jews born in the land of Israel).

In summary, in similar fashion to Hebraic identity, African traditional identity – while not homogenous – has a shared root on the continent of Africa. But like the Jews due to conquest, enslavement, colonialism, migration and neocolonialism, this heterogeneous identity on one continent was displaced so that the African diaspora was created in the West Indies as African Caribbeans and the Americas as African Americans. The transatlantic slave trade that fragmented African identity cannot be dichotomised from its link to racial and climate injustice.

Racial injustice: climate crisis

The transatlantic slave trade as a global economic system and institution prospered because of racial ideology that conceived Africans as objects and properties that needed to be dominated because they were inferior and not intelligent. Sometimes Christian mission, with its understanding that Africans were heathens and pagans that needed saving, colluded with colonial authorities to propagate the gospel. The transatlantic slave trade was also an integral part of the Industrial Revolution from the 1750s onwards. One of the first scholars to identify the links between racism and capitalism was Eric Williams (1911–81), the first prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago. Williams uncovered slavery's role at the heart of the Industrial Revolution. He states in his book *Capitalism and Slavery*, which was his published doctoral thesis:

> The triangular trade thereby gave a triple stimulus to British industry. The Negroes were purchased with British manufactures; transported to the plantations, they produced sugar, cotton, indigo, molasses and other tropical products, the processing of which created new industries in England; while the maintenance of the Negroes and their owners on the plantations provided another market for British industry, New England agriculture and the Newfoundland fisheries. By 1750 there was hardly a trading or a manufacturing town in England which was not in some way connected with the triangular or direct colonial trade. The profits obtained provided one of the

> main streams of that accumulation of capital in England which financed the Industrial Revolution.[7]

While many western historians would separate the history of the Industrial Revolution from that of slavery and colonialism, Williams' ground-breaking work was one of the first to integrate our thinking on this. A further step I am identifying in this essay is the link between racial injustice and climate injustice that is historically rooted in slavery, colonialism and the Industrial Revolution and which continues to shape current injustices around climate conversations.

Firstly, the Industrial Revolution prospered on the back of slave labour (the Atlantic economy). This was because cotton, which was the major product replacing wool during the industrial age, was imported from slave plantations. Industrialisation being powered by steam and water has led to what we now refer to as the climate crisis. Secondly, this historic connection of the fragmentation of African identity, racial injustice and climate crisis continues to today because poverty and economic instability in the Majority World means that Africa, Asia and Latin America suffer disproportionately the effects of the climate crisis.

It is interesting to know that slavery was later labelled an illegitimate trade only to be replaced by so-called legitimate trade through colonialism and partitioning of Africa, which further fragmented African identity as discussed above. Legitimate trade – that is, trading with Africa through colonisation – has also been replaced with what I refer to as controlled trade in neocolonialism, sometimes through aid, globalisation and international development. This sometimes leads to a dependency factor on the West by African countries.

Thirdly, western solutions to the climate crisis are not holistic and focus too much on the green agenda. Before describing what the green agenda is, it is worth summarising with clarity the intersectionality of racial injustice and climate injustice.

Enslavement: Slavery provided the slave labour and raw material for industrial change
Colonialism: Colonies were the early seeds of a capitalist economic system that finances and enhances industrialisation
Industrial Revolution: Steam power accelerated and increased our pollution and climate crisis

Climate justice and reparative justice[8]

I am going to digress briefly to share my own experience and journey into climate justice to illustrate some crucial points. My experience of climate change started with the fact that I grew up in an area of Nigeria where flooding was a constant occurrence. We played in it as we walked back home from school. Along the way I saw bridges collapse, roads torn apart, shops destroyed and businesses disappear as a result of these floods. The question of why we had so much flooding in my area lingered in my mind as I grew up and was not fully answered. Later, as a committed member of an African Pentecostal church in my area, our church, including myself, was so preoccupied with our spiritual and economic survival that issues that caused the flooding did not really surface in our conversations. While I continued to wrestle with why we had so much flooding, there were certain practices that my family and I engaged in that, on reflection, I did not realise were environmentally friendly or green. We planted our own tomatoes, and we had our own poultry. I remember my first job was working for my mother with our poultry looking after chickens and collecting and selling eggs.

It was while studying Religious Studies at the University of Ibadan that I was introduced to African theology and African religious traditions and culture. The implication of this exposure

[7] Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Milton Keynes: Penguin Classics, 2022), 48. This book was first published in the United States in 1944 but was not published in the UK until 1964 (and was then out of print again until now) due to some of the controversial themes the book addressed around slavery, the abolition of slavery and the Industrial Revolution.

[8] Disclaimer: The reflections on reparative justice in this section are in no way the views or position of the Evangelical Alliance on reparations. They are that of the author, who is also on a journey exploring this subject.

was that I began to realise that God cares for his creation and that humanity has a part to play. The introduction to African theology and the African religious world view educated me about the different West African names of God. What is striking about these names is that several African names for God demonstrate God as the creator of heaven and the earth, but more importantly they evidenced that he is involved in such a way that God cares for his creation. A Biblical theology of creation affirms this because Scripture says, "The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it."[9] Some of the names go further to assert that God cares and sustains his creation. Take, for example, the Edo name for God: *Osanobuwa*. This means "the Source Being who carries and sustains the universe". Other African names for God, such as *Olodumare* (Yoruba), *Ngewo* (Mende), *Nyame* (Akan) and *Odomankoma* (Akan), reveal that God really cares and is interested in maintaining the universe.[10] While African cosmology is rich in an understanding that sees God as the creator and carer of his creation, some African Pentecostals are somewhat disconnected from this narrative because of the colonial residue that sees everything in African religions and spirituality as evil. One of the consequences is a lack of engagement with climate justice issues.

It is therefore exciting for me as an African Pentecostal after being on this journey to be a part of the Christian Aid working group on climate justice with some Black Majority Church leaders, activists and theologians. My brief story serves as an example of an African that has experienced the effects of the climate crisis but did not have the resources or enough understanding to deal with the issue. In a recent survey poll done by Christian Aid into the views and attitudes of Black British Christians on climate change, 66 per cent of those polled are more aware that the impacts of climate change disproportionately affect people from the Majority World (Africa, Caribbean, Asia and Latin America) compared to the British public at 49 per cent. This is because being born in a climate vulnerable country, or through family connections, boosts awareness of the climate crisis.[11] This data confirms my own experience but also raises the issue of why we are not visible when it comes to government policies and conversations on climate change. It is the poorer countries in the world that suffer more the effects of climate disasters; therefore, while animal conservation, protection of endangered species and our environment are all important in their own right, my approach to climate justice is the brown agenda and not the green agenda.

The brown agenda in this instance is understood as the impact of ecological degradation on people,[12] particularly people from the Majority World, who have suffered from systemic and structural injustices such as colonialism and imperialism.[13] In this respect, there is a connection between racial and climate injustice because people who suffer more from the effects of the climate crisis are usually communities that had been impoverished due to legacies of enslavement, colonialism and imperialism. The green agenda in this respect is associated with "nature conservation and addresses specific issues such as the preservation of wilderness areas, endangered species, animal poaching, cruelty to animals, invader species, and in general, the impact of mining and industry, industrialised agriculture and urban trends on the habitats of plants and animals".[14] My observation is that it is easier for people who live in the West, particularly in the countryside or rural areas, to be green, whereas those who live in crowded urban centres will naturally gravitate towards the brown agenda. This is because of urban factors such as homelessness, deprivation, overpopulation, poverty and so on, which are often linked to the impact of climate on poorer communities. To be green sometimes

[9] Ps. 24:1 (NRSV).

[10] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1969). Omosade Awolalu and Adelumo Dopamu, *West African Traditional Religion* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Onibonoje Press and Book Industries Limited, 1979).

11 *Report on Views and Attitudes of Black British Christians on Climate Change*, Christian Aid Survey Poll, 2020, https://mediacentre.christianaid.org.uk/black-history-month-poll-shows-british-public-think-white-people-around-the-world-are-most-impacted-by-climate-change/.

[12] Ernst Conradie, "The Environment" in *African Public Theology*, ed. Sunday Bobai Agang, Dion A. Forster and H. Jurgens Hendriks (Plateau State, Nigeria: Hippo Books, 2020), 159.

[13] Israel Oluwole Olofinjana, *Discipleship, Suffering and Racial Justice: Mission in a Pandemic World* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2021), 113.

[14] Conradie, "The Environment," 159.

could also be expensive because you either have to drive a hybrid or electric car if you choose to drive. There is the option of cycling, which a lot of people now do. Maintaining healthy eating habits and lifestyle does not come cheap, and neither does living in an area that has poorer air quality due to pollution. Across the world being brown often means to live below the poverty line, lack resources and options, and lack education. This is not always the case because not all people classified as brown are poor or uneducated. I am also aware that we need both agendas and that they are not always mutually exclusive. I am clarifying here my own position and approach to the subject based on my journey and experience.

If the brown agenda offers us a holistic way of addressing the link between climate and racial injustice, what does it offer us in terms of reframing the debate on sustainability? Here I propose reparative justice as a way of repairing the damage of slavery, colonialism and Industrial Revolution in order to have a reconciled humanity who can then build a future together in hope.

Reparative justice: the brown theology on sustainability

Returning to the conversation of how best to measure sustainability, especially in the light of the intersection between racial injustice and climate injustice, requires a new theological framing. This is where insights from an African theological perspective can be fresh and innovative. Often conversations on sustainability, such as talks around a sustainable future, focus on the future. But what about a conversation on sustainability that looks backwards into the past? This will mean understanding sustainability as the necessity of repairing the past so that we can correct the present and repair the future together. This will mean employing an African philosophy and Bantu world view of the principle of unity of life, which views the dynamic union of past, present and future. In essence, time is integrated in this principle. As articulated by the late African Catholic theologian Bishop Tharcisse Tshibangu (1933–2021), the African philosophy of the principle of unity of life affects the life of a single human, of a community, and of nature and the world. It was commonly known as a holistic vision of life. Tshibangu emphasised the principle of unity of life as an epistemological principle marking African cultures in their internal coherence.[15] Another African theologian who gives us an innovative epistemological framing on time is the late John Mbiti (1931–2019) in *African Religions and Philosophy*:

> The most significant consequence of this is that, according to traditional concepts, time is a two-dimensional phenomenon, with a long past, a present and virtually no future. The linear concept of time in western thought, with an indefinite past, present and infinite future, is practically foreign to African thinking.[16]

In another place Mbiti talks about "history moving backwards from the *Sasa* period (now/period of tenses, that is the immediate) to the *Zamani* (a form of English past with its own past, present and future), from the moment of intense experience to the period beyond which nothing can go".[17] In essence, African philosophy describes the integral nature of past, present and future and the concept of time as moving backwards rather than forwards, and therefore people set their minds not on future things, but chiefly on what has taken place. Another African world view that helps us in this conversation is the Twi word *Sankofa*, which literally means *San* (return), *Ko* (go), *Fa* (look, seek and take).[18] Sankofa therefore means going back for something you might have left or going back to our roots. On the one hand, it offers us a lens into digging deep into African history and tradition, and on the other it enables us to look back to repair the damage in the past so as to achieve restorative or reparative justice. Adopting such a world view will mean addressing the intersection of racial and climate injustice resulting from the past connection of enslavement, colonialism and Industrial

[15] Francis Anekwe Oborji, "Tribute to Msgr. Tharcisse Tshibangu (1933 – 2021): Promoter of Theology with an 'African Color,'" *Journal of African Christian Biography* 1, no. 7 (2022): 12–17, https://open.bu.edu/ds2/stream/?#/documents/425563/page/16, accessed 11 April 2022.

[16] Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 17.

[17] *Ibid.*, 23.

[18] "Sankofa," *The Sankofa Collective*, https://sankofacollective.org/about, accessed 28 May 2022.

Revolution. One way of addressing this is known as reparative justice, or in climate language, loss and damage. Climate loss and damage is, however, different from climate finance, where rich nations offer financial support to help climate-vulnerable countries meet their carbon reduction targets and adapt to climate change impacts. Reparative justice is a controversial term as it is usually associated with monetary compensation. It is often understood in terms of redistribution of wealth, so that those who are descendants of the enslaved who continue to suffer the legacies of slavery and colonialism are compensated financially. But another way of understanding reparative justice is repairing justice;[19] that is, repairing and addressing the past so that reconciliation, healing and peace can take place. This approach will be holistic, looking at reparation not only in financial terms but also through holistic healing that embraces spiritual, psychological, social and environmental restoration from a traumatic past. This understanding of repairing justice is similar to restorative justice, which seeks to rehabilitate the offender so that the victim and the offender can both experience healing. After all, society is not truly healed until the oppressed and the oppressor are healed. This notion of repairing justice will be akin to the New Testament understanding of reconciliation, which has repentance, forgiveness and restitution at its core. The story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1–10 illustrates this so beautifully because as Zacchaeus encounters Jesus and forgiveness, he, in return, out of conviction decides to go on a journey of restitution. Three key elements of repairing justice are therefore repentance (forgiveness), lament (which incorporates resistance, justice and hope) and restitution.

So where do I see a current example of a model of practice that is beginning to address racial and climate injustice? This is where the significance of the Christian Aid working group with Black Majority Church leaders, activists and theologians becomes important. To understand the context of this, Melanie Nazareth, a member of the group, has written a reflective piece.[20] The objective of the group can be summarised into two. One is to find creative ways to educate and therefore engage Black Majority Churches on the subject of climate justice and racial justice. The other is to be able to engage in some ambassadorial work that ensures that the brown community and agenda is well represented in conversations with climate activist groups and governmental policies that shape this agenda. The importance of this work is that in bringing together theologians to work on some of the discipleship resources to engage churches in the UK as well as in the Global South, it has required the collective thinking of Black theologians and African theologians, whose voices are usually marginal in climate conversations and environmental theology. It has been a joy to participate in meetings where we hear the voices of African theologians advancing African religious world views as essential thinking in tackling climate concerns and in the same space hear the voices of Black theologians framing climate justice in liberative praxis terms. Another significance of this work is that this group is helping Christian Aid to develop their campaign on climate loss and damage through the lens of reparative justice. This aspect of its work is in its early stages and the work of the group is still in progress, but I offer this as an example of what a brown theology on climate and racial justice could look like in practice.

Concluding reflection

This essay has examined the interconnection of the fragmentation of African identity, racial injustice and climate injustice. This has been investigated through considering the impacts of the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism and the Industrial Revolution on people of African descent. The paper therefore proposes a new approach to climate justice that addresses the

[19] Karen Campbell, Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries for the United Reformed Church (URC), talks about repairing justice in the context of reparative justice in a webinar titled "Reparation and Economics: What Do I Get?" This webinar is part of a series of webinars organised by the Racial Justice Advocacy Forum (RJAF) in partnership with the Movement for Justice and Reconciliation and the National Church Leaders Forum (NCLF). The other two webinars are titled "I Will Repay: The Church and Reparations" and "Setting Us Free: How to Repair the Damage of Four Hundred Years of Slavery to Black Christians". Details of these webinars are available at: "Resources," Baptists Together, https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/365942/Resources.aspx, accessed 11 April 2022.

[20] Melanie Nazareth, "Climate Justice. A Monochrome Movement?" *Christians on the Left*, 31 March 2021, https://www.christiansontheleft.org.uk/latest/climate-justice-a-monochrome-movement, accessed 8 April 2022.

racial injustice element in this history. This is the brown agenda, which adequately situates the conversation in addressing the ecological impact and exploitative economies on people of colour. This is different from the green agenda, which focuses on tackling conservation and the preservation of green spaces, wilderness areas and endangered species.

This approach to climate justice also gives us a new way of measuring sustainability. While western notions of sustainability are rightly often rooted in finding alternative, renewable energy for our future, a different approach considered in this article is measuring sustainability by addressing the past through climate loss and damage. This is through a reparative justice lens, which seeks to advocate for the acknowledgement of and compensation for the descendants of the enslaved who continue to suffer the legacies of slavery and colonialism and the climate crisis. I have adequately termed this repairing justice as a way of repairing the past so that reconciled, restored humanity can address the future together. One example of a group that is employing a brown agenda in their approach to climate justice is the Christian Aid working group, which centres racial justice as an important element in climate justice conversations.

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Collectives with soul: building sustainable communities through organising

By Alison Webster

In thinking about building sustainable communities, it is helpful to begin by exploring the context we are in and the impact of global neoliberal capitalism on our sense of ourselves as human beings in the early twenty-first century. Competitive individualism, and a notion of "freedom" that prioritises the "freedom to consume", is eroding our identifies as citizens, creating and perpetuating massive inequalities between and within nations – making us sick, and destroying the planet for future generations. Engaging with the work of Bruce Rogers-Vaughn and his book *Caring for Souls in a Neoliberal Age*, I will explore these problems and identify how human connection and relationship are crucial to human well-being, and how building sustainable communities is a way out of our current malaise. I will then propose that community organising, as exemplified in the UK by Citizens UK,[1] can be a powerful tool for cultivating the habits of making and maintaining relationships, developing new leaders and enabling a diversity of people to tell their stories, challenge power imbalances and change the world for the better. I will show how being part of broad-based alliances of institutions that are not primarily aligned with the market or the state gives churches an opportunity to work in partnership for the common good, and to strengthen and renew themselves in their own sense of mission.

What has happened to us?

I begin with this observation from the pastoral theologian and psychotherapist Bruce Rogers-Vaughn, from his brilliant book *Caring for Souls in a Neoliberal Age*. In my experience, it resonates deeply with contemporary pastoral theological audiences as a summary of who and how we are as citizens of developed nations.

> The average individual I encounter in the clinical situation today is not the same as the person who sat with me 30 years ago. Sometimes the changes are subtle. Often they are obvious. But they are pervasive and apparently widespread. There has been a marked increase in self-blame among those seeking my care, as well as an amorphous but potent dread that they are somehow teetering on the edge of a precipice. This is confounded by the appearance of a few individuals who seem far more self-assured and confident, even entitled or defiant, than I have previously witnessed. Somewhat mysteriously, these highly self-reliant souls seem more superficial and one-dimensional than their depressive or anxious cohorts. Meanwhile, addictive behaviors have become more prevalent and have quickly expanded into areas of life not usually associated with compulsivity. Relationships, even familial or romantic ones, seem to be becoming more ephemeral and contrived, almost

[1] See www.citizensuk.org.

> businesslike. The people I now see tend to manifest a far more diffuse or fragmented sense of self, are frequently more overwhelmed, experience powerful forms of anxiety and depression too vague to be named, display less self-awareness, have often loosened or dropped affiliations with conventional human collectives, and are increasingly haunted by shame rooted in a nebulous sense of personal failure. I find myself more disquieted and even confused than I used to be while sitting with people, even less "myself". What has happened?"[2]

Rogers-Vaughn's book explores the impact of global capitalism through the eyes of a practical and pastoral theologian and psychotherapist. It tackles a spectrum from individual pain and suffering through to the biggest systemic material injustices that face us all today, and their ideological roots. It is deeply sobering; complexly nuanced, but curiously hopeful in that it gives us *urgent things to do*. There is no way I can do justice in this short article to even a fraction of the things that Rogers-Vaughn explores in his book, but my aim is to pick out some highlights of what he identifies has gone wrong (a broad-brush, big picture overview) and to explore briefly his analysis of what we need to build now. And with that in mind, I want to share with you something of one particular model of sustainable community that I think can be important in this work – community organising – and explain why.

1. Identifying the problem

Rogers-Vaughn explores in depth the growth of neoliberal global capitalism from the Reagan/Thatcher era to the present day, and its historical roots before that. Many of his observations will be familiar to us.

He explores how individuals have become commodities in a market of labour and consumption. We are reduced to "human resources" in an exchange market. That market is founded upon a free-market ideology based on individual liberty and limited government. Human freedom becomes the freedom to consume as rational, self-interested actors in the competitive marketplace. Freedom has therefore been redefined on the market's terms, and society has been replaced by isolated and competitive individuals. Moreover, the actions of these individuals are based on self-interest rather than the common good. As global capitalism has taken hold, so there has been a rapid increase in economic inequality and class-based segregation and a remarkable decline in the quality of social relations.

In cultural terms, he says, the organisation of human society based on individualism and competition "subtly but steadily influences our attitudes and feelings toward ourselves, including our understanding of what it means to be a 'self', as well as our dispositions and feelings toward others. Combined with the erosion of belief in the common good, this leaves us with a society in which each person increasingly looks after their own interests, and leaves others to look after theirs."[3]

Contemporary capitalism is a global system of expulsion. "In the current global economy, millions of human beings are needed for neither production nor consumption. These unfortunate souls have become a permanent underclass. The existence of an ever-expanding population of migrants, refugees, prisoners, asylum seekers, the perpetually unemployed, and other outcasts become what Bauman (2004) calls 'the waste products of globalization'."[4] We may justifiably think of them as excretions of the global debt economy. This perhaps gives us a perspective on the way in which the global COVID-19 pandemic unfolded in our own UK context: the very old (especially those in care homes – those who are no longer economically active and productive) were hit disproportionately hard because of acute underinvestment in that sector. As were the care home staff, who are paid a pittance for their hard and insecure work. And vaccination of the very young (those who are not yet economically active and productive) was left way beyond the time when it proved safe and effective.

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[2] Bruce Rogers-Vaughn, *Caring for Souls in a Neoliberal Age* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 1–2.
[3] *Ibid.*, 17–18.
[4] *Ibid.*, 112.

It has been remarked often that the pandemic exposed, more acutely and clearly than anything else, the extreme inequalities that exist in our society. Such inequality, according to Rogers-Vaughn's analysis, is underscored by the "belief that it is natural for the world to contain a very few 'winners' surrounded by multitudes of 'losers'".[5] In their bestselling book *The Spirit Level,* Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett demonstrate both the extent of inequality and its impact on our physical and mental health.[6] In their follow-up book, *The Inner Level,* which takes a more personal and individual look at the effects of inequality, Wilkinson and Pickett say this:

> Today we live in societies in which worries about how we are seen and judged by others – what psychologists call "the social evaluative threat" – are one of the most serious burdens on the quality and experience of life in rich developed countries. The costs are measured not only in terms of additional stress, anxiety and depression, but also in poorer physical health, in the frequent resort to drink and drugs we use to keep our anxieties at bay, and in the loss of friendly community life which leaves so many people feeling isolated and alone.
>
> Signs of our concern for social appearance are everywhere. It is as if most of us fear being seen for what we are, as if acceptance depended on hiding some awful truth about ourselves: what we really look like, our ignorance, signs of ageing, unemployment, low pay, incipient alcohol dependence, humourlessness, inability to make small talk – in fact anything which might make others view us less positively.[7]

As our sense of ourselves as subjects is undermined, we begin to "lose our voice" – we struggle to make meaning from our lives. And even *that* experience is affected by inequality. Rogers-Vaughn suggests that "although everyone in neoliberalized societies may suffer a reduction of voice, this will be exacerbated by the extreme material inequality in these societies. Moreover, loss of voice will be unequally distributed, with those with fewer material resources being the more severely affected. The inability to narrate one's life, then, participates in the oppressions occurring at the intersections between class, race, gender, sexuality, and other loci of social injustice."[8]

Stated theologically, he says, these conditions are weakening the human soul, that connective tissue linking us together as a human community, as well as to creation and the eternal. Within theological education generally, several scholars have begun to argue that advanced capitalism now poses the most significant threat to the human spirit, to civilisation and to the health of the planet.

In a particularly poignant and urgent passage, Rogers-Vaughn concludes by quoting social epidemiologist Roberto De Vogli:

> It is no coincidence that crises such as climate change and the rapid depletion of natural resources are occurring in combination with other symptoms of social breakdown: rising mental disorders, mindless consumerism, materialistic conformism, status competition, civic disengagement, startling economic inequalities, global financial instability and widespread political inertia. While these crises are usually studied in isolation, they are all interconnected.[9]

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[5] *Ibid.*, 3.

[6] Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone* (London: Penguin, 2010).

[7] Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Inner Level: How More Equal Societies Reduce Stress, Restore Sanity and Improve Everyone's Well-being* (London: Allen Lane, 2018), 5 and 9.

[8] Rogers-Vaughn, *Caring for Souls in a Neoliberal Age*, 125.

[9] Roberto De Vogli, *Progress or Collapse: The Crises of Market Greed* (London: Routledge, 2013), xi–xii, quoted in Rogers-Vaughn, *Caring for Souls in a Neoliberal Age*, 25.

Rethinking our "mission question"

Concluding this exploration of the problem, of "what has happened to us" in our context of global capitalism, it is helpful to pause to ask questions around mission and church. In his book, Rogers-Vaughn turns a self-reflexive gaze upon his own discipline of counselling and psychotherapy. He examines the ways in which it has, in his opinion, colluded with normative neoliberal value systems. It has instilled "adaptation to society (rather than resistance), functioning in accord with the values of production and consumption (rather than communion and wholeness in relation to others and the earth), on symptom relief (rather than meaning-making), and accepting personal responsibility (rather than interdependent reliance within the web of human relationships)".[10] As members of Christian communities, we might ask ourselves similar questions. In what ways have we (intentionally or not) accepted the normative value systems of capitalism? In what ways have we replicated them in our ways of "being church"? Not just in our organisational structures and strategies of mission and evangelism, but in our deeper discipleship and spiritual stories of self? It has been said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. To the extent that this is true, it presents us with a huge challenge to our theological imagination and creativity. Quoting Buddhist philosopher David Loy, Rogers-Vaughn states that "market capitalism… has already become the most successful religion of all time, winning more converts more quickly than any previous belief system or value system in human history".[11] Our mission question must be: what is our prophetic response to this reality?

2. *Building sustainable community*

You will by now see why I described Rogers-Vaughn's book as sobering reading. You will also recall, however, that I suggested with optimism that it also gives us "things to do". Let us move on, then, to a suggested programme for change.

According to Rogers-Vaughn, responding to the sufferings of our age will involve three things:

- The strengthening of human collectives
- The nurturing and increase of soul
- The amplification of hope

In so far as we could see these as three threads in a strategy for renewal, I want to explore them in the context of a model for social change and transformation that I find particularly powerful, and apposite for the needs of our times. That model is community organising, as embraced in the UK by Citizens UK.

For those unfamiliar with community organising, I refer you to the very comprehensive website of Citizens UK and also to the work of theologian Angus Ritchie and his Centre for Theology & Community (CTC) in East London.[12] His introductory pamphlet, which can be found on the CTC website, is entitled *People of Power: How community organising recalls the Church to the vision of the Gospel*.[13]

Community organising is a structured process that brings together grassroots institutions like churches, mosques and schools in a particular town or city to work for action on issues of common concern. It originated in the USA in the 1930s and has been growing in the UK since the 1990s. Perhaps its most famous US advocate is Barack Obama, who has his political roots

[10] Rogers-Vaughn, *Caring for Souls in a Neoliberal Age*, 6.

[11] David R. Loy, "The Religion of the Market," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65, no. 2 (1997): 276, quoted in Rogers-Vaughn, *Caring for Souls in a Neoliberal Age*, 79.

[12] http://www.citizensuk.org/, http://www.theology-centre.org/

[13] Angus Ritchie, *People of Power: How community organising recalls the Church to the vision of the Gospel* (London: The Centre for Theology & Community, 2018), http://www.theology-centre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/People-of-Power-.pdf.

in the practice of organising in the city of Chicago and famously used organising methodologies to encourage marginalised people to register to vote as part of his first successful presidential campaign.

My own engagement with Citizens UK began when I was deputy director of mission (social justice) for the Diocese of Oxford. Entering into a strategic partnership with Citizens UK was a crucial part of the diocesan common vision strategy to "make a bigger difference in the world". The diocese and Citizens are currently building broad-based alliances of institutions in Oxford and Reading, to work with the pre-existing Citizens Milton Keynes, as Thames Valley Citizens. Several other dioceses in England and Wales also have fruitful strategic partnerships with Citizens UK, as do some Methodist districts, and local churches of many denominations are member institutions of local broad-based alliances.

As a long-term practical theologian of social justice, I recognise community organising as particularly valuable for two reasons. Firstly, it goes beyond the usual Christian activities (laudable as these are) of mitigating the effects of structural injustice and moves to asking the question of what the underlying structural causes of food insecurity, homelessness and poverty are. Food banks, winter night shelters and soup kitchens have their place as a means of emergency support to those who are struggling, but it is vital that the deeper issues of structural cause are addressed. Secondly, community organising builds broad-based alliances. These are relational and ongoing alliances, not built as a means to an end (as some issue-focused campaign groups can be) but to establish long-term relationships for the common good.

In short, community organising starts from an awareness that while the market and the state are organised for power and success (not least, to make money), the so-called Third Sector is not organised to anything like the same extent. Collectives of all kinds have waned in importance under neoliberalism, and this has weakened participatory democracy and undermined ways of building "people power".

Community organising aims to address issues of social injustice through a distinct methodology and discipline. It seeks to build long-term relationships between these institutions and groups that work to the common good. These institutions together find particular issues and concerns they can work on together. They organise their people and their money to build power and to develop relationships that will bring about long-term change. It begins with listening to people – their passions and their concerns – through systematic listening campaigns built on 1-2-1 conversations. "The 1-2-1" is a basic building block of organising – it is an intentional conversation where the agenda is the other person, being attentive to the building of common "self-interest". A "power analysis" is conducted in order to take effective action on particular injustices, and there is a constant focus on developing leaders who can testify to their experience. Community organising defines leaders as those closest to the injustice, who are often those otherwise marginalised and oppressed by systems of power. These leaders and paid organisers work together to develop campaigns that are winnable and incremental, ensuring that change is won in a way that empowers these leaders and builds agency. Turnout is an important measure of these campaigns because power depends on the number of people supporting a particular change, and there is always a focus on the development of people as leaders following the mantra "people before programme". Broad-based alliances of diverse institutions evolve that are constantly listening to those in their communities through 1-2-1s such that their institutions are strengthened, and they become part of a long-term "collective of collectives". The power of these citizen alliances comes through the number and diversity of people that the alliance represents. This broad-based alliance works to an annual cycle of action for change but can also respond quickly to crises and challenges such as influxes of refugees, the pandemic, major disasters or crimes in local communities. Member organisations pay dues, which ensures that the alliance is independent of any body from whom it may wish to win changes.

I will now turn to explore how community organising addresses each of Bruce Rogers-Vaughn's three responses,.

Collectives

Somewhat counter-culturally, community organising focuses on institutions rather than individuals. As Angus Ritchie explains:

> Institutions attract a lot of suspicion, some of it justified. But an institution just is the set of structured relationships which emerge when human beings agree to be faithful to one another across time. That is what a Scout group, trade union, marriage and mosque have in common. It is one of the characteristic myths of our culture that such commitments restrict our freedom. In fact, our institutions are vital to our freedom. They enable us to build relationships of solidarity and trust across boundaries of age, race and religion. Without them, we are isolated individuals, and our lives and communities are dominated even more by the power of the market and the state.[14]

Rogers-Vaughn's analysis also takes us back to the importance of institutions. He comments, "Prior to neoliberalism, domination was exercised by means of the disciplinary powers of institutions. Today domination occurs through the suppression of these institutions. Prior to neoliberalism, domination required replacing a particular type of subject with a new form of subject. Today it occurs through the fragmentation and dispersal of the subject altogether."[15] Thus he maintains that "It is my judgment that the primary challenge for pastoral care, psychotherapy, social activism, and other approaches to caring for souls today is not the effort to fix discrete personal problems or even to redress specific injustices. It is, rather, to aid people, individually and collectively, in finding their footing—to articulate the deep meanings that ground their lives and to strengthen healthy collectives and social movements that hold some residue of transcendental values. These constitute the fundamental resources for addressing whatever ongoing crises people may be enduring under the new chronic."[16]

This is a practical theology in which the pastoral is embraced within the political because the oppression of our age works through every aspect of who we are and who we consider ourselves to be. It points our congregations towards both strengthening our relationality within, while simultaneously reaching out to build relationships with other collectives that can work with us to resist "the world as it is", and work towards "the world as it should be" (a key watchword of community organising).

The particular challenge of our time, characterised as it is by deep division and political polarisation and fragmentation, is to rekindle the concept of "solidarity". We need to press through our differences and work beyond the boundaries of our identity categories. Rogers-Vaughn explains that if the problems of class exploitation, sexism and racism arise together, then they must be addressed together. He explains, "This is a peculiar sort of solidarity, a common life rooted not in sameness, but on a deep respect, obligation to, and thus love for, the infinite and unique value of every individual. This is the solidarity that sustains soul."[17]

Angus Ritchie echoes this commitment to engaging with the whole gamut of humanity when he says:

> [T]he questions at the heart of a one-to-one… are questions Christians ought to be comfortable asking. Organising around citizens' "self-interest" does not involve organising around their selfishness. Rather, it honours their actual values and concerns – focusing on the realities of their lives and commitments, rather than talking in the language of vague and abstract ideas. And in the process of building relationships with our neighbours, and taking action with them for the good of our

[14] Ritchie, *People of Power*, 14.
[15] Rogers-Vaughn, *Caring for Souls in a Neoliberal Age*, 122.
[16] *Ibid.*, 128.
[17] *Ibid.*, 215.

> families and communities, we discover our hearts are expanded, and our "self-interest" becomes less and less self-absorbed. In losing our lives, we find them.[18]

In a broad-based community organising alliance, building across different religions and beliefs is crucial. Nobody is asked to "leave their beliefs at the door" or to abandon the distinctiveness of their convictions. Action is taken only on issues that everyone can agree on, and "What is surprising is just how much diverse groups can agree on and – also how different groups can learn from one another without diluting their own core beliefs. For example, the seriousness with which Muslims take Qu'ranic teachings on usury has inspired Christians to engage at a greater depth with Biblical teaching on these issues – and so churches and mosques have been at the heart of a successful community organising campaign for a legal cap on the interest rates of pay day loans."[19]

Soul

The community organising vision is an embodied and practical vision. Those approaching the activity from a theological perspective are working from a place of incarnation, and a Magnificat vision of justice. It has echoes of Henry Scott Holland, who declared, "The more you believe in the incarnation, the more you care about drains", or John Wesley's invocation to "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can." The "soul" of the book title Caring for Souls in a Neoliberal Age is not akin to the individual "spirit" as conceived of by capitalist-inspired individualist spiritualities. Neither is it the "spirit" that Christian theology has historically hived off from the body when under the influence of dualistic cosmologies. The soul that Rogers-Vaughn suggests we need to increase inhabits a collective home. Indeed, he argues that individuality, because it is dependent upon soul, arises only in a communal context. You cannot be an individual without first being part of community. Soul, he says, is "the quite substantial fabric that weaves us all together and with all that is. We are all entangled."... "Soul inhabits a collective body, a body that exhales hope."[20]

Hope

How is hope amplified in this re-emphasis on collectives and the embracing of soul as the fabric that weaves us together in those collectives? I think in two ways at least: firstly, and perhaps paradoxically, in the articulation of pain and suffering, and secondly in the discovery that change is possible, and we are not powerless.

Rogers-Vaughn says that like physical pain, psychological, relational, and spiritual suffering has a function – it calls us to take action to address a threat or a problem. Sufferings insist on finding a voice. He suggests that, "I (and we) have learned that, when unheeded, pain produces and structures alienation, injustice, ignorance, division, and isolation into our individual and collective lives.... I (we) have also learned that, when articulated and heard, pain may yield and structure connection, continuity, integrity, justice, and direction into our individual and collective lives."[21] We know that civil unrest arises often after many years of particular groups feeling that they cannot express their pain – and that if they could, nobody would listen and nothing would change.

Community organising gives a structure for both pain and joy to be articulated. There is the 1-2-1 listening, which can be characterised as "compassionate curiosity". There are "house meetings", which are small group conversations to further explore the dynamics and nuances of common issues that emerge from 1-2-1s (for example: "I worry about my child being injured outside his school because there is no zebra crossing"; "I can't afford to buy enough food

[18] Ritchie, *People of Power*, 13.
[19] *Ibid.*, 18
[20] Rogers-Vaughn, *Caring for Souls in a Neoliberal Age*, 174, 236.
[21] *Ibid.*, 5.

because my wages are too low"). Then, when a campaign for a specific change is being undertaken, the practice of "giving testimony" is at the heart of making the "ask" to those in power. Leaders bear witness to the issues that are affecting them – sometimes to audiences of 10 or 20; sometimes to hundreds and thousands ("My child was injured by a car outside her school: this is what it felt like, and this is how it affected my life"; "I work long hours to provide for my family, yet I do not earn enough to put food on the table. I feel that I am failing them. If I were paid the real Living Wage by my employer, it would radically affect my family and my self-esteem"). This is done through structured support. It can be both therapeutic and also political. Giving voice is, in itself, resistance.

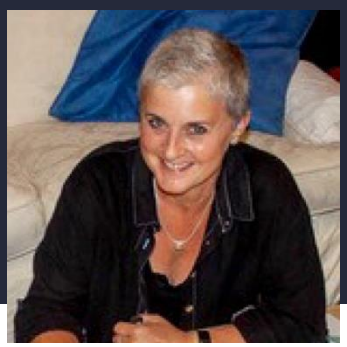
Of course, such activity is most effective when those with the power to make change respond positively. To win can be life-transforming. It builds hope and agency. It empowers, and draws people of all ages further into a form of participatory democracy that is a constant process of learning. We learn about power: who has the power to make the change we want to see (it may be a private employer who can decide to pay the real Living Wage, a local authority who can invest in a zebra crossing outside a school, a housing association that can respond more quickly to people's housing conditions); we learn about the power and influence we do have, as a collective, in making our "ask" (we have the power to vote for you or not to vote for you, to use your services or to go elsewhere, to enable you to have more constructive conversations and contact with your local residents); we learn effective ways to negotiate with power holders (when to compromise and when to hold out, how to agitate, how to keep up momentum through action, how to use powerful symbolic acts to draw attention to our cause).

These and many other things are what citizens can learn through community organising activities. Engaging with organising through our faith groups can enable spiritual growth and renewal as we reflect together on our actions for change – how they are transforming us and widening the horizons of those we call our neighbours and friends. Most of all, in the face of an edifice called "the world as it is" (however that looks to us), we have a place to start in working with others towards "the world as it should be".

Conclusion

The call from Rogers-Vaughn is to do urgent things to challenge the individualism and competition at the heart of neoliberalism and stand up to the injustices it perpetuates. Community organising offers one such means to do this, seeking to "reweave the fabric of civil society".[22] The approach of Citizens UK develops the solidarity we need to overcome individualism through building long-term relationships for the common good by bringing institutions together, improving those institutions and helping them to serve their members rather than bring domination. It develops an embodied, soulful approach to practical action by giving us a communal basis from which to act. And community organising brings hope in the naming of the pain and joy – not settling for the world as it is but seeking to act in keeping with the world as it should be.

[22] Séverine Deneulin, Dilwar Hussein and Angus Ritchie, "Citizen organising: reweaving the fabric of civil society?", *The Centre for Theology & Community*, http://www.theology-centre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/ritchieetal.pdf.



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Exploring apophatic approaches to mission: a conversation between Janet Williams and Richard Passmore

This is an edited transcript of a conversation that took place in April 2022 as part of a CMS Conversations Day. Richard Passmore invited Janet to be part of the Conversations Day as having heard her speak and read her book *Seeking the God Beyond*,[1] he was intrigued to explore how the apophatic tradition connected with pioneering missional practice and in particular practice rooted in an openness to journey with God and others to a new place.

Richard: Your work on the apophatic tradition gave me a language to start to describe the approach to mission I've been doing for the last 15 years, and I've been slowly trying to understand the concepts ever since and I'm loving the process. So, we're going to explore this topic a bit more conversationally. Janet's going to introduce herself and give a bit of an introduction and then I'm going to ask her questions that stem out of my missional practice, but it might help people to ground the notions of what apophatic theology is. Janet, over to you.

Janet: Thank you. It was great to listen to Israel opening the day by raising some really powerful questions: what does justice look like in a world that's built on the proceeds of colonialism and heading toward climate catastrophe, and how do we draw on African approaches to refresh our understanding of the unity of life? What can we do in practice to live out our callings as witnesses to hope, the stewards of God creation? We all know that Israel could have said some much harsher things than he did about the way our inherited religious life has encouraged injustice and about the way we deal with injustice, so here we are at a time when change is urgently necessary. So the question is, where can we find the resources to be faithful as ministers and stewards in this time? And my guess is that you invited me partly because you have this intuition that the resources of the apophatic tradition are helpful because they relate to a spirituality of not knowing.

For me, the core of the apophatic tradition is the search for God: it's as simple as that. It could be defined as the discipline of standing still long enough that God can have contact with us. To be really simplistic about it: if you want to get to know someone, broadly speaking there are two ways you can go about it. One is – you can find people who can talk about them or write about them or paint a picture of them; or alternatively you can hang about where they are likely to show up, in the hope of meeting. The point is this: when I want to get to know a person, if I spend too much time letting others tell me about them, I'll end up seeing the

[1] J. P. Williams, *Seeking the God Beyond: A Beginner's Guide to Christian Apophatic Spirituality* (Norwich: SCM Press, 2018).

person through their eyes, and my perception will become blinkered in a way by other people's perceptions.

We know about confirmation bias, don't we – so when I initially meet that person the things that they do that chime with what I've already been told will ring loud, and eventually instead of meeting the real person I find that what I have met is the person I expected to meet – and that's the way relationships go sour very quickly. So, being aware of that danger, at the point where I am going to meet that person, I need to set aside what I've been told about them in order to come with an open mind; I need to un-know what I've been told. The same goes, of course, for meeting people for the second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth time as well; in exactly the same way, my memories and expectations and processing of prior meetings can act as a blinker against the new encounter. The paradox is that the more you get to know a person, the more you realise that you don't know the person. With persons, human beings and, it turns out, God, there isn't a finite set of facts. The more you know someone, the more you see that there are as yet untapped depths in them – which is why people who've been friends for 30 years or people who've been spouses or who've been parents for a really long time are more likely to say "I really don't know you" than someone who's only met you a couple of times and is quite content with the little they know.

So, if that's true with human beings, it is of course more true of God who is bigger – infinite! – and so we can't ever end our process of getting to know God. When it comes to talking about God, there's a great joy in sharing everything that we've learned; but there's also great danger in talking about God, and I want to highlight two dangers that the apophatic tradition is really strong on. First, when we claim to know something about God or we claim to know God, whether we like it or not that's a power-claim; if it's true it means that we can speak with insight, that we can speak with some authority. It means that we're claiming to be able to see by the light of God, to see the truth about ourselves and the world. From our knowledge of God we're empowered to speak about God, but all too quickly that can become a power over others, and it can constrain or silence their voices – so we need to be really careful about how we talk about God.

Second, when we have some experience of God and we speak out of that, our experience of God is rightly precious, isn't it? We go back to these moments for comfort, and we reflect on them deeply, but the way the human heart works is we start all too quickly to defend our precious insights and to set them apart and to deflect criticism from them, don't we? And soon, before we know it, we've got this holy treasure – like a beautiful thing on a mantlepiece – and we've polished it and we've made a special place for it and we've kept it safe from harm. You know what the word for that is? It's an idol – and we start to worship that instead of the God that it purportedly represents.

I think we can all point to examples in our own experiences where those dangers have been real, and we can point to the way that they've exacerbated the current crises that we face. So we need to make a determined effort to go beyond the God of human projection, to go beyond the God of human speaking, to go beyond the God of past experience, and to encounter holy reality. The apophatic tradition is about setting aside all those beautiful things in search of the more beautiful thing that is the God who is ever ancient, ever new – the apophatic tradition has some insights as to how we do that. So how do you move from sharing lots of exciting talk and dealing with the danger of that to hanging about in the hope of holy encounter, the real meeting with God? The Bible tells us that holy encounters happen in places like deserts, in places like dark clouds at the tops of mountains (that was Moses' experience), by burning bushes when you've got no shoes on, in valleys of dry bones (Ezekiel), and there's a set of thematic spiritual disciplines that come out of that. All of those places are spaces of vulnerability where we find that the resources that usually carry us through familiar places become burdens that need to be put down because they no longer fit. We find ourselves stumbling around, not quite sure where we're going, stubbing our toes in the dark, getting smoke in our eyes – all those kinds of things and spaces are quite perilous: mountain tops are things you can fall off, they have crevices you can fall down; burning bushes have real flames that hurt if you get too close.

The apophatic spiritual tradition coming out of the Bible (and developed much more richly in eastern Christianity than in post-Reformation western Christianity, which is why you may not have heard of it) says that not knowing has always been part of God's plan. This is because God wants us to meet God, and not just to pontificate about God; that exile, wilderness and fiery furnaces are places where God is present and drawing us further towards God's self and that, in fact, it's sometimes God who takes us into those places. Vulnerability and surrender, not knowing where you're going and giving away any claim to power is and always has been a way of God. This is the way of the cross! The apophatic tradition maintains that all of those things, which are difficult and disempowering and not socially convenient, are bearable – even desirable – because that's the way that many of us find ourselves drawn into the wilderness of the unexpected encounter with God.

Richard: I've got a whole series of questions to ask but I want to draw a little bit on some of my practice particularly before I moved to Cumbria. Part of the work that has always shaped my missional practice has been Vincent Donovan, the "What does it mean to go to a new place that neither you or they have been before?",[2] reiterated by Koyama, who wrote *Water Buffalo Theology* (a more eastern view of Donovan),[3] and also E. Stanley Jones, *The Christ of the Indian Road*, and liberation theology.[4] They were all basically discovering a kind of apophatic language; they were discovering a way to talk about God that was new to them, leaving the language of the God they knew, to discover something being revealed, and I'm not sure whether it was a knowing or a feeling. So I was trying to place that idea of going to a new place in the practice of contemporary youth ministry with young people, and from this we developed what we called the Church of Flow because I asked a skater, "What does it feel like when you skate and ride?" and he said, "You just forget all the **** of life and you flow." So I said, "Well, I think that's God, but maybe we can go on a pilgrimage to discover what that means." So there was always that tentative language, but I was always trapped between this idea of knowing what I should say (or what I have been told by others to say about God) and feeling my way forward to a new place. So much so that at one point back in the early 2000s, when Jonny Baker asked me to do some teaching on mission and what we were kind of discovering with Flow, I said, "You can't teach it, you just feel it," and it's really hard to describe. But I think the apophatic begins to give some language to that feeling – does that make sense to people? Janet, can you talk a bit about that?

Janet: Yes, it's a different kind of knowing; you might say "beyond knowing", or "un-knowing". There's something about the kind of intellectual knowing that so quickly solidifies into something almost concrete, that then starts to have a weight of its own and to pull us away from God.

A couple of things: first, if you're looking for a spirituality that says it's okay to leave behind what you've already known and loved, then the apophatic tradition will help you to do that. It will give you a sense of comfort, that this has always been part of our spiritual tradition. It is not us suddenly saying, "Oh, at this point in our history we just need to give up on the past and move forward"!

And then, why did Christ give us a meal rather than a book? Because you have to eat it, digest it, excrete it and have another one; that's the point of meals! This is the rhythm of our faith, to come and be fed afresh all the time. At one level, this is a great reassurance; it's also endlessly challenging and I love it for that reason. I grew up in an environment where you got the impression that faith was fragile and you had to protect it; people were always terribly concerned about losing it, denying it, damaging it or something like that. For the apophatic tradition, faith in God is robust; you can question it, you can experiment with it, you can walk around it – you don't have to be so careful of it in that way.

[2] Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered: An Epistle from the Masai* (London: SCM Press, 2019).
[3] Kōsuke Koyama, *Water Buffalo Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999).
[4] E. Stanley Jones, *The Christ of the Indian Road* (New York: Abingdon Press, 2010).

All of our language about God can feed us up to a point and then fails us if we try to push it too far, just as there comes a time when you've exhausted the calorific content of a meal and there's nothing to do except excrete what's left and move on to the next one. There are things that we know we say about God and things that in the past we've done in relation to God that we can see the inadequacy of. For instance, childish notions of God as living on a cloud somewhere beyond the sun: we all know that's lovely up to a point, and then you do actually need to go beyond. Or notions of God as someone who will always keep me safe. However, the apophatic tradition won't stop telling you to put down your ideas about God; there will come a point for all of us where that starts to feel adventurous. If you go to some of the classic texts, they'll tell you, for example, that calling God good also needs to go. Meister Eckhart said, "No one can speak of God or know God. Accordingly, if I say that 'God is good', this is not true.... If I say again that 'God is wise', then this too is not true.... Or if I say that 'God exists', this is also not true. He is being beyond being: he is a nothingness beyond being. Therefore [Eckhart then quotes Augustine] 'The finest thing that we can say of God is to be silent concerning him from the wisdom of inner riches.' Be silent therefore, and do not chatter about God, for by chattering about him you tell lies."[5] That's very challenging, isn't it? And the apophatic tradition is quite good at that kind of really pointed challenge. Jesus was quite good at that pointed challenge as well, wasn't he, in many ways? So, the lovely place where you land with Vincent Donovan and all the other friends as you discover a language will be for a time.

Richard: So that's the bit that I want to move on to. So, for me, I would put that Donovan piece all against the notion of faith improvisation; I draw on the Bible, culture and the tradition and then I'm back to language and I'm back to quite defined knowns, and then alongside that I'm being quite experimental. So if you can imagine a skate park with a bunch of stoned skaters, and asking them to lie underneath the tree and be silent and then tell me what colour their silence is. At one level I've got this kind of known-ness; at another level I've got this un-known-ness and I'm trying to hold the tension between them, but in order to have the conversation I have to talk about the known-ness. So beyond silence as a kind of mechanism – what can we gleam from the apophatic tradition to help us practice mission in these tensions?

Janet: One of the best things I ever heard Jonny Baker say was, "Imagination is the missional muscle we most need to exercise." When you realise that words and ideas can become that kind of blinker, taking you down the road of idolatry if you hold too strongly to them instead of to the open-hearted encounter with the living God, the most obvious thing to do is to move into silence. So many of us find silence is so helpful these days; so many people are hungry for it. You're absolutely right, then: under the trees – notice the colour of the silence – that is such a powerful thing to do.

But silence can also be abusive; we will work with many people whose experience is of being silenced rather than of finding the release of silence. So the other thing that the apophatic tradition does is to use words against words, to use words to disrupt words in exactly the same way as people do when they go on a protest march with their banners. Words can be used to disrupt power claims and the way to do that is by playful, imaginative, exuberant use of words – in poetry and parable and paradox and story, and all the kinds of talking that can't easily be crystallised into something that is constrictive. It's supposing instead of telling, it's asking instead of answering, it's reflecting instead of explaining. My imagination keeps running back to one of the most powerful Biblical texts for the apophatic tradition, to the Song of Songs, which uses the metaphor of intimate encounter as a way of talking about our encounter with God. It seems to me that there are two things that very often happen when you find yourself up close and personal with the one you love the most. One is that you shut up because there are times when talking is not what's required but actual just presence, exploratory presence and mutual revelling is what's required. The other thing is, we talk – don't we? And we don't just talk, we write poetry, we sing love songs, we say the same stupid things over and over again and we develop silly names for one another, and language becomes playful and

[5] Meister Eckhart, *Selected Writings*, trans. Oliver Davies (London: Penguin Classics, 1994), sermon 28, 236.

creative. So, silence and then playful, creative and imaginative use of language to draw people in rather than sit them down and tell them.

Richard: OK, confession time, in order to practice my imagination – I have a fake Twitter account called Mr Pink Umbrella, a fake tour guide who gives random facts on images, and I do it deliberately to train my imagination. My daughter loves it and hates it, but I think there's a whole series of tricks that we need to use. As we close I want to think about the sustainability question. So although I hadn't discovered the apophatic stuff back in the day, I borrowed the idea of Sobornost from a theologian called Lossky, who was an eastern theologian. Sobornost is the idea about "many people heading in the same direction together". As I was leaving our work in Somerset, we were at a funeral for a young person who died and there were about 30 of us together in the pub afterwards; and they were wanting to take a picture as it's the first time they were all in suits. One of the lads turns to me and says, "We might be the most dysfunctional family in Chard but we're family," and that sense of togetherness, it was a thin moment and it suddenly released all the pressure of "we've got to be this" or "we've got to be that". It was playful language that captured where we were. So that was a bit of the eastern theology that helped me be sustainable, but it wasn't until they put it into words that I put two and two together and understood just how far we had come. So I wonder, how can the apophatic help sustain us in the work that we're doing is the final question.

Janet: This last term I've been teaching contemplative spirituality. If you teach something on a regular basis, every time the time comes to do it again, you think, "OK, what needs to be different now, what does this season require and what do these people require?" As I thought about it this term I thought, I have to make room for the connection between contemplative spirituality and activism, which is I think very pertinent to your question. So I invited Keith Hebden to come and talk – Keith wrote a fabulous book called *Re-enchanting The Activist* and his background in activism is enormously impressive.[6] If you're an activist, you need to keep your roots somewhere where they're going to be fed and nourished – so I knew that would be his link between contemplative spirituality and activism. But what really surprised me was that it was apophatic spirituality that he kept coming back to, for two reasons. The first thing is knowing it's OK to feel, "My gosh, I'm hanging on to this by my fingertips and I don't know where I'm going and it's all a bit out of control really" – that it's always been like that. This insight is embedded in the Bible and throughout our traditions. So, there's a kind of comfort in that: yes, it's terrifying, but this is God's way. The second thing is it's just the sheer excitement. There is no spiritual tradition as clear as the apophatic tradition in saying that your journey into God never ends; God is always, as St Augustine says, "ever ancient, ever new," taking seriously the infinity of God. So, on the one hand, we have the revelation of God in Christ and in biblical witness, but that isn't a matter of "and that, ladies and gentlemen, is everything about God!" It's merely the foretaste to get you into the banquet, and the God we meet is just endlessly fascinating. It's swimming in deep water, so there's just the sheer adventure of it and the comfort of not knowing – that's my understanding of it.

Richard: That's great. Thank you so much. That adventure bit really connects with me. Something I haven't mentioned is around the notion of missional spirituality so, for me, I'm not so good at the silence myself and all of that kind of stuff – but I love the adventure and I find the silence and stillness in the adventure, and there is something quite sustaining in that as well. Thank you very much, Janet. I really recommend her book.

Janet: Thank you! If you're looking for a book on apophatic spirituality then *Seeking the God Beyond* might fit the bill.[7] But if you want a book on mission that just happens to be really

[6] Keith Hebden, *Re-Enchanting the Activist: Spirituality and Social Change* (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2016).
[7] Williams, *Seeking the God Beyond*.

wise about apophatic spirituality, then I thoroughly recommend Paul Bradbury's *Home by Another Route* – chapter 3 makes the connection with apophatic spirituality brilliantly.[8]

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[8] Paul Bradbury, *Home by Another Route: Reimagining Today's Church* (Abingdon: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 2019).

Beyond measure: evaluating the impact of pioneering

Tina Hodgett

It has always struck me as arrogant to try to measure the outcomes of pioneering initiatives, as though the church were trying to control and direct God, or tell a blackberry bush how many blackberries it should produce, or if it should produce strawberries instead.

"My ways are not your ways," says the Lord in Isaiah 55:8. "Neither are my thoughts your thoughts. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."[1]

At a time when the thoughts of the Christian church are limited, stuck in the tramlines of Christendom presuppositions, this majestic and thunderous pronouncement offers hope of a fresh imagination for the church. The idea that we can navigate ourselves via management approaches into a new paradigm of what church can be for the next decade or century through the efforts of our own human brains seems foolish. What we need to do is to hang onto the coat-tails of the wild, unpredictable, unfathomably knowing Holy Spirit and see where that journey lands us up. It requires of the church an absolute willingness to abandon itself to God's thoughts as they are revealed, and to follow God's pathways as we begin to discern them.

This has always been the territory on which the pioneer innovator space of the pioneer spectrum has pitched its tent.[2] Pioneer innovators head out into a given context with a vision or intuition as to what might happen there. Such a vision or intuition is usually a very approximate download of God's intention for the shape of the local mission; the accuracy of the download is limited not by God's capacity to communicate but by our human capability to absorb an idea that extends beyond the existing mental models held in human brains of what is possible.

I'd like to offer a story from my personal life to illustrate what I believe happens in this kind of situation. On holiday in Nepal I woke up on my first night with a bright pink plastic jelly shoe running up my body. Or at least that's what my brain told me was happening; it had no mental model to tell me what was actually happening: that a small gecko was exploring the strange creature in its home (me). My brain did its best to interpret the sensory information it was receiving and convey it to me in terms that were familiar.

I think when God shares the thoughts of the Godhead with us, our brains try to interpret this information via existing mental models. The message we receive serves well enough to set our direction and give us a sense of where we are headed, but we cannot know the exact shape of what is in God's mind nor know in full the direction of the journey, the people or environment it will impact, how it will impact them or what the long-term effects of this

[1] Isa. 55:8–9 (KJV).

[2] *Pioneer Spectrum*, www.pioneerspectrum.com.

mission will be. Nor can we know how the various missional ventures over time will interrelate, affect each other and create a new paradigm of church.

It is for this reason I resist the impulse to measure outcomes in pioneering in the innovator space. In the Diocese of Bath and Wells nine full-time paid pioneers were appointed to five-year posts within a culture change initiative that was itself pioneering. Each of these nine posts took between six months and a year to work up to a point of advertising a role. It was agreed that the progress of each post would be evaluated against a timeline based on early understandings of the shape and pace of development of pioneer initiatives. Some concrete outcomes were attached to the first post advertised, in terms of numbers of people becoming disciples, but this soon proved unhelpful to the postholder and the mission as a whole: local residents found the information on the internet in the role description, felt it was threatening, and withdrew goodwill from their pioneer neighbour.

The process for setting up each pioneer role was roughly as follows. An individual – usually an ordained person with previous personal experience of being a pioneer or overseeing a pioneer – would propose a context for one of the posts. A long period of context mapping followed, as well as consultation with other local church leaders, community groups and influencers, and conversations with church congregations. Alongside this, the advocate and guardian of the pioneer initiative encouraged people to pray and dream and discern what the Holy Spirit was saying about the possible nature, direction and aims of the post. The role description would go through several iterations and was subject to numerous processes of consultation. Eventually a role would be advertised, followed by a rigorous application procedure, then an appointment, and subsequently a year of listening by the pioneer themselves.

It has been interesting to observe how very differently each of the posts has developed from how they were foreseen in the role description. Without doubt, all the pioneers are actively engaged in the community, discerning the divine breadcrumb trail, growing relationships with those beyond the walls of the church, and laying foundations that have the potential to grow new worshipping communities that will in turn grow new disciples (some of this is already happening two years in). The first six posts, however (those which have developed sufficiently for observers to make a judgement), have developed in unforeseen directions. Partly owing to the pandemic, five of these are building their public presence outdoors; during the appointment process there was no suggestion of this possible route of pioneering in any of them.

In this innovator space a pioneer has no control and little influence over any of the variables, most of which are human. The pandemic was unprecedented, but one of the features of being a guest in an environment is that any number of factors make a pioneer trajectory more like a that of a ball bearing in a pinball machine than a smooth growth curve from A to B. The posture of a pioneer in the innovator space is one of laying aside the natural desire for tangible results, managing the need to justify one's existence, trusting in the faithfulness of the God whose ways are often swathed in mystery, waiting to be surprised by the unexpected divine intervention from left field that may reveal a deeper purpose, and much greater commitment to a wide-angle kingdom outcome over a longer time span than could be humanly anticipated.

Having observed this characteristic of pioneering in the innovator space over four years, and experienced it myself at first hand as pioneer team vicar in an Anglican parish, I have come to the conviction that the focus of evaluation should take place at the beginning rather than the end of such initiatives, thus allowing them to escape the restrictive measurement values placed on them by our limited perspective on what mission is and what God might have conceived for it beyond our utilitarian imaginings.

Three of the models that are offered to us for church in the New Testament – the vine, the human body and the Temple – depend on optimum environmental conditions at the start of their life for healthy growth. The vine requires the right soil, climate and position to grow. A human baby needs a mother who fashions her daily routine around creating a healthy,

hospitable and nourishing environment to maximise the baby's well-being at birth. A temple needs its foundations to be laid in an appropriate situation according to engineering principles that will ensure the remaining structure will stand firm for generations. In each of these circumstances, the quality of the preparation period is a good predictor of future health and sustainability.

Taking the planting metaphor further, the Royal Horticultural Society website outlines all the factors a gardener needs to take into account when putting a new plant into the ground. These include choosing the right soil, including drainage, level of nourishment and acidity. It requires considering the position of the plant in relation to sunlight and ensuring the local climate will allow it to flourish. It's important to plant at the right depth, and to provide something for a climber to grow up. The RHS advice is to not over-fertilise the plant: not to rush, hurry or force it to grow as results will be rare for two to three years while the plants grow good root systems. It reassures the gardener not to worry if the plants die: "it may be due to nothing that you could have controlled".[3]

Given the unpredictability of the outcomes of pioneering in the innovator space – the unpredictability of the timing, scope, direction and character of the work – it seems logical to focus the evaluative lens on the process of how an initiative came into being (if it is a grassroots initiative started by a pioneer independently of any organisation) or on how it was set up (if part of an organisational strategy or programme).

If time has been given to prayerful discernment, consulting with relevant stakeholders including those on the margins, researching the local context, learning from other initiatives in similar situations, and allowing the base hypothesis incorporated in the proposed initiative to be scrutinised and amended as appropriate, then all these factors will help establish a positive foundation from which healthy outcomes are likely. If a pioneer leads on the initiative who has the vision, gifts, skills, spiritual maturity and personal support to engage in God's mission, this stands as another factor in doing everything to ensure that the mission flourishes even when the God-ordained desired outcomes may be hidden from view.

It may seem naïve and even irresponsible to focus evaluation on the early stages of the project rather than on the end, but the metaphors from gardening, agriculture and the natural world (a source of rich wisdom for Jesus in the Gospels) suggest that a plant with the DNA to grow a particular kind of fruit will normally do so if the conditions are right. The reason for a particularly fruitful or disappointing harvest will often be at best speculative. A pioneer goes out with the intention of joining in with God in God's mission, attuned to follow where the Holy Spirit leads and committed to follow that call to the best of their human ability, however twisty the path or apparently fruitless the harvest. Judging the outcome in a framework determined by human standards of success risks putting God in a box, disempowering pioneers and limiting the possibilities of mission.

[3] Susan Appleget Hurst, "Grow the Most Gorgeous Perennials Year After Year with These 11 Essential Tips," *Better Homes & Gardens*, 30 March 2022, https://www.bhg.com/gardening/flowers/perennials/how-to-grow-healthy-plants/. Other advice fromrhs.org.uk.

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Beyond measure

By Paul Bradbury

Pioneers and pioneering often feel caught in a system of measurement that is built for a different paradigm of missional ecclesiology. It's said that "if all you have is a hammer, everything starts to look like a nail". Current normative church metrics often feel like that hammer. Frameworks of measurement imposed without reflection on pioneers, many of whom are not using models but evolving processes to enable mission and church formation, can leave pioneers feeling like they are having to conform to the assumptions of a different system. Furthermore, these measurement frameworks that focus on the measures of mature church, such as attendance and giving, overlook more relational and transformational outcomes in the work of many pioneers. Numbers don't tell the whole story. Often, they don't allow space for any stories at all.

In this short article I want to explore why we are so committed to the systems of measurement that dominate church life at the moment. I am probing at the philosophical and theological assumptions that underpin the paradigm of measurement that prioritises the hard data of attendance and financial strength. Having done this, the article then makes some suggestions for a healthier approach to measurement that puts these metrics in the wider context of disclosure and evaluation.

Measurement and modernity I – growth as a higher good

In his book *The Congregation in a Secular Age*,[1] Andrew Root explores the challenge for church in keeping up with the culture of late modernity and its need for constant growth and acceleration. Drawing on philosophers Hartmut Rosa and Charles Taylor, Root examines religion and modernity through the lens of time. He argues that western culture has become disconnected from the moral and spiritual traditions that formed it and in so doing has become "emptied" of any sense of sacred time. Charles Taylor described the development of modernity as a move towards an "immanent frame" – that is, to a perspective on our experience that has no account of the transcendent.[2] In the same way time has become disengaged from any sense of an eternal framework, or story with a beginning and an end. Time is not moving towards any eternally held *telos* but reduced to an endless series of identical moments that must be freighted with all our anticipated and desired experience. Time is not held as gift within the fullness of who God is but must be acted on by us as human agents. Time is nothing more than another resource to be utilised towards our own ends.

The consequence of the utilitarian view of time is the hardwiring of growth and acceleration in modernist culture. We have become accustomed to seeing growth and acceleration as goods in and of themselves. We are nothing if we are not busy, and busier than we were before. Organisations likewise judge by virtue of their growth against past performance and that of others. The "higher goods" of growth and acceleration must then be served by the resources needed to improve them. People and money become resources subservient to

[1] Andrew Root, *The Congregation in a Secular Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2021).
[2] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MI: Harvard University Press, 2007).

these outcomes. And the church is not immune to this reality. Many churches looking to engage with the culture around them embody the values of growth and acceleration. To engage relevantly with a culture high on busyness, churches seek to be busy places too.

Root probes the "double bind" created by the logic of late modernity in which the church has become entangled. A "double bind" that means that we present churches as busy places in which growth is happening, while at the same time we find ourselves struggling to compete in a saturated market for the time and resources of our congregations to fuel continued growth.

Regarding measurement, the point is this: the system that much of the modern church is engaged in is one that prizes growth and busyness. Metrics that focus on the resources of people and money are what you would expect from a system built on these values. They are proxies for an ecclesiology dependent on growth. But is growth a "higher good" for the church?

Measurement and modernity II – the hall of mirrors

In his book *The Master and His Emissary*, Iain McGilchrist develops the thesis that the asymmetry of the human brain's two hemispheres, which can be witnessed when people suffer brain injuries or strokes in one or other of these hemispheres, relates to a fundamental difference in the way these two sides of the brain "see" or attend to the world.[3] McGilchrist draws on a wealth of neuroscientific data to show how the left-hand side of the brain is associated with our ability to rationalise, theorise and codify the world. We do this to make sense of complexity and to enable ourselves to get the resources we need to survive and thrive. Meanwhile the right-hand side of the brain is associated with the ability to make connections. The right-hand side attends to the experiences it receives from the world, not by reducing to some kind of system but by holding data ambiguously and provisionally, attending to the relationships between them.

McGilchrist then goes on to argue that the power of the left-hand side of the brain can overreach itself, resisting the perspective of the right-hand side of the brain and in effect constructing the world on the basis of the world view it has created. The effect created can be described as a "hall of mirrors", where the dominance of one particular way of seeing prevents escape from that perspective. McGilchrist provides a thorough overview of western cultural history to argue that at various points in this story, the left hemisphere perspective has taken over at the exclusion of the right hemisphere. Furthermore, he argues modernism represents just such a time in western cultural history.

This provides another important perspective on the systems of measurement that dominate in the life of the church. The measures and metrics that are offered to us are the product of the reductive processes of left-hemisphere thinking, very proficiently reducing complexity down to simple models and measurables. However, the blanket use of those metrics for every expression of church risks keeping the church in its own hall of mirrors, unable to give attention to new data, new ideas, new expressions of church that are emerging through its engagement with an ever-changing world.

Beyond measurement

So how might we find a way out of Root's "double bind" or McGilchrist's "hall of mirrors"? Well, let's begin to seek an escape by probing some of the language used in this field of measurement. For example, measurement is often linked with the word evaluation – measurement and evaluation. It's interesting to note the different perspectives these offer. "Measure" refers to a standard, the result of dividing a whole into equal parts. Applying a measure therefore means imposing a standard that has been developed in one field or

[3] Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

context onto another, as though it were from the same system. Evaluation, however, comes from the French *évaluer,* which has the sense of finding the value *out of* something. In other words, evaluation is not imposing value, or measure, but discovering value that is being formed within something. There is therefore a sense of exploring in a much more provisional and open way in order to allow the value of something to be revealed or disclosed.

This understanding of evaluation perhaps gives us a route back, out of the "hall of mirrors" that McGilchrist describes and towards a re-emphasis on ways of giving which account for what is happening in our mission and ministry within the church that are more open and provisional. Understanding evaluation in this sense moves us toward a healthier perspective on the church as the flow of God's mission. While Christ has inaugurated the church, the ongoing creation of the church in its time and context takes place in the wake of the movement of the *missio Dei*.[4] The church is constantly being created and disclosed through the work of the Holy Spirit, and part of the ministry of the church is to help discover the ongoing nature of its life.[5] This gives scope for a broader range of methods of giving account for our work, not just counting people or other resources, but bringing other methods such as qualitative research, facilitated listening, storytelling, prayer and discernment, for example.

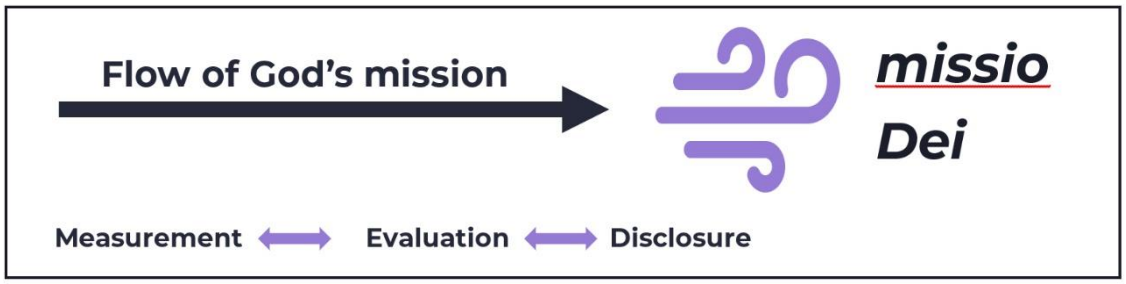

Figure 1: Evaluation, measurement and the *missio Dei*

Figure 1 therefore provides a way of seeing the relationship between the mission of the church and the work of evaluation and measurement. As the ongoing form and shape of the church emerges through the work of the Holy Spirit in time and place, the first activity will be one of evaluation, not measurement. This is a process that does not impose systems or models on what is being experienced but is open to seeing the value discerned *out of* experience. Measurement may well form part of this process of evaluation as common patterns and forms start to emerge from evaluation. But measurement in this perspective must always serve the process of evaluation and discernment, lending more specific detail to an emerging picture.

Does this perspective get us out of Root's "double bind", where we are forever competing for resources to do more from already busy people? Well, Root himself recognises that the context of late modernity is one the church cannot simply escape or ignore. We have to minister in this secular age at odds with any sense of sacred time. Root urges the church not to escape into slowness as a kind of antidote to endless growth and acceleration. Instead, he invites the church to pay attention to what he calls "resonance", which he describes as an attention to those moments of transcendence and connection that people experience in the presence of God.[6] Root invites us into the right-hemisphere perspective of an open

[4] Stephen Bevans, "The Church as the Creation of the Spirit: Unpacking a Missionary Image," *Missiology: An International Review* 35,
no. 1 (2007), 5–21.

[5] Clare Watkins, *Disclosing Church: An Ecclesiology Learned from Conversations in Practice* (London: Routledge, 2020).

[6] The word "resonance" is drawn directly from the work of Hartmut Rosa; see his *Resonance: A Sociology of our Relationship to the World*, trans. James Wagner (Cambridge: Polity, 2019). Rosa makes the distinction between two kinds of action in the world. The action of modernism is solely about *having* and it therefore reduces action to the expenditure of energy towards this cause. Rosa argues that resisting this reductive mode of action requires us to seek action that is about *being* in relationship with the world. For the church this advocates an "active passivity" a "hastened waiting", which is open to the presence of God and which orients the church as a community of *being* more than a community of doing.

attentiveness to the kind of things that we might recognise as authentic connections between our own experience and the presence of God. Being attentive prioritises our life as a church as a life of *being* in the world in relationship with God, one another and our neighbour. Being attentive to "resonance" is being attentive to what God is doing in our midst without prejudging what that activity might look like. Being attentive in this way opens us to the possibility of the new horizons of God's saving action being disclosed to us that we might participate.

Conclusion

Moving beyond measurement is recognising the proper context of measurement. Measurement is fundamental to a culture where growth is seen as a "higher good". Measurement is part of the furniture of a modernist culture that holds tightly to a codified view of the world. Measurement needs to find its place as a servant to disclosure and evaluation. Measurement may well have its place within the broader scope of evaluation but must not be allowed to overreach itself and construct the church in its own image. Evaluation is within the important task of joining in with the flow of the *missio Dei*. Evaluation will therefore use various means and methods to help the church discern what is being disclosed by God in the wake of the flow of the Spirit.

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See the Andrew Root books *The Congregation in a Secular Age*, 191–213 and *Churches and the Crisis of Decline: A Hopeful Practical Ecclesiology for a Secular Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2022), 151–62.

Sustaining community spirituality – a reflection on practice

By Alison Boulton

The parables of the mustard seed and the small amount of yeast are well-known stories that can trip off the tongue when reflecting upon how small incarnational groups might spiritually transform the communities to which they are called. The idea that a small amount of yeast makes a whole batch of flour rise, or that a mustard seed can grow into a huge tree, can be incredibly encouraging when starting to pioneer a small, usually fragile, group in a new context. And yet the reality of making a long-term sustainable difference to the spirituality of a given context feels more complex than simply allowing yeast to do its work or for a tree to grow from a seed.

This article reflects upon my own practice and experience of seeking to develop spiritual sustainability within a local community on a new housing estate over the past 14 years.

Defining sustainability

Sustainability is a difficult concept to pin down. My experience of hearing the term in relation to pioneering is primarily in relation to financial sustainability. In his study on the sustainability of fresh expression of church (FXC), Andy Weir notes the complexity of the term and makes some helpful comments that will help frame this reflection.[1] While Weir's study is not fully relevant to this paper, as it focuses on the sustainability of FXCs rather than developing spiritual sustainability within a neighbourhood, some comments are helpful in defining what sustainability might look like in this context. Firstly, he notes the dictionary definitions of "sustainable", which highlight that a characteristic of being sustainable is that something has longevity and does not adversely affect the environment.[2] Not all pioneers are aiming to create something that will last a long time.[3] In my context, however, on a brand-new housing estate, my focus is to develop a spirituality that will last for the lifetime of the housing area.[4] In terms of environmental effects, it is vital that the spirituality enhances individuals and the community as a whole rather than depletes it. The spirituality must not exhaust and condemn but rather affirm and refresh to ensure sustainability.

Secondly, while discussing the "three-self" principles of self-financing, self-governing and self-reproducing (a concept developed in the nineteenth century by missionary strategists Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson),[5] which are often used to assess the sustainability of an FXC, Weir footnotes Moynagh's work. Moynagh notes that at times a fourth self is added, that of "self-

[1] Andy Weir, *Sustaining young Churches: A qualitative pilot study of fresh expressions of Church in the Church of England* (Sheffield: Church Army's Research Unit, 2016).
[2] Ibid., 6.
[3] In Weir's study, the 12 FXC contexts were split 50/50 in terms of whether long-term sustainability was an aspiration (Weir, Sustaining young Churches, 15).
[4] I am also concerned with developing sustainable spirituality within the new community of faith, but that is not the focus of this article.
[5] Weir, *Sustaining young Churches*, 18.

theologising".[6] This fourth self is helpful in considering spiritual sustainability within a community. Is the local neighbourhood beginning to own the spirituality and develop it themselves?

I will reflect upon my practice through the lens of longevity, enhancing community and owning/developing the spirituality themselves.

Long-term sustainable spiritual impact

Importance of developing or changing an ethos

Pioneering on a new estate offers the opportunity to be part of shaping the ethos of a new neighbourhood. Within my context we use the metaphorical concept of digging blessing into the very foundations of the new area. In reality, that means developing an ethos of blessing within the new community. I have drawn on my experience as a teacher working in a school in special measures where we have been charged with changing the ethos among the pupils and staff. I adopted a "this is the way we do things around here" approach.

We have integrated festivals into the common life of the community in such a way that this is now "the way we do things around here". Facilitating opportunities to celebrate or engage with activities relating to the major Christian festivals, alongside Pancake Day, St Valentine's Day and a Christian response to Remembrance Sunday and Halloween, has raised an interest in finding out more about the Christian faith and led to discussions regarding the similarities and differences with people of different faiths. It is now not only an expectation that these festivals will be observed on the estate, but also that others have begun to join in with some of our traditions, such as adding their crafts to our craft bombing of the area overnight with characters from the Nativity just before Christmas. It is my hope that these traditions become an established part of the culture for the long term that will continue beyond my time here. In this way we are seeking to seed long-term sustainable spirituality within this community. These celebrations of key days and festivals offer an opportunity for spiritual encounter. The work of Katie McClymont is helpful here. She does not write from a specifically Christian perspective but advocates for the importance of creating places of spiritual encounter beyond "places of worship" within new estates.[7] We have not created permanent physical spaces for spiritual encounter, although encouraged by the work of McClymont – this is certainly something for us to explore – but we have created a yearly rhythm with times and spaces where spiritual encounter can happen and spiritual sustainability can be built on the estate.

This yearly rhythm offers an opportunity for the neighbourhood to begin basic self-theologising, to engage with spiritual issues, and to question and reflect on their theological understanding and approach. For some that has meant reaching the conclusion that spirituality is not important or should not be central to the life of this community. But for others this has meant valuing the opportunity to engage spiritually and reaching out to connect spiritually at times of personal celebration or lament. I have been asked to explain death to a small child when their rabbit died and to do numerous pet funerals; I have regularly marked the anniversary of a baby's death by gathering the family and friends at home, praying, lighting a candle and sharing some simple words of comfort and lament. I have also been asked to do baby blessings among friends and family at the local community centre and pray blessing on a new house. While these people are not formally gathering and exploring faith, they are beginning a theological journey of wondering where God is at key times in their lives.

Shaping a spiritually sustainable ethos within the community has also involved weaving the pioneers and church that has emerged into other stakeholders and community members who have a vision to nurture positive community. This means that the local council, housing association and other key stakeholders recognise and even advocate for the importance of

[6] Michael Moynagh, *Church for Every Context: An Introduction to Theology and Practice* (London: SCM, 2012), 405–08.

[7] See Katie McClymont, "Postsecular planning? The idea of municipal spirituality," *Planning Theory & Practice* 16, no. 4 (2015): 535–54 and "Spaces of Secular Faith? Shared Assets and Intangible Values in Diverse, Changing Communities," *Implicit Religion* 21, no. 2 (2018): 142–64.

the involvement of Christians in local activities and decision-making. An invitation from the council to establish a charitable community association to give the community a voice and manage a new community centre has meant that values that one might describe as "kingdom values", such as loving our neighbour, prioritising the marginalised, and giving back money to bless the community rather than accumulating reserves, have become central to the way that the trustees of all faiths and none manage the charity.[8] There is also a pattern of partnership working between the pioneers/church and the community association whereby both are valued and respected by the wider community and one another. Although it is too soon to know the long-term sustainability, it was interesting to observe at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic that when lockdown struck, members of the local community began to adopt practices that we have modelled, such as starting a picture treasure hunt in windows to amuse children out on a daily walk, and encouraging people to share what they have and name what they need. I hope that this way of working and these values have been embedded within the neighbourhood and in the lives of individuals so that this way of relating to one another will continue long into the future, thus ensuring sustainable kingdom values within the community and a positive and sustainable relationship with future Christians and church on the estate.

I have reflected on whether these community partnerships and adopting of kingdom values enhances or depletes the neighbourhood. I have reached the conclusion that overall, the community is enhanced. The community spirit is often referred to in positive terms. People have commented that previous communities where they have lived were not "like this". I have witnessed individual people being affirmed and refreshed as they have been served and blessed but also as they have been involved in the serving and blessing. However, there is a note of caution. I have also witnessed a few individuals becoming depleted by doing too much and becoming exhausted and feeling overwhelmed. I am aware that if this way of being is to be sustainable in the long term, we need to ensure that the spirituality of sabbath rest is also embedded into the culture.

Importance of DNA

In order to make an impact, it is important to have a unified vision and posture. For us this has involved identifying the key things that we believe we are called to and articulating this calling as our DNA values. In his study of the changing culture at Barcelona football club, *The Barcelona Way*, Damian Hughes notes the centrality of identifying and embodying the cultural DNA.[9] Hughes cites Sir Alf Ramsey's adage that "constant repetition gets the message home".[10] Our DNA articulates ways of being that bless, love and serve one another within the area. As a Christian group here, we have sought to inhabit and model a way of being. By being, saying and doing the same things repeatedly as a group of Christians within the neighbourhood, we are seeking to make a lasting and sustainable impact upon the spiritual ethos of the community.

We have had some encouraging signs that living out our DNA is making a difference. Early on we saw signs that local people were adopting our language and behaviour. It was interesting to see a Facebook status that stated that someone was "blessing the community by giving away [her] baby clothes". We have witnessed Individuals embracing the DNA value of "authenticity not perfectionism", accepting and living in the reality of perceived weaknesses, such as not having a perfect home, family or appearance. The toddler group, made up of people of all faiths and none, is also an interesting example. A local mum, who is not practising any particular faith, recently fed back to me that my being a Christian made a difference to the group. She explained that the group encouraged friendships not cliques, and that it was inclusive, encouraging people to love each other and not to judge each other's children. This mum is not exploring faith with us formally and has not attended any regular Sunday gathering, yet she was able to articulate the kingdom values that we are modelling.

[8] The community association charity trustees comprises people practicing Islam, Hinduism and Christianity, alongside those with no particular faith.
[9] Damian Hughes, *The Barcelona Way: How to Create a High-Performance Culture* (London: Pan Books, 2018).
[10] Ibid., 29.

This would indicate some self-theologising and reflection upon the unspoken theological and spiritual values of the group.

Longevity, enhancing community and self-theologising

It is important to note that spiritual sustainability within the community is being nurtured in conjunction with nurturing spiritual sustainability in individuals seeking faith, new disciples and the new community of faith that has emerged. Only time will tell whether long-term spiritual sustainability has been established within the new housing estate where I live, but alongside areas of development and caution, there are some encouraging signs.

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Treasure seeking: sustaining personal spirituality

By Caroline Kennedy

The other week, having dropped off my son for a train to London, I sat in the car for a few minutes sipping coffee and (unusually for me in the early morning) listening to the news. Radio 4's Thought for the Day came on as I headed back to my desk and I heard Rhidian Brook, the Welsh writer and broadcaster, talk about teachers, priests and the connection between their vocations.[1] As someone who is a priest and has been a teacher, this caught my attention and it felt like a gem; a gift. Brook used a phrase that resonated powerfully: "A good teacher knows where the gold is buried and is able to show others how to find it." The ability to sense the gifts of others and to signpost what might help these gifts grow and flourish is important in the vocation of both teacher and priest. And the search for gold, for something of great value, is strongly connected to sustaining personal spirituality. In fact, for me, the process is akin to treasure seeking.

There are activities, abilities and attitudes in a human life that could be described as treasure. These are the things of deepest value on our journey. Jesus used the image of his father's kingdom to point to them and said to his followers, "Set your mind upon his kingdom and all the rest will come to you as well."[2] For those of us today who might be termed pioneers, weighing up virgin territories beyond traditional church (and possibly without some of its resources), being sustained spiritually is vital. We may understand ourselves as trying to "sing the Lord's song in a foreign land"[3] as Psalm 137 says. New lands have to be navigated carefully, and a spirituality to sustain us here needs to signpost God's presence and keep us encouraged. What are the tools that can help us find treasure in task-filled days and keep us close to God under the pressure of productivity, even when the product is a fresh expression? I've identified some that quench my thirst and feed my soul.

Attitude

The first is Attitude. Pope Francis says that "God acts in the simplicity of open hearts, in the patience of those who pause until they can see clearly".[4] An attitude of trust means that my shape is open to the action of God. I make a note to put this attitude on, like an item of clothing that is familiar, at the start of each day, and I verbally commit to being open to the unexpected and to trusting in the movement and encounters that the day will bring. I step out of the belief that I can control and nail everything down, however efficient I might be.

In connection with this I try to be intentional and discerning about my use of time, staying open to the fullness of the moment. In his book *Four Thousand Weeks* Oliver Burkeman has some interesting things to say, including giving advice about letting go of the "limit-denying

[1] "Rhidian Brook – 26/07/2022," Thought for the Day, *BBC Radio 4*, 26 July 2022, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0cp3234.
[2] Luke 12:31 (NEB).
[3] Ps. 137:4.
[4] Pope Francis and Austen Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream: A Path to a Better Future* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 61.

fantasy of getting it all done" and focusing on "doing a few things that count".[5] He also advocates deciding in advance what you're going to fail at in order to give room for priorities! Time to think something through or to silently seek discernment is time well spent in the business of treasure seeking. Without the discipline of this, I could sink into discontent and lose my joy among the strong and seductive powers of the world.

Recollection, connection and reflection

In addition, the tools of what I call "Recollection, Connection and Reflection" work well together. I need and use them daily. "Recollection" defends against forgetfulness, reminding me of the story I've stepped into and the teachings I try to live among. In my own practice the tool finds a home in the shape of the Anglican Lectionary's Eucharistic texts, read slowly in the early part of the day so that words or phrases can sink into my inner life. These have the power to surface unbidden later, doing their work of connecting and reminding. Taking communion regularly is another dimension of this. Yesterday I was at an ancient priory, noticing wells of stillness while waiting at the altar and sensing the deep faith and present struggles of those I kneeled among. I usually leave these services feeling humbled, gently nudged in direction, reshaped and anchored in a historic and living faith. Keeping a journal to record insights connected to the day's readings and moments of encounter or change helps me to remember, reflect and spot attitudes that block love. Being able to access this when things feel tough can be a great encouragement, bringing the strength to hold to good decisions.

The tool I call "Connection" works effectively when I'm very present in the activities of the day and open to the possibilities of wonder. If I'd been the teacher of the Law in Luke's Gospel who asked Jesus what he had to do to inherit eternal life, and was asked himself, by way of a reply, to reflect on his understanding of the Law ("Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself"), I think I would have preceded the lawyer's question "And who is my neighbour?" with "And how do I love God? How will I know I'm loving in the right place and in the right way?"[6]

The answer for me is connected to encountering treasure. When I love in the right places, my heart is opened and I feel joy and delight. I may also feel totally absorbed, either via wonder and awe or through a state of flow where I am challenged enough for my mind to be occupied with a task that is enjoyable and satisfying. I notice this "hit" with treasure when I connect with nature, feeling love and gratitude for landscape and wildlife. It also happens when I listen carefully, share in the concerns of others or act for good. I can access this heart-opening through music, playing sport, dancing, being part of community, writing, spending time with children or animals and using my abilities in a focused way. In all these activities, the God of life is present and I am loving him there.

James Martin, writing about the life of Thomas Merton, says: "The most important spiritual insight I've learned… is that God calls each of us to be who we are. 'For me to be a saint means for me to be myself,' said Thomas Merton."[7] When we are being most ourselves, God is there and we are loving him. Realising this can take away the habit of comparison that Roosevelt described as the thief of joy. And it can help us to prioritise activities and tasks that bring this heart-opening experience to us.

So I spend some of each day outside, whatever the weather, and make time to stand and stare. Early this morning I watched a stream bounce and flow in clear waves over red and brown stones and tonight I saw a deer on a path to my left. We watched each other for a few moments before it moved silently to a barley field. I also took in the round curves of Scottish hills in the distance, crowned with pink. For me this is the opposite of a waste of time. It might sound hard to justify to your archdeacon but I'm pretty sure mine would understand,

[5] Oliver Burkeman, *Four Thousand Weeks: Time and How to Use It* (London: Vintage, 2021), 44.

[6] Luke 10:25–30 (HCSB).

[7] James Martin, SJ, *Becoming Who You Are: Insights on the True Self from Thomas Merton and Other Saints* (Marwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2006), 71.

especially if I link standing and staring to the practice of mindfulness or becoming more present. I believe focusing on beauty contributes to building what might be termed headspace, and that this in turn strengthens awareness of a gap between thought, action and speech in which there is time to make choices about habits and decisions. Living in a rural location I don't have to dig hard for the treasure of nature, but without understanding it as illuminating I could easily pass it by, charging on through the task of exercising our crazy Border collie or burning calories.

Being open to encounters is another priority. These are the heartbeat of my work as a chaplain and they often spark long-term connections and give rise to ideas and activities. I understand the unexpected ones not as unwelcome obstructions on my worthy way to efficiency but as gifts and opportunities to exercise imagination and compassion. They are places of learning and sometimes healing, and the experience of being allowed a glimpse into the life of another is a great privilege. I may not be able to put encounters on my CV but I know they hold life, and that when I'm engaged in them I am being myself and bringing powers of concentration and receptiveness to bear.

The tool of "Reflection" is something I use frequently and it works in tandem with Recollection and Connection. Reflection can find hospitality in the wells of stillness I described in communion services and it can be comfortably at work during walks outside and as part of the Examen, which is itself an important tool in Ignatian spirituality. In this exercise, events of the day are allowed to surface and are sifted for clues to the presence of God. Reflection oils and waters the process of treasure seeking and learning, and the Examen, used regularly, can build skill and resilience.

Finding rest

If sustaining personal spirituality is about being able to grow into the people we really are, periods of rest will help our growth. Where are the places of sanctuary for you? Where can you sleep peacefully? Identifying physical locations that promote a sense of rest and a feeling of being closer to God can be a real resource. Learning from Ignatian spirituality and spending time with guides at St Beuno's has brought me rest and a new way of seeing.[8] On silent retreats there I've received the wisdom of others who are more experienced, and I've connected with the story of St Ignatius. I've also been able to access the Exercises coming out of his teaching.[9] The Scottish island of Iona is another place I return to annually. The story of St Columba, who journeyed there from Ireland in the 500s and set up a monastic community, speaks to my context. As a chaplain working in a multi-campus university, I identify with the shape of Columba's life: stillness and contemplation equipping him for movement and encounter in the lands around.

Both Iona and St Beuno's are places of rest and possibility for me, but we can probably all identify places much closer that do a similar thing in short bursts. I know a priest who regularly drives 15 minutes to a stretch of coastline for refreshment and connection; another who sits in a favourite coffee shop beyond his parishes. And there is benefit in a designated space at home for prayer. I've been going to the same corner for years and associate it with stopping and receiving. Are there places in your house (or garden) that lend themselves to this more than others?

I began by referring to the kingdom and its treasures, and I'd like to end there too, thinking again about that place of new horizons and flourishing life. Jesus said to his disciples:

> When… a teacher of the Law has become a learner in the kingdom of Heaven [he] is like a householder who can produce from his store both the new and the old.[8]

Sound anything like a pioneer?

[8] St Beuno's Jesuit Spirituality Centre, St Asaph, North Wales.
[9] The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius.
[8] Matt. 13:52 (NEB).

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Business that sustains

By Rosie Hopley

In this article I am going to explore how people can thrive and be sustained in entrepreneurship.[1] I will reflect on whether it is possible to carry out sustainable entrepreneurship in the context of a "social business", one which puts community outcomes above profit. Is this mission impossible or is there a way to thrive in faith, pioneering and in business?

Over the last decade, I have been interested in finding out how business and community endeavour can help people forge a pathway out of long-term unemployment and economic hardship. More recently, I have started to explore what it might mean to do business in such a way so that people can flourish through sustainable entrepreneurship. Building a thriving community is, I would argue, vital for successful entrepreneurship, and there are some tools and ways of thinking that might contribute to this. My focus in this article will be the member care model and ubuntu.

I was introduced to the member care model by Tearfund in 2015,[2] and I adapted it for a ministry, in Bristol, called Beloved, which provides practical, emotional and chaplaincy support to women working in any part of the indoor sex industry.[3] Having seen the success of this model for caring for outreach teams visiting women working in massage parlours in Bristol, in early 2022 I started to explore whether it might be adapted for LoveWell,[4] a small and growing social enterprise that produces beauty and skincare products.

Pioneering for social good

The Department for Business Innovation & Skills defines a social enterprise as "a business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders and owners".[5] This definition demonstrates some of the elements that need to be balanced in harmony in sustainable entrepreneurship – pioneering, growth, profitability. Without the profit, you won't have enough money to reinvest and do good in the community or the business. Without growth, you will hamper the size and reach of your social business. For success, you need pioneers who are brave enough to forge a new way of doing their business that allows it to flourish. Perhaps this sounds idealistic – impossible, even? But I would argue it is entirely possible to aim for growth alongside support for beneficiaries/staff,

[1] This piece is based on a seminar on sustainable entrepreneurship given at the Pioneer Mission Leadership Conversations day held by Church Mission Society and Northern Mission Centre in April 2022.
[2] Kelly O'Donnell, "Going Global: A Member Care Model for Best Practice," in Kelly O'Donnell, ed., *Doing Member Care Well: Perspectives and Practices from Around the World*, (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2002), 16.
[3] Beloved provides practical, emotional and chaplaincy support to women working in any part of the indoor sex industry. For more information see https://beloved.org.uk.
[4] LoveWell is a social business in Bristol offering employment and support for women who have experienced significant trauma through trafficking and exploitation. See more about LoveWell here: https://lovewelluk.com/pages/our-mission
[5] "A Guide to Legal Forms for Social Enterprise," Department for Business Innovation & Skills (November 2011), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/31677/11-1400-guide-legal-forms-for-social-enterprise.pdf, 2.

as a major element of social business is that it works with people who have additional needs.[6] So, how do we integrate community into doing business, and in particular in a social business and enterprise? To explore this I turn to my own experience as a co-founder of LoveWell.

Finding community in a workplace setting

LoveWell was born out of a desire to offer an employment and training pathway for women who have experienced significant trauma through trafficking and exploitation – it was set up to see women thrive in a holistic workplace setting. I was a co-founder of the business with two other women. All of us had previous experience of setting up our own businesses.

LoveWell is a social enterprise that supports and trains women to build new skills through the manufacture of luxury natural skincare products. It currently has a team of five part-time staff and takes on six to eight trainees each year for a six-month training and development programme. The goal of this social enterprise is to expand to employ more women and to enable trainees to progress into long-term employment or to set up their own small businesses. To date, recruits have been employed and trained two days a week in the six-month programme, focusing on holistic training and production skills. Other skills in the development programme include maths and English, teamwork, home budgeting, CV-writing, job applications and production skills for handmade skincare products. Eighty per cent of graduates from LoveWell's first Work Well programme made positive moves into further education, training, employment and employability support. In future, it will be exploring a one day a week model, in order to expand the offer to more women.

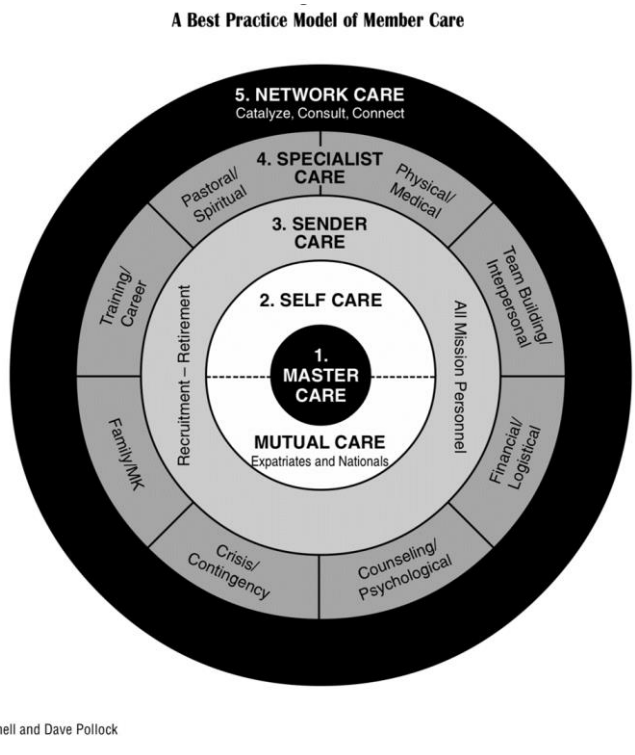

Figure 1: Member care model[7]

[6] Thank you to Claire Dormand, co-founder of LoveWell, for providing additional thinking on this area.
[7] O'Donnell, "Going Global," 16.

Contextualising the member care model

The member care model (shown in Figure 1), developed by Kelly O'Donnell and Dave Pollock for missionary care work, has been used in multiple contexts across the world. The model offers a framework for caring for Christian workers and volunteers. The model begins with an individual's care, being cared for by their master, their maker. For example, we might understand this by asking a worker when they feel most nourished by God, or what helps to bring them into his presence. In growing concentric circles, we see other forms of care have their part to play, such as self-care (looking after yourself) and mutual care (looking after others in your team). In the model we can explore what being part of a church community looks like for the person, and how they are involving their community as part of being on mission. We think about and find different ways of care as it might be expressed in family, community and church contexts.

Specialist care is where we consider how the employer or sending organisation plays its part in taking responsibility for caring for its members. This might include team prayer, meals together, visits to teams (if overseas), group or one-to-one supervision, peer debrief, clinical debrief and people development. Finally, we come to the outermost circle of network care, which might include things such as connecting with national or international training bodies or connecting its wider networks for peer support.

I aim to see whether the member care model can be adapted for use with LoveWell, albeit in the context of a social enterprise. Working closely together with another LoveWell co-founder, Claire Dormand, and the LoveWell team, we are discovering how transferable aspects of member care are into an enterprise that has a focus on social good in the context of trainees' experience of significant trauma through trafficking and exploitation. Aspects that will need some adjustment will focus on stages 1 to 5 of the model so that it is contextualised for LoveWell's pioneering work.

It will be interesting to see how this adapted model evolves as the team grows, builds up its following among customers and retail outlets, and helps more women make the changes they want to see happen in their lives. How will sustainable entrepreneurship find its expression in ways that meet customer demand and the need to be profitable?

Community, communication and connecting

Community, communication and connecting via renewal spaces are all vital for enabling LoveWell to grow steadily, profitably and in a way that sees its team flourishing.

- ***Community*** means getting a good match between trainees, staff and volunteers so they are all committed to working together towards a singular vision. This is the ground bed necessary for helping trainees and the pioneering team to flourish as individuals and as a group.
- ***Communication*** is about helping trainees, staff and volunteers to communicate the vision and the larger story as LoveWell builds a gathering of customers into this community – in other words, gaining champions for the community who understand what makes these particular products stand out from the rest of the market. It's a unique way of working together, to enable women to escape various forms of coercion and a powerful counter narrative for those who have previously lived with experience of exploitation.
- ***Connecting*** entails developing intentional spaces and understanding how such restorative spaces are inhabited by the LoveWell team, so they find rest, refreshment and meaning. These would include shared meals and hospitality, socials and reflection. In addition to spiritual and personal restorative spaces that might be in church or wider community, more conventional business practices such as supervision, training and people development also have a vital part to play. Being connected intentionally is a particularly important aspect of developing entrepreneurship that is sustainable.

In LoveWell, through these three Cs of community, communication and connection, women are finding a place of belonging, a place where they can learn to trust others and to take pride in their individuality and being part of a collective business effort. The member care model also enables the LoveWell community to embrace faith and belief, life and pioneering. As a learning organisation, LoveWell has positioned itself in the UK beauty industry by focusing on holistic wholeness, well-being and empowering women within its workforce. Everyone involved in LoveWell is committed to producing high-end products. For example, it develops a new product with each training cohort, with trainees taking responsibility for selecting scents, taking product images/photos and naming the final product.

There are limitations with regards to contextualising stages 1 to 3 of the member care model. As the organisation grows, it is likely there will be people with no faith or another faith who join the team. How therefore does LoveWell adapt this model for supporting entrepreneurs for the longevity of its work, in a context that might feature multiplicity of belief systems?

The team are grappling with these questions right now:

How do we adapt this for people who wouldn't have the view that they have been sent by others?

How could we take a more spiritual view of this for those with other or no faith? Or for someone who doesn't ascribe any spiritual aspect to life?

How do we make this culturally relevant to women from other countries but also from other cultures – for example, not just middle class and Christian backgrounds?

It would appear that there might be limited scope for some aspects of the model to be adapted in light of these questions. An alternative framework that lends itself better to the flourishing of a diverse team is ubuntu.

Ubuntu as resistance

Ubuntu is a philosophy that is rooted in Africa. It is a community way of thinking summed up in the saying "I belong, therefore I am". It can be understood as a means of resistance to hyper-consumption when built into business practices. After decades of global economic development, it is increasingly recognised that many parts of the world, much of it in the West, cannot keep producing and consuming at an accelerated rate. Such rapacious consumption with insufficient thought to sustainability and environmental impact is having a harmful impact on people, animals and the planet. Sustainable, just economies recognise there is a need to function in a different way if we – people, animals, planet – are to flourish and thrive.

This led me to think about how the principles of ubuntu might lend themselves well to a social business. The growth of social business is helping to usher in ways of resisting hyper-production and hyper-consumption business models, and pointing to a more humane, kinder, even humbler way of working. Is the West ready to embrace management and business lessons from Africa? For example, there are underappreciated principles held within ubuntu that we would do well to take heed of and replicate here in the West. These concepts point to the community and the individual, saying "I am, because we are".

Bringing ubuntu into Bristol business

In her paper on postcolonial and anti-colonial reading of "African" leadership and management, Stella M. Nkomo explores how ubuntu speaks into community, caring, hospitality and more.[8] This resonates for social businesses that aim to do business in a different way from the traditional capitalist model. Mzami P. Mangaliso defined ubuntu as:

[8] Stella M. Nkomo, "A postcolonial and anti-colonial reading of 'African' leadership and management in organization studies: tensions, contradictions and possibilities," *Organization* 18, no. 3 (2011), 365–86.

Humaneness – a pervasive spirit of caring and community, harmony and hospitality, respect and responsiveness – that individuals and groups display for one another. Ubuntu is the foundation for the basic values that manifest in the ways African people think and behave towards each other and everyone else they encounter.[9]

LoveWell has a very strong caring and community ethos, and although it is still a relatively new enterprise, it is showing some resonance with the concepts of caring and community, hospitality, respect and responsiveness.

Ubuntu theology in social business practice

Archbishop Desmond Tutu shared his view of how ubuntu enables all who live by its principles to take a more expansive approach to life in all its fullness:

A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good; for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed.[10]

There is an irresistible correlation here between Archbishop Tutu's words and Jesus' commands to "Love your neighbour as yourself"[11].

Suppose we take a view that our colleagues, our customers, our suppliers are our neighbours, and that by doing business with one another following ubuntu practices, we can show that each person belongs to a greater whole? Surely, our way of working in such a way would lead us away from aggressive business and capitalist practices that grind others down to the lowest possible supply price, characterised by business boards and shareholders making ever bigger profits and dividends, larger salaries and normalising oppressive working practices. Following the Lord's invitation and embracing ubuntu, we can find a different way: a way to do business so that we thrive, you thrive and together we take care of our planet. It encompasses a way of helping each other to flourish, as opposed to being diminished or oppressed. By slowing down, being intentional in our ways of being social, it is possible to take steps towards carrying out sustainable entrepreneurship. In answer to our first question, we do not have to face a mission that is impossible. In community, together we can find a way to thrive in faith, pioneering and business. It might look slower, more localised and be more embedded in the community. And I'm all for that – are you?

Rosie Hopley is founder and former CEO of the Christian charity Beloved (www.beloved.org.uk) and co-founder of social enterprise LoveWell (https://lovewelluk.com). She enjoys learning about God's reconciling love and writing. In 2021, she wrote the Reconciled Church Course.

[9] For more of an exploration of these ideas, see Mzamo P. Mangaliso, "Building Competitive Advantage from 'Ubuntu': Management Lessons from South Africa," *Academy of Management Executive* 15, no. 3 (2001), 23–33. See more here: Mzamo P. Mangaliso, Nomazengele A. Mangaliso, Bradford J. Knipes, Leah Z. B. Ndanga, and Howard Jean-Denisa, "Invoking Ubuntu Philosophy as a Source of Harmonious Organizational Management," *Academy of Management Annual Meeting Proceedings* 2018, no. 1, 15007, https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Diagram-of-Ubuntu-Inspired-Change-Management_fig1_326277803.

[10] Archbishop Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (London: Rider, 1999), 35.

[11] Matthew 22:39 (NIV).

Anvil Book Reviews

Renie Chow Choy, *Ancestral Feeling: Postcolonial Thoughts on Western Christian Heritage*, (London: SCM Press, 2021)

This is a profoundly stimulating and personal book examining the complex feelings that Christians from elsewhere in the world can have about the European heritage of the faith which they or their families received through colonial missionary movements. Renie Chow Choy is a historian of medieval Europe and teaches church history at St Mellitus College. The "ancestral feeling" Choy explores has multiple meanings. It is a sense of connection (or otherwise) to the Christian forebears she studies, teaches, or remembers when visiting heritage sites such as ruined monasteries, ancient churches or John Wesley's London home. It is also the emotions evoked by contemplating family origins and faith stories – in Choy's case, her grandparents' migration from rural China to colonial Hong Kong, her parents' Christian formation in Hong Kong and Canada, and her own moves and sense of home in the UK.

Choy begins by recognising a tension and an irony in the notion of "Christian heritage" in the West. Political rhetoric defending Europe and North America's Christian heritage tends to carry racial and nationalistic implications. These are designed to exclude immigrant or non-white groups from a sense of belonging. And yet the West's colonial past also generated missionary movements that produced today's global majority Christians. Millions of Asian, African and South American Christians can themselves feel significant attachment to Western Christian heritage and consider it their own faith heritage too. An array of denominational affiliations – Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Reformed, Pentecostal and more – have each generated an instinctive affinity to the West through inherited hymns, devotional literature and ecclesial architectural styles. Western theologians and church founders, as well as pioneer missionaries, are all felt to be *their* ancestors in the faith too.

Choy acknowledges the postcolonial critique of such affinities as a hold-over from empire, meaning colonised people lose not only their land but also their history. Christian historiography can in this sense be a form of colonial hegemony. However, Choy strongly rejects an assumed corrective to this will come from tracing and narrating an alternative Chinese Christian history for the Chinese, or African church history for Africans. Adopting such a remedy, Choy asserts, "only serves to divide, alienate, marginalize and tribalize, and it is a thin disguise for exclusionary habits" (p.22). Instead, Choy seeks through her book to "find a way to think about the history of Western Christianity that promotes an inclusive memory and fosters belonging" (p.25).

Choy sets about this by weaving together reflections on the history of Christianity (especially the forms of Protestant Christianity exported to British colonies) and strands of narrative recovering the personal experiences, trials and commitments of her biological ancestors. The result is consistently thought-provoking, admirably deft in its handling of a range of sociological and cultural theories, and wonderfully fresh in the perspective it offers.

Not long before Choy will have been finishing *Ancestral Feeling*, the Church of England's Racial Justice Commission published a report, *From Lament to Action*, which acknowledged racism's influence in the church extended to the process of remembering and retelling the

church's story. Racism has shaped what and who is remembered and forgotten, and to whom a church's history is perceived to belong. *From Lament to Action* calls for a healthier focus on memory and history, and an opening up of new avenues for dealing with aspects of the past understood and shared differently. *Ancestral Feeling* delivers such a focus and such an avenue for understanding in an exemplary way. The book is recommended to anyone interested is discovering how a creative historian has served this important work for the health and future of the global church.

Philip Lockley

Banseok Cho, *Being Missional, Becoming Missional: A Biblical-Theological Study of the Missional Conversion of the Church*, (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021)

This book offers an exploration of the church, in particular the North American church, and its understanding of mission.

Banseok Cho gives a thorough grounding into the concept of mission for the church and sets out to research the topic of missional conversion of the church itself. Using an in-depth biblical theological approach (p. 7), he explores the missionary vocation of the people of God, and the way God shapes his people through this process. Beginning with Yahweh and Israel's missional conversion, Cho moves on to Jesus and his disciples' missional conversion, the Holy Spirit and conversion of the early church and the missiological implications for the church today.

I found myself persuaded by Cho's arguments and the evidence he presents that Yahweh in the Old Testament, and God in the New Testament, has faithfully been committed to his mission for enfolding the nations into his presence and holiness. What the Lord began with Abraham has continued through millennia: a covenantal love and commitment to relationship with those he has created. Through the Son of God, filled with the Spirit of God, peoples have been invited into the family and community of God.

This is a book well worth reading. I found that I particularly enjoyed section 3: The Disciples' Encounter with Jesus and Their Missional Conversion, and section 4: The Earliest Church's Encounter with the Holy Spirit and Its Missional Conversion. Cho helps the reader to understand how Jesus' and the Holy Spirit's commitment to transforming people into a contrast community witnessing to those around demonstrates the missional purpose of the church. God not only sends his church but also changes his church through mission. As people we are transformed by his presence and holiness among his people. The presence and holiness of God, now indwelling his contrast communities, act as a witness to those who do not yet know him. Reading Cho's description of God's presence with his people reminded me of the precious privilege of being a chosen people, and a treasured possession in the eyes of their maker.

If you want to gain an understanding of the church's calling to be a people on mission because of the Lord's presence among us, this is a book for you. Cho will deftly walk you through millennia of how God has done this among his people in an increasing and expansive way, firstly with Abraham, then the people of Israel, the disciples and early church, and more recently with the church that crosses barriers and boundaries. For those longing to see more of the presence of God in their midst, Cho's book can increase insight and more importantly provide fuel for prayer to see the church becoming missional, and so transformed, in the process.

Rosie Hopley, CMS MA student

Joe M Easterling, *Big Things Start Small: How Small Groups Helped Ignite Christianity's Greatest Spiritual Awakenings*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2021)

Subtitled *How Small Groups Helped Ignite Christianity's Greatest Spiritual Awakenings*, Joe Easterling's debut publication claims to be the first to document, in a systematic fashion, the ways in which small group gatherings have summoned, sustained and been seeded from times of revival.

After briefly taking in Old Testament household spirituality, Easterling whisks us through the early church to monastic communities and Augustine. He then fast forwards to twelfth century pre-Reformation groups – Waldensians, Lollards, Hussites and Anabaptists – before settling to look in more detail at the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries' four "major awakenings": the first Great Awakening, the second, the Laymen's, Welsh and Korean revivals, and what he terms the "mid-twentieth century" revival.

Following discussion of each of these periods, we are presented with a summary table listing the types of small group that were a precursor to each awakening, those which ensued from it, the major proponents of small group meetings, notable leaders and ministries that emerged, and (perhaps the thrust of Easterling's work) what the key features of these groups were. These features, which the author would entreat us to rekindle in our contemporary groups, are (spoiler alert!) Bible study, fervently focused prayer, personal holiness, worship in song, an outward reach and a "latitude towards logistics" (meaning that a group's demography and structure should simply arise from its context). So, we find ourselves calling into clubs, classes and conventicles, in campuses, freight cars and coffeehouses.

Easterling wears his heart on his sleeve, and there is a clear North American Evangelical slant to the writing, which is bookended with his desire to see a reversal of the spiralling decline of the church in the States. Awakenings in Britain and Europe are recounted principally as a prelude to the contemporary US context. The key figures mentioned in the Korean revival are Western missionaries. Christian resurgences in other nations are out of scope, as are other growth movements such as South American Liberationism. White American Evangelical texts form the bedrock of the bibliography. The importance of the "social gospel" is acknowledged and gently dismissed. But it's a good read – a research piece in an accessible style.

There is a fresh take here for students of Evangelical history, and there is (as both back cover endorsements note) an obvious encouragement for churches to continue with small group meetings. Mind you, those hungry for renewal in their contexts, and frustrated by the constraints of their incumbent ecclesiology, are probably meeting and praying with likeminded people already. But a reader struggling with the impossibility of fitting all Easterling's recommended elements into a 90-minute group might have liked some practical advice – which is not this book's aim. So, while it may be true that too many of today's church groups are focused on their members' felt needs, we would need to do our own work to find ways of (for example) doing deep Bible study where literacy is low and few in the room have English as their mother tongue – or implementing honest personal accountability in a cross-cultural context with a sensitive safeguarding framework. We seem a long way from the world in which Wesley's disciples could "peer in" to one another.

There are countless books available to those seeking inspiration from Christianity's great awakenings, as indeed there are for those looking at ways of doing small groups well. Whether *Big Things Start Small* has enough new material to appeal to either market is a concern. Let's hope that a volume that binds the topics together doesn't fall between two bookstalls.

Simon Baigent, Pioneer Mission student, South London

Richard N Pitt, *Church Planters: Inside the World of Religion Entrepreneurs*, (New York, NY: OUP, 2022)

Much ink (virtual and otherwise) has been spilled in recent decades on the topic of church planting. Methods, location, funding models, theological imperatives and inspirational stories have somewhat flooded both the academic and popular market. In this work, Pitt takes an unusual approach of a sociological survey of planters, with the starting thesis that this is a group of people who might be best characterised as Religion Entrepreneurs. The result is a fascinating set of insights into both common and divergent personality types, experiences and subcultures of American church planters.

Refreshingly, Pitt focuses chiefly upon planters in two Pentecostal denominations who are not usually represented in scholarly literature (The Church of God in Christ and Assemblies of God), together with those who are in smaller denominational networks (with a range of theological and social positions from conservative to liberal) or in the non-denominational context. This provides a broad view of experience from planters from across racial and social backgrounds, as well as from those who might be very critical of each others' theological, ecclesiological or missiological perspectives.

Considering this diverse group of planters with the starting assumption that they share similar ground with those who start businesses rather than seeking employment raises all kinds of questions around the (sometimes uncomfortable) role of vocation. In planting a new church is the planter responding to a clear call of divine origin, or are they frustrated by a lack of opportunity in existing structures, unwilling to serve under another pastor, or reacting against past mistakes by forging a new path into the future? To what extent would they have become a business entrepreneur if they had not entered ministry? Most uncomfortable of all are the questions around the social standing of planters' church life. Pitt dares to talk out loud and explicitly about the elephant in the room: that in many circles, becoming a church planter is an ambition which, if realised, confers status in a congregation, a platform on the conference circuit and the aura of success. It is only through addressing this that the impact of the inverse fears of public and personal failure can be explored.

Inevitably the book is extremely USA-centric, and many of the situations of the planters are unique to that cultural and religious landscape. It would be fascinating to see similar interviews conducted in the UK as a comparative exercise. There is an inherent danger in taking starting assumptions, questions and conclusions from one side of the Atlantic and applying them to the other. That said, with appropriate and careful cultural filters in place, there is much to be learned for those of us outside of that context to learn from the work here. We too are in a church cultural context where there are incentives to plant which are often dressed up as vocational, and yet are so much more complex than presented. We too need to understand that some of these complexities may be part of the package of vocation, but equally may be rooted in the more negative realms of hurt, frustration, entitlement or desire for approval which are ever lurking in our mix of motivations.

The lens of the Religion Entrepreneur is a narrow one, but provides some fascinating insights and enables questions to be raised without judgement which in another approach might have been viewed as judgemental or even taboo. In and of itself, I am not convinced that it is an adequate sole framework for understanding the motivations and drivers for church planters. It is, however, a valuable additional perspective and deserves hearing and engagement from those who are planting new churches themselves, those who select, send, and fund them, and the Christian subculture which encourages and prays for them.

Rev Kate Seagrave, currently the Church Planting Missioner for the Diocese of Winchester

Jione Havea, *Doing Theology in the New Normal: Global Perspectives* (London: SCM Press, 2021)

A friend of mine, with no connection to church, recently had a wayward son return to the family home. Her eldest was not best pleased. In discussing this I was able to share the story of the prodigal son. For me this is when theology is most alive: when our lived experience sheds light on old stories in a way that opens new possibilities. *Doing Theology in the New Normal* is a book that explores global experiences of COVID-19, using them to uncover how theology has, or should have, changed for the post-pandemic world.

Jione Havea has curated this collection of essays from theologians around the world and interspersed them with poetry. Published in 2021, these pieces were written at the height of the COVID-19 crisis, reflecting on the impact of lockdowns and public health interventions, and seeking connections with historical and theological themes. The 350-page volume contains a diverse range of perspectives – some that clicked, and some that didn't. I was particularly moved by Sung Uk Lim's essay on the Korean idea of *Untact*. In this piece Lim draws a connection between Jesus' healing touch and the public health regimes of the pandemic era. In this contrast we explore boundary crossing in Mark's Gospel. It brings fresh perspective on the call for the church to align itself with the hurting, outcast and untouchables. This piece related well to my own context as a youth worker on a UK council estate. Likewise, in their chapter, Angelica Tostes and Delana Corazza explore a mission spirituality built on shared, communal values. They look to the Latin American concepts of *Buen Vivir* (good living) as models and inspiration for transforming the whole community through solidarity. What I valued so much in these chapters was the theological exploration of a cultural idea that came to the surface during COVID-19, but that has actual real-world application in our communities now – this is local theology at its best!

However, despite these notable exceptions, it would be fair to say that I found the book hard going. It may be that looking back from the summer of '22 makes the subject matter unrelatable as a time that we'd rather forget. More depressingly, the collection presents a hopeful new dawn beyond COVID-19, which – given the Ukrainian war, a cost-of-living crisis and other painful realities – feels rather misplaced. The hardest part for me is that some of the authors seem to be doing their theology outside of an immediate ministry context, which makes much of the work feel academic rather than practical. In this way, the book pulls together grand overarching narratives around COVID-19, but fails to relate to either the lived experience of the pandemic, nor the less-than-hoped-for "new normal".

At its best, the contributors of this book show us how the church can pioneer new ideas and new ways of doing theology built on the cultural resources of the day. For us ordinary do-it-yourself pioneers, who are doing our best to find meaningful connection between cultural context and the wisdom of the Christian story, there are some selected pieces of brilliance among the essays that represent good local theology. These could have significant application in our practice. But for the most part, this is a book for those studying the discipline of contextual theology, and probably those looking back with interest at the COVID-19 2020–21 pandemic years. For sure, it is a book best borrowed from the library. Still, doing theology is always an act of hope – hope that a new normal is possible even in trying times. This book is a manifesto of hope from within the darkest moments of recent history.

John Wheatley, CMS MA graduate and Frontier Youth Trust

Steve Taylor, *First Expressions: Innovation and the Mission of God*, (London: SCM Press, 2019)

First Expressions is an important contribution to the conversation around Fresh Expressions and new forms of church. By returning to alternative worship and emerging church groups that he had spent time with over 11 years previously, Taylor is able to provide a longitudinal study and begin to respond to the questions Fresh Expressions continually face around longevity and sustainability. Starting from his own experience of leading a "first expression" of church and seeing it grow and thrive and then come to an end, Taylor takes a fascinating journey exploring different experiences of these experimental Christian communities. He helpfully distinguishes between these "first expressions" of church and the institutional body seeking to learn from and resource these kinds of churches, "Fresh Expressions". I found this a particularly significant insight which recognises their unique and valuable contributions.

The book is laid out in four parts. The first part, consisting of three chapters, introduces first expressions, processes of innovation and the practical theology underpinning the project. It is about paying attention to the particular and the church "body-ing forth in innovation". Taylor firmly locates first expressions within innovation. The exploration of innovation moves it beyond what we might consider a Silicon Valley approach, drawing insights from ecosystems, indigenous understandings of innovation and from craft. These provide lenses through which innovation in Scripture can be seen afresh. His evaluative questions, which he forms through the chapter, are particularly helpful for drawing churches and communities into much more helpful and sustainable ways of being.

The second part revisits the 11 communities Taylor first researched in 2001, of which only five are still in existence. In chapter 4 he reflects on spending time with each of those five and begins to identify key themes around sustainability. In chapter 5 he spends time talking to those who were involved in the first expressions that came to an end, like the one he had led. Again, there is wisdom drawn from these experiences, both in what might have helped the first expressions to develop differently, and from the ecclesiology which is being revealed in these stories. An ecclesiology that reveals the models of church-as-gathered and church-as-growing to be deficient.

Part three focuses on the role of Fresh Expressions as organisational innovation. In the three chapters, Taylor spends time developing the theology that rooted Rowan William's approach to Fresh Expressions, the ways in which Fresh Expressions brought about ecclesial innovation and the organisational structures that enable mission.

Chapter four begins to draw out the implications for a theology of first expressions. Taking the four marks of the church – one, holy, catholic and apostolic – he reflects on the learning from the longitudinal study.

One of the most helpful chapters for me was exploring authenticity and what it means for the church to be "one". Taylor contrasts authenticity-as-originality and authenticity-as-sincerity. The former is the experimental and innovative, finding a contextual understanding of faith in a new culture, the latter is about discerning how it is a sign of God in the world. While Taylor is not questioning the need for discernment, what he is pointing out is that there are far more resources dedicated to discerning God in the past than in the present, and without the resources focused on that discernment stability and continuity becomes implicitly valued over the innovative and new. Because Fresh Expressions inadvertently conflated the two there is always a pull back to continuity and stability.

For all the discussion and interviews it felt a little detached from practice and there is some work to be done by the reader to make the connections. It was perhaps slightly long, and as a result it lost some of the focus of the earlier sections as it reached its concluding chapters. However, this is a significant piece of work, for a number of reasons: It provides a longitudinal and honest view of these "first expressions" that does not shy away from the difficulties and struggles and provides important perspective on such community; it is based on careful, in

depth qualitative research that enables the wider church to listen carefully and attentively to these groups; and it develops an approach to innovation that encourages a more complex and sustainable approach to church.

James Butler, Church Mission Society

Lucinda Mosher (ed.), *Freedom: Christian and Muslim Perspectives* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2021).

This edited collection reflects the proceedings of the 18th annual Building Bridges Seminar, which brings together Muslim and Christian scholars from around the world and was held in Switzerland in 2019.

Part one contains the opening plenary addresses of the gathering: C. Rosalee Velloso Ewell provides a Christian perspective and Tuba Isik a Muslim one on the topic of freedom. Azza Karram offers a few brief reflections on both essays. Part two focuses on Islamic texts on freedom. There are texts to discuss, drawn from the Quran and Hadith, from premodern Islamic writings and from writings in the modern period. There are also three essays, which introduce the three text selections. Part three does a similar job for the Christian texts, although in this case there are four selections: Old Testament, New Testament, the classical period and the modern period. Part four has one essay – some reflections on the seminar from Lucinda Mosher, the editor of this volume.

Rather than list the contents in exhaustive (and probably exhausting) detail, I will instead reflect upon the usefulness of the volume and the lessons it offers for other forms of Christian–Muslim dialogue. I will make four points. First, as a written record of interfaith dialogues, *Freedom* perhaps is best read as a stimulus for further conversations between Muslims and Christians about the nature of freedom in the many and various contexts in which we find ourselves. There is some reward in reading it by yourself and reflecting on what you find. I suspect there is much more to be gained if it is used as a way into conversation.

But second, this is a very intellectual and academic approach to dialogue, which will only work for an educated elite. So perhaps this is more a library resource or a book to buy a single copy of and use in planning dialogue events. The more practical questions, of how do we live well together in shared space, are notably absent – a curious oversight in a dialogue about freedom. Surely questions of how to live out my religion freely without harming others ought to be front and centre to the endeavours of an organisation such as Building Bridges. I would certainly advocate they become central to any dialogue group that uses this book as a stimulus for their own conversations.

Third, as well as being not enough, there is also far too much in this book for most dialogue groups to work with. This is especially true of the secondary texts, but even the wealth of scriptural citations would take a while to work through. There is a need to plan any dialogical encounter carefully, and be very clear on aims and expectations. The desire to include female and male voices from a range of Christian and Muslim theological perspectives is one to emulate as far as is practicable. It should be noted that, as with any selection, some are inevitably ignored. The lack of black voices is noted by Mosher, and does mean *Freedom* lacks some crucial perspectives.

Fourth, dialogue is founded on friendship; there are hints that Building Bridges is a gathering of friends, doubtless a changing and developing group, but with a core who have built relationships of trust in which truths can be spoken. Ultimately, this is where freedom lies, in our decisions to learn to live well together.

Tom Wilson, St Philip's Centre, Leicester

M Daniel Caroll R and Vincent E Bacote (eds.), *Global Migration & Christian Faith: Implications for Identity and Mission*, (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2022)

The Yoruba people of Nigeria have a saying: "The conflagration that destroyed the king's palace only makes it more palatial." In other words, there are blessings hidden in every disaster. Such is the story behind the publishing of this book, born out of a 2020 Wheaton Theology Conference that was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a Nigerian involved in missionary work in Britain in both church and academic contexts, this reviewer – along with millions of other diaspora Christians – lives in the reality of the tensions of global migration and its intersection with the Christian faith. In many of the migrant churches in Britain I have encountered in the course of my study and research, immigration issues are top of their prayer list and often the highlight of the "testimony time" (a time when church members give a praise report on an answered prayer) in their church services. Many pastors, church members and Christian scholars are understandably concerned with the refugee crisis both in their own immediate contexts and globally. While being aware of the different perspectives on (im)migration that are shaped along political lines, our Christian faith demands that we think Christianly about the intersection of our faith and the volatile subject of migration. This book definitely is a helpful resource in that regard.

The diverse disciplines of the contributors resulted in a rich variety of perspectives presented in the volume which are neatly categorised into four sections: Historical Perspectives (two authors), Biblical Foundations (four authors), Theological Reflections (two authors) and Ecclesiological and Missiological Challenges (three authors).

The Historical Perspectives section dwelt mainly on the Reformation era by reconsidering two writings of Martin Luther (Leopoldo A. Sánchez M.'s essay) as well as the Bible translation endeavours of the Reformation refugees as they took the Bible "on the run" with them and endeavoured to vernacularise across language frontiers (Powell McNutt's essay). I found Sánchez M's proposition insightful – that we are not only saved by *grace alone* through *faith alone* in *Christ alone* based on *scripture alone* to the *glory of God alone* (the five *solas* of the Reformation) but also because of God's *generosity alone* (*sola hospitalitate*).

The Biblical Foundations section begins with editor M. Daniel Carroll's fresh consideration of the Book of Genesis both to reconsider the concept of the image of God and the various strands of migration in the Book. Likewise, C.L. Crouch, in his contribution, considers the concerns of involuntary migration from the prophetic books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel and the "emergency theology" that emerges from such contexts. Joshua Jipp, through the books of Luke and Acts, and Nelson Morales, through the books of James and 1 Peter, offer a lens that glorifies the cross-cultural mission of the gospel of Christ.

In the Theological Reflections section, Peter Phan makes both literal and figurative use of the terms "home land", "foreign land" and "our land" as raw materials to tease out a theology of place that reflects the stages of the migration experience of many migrants. Then Daniel Groody creatively theologises on illegal border crossings by identifying Christ's miraculous conception in the womb of a betrothed virgin as a somewhat "illegal border crossing" in its own right.

In the final section on Ecclesiological and Missiological Challenges, Mark Douglas links climate change with migration and international law. George Kalantzis' vivid account of Europe's largest refugee camp in Lesbos suggests new ecclesiologies that can help in rehumanising people living in Lesbos-like realities, to the point where they can begin to consider themselves not only as refugees but also as people capable of hosting others with what they have to offer to the wider Body of Christ and the society. In the final contribution in the volume Sam George adapts the *Missio Dei* missiological terminology to remind readers that God is always on the move (*Motus Dei*), thus defining mission as following God on the move with a continuous intentional realignment of our steps with God's.

In its entirety, the volume is an attempt to use the Bible, Christian theology and church history as collaborative tools in shaping a missional response to the global migration and refugee crises. While the editors and most of the other contributors live and work in the United States of America (four from Wheaton College and eight from elsewhere – mainly from institutions in the United States), the book contains helpful and provocative insights for church leaders, mission partners, students and anyone involved in cross-cultural ministry from across the world – at least, those who are able to afford it.

Joseph Ola, Missio Africanus, Liverpool

David F Ford, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021)

This long-awaited commentary does not disappoint. One commentator calls it a feast, and so it is. This commentary is unusual in that it is not the work of a New Testament scholar. The author was, before his retirement, Regius Professor of Divinity in the University of Cambridge. He has been working on the book for twenty years and acknowledges the many individuals and institutions who have helped to shape his thinking. As I am personally acquainted with the author, however, and have heard him speak on various occasions, I can say unequivocally that this is the author's voice.

What kind of commentary is it? It began life as a contribution to the Westminster John Knox Belief series aimed at a broad readership in churches of many traditions, but more broadly anyone in varied cultures who "is open to an intelligent faith that engages… with the Bible and with the contemporary world"(p.xi). When the commentary grew too large to be accommodated within that series, it was taken on by Baker Academic.

The commentary is organised devoting a chapter to each chapter of the Gospel. It is based on the English text of the NRSV, but Ford's fluency in Greek enables him to focus on particular words helpfully transliterated. The introduction poses the questions Why John? Why now? It is important to read it because Ford surveys a number of essential matters, chiefly the all-important question of the identity of Jesus in John's Gospel. He also draws attention to how John envisages an ongoing drama in the lives of Jesus' disciples and those who will be drawn to believe through their testimony (cf. John 20:31). Ford believes that John knew the synoptic Gospels, but his post-resurrection stance leads him to make use of traditional material in a thoroughly Johannine manner (e.g. the cleansing of the temple: 2:13–22). Otherwise, Ford does not overly concern himself with matters of historical criticism.

In his treatment of chapter 1 Ford lays out a rich panoply of Johannine concepts, beginning with the momentous "In the Beginning was the Word" recalling Genesis 1:1. Then follows in the prologue (vv. 1–18), a cascade of words familiar to readers of John's Gospel: life, light and darkness, glory, grace and truth. The rest of the chapter (vv. 19–51) introduces further key terms: the witness of John the Baptist, Jesus the Lamb of God, Son of God and, in v. 51, the mysterious Son of Man. Then in verse 38ff comes the delightful little story where Jesus invites the first disciples to follow him, thereby introducing the key theme of discipleship.

It is impossible to do adequate justice to this excellent commentary, but readers may get a brief glimpse of Ford's ability to question familiar interpretations of key ideas by focusing on a single term: truth. In 16:13 Jesus assures his anxious disciples that after his return to the Father, the Holy Spirit will "guide you into all the truth". How comprehensive is this? Ford notes the numerous attempts to limit this to a "neatly defined package of meaning" (p.316). The activity of the Holy Spirit is far greater than merely reminding the disciples and their successors of truths already revealed. The Gospel is clear too that truth is inseparable from action. In 3:21 John links truth and light in a passage contrasting lovers of darkness with those who come to the light. Later, in chapter 18, in his confrontation with Pilate, Jesus accepts the title of king

but proceeds to fill it with his own meaning: "For this I was born, for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth" (18:37).

I should just mention Ford's indebtedness to the work of Richard Hays, who expounded the value of figural interpretation which he defined as "the discernment of unexpected patterns of correspondence between earlier and later events or persons within a continuous temporal stream". Applying this principle to John, Hays writes that "even more comprehensively than the other gospels, John understands the Old Testament as a vast matrix of symbols prefiguring Jesus". This way of interpreting will frequently alert readers to recognise this principle at work. An excellent example of this can be seen in Ford's treatment of the cleansing of the temple (2:13-25). In reading the Gospel alongside the Old Testament, Ford consistently uses the Greek translation (LXX).

I have no doubt that anybody who buys this commentary will find in it an imaginative resource, opening up new ways of understanding and applying this wonderful Gospel. My only minor quibble is that I don't think the average reader will know what "midrash" is (p.58).

To conclude, I think this commentary could profitably be read right through such is the quality of the narrative. My verdict is, buy this book!

Howard C Bigg, Cambridge

Jeremy Thomson, *Interpreting the Old Testament after Christendom: A Workbook for Christian Imagination*, (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021)

A workbook suggests a series of problems to be solved, which is how Thomson presents the task to the reader in *Interpreting the Old Testament after Christendom*. In trying to read the Hebrew Bible (or First Testament, as the author prefers), Thomson sees the modern Christian as beset on all sides by impediments. The Shoah exposed the contributions of the Christian tradition to the genocide of European Jews, demanding an undoing of its supersessionism. The decline of Christendom in the West has decentred the Bible in its cultures. The breadth of literature in the Hebrew Bible is a challenge. In the face of all this, *Interpreting the Old Testament* offers the reader only what it can: an honest assessment of the challenges and an approach whereby the Christian imagination might be drawn authentically and responsibly to engage with these Scriptures.

The approach Thomson advocates is less a formula and more a series of *loci* or points around which his engagement with the text centres. He takes as his starting point the intertextuality that defines the presence of the First Testament in the Second, looking to how its authors quote, allude and echo the Hebrew Bible in their own writings. He balances this intertextuality with an emphasis on reading whole books, reading any passage through the genre and motifs of the book as a whole. To demonstrate how this approach looks Thomson focuses on four books – Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings – as proofs-of-concept for his method. From these examples, Thomson concludes with a summary of what he recommends: a preference for a canonical (as opposed to narrative) approach that emphasises the conversation within and between the books themselves, aimed at facilitating greater access to these books at all levels of education and familiarity.

Despite its laudable goals – or perhaps, because of them – *Interpreting the Old Testament after Christendom* will prove frustrating to readers. The title of the book will be read by many as promising something it does not adequately deliver, which is an interpretive approach equal to the challenge the Hebrew Bible presents. This is, I believe, by design: the problem Thomson sets before the reader is one he knows he cannot solve for them, and so he sets about equipping them to wrestle with it instead. Still, some will be frustrated by the author alerting them to the difficulty of the challenge without providing a tidier solution. Similarly,

the book does not match well with any one audience. A lay reader will be overwhelmed by the wealth of scholarly engagement, whereas the interdisciplinary nature gives the book a jack-of-all-trades feel in the hands of an academic. Pastors appear to be its target audience, and they may make good use of it; however, the lack of stronger signposting and better organisation in its writing will make harvesting its value tougher going than need be.

Interpreting the Old Testament after Christendom is, in short, the book its subject matter warrants. It is upfront in its challenge, offering much insight at the cost of much work, so much so that many who pick it up will deem it not worth the effort. While it could have been made easier to engage, those who know the value of what it covers are encouraged to make the time to read it.

Miles Hopgood, Ewing, New Jersey, USA

Andrew Hayes and Stephen Cherry (eds.), *The Meanings of Discipleship: Being Disciples Then and Now* (London: SCM Press, 2021)

Discipleship seems to be popping up everywhere. The term that is. Whether it is in the denominational calls to renewal to reverse church decline, or the multitude of courses and programmes emerging from organisations supporting mission and learning in churches, discipleship has become the most common way to frame this. *The Meanings of Discipleship* is therefore timely, a prolonged theological reflection on discipleship through its meaning, history and practice. The book has much to offer in drawing the reader to a multitude of sources to enrich the understanding and practice of discipleship. It is an edited volume split into two parts. Each part is also split into two sections.

Part 1 is "A very short history of discipleship", looking at the early foundations and the architects of discipleship. The first three chapters turn to the New Testament, the early church and medieval Christianity respectively. The next five look at particular key figures such as Benedict, Calvin and Ramabai. There is a helpful basis for much of the discussion here, and some important insights emerge through the chapters, around agency, holiness and church. The problem with the section is it does not, in my opinion, have enough focus on drawing out the learning for the contemporary church. Partly due to it being a multi-authored volume it does not have a sense of forward motion and the reader is left to do much of the work of making the bigger connections.

Part 2, entitled "Imperatives for Discipleship Today", turns much more clearly to the contemporary context. Helpful chapters on missionary discipleship by Kirsteen Kim, on Eucharist Discipleship by Matthew Bullimore and Relational Discipleship by Stephen Cherry are for me the heart of the book and the most important contributions to the discussion on discipleship. Bullimore's account of the everyday and domestic and its relationship to prayer and eucharist I found particularly compelling. The five chapters on priorities for contemporary disciples – while all strong and engaging essays with much to contemplate and draw from – felt like they needed a bit more direction and to be more focused on exploring the "meanings of discipleship".

The fact that, as the title indicates, discipleship has many meanings, causes problems for the book. While this is an important observation about the language of discipleship and one which I would have liked to see given greater attention, it means that the offerings in the different chapters cover a huge range of topics – from medieval pilgrimage to racial justice, from historical "architects" of discipleship such as Benedict and Bonhoeffer to trans experience. While all these chapters offer fascinating insights in their own right, because of discipleship's many meanings it was harder to see what they offered together to the contemporary understanding of discipleship. I felt there were assumptions about what discipleship was within the different chapters that were not always brought to the surface.

And I would have liked to see more engagement between the chapters – something which is, admittedly, tricky in an edited volume.

I think Hayes and Cherry have a keen sense of the issues at stake in the contemporary use of the language of discipleship around agency, connectedness, ecclesiology, desire and holiness and would like to have seen the volume explore these in more detail. Hopefully there is more to come from them around these themes.

Generally, I think this volume makes a helpful contribution to the discussion around discipleship and offers a multitude of perspectives that will serve scholars and practitioners as they reflect on the meanings of discipleship. I recommend the essays from Herman Paul, Anthony Reddie and Rachel Mann in particular as deeply thought provoking and challenging. Overall, this is a rich book with much to recommend despite the limitations suggested above.

James Butler, Church Mission Society

Joseph Sievers and Amy Jill Levine (eds.), *The Pharisees*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021).

The Pharisees invariably get bad press in sermons. The purpose of this book is to encourage preachers and teachers to think again. The book's basic argument is that any account of the Pharisees given in the Gospels is polemical, one side of a debate conducted in a particular style. Unthinking repetition of these stereotypes can, at worst, contribute to continued antisemitism. Lest the reader rolls their eyes and thinks of political correctness gone mad, I personally have witnessed and heard from Jewish friends of many incidents of precisely this problem.

The write up of a conference held at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome in 2019, *The Pharisees* is perhaps not the kind of volume to read cover-to-cover in one sitting (specialist academics and book reviewers aside). The price tag may also mean those on a limited budget might look to a library to provide an opportunity to read it. But these points aside, this is a text that is well worth engaging with. In the prelude, Craig Morrison discusses where the name "Pharisee" comes from. He explores Leo Baeck's focus on linking "saintliness" with "separation" as well as Louis Finkelstein's argument that Pharisees were "separatists" within the Synagogue. He also covers New Testament approaches.

The first main part explores historical reconstructions. Many of these essays are specialist: a detailed exploration of 4QMMT from the Dead Sea Scrolls and what archaeological finds tell us about Pharisees being two examples. There is also considerable discussion of Josephus and the New Testament texts. Here essays range from detailed discussion of a particular passage (the woes against the Pharisees in Matthew 23) to more general questions as to whether Paul was a "perfectly righteous Pharisee" made all the more righteous by meeting with Jesus, and the relationship between Jesus and the Pharisees. This section contains essays that any serious student of the New Testament ought to read. What is particularly useful for those who tend to only engage with Christian (Evangelical) scholarship is that there are various perspectives present. It is, in my view at least, helpful for those who preach and teach the New Testament to understand how painful some of our most treasured texts are to other audiences.

This point, of the reception history of texts, is the central focus of part two. The sweep of history is broad in this section, beginning with the Church Fathers: Justin Martyr, Hegesippus, Hipolytus of Rome and Epiphanius of Salamis, as Matthias Sked explains how Pharisees were used as a symbolic group to suit the theological purposes of the authors. At the other end of this section, Philip Cunningham looks as how Pharisees are portrayed in Catholic religion textbooks, noting with disappointment that stereotypes and inaccuracies abound. Essays in this section discuss portrayal of Pharisees in art and in films, the Oberammergau Passion Play, as well as medieval scholars, Martin Luther and John Calvin. The tone of the section is one of

Christian recognition of and repentance for past sins. There is a long, and deeply troubling, history of Christian antisemitism, which stands at odds with Jesus' own Jewish identity, not to mention his command that we love everyone, including those we theologically disagree with, as ourselves. While it is true that Christians and Jewish people disagree as to our understanding of the person and significance of Jesus of Nazareth, the way in which Christians have done so has all-too-often brought nothing but shame and disgrace to our faith.

The third part provides suggestions as to how we can improve. All those training for ministry, or indeed who preach regularly, ought to read or listen to Amy-Jill Levine at least once. Not because you will necessarily agree with everything she says, but because her views will certainly make you think. This is certainly true of her essay on preaching and teaching about the Pharisees in this volume. Levine is a New Testament scholar of considerable standing, who is also Jewish. Her scholarship is on the liberal and revisionist side, and in other writing she has challenged the historicity of different aspects of the Gospel accounts. That is an area that is open to debate; what is not debatable is her experience of (unthinking) antisemitism perpetuated by both popular Christian preachers and Sunday school teachers, as well as by New Testament scholars. But Levine doesn't just find problems. She also suggests solutions such as labelling discriminatory art, providing historical information in the church newsletter to supplement the sermon, utilising resources specifically written to help the preacher avoid antisemitism, as well as teaching more generally on the history of Christian–Jewish relations. Perhaps most importantly, Levine encourages Christians to work with Jewish people in developing appropriate responses.

Christians believe they have good news to share. Many Jewish people hear us sharing hatred, discrimination and prejudice. The only way to deal with this problem is for honest conversation resulting in meaningful change. It may not be the case that your Jewish friends and colleagues will come to faith in Christ. But at least they'll learn you love them enough to be willing to admit your mistakes and change where you've got things wrong.

Tom Wilson, St Philip's Centre, Leicester

Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: for the 21st Century*, (London: SCM Press, 2021)

Where to begin with a book which is widely regarded as a classic, and one I've heard described by one theologian as the most important book of the last 50 years? I do not claim to have grasped its profundity, nor taken in its careful argument in a such a way to make such claims, nor to add much to all that has already been written. While some of it is highly technical and specific (and I'm grateful to the foreword from Richard Bauckham for guidance on where to focus my attention,), as Moltmann carefully opens up his main thesis, I could see why this was a classic that demanded careful attention.

Moltmann's key claim is that we must have a theology of eschatology; a theology that pulls us out of the mechanistic closed universe of modern thinking, and to realise that the kind of hope Jesus promises is not one in continuity with the way the world is, but a radical change. He is critical of what he calls "a theology of the eternal present", where theology becomes linked to the revelation of God in place. Moltmann argues that God's presence, for Israel and in the life, death and revelation of Jesus is about promise. The point of God's presence is always in relation to the promise of the future that is yet to come to pass. This means that Christian theology must have the future in sight, it must be about the future that God promises to bring about, rather than about bringing the present into line with God's eternity. In this way it unsettles followers of God to "strike out in hope towards the promised new future" (p.89). Moltmann takes almost the entire book to work through the theological implications of such a position: he traces the problem through (mainly German) theological thought in chapter 1, discussing it in relation to history in chapter 2 (particularly through the history of Israel), and

through Jesus, and particularly the resurrected Jesus, in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 then begins to explore the consequences of this eschatological perspective to understand what "history" is.

It is only chapter 5 where some of the more practical implications of this theology begin to be explored. In particular, he looks at what it means for the church and Christianity in the modern world. It is by far the shortest chapter and remains fairly abstract and big picture. I think it is safe to say, though, that in reality much of the rest of Moltmann's great library of works is him working through the implications of this *Theology of Hope* for the church, for mission and for the world.

The new edition has a new introduction by James Hawkey and includes a lecture from Moltmann delivered in Westminster Abbey in March 2020. Neither add a great deal to what is already there, and Richard Bauckham's introduction remains a much more significant help in engaging with Moltmann's work, but they do highlight the continuing need to reflect on eschatology in light of all that is going on in the world. The fact that Moltmann's lecture took place just before Britain went into full lockdown seems particularly poignant.

So why should you read this book? Well, I have greatly appreciated the challenge to think about the world and theology eschatologically. In the West we are wedded to a sense of progress, to a capitalist outlook that assumes that all can be put right if we work better and harder. Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* interrupts this assumption and sets our sights on the future promises of God. Similarly, for churches increasingly drawn to see the world in immanent terms, we desperately need this challenge and to be drawn into God's promised future; something which is in radical discontinuity with the world as it is, and something we are being invited to participate in and hope for.

This book is not easy going, but it is rewarding. It is not particularly focused on practice, but it paints a compelling vision of theology, and indeed mission, that is focused on God's future through Jesus Christ, by the Spirit.

James Butler, Church Mission Society

David W Scott, Daryl R Ireland, Grace Y May and Casely B Essamuah (eds.), *Unlikely Friends: How God Uses Boundary-Crossing Friendships to Transform the World*, (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021)

This fascinating book offers a variety of contributions on the theme of boundary-crossing friendships in mission. Compiled by four of her former students as a tribute to Dana L Robert on her 65th birthday, it focuses on a topic which has been central to her influential writings upon cross-cultural mission. With the current tendency to focus on strategy, resource and innovation in mission, this book is a timely reminder of the simple yet profound gift of friendship and its prophetic and powerful impact. Robert's work reorientates us to the foundational practice of friendship in Christian mission and the wisdom there is to be gleaned from the lived experience of those who follow the missionary call of Christ. It follows a central thread in Robert's own work, which asserted that in the development of world Christianity it is transnational friendships, often behind the scenes, that have slowly and faithfully shaped its emergence.

The book is structured around 12 differently authored contributions reflecting on the role of friendship in diverse contexts and thus raising a variety of critical themes. Soojin Chung skilfully tells the story of the inspirational Pearl Buck, who fought against the systemic racial hierarchy that persisted in transnational adoption. Buck's own experience of adopting two mixed race children led her to conclude that cross-cultural love was the basis of true family, built on a vision that all humans are created in divine likeness. Michele Miller Sigg writes about Emile Mallet who, during the cholera epidemic in Paris in the mid-nineteenth century, built a

network of female friends who ministered alongside street children, vulnerable women and women in prison, inspiring a new generation of Christian women to be missionaries. Taking us on a global and historical tour touching down in the East African revival, Latin America in the early twentieth century and Boston in the height of racial tension in the 1960s, Robert's former students narrate stories of ordinary missionaries who go under the radar yet through the generosity of their practice of cross-cultural friendship enact the coming kingdom. There is much we can learn from them, and this collection of essays walks us through a journey in which we can do precisely that, challenging us to think about the narrowness of our own social interactions and the possibility of blessing if we are prepared to courageously cross boundaries in friendship.

The second half of the book attends to some of the challenges of such transnational friendships, engaging critically with the danger of cultural dependency and the ever-present danger of what Kendal Mobely astutely calls "the ethical dualism of white supremacy" (p.128). I would have valued this theme being expanded more, but one of the challenges of a collection of essays is the tendency to whet the reader's appetite rather than offer a comprehensive dealing with a particular subject. I particularly appreciated Bonnie Sue Lewis's contribution on the value of interfaith friendships and the mutual enrichments of friendships that cross even religious boundaries and open our eyes to ourselves, one another and the presence of God in the world.

In our post-Brexit Western context, where societal division seems more apparent than ever, the importance of friendship in crossing cultural and ethnic barriers cannot be underestimated and carries a prophetic and eschatological potency. *Unlikely Friends* presents a vision for friendships that transcend the often preferred comfort of homogeneity and alikeness to express something of the joy and value found in difference. While it would be disingenuous to speak of friendship as a "strategy" in mission this volume comprehensively demonstrates the role relationships have and continue to play in shaping world Christianity.

The final section contains tributes to Robert from colleagues and former students. This is perhaps less interesting to the reader wanting simply to explore the missionary and theological value of friendship, yet it is nevertheless testimony to the impact of a remarkable scholar, not least in terms of the sheer breadth of contexts those tributes come from. It would seem that Robert really is a living embodiment of her message.

Rev Dr Hannah Steele, lecturer in missiology, St Mellitus College

Aaron J Ghiloni (ed.), *World Religions and their Missions* (2nd Edition), (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2022).

I'm presuming that readers of this review are mission-minded Christians interested in what they can learn about mission (broadly understood) both from their fellow Christians as well as followers of other world religions. I certainly found plenty of food for thought in this book. After an opening and orientating chapter, *World Religions and their Missions* is divided into two parts: reflections on particular belief systems and then discussion on the work of comparison of approaches.

Part one works alphabetically through seven belief systems in eight chapters. Rather than summarise the whole argument of each, I will instead note points that particularly struck me.

First, the reflection on mission in the Baha'i faith made me consider the challenge not of winning new adherents but the far greater struggle of deepening their faith. Second, on a related theme, the chapter on Buddhism explored the aim of a conversion of the mind rather than recruitment of numbers. Third, the chapter on Christianity reminded me of the sheer breadth and variety of expressions of faith in Jesus that have existed and continue to exist in the world today. Fourth, I really liked the explanation of Hinduism as "a complex network of closely associated religious traditions" (p.111), as well as the exploration of spreading *dharma*

through proselytization and conversion, sitting in contrast with the process of awakening communion with the divine through *bhakti*. Fifth, I was slightly surprised by two chapters on Islam, but both were interesting, covering between them the example of the Prophet in *da'wah*, the history and practice of debate with Christians, the notion of justice as mission, rooted in the Qur'an and Islamic philosophy, as well as active in practice. Sixth, the potted history of Mormon mission was instructive. I found the discussion of the apocalyptic consciousness of the first Mormon missionaries especially enlightening, with the duality of either winning converts for baptism, or shaking off the dust from one's feet as a sign of eternal rejection and damnation for those who refused to accept the Mormon teachings. The explanation of the current systematic Mormon mission, including the ancestor searches and vicarious baptism of the dead was also interesting. Finally, it was refreshing to see the mission of atheism, or "nonreligion" as the book terms it, discussed in some detail. I found the analysis that nonreligion has two missional aims: critique of religion and support for the views of the nonreligious, to be entirely convincing.

Part two is much shorter, with only two chapters. Chapter ten discusses how the study of mission has developed over time. The particularly useful parts of this chapter, from my perspective, were the discussions of religions not covered so far, acknowledging that Sikhism and Judaism both have missional aspects, as well as the missional focus of the Jehovah's Witnesses. The final chapter, on mission and interreligious dialogue, provides a robust framework for continuing the conversation in detail.

World Religions and their Missions is an interesting, if specialist, read. For Christians who work in interfaith, such as myself, it is a useful resource for nuancing and advancing what can sometimes be an overly simplistic and polemical conversation about mission. For those who train others for Christian mission, it is a useful way in to such discussions. It should therefore be on the shelves of mission training college libraries, for students to use as they develop their own practical and ethical frameworks for twenty-first century mission.

Tom Wilson, St Philip's Centre, Leicester

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