Holiness Volume 1 (2015) Issue 1

Holiness & Education

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HOLINESS
THE JOURNAL OF WESLEY HOUSE CAMBRIDGE

Editorial

Janet Morley

Welcome to the first issue of Wesley House's new online journal, *HOLINESS*. We are hoping the journal will become a platform for all scholars who are interested in addressing an international readership who are engaged with Wesleyan and Holiness traditions, as they are lived out in the contemporary world.

As we launch *HOLINESS*, we want to announce our clear intention of developing a truly international journal. Most contributors to our first issue are writing from a British perspective. But we are delighted to have secured the agreement of several eminent Methodist scholars from across the world to act as international consultants. We hope they will recommend potential contributors and peer reviewers. Already we are receiving proposals and offers of help from outside Britain – please be in touch, wherever you live, if you would like to contribute to the journal in any way.

In calling for contributions, the format of proposing a theme which is specific but not too narrow, attached to the title *HOLINESS*, is proving popular. 'Holiness & Education' has mainly generated debate about the importance of theological education. Controversial matters within British Methodism are not avoided. In the peer-reviewed articles, Professor Tom Greggs explores the nature and purpose of theological teaching and learning throughout the Church ('If it is teaching, then teach!'). Dr Jane Leach asks what is the central point of it all, and therefore what considerations should be shaping how we provide formation for church leaders ('Is wisdom the principal thing?'). Dr Roger Walton ('A discipleship movement shaped for mission?') looks at the development of a new ecclesial strapline for the British Methodist Church and its impact on its identity within education and ecumenism.

Some of the shorter articles explore different aspects of theological education. Dr Clive Marsh engages with the insights of Les Ball's study of theological

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training institutions in Australia, asking how these may have a wider, cross-cultural application ('Transforming theological learning'). In 'The role of the creative arts in initial ministerial education', Anne Holmes explores the concept of 'creative repair' and its role in initial formation in preventing burnout in ministry. David Deeks' article takes a distinctive approach, looking at the role of week-by-week congregational worship as a drama of holy learning that potentially incorporates the whole congregation. Val Ogden, from her new perspective of the South Pacific, writes as a mission partner who has been appointed to a role that involves theological education by extension. She reflects on the meaning of her vocation at this time, and the insights of Pacific theologians. Finally, there is an article addressing Methodist involvement in faith schools. Barbara Easton, who is the newly appointed Director of Education for The Methodist Church in Britain, looks at the history of Methodist involvement in schools, and whether the founders would recognise what is happening now.

We are publishing some regular columns, for which we would be delighted to receive additional contributions. Dr Cindy Wesley introduces a column, 'What have the sermons of John Wesley ever done for us?', which is intended to revisit some of the classic sermons and explore what is their value to the enterprise of holy living in different contexts today. In this issue we look at the whole principle of being guided by these sermons, and invite contributions in relation to individual Wesley sermons for future issues.

Our review section of books and films is not limited to the theme of the issue but will seek to cover a variety of key new releases within the whole range of disciplines that should affect theological reflection, as well as revisiting classic texts.

In addition to the discursive articles, we hope to develop a poetic and liturgical section, and we look forward to receiving creative as well as academic contributions. In this issue, as a taster, we are offering a devotional reflection based on Charles Wesley's hymn 'Open Lord my inward ear', sung to Nicola Morrison's contemporary lyrical setting. This is published as an online podcast only, with the hymn text available on screen. As part of Wesley House's commitment to be a place of both worship and scholarship, it is a devotional piece, asking God to open our ears and eyes, minds and hearts to each other and to a shared search for truth, as we seek to live out the holiness to which we are called.

Janet Morley, Commissioning Editor
Wesley Day, Pentecost 2015

HOLINESS
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'If it is teaching, then teach!' (Romans 12:7): ministry, big issues and grown-up discipleship

Tom Greggs

PROFESSOR TOM GREGGS is the Chair of Historical and Doctrinal Theology, Kings College, University of Aberdeen. His publications include *Barth, Origen, and Universal Salvation*; *Theology against Religion*; and *New Perspectives for Evangelical Theology*.

t.greggs@abdn.ac.uk
Aberdeen, UK

After addressing the teaching and learning context in which contemporary theology exists, this article seeks to address contemporary Methodism and Methodist theology. Drawing on Scripture and theologians, it is argued that the Church is a creation of the Holy Spirit, and knows itself as such not only as it is created intensely so by an event of the Spirit of God, but also that the purpose of this intensive indwelling work of the Holy Spirit is to push the Church beyond its boundaries and orientate it onto the world. In light of this, seven motifs are identified for a theology which seeks to serve the Church.

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This following journal article is a facsimile of a lecture which was given as the 2014 Presbyteral Session of the British Methodist Conference. It stands largely unchanged from its first delivery in the hope that the texture and tone of the lecture's content might also be retained, and it was given at the request of the out-going President, the Revd Ruth Gee, that the author speak on issues relating to church, theology and public life.

Introduction

If I am honest, and at the risk of losing a great deal of you in the opening section of this paper, as a theologian in the twenty-first century, in terms of most of the conversations I have (especially in relation to people from the Church and the vocation I feel called to), I sometimes feel a little bit akin to one of the violin players who chose to play on while the *Titanic* sank. We live in an age in which the Church (and particularly perhaps our own and other Nonconformist traditions) finds itself sidelined. We do not enjoy the status we once had. Churches are closing. Our large preaching houses are emptying. Focus is often on the management of decline. Cultures have shifted towards relativism and pluralism. Book shops now stock more books on New Age medicine than Bibles.

There are potentially two implications of this in terms of theology. The first is that theology (public or otherwise) may well seem to be a luxury that we cannot afford in The Methodist Church in Britain at this moment of ecclesial austerity: priorities have to be ordered elsewhere. The second is that even if we do afford ourselves time to focus on theology, it is very easy for us in the context in which we live (a context which is complexly secular and pluralist) to lose confidence in the message we are called to proclaim; it is easy to feel we cannot have confidence in the gospel. Either way, the circumstance for us can feel somewhat desperate, and the context in which we might think of public theology as existing is one in which we can feel as though there is no public interested and, even if there were, we would be unsure about what it is we should say to them.

Remembering the context in which we worship, live and speak is, however, important. It is important for us in terms of the priorities we set ourselves; in terms of differentiating between that which is central and that which is peripheral to our purpose. But it is in this context that the words of St Paul in the title of this paper need to resound loud and clear: if our calling is to teach,

then let us teach. There is, it seems to me, no theology which is not public theology: there is no theology without a public, without the context of teaching and learning. Doctrine after all comes from the Latin *doceo*, meaning 'I teach'; and disciple from the Latin *discere,* meaning 'to learn'. To be a disciple is to be a learner; just as to engage in doctrine, in theology, is to engage with teaching. Theology is not about playing some intellectual chess game in our heads, nor is it an exercise between some small esoteric gnostic group; theology is, instead, about teaching the faith publicly in order to foster grown-up disciples (grown-up learners) who live in a context of pressing big questions. We are at a moment when we need to learn again to put our fiddles down and to speak calmly and meaningfully, speaking the way to go so that others may learn: rather than to play our fiddles while the *Titanic* sinks, we are to instruct people calmly into the lifeboats and aid people in a time of difficulty.

The Church exists only for the world: it is orientated outwards

It is of vital importance that we realise that, as the Church, we do not exist for ourselves. Our life is not to be focused or ordered primarily inwardly upon our own polity and order. It is to be focused outwards to the world. Any church which seeks to be the true Church by ordering itself internally as such is sure to fail to become the true Church: the true Church exists for the world. This means we are to have a voice not only ordered to ourselves but to those many for whom Jesus Christ lived, died and was raised, who as yet do not know the good news.

Martin Luther (drawing upon Augustine) speaks of sin as the *cor incurvatum in se* (the heart turned in upon itself). In the Church, we not only turn our individual hearts towards one another as part of salvation; but we also turn our corporate heart *as the Church* outwards towards the world. Our purpose is not for ourselves and our self-preservation: our purpose is for the world. Let me explain what I mean.

In Acts 1:12 we get what seems to be the beginnings of the Church. A little bit like the way in which each year the superintendent minister reads out the list of preachers at the Preachers' Meeting, we get something similar with the list of the disciples in v. 13. We then get a description of worship (v.14). We have count of membership in v. 15 (obviously to work out what the circuit assessment would be!). Then a sermon and readings led by Peter is offered – a

service. After that, there is even a church council meeting, with an election of officers (vv. 23–26), and Matthias taking the new position.

The description of what is going on in Acts 1 looks to me as though what we are dealing with is a church. However, and this is crucial, it is not; what we get in Acts 1 has only a *semblance* of the Church. The Church begins in chapter 2:

> When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. (Acts 2:1–4[1])

The Church begins at Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit. The foundational condition of the Church is not ecclesial propriety or having officers appropriately in place. The foundational condition of the Church is simply the presence of the Holy Spirit who is present within the variety and plurality of the community in all its variety and diversity.

We live in an age today in which we are rightly nervous about the lack of the impact of the Church on a broader society, which is at once marked by secularism and pluralism. It is perhaps right that as people we have asked the question that Dietrich Bonhoeffer poses to his own (somewhat different) situation of de-christianisation: 'What does a church, a congregation, a sermon, a liturgy, a Christian life, mean in a religionless world?',[2] or – we might say – a complexly religious and secular world.

However, in seeking to answer this question, as a church we have very often descended, in the words of the American theologian Michael Jinkins, into 'the hyperactivity of panic. This manifests itself in clutching for any and every programmatic solution and structural reorganization in the desperate hope that survival is just another project or organizational chart away.'[3] The result has been that we have sought to think about the Church in resolutely inward-facing, self-preserving and non-theological terms; and this runs deep. We are concerned very often to ape the church of Acts 1, not attend to the condition of the existence of the church in Acts 2 – the condition of the presence of the Spirit. We have become obsessed with questions of *how* to be church, I fear, sometimes at the expense of thinking about the question of *what* the Church actually is.

I want to propose to you today that the Church is simply and singularly a dynamic community of the Holy Spirit of God, and that we need to attend to the Spirit's sovereignty over the Church if we are to have any hope of being a church which is meaningful to the world, because it is the Holy Spirit who makes God present in the contingent situations, in the contexts of big questions, in which we find ourselves. Calvin writes that there is no reason 'to pretend … that God is so bound to persons and places, and attached to external observances, that he has to remain among those who have only the title and appearance of a church [Rom 9:6].'[4] If, as I suggest, that is true of the players in Acts 1, then it is no less true for us today – whatever those external observances might be (whether contemporary or traditional, low or high church). It is the Holy Spirit of God alone who gives life to the Church. While the Church is formed into the Body of Christ, it is the Holy Spirit who does this. The order here is important. We pray 'Come Holy Spirit' in order that we may say 'Jesus is Lord'; we pray 'Come Holy Spirit' because the Spirit is the one who makes present the reality of Christ in the multiplicity, diversity and plurality of the communities which form the universal Body of Christ. The Spirit is the one who guides the Church, who helps the Church to know and understand its purpose in the world, to help us to receive the gospel in the context in which we live. The Spirit is the one who guides us to speak theologically in all our changing publics.

How we are a true Church rather than something with the semblance of a church is related to the presence of the Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ and who makes the Word known to us in the present and in all of our messiness and contingency. Not having the semblance of a church is *not* under any circumstances about one form of church practice or liturgy or worship trumping another. The issue at stake is, instead, one which involves a recognition simply that the Church is made the Church by an act and event of God the Holy Spirit; and the Church is made simply, completely and fully to serve the world of which it is a part. To find the concrete condition of the Church in the world, we have to ask the following question: does the Church display the Spirit's fruits?

None of this is to say that the Holy Spirit is only confined to the Church. As I've said on numerous occasions before: while the Holy Spirit is the *sine qua non* of the Church, the Church is not the *sine qua non* of the Holy Spirit. The condition for the existence of the Church is the presence of the Spirit; but the condition for the presence of the Spirit (who blows wherever God wills) is not the Church.

But what does this mean in terms of our speech to the world, our public theology?

The Holy Spirit presses us to move towards the world: outside of ourselves and beyond our boundaries

Lots of the imagery surrounding the Holy Spirit in Scripture is imagery that we might think of as being 'intense'. In Acts, we have a picture of deep intensity. Think about the language that is used to describe the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost:

> And suddenly from *heaven* there came a sound like the *rush of a violent wind*, and it *filled* the entire house where they were sitting. Divided *tongues, as of fire*, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were *filled* with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.
>
> Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered… (Acts 2:2–6)

This is maximal metaphorical language here: violent winds, heaven, filling, tongues of fire. And this is only what the event is *like*! Luke struggles to find the words that do justice to this description of the event. The imagery here is thick, deep, wildly intense.

Worship and holiness are in many ways like that. We find ourselves wonderfully lost in God. Think of the way in which congregations sing in our Methodist tradition – voices and tongues crying out in praise of God, 'cathedrals of sound' calling for a thousand tongues to sing our Great Redeemer's praise. There is an intensity about what we do. Feeling God's presence deep within is a fundamental part of this – what John Wesley called having our hearts 'strangely warmed'. The palpable presence of the Spirit in this worship brings with it a degree of assurance: the knowledge of the presence of God who, although not seen, feels as real to us by the power of the Spirit as the presence of a mighty wind blowing through us.

One of the dangers of this intensity is that it can easily transform itself into interiority. Worship can become about *my* getting that particular feeling; what *I* get out of it. Even in its best forms, all too easily (and of this I am more than culpable) worship can become about *my* relationship with God. We often respond to this by pointing out the need for community, for ecclesiality. Certainly the story of Pentecost is not an occurrence that happens to only one person. Luke tells us (Acts 2:1): 'When the day of Pentecost had come, *they* were *all together* in one place.' A focus on the Church is certainly better than a focus on the self. However, I wonder whether that really goes far enough. While lots of worship and devotion in our tradition is about personal relationship with God, I think we do quite a good job of building community internally. We celebrate communion; we emphasise small groups; and (let's be frank) we're friendly enough; Methodists are nice folk – and we do a good line in puddings. My fear is rather that our communities can become about collective egos rather than individual ones: we can move too easily from thinking about 'me' to think about 'people like me', with whom I like to be. We can refocus our concern on our church, preserving or building *it* up, making sure *it* doesn't fall apart on our watch.

There is nothing wrong in that in and of itself. But I want to ask this: what is the purpose of that intensity? Certainly, worship of God; yes. That comes before all else. But we are not in heaven yet, and we should be patient with the world which God has created and patiently sustains as the cosmos awaits redemption. Instead, I want to say that the purpose of this intensity is for the extensity of the world: it is for the public. This intensity is one that leads, nay throws, us outwards: it leads us to the world, to our publics. The disciples move from being gathered in their upper room (selecting their officers, being orientated on one another, and on God), to in the event of Pentecost being orientated on God and the world.

The universality of that extensity is emphatically repeated in Acts 2 (vv. 5–11):

> Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to

> Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs – in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.'

The orientation outwards onto the world and for the world is an extensity which is the purpose and simultaneous effect of the coming intensity of the Holy Spirit.

Should we be remotely surprised by this, however? Is that not God's way throughout the Bible? God appears in a burning bush and Moses takes off his shoes because he is on holy ground and speaks with God. And Moses experiences that deep intensity of God not so that he can think 'Oh, that was a nice thing to happen?' or 'Aren't I special?' or 'Haven't I got worship right?'; but so that he rescue a people from slavery, and lead them to freedom. As Gregory of Nyssa reminds us in his *Life of Moses*, the result of the intensity of God's presence on Sinai (the thunder claps, the sound of the *shofar*, the cloud) in Exodus 19 is the giving of the Law, is relations with people and the world. Deep intensity with God leads us out to the world. In fact the Ten Commandments themselves even work that way – a focus on God followed by a focus on others. I could go on: Isaiah 6, or the Greatest Commandment. An orientation towards God leads us to an orientation towards the other; the two belong together. The intense coming of God's Spirit leads us to the extensity of the world around us. The Spirit, who leads us into deep worship and love of God, leads us simultaneously outwards to the world.

Karl Barth, to my mind the greatest theologian of the twentieth century, once wrote this:

> The work of the Holy Spirit in the gathering and upbuilding of the community … cannot merely lead to the blind alley of a new qualification, enhancement, deepening and enrichment of this being of the community as such. Wonderful and glorious as this is, *it is not an end in itself even in what it includes for its individual members*. The enlightening power of the Holy Spirit draws and impels and presses beyond its being as such, beyond all the reception and experience of its members, beyond all that is promised to them personally. And only as it follows this drawing and impelling is it the real community of Jesus Christ.[5]

The Spirit who leads us ever deeper into God, whose Spirit testifies to our spirit, leads us at once ever deeper into the world, for the world. To be theological, to engage with God, is simultaneously to be led out towards the public, towards the world. These two cannot be prised apart. The Spirit is, after all, God's coming to the world in the time between the times. A church with a singularly inwards concern for itself, even if a good community of praise and of love of God, with Scripture and preaching as central, can never be the church of Pentecost; it will only ever be the church of Acts 1. My other great theological hero, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, put it thus:

> The space of the church does not, therefore, exist just for itself, but its existence is already always something that reaches far beyond it. This is because it is not the space of a cult that would have to fight for its own existence in the world. Rather, the space of the church is the place where witness is given to the foundation of all reality in Jesus Christ … The space of the church is not there in order to fight with the world for a piece of territory, but precisely to testify to the world that it is still the world, namely the world that is loved and reconciled by God.[6]

The Church receives the Spirit of God in deep and intense ways to enable it to exist for the world in all its extensity, plurality and diversity – to exist for its public. It is, after all, the nature of the Spirit to be freely and extensively present in the world; and the Church is a place where that extensive presence intensely dwells – not for the Church's own sake but for the world. The intensity is like that of a light on a lampstand, which burns brightly not for its own sake but for the sake of the room it lights up; and the more intensely and brighter it burns, the more the light cannot but fill the room. It is impossible to have an intense light without its extensive effects: the two belong together.

What might this theology look like?

If all of this is true, what does this mean for the theology that the Church engages in? What should this theology look like?

Here, I want to identify seven motifs, seven principles if you like, for the Church to observe in relation to its theology, which cannot be anything but public, since it is engaged in by the Church and since the Church exists only for the world.

1. Theology is an activity of love and praise of God

For as much as theology has a practical end point, and is located in the Church, it is also a way in which as human beings we engage in the adoration of God. When asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus said: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your *mind*' (Lk 10:27 and parallels). The enterprise of theology, before it terminates in practical and public *outputs* in and from the Church, is primarily a discipline of discipleship which comprises part of the Church's activity of loving God with its mind. Before its order upon the public, theology must order itself towards God. This is not to say that theology is a discipline with no practical end point, but it is to say that the proper and immediate context for theology is that of love and praise of God: not playing chess with a philosophical concept or reducing theology to its singularly contextual or practical purposes, but rather understanding theological thinking as existing ultimately not for its own or the community's or the public's sake, but *also* and ultimately for the sake of the adoration of God. To love God with our minds does not mean, however, that we somehow denigrate the affections. It is rather about the reality that if you love a person, you wish to continue to get to know them: you do not just stop at the first date, if you like. We need to instil the significance of intellectual engagements with the faith deep within our ministers and our people: that this is a part of their spirituality; it is a way that they love with their minds. Continued serious theological engagement is in some sense a part of the path of sanctification. The old class system of Methodism demonstrated that.

I learned recently that C. K. Barrett, the great Methodist scholar, used to teach miners New Testament Greek, as they wished to read the New Testament in its original in their lunch breaks down the mine. That is what it means to love God with our mind, and to learn to love God more: the true and primary context of theology is discipleship and love and adoration. This is not some intellectually snobby comment: it is a comment about seeking to know more of God in order to love God in every way possible (including with our minds).

The practical offshoot of this ultimate purpose of theology is, however, that we cannot allow the Church to settle for Sunday school understandings of the Lord (or allow our preachers to get away with children's addresses for sermons). Being reminded that the primary location of theological discourse is love of God, we should also be reminded that we need *continually* to love God *in ever deeper* ways with our minds. We need grown-up discipleship. Paul talks about the differences between childish desires and adult ones. We must do all we can

to prevent congregations being fed with spiritual milk; and we must do all we can to see progression, in Pauline terms, from milk to meat.

Furthermore, there is a very contextual element to this. We now live in a society which is better educated by and large than at any time previously: 50 per cent of the population now goes to university; literacy levels are high; there is compulsory education up to the age of 18 in England and Wales. However, speaking from my own experience, if I were to compare the level of intellectual demands placed on me most Sundays to that Wesley placed on miners and field labourers, we would all, I think, be shocked. Wesley, however, delivered his sermons to vast numbers of illiterate people: the reading rooms used to educate people are evidence of that, as is the original Sunday school movement. Yet, Wesley had faith in his congregation (and faith in the Spirit of God) not to have to dumb down his message to a lowest common denominator, and he saw salvation as total salvation, such that it was also a salvation of the intellect. We need, in the current age of intellectual assault on Christianity, to show that we love God with our minds, and to use our critical and intellectual faculties to reflect on the nature of God and God's ways with the world.

2. Theology is an activity by which we know God

At the start of his *Confessions*, Augustine presents us with a problem. He says that he desires to search after God, but (reflecting on his life as an unbeliever) does not know who it is that he is searching for without already knowing God. (This leads Augustine into long discourses on the nature of memory, but we need not go into that.) Augustine presents us with a very real problem, which is a very real problem for this age. And this problem is this: it is not remotely clear and settled what or who God is for most people. 'God' is a difficult word: it is a common noun functioning like a proper noun. We know it's a common noun (like 'fluff' or 'jam') by virtue of the fact that it is translated: *God*, *theos*, *Gott*, *Deiu*, *Deus*, etc. But it is used like a proper noun (like 'Sheila' or 'Bob'). What this means is that 'God' can mean all kinds of different things to all kinds of different people. And even within the Church, we can all be unintentionally idolatrous.

In Exodus 3, Moses meets God in a burning bush, and Moses asks an eminently sensible question: what's your name (this is a theme also picked up in Exodus 6)? Effectively, it seems to me, he is asking: 'Well, which god are you?' God answers by pointing Moses to a particular history with a particular people: 'I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob' (and we would all want to say 'and Sarah, Rebekkah, Leah and Rachel as well'!). Moses needed to know which god

he was dealing with. He needed to know what the referent of the word 'God' was. This is an issue that we need to address today. In the Church, we are called to tell people about God: about what God is like, and who God is. People are unhelpfully idolatrous all the time, and this causes very concrete pastoral problems and issues, as people confuse God with all kinds of deities (which are ungracious, unloving, distant, deistic, and so on…), leading them to fear. Many pastoral situations also often arise from people getting the referent wrong in terms of theological description: the image of a wrathful God; or an extrinsic God (as is Dawkins' description); or a God who is completely other and uninterested in the world. We need to say to the world, tell us all about the God you do not believe in, because we do not believe in that God either. And let us talk confidently and publically about the God of grace and of mercy and of salvation. Thinking theologically helps us to understand who God is, and what God is like; and helps us to tell people about that God. At a time when many people do not believe in God, and when many of those who do have unhelpful images of the nature of God, this is pressing and a public issue.

3. Theology is an activity by which we know that God is eternally ahead of us

Getting the referent right (knowing which god) is not only about the narrative so far, or history up to this point. Theology is not primarily an historical discipline. The reason for this is that when Moses asks God's name, God answers in this enigmatic way: 'I am who I am.' Except, that is not really what the Hebrew means. Our translations feel some of the effects of the Septuagint's *egō eimi ho ōn* (I am the being, or something like that) which is rendered in the Latin *ego sum qui sum* (I am who I am). The Hebrew is more dynamic than that, however – more historical, more active. The Hebrew, *eyeher asher eyeher*, is difficult to translate, but it means something like 'I will be who I will be'; 'I will cause to be what I cause to be'; as well as 'I am who I am'; and any combination, perhaps, thereof. What is key to take from this is that there is a future and a causative element to the nature of God; indeed, we see that in the history which is about to take place, as God does something monumental, history-shaping and new in the book of Exodus. And we also see it in the image of God as a pillar of cloud or of fire: God is the God who is always ahead of us, leading us, in front of us.

Taking theology seriously should remind us of this, and prevent us from being so concrete in our idea of God that we make an idol of our own current or historical imaginings. So often, we can all behave as if we needed to drag God into the future; that everything would be fine if we were only to update

ourselves and be contemporary. Or else we reify God in terms of some past image of God (whether medieval and indebted to Aquinas, or modern and indebted to Schleiermacher). However, God is not some past museum piece that requires distant hands-off observation, or else sprucing up, or making contemporary. God is forever ahead of us. This future/causative name of God is something God has 'forever throughout all generations'. This is the image that Gregory of Nyssa gives us in his description of the *eschaton* (the end either individually or at the return of Christ): Nyssa offers us the idea of *epektesis* as one of forever journeying deeper into the God who in his infinity is always beyond us and ahead of us.

However, there is something very practical to this as well for the contemporary setting. God is ahead of the Church leading us, and we should not therefore confuse the conservative position with the true position. If the Church had presumed God were only the Church's understanding of God up to this point, then imagine what terrible things we would be doing still. Three hundred and fifty years ago we were dunking witches and burning heretics; in the last century some traditions made women be churched after childbirth; and it is only in our lifetimes that women have been able to be ordained in some Churches, and in some traditions they still are not able to fulfil that vocation. These things may well seem monstrous to most of us now, and we may be tempted to think that things are better now. But what issues will people look back in 350 years' time at in relation to what we do, and think what monstrous and awful people? God is not about conserving; God's business is transforming and making new. And that is something God will do for all eternity. Theology should guard us against mindless conservation and repetition.

4. Theology is an activity which is meaningful only in the life of the Church

Theology's subject and context is the Church, but it asks questions that otherwise might not be asked within and by the Church. Primarily theology asks questions about the nature of the Church, the 'what the Church is' questions which should precede 'the how the Church is done' question. The 'what' question might come in all kinds of forms – nature of God, way of reading Scripture, mechanisms of salvation – but will ultimately be an attempt at expressing what the Church believes, or should believe, or might believe. In the contemporary setting, this is a really important issue because at times we have undertaken a determinedly functionalist understanding of the life of the Church.

It is necessary to pause here a moment to say a few things about this.

(a) I am terribly anxious about the preoccupation that we have at the moment to engage in business model approaches to the life of the Church and to its ministry. Now, in a supportive role they are good and well and proper, but the Church is not a business. It is necessary to repeat this: the Church is not a business. We may well need wise stewardship. But the Church is the Body of Christ, as it is made such by the Holy Spirit who enables the Church to participate in, encounter and be transformed by the resurrected Jesus. The flourishing of a church does not come by strategy (though we may need to be strategic); it comes by the activity of the Spirit forming us into the wounded but resurrected Body of Christ. Priority of understanding here is important: we need to reflect on what the Church is before we can reflect on how we do it. So often in ecclesiology, we concern ourselves with the church of Acts 1; we need to concern ourselves with the church of Acts 2 (see above). This leads, secondly, to the following point.

(b) The focus of the Church cannot be its survival. This is a focus on the self, and it is an instrumentalisation of the world. The world does not exist for the sake of the Church; the Church exists for the sake of the world. This order is absolutely key for those in ministry – again in terms of priority and vocation. William Temple is reputed to have said, 'The Church is the only cooperative organisation which exists for the benefit of those who are not its members.'[7]

Theology needs to help the Church move from its preoccupation with form to a preoccupation with its nature.

5. Theology is an activity by which we are led into all truth

All of this approach so far has been quite individualised or ecclesial in some sense, despite what I said in the first part of this lecture. However, theology is a discipline which concerns God and God's ways with the world, and there is nothing that cannot be understood in relation to God's ways with the world. Thomas Aquinas speaks of theology as a science whose subject is God and all things in relation to God. Scripture itself talks about all kinds of things (from how we dress to what we should do with our politics). The people who comprise the Church have all kinds of experiences and come from all kinds of backgrounds in which they do not cease to be Christian but in which they function as Christians. Theology is not, therefore, some narrow disciplinary engagement in small and technical questions; there is, instead, a sense in which there is nothing that is not theological data.

In John 16, Jesus says that the Spirit will lead us into all truth. The idea of truth here is not some abstract game of epistemology; the idea of truth is rather more concretely related to the concept of reality. The reality of the world in all of its complexity is God's; and the Christian theologian is to reflect on that very real world and the very real God who is working within it – who created, sustains and will redeem it. That means that theology has as its conjoined-twin discipline, the discipline of ethics, and that the Church is to think about its relation to the rest of creation in this way. Let us think again for a moment about the foundation of the Church at Pentecost. The immediate effects of the coming of the Holy Spirit and of the foundation of the Church are political and economic. Although we are told that miraculous signs accompanied the Church at the end of Acts 2, twice the amount of space is given over to something even more amazing – that everyone held things in common. And there is a sense as well in which we might think that the very recording of the *glossolalia* (speaking in tongues) is a description of a new political reality in which difference is not undermined by and does not lead to a breakdown of community or a strain in communication (speaking and listening).

Theology is training in how to read all of creation as the creation of God.

6. Theology is the way we reflect on last Sunday's sermon to make next Sunday's better

There is a very practical and real concern that theology should have: we can never exhaust the knowledge of God, and we are on a never-ending journey of discovery. The idea that we have arrived, and that we do not need to progress, is a long way from the idea of Christian discipleship. Theology has a critical task, as Barth tells us, in terms of the Church's self-examination of its proclamation. It seems to me that clergy need to read more theology in order to make their sermons better; and academic theologians need to write more theology that clergy would read!

Although certainly there is much to be said for the simplicity of faith, that is not where things end, as I've said already. Jesus tells us to have deep roots, or else to build on a rock. Paul tells us to mature in faith; the Psalms speak of 'deep calling unto deep' (Ps 42:7). We need a ministry that produces grown-up disciples in a grown-up world of big questions. I hope that what we are producing, all of us as those who teach and who preach, are disciples who are lifelong learners of the faith. And there is a need for us to tie theology much more overtly to the activity of preaching.

I am firmly of the opinion that theological reflection is the highest-order discipline that we have; the apex of theological education. And it is obviously not just sermons that we reflect on; sermon here is shorthand simply to make my point. But the effort and energy that go into the main weekly services need to be recognised, and emphasised; and the relation of these to the reading of theology (not just commentary) is key. The centrality of a study day for us all who preach is also crucial.

7. Theology deals with ultimate questions in light of God

Who are we? What happens when we die? Where do we come from? Why do bad things happen to good people? Who is God? Does God love me?

These are the big questions which people I meet are desperately asking. We need only to go into a general book shop and look at the Spirituality and Religion section in order to see how desperate people are for meaning and answers. I do not know what the answers to all the questions people ask are completely. But I want to be able to have a go at struggling with people with them; I want to pose them to myself; and I want them to be the basis of the sorts of questions we address in pastoral settings and in preaching. I think these are questions that we need to be asking ourselves to engage with. In some sense, I care less about how we answer them than I do that we wrestle publically with them. That is what public theology is all about.

I have always thought that the best image of preaching and theological reflection is the image of Jacob wrestling with God. Charles Wesley put this nicely in his hymn 'Come, O thou traveller unknown' with the refrain, 'Wrestling I will not let thee go,/ Till I thy name and nature know.' The task is for us to wrestle in public with God before other people. This is not about thinking that we can somehow pin God down with the answers we have already come to, but rather about wrestling with God to find truth. We cannot give up on the big questions, and we must continue throughout our lives, throughout our ministry, to wrestle with them. To do public theology involves love of God and love of the world; it involves wrestling with the deep things of God in public; it means preaching this wrestling, living with it.

Conclusion

However tempted we may be as a church in a context which is complexly religious and secular in the UK, and in which the Methodist tradition seems

particularly to be in decline, to see theology as an unnecessary ecclesial luxury; however tempted we may be to lose confidence in the proclamation of the gospel and our own capacity to relate it to our context; however tempted we may be to attend to the polity and form of the Church at the expense of its God-created life and nature (the church of Acts 1 and not the church of Acts 2), let us never as a church forget the absolutely central role of theology to our ministry, discipleship and public life. Theology is an act in which we love God and through loving God are enabled to love those others around us more. We should not arrive at theological quandaries and questions with formulae in place or with a sense that the rich wisdom of the past might not offer guidance and hope in the present. We are called to teach the gospel of Christ, and whatever answers we feel in our theological wrestling we may come to, if we are called to teach, then let us teach.

Notes

1. Quotations from the Bible are from the New Revised Standard Version (Anglicized Edition).
2. Bonhoeffer 2010, p. 364.
3. Jinkins 1999, p. 9.
4. Calvin [1559] 1960, 4.2.3, p. 1044. These discussions concern Roman Catholicism polemically. However, outside of that polemic, the dogmatic content remains helpful and can usefully be redirected back to the Protestant Church as itself an *ecclesia semper reformanda*.
5. Barth 2004, § 72, p. 764.
6. Bonhoeffer 2005, p. 63.
7. Obviously, much more can and needs to be said about the ontology, function and instrumentality of the Church. The reader is directed to my forthcoming work on ecclesiology (a three-volume account of the Church from a Protestant perspective). The first volume is due to be completed in 18 months (in 2017) and to be published by Baker.

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The end of theological education – is wisdom the principal thing?

Jane Leach

THE REVD DR JANE LEACH is an ordained presbyter in The Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Principal of Wesley House, Cambridge. She teaches and supervises in the field of practical theology.

jl332@cam.ac.uk
Cambridge, UK

*This article invites reflection on the theological purposes of the education of church leaders. It is conceived as a piece of practical theology that arises from the challenge to the Wesley House Trustees in Cambridge to reconceive and re-articulate their vision for theological education in a time of turbulence and change. I reflect on Wesley House's inheritance as a community of formation (*paideia*) and rigorous scholarship (*Wissenschaft*); and on the opportunities offered for the future of theological education in this context by a serious engagement with both the practices and concepts of* phronēsis *and* poiēsis *and a dialogical understanding of biblical wisdom, as Wesley House seeks to offer itself as a cross-cultural community of prayer and study to an international Methodist constituency.*

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Introduction

What should a theological college inscribe on its walls? This is an immediate question facing the Trustees of Wesley House, Cambridge, where I work, as we construct a new academic building. It is also a question that has deepened in significance for me in this last year as I have visited Methodist seminaries and universities around the world.[1] Looking at the words chosen by others – some recently selected and some inherited from earlier generations – I have been prompted to reflect on the implicit bearing that these words have on the deeper question of the purposes of theological education. For, if those of us engaged in theological education are not simply to follow the tide of public education policy, the latest fashions in theology or the demands of our sponsoring churches for certain skill sets, we need periodically to evaluate what we are doing and why. Academic qualifications may be seen as badges of honour in themselves; professional qualifications may make us more effective at particular tasks, but what are the *theological purposes*[2] of theological education – and how should that education be shaped as a consequence?

It is a debate that will be familiar to some, particularly from the North American context,[3] and in Cambridge from the work of David Ford on the Christian contribution to the contemporary university.[4] This paper seeks to contribute to that conversation by reflecting on the process through which the staff and trustees of Wesley House have gone since the review of learning and development in the British Methodist Church, known as the 'Fruitful Field', was announced in 2011. The main ideas within it were first presented in the form of the Fernley-Hartley Lecture delivered at Wesley House in 2012 on the occasion of its ninetieth birthday.

The lecture was delivered in the week that the recommendation was announced that the British Methodist Conference should withdraw the training of its candidates for ordained ministry from the Cambridge Theological Federation[5] (of which Wesley House was a founding member) and from more than a dozen other places, and to consolidate that training in and through only two centres, giving more emphasis and resourcing to lay education, continuing development in ministry, and to the immediately discerned needs for Methodist ecclesial leaders in Britain today, chiefly evangelism.[6]

The original lecture formed part of an apologetic for initial theological education for Methodists training for ordination in Britain that is not utilitarian or anti-intellectual, and pays attention to the formation of the whole person

as a Christian leader, including to the development of the ability to think rigorously about the demands of the gospel and of the situation in which it is set, for the sake not only of church growth but for the integrity and health of the whole inhabited earth.[7]

Almost three years on, as I have prepared this material for publication, Wesley House is no longer involved in the theological education of those in initial training for ordination in the British Methodist Church. Now the plans of the Trustees are to offer theological education on a broader basis to Methodists and others of Wesleyan heritage from overseas and to those at stages of ministry other than in initial training. The process, therefore, of needing to articulate a vision for theological education did not end with the Conference of 2012 but has intensified as we have needed to reimagine the future of the college.

Is wisdom the principal thing?

In the building which was part of the original courtyard constructed in 1925 to house the library, there are carved two inscriptions. One is reputed to record the last words of John Wesley:

THE BEST OF ALL IS GOD IS WITH US.

The other is a quotation from Proverbs 4:7:

WISDOM IS THE PRINCIPLE[8] THING, THEREFORE GET WISDOM
AND IN ALL THY GETTING, GET UNDERSTANDING.[9]

In September 2011 when I became the Principal of Wesley House, I was struck by these quotations, and by the two texts inscribed into the fabric of the college chapel dedicated in 1930. Above the door as you enter, from Matthew 11:29,

DISCITE A ME QUIA MITIS SUM ET HUMILIS CORDE[10]

and, running like a ribbon around the interior, from the Prayer of Azariah, sung, according to the Apocrypha, by Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace,

O ALL YE ANGELS OF THE LORD BLESS YE THE LORD,
PRAISE AND MAGNIFY HIM FOR EVER.
O ALL YE WORKS OF THE LORD, BLESS YE THE LORD,
PRAISE AND MAGNIFY HIM FOR EVER.[11]

These four prominent inscriptions were part of the environment which shaped the life of the college over the 92 years of its work training people for ordination in the Methodist Church in Britain.[12] Because we retain the chapel and will go on worshipping in it day by day, the latter two quotations will continue to have a role of their own in shaping the future ethos of the House. What we will lose, however, is access to the original library quotations. As we have considered the way in which memory needs to play a role if we are to practise what Walter Brueggemann considers to be 'hopeful imagination',[13] it has seemed important to ponder the questions posed by the choice of Proverbs 4:7: should wisdom be the principal purpose of theological education? And how should such wisdom be understood?

Framing the conversation

In order to frame an understanding of the kind of theological education that has been offered and might be offered at Wesley House, I want to draw on the influential summary of the US debate on this subject that was published in 1993 by David Kelsey. The title of the book is instructive: *Between Athens and Berlin; The Theological Education Debate*. Kelsey analysed the various responses to the American cry that theological education had become fragmented by positing two ideal types to which he suggested American theological institutions are committed, yet which hold inherent tensions that are difficult to resolve.

'Athens' represents a model of theological education more properly called 'formation' (*paideia*). This takes place in communities of practice and its goal is the knowledge of God, together with the correlative formation of holy virtues. It requires a conversion towards God followed by a slow growth towards wisdom. In this educational process a teacher cannot impart wisdom, but only provide intellectual and moral disciplines that facilitate students in acquiring it.[14] The devotional study of texts (chiefly Scripture but also other texts of the tradition) is understood to be the prime context in which the Holy Spirit can both convert and guide the development of Christian disciples and leaders. In

this sense, the Church is seen as a school, and a college focused on ordination training is an organ of the Church.

'Berlin' represents a model of education arising out of the Enlightenment in which 'knowledge' is understood not as the ability to intuit and explicate what is real and universally true in a metaphysical or theological sense, but as the ability to engage in orderly, disciplined and critical research that leads to the establishment of reliable data. In this model there are no authoritative texts; rather there is a drive towards abstraction and all-encompassing theories; great attention is paid to method. This, Kelsey argues, is the paradigm of the research university. It exists to establish reliable knowledge, whether historical, philosophical or scientific; it is independent of any external authority (eg the Church or state) and it requires of its teachers an ability both to communicate to students that body of knowledge already believed to be reliable, and, above all, the ability to critique it and establish new bodies of knowledge. This model was first incarnated in the University of Berlin in 1810 and occasioned a great debate about whether theology should be taught there at all as its foundations were revealed truth and metaphysical assumptions that were not susceptible of scientific investigation. In order to accommodate theology, the subject was conceived as an historical, philosophical and professional discipline, comprising the history of the tradition (including Scripture), philosophical and systematic thought about Christian belief, and application to clerical practice.[15]

Kelsey diagnosed that in the late twentieth-century American context fragmentation was a common complaint about the theological education enterprise because of the unresolved tension between these two models. This comprised an unwillingness to commit to either entirely at the expense of the other, but also an inability effectively to synthesise the two within a unified vision of a theological purpose for theological education. His framing of the debate set up two key oppositions that remain at the heart of arguments about theological education: first, between theory and practice, and second, between revealed wisdom and wisdom achieved through the processes of reason.

Wesley House – Athens or Berlin?

Wesley House has never been a seminary in the sense of itself being responsible for the curriculum and the bulk of the teaching of its students. It was founded to provide a 'postgraduate course in which students would have the full benefit of University Life and tuition side by side with such distinctive

teaching of the history, constitution, theology and polity of that church as would enable them to maintain in the Church Universal, those doctrines of experimental religion and especially spiritual holiness upon which John Wesley laid emphasis' (Wesley House Trust Deed, 1919).

The insistence of Michael Gutteridge, who provided the bulk of the money for the endowment, was that what mattered was access to the best theological scholarship available – in his view, this meant Cambridge.[16] For this reason the original intention was that Wesley House men (*sic*) would study the Tripos[17] in the Divinity School of the University of Cambridge, either as graduates or occasionally, as provided for by a gift of William Greenhalgh, as undergraduates.

In this sense, Wesley House's first generations of students were formed in part by a set of values which were not shaped theologically but oriented towards historical, philosophical and scientific canons of reason. Of course, it is also the case that many of the staff of the Faculty of Divinity (originally all Anglican clergy but then opened to other denominations and latterly to any scholar of theology or religious studies regardless of faith commitment) have been and remain committed to the truth claims of Christianity or to the practice of Christian communities or to the formation of clergy;[18] however, there was nothing about the shape of the curriculum per se, nor the core activities of the institution that would give a shape and coherence to the educational enterprise beyond the *Wissenschaft*[19] element of the 'Berlin' model.

This, however, is not the whole story. Although intentionally located within a research university, Wesley House was also deliberately constructed on the monastic lines evident in the design of the Cambridge colleges that themselves make up the University. These buildings clearly betray their inheritance to the 'Athens' model with chapel and refectory being as prominent as the library – signalling the importance of worship and the corporate life of faith as the context for study.[20]

Moreover, the monastic heritage of those buildings was not incidental, for it is possible to trace an understanding of Christianity itself (and not just formal theological education) as *paideia*. Because *paideia* was the way in which Hellenistic Greeks conceived their own educational system,[21] converts to early Christianity naturally thought of it not as a system of belief but as a new *paideia*.[22] This way of thinking and learning was then disseminated through the monastic movements that founded colleges in Cambridge in the medieval period.[23]

Wesley House's modelling of itself on the medieval Cambridge colleges reflected, in part, a desire to announce the arrival of the Edwardian Wesleyans at the peak of academic life in a bid not to be left behind as educational standards in the population rose. But in this collegiate model there was also embodied a corporate formation in the Christian life that reflected the maxim put above the chapel door:

DISCITE A ME QUIA MITIS SUM ET HUMILIS CORDE.[24]

In consequence, Wesley House has always had a hybrid heritage, symbolised by its own formational environment of prayer and common life in which faith is seeking understanding; and by its engagement with the Faculty of Divinity in which the students would learn more about the Christian tradition and learn to think rigorously and critically about it. In practice, of course, the Divinity Faculty has also been a hybrid environment because it is not only located in what is now a research-led university, but is populated by many teachers and students, themselves formed in Churches and theological colleges with a variety of views about *paideia* or the value of education as a virtue in itself.[25]

A third part of the heritage has been the ongoing influence of the broader Church – the community of faith of which Wesley House has been part, and which it was founded to serve by educating its ministers. The relationship between the college and the Methodist (originally Wesleyan) Church was structurally present in a variety of ways throughout the 92 years of its use as a place of initial training for accepted candidates selected and then stationed by the Conference. In pedagogical terms the main contact that students of Wesley House had initially with the broader Church was by regularly preaching in local pulpits and by being part of the University MethSoc. In later years this developed into more comprehensive contact, not only with the worshipping life of churches, but with their pastoral, oversight and mission activities in supervised placements both in Methodist churches and those of our ecumenical partners.

One of the consequences of Wesley House's location within, and engagement with, the University of Cambridge, however, was that it acquired a reputation in the broader Church for elitism and intellectualism and was suspected by parts of the Church as an institution that would undermine simple faith and ruin good evangelical preaching. Embedded in these concerns are four strands that require some attention if an argument is to be made for a continued face-to-face engagement between the formation of Christian leaders and such a university environment.

First, although Wesley House's students over the years have come from some surprisingly modest backgrounds from which many would not have expected to attend such a university,[26] an active alertness to and engagement with less privileged contexts has also to be undertaken if Cambridge college life is not to create within the Christian community a separate class of ministers who consider themselves (or are considered by others to be) socially or intellectually superior. However, a belief in the importance of some Christian leaders being deliberately equipped to think at the highest level about the nature of faith and its relation to new developments in philosophy, technology and the sciences need not be tantamount to an assertion that all forms of Christian service require a university education.[27]

Second, it should be noted that if the gospel is to have credibility among those who are university educated (in the UK, for example, 46 per cent of jobs in the economy require a degree[28]), theological endeavour needs still to keep pace. This is partly for the sake of the proclamation of the gospel – to be fully itself, the gospel must enable discipleship that engages not only the heart and spirit but also the mind – but it also concerns the ability of Christian values and practices still to contribute to the formation of leaders for nations and businesses. At a time when wisdom for global living is much in demand: in the context of global warming; of widening gaps between rich and poor across the world; and of globalising conflicts between people of different faith, the cry for a wisdom that is beyond technical knowledge is often heard, yet there is little agreement about the sources for such a wisdom.

In this context David Ford suggests that a Christian wisdom that is attentive to the cries of wisdom in Scripture, to cries of the poor, and to the cries of Jesus Christ recorded in the gospels has a crucial role to play in helping address the deep problems facing the world,[29] but there is no doubt that simply presenting Christianity as a revealed packet of wisdom will not be convincing, either to those with other faith commitments or to those educated in the disciplines of critical thought and the rules of evidence. If Christian wisdom is really to contribute to the ways in which the world operates, then it must be able to speak not only the language of prayer and praise but in the language of reason. This is something of which I am starkly aware when broadcasting on the BBC's Radio 4 to an educated and thoughtful audience, most of whom do not share Christian presuppositions. If Methodists still believe that the Wesleyan emphases that were important to Michael Gutteridge have something to offer to the world, then an educated ministry capable of articulating that vision in ways that make sense within the public square remains a priority.[30]

However, and this is the third point, it is true that studying in a research university involves not only the transmission of knowledge and the technical skills of scholarship, but being part of a community of practice in which intellectual virtues, such as the ability to cope with uncertainty and the willingness to live with complexity, are being nurtured.[31] Such virtues may sit quite uncomfortably with the commitments of some Christians accustomed to conceiving of revealed truth in ways that offer 'clarity, security and certainty in the midst of the confusions and complexities of life'.[32]

Part of Wesley House's historical answer to this problem for its students was its provision of a formational community of prayer and common life, but while this modelled faith seeking understanding it has not, perhaps, always necessarily helped students negotiate philosophically or in practice the relationship between reason and revealed religion, though the importance of both was clearly being asserted. Reflection on our more recent experience of students from other cultural contexts and from more biblicist backgrounds is that it is important to make explicit the kind of learning that takes place in the British university setting and to help students consider how to orient themselves to it.[33] In large part, this article is concerned with how to articulate a theological rationale for such an enterprise for the sake of our future students, but also as a contribution to continuing reforms of theological education in Britain.[34]

Fourth, it is clear that the Naples businessman Michael Gutteridge (who himself was not university educated) was not primarily interested in the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, or for the sake of creating a social elite, but for practical reasons:

> The primary aim is not to produce scholars in the technical sense, though it is hoped that this will be the result in some cases, but men (*sic*) who have first a love of God and the souls of men (*sic*), and secondly a wide outlook and a practical understanding of life, as a result of contact with all kinds of men (*sic*) at the University. It is not held that University training will of itself make a man a more efficient minister, but experience proves that if he has the root of the matter in him, it should make him a more effective preacher and increase his public influence, especially over young people, among whom the standard of education is rising so steadily today.[35]

However, what is not clear is whether such practicality was necessarily and routinely the outcome of the educational model he set up.

In the classic 'Berlin' model, knowledge is established and then applied to practice. In Berlin in 1810 (and in many other places), this is something that was systematically developed as part of the university curriculum, but in Cambridge this was never a stated objective of the Faculty of Divinity. In consequence, theological colleges like Wesley House were left with responsibility for the application of this theology (and for also ensuring a denominational flavour). So while in continental, American and Scottish contexts practical theology developed as a professional discipline in which the historically and philosophically established Christian tradition was applied systematically to the disciplines of preaching, Christian education, pastoral care etc, in the British context neither the universities nor the theological colleges really took seriously – or in some cases actively resisted – the professionalisation of theological education as clergy training.[36] 'Pastoralia' remained very much at the edges of the curriculum and practical experience (with the exception of preaching) was largely thought of as something to be gained in the future.

It is not possible here to document the developments in pastoral theology at Wesley House through the years of the twentieth century in order to examine the various approaches to pastoral education taken. My own experience of being educated at Wesley House in the 1990s through the Tripos and then a PhD, however, was of a certain emphasis on theoretical wisdom (including sometimes about practical subjects) which was not yet properly practical.

For example, I remember going to visit the first funeral family I ever visited in my probationer's appointment. As I came to the end of the visit it suddenly occurred to me that I ought to offer to pray with this family. As I opened my mouth to formulate the words, I realised that my theological education had helped me to deconstruct the more naive prayers of my youth, but had not helped me to formulate new words. My prayers had become more of a silent waiting before God. This was fine for my personal devotions – and certainly something I could justify theologically as a critique of the wordy culture in which we live and which can be an effective defence against God, but hopeless for leading a bereaved family into the presence of the God for whose comfort they yearned. I had become a reflective thinker, but not yet a reflective practitioner.

The anecdote perhaps illustrates some of the fruit of a model of education in which the disciplines of devotion were practised (*paideia*) and in which critical thought (*Wissenschaft*) was developed. It also, however, highlights a weakness in the model in terms of the development of practical wisdom. In the 25 years

between leaving Wesley House as a student and becoming the Principal of the college, there was a whole raft of developments in the theological provision offered at or through Wesley House.[37] A key development which does deserve mention because of its relevance to the future was the impact in Cambridge of the emergence in Britain and Ireland of practical theology as a serious discipline.

One of the features of this development was the establishment by the Cambridge Theological Federation of degrees in pastoral and practical theology through a new partnership with Anglia Ruskin University.[38] The teaching and learning on these awards (in conjunction with the more traditionally structured degrees) have helped to reframe the conversation about and experience of the relationship between theology and practice (David Kelsey's first opposition) for Wesley House's students. One of the key features of this reframing has been a focusing upon the whole theological enterprise as primarily a *sapiential* (wisdom-seeking) activity rather than as a *scientific* (speculative) one.[39] Much of the work in this area has focused on the notion of *phronēsi*s (practical wisdom) – a term adopted by practical theology[40] from the work of the fourth-century BC Greek philosopher Aristotle.

In the next section of this paper, therefore, I want to engage directly with Aristotle's work on *phronēsis*, exploring its potential as a purpose for theological education, and as a pedagogy (way of teaching). Choosing, at the outset, to engage with a dialogue partner from outside the Judaeo-Christian tradition is partly in order to explicate historical developments that have happened in the teaching of pastoral theology in the Cambridge Theological Federation; more importantly though, it exemplifies a commitment to a dialogical understanding of wisdom – a wisdom that is willing to engage with other truth and wisdom-seeking traditions and disciplines – an understanding that I shall go on to explicate in relation to a renewed interest in the biblical understanding of wisdom that has even more recently been receiving scholarly attention.[41] This latter discussion will involve a consideration of David Kelsey's second opposition concerning the relationship between revealed religion and human reason.

Engaging with Aristotle

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*[42] Aristotle was interested not in the education of philosophers, but in the development of political leaders who deal in the complex and messy world of human action. In that sense, as theological

education at Wesley House has been largely for the sake of the formation not of scholars but of Christian ministers whose primary roles involve them in the leadership of human communities, it makes Aristotle an interesting dialogue partner.

At the heart of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is the question of what is good for human beings (*eudaimonia*).[43] For Aristotle this was not a question of human flourishing being based on what best serves an individual or even a corporate body in a given moment, rather it was about human beings being fulfilled by living in accordance with their true natures as rational and virtuous beings.[44] He believed, therefore, that the process by which people[45] discern how to live well and help others to do so is through a combination of attention to their natural dispositions (nature), habitual formation by wise teachers (nurture), and rational thought (education). In this sense Aristotle was concerned with *paideia*; his ideas, among those of others like Plato and Cicero, have contributed to Kelsey's articulation of the 'Athens' model.

Aristotle outlined five intellectual virtues which are involved in the discernment of what is true and how to lead and guide others in life. Three are associated with the development of theoretical wisdom (seeing unchanging things as they really are),[46] and two are directed towards getting things done (doing and making in the realm of contingent things that change). While *poiēsis* (making) is directed beyond itself towards the production of things and involves *technē* (skill), *praxis* (action) is an end in itself and involves *phronēsis* (practical wisdom). For Aristotle, *phronēsis* is 'an excellent state of the rational faculty insofar as it concerns itself with action'.[47] It results from a combination of the habitual virtues that are formed in community, together with the virtues of thought that are natural but need to be educated (drawn out) in order to develop. Together these attributes help us to reason about why a particular course of action is the right course and to undertake it. From this initial statement of Aristotle's understanding of how truth is apprehended and good leadership formed, what can be learned about the goals and processes of theological education?

First, Aristotle's understanding of leadership development has far richer dimensions than training for purely utilitarian and immediate ends. Such a utilitarian training is technical and concerns the 'how' of a thing combined with the 'what' of the thing: the contents that should be transmitted. The contents are learned as facts, and the techniques are learned as protocols. For Aristotle, however, this is not an appropriate way to think about the world of human action and community. 'How' and 'what' are relevant, but action (praxis), in

order to be properly and fully action, needs not only to be habitual but should engage with the question 'why?' or 'to what end?' He therefore advocates an understanding of the good leader as one who is able by instinct and formation to do what is right, but who is also able to articulate how and why an action *is* right. Moreover, this is not a matter of theory, but a matter of practice in two senses – the rightness of the action can only be right in the specificity and peculiarity of its context, attending to the totality of the factors in that actual situation. And, the leader only becomes wise by practising and reflecting on those practices.

This is already an argument against conceiving ministerial education as a purely technical training in which content and techniques are passed on – focusing on what and how to preach; what to say and how to speak as an evangelist; or the rules of the Methodist Church and how to chair a meeting in accordance with them. This is partly because no protocol can be complex enough to cope with the many contingencies of human situations and contexts – good leadership involves an ability *to reason well* in the sphere of action; it is also because good leadership involves the moral strength not only to know what one should do in any given situation but actually to do it.

For the theological educator, Aristotle's account of wisdom in the sphere of action also raises the pedagogical question of how such wisdom is acquired. In the first place, he places huge emphasis on the formation of character by the development of habits. By this Aristotle means that for a student to learn how to lead and structure a community such that the welfare of the whole is served, it is important that he (*sic*) has already learned how to act well within such a community.

One implication of this commitment for theological educators is that it needs to take place in face-to-face communities.[48] In the formation of leaders, however, it was important to Aristotle not only that the student experienced good practice as part of their development, but had the opportunity to reflect on the particulars of good practice, developing the intellectual habits of reading, reflection and critique. Such rigorous reflection would enable them there to recognise the principles enacted, so that they might be grasped in general and reinterpreted for different times and places. The role of the teacher was to help the student articulate what was good (or not) about the experience they had had, and to help them grasp the principles behind the particulars of the goods they had intuited (not simply to assert principles as good and demonstrate their effects in practice). They would do this as midwives of a

wisdom-directed knowledge, rather than as the transmitters of knowledge as content.

A second implication is that the community of formation and its leadership themselves become subjects of reflection. This has the effect of placing the leadership of a theological college under scrutiny – or, rather, of bringing the scrutiny under which the leadership of a theological college community lives into the open – so that it may contribute to the learning of everyone. While this may be humbling at times, it avoids the impression that because the theological teacher is 'learned', they are any less a member of the Christian community and still essentially a learner (disciple).[49]

At one level this emphasis upon practical wisdom might be music to the ears of those who want a more skills-focused curriculum. But, in a conversation with Aristotle's understanding of wisdom, two points must be made. First, for Aristotle, no one can be practically wise without being good – so skills are of little consequence without the habituated ethical knowledge learnt in community by which the exercise of those skills must be directed. Second, effective skills learnt and exercised – even in a way that leads to good results – are vulnerable if they are not grounded in an understanding of why and how they achieve the overall aim of the enterprise.[50] Moreover, in the formation of church leaders this must involve not only reflection on what works in pragmatic terms in relation to goals that remain uncritiqued, but an ability to think conceptually about those embedded goals.

Aristotle's account of how *phronēsis* is attained raises the question of the relationship between theoretical and practical wisdom. Sometimes in his writing it seems that the two spheres are separate, with the theoretical being higher than the practical and more godlike or conducive to happiness. At other times it appears that the same intuitive capacity (*nous*) is needed in both spheres for the grasping of the patterns embedded in complexity, as well as the same ability to think critically and build a systemic approach (*epistēmē*), even if, in his view, the kind of knowledge attainable in the practical sphere is contingent in a way that in the theoretical sphere it is not.[51]

If, however, in Aristotle's work there is a separation between theoretical and practical wisdom, once placed in the Christian milieu this separation is immediately challenged. For, while the subject of contemplation for Aristotle is thought itself (or God as intellectual being or first cause), in Christian theology, the God who is worshipped is a God of action and compassion, and above all a God revealed in the lived life of the Word made flesh.

The embracing of Aristotle's notion of *phronēsis* by some key practical theologians[52] has led to a recovered understanding of all theology as essentially practical (a way of living or *paideia*), yet a practice that needs not only to be inhabited but to be conceptualised and critiqued intellectually in order to be lived.[53] In this way of thinking, while abstraction plays a role as faith seeks understanding, theology is not primarily understood as a set of propositional beliefs. In fact, from this perspective, the dichotomy between theology and practice is perceived as a false one. Rather, the Christian life itself involves a dialectic between the living of that life (which requires discernment among the complexity and detail of daily choices), and a conceptualisation of that life (that allows one to think about particular actions in its light). The dynamic is not one of the revelation of theoretical truth that then needs to be put into practice, but the revelation of a lived life (the Word made flesh) that needs to be formed and shaped in us by the work of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace, and that needs to be thought about and conceptualised if we are to live it reflectively and faithfully with all our mind as well as with our heart, soul and strength.

In terms of curriculum, this does not suggest that detailed attention not be given to biblical studies or to other traditional disciplines, but it does suggest both that these studies are themselves practices in and through which God may be encountered (theology as doxology and for God's sake) as well suggesting that these disciplines help with the conceptualisation of the Christian life that is itself subject to critique from other disciplines and from the lived Christian experience of contemporary Christians. The study of the Bible and the beliefs of the Church become one movement in the evolution of the dance of theology in a dialectic of action and thought. Both action (how the Christian life is lived in the particularities of all kinds of contexts) and thought (how the Christian life is conceptualised) are subject to critique and enrichment through the canons of secular reason (philosophy, psychology, economic theory…). Yet, at the same time, God is understood actively to be self-revealing Godself through the disciplines of both thought and action and in the dialogue between them.

Through our association with Anglia Ruskin University – a university concerned, among other things, with vocational learning in the fields of business and health care in which *phronēsis* has also received considerable attention[54] – the Cambridge Theological Federation has been able to give considerable attention to questions of praxis.[55] Together, we have been able to develop modules in pastoral skills, measured by a series of practical competencies in

live contexts. Was the candidate able to greet the patient and establish a rapport? Was the candidate able to ask open questions? Was the candidate able to leave silences when appropriate? Was the candidate able to name God in a natural and timely manner? Was the candidate able to judge whether offering prayer or other religious resources was appropriate?

However, what is measured is not only whether or not a successful pastoral encounter has taken place, but whether or not the student is able to reflect on the interventions they have made, the context and other conditions that have contributed to the outcome, and the worthiness of the aims of their encounter, even if those have been met. The paradigm is reflective practice[56] as we examine the gaps between what we say is important and what we actually do; as we pay attention not only to the critical self, but to the aware self:

> Performance professions such as music, acting, surgery, engineering and leading liturgy call for the development of the *aware self* alongside the *critical self* … for example, the liturgist's critical self may suggest the aims and content of a service but their aware self may focus on the quality of silence or movement or cooperation needed to make the service happen in ways conducive to worship for the congregation actually present.[57]

This takes us beyond the Aristotelian framework of reflecting on the practices that have shaped and continue to shape one's community, and into the realm of reflecting on one's own interventions as a practitioner. While reflective practice has been critiqued by some as being too individualist a paradigm for the formation of leaders in the Christian community,[58] the encouragement of detailed reflection on one's Christian discipleship as it expresses itself in action has many noble precedents, not least in the band meetings of the early Methodist movement, and need not be seen as an inappropriate professionalisation of Christian ministry, but an appropriately serious examination of our motives and interactions before one another and before God in the light of deep reflection on the nature of the kind of Christian practices (prayer, hospitality, justice-making) that are about life in all its fullness.

For me this engagement with Aristotle's understanding of *phronēsis* and with the culture of Anglia Ruskin University has been a key step towards realising the purposes of theological education as expressed by Michael Gutteridge. Whereas, at the turn of the twenty-first century practical theologians in the Cambridge Theological Federation used case study as a prime method in which

the teacher could help the class identify the underlying principles in a context that was not their own, in recent times we have preferred to work with the practice of the students themselves. One of the implications of this is that as they engage with the material, students are not cut off from the great store of wisdom they have which is embodied and relational.

Faced with an impersonal case study and asked the question, 'What would you do?', students would answer, 'It depends…' on a whole range of factors undisclosed in the case study, from the history of their relationships with those people in that place to the way in which the body language of those involved would give them clues to interpretation.[59] This is not a substitute for the study of Christian practices and the establishment of principles by which to live, but represents an examination of the reciprocal movement by which attempts to make interventions as those who live by such principles are embodied in practice.[60]

Facing towards the future

Learning from Aristotle has already developed into a conversation about theological education as it had developed at Wesley House in the last years of initial formation. As we face the future, though, two contextual questions and one fundamental question need some attention – all of which concern the matter of diversity.

First, anecdotal evidence suggests that the depth and range of Christian experience with which students enter preparation for Christian ministry in the UK context has declined in recent years, and has also fragmented – Methodist congregational practices in the UK are not as like one another as they used to be. As a teacher this presents problems when trying to elicit principles from practice. For example, asking students what they consider to be the principles of a 'good pastoral visit' reveals not only different accounts of what a pastoral visit is, but a lack of personal experience of either being visited or visiting oneself. Doing this with a cross-cultural community adds complexity as different Methodist traditions are put on the table. In the process it becomes apparent that there is not necessarily a shared praxis on which to reflect.

The second contextual point concerns how such a diverse community can function effectively as a community of formation at the level of character. What are the disciplines of the Christian life in which the students have been formed

and how is a common life to be established? What attitudes towards women are to be considered faithful to the tradition? At what time in the morning should prayer begin and for how many hours should it last? Is plagiarism a moral issue? While there has always been at Wesley House a variety of views and 'Methodist' practices among the student body, there has also been a normative position established by the British Methodist Church and its standing orders.[61] As Wesley House was forming students for this context, although the wisdom of its practices and rules could be debated, there was, at least, a clear set of markers to which we could all relate. In the creation of a formational community at the service of a range of Methodist and other denominations around the world, such a base cannot be assumed.

Does this then mean that the *paideia* of 'Athens' should be abandoned in favour of the *Wissenschaft* of 'Berlin'? Does it mean that Wesley House should not lay claim to a role in the formation of character or wise leadership, but only in the development of rigorous thought at the service of whatever purpose the individual or sending church has in mind? Despite the attractive simplicity of such a position, it is one that the Trustees have resisted, arguing consistently that those who live in the college should be required to adopt a rule of life that involves common worship, service and shared life. This maintains a commitment to a view of theology that is firmly rooted in the 'Athens' tradition: that theology is not best conceived as a series of propositions and doctrines that can be abstracted from the Christian life and studied as such, but is fundamentally a corporate matter of faith seeking understanding. It also retains a commitment to the possibility of Methodist thinkers (teachers and students) making a contribution to the development of wisdom in the university context.[62]

Underlying these practical considerations is a third, more fundamental challenge that such diversity of experience poses to the process of becoming wise outlined by Aristotle. Belief that the Good was one, and accessible by metaphysical reasoning, may have been a sustainable belief within a small city state in classical Greece, or even in a medieval Christian university. However, in a college environment that inherits both Enlightenment commitments to the painstaking establishment of knowledge, historically, philosophically and scientifically, as well as the different cultural and philosophical orientations of Christians from around the world with different notions of the relationship between reason and revelation, it would be short-sighted not to ask whether in such a college any common basis for living and conceptualising the Christian life can be established at all.

This dilemma pushes sharply the problem perceived in the Berlin context in 1810 and in the American context in the late twentieth century: how can a revealed religion like Christianity flourish with integrity within a post-Enlightenment framework of assumptions? In particular, with resident students from Asian and African contexts and from some biblicist traditions, the question is likely to focus, in practice, around the role and authority of the Bible.

Biblical wisdom

One possible answer to the Enlightenment challenge to biblical authority, most acutely framed by Ernst Troeltsch, that all interpretations of events are relative to the perspective of the interpreter,[63] is to retreat from the critical environment of the research university into a pre-reflective assertion of revealed truth. Although this might be a strategy open to other theological communities, it was clearly the intention of Wesley House's founder that Wesley House be placed in the orbit of a research university and so the choice of a quotation from Scripture about wisdom to place in the library at Wesley House cannot legitimately be read as a retreat into a single (biblical) source of authority in which wisdom is understood as propositional content:

> WISDOM IS THE PRINCIPLE THING, THEREFORE GET WISDOM
> AND IN ALL THY GETTING, GET UNDERSTANDING.[64]

This quotation about wisdom chosen by the first Trustees comes from the opening chapters of the book of Proverbs in which pithy and sometimes contradictory instructions about very human things are introduced by an essay on the cosmic nature of wisdom in which God's wisdom is personified as Lady Wisdom (*chokmah*/*sophia*) who was present at the foundation of the world (Prov 8:22) and who invites the young men to whom the book is addressed to follow in her paths (Prov 8:1–12).[65]

For some interpreters the primary relationship between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of human beings is that of true to false content. This is particularly sharply seen as New Testament writers sought to cope with the scandal of the crucified son of God: 'but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles' (1 Cor 1:23). It is also, though, undoubtedly present in the wisdom literature. In the late Deuteronomic writings and during the exilic and post-exilic periods there were certainly

writers, such as Baruch,[66] who identified wisdom completely with the keeping of God's commandments and contrasted this with the false wisdom of the world which leads to destruction:

> Hear the commandments of life, O Israel;
> give ear, and learn wisdom!
> Why is it, O Israel, why is it that you are in the land of your enemies,
> that you are growing old in a foreign country,
> that you are defiled with the dead,
> that you are counted among those in Hades?
> You have forsaken the fountain of wisdom.[67] (Bar 3:9–12)

In this version of reality, truth is one, and it is contained in the Torah[68] which alone is the fountain of wisdom and the source of salvation. In Christian thinking this line of argument has sometimes been taken up to characterise Christ, the incarnate Word of God, as the replacement for Torah and the sole way of accessing God's wisdom and salvation.

However, within the mainstream of the wisdom literature there is an alternative understanding[69] whereby Torah is understood to be an accessible and compact (though not the sole) area of wisdom to turn to amid the universal wisdom that is sometimes hidden within the complexity of the world: 'upon *all the living* according to his gift; he *lavished* her [wisdom] on those who love him' (Sir 1:10).[70]

Building on this broader interpretation, the Incarnation may be understood as a concentration of that wisdom that is to be found at the heart of all things with Christ being

> the bodily text which gives the clue to the whole text and body of the world. This is not because he is a cosmic mediator, bridging a gap between two worlds, but because the pattern visible in the actions and words of Christ is the rhythm in which the world comes to its fullness.[71]

So, for example, however difficult some of the biblical proverbs may be for the cultural and social environments we now inhabit (not least for women), it is instructive to note that in the book of Proverbs the kind of theoretical wisdom that dances on a cosmic scale is considered to be intimately connected with the human wisdom that concerns practical daily tasks. In this way, according

to the Baptist theologian Paul Fiddes, the writers of ancient Israel offer an interplay of *phronēsis* (practical wisdom) and contemplative wisdom (*sophia*), in which there is issued an invitation to an *embodied* participation in the wisdom of God that suffuses the created order (rather than only an opportunity to contemplate the Good as in Aristotle or Plato).[72]

According to Heather Walton (2014), this invitation also opens up the possibility of encountering God not just in action (*praxis*), but through a sacramental making (*poiēsis*). She points to the possibilities for *poiēsis* in practical theology with reference to the work of Henri Lefebvre, the dialectic materialist, for whom *poiēsis* refers to the 'supreme, restless, transformative capacity of human beings to reshape their world and create meaning out of the mundane'.[73] She quotes Lefebvre saying that in our playful creativity 'another reality is born, not a separate one, but one which is "lived" in the everyday, alongside the functional … It is a domain without limits.'[74]

Such an approach to *poiēsis* clearly moves beyond Aristotle's discussion of crafts and is conceived as a genuinely creative engagement between God, the human community and the rest of the material world that might theologically be described as sacramental. Although 'sacramental' might, in Methodist circles, be taken more often to refer to the dominical sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, more broadly, a sacramental understanding of the world concerns the way in which God reveals Godself as human beings engage with their own physicality and that of the world around them (eg for St Augustine there was a much broader range of *sacramenta* than bread and wine and water, including ashes, oil and the kiss of peace).

To articulate this theologically Rowan Williams, drawing on the scholastic tradition, argues that both the mind and the world are understood to be formed of underlying structures and relations which go beyond surface harmonies and which 'resonate with the patterns of God's action in the created world'.[75] In this way of thinking, God, therefore, is understood not to be confined to operating solely within the mind of the human being, nor to be contained as propositional truth within the authorised meaning of a text, but is genuinely at work in the created order, not in the sense of miraculous interventions but in the sense of weaving together all things for good with those who love God. While the dominical sacraments represent reliable corporate means through which God discloses Godself, any dimension of materiality (such as a burning bush) might be an occasion for such an encounter.

This orientation towards wisdom has important theoretical and practical consequences. Holiness, for example, becomes not a question of only attending to a narrow and religiously defined set of matters – that would be creating propaganda for God – but, rather, becomes a question of attending to the truth of all things in their detail and particularity in the confidence that they are held in being by God, and that though we may not be able to put them easily or neatly together they belong together in God and are being drawn into God's future.

Such a way of thinking means that Christian wisdom will be directed towards recognising, and helping others to recognise, the texture of God in the everyday complexity around us but without the need to discount the efforts or findings of other truth-seeking communities (whether religious or academic) from the outset. This does not excuse us from rigorous thought, either about what Christians understand to be true, or about how that life is lived and experienced, or about the truth-claims and assumptions of other wisdom-seeking communities, but it invites us into a deep conversation with everyone and everything in the confidence that, in and through that dialogue, God, as wisdom, will be encountered.

One consequence of this argument for Christian theological education is that it need not be seen and practised as a narrow learning about religious things in defence against the false truths of the world, but may be seen as a dialogical process between different voices and articulations of wisdom, both reasoned and revealed, in which, to use Paul Fiddes' phrase, 'the pattern visible in the actions and words of Christ is the rhythm in which the world comes to its fullness'.[76]

One advantage of the claim that God's wisdom is dialogical, for a cross-cultural community of theological formation like Wesley House, is that we need not defend the processes and contents of any of our attempts to articulate Christian wisdom as being 'pure'. We can acknowledge that our wisdom has been lived and formulated by particular people in particular times and contexts and embodiments. This takes seriously the Enlightenment discovery of the historical character of human reasoning but it does not deny God as the source of wisdom. Rather it highlights the need for wisdom to pay attention to our own voice and the voice of the other in order to prevent its distortion.

The Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann affirms this when he contends that even though it is God who initiates revelation, human beings cannot naively abdicate responsibility for discerning the meaning of such moments

of transfiguration. In fact, we must not seek to collapse the essential distance that must be preserved between us and the other for the voice of God to be heard. In the case of preaching, for example, he warns that if

> the voice of our listeners has been silenced by alienation or suppressed rage, then the voice of God alone will not evoke praise or permit transformation. We should remember that we can only preach the word of God as such a conversation if our own voice, too, has not been reduced to silence.[77]

Further, the Roman Catholic theologian Mary Grey writes:

> Transforming the process of coming to know gives us new eyes for reading the sacred texts. How we read these texts, how we transmit tradition, is influenced to a great extent by our position in the world – our genderedness, race, societal status, sexual preference, health and so on … 'Feeling the world', 'letting the world in' is a thoroughly embodied process.[78]

A second consequence for theological education of this way of conceiving wisdom is the need to incorporate embodied methods of learning that enable both right- and left-brain engagement.[79] These we have developed at Wesley House since 2011 and such methods will continue to have an important place as we seek to allow students from different parts of the world to find their voice in the Cambridge context, and to do so not only through shaping and being shaped through the disciplines of *paideia*, through learning the disciplines of *Wissenschaft*, and through the dialogical activities of *phronēsis*, but also through the opportunities of *poiēsis*. One of the most moving communications of theological meaning I have witnessed in recent years, for example, was the creation of a chair out of thorns by a Korean student using a traditional method of chair-making with sticks and string, binding together rosebush cuttings from the college garden. This act of *poiēsis* articulated, in a visceral way, a sacrificial emphasis that he felt was lacking in the expressions of Christian life he found in the UK – an emphasis that he both rediscovered and was able to communicate through the process of making and sharing what he had made.

In this account diversity becomes a strength. The more people are engaged in seeking God's wisdom, authentically, out of their different embodiments and experiences, the more likely we are to hear God speaking.[80] While hearing our

own voice can be a costly matter (it can be easier to conform to external demands – even those we think are from God – than to face our own truth), there are no short cuts to a practical wisdom which involves the willingness to ask powerful questions of ourselves and of others. This points not only to a different pedagogy (way of teaching) but a different way of understanding how we know what wisdom is (epistemology), which is not totalising (from one point of view), but essentially dialogical (engaging many voices), and which is not only concerned with content (what is wise?), but also with process (how does one *participate*[81] in God's invitation to wisdom in a changing and complex world?).

Conclusions – is wisdom the principal thing?

I began this article with a question prompted by the quotation on the original library wall at Wesley House and by asking whether wisdom should be the principal thing in theological education and, if so, what kind of wisdom that might be. Having framed the conversation by explaining the ways in which Wesley House has inherited aspects of the 'Berlin' and 'Athens' models, I have sought to consider the oppositions set up by those models in relation to theory and practice, and to revealed and reasoned accounts of wisdom. I have done so through a conversation with Aristotle about *phronēsis* and *poiēsis* and a conversation with the Bible about the dialogical and participative nature of wisdom.

Despite the (pragmatically understandable) preoccupations of the Methodist Church in the British context with evangelism as the 'main thing'[82] I have become convinced, with Michael Gutteridge, that wisdom *is* the principal thing with which theological education (whether of lay or ordained people) ought, in general, to be concerned. This is because, without the capacity to discern in detail and in particular how the Christian community should engage, and without the capacity to articulate afresh for new generations what the Christian vision is about – in terms that are contextually intelligible and involve a non-defensive search for truth through all the ways that God provides (heart, mind, soul and strength) – the leadership of the Churches will be disastrously short-sighted.

In an international and residential[83] community, in which Methodists from all over the world are going to be living in close proximity, I think there would be considerable merit in finding a new location for the quotation from Proverbs 4:7:

WISDOM IS THE PRINCIPLE THING, THEREFORE GET WISDOM
AND IN ALL THY GETTING, GET UNDERSTANDING,

preferably sited in close proximity to the chapel entrance where the injunction is to learn from Jesus:

DISCITE A ME QUIA MITIS SUM ET HUMILIS CORDE.[84]

The interplay between the two texts perhaps comes as close as I am able to get to the four aspects of wisdom that I would want to draw out as they relate to theological education: (1) the practical and embodied nature of that wisdom as *paideia* and as *poiēsis* that needs to be experienced in communities of practice; (2) the need to think rigorously both about how we live the Christian life and how we lead others in it (*phronēsis*), but also about how we articulate what the Christian wisdom is in ways that make sense not only to us but are also intelligible to those who do not share our presuppositions; (3) the suffusion of the wisdom of God throughout the world beyond the canon of Scripture and the Christian community, and discoverable in art, literature, science and the dialogue between truth and wisdom-seeking communities of all kinds; (4) finally, wisdom's genuine accessibility through the life of holiness as disciples of Christ as we open ourselves to the transcendent Other through the means of grace.

If others disagree, I look forward to the dialogue.

Notes

1. Methodist Theological University in Seoul; Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary in Pietermaritzburg; Kenya Methodist University; The Candler School of Theology, Atlanta; Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington.
2. A theological purpose might be variously defined. My assumption here is that a theological purpose concerns the overall meaning of an enterprise in relation to God.
3. For a summary of the debate in the 1980s–1990s, see Kelsey 1993.
4. Ford 2007. See especially chapter 8, 'An interdisciplinary wisdom: knowledge, formation and collegiality in the negotiable university', pp. 305–349.
5. The Cambridge Theological Federation, www.theofed.cam.ac.uk/, was formed in 1972, originally between Wesley House, Westcott House and Ridley Hall in the context of conversations about Anglican–Methodist union. Now more than 40 years on, it is a collaboration of 9 institutes (Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, Orthodox and Reformed, Jewish and Muslim) in the areas of theological

formation for ministry and mission, research in theology and religious studies, encounter between people of different Christian traditions and between people of other faith. In many ways it was a fulfilment of Michael Gutteridge's desire, as the original benefactor, that Methodist students should be educated with those of other traditions also being formed in Cambridge (unpublished letter of 1922).

6. To read the vision as it was set out, see www.methodist.org.uk/conference/conference-reports/2012-reports, 57, 'The Fruitful Field'.
7. This was an apologetic made despite the acknowledged costs – in terms of finance and of imagination – in a world (and a Church) that is increasingly conformed to the commodification of everything including education. As David Ford says, 'The creation and sustaining of physical and social settings where they [theological values] actually flourish is an extraordinarily demanding task, and the timescale involved is nearly always transgenerational. The socially and personally embedded nature of the values means that they are rarely well learnt except through face to face contact in settings structured and shaped through experience of embodying the values and resisting whatever undermines or distorts them. The values and their settings are continually under threat from many angles, and decades of building can be destroyed at any time.' Ford 2007, pp. 314–315.
8. This was the spelling used on the frieze in the library.
9. While other quotations from the Bible in this text will be from the NRSV Anglicized Edition, where they are inscriptions, they are reproduced in the form used on the walls.
10. 'Learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart.' NRSV.
11. Prayer of Azariah, vv. 37 and 35.
12. Founded in 1921, in anticipation of Methodist Union in 1932, Wesley House accepted students to train from all three branches of what was to become The Methodist Church in Britain: Wesleyan, Primitive and United Methodist. The Trust Deed was amended in 2014 explicitly to include students and scholars from any church or institution associated with a church eligible to join the World Methodist Council.
13. This is a phrase borrowed from the work of Walter Brueggemann (1986) who in his book of that title commends the necessity for memory and imagination to be held together if a community is to be faithful to its calling. In its first submission to the Fruitful Field consultation process, the paper produced by the staff and trustees of Wesley House (Leach et al. 2011) quoted the Australian Catholic theologian David Ransom (2001, pp. 605–606), 'Where memory's lacking, distorted or ruptured the present loses its potential to become pregnant with possibility … But if memory is to become future it requires the engagement of that other profound human faculty, imagination. Memory and imagination give birth to the future.'
14. Kelsey 1993, pp. 6–11.
15. Kelsey 1993, pp. 12–18.
16. Cambridge's Faculty of Divinity is consistently ranked in the top two in Britain; see www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/league-tables/rankings?s=Theology%20%26%20Religious%20Studies, accessed 12 February 2015.

17. The traditional way of describing the originally three-part undergraduate degree – perhaps examined while seated on a three-legged stool. In fact most Wesley House students who have taken the theological Tripos did so as graduates in other subjects and so were excused Part I.
18. For example the current Regius Professor, David Ford, sets out his commitments in Ford 2007, p. 4.
19. *Wissenschaft* is defined by David Kelsey (1993, p. 12) as 'orderly, disciplined, critical research'.
20. David Ford describes the colleges as 'long term environments of conversational culture centred on meals' (2007, p. 324). Although many Cambridge colleges retain a chapel, the fellows are no longer required to be in holy orders and not many of them (or their students) are participants in the life of the chapels.
21. *Paideia* was a common and long-lived classical practice debated, for example, by Plato, Aristotle and Cicero, among others; see Kelsey 1993, pp. 6–7.
22. So, for example, Clement of Rome's letter to Corinth in ad 90 speaks of the *paideia* of Christ (Jaeger 1939–1963, vol. I, p. 25).
23. The first students arrived in Cambridge from Oxford in 1209. Walter Rüegg summarises the main values of the medieval university as: rational investigation of the world; ethical values of modesty, reverence and self-criticism; respect for the dignity and freedom of the individual; rigorous public argument appealing to demonstrated knowledge and rules of evidence; recognition of the pursuit of knowledge as a public good irreducible to economic interest; the need for continual self-criticism in the course of improving our knowledge; equality and solidarity. These values were embedded in Christian doctrines such as creation, human imperfection, the connection between knowledge and virtue, a collegial commitment to the pursuit of truth and knowledge in communities (Rüegg 1992).
24. 'Learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart.' NRSV.
25. This is a virtue celebrated influentially by John Henry Newman in *The Idea of a University* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1899), in which the overall goal is the cultivation of students' intellectual capacities for their own sake and to fit them for a generic leadership through learning to think (rather than in terms of any specialist professional training or specific readiness for independent research within an academic discipline).
26. This has been evidenced in correspondence I have received as Principal in the context of the Fruitful Field about the value of Wesley House to its alumni.
27. It was never asserted by Wesley House's founders that all ministers should receive this kind of education but only those who would most benefit. Moreover, an intellectual wisdom need not preclude or be in conflict with a relational or interpersonal wisdom that might be learnt, for example, from children or those with learning disabilities. See David Ford's chapter on the wisdom embodied in a L'Arche community (Ford 2007).
28. www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2013/jun/04/higher-education-participation-data-analysis, accessed 16 February 2015. Article by Charlie Ball, deputy director of research at the Higher Education Careers Services Unit.

29. Ford 2007, pp. 4–5.
30. For David Ford the health of society itself also depends on the health of its universities, which, if reduced to utilitarian, technical or essential 'bought' interests, is unable to produce broad and wise thinkers (Ford 2007, p. 319).
31. For example, the Russell Group of which the University of Cambridge is a member, says, 'Russell Group universities offer a high-quality learning experience with a deliberate emphasis on independent learning through research to encourage their students to develop into self-reliant graduates, able to pursue new knowledge and cope with uncertainty.' www.russellgroup.ac.uk/uploads/Learning-in-a-research-intensive-environment.pdf, paragraph 56.
32. Ford 2007, p. 2. For those students brought up in a cultural and educational environment that largely assumes the scientific world-view of the 'Berlin' model this may not be new, but for those coming to Britain from Africa or Asia the experience can be bewildering. Further, those formed as Christians within a broadly liberal Protestant tradition into which scientific ways of thinking have been introduced will have fewer difficulties with the environment of a research university than those coming from Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic or biblicist traditions in which sources of authority may not have been subjected to that kind of critique.
33. A useful model in this respect is that of the four voices of theology offered by Helen Cameron and colleagues, H. Cameron et al. 2010, pp. 53–56. The four voices are *normative* (Scripture, the creeds, formal church teaching, authorised worship materials of my denomination); *formal* (individual contributions of theologians, dialogue with other disciples, eg philosophy, psychology, biology); *espoused* (the theology embedded in the beliefs expressed by my immediate church or group); *operant* (the theology expressed through the practices of that church or group).
34. For example, the Green Report of the Church of England, www.churchofengland.org/media/2130591/report.pdf, published in January 2015. The Methodist Church in Britain is also due to review the implementation of the Fruitful Field at the Conference of 2017.
35. Gutteridge 1922.
36. See note 10.
37. The themes of these developments were broadly speaking diversification and regionalisation. Originally the community was entirely resident, male, young, single, comprised of accepted candidates for ordination to the presbyterate and intellectually able to engage in degrees offered by the University of Cambridge. From the 1960s onwards, the requirements of the British Methodist Church meant that the community became more diverse, embracing married, female, and students of all ages, people in formation for a range of ministries or discerning vocations, and people from the region whose learning needs were not going to be met by University of Cambridge programmes. This led to a proliferation of patterns of residence, full- and part-time engagement, and new programmes of study. So, while Wesley House had historically been associated with intellectualism and elitism, ironically by the time of the Fruitful Field there

were also criticisms that Wesley House was no longer sufficiently engaged with the University of Cambridge to justify its existence. The release of Wesley House from meeting the diversified needs of the British Methodist Conference has allowed a re-engagement by the Trustees with the original charisms of the college and an opportunity to make the best of those for a global constituency.

38. These terms are used quite precisely by some and interchangeably by others. In general I would favour the use of practical theology to describe theology that is attentive to the breadth of the practices of the Christian faith and to the theological treatment of other human practices, and pastoral theology to describe a narrower activity concerned with pastoral care or pastoral responsibility. The degree programmes referred to here are an MA in Pastoral Theology and a Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology.
39. Heather Walton (2014, p. 8) summarises the views of empirical theologian Johannes Van der Ven in order to locate practical theology: 'Van der Ven makes clear that he views Practical Theology in pre-Thomistic terms as sapientia (wisdom) rather than scientia (speculative knowledge) and it is a wisdom that is concerned with understanding and indeed celebrating how people find spiritual meaning, faith, God in the midst of contemporary life (1998: 30–1). This work is done in order that we can do better theology, offer better pastoral care and (as is extremely important to empirical theologians) communicate effectively in a world that no longer comprehends the categories upon which theology is based.'
40. Such as Elaine Graham 1996 and Don Browning 1976.
41. In the last decade two significant books on sapiential wisdom have been published in the UK that engage with biblical wisdom literature – one by the Regius Professor of Divinity in Cambridge (Ford 2007) and the other by the Professor of Systematic Theology in the University of Oxford (Fiddes 2013).
42. References are to the translation by Roger Crisp 2000.
43. This is usually translated 'happiness'. Scholars debate whether the highest happiness for Aristotle is a contemplative happiness rather than a composite of intellectual and practical elements. For further discussion, see Curzer 2012, pp. 14–15.
44. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* X.8.1178a.
45. Crisp (ed.) 2000, p. viii.
46. The first two, 'scientific knowledge' (*epistēmē*) and 'intuitive reasoning' (*nous*), contribute to the third, 'theoretical' or 'philosophical wisdom' (*sophia*).
47. Curzer 2012, p. 295.
48. A similar point is made by David Ford in relation to the formation of rounded characters in the university setting: 'The socially and personally embedded nature of the values means that they are rarely well learnt except through face-to-face contact in settings structured and shaped through experience of embodying the values and resisting whatever undermines or distorts them' (Ford 2007, p. 314).
49. During the period between the announcement of the intention of The Methodist Church in Britain radically to reconfigure theological education (September

2011) and the completion of its implementation at Wesley House (July 2014) this brought into sharp and painful focus a number of demanding questions: how to live with integrity while in conflict with denominational decisions; how to deal with anger and loss; how to make good enough institutional endings; how to discern personal and institutional futures amid competing demands and complexities… It seemed crucial to the health of the institution for these issues to be handled as transparently as possible within the staff and student bodies.

50. One of the key thinkers who has helped recover a sense of the need for practical wisdom rooted in virtue that is beyond technical knowledge is Alasdair MacIntyre (crucially, MacIntyre 1985) whose work has resonated beyond a theological context to inspire ventures such as business schools. See, for example, Geoff Moore 2002.
51. In Book X, Aristotle states that the happiest life consists in the exercise of intellectual virtue or contemplation (*theoria*), while the political life of *phronēsis* is only a secondary kind of happiness (*NE* x.7–8, 1178. 10a6–10). However, scholars disagree about the extent to which the bulk of the *Nicomachean Ethics* can be read in this way. For a discussion of this debate, see Long 2011.
52. The adoption of *phronēsis* by American theologian Don Browning was a way of emphasising the Christian community as the context in which its fundamental truth claims come to be known, not only as theoretical truths but as lived experience. For Elaine Graham, who did much to introduce a British audience to this application of *phronēsis*, Browning was still too committed to a model of practice in which morals (ideas) were wrapped up in practice, rather than to an examination of broader practices such as the liturgical and affective. Drawing on the work of Edward Farley (1983), she argued that what we need is 'a model of practical wisdom which is both "indwelt" and "constructed": habitus as handed down and reinterpreted anew for every generation' (Graham 1996, p. 95).
53. I find Charles Wood (1985) a helpful contribution to the breaking down of the dichotomy between theory and practice in Christian education.
54. See, for example, Moore 2002.
55. This happened through the MA in Pastoral Theology and then the BA in Christian Theology. Our engagement with the pedagogy of *phronēsis*, however, has also influenced the development of new degree programmes with the University of Cambridge, so now the Bachelor of Theology and Diploma in Theology for Ministry programmes benefit from a hybrid approach that takes seriously the traditional strengths of the Faculty of Divinity and an attention to *phronēsis* and *poiēsis*. For an exposition of the impact on Cambridge awards, see Leach 2010. To explore the reference to *poiēsis*, see further below.
56. The terminology is borrowed from teacher education and is widely used as a tool in professional development. For example, 'Unless teachers develop the practice of critical reflection, they stay trapped in unexamined judgments, interpretations, assumptions, and expectations. Approaching teaching as a reflective practitioner involves fusing personal beliefs and values into a professional identity' (Larrivee 2000, p. 293).
57. Henderson 2003, pp. 110–111

58. For example, Edward Farley complains about a professional practice focus as being unduly functional and thereby uncritical in relation to an understanding of the essentially theological nature of the Church as a redemptive community (Farley 1983, p. 127). Dykstra and Bass (2008, p. 7) argue for a reorientation of attention to practice, not as any intervention made by an individual practitioner but as a definitive activity of the Christian community, saying, 'A practice is a practice in our meaning of the term only if it is a sustained, cooperative pattern of human activity that is big enough, rich enough, and complex enough to address some fundamental feature of human existence.'
59. For a practical outworking of this in theological reflection, see my work on pastoral theology as attention (Leach 2007).
60. This is the process that Elaine Graham describes as helping the Churches to practise what they preach (Graham 1996, p. 11) (though it is simultaneously the process of helping the Churches to preach what they practise).
61. As Professor Peter W. Stephens remarked to the British Methodist Conference of 2003, the fact that some Methodists engage in certain practices does not make those practices Methodist.
62. 'Overall the health, not only of the economy but also of democratic polity and its accompanying civil society depends on a well-educated population. There are very few other institutional settings where a wide range of fields, professions and applications come together, so if the university fails here, the flourishing of a whole society is at stake' (Ford 2007, p. 319).
63. For the significance of Ernst Troeltsch and other Enlightenment figures in the development of the doctrine of revelation, see Stroup 1982.
64. There is not room in this article for a detailed discussion of the different Hebrew and Greek words used in the Bible to describe different aspects of wisdom. Here 'wisdom' is the translation for *chokmah* and 'understanding' is the translation for *biynah*.
65. In this passage a variety of Hebrew words are used that are variously translated wisdom, prudence, understanding and knowledge. These words are not necessarily translated into Greek in the Septuagint nor into English with consistency as if they were technical terms. The most consistent translation is *chokmah*/*sophia*/wisdom, which is particularly associated with the personified figure of Lady Wisdom and with God. The implication is that a response to the invitation to follow or learn from Lady Wisdom (God's wisdom) brings with it all kinds of practical prudence, understanding and knowledge useful in governing and living.
66. A date in the first century BC seems most likely. See Burke 1982.
67. There is scholarly dispute as to whether Baruch 3:9ff was ever written in Hebrew. Emmanuel Tov argues that the Greek is the original (which uses *phronēsin* in 3:9 and *sophias* in 3:12), whereas Kneucher and Pfeiffer have separately argued there was an original Hebrew version.
68. There is not room in this article for a more extended discussion of the way in which wisdom, Torah and prophecy are related in Old Testament literature.
69. For a detailed discussion, see Fiddes 2013, chapter 10.

70. The meaning is perhaps more clearly expressed in the NEB translation: 'To all humankind he has given her in some measure but in plenty to those who love him.' The Greek text of Sirach uses *sophia* to render 'wisdom' throughout this passage.
71. Fiddes 2013, p. 346.
72. To interpret the wisdom literature of the Old Testament and the Apocrypha in this way is not uncontroversial, not least because it involves accepting the argument of Paul Fiddes that the figure of Lady Wisdom is not evidence of a necessary mediator between heaven and earth which otherwise would be entirely strange to each other, but a Hebrew way of talking about God's very self – God is both beyond the creation and thus able to see it whole, and in the midst of daily life, revealing herself in the embodied business of living. Thus, in Proverbs 8, wisdom, for Fiddes, is not a demi-God borrowed from earlier goddess traditions, but a personified attribute of God's very self: 'in daily practices, in a created context which is "other-than-God" we are participating in a self-giving movement of God. This is a giving of God's self which is partly pictured in the dancing and travelling Lady Wisdom.' The consequence of his exegesis is that seeing the world in all its complexity is itself a way of being drawn into the contemplation of God's wisdom because wisdom not only sees all, but invites a journey into the manifold delights of the world which she knows intimately because she pervades them.
73. Walton 2014, p. 13.
74. Lefebvre [1961] 2002, p. 204, quoted in Walton 2014, p. 13.
75. Williams 2005, pp. 23–24.
76. Fiddes 2013, p. 346.
77. Brueggemann in Cocksworth and Brown 2004, pp. 92–93.
78. Grey 1993, p. 85. This allusion to embodied knowing is an important corrective either to the paradigm of sight or speech as metaphors. For a discussion of haptic knowledge that takes touch seriously, see Pattison 2007.
79. For an example of this kind of learning in practice, see Leach 2014. For a theological explanation of why embodied learning might matter in Christian communities, see Leach and Paterson 2015, chapter 6, 'Attention to the body'.
80. Mike Higton (2004, pp. 112–114) highlights the use of the metaphor of an orchestra in Rowan Williams' thoughts about peace. He speaks of the attentive listening that is required that can both hear the distinctive contribution of each instrument, but also imagine how, out of the cacophony of tuning up, a symphony might emerge.
81. Paul Fiddes explores the notion of participation in God and in God's wisdom through the Hebrew verb *yada* – to know and to be known. This implies a relational way of knowing that involves God, the self and the other. Rowan Williams (2005) explores this participative kind of knowing in relation to art and the world of 'things'.
82. This line of thought was sharply in evidence at the British Methodist Conference in Birmingham in 2014. Under the heading 'The main thing', the General Secretary said, 'However the Statistics for Mission report is understood and interpreted it

does not make for easy or comfortable reading. If ever we needed any encouragement to continue to focus on those things that make for an ever better Church which is a discipleship movement shaped for mission today, then these statistics provide that' (Atkins 2014, p. 266). In a post-Christian context where numbers of regular churchgoers are in free-fall, this priority may well be the right one, but how do we discern that evangelism is the response that God requires of us to this situation? How do we know that it is not repentance or a deeper commitment to the common good that is required, or some other response? The question is sharpened when we look at other parts of the world, or different moments in history when the contextually discerned priorities of the Church have been different from those being discerned in Britain today. Behind immediate priorities lies the question of how we discern what God requires of us at all.

83. Wesley House will remain, at its core, a residential community in Cambridge for long-term and short-term residents, though key expressions of its ethos and life will also be through the more dispersed activities of research and learning, for example through the sponsorship and ownership of this journal and the activities of part-time non-resident students.

84. 'Learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart.' NRSV.

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HOLINESS
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A discipleship movement shaped for mission: forming a new ecclesial identity for British Methodism?

Roger L. Walton

THE REVD DR ROGER WALTON is Chair of the West Yorkshire Methodist District. Formerly Director of the Wesley Study Centre, Durham, his publications include *Learning for Ministry, The Reflective Disciple* and *Disciples Together*.

chair@wymethodist.org.uk
West Yorkshire, UK

The article tracks the development of a new ecclesial strapline for the British Methodist Church in the period between 2007 and 2014 and assesses the initial impact of the identity on education and ecumenism. It argues that the theme and practice of holiness has been underplayed and underdeveloped in the discourse to find a fresh expression of Methodism's calling but that there are surprisingly creative elements latent in the expression, especially in a new era of ecumenical relations.

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Introduction

In 2011 the Methodist Conference received a report from its General Secretary under the title *Contemporary Methodism: A Discipleship Movement Shaped for Mission*. Within a year this identity slogan was widely used; and now, three years later, these are the first words that greet you when you tap into Methodism's daily Bible readings and prayers, they regularly appear as the introduction to and justification for reports and projects of the Methodist Church, they adorn the bottom of emails from connexional officers and can be found at over 300 places on the Methodist Church website. They can be recalled and recited by many Methodists, lay and ordained, and feature in numerous circuit and local church mission statements. As an exercise in corporate identity-building it is a remarkable achievement, which might be the envy of any organisation with considerably less than the 250,000 members and almost 5,000 centres of operation that comprise Methodism in Britain.

My paper explores this phenomenon. In it I trace the forming of this phrase through the work of its General Secretary of the last six years, the Revd Dr Martyn Atkins; examine the concept for its faithfulness to Methodist theology and spirituality as seen in its founders; assess the impact on the Church, especially its effects on education and ecumenism; and make some suggestions about what is lacking in this new identity and how it may be addressed.

The paper is thus structured in four sections:

1. The contribution of Martyn Atkins.
2. The adequacy of the identity strapline.
3. The effects of the programme.
4. Conclusion: the unfinished agenda.

1. The contribution of Martyn Atkins

The role of Martyn Atkins cannot be overestimated in the process of forming a new identity for Methodism. While it would be severely mistaken to imagine that 'a discipleship movement shaped for mission' was a ready-made phrase in the mind of the General Secretary waiting to be revealed, it is clear from careful reading that the church identity slogan has been arrived at by the drive of Atkins to secure an expression that can encapsulate and enable a renewal of the sense of calling for the Methodist Church. This can be seen as early as 2007 in his book

Resourcing Renewal,[1] which was written to coincide with his year as President of the Methodist Conference. The title clearly reveals his intention and in the book he draws on material from Vatican II on the renewal of religious orders to indicate his core method.[2] Of the five principles identified in *Perfectae Caritatis*, he homes in on three basic steps in the recovery of purpose and energy:

- return to the gospel
- return to the founding intentions or charisms of the founders
- read the sign of the times.

This core idea was repeated in his presidential address in June 2007. Again Atkins cites Vatican II as his 'favourite model of renewal' and goes on to urge the Church towards a rediscovery of its calling by visiting its founding charisms and reconnecting with its core DNA. He outlines the cost of the change that might ensue and ends with a modern parable about an organisation running orphanages which by the end of the twentieth century had become moribund and was renewed by examining afresh why it was originally set up in the nineteenth century. Being clear about the significant challenges of renewal, he suggests that the time is ripe for this exercise. Interestingly, the opening story about his own period of time in hospital in 2001 when faced with an unknown illness, causing him to wonder whether his own time of ministry and perhaps life was at an end before seeing a sign through a digital clock face, is portrayed as a divine revelation and calling. His epiphany moment in hospital is connected strongly with Methodist renewal and, it might not be unfair to say, he sensed a personal calling to this task.[3]

Atkins had an unparalleled opportunity in Methodism to press his vision further by being appointed General Secretary[4] immediately as he finished his year as President of Conference. Whereas it is common, indeed expected, for a President in his or her year of office to urge the Church to attend to some key, possibly neglected, aspect of the gospel or church life, in reality the ongoing shaping of connexional policy and practice lies with the Connexional Team and in particular with the General Secretary, who is also the Secretary of Conference and leader of the connexional officers. With an initial five-year appointment ahead of him in this post, Atkins wasted no time in pursuing a renewal agenda by proceeding with a major conference entitled 'Holiness and Risk'. This conference took place over three days in February 2009 and was 'aimed at enabling those in positions of change leadership to explore this heritage and think deeply about what it means to be Methodist, and what it might mean to

express the charisms of the tradition in the 21st century'.[5] It was actively led by Atkins and one quickly recognises in the title a first attempt at identifying the charisms of the founding fathers. For the Wesleys, the pursuit of holiness was the central agenda of their enterprise and in the desire to draw others onto this journey, they were prepared to take bold and controversial risks, such as preaching in the open air in other people's parishes, commissioning lay preachers and affirming the leadership of women. As a first stab at identifying and reflecting on key foundational aspects of Methodism, the title of the February 2009 conference, 'Holiness and Risk', was reasonable and fair, and the fact that it was attended by many of those in positions to influence and affect change meant that there was a huge potential for wide ownership.

By the time of his first General Secretary's report to Conference in 2009 the agenda was, however, shifting towards the motif of discipleship.[6] The report began by setting out a commitment to discern God's will 'for our church at this time in our life'. It then went on to identify a series of (18) themes that had emerged from various conversations, including at the Holiness and Risk gathering. The first theme is a shared desire to be '*bolder and more courageous about being Methodist disciples*'. The report then goes on to talk about the need for a new narrative – 'those stories that articulate who we are and what we seek to be …' in order to move away from a self-defining narrative of decline and 'a wistful appeal to a golden past'. The final two themes are both concerned with discipleship. The penultimate one identified what it called a yearning for 'a whole life discipleship', for which Methodism should reshape its structures and fellowships. The final theme announces a commitment to discipleship as 'a key theme for our Church'. This is the beginning of the new narrative.

There is no denying that a discourse wider than British Methodism was underway around the theme of discipleship. The Church of England's Hind Report of 2005 championed a strand of training for lay Christians called 'Education for discipleship',[7] many of the new Churches and para-church agencies were emphasising the concept[8] and even the academy produced a flurry of books which featured discipleship in the title.[9] Significantly, the United Methodist Church (UMC), principally based in the USA, added to its *Book of Discipline* in 2000 a mission statement for the Church which reads quite simply, 'The mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ.' This was amended in 2008 to read, 'The mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.'[10] This theme of discipleship has been running since the mid-1990s in the UMC – the largest part of the Methodist family of Churches – and as such has developed a critical discourse.[11]

Throughout his reports, over the five years, Atkins repeatedly appeals for British Methodism to be more strongly connected to world Methodism, in which the UMC continues to be the lead player. There can be little doubt that the focus on making disciples advocated by the UMC exerted some influence on his thinking. The expression of this discipleship theme in British Methodism, however, for Atkins was to find a particular and distinctive shape.

The following year (2010) there was a brief General Secretary's report, but in it the notion of discipleship is expanded and coupled with the idea of mission.[12] These themes take up the first and prophetic part of the paper, the other succeeding sections being largely reporting on how the tasks and responsibilities of the General Secretary's post had been exercised in the past year.

The concept of discipleship is now articulated as 'life long, encompassing the whole of life and … world transforming',[13] and the term 'discipleship movement' is used for the first time. Having urged and encouraged discipleship as 'a particular emphasis across several years on Christian discipleship' for Methodism in his 2009 report, Atkins now reports widespread and increased enthusiasm. What had been identified as 'a key theme' in the 2009 report has become in 2010 a longitudinal commitment embraced by the Conference and a 'distinctive identity'.[14]

The theme of discipleship, now established, is given a particular form because of Conference's plan to celebrate 2011 as the 'Year of the Bible'. Linking the commitments together, Atkins argued, would allow the Year of the Bible to become 'a focus for deepening Christian discipleship throughout the Connexion' and, what is more, this theme of discipleship would enable 'priorities to be identified and choices to be made by the Connexional Team and other connexional bodies' with budgetary implications.[15]

The report was accompanied by the production and wide distribution of a booklet entitled *Discipleship and the People Called Methodist*.[16] After an initial print run of 10,000 copies, it was reprinted a second and third time, with over 26,000 finally being dispersed free within Methodism and a pdf version available for free download on the Methodist Church website.

The introduction of 'Mission' as a second major category in the 2010 report[17] sets the scene for the emergence of the strapline to appear in 2011. Mission, it is noted, is not new in Methodist discourse. Indeed Atkins relates mission to contemporary developments in Methodism as his starting point. In particular he recalls the Conference's commitment to 'Mapping the Way forward:

regrouping for mission' in 2007, a process for the audit and redevelopment of circuits, and he notes that the subtitle has now replaced the original title as a designation of the process. In other words, the Methodist Church has incorporated a regrouping for mission ethos and, because structural reorganisation for mission has already begun, mission is portrayed as the second key concept in the foci of Methodist renewal.

In these two reports, 2009 and 2010, it is possible to trace the build-up and the emergence of the key components for a new identity statement. The scene is thus set for the 2011 report, which came to the Methodist Conference as a tour de force.

The General Secretary's report to the Conference of 2011[18] is the watershed of this intentional process to find and articulate the founding charisms of Methodism for a new age. This report is significant in several ways:

1. The strapline 'discipleship movement shaped for mission' appears for the first time in a Conference report, indeed it is the title of the report.
2. It is the longest of all Atkins' reports, running to over 9,000 words. (The reports of the previous two years were of the order of 2,000 words).
3. It lays out a set of commitments or issues for the Church to tackle under this new title. Atkins calls these 'a first grouping of decisive intentions' (#13). In effect, it is an agenda for a programme of wide-ranging changes to the structure and working of the Methodist Church.
   These include:
   - resourcing of circuit leadership teams (CLTs) (#34)
   - greater investment in small-group leadership (#35)
   - children's and young adults' ministry (#36)
   - identifying, training and resourcing superintendents (#37)
   - local pastoral ministry (a revisiting of 'a pastor in every church') (#38)
   - a review and re-energising of local preacher and worship leader training (#43)
   - tackling the issue of too many church buildings (#46–56)
   - patterns of ministry to relate to the growing 'mixed economy' in the Church (#61)
   - a commitment to evangelism, which is equated with making more disciples (#65–70)
   - a commitment to 'new' ecumenism as well as established patterns of relating to traditional denominations (#73–74)
   - stronger links with world Methodism (#75).

4. It embeds 'a discipleship movement shaped for mission' into the life of the Methodist Church by asking the Conference to commend it to the Methodist people 'for study, response and action' and to direct various bodies to do work on key parts of the proposed programme.[19] All these were agreed.

The General Secretary's 2012 report suggests that the Church has confirmed the new identity in that the response to the 2011 report has been overwhelmingly positive or at least deeply engaged. This settles and sanctions the discerning and articulating of the concept and programme and further authorises the structural revisions and development set out in the 'first grouping of decisive intentions'. Atkins argues that the direction of travel is now set and thus it is legitimate and necessary to revisit and refine these intentions. Some of the programme items are expanded, drawing on the feedback to the report; other parts of the 2011 report are nuanced. In particular, he reflects further on the nature of connexionalism; illustrates how a focus on mission can be translated into reviewing our life and work; emphasises the need to find an apologetic for 'apt evangelism' as a priority; and reflects back some of the comments on worship that have been expressed. He acknowledges that the word 'movement' is contentious, especially in relation to ecclesiology where some fear that ministry and sacraments may be downgraded, but he defends the notion of movement as resonating strongly with Fresh Expressions and pioneer minister initiatives. The important thing for Atkins is 'not to permit our commitment to discipleship and mission to falter' (#17).

The subsequent reports of 2013 and 2014 are appropriately more concerned with consolidation and the progress of various 'decisive intentions'. More on that later.

For now we must turn to a brief evaluation of the new identity statement and explore some of its implications and effects.

2. The adequacy of the identity strapline

There can be little doubt that the use of the word 'movement' has a clear affinity with John Wesley's view that he was not founding a church but spearheading or facilitating a renewal of both church and nation. The notion of movement as a leveller of lay and ordained also resonates. However, in terms of founding charisms there are some significant problems with identifying 'a discipleship

movement shaped for mission' with the theology and practice of the Wesleys, at least on the surface. None of the words 'disciple', 'discipleship' or 'mission' feature much in the extensive writings of John and Charles Wesley. As Randy Maddox has carefully recorded, John Wesley studiously avoided using the term disciple, believing that the common usage of the word disciple in the eighteenth century was to indicate someone who accepts the teaching of another without question, or to designate an 'adherent' or 'pupil'. Wesley's desire was for people to become 'real Christians' of passion and commitment rather than nominal believers and for Methodists to be participants in ongoing transformation of life through faith, on the journey towards holiness or Christian perfection. For him the term disciple was not adequate for the enterprise to which he was committed and thus the terms discipleship and making disciples are never used.[20]

Likewise, the term mission in Wesley's day had different connotations, its main reference being overseas missions or missionary work, and was never used of the work of the Methodist Societies or Methodist people in Britain. The modern use of the word as an umbrella term for the range of activities such as evangelism, loving service to others in need, transforming unjust structures of society and ecological responsibility, as, for example, in the Anglican Five Marks of Mission[21] or as embodied in the Methodist report *Sharing in God's Mission*,[22] would have been unfamiliar to John and Charles Wesley and their associates.

However, both these criticisms are unfair in the sense that the mapping of words in an isomorphic fashion is hardly an adequate test of faithfulness. We need to ask whether what lies behind the words, in terms of convictions and practices, can be mapped onto the modern use of these key words.

Here the resonance is much stronger. In terms of mission, the Wesleys were deeply committed to calling people to conversion to the way of Christ, and although their preaching and hymnody were soteriologically driven, it is clear that their commitment to the poor, their opposition to public evils such as alcoholism and slavery, their writings on war and science, as well as their health clinics and other experiments in medicine, are suggestive of a broad understanding of mission. The fact that involvement in politics and trade unionism grew rapidly among Methodists in the nineteenth century further confirms this sense of mission encompassing the whole of life, as set in train by the Wesleys.

Similarly, when discipleship is defined as 'life long, encompassing the whole of life and world transforming' it lies close to the testimonies of many early

Methodists who, through the Wesleys' eighteenth-century fresh expression of church, found the motivation and means for living holy lives in the midst of turbulent times. As Ken Howcroft has argued, holiness for Wesley is not withdrawal or separation from the world but deep engagement with it as we are transformed in the love God.

> [Wesley] says that scriptural holiness '… is no less than the image of God stamped upon the heart; it is no other than the whole mind which was in Christ Jesus …' He goes on to say that that involves all of what we would call our instincts, feelings, emotional dispositions, ways of thinking and spiritual sensitivities being brought together, made whole and made holy. It makes us respond to God thankfully and lovingly in turn. And, says Wesley, if we start to love God, we shall naturally end up loving the rest of the world as well. We will not be able to help it. God's love will not let us.[23]

Like mission, then, the term discipleship can be seen as an appropriate category into which we may map much of the early Methodist enterprise. There are, however, two weaknesses of this mapping and both are to do with holiness.

The first is to do with the teleological orientation of early Methodism. The structure of the first Methodist societies with their classes, bands and select bands was for the goal of Christian perfection. Whether perfection is defined in terms of a patient journey of growing into holiness or the more contentious idea of the instant gift of God, the end is the same: personal as well as social holiness defined in the practice of perfect love. This was the purpose and end of all that the Wesleys did in forming their Connexion, and, while Howcroft's exposition of Wesley's sermon on *The New Birth*[24] (above) indicates the view of holiness that Methodism has treasured, and hints at the transformations entailed, the current conceptualisation of discipleship lacks the holiness orientation or telos of the founding fathers. Atkins acknowledges in the 2011 report that he has not focused at any length on 'social holiness themes' (#81) but he believes that these are 'intrinsic' to Methodism. The lack of a theological articulation of a contemporary conceptualisation of holiness, however, which was not rectified in subsequent reports, means that an important part of the jigsaw picture is missing.

The second weakness is in relation to the nature of Methodist society membership as embedded in a set of rules and values. The analogy of

Methodism as a monastic order has been made several times.[25] In its earliest form it was a society that sought holiness by articulating and pressing its members to live by a set of rules. These rules came in many and various forms but like the core rules of orders such as the Franciscans they were readily translated in a popular form that all could understand and act on.

Take, for example:

> Do no harm. Do good. Love God.

or

> 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.

or

> Earn all you can, save all you can, give all you can.

These were popular versions of the society's rules which were also enshrined in the 12 rules for a helper, the rules of the bands and other set-out structures for nurturing the spiritual life.

For John Wesley, the creation of rules, which was a regular feature – perhaps a congenital disposition – of his life, was a way of catching gospel values and engaging with practices for godly living. And these rules were to be monitored and policed in the societies. Indeed he could be ruthless in expelling people from the societies for failing to live by them, in order to preserve the commitment to the end of holiness. Atkins acknowledges the role of rules in *Discipleship and the People Called Methodist* and illustrates the three rules of *The General Rules of the Society of the People Called Methodist* with the way Wesley himself expounded them.[26] However, the tone of the section plays down their importance by emphasising how few and how short the rules are. This fails to do justice to the way in which these, and the many forms of other early Methodist rules, shaped and patterned an intentional community. Moreover, in the presentation and exposition of 'a discipleship movement shaped for mission' they appear to have no counterpart. One might argue that the four elements of the Methodist millennium document *Our Calling* are a simple form of discipline for the Christian life, but these commitments, which appear on the annual membership ticket, have little by way of accountability or wider embedding in the life of local churches. They serve as a gentle and broad reminder of the Christian life rather than a rule to live by.

These two together highlight the essential concern with holiness, vital to early Methodism, that is not obvious in the new identity slogan. Missing are the sharpness, severity and accountability that would have characterised early Methodism.[27] Lost is the puritan strictness and the Moravian alternative community, both admired, followed and promoted by Wesley in his societies. Absent is 'the searching challenge to the ways of the world, such as might be expected to produce persecution'.[28] While unintended by Atkins, discipleship in the new strapline is in danger of being too vague and too comfortable.

It may be in that in postmodern culture with its dislike of ultimate or exclusive visions of human being and its concept of freedom as expressed in unfettered, individualised choice, these two aspects of holiness, central to the founding charisms, are the hardest to map. Nevertheless, by attempting to map holiness into a loosely defined form of Christian discipleship, there is something vital missing which limits the renewing power of the expressed identity. This weakness becomes acute when issues of ecclesiology in relation to ecumenism come into play. With that in mind let us turn to our third section.

3. The effects of the programme

After only three years there is no way of making any realistic evaluation of this initiative. That is for the future. There has been ample time, however, to observe a number of following decisions and actions taken in the light of the newly articulated identity. I will concentrate on two areas: education and ecumenism, as these are major areas to be impacted by the new identity as it has begun to shape Methodist Church life.

Education

The largest and most far-reaching change of recent years in Methodism was the decision to radically alter patterns of ministerial formation, training and Christian education. This was focused and enacted through the Fruitful Field process. Fruitful Field, the title of which is a quote from Isaiah 32,[29] was a root-and-branch review of the Church's learning resources and training provision. The Final Report, which came to the Methodist Conference of 2012, proposed the focusing of all training and learning provision at two institutions and withdrawal from or closure of all other courses and institutions for ministerial formation. Alongside this it planned for a new Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network (DMLN) made up of small teams working in regions to

support and work in circuits and churches for development in relation to three broad fields: discipleship, church and community, and ministries. The team members would be employed and line managed nationally, but also work with districts on learning agendas which were emerging in the locality.

The rightness and effectiveness of this decision is not our concern here. What is of interest is the relationship between this decision and the 'discipleship movement shaped for mission' identity.

It needs to be noted that the two processes evolved together, at least in part, in that the initial thinking about a review of training and learning began as early as 2007, when a settlement was reached about institutions and approaches to training. Some connexional officers, and perhaps others, felt that this was the not the most desirable arrangement and was at best an interim measure before something more radical. Martyn Atkins' involvement at the beginning of this thinking would have been limited and, although he advocated some changes to ministerial training in *Resourcing Renewal*, he did not venture into the messy area of institutional provision. However, the timing of the two decisions is highly significant. The fact that the 2011 General Secretary's report appeared months before the Fruitful Field consultation document[30] meant that the consultation document was built around the new identity slogan. Let me present the evidence for this.

First, the Foreword to the Fruitful Field consultation document is written by the General Secretary. Its opening words are, 'The Methodist Church is called to be a discipleship movement shaped for mission.' This notion is then expanded in the document and the need for change in a changing world is highlighted. The General Secretary is careful to point out that it is a consultation document and that it comes from the Ministries Committee rather than from him, but the link between the new identity and the Fruitful Field proposals is made explicit in the penultimate paragraph of the Foreword. It starts, 'The core of this document consists of a vision for a new way of equipping the Church, equipping the Methodist movement and equipping God's people for discipleship and mission.'

Second, the Introduction, in the names of Ken Jackson (Chair of the Ministries Committee), Anne Brown (Vice Chair) and Martyn Atkins (General Secretary), has five sections, the longest of which is a section entitled 'A discipleship movement shaped for mission'. Again it is an exciting upbeat exposition of this phrase as a 'hope-filled' expression, a statement of purpose and a call to some very practical commitments. Urgent action is required, it argues, 'For we also

share the conviction of the general secretary's report that much must be done – and done urgently – to ensure that the Methodist Church can fully deserve that description and be "fit" for that great purpose.' The text goes on immediately to set out items listed (as decisive intentions) in the General Secretary's 2011 report and describes how these are to be addressed in the Fruitful Field proposals. Fruitful Field is thus portrayed as the mechanism for enacting the vision, or at least key parts of it.

Third, the full phrase occurs throughout the text but equally noteworthy is the fact that 'movement' is used to describe Methodism or the Methodist Church 30 times. While Church remains the standard designation for Methodism, at all key points of change and proposal the word 'movement' occurs in the text.

It is hard not to conclude that the Fruitful Field consultation document is both a vehicle for extending the message of the 'discipleship movement shaped for mission' and the first test case for the ability of the new vision to shape both priorities and decision-making. What is offered to the Methodist people is a scheme and structure which will better equip them to become a discipleship movement shaped for mission, to revitalise the Church's life and work and purpose and to realise a new and exciting future before it is too late.

A revised document built around the same core vision came to the 2012 Conference after consultation, though its final text was only published a short time before the Conference met. The Conference debated long and hard, and various amendments were defeated, including those proposing a longer time for consideration. The proposals of the Fruitful Field report were accepted. The General Secretary was sparing in his involvement at this stage, with the final text coming in the name of the Ministries Committee without Foreword or Introduction as in the consultation document, and little intervention on his part in the long discussions. The General Secretary's report of 2012 refers to Fruitful Field and describes its basic assertions as lying 'within the direction of travel we have agreed upon', but otherwise has little to say about the report. The final text regularly used the new phrase, however, and quoted from those who had used it in the consultation feedback, as well as using the word 'movement' regularly to describe Methodism. Fruitful Field became in effect the first decision to express the new direction of travel.

Ecumenism

The impact on ecumenism is more complex and not so focused in one decision. Indeed its impact is yet to be tested in relation to the Anglican-Methodist

Covenant and formal bilateral and multilateral conversations, on the one hand, and joint mission initiatives and partnerships with the new Churches on the other.

One sees clearly in *Resourcing Renewal* that Atkins favours a mission-led form of ecclesiology. He devotes almost three chapters to the topic and makes a strong case for the *missio Dei* to be the starting point rather than traditional understandings of the Church. He accuses both the missionary movement and the ecumenical movement of artificially dividing church and world and is ill at ease with traditional hallmarks such as one, holy, catholic and apostolic. His own convictions about ecclesiology are:

- God wants the Church to share in the *missio Dei*.
- The Church needs to be incarnate like Jesus.
- The Church is impelled and empowered by the Spirit.

Atkins is aware of the issue of continuity for this position. If church changes radically over time, how is it authentically and consistently Christian? His answer is that *'there is a continuity of themes and values more than unalterable content or expression'.*[31] By this he means community, worship, a credo to live by and Scripture will always be there, but he recognises that these may not always be used or deployed in the same way.

The effect of all this is to loosen the shape of ecclesiological discourse so that ecclesiology is always emergent, growing from the bottom up rather than the top down and preferring evocative images of church to tight definitions.

As an ecclesiology, 'a discipleship movement shaped for mission' expresses well Atkins' desire to find a mission-led understanding of the Church. Its flexibility, provisionality and openness to both context and future allows a much larger space for fresh expressions of church, pioneer ministry and mission-based partnerships with the growing and diverse range of new Churches and 'ministries' which focus on specific generations or ethnic groupings. This intention is made explicit in the 2011 report.[32]

The problem, which is acknowledged at the outset of the 2011 report, is whether such an ecclesiology is adequate for Methodism, which over time has increasingly seen itself as a church and part of the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church. Atkins suggests that the designation of a discipleship movement shaped for mission is not a complete ecclesiology for the Connexion but 'an appropriate ecclesiological statement … consonant with recent

declarations of the Conference', such as *Called to Love and Praise*, and 'the key ecclesial theme to be prioritised and emphasised at this time'.[33]

It is hard to know how this will stand up in ecumenical dialogue. Certainly the amount of space given to ecumenical matters in the General Secretary's reports since 2011 suggest that this is a tricky area to navigate. On the one hand, there is repeated affirmation of the Covenant with the Church of England and the close working of the Methodist Church with the URC and, on the other, a regular argument that partnership with other parts of the Church of Christ has to be seen as taking place within a large and diverse landscape and must include world Methodism, the cultural-based congregations and fellowships in Britain today and the new Churches with their enviable emphasis on mission and making disciples. It also refocuses the discussion of our topic. Is this a theme or programme for our Church for a limited period of time akin to setting some priorities such as the Church of England's Quinquennium Goals[34] or is it a paradigmatic shift in self-understanding and ecclesiology? Methodism has always struggled to find a way to live with its history of being a society of members and being a church. Is this a slight shift back towards the society identity so as to recapture the spirit of a vibrant movement, or is it more fundamental in paving the way for a type of ecclesiology that is more appropriate for Churches in postmodernity? The crunch may come over Methodism's response to the repeated challenge from the Church of England to take some form of episcopacy into its system that could be recognised as being in continuity with apostolic succession and open the door to the interchangeability of ministry.

My own view is that the adoption of 'a discipleship movement shaped for mission' may in the medium term prove to have opened up a potentially more creative seam for Methodism in the realm of inter-church relations, particularly if the possibility of having 'internal and external' ecclesiologies is explored. By this I mean different ways of speaking about the nature of the Church depending on the constituency and relationship. For its internal self-understanding a 'discipleship movement shaped for mission' may allow Methodism to recover something of its particular calling and focus, as a quasi-religious order, but in relation to other Churches it may need to assert its church credentials by connecting with the received language of ecumenical dialogue. Walter Brueggemann has provided an insight for this kind of internal and external language in his highly evocative exposition of 2 Kings 18 – 19.[35] In his essay, Brueggemann argues that in the face of Assyrian confrontation the Hebrews need to use their own language internally or 'behind the wall' because

different languages allow for different thought patterns and possibilities. He explores how the conversation 'behind the wall' is both necessary and contributes to the conversation 'at the wall'. His point is that using Hebrew enables the Israelites to explore the world from their particular faith perspective, where Yahweh is the heart of the language. Rather than being absorbed into the discourse of a larger power (Assyria), speaking Hebrew liberates both imagination and energy which in turn contributes to the public dialogue.

In ecumenical relations, dialogue has often sought out a single language to which all Christian Churches have attempted to connect. The icon of this single language game was *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* but it would be true of many of the bilateral and multilateral conversations. As a way of searching for visible unity, it has served the Churches well but its cost may be the limiting of internal theological reflection which necessarily needs to draw deeply on an individual denomination's own history, charisms and language. There are hints that we are entering a new era or phase of dialogue where internal coherence and external connectivity may need to be related but may be cast in different vocabulary. There are suggestions of this in the recent Joint Implementation Commission report, where alongside urging Methodists to adopt a form of personal *episcopē* in the person of a bishop so as to connect with the signage of continuity embodied in the notion of historic succession, both Churches are asked to recognise the ways in which Methodism has held with integrity both apostolicity and *episcopē* throughout its history. At one time these might have been exclusive of each other but by being pursued together by both Churches they may be complementary and mutually releasing of the other while guarding the internal integrity of each tradition.

Just as science recognises that an electron may be both a wave and a particle, so it may be that ecclesiologies can have internal cohesion and external connection without having to surrender to a single vocabulary or language.

4. Conclusion: the unfinished agenda

We could discuss other effects on Methodism of the new strapline. I am conscious, for example, that in all the accompanying discourse little or nothing has been said about Christian faith in the multifaith context of Britain today. A discipleship movement shaped for mission for our age might have had much to say about this but in reality next to nothing has been articulated and as a

consequence inter-faith work struggles to find a place in the new Methodism. Suffice to say, accepting a 'discipleship movement shaped for mission' as an identity has already had significant implications for Methodism. It has led into a major reconfiguration of ministerial formation, training and Christian education and as such has set in motion a set of structures that will shape Methodism's pedagogical ethos and focus for ten to twenty years at least. At the same time it has relocated the site and self-understanding from which the Methodist Church will enter into ecumenical conversation, cooperation and partnership.

Within both these areas there are hopeful as well as worrying signals. The radical switch to a new approach to learning and formation may provide the opportunity for Methodism to consolidate and concentrate its limited resources into focused education and development for effective mission, but the desire to enact the new identity in this area quickly, which appears to have been the effect of Fruitful Field following on so closely after the 2011 General Secretary's Report, may have unintended but now embedded weaknesses that will be difficult to rectify. On the other hand, the seeming retreat from the established language of ecclesiology within ecumenical dialogue, which a 'discipleship movement shaped for mission' implies, may have an advantage. While appearing to undermine much of the progress made in inter-church relations, it may herald a new way of strengthening the internal identity of Methodism (behind the wall) so as to enable a critique and rich contribution to the conversations with other Christian denominations (at the wall). Methodism's root identity as a society for the pursuit of holiness, as well as its development into a mature form of church, is a contributory factor to the particular gifts it brings to the ecumenical table. The recovery of Methodism's monastic dynamism, which being a discipleship movement it seeks to recapture, may signal an advance rather than a retreat. Moreover, the shift from blueprint theologies of church to those that are shaped by the empirical context of mission, for which Nicholas Healy has argued,[36] may need to be matched by the rediscovery and fresh application of particular charisms, of ecclesial communities, as well as a humble form of receptive ecumenism.[37]

Meanwhile, the General Secretary has announced his resignation from post in August 2015. This means that, as I write, there is one more report to Conference in the summer of 2015. All the signs are that this will highlight the issues of (too many) buildings and apt evangelism, two of the 'decisive intentions' identified in the 2011 report. It will be interesting to see how the project fares after that point, as his successor takes up office. The next few years will to some

extent test the longevity of the new identity and its implications. At this moment the resilience of 'a discipleship movement shaped for mission' is an open question.

I hope that the basic idea is retained, refined and extended, especially in relation to holiness. As identified above, the teleological and monastic dimensions of early Methodism need to be recovered within this movement. Discipleship requires more definition in terms of personal and social goals and should be embedded within a more intentional Christian community. Elsewhere I have argued that disciples are formed by engagement with mission, by worship and by participation within a community of practice that is intentionally attending to Christian values and gospel practices.[38] In the recent past we have assumed that worship together with some form of Christian education will do the formational work. Having begun to recover the formational dynamic of engagement in mission, we still have to rediscover the power of intentional Christian community. To go deeper into the identity of early Methodism for today will mean seeking to live by a rule (or rules) of life that provides a teleological orientation and re-engages with the pursuit of holiness. Such a discipleship movement will be more true to our roots and better shaped for mission.

Notes

1. Atkins 2007.
2. *Perfectae Caritatis*.
3. The text of the speech appeared in *The Methodist Recorder* on 12 July 2007.
4. The post of General Secretary of the British Methodist Church was created in 2003 to integrate the work of the Conference Office and the Connexional Team and to be convening officer for Connexional Leaders' Forum. The intention was to offer a visionary and strategic leadership role. Martyn Atkins was only the second person to hold this post. Both he and his predecessor were appointed to be Secretary of the Conference and General Secretary of the Methodist Church. The Conference in 2014 agreed to the post being abolished or rather to be reintegrated into that of the Secretary of the Conference, as Atkins steps down in 2015. For the purpose and tasks, see *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*, 2013, SO 300, p. 372.
5. www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/vision-values/priorities-for-the-methodist-church/holiness-and-risk.
6. General Secretary's report, Section 2, *The Methodist Church Annual Conference 2009 Agenda*, vol. 1, London: Methodist Publishing.
7. Named after the Bishop of Chelmsford, the Rt Revd John Hind. See *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church* (2005). See also *Shaping the Future: New Patterns of Training for Lay and Ordained* (2006).

8. See, for example, Greene and Cotterell 2006 and Hull 2006.
9. Brown 200, Ward 2009, Longenecker 1996 and Longenecker 2004.
10. This was adopted in 1996 and reaffirmed in 2008 without amendment. See www.umc.org/who-we-are/general-conference-2008-legislation-tracking. For the full mission statement, see the United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline*, #120.
11. For a full critical review, see *Quarterly Review* 23(2), Summer 2003, issue theme: 'Make Disciples of Jesus Christ'.
12. General Secretary's report, *The Methodist Church Annual Conference 2010 Agenda*, vol. 1, London: Methodist Publishing.
13. General Secretary's report, 2010, #2.
14. General Secretary's report, 2010, #1.
15. General Secretary's report, 2010, #4.
16. Atkins 2010.
17. General Secretary's report, 2010, #6–9.
18. General Secretary's report, Section 2, *The Methodist Church Annual Conference 2011 Agenda*, vol. 1, London: Methodist Publishing.
19. The Ministries Committee to address patterns of ministry for fluid economy; the Methodist Council to consider the issue of (too many) buildings; and the Faith & Order Committee to reflect on worship.
20. R. Maddox, 'Wesley's Prescription for Making Disciples of Jesus Christ: Insights for the 21st Century Church', www.pulpitandpew.org/other-publications.
21. (1) To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom; (2) To teach, baptise and nurture new believers; (3) To respond to human need by loving service; (4) To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation; (5) To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth. See www.anglicanwitness.org/five-marks-of-mission/.
22. Methodist Church Home Mission Division, 1985.
23. Kenneth Howcroft, Presidential Address to the Methodist Conference, 2014. For the full text, see www.methodist.org.uk/news-and-events/news-releases/back-to-the-bible-forward-to-the-world-inaugural-address-of-the-methodist-president.
24. 'The New Birth', Sermon 45, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. II, ed. Albert Outler, Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1985, pp. 185–201.
25. Townsend compares closely early Methodism with the Franciscans, and John Wesley with Francis: Townsend, Worksman and Eayrs 1909, pp. 43–50. Wainwright (1995) draws a parallel between Benedictine and Methodist Spirituality.
26. Atkins 2010, pp. 32–34.
27. See John Lawson, 'The People Called Methodist: 2. Our Discipline' in Davies and Rupp 1965, pp. 183–209.
28. ibid., p. 196.
29. Isaiah 32:10, 15–17.
30. *The Fruitful Field*.
31. Atkins 2010, p. 60.

32. General Secretary's report, 2011, #72.
33. ibid., #6.
34. This is a set of three goals first set out in a Presidential Address to the General Synod of the Church of England in November 2010 and subsequently adopted as a five-year plan.
35. Brueggemann 1991, pp. 41–69.
36. Healy 2000.
37. Murray 2008.
38. Walton 2014.

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HOLINESS
THE JOURNAL OF WESLEY HOUSE CAMBRIDGE

Transforming theological learning: a conversation across the globe with Les Ball

Clive Marsh

DR CLIVE MARSH is Head of the Vaughan Centre for Lifelong Learning at the University of Leicester. His most recent book (written with Vaughan S. Roberts) is *Personal Jesus: How Popular Music Shapes Our Souls* (Baker 2013).

cm286@le.ac.uk
Leicester, UK

This is a review article responding to Transforming Theology: Student Experience and Transformative Learning in Undergraduate Theological Education, *by Les Ball (Preston, Victoria: Mosaic Press, 2012). It seeks to clarify how the concept of 'transformative learning' is significant not just for the formal settings of theological study that this book considers, but for all contexts in which learning about faith happens. The article explores the appreciative but not uncritical stance adopted in the book towards the term 'transformative learning'. It then goes on to examine what the concept means with respect to the prior (everyday life) learning which all participants bring, to the way in which courses are designed, and to how assessment of learning (whether formal or informal) is undertaken.*

TRANSFORMATION • LIFE EXPERIENCE • PRIOR LEARNING • COURSE DESIGN • ASSESSMENT • LEARNING OUTCOMES

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Les Ball's recent book is important to engage with in this journal because it is a significant study which raises key questions for theological education and learning at all levels. Though focused on formal institutions of learning, its insights have wider significance too. It is a careful study, undertaken through a combination of scrutiny of curricula used in theological training institutions in Australia, and of qualitative data drawn from interviews with students and staff who experience and teach those curricula. At the heart of the exploration – and as reflected in the book's title – is the concept of 'transformative education': the recognition that learning actually changes people. It *changes* people, and it changes *people*. In other words, it does things to participants (staff and students) in a way which affects their lives in and beyond the classroom. And it does this precisely because it is not simply about filling people's heads with cognitive stuff (be it facts about the Bible, significant dates in Christian history, or even doctrines to be recited by rote or techniques of pastoral practice to be put into effect). Theological education, all education, shapes lives through forming character, inculcating virtues, as well as transferring knowledge.

All good educators – at all levels (primary, secondary, tertiary) and in all types (formal, informal) of education – have, of course, long known this, often without having the theoretical conceptuality available to describe it as such. 'Transformative education' may be a new term. But it may ultimately mean no more than 'good' or 'wise' educational practice. Be that as it may, it still needs identifying, analysing and putting into practice, and may not be as easy as it sounds (otherwise, why do we keep experiencing bad teaching, poor training and the already proverbial 'death by PowerPoint' in sessions in which we participate?).

The phrase 'theological education' can, of course, itself be alienating. As I write, I am mindful of a recent conversation about whether to call a local event a 'training workshop', a 'discipleship session' or a 'Bible study'. Apparently, it is the third of those which produces greatest numbers. Hence, that basic bit of market research indicates that Christians in the West today (or just English Methodists?) are reluctant to be 'trained', may be suspicious of 'discipleship', yet are reassured when they know they will do something with the Bible. All such initiatives are, however, to be classed as 'theological education' in the widest sense of that term.

Meanwhile, ministers have to be prepared in some way, and what they do is, mostly, not different in kind from what most Christians do. It is just that they

do more of it, in a sustained and focused way, as well as being trained to be authorised leaders. It is important to know about the Bible and how to use it. It is crucial to have some sense of Christian history, and how the history of Christian thought has interwoven with the Church's and Western culture's history. It is vital, too, to reflect carefully and practically about what 'good worship' might be. It is also necessary to practise relating to others, to develop listening skills, to think about the Church as an organisation (and not just as a theological concept), to find out a bit more about the society in which churches currently operate, and to know something of the legal issues relating to church life. That, in a nutshell, is not a bad summary of what a ministerial programme might look like (biblical study, doctrine, church history, liturgical/worship studies, practical/pastoral theology). Without the big words and the scale of study, though, the same elements make up the 'Christian life' for any Christian disciple. It is just that most people don't have much time for formal study. Or, to put it more sharply and more challengingly for local churches, it may not always be apparent that such 'training' really is all that useful for living the Christian life on a daily basis.

Alongside all of this – whether we are talking about ministerial training or lay discipleship – there is the matter of 'pedagogy'. How might the insights of educators help the whole process of 'being trained'? Biblical study, doctrine and church history, in particular, have long suffered from the assumption that they are about 'stuff which you learn' (facts you imbibe), knowledge to be transferred from a book (or a computer screen) into your head. But what if the best kind of biblical study, especially in a computer age, is that which both makes you aware of *how* to get at that stuff, and teaches you ways of understanding *how the Bible 'works'* as a text on its readers and users, for a life of faith or for other purposes.

Les Ball's book is helpful in relation to all of these questions and concerns. As a study of theological education in Australia it is helpfully distinct from UK and US contexts, while being directly resonant of the same issues faced here. Across eight chapters Ball reports on his enquiry into the extent to which forms of theological education can be seen as 'transformative'. What does such study do *to and for* the people who study? In what ways are students aware of personal change going on? How explicit is such personal change in the educational programmes themselves, and to what extent do they notice such intentions within the programmes they study? To use a phrase frequently employed in ministerial training, though less commonly outside, Ball's report is a critical examination of the processes of 'formation' going on as people study theology.

(What kind of *people* do students of theology become?) In contemporary educational terms, it is also an exploration of what 'learning outcomes' are implicit or explicit in the programmes being scrutinised. What are these programmes *for*? What do they *say* that they are for? How is it known if they *achieve* what they set out to achieve? How clear are the participants about what is intended to be done *to* them?

Ball locates his enquiry in the context of current educational thinking about transformative education (ch. 2). Setting off from a short summary of the ideas of Jack Mezirow, Ball considers proponents and opponents alike, noting as a central thread a shift from 'content-centred' to 'person-centred' pedagogy. In contexts of theological learning, perhaps strangely, this proves a hard pill to swallow. Even though people are consciously being 'formed' (as disciples or ministers), and may need 'transforming' to become so, as Ball will go on to note in his concluding chapter (ch. 8) theological institutions still want to stress the primacy of biblical and theological knowledge.

The main part of the work contains the results of analysis of curriculum documents (ch. 3), scrutiny of how participation in learning programmes does or does not mesh with life experience (ch. 4), and then analysis of what students and staff themselves say about their experiences as learners and teachers (ch. 5). The final three chapters begin to look at the consequences of the findings: for the place of formal programmes within a person's life-journey (ch. 6), from the perspective of identifying existing good practice (ch. 7) and with a view to suggesting key principles for the future (ch. 8).

The material presented is full of sobering data and helpful insights and essential questions, about any educational or training programme, not just theological ones. What, though, emerges directly and indirectly from the published conclusions which may be of interest and use to readers of this journal, both with respect to formal learning in theology, and the more informal versions of theological education which happen in local church life? I suggest four things, each of which I shall examine with respect to each of these two contexts.

First, it is good in Ball's study that 'transformative learning' is not taken on uncritically as if this is something wholly new of which educators from the past were unaware. As noted already, it may be a recent concept but lots of educators know that education can be life-changing. With reference to transformative learning's critics, though, Ball recognises that it may be a fallacy to assume that good adult education by definition incorporates 'critical disorientation, reflective processing and identity formation' (p. 13). I can, from experience, vouch for the

damage which can be caused in educational programmes when the process of 're-formation' is emphasised so strongly ('you *will* leave here a different person') that it proves not constructive for students.

That said, ensuring that attention is paid to people's lives, and the place that study occupies within those ongoing (and potentially developed or transformed) lives, is not in itself new, and is a valuable, indeed vital, educational approach. Ball is able to recognise that 'transformative learning' may simply be what results from well-thought-out programmes of teaching and learning, together with the acknowledgement that people learn and develop in ways that go *beyond* what it is planned for them to learn. (Educators really are not wholly in control of what learners learn!)

How, though, to get there, when so little pedagogical reflection may be happening? That is the challenge Ball faces, as do we. In terms of learning, formal and informal, which goes on in academic and church contexts, it is, then, vital for anyone leading a session of any kind to be clear about what's intended, and how it will be known if what's intended has been achieved. This is the background to the Learning Outcomes revolution of recent decades. Though often criticised as the imposition of administrators and managers, the revolution can be received much more constructively in educational terms.[1] Furthermore, the recognition that people are in part transformed by what happens on the margins of groups, in the incidental exchanges within groups, in the one-to-one interactions which occur beyond groups is of crucial importance. Not all learning can be labelled, assessed and monitored. But it may still be transformative.

Second, there is a concern throughout Ball's study to cajole programme designers into thinking about what experience people *already bring* to theological education. I have encountered in many different forms over the years learners who 'think they know it all already' because of the life or work experience that they bring. That is problematic in itself. Equally problematic, though, as already noted above, is the dangerous tendency of educators or trainers who desire to 'knock it out of them' and 'return them to basics', as if life or work experience does not count. The much harder task (for trainers/tutors and learners) is how to encourage people to identify and use their experience, while also re-evaluating it, reflectively and critically, and asking how it fits (or not) into their life, discipleship and ministry.

At its best, in formal theological education, this challenge will take an interdisciplinary form, enabling people to process their life or professional

experience not simply through a theological lens, but to use, say, professional psychological or sociological insights, or insights about management and organisations, drawn from other study or professional experience, within ministerial/discipleship formation. The context of formal theological learning may, in fact, be the first time that people from different 'schools' of organisational theory of experience have met and reflected on their practice. To do so while permitting both to be engaged with theological insights can prove very rich indeed.

In a local church context, where it may easily be assumed who the 'experts' in finance and property are, or who the teachers and lecturers are, it can be much harder to construct settings in which 'critical reflection on practice' occurs in a way which draws on insights gained within the church community through the life and work experience of traffic wardens, supermarket assistants, child-minders or pizza delivery workers. But that *is* the challenge of transformative learning in the local church: where are the contexts, however informal, in which interaction between people with different life and work experience actually occurs, so that it benefits all?

Third, at every turn Ball is keen to draw out what the findings of his research mean for teachers, lecturers, tutors, course leaders (and, we must add, workshop leaders, trainers, anyone, in fact, who runs any kind of 'session' which invites participants to learn). Whether or not such people call themselves 'learning facilitators', that is what they are, and that is how they need to see themselves. This is not to deny that there may be content to be 'got across' at some points, but it is vital to remember that the focus has to be on how participants in any group connect with the subject matter (be it Bible, listening skills, social study, church history, spirituality) and then make use of it in some way beyond the learning that they undertake 'in class' (or online). There is also something to be explored about 'transforming teachers': teachers transform others through their facilitative style, and can themselves be developed and transformed as people through the learning experiences in which they are engaged. Given how much happens in the interaction between 'teacher' and 'learner' (and that roles often switch within learning interactions), the question 'just what kind of person are *you*, as you do your teaching?' reverberates through the book, just as much as the question 'what happens to students?'

This thread again hits hard in the two different contexts we are considering. Paid, or at least formal, educators will have formal training available to them, even annual 'continuing professional development' sessions which they may

be required to attend. There is the danger that such professional 'updates' are paid lip service to, or do not really bring about much change in teaching practice ('we know what works, and what doesn't', after all). But if this insight is taken seriously then the interactive nature of teaching, and critical reflection on the practice of teaching, constantly has an impact on the practice of the teacher, as him- or herself a learner about their pedagogical practice. So teachers are themselves learners, and this should in turn inform how they teach what they teach. A biblical scholar may be a New Testament expert and regarded as a 'very good lecturer'. But if a student leaves their session thinking that they have only gathered facts, then from a transformative learning perspective, the lecturer has failed as an educator. Content will have been learned. (With no 'knowledge transfer' then the session would be inadequate anyway.) But the personal impact of the encounter with the content would need to have been part of the session too, plus the beginnings, or continuing, of exploration of how the biblical text influences them or society outside of an educational context.

In local church terms, this applies just as much, if in slightly different ways, to small group sessions, Bible studies, house groups, or in whatever context informal biblical or theological learning occurs. Many is the time I have heard it said of particular church members that she or he (and, significantly, it has often usually been 'he') is a great 'Bible teacher'. In practice this has often meant that the person is indeed widely read and well informed, reads commentaries and knows much about whatever passage is being studied. But the person also enjoys having the knowledge and expertise, and may not be seeing as a key aim of a Bible study that all participants engage with the text, whatever their level of education or background knowledge about the text. This simple illustration highlights just how complex and yet also how vital local church Bible studies are.

Fourth, there is a crucial issue about how assessment is to be done (and how much). When the content of education is 'subject knowledge' it seems relatively easy to know how to assess it ('write an essay on who wrote the Fourth Gospel'). When it comes to personal development, learning outcomes ('what *is it* exactly that is being looked for and tested here?') and methods of assessment are harder to draw up. Furthermore, and as is the case in so many local church settings, beyond the requirements of ministerial training, what about when people will not be doing (and will have absolutely no desire to do) any assignments or 'assessable work' at all? Ball does not address the latter point, as that is not his focus. But it is in part addressed by the way his work touches

on the first. It really is important to ensure that learning outcomes and assessment begin to address what happens to people as a whole, and not just the cognitive content which may be transferred into their heads. This being so, we might add that for every training session, discipleship workshop or Bible study that happens *anywhere*, anywhere in the world, as well as pressing for learning outcomes (however informally drawn up and acknowledged) it is not unreasonable to require leaders/tutors to state how it will be known what has happened as a result of the session. And however informal the 'assessment' might be, it is not unreasonable for that to be checked out as part of the experience.

It may seem an obvious point to make, but the simple task often asked of people at the end of a workshop or training session to note down 'one new thing they have learned as a result of the session' at least encourages participants to reflect on what has happened and to take something away from it. It may reveal, of course, that a session leader's learning outcomes have not been met (which may mean revising the session for future re-use). This simple exercise does, however, stand on a continuum with the much more formal forms of assessment, in all their variety, which are used in theological training institutions. The very variety (group presentations, critical reviews, short electronic-resource-based exercises, posters), which now moves well beyond the requirement to 'write an essay' or 'sit an examination', is testament to the impact of transformative learning upon the learning and assessment process ('just how will participants get hold of what they are supposed to learn?'; 'how will they retain and use what they have learned?'). But there is still the tough task of ensuring that the most appropriate and creative forms of assessment are used, forms which stretch and challenge, while also, if at all possible, being *enjoyable* to undertake.

Les Ball's study, then, has proved very fruitful for this particular interactive, critical reviewer. In truth I have barely been negatively critical at all, only appreciatively critical in engaging with the book. If I were to sound a predictable negative note it would be that it is rather dry to read. But it is a research report, after all. And it is, of course, bound to some extent to the context from which it comes. But all research is susceptible to this charge. Beyond such points I want, rather, to express gratitude for the work. As I trust I have indicated, it has very far-reaching implications for anyone involved in theological education, discipleship training, local church session leading across the world. He is to be warmly thanked for having done the work, written it up and made it available. It would be gratifying to think that lots of people may

be picking the study up and using its insights in the practical, life-enhancing ways which potentially flow from it. Growth in grace and holiness requires it.

Note

1. See, for example, Clive Marsh, '"Learning Outcome" as a Theological Concept: Skills, Competences, and Personal Development in Theological Education', *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 11(2), 2014, pp. 110–122.

HOLINESS
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The role of the creative arts in initial ministerial education

Anne C. Holmes

THE REVD ANNE HOLMES MA is a self-supporting minister in the Anglican Diocese of Oxford. She works as a psychotherapist and is engaged in a professional doctorate in practical theology in Cambridge.

administrator@acholmes.demon.co.uk
Oxford, UK

In this paper, I bring together three concerns: the stress of clergy and the role of the creative arts in the prevention of clergy burnout, the importance of beginnings and the opportunity to establish healthy habits during initial ministerial education. Drawing on my earlier and recent qualitative research, the known therapeutic value of the creative arts and the thinking of Winnicott and other psychoanalysts about the importance of beginnings, I indicate the significance of good role models and suggest that any appropriate change in the formation process needs to be intentional in order to set healthy patterns for ministry.

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Introduction[1]

First, a word about my professional context: for the last 20 years I have been working as a psychotherapist in a variety of public sector and private settings in England. I see individuals, couples and groups. Previously I was a school teacher and counsellor. A 'cradle' Anglican, I was a licensed lay minister. Ordained in 2002, I have served in parish ministry as well as in a variety of chaplaincy settings. I am now engaged in a professional doctorate in practical theology with the Cambridge Theological Federation and Anglia Ruskin University. I am no longer active in the ministry of a particular parish, but am involved in the annual ministry review of clergy and am attached to a community of Anglican nuns.

The broad context for my research is the level of stress among clergy. Notwithstanding the appearance of Coate's key text highlighting the hidden sources of stress in ministry published 25 years ago (Coate 1989), in which she drew attention to the need for more psychological understanding in ministry selection and training, the problem of continuing clergy stress has been described as a 'widespread, deep-rooted and growing problem'.[2] It is increasingly becoming a subject for concern among the Churches, as evidenced by, for example, the report on ministerial well-being that was presented to a recent British Methodist Conference (Tidey 2013). Stress which continues unaddressed over a substantial period of time can lead to burnout. Given the acknowledged significance of the problem in the Churches in the UK, it seems important to consider how it might be addressed in advance during initial ministerial education as well as during the active ministry of clergy.

My particular focus is the role of the creative arts in the prevention of clergy burnout. This research evolved from my MA dissertation, 'Choose your Companions from Among the Best' (Holmes 2009), in which I indicated the value of *creative repair*. Creative repair is regular, active engagement with the creative arts as a way of repairing energy expended in sensitive pastoral care. This idea combines the psychoanalytic idea of *repair* in a here-and-now encounter of the damage done to the psyche in formative relationships on the one hand, and the capacity of the *creative* arts to restore emotional and psychological energy on the other. Various members of the focus group for my MA research indicated that they had experienced or come close to experiencing burnout and that active engagement with the creative arts had either helped to prevent the burnout or had been instrumental in the recovery from burnout.

Evidence abounds for the value of the creative arts in repairing wounded psyches. At a professional level, branches of psychotherapy which have become established disciplines in their own right include art therapy, music therapy and drama therapy. In the popular domain, enthusiasm for singing has increased partly due to the work of Gareth Malone with his formation of various choirs and especially the choir of military wives and later other choirs in various organisational settings (Malone 2012). Not only were individuals helped to become less tense and more confident, but the non-hierarchical nature of the choirs fostered better communication within the organisations. Recently Alain de Botton has made a case for art itself as therapy (de Botton and Armstrong 2014).

In the two years following my MA, I led various creative repair workshops for clergy and ordinands. These seemed to indicate that while the participants found the experience of the workshop restorative, they could not imagine integrating that thinking and experience into their daily lives. I therefore became curious about the blocks to the practice of creative repair and identified feelings of guilt as a possible cause. In 2013, I explored this in a piece of qualitative research and was surprised by the evidence of the particular focus group which considered this. What emerged was the importance of a childhood template in setting patterns of obligation and the need for supportive church structures at times of overload or personal crisis. Those participants who had reframed the habits of childhood had done so with the help of significant others. This resonated with my work as a psychotherapist, as I am often the agent of a process that supports that change that allows the childhood template to be modified via the establishment of new, more appropriate habits for an adult context. This group also highlighted the role of church structures and good modelling by senior clergy in the practice of creative repair. This is relevant not only to the early years of ministry, but also to the initial education process.

Beginnings

I would like to say more about the childhood template and to indicate the importance of new beginnings in later life. One of the important insights of psychoanalysis is the correlation between a sound emotional start in life and our capacity to manage other beginnings.[3] For each one of us any important beginning echoes our very entry into the world at birth. It is perhaps worth

rehearsing what happens psychologically in our early experience. When we come into the world we have to begin the *work* of existence. Whereas in the womb our cells just carried on multiplying and developing and we were fed automatically, after birth we have to breathe and suck and give voice to our needs. We are dependent on others to respond to our needs and we go on developing and growing. The psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott has written about the importance of the 'good-enough' mother who attends to her baby, but does not anticipate her or his needs (Winnicott 1964). It is a sort of dance in which she creates a safe place for her baby which is very intense at first, but gradually allows the baby to gain confidence in her or his own voice. It is the baby's task to train the mother in how much she or he can take in so as not to be left under- or over-fed or stimulated. If the mother is preoccupied with her own problems or not interested in her baby, then this opportunity is lost and the feeding becomes mechanical and partial. Whatever the circumstances, the baby's primary task is to survive and we know from the work of John Bowlby (1979) that there is an instinct to attach to whoever or whatever is available to keep going. As babies we take in whatever there is, so that if, for example, our mother is depressed, we take in the symptoms of that depression. Nowadays neuroscience is confirming what we have known intuitively for centuries, namely that we need to be held and loved and accompanied as we begin to make sense of our experience (Gerhardt 2004).

From this it may be deduced that for many people there may be problems in successfully negotiating other new beginnings, such as going to school, embarking on an important adult intimate relationship and any significant change of job, house move or professional identity. If we have been well-enough accompanied by our parents and significant others, then we will be able to draw on that experience and accompany ourselves through future transitions. This leads me to the third of my concerns, the formation process and the opportunities which it offers for creative repair.

Initial ministerial education

If we accept that our childhood template influences other beginnings, then it follows that beginnings mean that we revert to early templates. The time of ministry training, is, potentially, an ideal time to develop new habits and establish healthy patterns, which could later stand candidates in good stead when they move on to their first ministry posts.

With respect to developing sustainable healthy patterns of life and ministry, my research suggests that engagement in creative repair during ministry formation might help to do this. However, at this time the modelling of good practice and establishment of sound structures for not over-working are paramount. Yet two of my MA focus group members who were involved in the training of Anglican ordinands commented on the difficulty in persuading students to take time off to engage in creative pursuits. This resonates with the observations of Anne Tomlinson. In her monograph *Training God's Spies*, she reflects on her experience of training candidates for lay and ordained ministry in the Scottish Church's Theological Institute. She deplores the 'culture of expediency' which sets in soon after the beginning of the three-year course. Reading becomes directed to the next assignment, rather than 'being a glorious trawl through the uncharted waters of different theological approaches'.[4] The culture of busyness which was also referred to by members of my recent focus group was already established in training and Tomlinson's attempts to persuade candidates to build more leisure into their schedules met with responses such as 'There'll be time for that once I've finished the course'.

She goes on to make a theological case for the crucial role of the imagination, writing:

> It is my contention that the action of the Spirit – this power that makes connections between the extraordinary and the ordinary in our lives, that rouses us into being aware of the Infinite in the finite – is identical to that of the imagination; that the imagination, in other words, is the spark of the Spirit.[5]

While I would take issue with Tomlinson's pneumatology,[6] her passion for the inclusion of creativity in the formation process resonates with my own thinking about the importance of creative repair.

In addition to the impact of childhood templates on beginnings in ministry, there is evidence that those in formation are still being influenced by ministerial role models who had inspired them to explore their own vocation. A recent study by Amanda Bloor explored how a group of Anglican ordinands assessed what it might mean to 'put on' priesthood. Her long-term research project revealed that many of them measured their vocation not against theory or theology, but against the example of priests whom they had known and admired. This was the case whether they came from evangelical or more catholic backgrounds. She writes: 'Whatever the underlying theology, it was

the attractiveness of the example provided by particular priests that drove aspiring clergy to consider ordination. The individuals they had observed became templates of what dedicating oneself to Christian service could involve.'[7] Bloor found that these idealised views of ministry were not usually modified during the formation process. Here we may have a problem. Given that my focus group participants identified a childhood template of duty as being a block to the practice of creative repair and the power of an idealised ministerial template in encouraging vocation, the initial ministerial education provides a crucial opportunity for candidates to develop deep habits of reflection and restoration.

Earlier I indicated that, as a psychotherapist, I am often the agent of a process that supports that change that allows the childhood template to be modified via the establishment of new, more appropriate habits for an adult context. This is a difficult process and usually requires quite a long time in therapy. Thus it cannot easily be translated into the context of ministry formation. Although ministry training, including study and placements, may take several years, the level of self-awareness of ordinands varies and there may not be a perceived need to challenge either childhood templates or even identify an idealised ministerial template. Yet there is some common ground, in as much as the habits of healthy self-care are usually established during a rigorous psychotherapy training. As with ministry training, it is not merely an acquisition of new sets of skills, although that certainly takes place. Rather, it concerns the whole person and requires a commitment to that self-knowledge which will equip the future therapist with the capacity to be an agent of a greater process. In the therapeutic encounter, it is important to be able to work in three dimensions: the personal past of the individual patient, the external world in which the patient is living and the here-and-now encounter between therapist and patient. This can be very demanding on both parties and it is the responsibility of the psychotherapist to resource her- or himself. I have observed that many do so via the creative arts.[8]

If the principle of developing a new template during initial ministerial education is seen to be desirable, it may involve a reframing of the aims of the training process. It also involves a consideration of the process of change. One essential ingredient is the modelling of good practice by theological educators. Higher education generally is suffering from the impact of a culture of targets and outcomes, although some of this has led to an improvement in accountability within learning settings. However, if the formation process is really to impact on early templates in a positive way, then there needs to be

an intentional emphasis on the creation of those habits which will protect candidates from the culture of over-busyness. Educators also need to have examined their own habits, so that they model healthy practice. I would also argue that an engagement with the creative arts could be seen as an essential part not only of ministry but as a way of modelling the full flourishing indicated in the Jewish idea of shalom. Stephen Pattison has written that human flourishing allows for a variety of understanding and is true to the plurality of human well-being.[9]

If healthy habits are established during ministry training, then they need to be refreshed or even re-formed during ongoing ministry as it is lived out in consecutive settings. The need for continuing professional development is recognised in many disciplines and, as a psychotherapist working in a variety of contexts, I am required both to be in regular clinical supervision and to attend lectures or workshops in order to reflect on my practice and develop my thinking. One of the reasons for this is to offer a check and balance against possible dangers to the quality of my clinical work, such as fatigue or some confusion between the needs of a particular patient and my own personal needs. It may be that aspects of a situation or life story trigger memories of something in my own experience.

For example, there was a time when my daughter's life was put at risk when her appendicitis became peritonitis. Soon afterwards I heard about a similar event in a patient's life. I was aware of the danger of identification and good supervision protected my clinical work. This regular supervision means that not only am I accountable to a colleague for maintaining my professional competence, but that I am expected to resource myself appropriately for a sustainable quality of practice and lifestyle. Like many colleagues, I often turn to the creative arts for this, so that I am practising creative repair. The equivalent of this in ministry is continuing ministerial development and in the Church of England there is an obligatory annual Ministerial Development Review for all licensed clergy. This allows the minister to review and reflect on their ministry over the previous year and includes a section on well-being. I would like to see an inclusion of the encouragement of creative repair in this section. This is not, of course, a substitute for the regular oversight of pastoral work. Unfortunately, the importance of pastoral supervision is not yet recognised as essential although there is some evidence (Leach and Paterson 2010) that it is being valued across denominations, although this is rarely allocated adequate funding.

What is being encouraged within the Church of England is the opportunity to engage in further studies, especially during a sabbatical. There is a growing assumption of the importance of 'lifelong learning' (Ward 2005), which perhaps creates a climate in which more self-resourcing in the creative arts could be embraced. Ward has drawn on the work of Gillie Bolton and Jennifer Moon to indicate the value of creative writing as part of self-supervision and reflection.[10] I affirm this approach and in addition I would argue that any active participation in the creative arts would enable the minister to repair those emotional and psychological resources used up in sensitive pastoral care and allow for growth and the facilitation of full flourishing. Increasingly the creative arts are being used as a vehicle for pastoral supervision and personal growth (Leach 2014).

When I have had the opportunity to give a workshop on creative repair to those in training, they have reported that the live experience has resourced them. As the class was in their timetable, they were obliged to take part and gave themselves to the experience in their usual conscientious way. However, they could not imagine practising it in a ministry context. Also one or two of the tutors indicated that they were not modelling good practice.

It seems to me that in the Churches in the western world we have idealised a type of workaholism in ministry. The idea of sacrifice and of 'going the extra mile' has been distorted into a 24/7 approach, mirroring that of our society as a whole. This is perhaps exacerbated by the clergy's knowledge of declining church numbers and an anxiety about failure that closes down essential thinking space into a whorl of activity. Such a pattern can also be seen in other organisations. For example, I am involved in the training of psychotherapists within a variety of settings and, within the National Health Service in England, there is a current devaluing of what I would call essential thinking spaces. If ministry is to have a prophetic dimension, then it must be willing to be counter-cultural. I would therefore argue that as a key beginning for ministry, initial ministerial education is an opportunity for the establishment of healthy habits such as the practice of creative repair.

More comprehensively, I would argue that the process of initial ministerial education is a time to revisit the formative models for ministry and reflect on them, so that the bad habits of our idols do not pursue us. At the end of formal training, ministers will begin their ordained ministry, when they will be even more vulnerable to their early templates. At that time it is to be hoped that their training incumbents or supervising ministers will themselves be

modelling good practice. My hope is that future generations of Christian leaders will be mindful of God's ongoing creative power in our lives and model the full flourishing and wholeness which itself prevents burnout.

Conclusion

I have indicated that there is a concern in the UK Churches about the level of clergy stress, which, if unaddressed, can lead to burnout. In earlier research I developed the concept of creative repair as one way of preventing burnout. My more recent research highlighted the importance of childhood templates in the establishment of habits of obligation. The significance of beginnings and the potential of a prophylactic approach to burnout have informed my view that good new habits might usefully be formed in the process of initial ministerial education. Given Bloor's discovery of the power of an idealised view of ministry based on previous encounters with clergy to influence ordinands, if any change is to take place it needs to be intentional. This may need a review of educational aims and priorities. It also demands of educators that they reflect on and perhaps modify their own working habits in order to model healthy practice. Finally, the process of ongoing ministerial review and lifelong learning could be adjusted to include the practice of creative repair as one way of affirming the need actively to prevent clergy burnout.

Notes

1. A shorter version of this paper was given at the Thanksgiving and Celebration: Formation for the Future conference held in the Wesley Study Centre, University of Durham, 16 and 17 June 2014.
2. Lee and Horsman 2002, Introduction.
3. The general importance of life stages was first considered within psychoanalysis by Freud and has been developed by others, especially Erikson (1950) and Jacobs (1986) among others.
4. Tomlinson 2001, p. 3.
5. Tomlinson 2001, p.17.
6. I consider that her easy equation between the imagination and the work of the Holy Spirit is perhaps an example of exaggeration to make a point. As John V. Taylor (1972) showed us in his pioneering examination of the work of the Holy Spirit, with his idea of the Go-Between God, the third person of the Trinity allows for communication in the here and now. Perhaps more apt a reference to the Trinity within the creative arts is to be found in *The Mind of the Maker* in which Dorothy Sayers (1994) made a comparison between the Trinity and the process of writing.

7. Bloor 2013, p.19.
8. My own training organisation, the Institute of Group Analysis, often puts on film nights and I was at a recent study day on psychoanalytic poetry, put on jointly by the Freud Museum and the Poetry Society. Several of my local colleagues belong to choirs.
9. Pattison 2002, p. viii.
10. Ward 2005, pp. 146–147.

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Learn to worship: worship to learn

David G. Deeks

DAVID DEEKS is a retired presbyter of the British Methodist Church.

david.deeks@gmail.com
Bristol, UK

Worship is the principal locus for Christian education. The faith and vocation of the Church and of disciples is explored and developed in every authentic act of worship. Worship is a unique communal activity; but it is analogous to participation in a drama. The article expounds a vision of the worship-drama as shaped by the passage of dark and light over a 24-hour period, whose key phases are interpreted by classic liturgical words and biblical metaphors. The renewal of worship as a high-quality creative experience hinges on the Church addressing some systemic failures in its organisation of worship and preparation for worship.

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The Christian calling is to share in the mission of God. Worship, discipleship and mission are the principal aspects of Christian participation in the mission of God. Worship, discipleship and mission are not separate dimensions of the Christian life; they are interconnected. Christian worship is the hub that holds them together. Worship is also the principal educator of the whole of Christian life. When a congregation is a school for learning to worship, its members discover in and with their feel for worship a more acute sense of discipleship and mission. In the worship of God, the faith and calling of every Christian – and of the Church as a whole – are focused, clarified and developed.

How does the educational character of worship function? By enabling a community of people to be immersed in a drama – a movement from night to day, from sorrow to joy and from death to life. This is a special sort of learning, which I will sketch below. But some rudimentary initial reflections are in order.

There is something be learned about worship from listening to music. It is not necessary for a listener to know the techniques by which a piece of music is constructed. What stops a listener in their track is the discovery that, for inexplicable reasons, a particular composition moves them deeply, compels them to find one way or another to hear that music again and again, to the point that they find welling up inside them an authentic love for that song or symphony or whatever. Of course, there have to be in the background technicians and learned scholars of both composition and instrumental skills, and hours of practice to the point that making music seems to the untrained listener to have become second nature to the performers, and truly to be a marvel. But it is the music that 'speaks', enthrals, thrills and lifts an enrapt listener out of themselves into a new dimension of existence. Emotions, imagination, feeling and aesthetic appreciation of beauty surpass intellectual analysis in the learning process.

Worship is not about the refined exposition of doctrinal themes or even biblical scholarship. It is about the skilful management of specialised resources so as to develop a drama, into which worshippers are drawn spiritually, imaginatively and emotionally. Worship is a self-involving process; more like a theatre than a classroom. It is more than anything like coming to know a person in depth. It is an adventure in love. Worship therefore entails something like the following: respect, tentativeness and adoration of a mysterious 'other'; ever deeper self-awareness; ever more trusting openness and more careful speaking and listening in mutual conversation; the struggle to integrate hurts inflicted, miscommunications and annoying habits which are perceived with increasing

clarity both ways in the developing relationship into a shared sense of being at peace with each other; and an acknowledgement of mutual affect, even mutual transformation, as shared responsibilities are undertaken jointly.

Reference to the analogy of learning to love another person reminds us of how fragile such an enterprise is. High aspirations for quality in worship preparation and worship leading are essential for the growth and nurture of Christian people. But nothing can disguise the fact that each leader of worship, however experienced and dedicated, is a clay vessel with at least some cracks in it. And each service of worship, whether formal or informal, fails in some degree to be a worthy carrier of divine Love. Mysteriously, by the mercy of God, both the product of intense striving for perfection in worship provision and a slap-dash, incoherent concoction may be vehicles of grace. The latter, however, is never justifiable as an offering of the Church. The Church must prioritise training which produces quality worship resources and leadership skills.

What shape and form does Christian worship take, to act as a powerful educator?

Before that question can be answered, attention must be given to the preparation for worship that is the responsibility of all regular participants and not just of the accredited leader of worship.

Long before it gets near service time there is an obligation laid on all potential worshippers: they must do all in their power to put right stressed or broken relationships. They must practise forgiveness of those who have wronged or hurt them; and they must seek peace with people they themselves have upset or abused. Failure to attend to this basic focus on relationships on the part of everyone frustrates the possibility of worship, however erudite and well managed the drama of worship may be in the hands of an experienced leader. (See Matthew 5:23–24; 6:12, 14–15.)

Worship cannot begin until energy has been given to forming those who assemble into some sort of community or fellowship, inspired by Christian ideals. People come to a worship service from all sorts of backgrounds and experiences and with a multitude of worries and excitements. Everyone is to be welcomed with respect. We all need time to share our recent stories with one another. Some will need to unburden themselves of terrible news and traumas, of anxieties and hurts that threaten to overwhelm them. We are

learning to be 'church', building a sense of belonging to one another as brothers and sisters, with mutual support at its heart. Perhaps the famed 'tea or coffee and a biscuit' should precede a worship service, not follow it.

Consider now who in fact assembles when an act of public worship is about to begin. A particular number of identifiable individuals, obviously: their names may or may not be known; their past experience of worship and their motivations for being present on this particular occasion will remain largely unknown. Methodists like to count the numbers assembling for worship. They overrate the significance of numbers increasing or declining. Counting disguises a basic truth: there are always more present than meet the eye.

Each and every person present has brought with them – consciously or unconsciously – an extraordinary collection of 'invisible' people: those they care deeply about, for example, and people who have profoundly affected them in the past, for good or ill. All stand together before God. Furthermore, a worship service has the potential to *influence* all those who are present, both literally present and present imaginatively and emotionally. Worship and mission are intertwined. That is what we believe – though it cuts across the rabid individualism of our society.

The drama of worship now begins. It can be formal or informal, brief or lengthy, traditional or experimental. I simply provide some brief notes that remind us of the flow of a worship service, organised as a three-act drama.

Act One: God is present and active in God's creation

We watch and wait, in reflective mode; we journey from night to the first light of day

Worship has to begin with common human experience, to engage all who are present (literally and imaginatively), from whatever cultural, social or political background. But it is common human experience viewed from a fresh and distinctive perspective. An analogy is in order. Look at the night sky in a typical urban street and it is impossible to see the stars, so great is the light pollution from street lights and cars. To see the sky differently it is essential to get right away from towns and cities, deep into isolated rural environments. All around is deep darkness. But what is seen in the sky? Sometimes an all-pervading blackness, when the night sky is filled with thick clouds. On a clear night, however, a wondrous sight – the starlit heavens! There is one sky, but what is perceived is dramatically different in city and countryside

At the moment the service begins there needs to be a sharp break from everyday personal conversations (the sort of chatter we indulge over tea and coffee); and from the everyday secular values and interpretations that we use. Ideally the congregation moves from the place of informal gathering into a specially prepared worship area which is totally silent. Stillness and silence place us in a context open to Holy Mystery. We stand in awe before that which is infinite, ineffable and incomprehensible, utterly beyond us. But Holy Mystery is also closer to us than we are to ourselves, as Holy Spirit. In the silence we inhale Spirit like the air we breathe.

(If later we are to use words in worship, they have to be chosen with immense care; and selected from reliable sources. Indeed church authorities, like the Methodist Conference, invest heavily in hymn books and worship books that both authorise well-tried words for worship and provide models for using contemporary language. And only trained and accountable persons – presbyters and local preachers – may use their own words in public worship or take responsibility for the outcomes when others are encouraged to speak.)

Adjusting to silence is like adjusting to pitch darkness in the countryside at night. It enables people to perceive things in our human experience that are otherwise blotted out from view. Sometimes there is no view: the world is so awful, full of rape and abuse, of vicious cruelty, warfare and violence, or natural disaster. But even in the bleakest place the task is to search for specs of light – that is, for signs of moral actions, integrity and human values.

On other occasions, the night sky is ablaze with glorious lights! We discern any number of examples of goodness, truth and beauty: they are owned and celebrated by all. Examples and stories are beyond number of what nourishes the genuinely human – from a young child in school discovering gifts and aptitudes not hitherto suspected, to simple acts of neighbourliness, to international negotiations for peace and justice; from a photograph of a striking landscape taken by a member of the congregation on their holiday and projected on a screen to a masterpiece by Rembrandt or Monet; from the local organist playing a piece of Bach to the best of their ability to a professional recording of Debussy's *Syrinx*.

Faith declares that all examples of goodness, truth and beauty are signs of the Spirit's invisible presence and activity in every part of God's creation, quietly nourishing spiritual and moral values in every human heart and community (Galatians 5:22–23), in spite of human wickedness and selfishness. These gifts

are in truth fragments of Christlikeness, for the crown of the Spirit's work is to form in human beings the mind of Jesus Christ.

Now the Church is ready to pray: Come, Lord Jesus! Suddenly we discern the first light of day gradually dispelling the darkness just before the sun rises above the horizon (Luke 1:78–79). The Light of the World, the living Word of God, Jesus Christ, is about to appear! God's steadfast love and mercy, God's peace and forgiveness, are to be revealed. This is gift beyond all measure and expectation. The Church responds in praise and adoration. Psalms, hymns and songs fill the air, like the voices of the heavenly host in the Bethlehem fields (Luke 2:14).

Act Two: Jesus and ourselves in dialogue

Time for work; we journey from daybreak to three in the afternoon

Morning breaks: 'Christ, whose glory fills the skies', dispels gloom and fear.

Sometimes the very nearness of the living Jesus takes us aback with a stunning disclosure of majestic generosity and promise. Out of the blue sky a treasure of incalculable worth is suddenly in front of us. It startles us with infinite possibilities for our lives, for their radical renewal and for moral and spiritual transformation. This is pure grace! And we have little option but to make our overriding priority to absorb this gift and be changed by it (Matthew 13:44–46).

More typically, in the burning light of the rising sun, it is we ourselves who are exposed to view. Jesus Christ knows every secret of our hearts. But he looks at us and into us with unqualified kindness, with no shred of contempt. We are therefore emboldened to see ourselves a bit more truthfully, to acknowledge in our hearts muddled intentions, terrible memories of words and deeds which now shame us, and buried guilts. 'Lord, have mercy on us!'

The daytime, however, is for work. Like Bartimaeus of old (Mark 10:46–52), we have waited for this moment when the Lord comes vaguely into our orbit. Now is the time for action. We sense, however inchoately, that Jesus could help us, could change our circumstances for the better. We must engage with him personally and directly. We will not be frustrated or put off. Jesus asks us: 'What do you want me to do for you?' Jesus requires of us that we go as deeply as possible into our hearts to find out what drives us, our inner yearnings, what it is we crave for above all else. We may well have little awareness of this. The

inner desires we are alert to will be dominated by self-importance. We may even be ashamed of what is energising our determination to get close to Jesus, for his help. But unless we ask, unless we beg for attention, we cannot expect to receive anything. Conversely, 'Ask and you will receive' (Luke 11:9). Only now are we in a position to listen for the voice of Jesus addressing our deepest desires and needs on this occasion. Our hearts burn within us, in expectation.

The word of God is to be heard through readings from Scripture and the words of a sermon. Reading and preaching are both essential. Scripture comprises the authoritative collection of writings from the ancient world which, in the Church's experience, have provided a series of lenses through which the creative, saving and sanctifying grace of the one God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) may be truthfully discerned. But they are strange writings to us – a complex mix of stories, prayers, practical wisdom and moral exhortation, all enveloped by complicated metaphors and disabling mythologies, and written in unknown languages. They must be translated and interpreted in order that their transforming possibilities may become accessible to twenty-first-century people. A broad-brush interpretation is provided by the use of an accredited version of the Bible from which passages can be read in the vernacular. But the preacher must take the interpretation much further, to demonstrate how Scripture may engage with the challenging spiritual, moral, political and economic issues of the day: an awesome responsibility.

The great French writer Marcel Proust was brilliantly served by a fine translation into English of his masterpiece, *À la Recherche du temps perdu*, by C. K. Scott Moncrieff. Proust himself was an admirer of things English and tried his hand at translating John Ruskin into French. Critics found in his translation many technical flaws, to which Proust replied, 'I do not claim to know English, but to know Ruskin.' Authentic preaching comes from a preacher who may have limited oratorical skills and will certainly not produce a masterpiece of translation, but who knows and loves Jesus Christ. For Jesus Christ is the one who proclaims God's good news; moreover, in his life and pivotally in his death on a Roman cross (at three o'clock), he *became* the good news. Through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and him crucified, God graciously offers to all the possibility of freedom and repentance, forgiveness and radical transformation. Our blind eyes may be opened.

The word of Jesus to us always far exceeds our own perception of our needs and wants. Our needs and wants may indeed be met – but are always then surpassed. Sometimes it is an immense puzzle how the promise and gifts of

God, wonderful as they obviously are, connect to what we imagined were our deepest desires. The challenge Jesus presents to us is to have faith in him and his extravagant generosity. For everyone who puts their trust in Jesus, a new world begins: this is pure and unconditional gift – God's converting grace.

We must never underestimate the potential for change in God's ministry to us in a single encounter, in a particular time and place. However, the characteristic way of God is to nurture change in us through good habits – most especially the habit of regular worship. A habit of worship is the core of Christian education.

Regular worship facilitates the education of our desires.

- Our determination to get close to Jesus, to draw from him the power of the Holy Spirit, is strengthened both from the disciplining of our own wills and with the help of fellow seekers. It demands singlemindedness to refuse all sorts of distractions (notably a fascination with wealth and power) and to overcome blockages. Mary established her place at the Lord's feet in spite of Martha's fretting and fussing (Luke 10:38–42).
- Frequent worship encourages the refocusing or redirecting of our inner yearnings, of our prayers of petition. Emerging in the midst of our unreconstructed self-interests, and hopefully in due course overcoming them, will be a desire for a heart cleansed of everything but love, and for that love to be shaped by the infinitely costly, self-giving love of the crucified Jesus.

It also takes time profoundly to trust in Jesus; perhaps a lifetime. We listen for God's word to us regularly (weekly?) because there is no quick way to believe we are loved enough to forgo all defensiveness and self-concern and to worship God alone.

Act Three: Following Jesus and sharing in God's mission to all

Devotion expressed in practice: the late afternoon and evening

Spiritual transformation (a new heart) is meaningful only when it becomes physical and practical, making an identifiable impact on the lives of worshippers and their relationships. Discipleship entails imitating the poor, humble and gentle Jesus, practising compassion for the poor and struggling

for justice and peace in the world. Standing at the foot of the Cross demands a commitment to kneel at the feet of hurting, frail and persecuted people anywhere in the world (Matthew 5:3–5; 25:31–46). Discipleship also involves participation in the life of the Church, the corporate Body of Christ in the world.

The third phase of worship shapes discipleship and mission through prayers. They help us to give practical expression to the love the Spirit releases in our hearts – love for particular people and circumstances in our contemporary world, and love for God.

We need the Spirit's guidance if we are to learn to pray. So we must begin with the prayer of the Spirit-filled Jesus himself – the Lord's Prayer. Entering deeply into this prayer helps us to believe that if we cannot think what to pray for (a frequent puzzle), the living Jesus or the Holy Spirit will pray for us. It never hurts to ask Jesus or the Spirit to do that for us anyway.

The pattern of prayers unfolds like this:

- our prayers of love and concern: intercessions for the Church and the world in its need
- a sacrifice of thanksgiving: for creation itself and the whole of our life within it (in its fragility, as well as its fullness); and above all for God giving us a share in God's own life, through Jesus and the Spirit
- prayers of consecration to obedient discipleship. They include commitments to particular vocations and ministries, or specific acts of rededication. Such devotion is focused in two powerful actions:

    1. the *offering of money and gifts*, with a vow to rethink how we use all the resources and time entrusted to us ('Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also', Matthew 6:21)
    2. the *sharing in Holy Communion*: like the two pilgrims at Emmaus, when evening was approaching and the day was almost over (Luke 24:29), we celebrate the self-disclosing presence of the living Christ who died for all. We are filled with a joy that transcends the nitty-gritty of time and place. Day or night no longer count for anything: this is a foretaste of heaven! Our doubts are dispelled, our muddled and partial understandings form a meaningful picture and we are energised to share in God's mission to the whole of creation.

We are now ready to leave the drama of worship and to re-enter everyday life, as disciples. We receive an assurance that God's Spirit will protect and guide

us; God's ever-present blessing and peace will be with us. We leave the worship event with a joyful song of praise on our lips.

Conclusion

Worship is never a rigid performance (like playing a CD endlessly). It is a living drama, and capable of infinite variations. But, like a child's squidgy toy, it must never lose its basic shape. Congregations, or at least a core of regular worshippers in a congregation, need to be confident about that shape as much as every accredited leader. In any particular act of worship, mishaps are likely to occur. Normally they are not significant and leader and congregation can learn from them if they are encouraged to do so. Critical reflection and regular participation provide the environment in which informal small-group learning in the Church and formal educational courses for Christian initiation and authorised ministries need to be grounded, to articulate systematically what is learned experientially in worship.

More worrying are systemic failures that vitiate effective worship. In British Methodism it is the tyranny of the circuit plan (a quarterly published rota providing for the leading of worship by different people in each church, week by week). Routinely the appointed presbyter or local preacher may be trusted to have done intense homework in preparation for a particular service. But the congregation is in the dark about the details; and there is no expectation of the 'director' and 'troupe' rehearsing together before the drama of worship is performed; or of the director releasing and coordinating the contributions of the troupe. The Church cannot any longer hope against hope that each Sunday the worship service will flow as a major creative experience while the congregants are alienated and non-participating.

A revolution is demanded, to win a new compact between congregations, worship leaders, preachers and presbyters. The outline of the worship drama will be held in common. Making its 'performance' matter will be the emotional, spiritual and learning ambition of all.

HOLINESS
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Why am I here? An itinerant minister reflects on a recent move

Val Ogden

THE REVD VAL OGDEN is Director of Theological Education by Extension at the Pacific Theological College in Suva, Fiji, and serves as a mission partner of the British Methodist Church.

director.ptcee@ptc.ac.fj
Suva, Fiji

Prompted by the vocational challenge of a gospel chorus writer, Val Ogden considers the different ways in which a minister might 'be proud to be known'. She contemplates her own, unexpected, recent move in mission and ministry to serve churches of the Pacific region through theological education by extension, and confronts some of the missiological dilemmas it revives. She recognises the consistent 'core' of word, sacrament and pastoral care to ministry in whatever context and ends by sharing a sample of Pacific voices whose most creative theology is born from the ocean depths and fruitful earth.

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> Wide, wide as the ocean, high as the heavens above,
> Deep, deep as the deepest sea is my Saviour's love;
> I, though so unworthy, still am a child of his care,
> For his Word teaches me that his love reaches me everywhere.

This is what we need: professional theological reflection in a serious academic journal that has us bursting uncontrollably into song. (Don't deny it. I could hear you!)

It's a Charles Austin Miles chorus: a glad and permanent imprint on my mind and heart from Methodist Sunday school days in Manchester, England in the 1960s.[1] Start it off here in Fiji, in 2015, with children or adults who come from a vast range of churches across the South Pacific, and it is equally well known and sung, with younger arms flung out excitedly to their widest, highest and deepest. Across generations and evidently continents, this song has made a simple but credible liturgical attempt through music and movement to express something of the un-navigable, unfathomable, unattainable vastness of God's love, incomprehensible in its enormity until it touches us personally, through the reach of a Saviour for whom 'everywhere' is no barrier.

Composer Charles Miles said of his vocation, 'It is as a writer of gospel songs I am proud to be known, for in that way I may be of the most use to my Master, whom I serve willingly although not as efficiently as is my desire.'[2] That one-sentence vocational summary of his becomes a profound spiritual exercise when we blank out six words and attempt to reframe it for ourselves: *It is as a _____? I am proud to be known, for in that way I may be of the most use to my Master, whom I serve willingly although not as efficiently as is my desire.*

How would you complete that sentence?

Applying the discipline to myself for the purposes of this article, I can start nowhere else than in the present moment.

It is as *Director of Theological Education by Extension at the Pacific Theological College* in Fiji I am proud to be known

That word 'proud' gets in the way and I shuffle uneasily. Paul's reflection on Gentile identity and participation in Romans 11:13–22 helps a little.[3] I stand, not proudly in a conceited sense, but in utter faith and awe (v. 20) because, through being open to move in mission, I appear to have been grafted as a

'wild olive shoot', a British Methodist mission partner, onto the 'olive tree' that is the richly rooted and grounded Pacific Theological College, 50 years old this year.[4] Since August 2014 I have lived on a beautiful, lush and leafy campus, learning quickly that wobbly branches are vulnerable to the wayward winds. A strong fusion of this new English twig with the established plant is needed before branching out too much.

The Extension department now under my care is known as PTCEE and has been in existence for 25 years. Its commitment is to offer practical courses in areas such as Introduction to the Bible, Ministry, Worship, Pastoral Care, Pacific Church History, Ethics, and more, designed for use by (and here comes that dubious term) 'ordinary Christians' across the South Pacific. PTCEE's well-established aims and objectives are clear:

- to train lay Christians in the Pacific, both men and women, for theologically informed service in various forms of ministry
- to develop Christian responses to social issues affecting church and society in the Pacific, such as the environment, poverty, politics, justice and reconciliation
- to enable people to learn in their own environment and at their own speed.

Through courses at certificate and diploma level and potentially to Bachelor of Divinity level, people are equipped for ministry, but not ordained ministry necessarily. PTCEE plugs a significant gap. Most areas in the Pacific do have theological colleges, but full-time study residentially would be impossible and inappropriate for most. Theological colleges are dedicated to training people for ordination primarily, to which is accorded massive status, though the laity may be responsible for much of the ministry within and beyond their churches. The deeply religious nature of Pacific people and their enthusiasm for growing in faith and gaining qualifications along the way makes it imperative for PTCEE to provide accessible, affordable, reputable theological education.

Practically, many people in the region live on isolated islands separated by vast expanses of ocean, so PTCEE programmes are print-based and generally completed through textbook, pen, paper and the postal service. Computer proficiency and internet access are not required, though typed and emailed assignments are of course acceptable if people prefer to work that way. Hopefully I can visit smaller islands and more remote areas in due course to meet Extension students, encourage them and promote the programme. It may well be that, as the years progress, the face of PTCEE changes and we will

be into online learning, webinars and the like, but that is not the present scene. Most students complete assignments in lined exercise books, handwritten in biro, and post them back to PTCEE where they are marked and returned.

There is something much earthed about that. I flick through the pages and feel a connection to the person and try to imagine their setting. I like it that one human hand has physically shaped the lines and curves of the sentences (except when illegible!). There are occasional smudges and neat crossings out; possibly a change of ink colour. There is no slick cutting and pasting and no smart layout and design tricks to entice the eye. It is a method of theological communication-reflection fast disappearing of course and I acknowledge it, not to over-romanticise or have a questionable nostalgia trip. Nor do I argue against development in communications technology and connectivity. We all have a right to the same and Suva, the capital city where I'm based, has all this. I simply reflect on PTCEE's commitment to champion courses that are written mostly by people in the Pacific to be appropriate for Pacific people on the ground in real settings. And, as of now, grounded theological reflection and the painstaking graft of handwriting – in the blessing and curse of the English language – is how it happens. Often a handwritten manuscript has a mysterious and powerful way of conveying grass-roots content and context. I feel proud to read and react to them.

Now, back to that earlier probing vocational sentence and a slightly different response.

It is as *a mission partner of the Methodist Church in Britain* I am proud to be known

Would that a gleaming, glowing confidence and surety accompanied that sentiment! Mission partnership – even that terminology – always generates some deep and discomforting reflection, and may God forgive us if we ever shirk it. Here I am in Fiji, independent from Britain since 1970, living a short bus ride from the Queen Elizabeth barracks. Because of my roots I happen to speak English with some sort of English accent (as opposed to, say, the Australian, New Zealand, German or Samoan versions more frequently heard on campus) and this generates admiring comment constantly. Two Methodist lay preachers were in the office the other day enquiring about courses and hung onto every word I said with such rapt and reverential attention it was really quite disconcerting. 'Ahh', they said on leaving, with a sigh and a shake of the head,

'now we know where to come to hear English spoken properly!' The anecdote may induce a smile at one level, but any serious unpacking of it theologically and missiologically can't avoid three heavily laden words: 'British', 'mission' and 'partnership'. Let's also add to those, 'white' and 'power'. The language that enables verbal communication in the region across ethnicities and communities for the purposes of politics, business and education – theological or otherwise – is English. We are where we are. But there is still a massive task to do in enabling communication in English as a learned language to feel truly liberating and empowering. It is basic in communication studies to acknowledge that all manner of words can be spoken and heard, written and read, yet there is no guarantee that meaningful communication has taken place. Sometimes we have to test out quite intentionally whether that has happened. A mission appointment in Fiji throws all that reality into sharp focus once again.

So, should I be here? Can I trust it was God's leading? Coming to the end of a Methodist-Anglican circuit appointment in the South-East and some doctoral research, I had offered to serve as a Chair of District in British Methodism, after much encouragement to do so, and in a context where my gifts, graces, experience and shortcomings in ministry are known. I was shortlisted but considered by the appointing panel to be unsuitable for that responsibility. The Pacific Theological College in Fiji, where my gifts, graces, experience and shortcomings in ministry are *un*known, were recruiting and judged me suitable to lead and manage a region-wide theological education programme across the South Pacific having never set foot here before. All is mystery. Better the devil you *don't* know, clearly.

Because money and mission are key factors and holy business in any overseas partnership, let me fill in a detail or two for background. Here I receive a local programme head's salary paid in Fijian dollars (£14,000 equivalent). The Pacific Theological College pays 75 per cent of that and houses me on campus. I pay utilities, tax, local pension fund etc. The Methodist Church in Britain picks up 25 per cent of the cost, keeps up my pension contributions in the UK and buys the flight to and from. In monetary terms, I would cost British Methodism more at home, contrary to some assumptions that mission partners are largely an unjustifiable expense.

As a probationer minister years ago, I served (1993–1998) as a Methodist mission partner in the United Church of Zambia and was ordained there, unforgettably, in 1994. God used Zambia to shape and form me for mission and ministry since more than any other influence, of that I have no doubt.

Global, ecumenical, mission education became my 'world' from 2000 to 2009 in Selly Oak and at Queen's, Birmingham. The equipping and enabling of those embarking on short- and long-term mission was always part of that ministry, plus teaching, tutoring and engagement with leaders from the wider world Church studying or preparing to serve in the UK.

I'm proud to say – really proud this time – that we never ducked the hard questions. A revealing exercise was the one where we had those from the UK preparing for overseas mission placements seated in one half of the room directly facing those who were in Britain from elsewhere seated in the other half: the 'sending' and 'receiving' Churches confronting each other, so to speak. When people took the risk, conversations could get hot. If you're a young gap-year volunteer, nervous but enthusiastic about 'serving the Lord in Africa', sponsored and urged on by your generous local congregation, it is a bit of a blow to hear from an experienced minister in the country you're jetting off to about all the problems he's encountered with recent volunteers and what the price of your return air fare could do for his local health centre. It's also not great to hear English Methodists talk about how disappointing their 'overseas minister' has been when they had such high expectations of what she or he might bring in terms of reverse mission, critical challenge and possibly revival. 'It might help if s/he mixed with us not just other …….s!'

But the point to ponder is this. Never once did any person, on either side, argue for a moratorium on comings and goings, sendings and receivings in mission. With all its messiness we still wanted it. In recent doctoral research on the mission and ministry of the Revd Dr Colin Morris, I revisited the missionary moratorium debates of the 1970s, which occurred during his period as General Secretary of the Overseas Division.[5] A lot more is said in the thesis than I bring here, but Dr Morris's passion for an incarnational missiology that safeguards catholicity and ecumenicity is strongly heard. A passionate, high-profile, controversial campaigner in northern Rhodesia's independence struggle and sharply critical of the British Church scene, he nevertheless feared for the catholicity of the Church globally in the 1970s if moratorium gained ground. He expresses this movingly and succinctly: 'Outsiders in any one national Church's midst are living parables of the Incarnation. God cleaves history in two by breaking into it with the gift of salvation which no-one can puzzle out, conjure up or discover for himself.'[6]

Because God in Christ chose the model of 'breaking in' for the purposes of our salvation, Christians follow his example by doing so too, in and from many

directions. It shatters conventions and disrupts comfort zones, of course. How many congregations do we know who, secretly, would love to hang a 'do not disturb' sign on the door? Elaborate rituals of welcome and farewell to newcomers are hugely important in the Pacific and raise some intriguing 'gospel and culture' questions for those who follow a Jesus who frequently pitched up without invitation. But then we don't break in armed and violent. Forced entry isn't the way of servant-leaders. It wasn't a burglary at Bethlehem after all. We tread the territory gently, incarnationally, in wonderment and deep gratitude to God for new life in a fresh context. Breaking in is sacramental.

It is as *Director of Theological Education by Extension at the Pacific Theological College in Fiji* I am proud to be known. It is as *a mission partner of the Methodist Church in Britain* I am proud to be known. But there's another reflective sentence that presents.

It is as *a minister of word, sacrament and pastoral care* I am proud to be known

Everything has changed, but nothing has really. Reversing the order above, opportunities for pastoral care will always present themselves here: among families on campus, in local churches and because of the unexpected conversation on the local bus. Ministry is like that, and thank God for it. There will frequently be the opportunity to preach and to preside at services of Holy Communion in our college chapel and beyond, formally breaking open word and bread. But I need to be attentive to what it means not just to function and operate ministerially in this new mission context, but to discern what it might require in terms of holy and sacramental living in this new sacred space. We are instructed at ordination, 'Remember your call', and that's a call that must embrace the whole of life here.[7] Much more than a job. The Roman Catholic Cathedral of the Sacred Heart here in Suva has been making much of Pope Francis' 'Year of Consecrated Life' which began on Advent Sunday. A bold and striking banner appeared above the high altar saying, 'Wake up the World!' with its confident declaration, 'Grateful for the past. Hopeful for the future. Joyful for today.' It has become a most powerful message for me, unexpectedly 'born again' into Fiji for a while and trying to work out what that means.

A ministry of word and words will inevitably dominate in theological education and gives weight to the first part of 'word, sacrament and pastoral care'. My

mission world will be largely one of writing and marking, compilation and collation: the chance to play a tiny part, as others of far greater stature have already done, in enabling the words, work and experience of ordinary Pacific Island Christians doing theology to be recorded and accorded value, even to Bachelor degree level through extension studies, which will be excellent. Also, perhaps, to be part of an ongoing mission to ensure that Pacific words and voices are given more generous space on the global church stage. There is fine literature and scholarship around. But who's reading and who's listening?

With that in mind, here are just three examples of recent theological work through the words of contemporary Pacific Island theologians and Church leaders, gleaned from the library which now happens to be the gift on my doorstep. It will be a very limited selection and sharing inevitably as I read and digest in these early months.

The impact of the insignificant

I appreciated reading Judith Vusi's article, 'Lord of the Insignificant – A Christ for Ni-Vanuatu Women', where she uses the legend of Wagerrie to speak of influence and power emanating from one who was regarded as unimportant and ineffective. Wagerrie refers to a very small man who served Budkolkol, a native god. There are many legends concerning Wagerrie's character; one in particular notes the distinctive and different colour of the root vegetables which he grows in his little garden. Judith retells the legend:

> Once upon a time, Budkolkol and his group of followers including Wagerrie decided to plant a new garden of taro, which they did. Even though Wagerrie was present, he was not counted or included, but he managed nevertheless to clear some bush and to plant one tiny garden. When the taro was ready to be harvested, a big feast was held. When the men collected their big taro, Wagerrie also collected his. His taro were tiny in size, but he still contributed them. The others laughed and said they were worth nothing at all. Still, when the tiny taro were grated to make a big pudding (*laplap*), the tiny taro Wagerrie brought were also grated, and their colour was a bright red. The *laplap* was baked in the bush-oven, and when the leaves were unwrapped, to everyone's surprise and amazement the colour of the whole *laplap* was red, taking on the colour from the tiny taro that Wagerrie had contributed from his little garden.

Judith reflects:

> We women in our communities in Vanuatu and the Pacific today also have resources within ourselves and our own households – gifts of various kinds which we can contribute toward the development and well-being of our people, our churches and the world. Although society may not view these gifts as significant, in Jesus' eyes they are of great value.[8]

'The land has eyes' – Trinity and ecotheology

I've been learning a lot from Jone Ulago's MTh thesis from 2012, 'Cultural Values in the "Vanua" and their Bases for an Ecotheology in Holistic Relationships in the Fiji Islands'. Reading of and absorbing more and more about the sacred relationships of land, water and people in this region is enlightening and moving. Ulago identifies the threefold set of relationships that the *vanua* (indigenous Fijians) venerate: those between human beings themselves – chiefs, warriors, priests, craftsmen and fishermen; those between human beings and their ancestors which require loyalty, obedience and reverence; and those between human beings and their natural environment. Always in a creative interplay are the human and divine, natural and supernatural. In this way, Ulago argues, the divine Trinity and the *vanua* community are interconnected and interrelated in terrestrial and marine environments, and even in the atmosphere. His work is rich in illustration, including this snippet from a conversation with Rotuman minister Raki Tigarea:

> The neighbouring island of Rotuma has a very meaningful and touching statement which says, 'The land has eyes' (*Pear ta ma 'on maf*). It means whenever someone commits an offence on any turf without being seen by any human being, the land has eyes to record and express openly in the future about the committed offences. Nature has voices and these can only be heard and understood by those who are closely connected and related to them. But the voices need to be heard and nature cared for as they have parts to play in our harmonious relationships.[9]

Gospel and culture – continuing debates

I've been dipping too into words and writing that constantly wrestle with missionary heritage across Pacific churches and illustrate what ministers are

facing daily. In Uesile Tupu's thesis 'Mutually Indispensible', he unpacks the leadership tensions that arise between ministers of the Methodist Church in Samoa and the *matai*, traditional village leadership. His concern is that the *matai* 'tend to accuse the minister of interfering with or interrupting them in their traditional leadership', and he continues:

> I perceive that if the tension between Gospel and Culture is not resolved, then it is likely that culture will undermine the Gospel in the future. Samoans will eventually resurrect the behavioural patterns banned by the early missionaries. The practice of punishment in the traditional Samoan culture like *mu le foaga* (burning of possessions), *ati ma le lau* (uprooting of crops) and others will come into force to control the life of the community without any consideration given to the Christian point of view. The Gospel will be viewed as lesser or not important at all.[10]

The harmonious workings of a Samoan fishing net give Tupu a creative window onto the gospel and culture relationship. The *uto* is the float at the top that prevents the net from sinking and tangling. The *maene* is the sinker, the lower part of the fishing net tied with rocks which allows the net to be anchored and spread for catching fish. Both *uto* and *maene* play distinctive roles but are vital to successful fishing. The same must be the case, he argues, with gospel and culture, the ministers and the *matai*.

Having begun with 'Wide, wide as the ocean', a fishing net analogy is an apt one with which to end this reflection. Are contemporary British mission partners to be read as 'floats' or 'sinkers', I wonder? Or neither. Discuss.

In the end, a simple hope remains for me; the same as expressed by gospel chorus composer Charles Miles, 'that I may be of the most use to my Master, whom I serve willingly, although not as efficiently as is my desire'.

Notes

1. Charles Austin Miles (1868–1946) was born on 7 January 1868 at Lakehurst, New Jersey. He died on 10 March 1946 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. See www.hymnary.org/person/Miles_CAustin, accessed 29 December 2014.
2. See the reference above.
3. Romans 11:13–22.
4. See www.ptc.ac.fj/ptcee.
5. The literature is considerable. One example, 'The Moratorium Debate', *International Review of Mission* 64 (1975), 148–164, features a robust exchange

between a sample of eleven scholars, one each from Costa Rica, Tanzania, Korea, Uruguay, South Africa, Switzerland and Britain, but dominated numerically by four from the USA.

6. Colin Morris, 'Was My Old Mum Wrong?' – annual sermon of the Church Missionary Society, preached at the Society's headquarters, 29 January 1975.
7. Ordination of Presbyters, *Methodist Worship Book*, Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1999, p. 308.
8. Judith Vusi, 'Lord of the Insignificant' in *Weavings: Women Doing Theology in Oceani*, Fiji: South Pacific Association of Theological Schools, 2003, pp. 58–61.
9. Jone Davule Ulago, 'Cultural Values in the "Vanua"', unpublished MTh thesis, Pacific Theological College, Fiji, 2012.
10. Uesile Tupu, 'Mutually Indispensible? A Theological Exploration of *Uto Ma Le Maene* as an Expression of the Gospel and Culture Relationship in the Methodist Church in Samoa', unpublished thesis, Pacific Theological College, Fiji, 2012.

HOLINESS
THE JOURNAL OF WESLEY HOUSE CAMBRIDGE

'Why should not we do what we can?' How does revisiting the history of the Methodist commitment to education help us to evaluate our work in faith schools today?

Barbara Easton

BARBARA EASTON is Director of Education for The Methodist Church in Britain. A lifelong Methodist, she previously worked as an RE teacher and school leader in the West Midlands.

eastonb@methodistchurch.org.uk
London, UK

Methodism was born long before the benefits of universal education had gained widespread acceptance. It is therefore significant that the early Methodists directed so much energy to the provision of schooling, with the first school established by Wesley himself within ten years of his conversion. Although today's Methodists operate within a very different socio-political framework, the discussions and actions of our nineteenth-century counterparts identify themes which resonate across the centuries. Reflecting on this history informs the thinking of the contemporary Church about what can be achieved by our continued involvement in the challenging world of education provision.

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It is a moot question: if the British Methodist Church did not already have schools as part of its historic legacy, would we be getting into the education business now? The social, religious and educational climate which provided the impetus for Methodism's early involvement in education is now much changed: secular voices more loudly challenge the legitimacy of religious drivers in educational provision and, while schooling is now universally offered by the state, political interest is focused more on the material imperatives of educational and economic competitiveness. Since the summer of 2014, there has been a significant further shift in the educational landscape following the so-called 'Trojan Horse'[1] controversy in which a number of schools in Birmingham were revealed as nurturing Islamic fundamentalism, with a suspicion that this was more widespread across the country. Although none of these was a 'faith school', this has subjected the role of faith in schooling to greater scrutiny. Also in the summer of 2014, the British Methodist Conference received a report indicating a significant fall in Methodism's current numbers and projecting further major decline. In this current context, what role have the schools played in Methodism and how do they continue to serve the Church?

John Henry Newman once observed that 'To live is to change and to become perfect is to have changed often'.[2] Nowhere is this more true than in the world of education where the landscape is constantly shifting and the changing ideal of perfection remains ever beyond our grasp. The material experience of schooling is always on the move: when I started as a teacher in 1981 we still used chalk on a 'black' board and the small supply of very rudimentary computers was kept in a special locked room. Walking into a classroom in the second decade of the twenty-first century, the observer may find that the teacher has different tools in their 'bag' and, more subtly, a different pedagogical armoury at their disposal, although the classroom may look reassuringly (or perhaps stubbornly) the same. Teachers are necessarily the product of the previous generations' learning, preparing children for life in a world which we do not yet know. Beyond the changing material aspects of schooling, the philosophical and political understandings of what our schools are for are also fluid and contested.

The relationship of Methodism with formal education has also been a changing one. John Wesley and George Whitfield founded the first Methodist school at King's Wood (now 'Kingswood'), Bristol, in 1745. At the time, education was not seen as the politicians' business; it generally served noble liberal principles in its offer to the few (mostly rich, mostly male) while also serving the political

purpose of securing the advantage of the wealthy over the poor, a somewhat less liberal intention. Leading up to this period, from the end of the Roman Empire, education in Christian Europe was frequently driven by some sense of a life lived under God and funded privately, charitably or by the Church. It met some of the needs of commerce but the trades, through apprenticeships, fulfilled the need to provide a skilled workforce to meet society's needs. The labouring masses, first in the countryside and later in the factory towns, were unconsidered. Many of us do not have to go back very far in our family history before finding ancestors who could only mark an X to fulfil the rudimentary task of writing their name, for example.

Against this background, the school at Kingswood was a radical though short-lived departure. Moved by Wesley's and Whitfield's preaching, the miners challenged the early Methodist leaders to translate their life-changing message into life-changing reality by establishing a charitable school for the education of their children. Miners were not just the average poor: poverty and the accompanying squalor, hunger and disease made colliers a byword for social exclusion. The outworking of Methodist theology through practical, therapeutic action in the lives of the children of the disadvantaged was established as a principle from the earliest days of the movement and is still a fundamental principle in the commitment to schools today. This is not solely a Methodist concern. Most significant religious communities in the UK have a presence in education, although other 'faith providers' may be working out different priorities, influenced by a different combination of theology, history and circumstance. The perspective of some of our partners, motivated by more confessional concerns, prioritises supporting parents to bring up their children in the faith. Methodists see themselves at the other end of the spectrum, tracing through their history a philanthropic golden thread recently described by the Archbishop of Canterbury as 'a deeply felt moral obligation to provide education for all, a gift of grace overflowing from the grace and love of Christ lavished in the Church then and now'.[3]

The motivations underpinning the Methodist commitment to education have not always been the same. Themes fade in and out: although Louden comments on the unrecognisable distance between the worlds of the Churches' educationalists then and now,[4] it is interesting how issues in the early Methodist records might strike a fresh chord with contemporary readers. The miners' school fades from history as Wesley opened a new 'Kingswood' in 1748, refocusing his interest in schooling to provide for the pressing needs of the children of his itinerant ministers; it is fair to say that this is an issue which is no

longer at the forefront of church education policy. Lay people's needs were not accommodated at Kingswood until after the First World War, although Methodists gradually opened other schools admitting the children of laity. One such was The Leys (Cambridge) and here the issue of educational excellence was the key driver: after rules prohibiting the admission of Nonconformists to the universities had been relaxed, lay families were looking for a level of educational opportunity that would enable them to win places at Oxbridge. Although times have changed, this aspirational challenge has a very modern ring to it as schools are pushed externally by political rhetoric and internally by their own aspirations to achieve an educational excellence which will open up children's futures to life-transforming opportunities.

The determination of Methodists to transform wider society through education, first raised among the Kingswood colliers, slowly spread nationally as local societies began to set up schools in connection with their chapels. Almost 100 years after the British initiative, the Methodist Conference of 1837 records 9 daily infant schools under the immediate direction of members of a society and 22 weekday schools for older children. However, most children would only be able to access learning on a Sunday and here the numbers are staggering: 341,442 children attending 3,349 Sunday schools. There were 1,766 chapels and preaching places with no Sunday school – a fact noted as a challenge to expansion. Interestingly, while there were far more Anglican day schools, the numbers of Sunday schools bear favourable comparison.[5] Although the impetus for growth can be credited to the social awareness and transformative commitment of church members, more was made possible by the limited availability of new government grants. This opportunism is mirrored by the encouragement given to twenty-first-century Methodists to capitalise on the diversification of government funding which once again encourages interest groups to set up their own schools.[6]

The first Conference involvement in education came in 1837 when, to manage the burgeoning situation and maximise new financial opportunities, Conference set up the first Wesleyan Committee of Education. Their first report, in 1838, echoed at Conference in 2012, gives a strong ethical impetus for Methodists to take seriously the opportunities offered through involvement in education as well as highlighting the opportunities offered by government money. However, then as now, the relationship with government combines threat with opportunity, with the question of what control politicians can have over the religious messages of state-funded schools a key contested area. This debate has been renewed since the 2014 'Islamisation' controversies. Another

point of similarity, now as then, is the anxiety that the resource demands of involvement in education may lie beyond the capacity of the Methodist Church. The same response applies: members are urged to see that the opportunity to have impact through schooling is a valuable investment in mission. The 1830s was a time of so much educational change that some argued the wisdom of waiting until the situation had clarified. Conference, however, was moved to act rather than miss chances. The words of exhortation used 200 years ago speak eloquently to modern Methodists similarly trying to make sense of the shifting world of educational policy:

> Mr Wesley said he would not neglect the performance of a present duty through a fear of distant and uncertain consequences. But, supposing that the necessity for our labours should, a few years hence, be superseded by a better system of education, why should not we do what we can in the meantime?[7]

In comparing Methodist education then and now, it is the numbers of children which show the biggest difference, and it is not a favourable comparison. After a buoyant period of school development throughout the 1800s, the Church found the financial challenge of running schools overwhelming and took the opportunities of turn-of-century legislation to cede most schools to the state. Numbers began to grow again from the late twentieth century such that, by 2014, the number of Methodist schools stands at 80, of which 15 are in the independent (fee-paying) sector. Scrutiny of individual school stories reveals a consistent theme which is one of the distinguishing points of Methodism in education: that the real ownership lies with individuals, local congregations and circuits whose persistence, loyalty and opportunism has opened, or kept open, their own school. Some enable the Church to maintain a ministry in areas in which the chapel could not survive: for example, in a former agricultural village now an attractive dormitory with no other community facilities, or a suburb of a former mill town where local demographics have seen the area change from mainly Methodist to mainly Muslim. Others mark the determined outreach of the churches into difficult new housing estates in advance of any formal ecclesiastical building. This localism is consistent with the current educational thrust repositioning control of schools with local enthusiasts and away from Local Authorities. In a numerically declining Church, the schools gain in importance: the number of children encountering the gospel through our Methodist ethos for roughly 30 hours a week is approximately 24,500. For comparison, the numbers of the same age who attend Methodist services on

a weekly basis is approaching 17,000. Where contact with homes and families is factored in, the reach of Methodist schools could be estimated at 100,000 and the presence of boarders in the independent schools extends this impact internationally. From the point of view of the Church, this becomes an important locus of encounter and mission.

If Methodists could time travel, they would see that over the divide of the centuries they have many issues and opportunities in common. To what extent would they also recognise each others' intentions and aspirations? Conference records suggest the nineteenth-century Methodists had twin objectives: to ensure the broader social benefits of educational provision, but also that the schools had a Christian character. They recognised that the government may, in time, take over the responsibilities of the former and acknowledge their work as a Church, to an extent, as infilling as (even ecumenically) the Churches themselves may not be sufficient to this task. Although access to free education is now accepted as a matter of course in Britain, it is important for the debt owed to the Churches in achieving this to be recognised. When secularists argue that the continued existence of faith schools is an inappropriate diversion of public money, it is generally overlooked that in most cases the land and/or buildings were provided, and are still owned, by the Churches. In this way, the Church of England, for example, provides for the education of approximately one million children in this country: its name is above the door of one out of every four primary schools and one in thirteen secondary schools. In addition to 'estate', through their education staff, the Churches provide formal support for school performance coupled with armies of free volunteers to support activities within the schools, from one-to-one support with reading to planting up the school garden.

Universal education is an area in which Methodists continue to be extensively involved and through which they express their active Christian commitment. The examples are broad and varied. Participants on the Methodist Lay Workers' Connecting Disciples course in 2013, for example, reported a wide range of activities, such as taking in 'Friday cake' for the local staff room to show pastoral support for the work of the teachers, or studying for the RE GCSE so that they could be more useful in their support to the RE department in the classroom. Although the Methodist Church no longer has its own teacher training colleges, there is anecdotal evidence that Methodist churches have produced many teachers: in my first school, a large multicultural comprehensive in the West Midlands, approximately one in ten staff was from an active Methodist background, giving themselves over to a role in state education as a vocational

response to God's calling. Methodists remain significantly active in and committed to contributing to the quality and spirituality of universal education.

At the same time, our early coreligionists wanted to build schools as places where children were fully exposed to the Christian gospel. The school ethos and curricular diet should be strongly religious. After all, it was argued, 'no good has ever been witnessed in popular schools where religion was wanting'.[8] This (religious) education was not open-ended – it had the clear objective of salvation: 'to fill the world with saints and paradise with glorified spirits'.[9] However, in true Methodist tradition, salvation was not only about what happened to people after they died but also focused on enabling fullness of life in the present. What is the point, it is argued, of rescuing people from vice when they are older if education could have saved them from falling into it in the first place? Through the schools, Methodists aspired to 'throw a sacred guard around our youth to protect them from the loose and dangerous principles of the false liberalism and latitudinarianism of the age'.[10]

There is also a broad desire for religion to bring people together in good community relationships – in this case between the generations, but based on the religious connection between people. Interestingly, it was also accepted that, although church attendance was the norm, it was not always to be expected: 'children should not in all cases be compelled to attend our places of worship, but … the general rule should be, of course, attendance at our chapels on Sundays'.[11] Methodist schools were distinguished by a more open approach to religious dogma and therefore to admissions: Church of England schools were generally restricted to those able to assent to the catechism. The attitude to partnerships with other Christian education providers in these early documents is striking: despite the rivalry between The National Society and the Free Churches during some of the nineteenth century, a sense of partnership with the Church of England is recorded. It is clearly felt that there is a specific Methodist ethos which is worth preserving through Methodist schools, but there is a bigger religious agenda which is worth pursuing in partnership.

Although the social climate around religion has changed and, with it, the language of zeal, the Methodist aspiration to offer schools which are not only 'good' but also demonstrate a Christian ethos remains similar albeit differently expressed. Echoing the early Methodists' perception of the whole school as 'religion', Methodists aim to provide schools in which children's full potential is nurtured and in which they have the opportunity to flourish into a fullness of

life in a context which offers a rich breadth of experience and a rounded approach to the whole person. This goes beyond a secular ambition for schooling because we intend our schools to be Christian communities where the whole experience of growing and learning is framed against the Christian narrative and values. Our schools deliberately give space and priority to aspects of personal and spiritual development which can sometimes be overlooked. Alongside our colleagues in other denominations and faiths, we perform something of a prophetic role here, which is as important in the contemporary landscape as it was in the past: the recent strengthened focus on academic progress and achievement in schools has combined with the tight financial climate to restrict the breadth available to many youngsters, particularly in the maintained sector. Many voices have called for a broader approach which would restore the value of sport and the arts, especially in extracurricular activities. However, for schools of a religious character, the understanding of what a school is and is for goes beyond this and encompasses serious time given to the spiritual against a backdrop of lived religious tradition. This is intrinsic to the school, not an optional activity which can be isolated to RE lessons and the assembly slot. Our schools take faith seriously and this is part of the learning: our objective is not to make more Methodists, but to offer a more authentic encounter with lived Christianity. Because we are in the business of education and not indoctrination, it is an open-ended encounter. Two hundred years ago, the religious style and social context were different. However, then as now, it is the same: the response of faith is always a matter of choice.

As in the early years of the nineteenth century, the beginning of the twenty-first century is a period of great change in the organisation of education, bringing with it both opportunities and uncertainties. The Methodist commitment to the transformational power of learning has seen the establishment of Methodist schools all over the world and played a major role in the development of free universal education in Great Britain. Service through education continues to be a key plank in Methodist thinking, both at connexional and local level, but anxieties about our involvement remain, particularly around issues of capacity. The early Methodists, from Wesley onwards, recognised the value of giving a religious framework to the full breadth of children's experience, seeing this as the only true foundation of what, today, is known as spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. Even with our relatively small schools estate, the continued Methodist presence in school provision not only allows us to sustain this impact at school level but also gives us a seat at the

table of government, adding a Methodist perspective to debates about national policy. Inspection reports show how the schools contribute to the lives of children and how the mission of the Church is enriched by the work of the schools. Inspection, vision, strategic planning and vibrant, focused leadership typify their success. Many of our schools are also a vibrant base of extended church activity, hosting prayer groups, Messy Church, chaplaincy and a range of community activities – including, in some places, Sunday worship itself. Schools are not churches and they function in a different way, but it is interesting to consider whether the Church has anything to learn from its schools and the extent to which they offer a route for the new ways of touching people's lives which the Church seeks for the future.

Notes

1. In the British educational context, the term 'Trojan Horse' refers to the concerted efforts of some very conservative Muslim governors to influence unduly a number of state schools in major English cities including Manchester, Bradford, Luton and parts of London. The issue, first highlighted in Birmingham, was separately investigated by a number of national and local agencies including Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) and the EFA (Education Funding Agency). There are many press references to the ongoing controversy, and separate reports on each school are available on the Ofsted website. Peter Clarke's government-commissioned report provides a thorough overview of his investigation (Clarke 2014).
2. Newman 1909, p. 33.
3. Welby 2014.
4. Louden 2012, author's note.
5. Louden 2012, p. 20.
6. The Methodist Church 2012.
7. The Methodist Church 1837, p. 10.
8. The Methodist Church 1839, p. 13.
9. The Methodist Church 1837, p. 8.
10. The Methodist Church 1839, p. 14.
11. The Methodist Church 1839, p. 16.

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HOLINESS
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What have the sermons of John Wesley ever done for us? John Wesley's sermons and Methodist doctrine

Cindy Wesley

REVD DR CINDY WESLEY is the Director of Studies at Wesley House, where she teaches and supervises in Church History and Christian Doctrine. She is an ordained elder (presbyter) in the United Methodist Church.

ckw30@cam.ac.uk
Cambridge, UK

This article considers John Wesley's sermons as a source for Methodist theological reflection. There is a great deal of historical evidence that John Wesley intended his published sermons to provide a standard for Methodist doctrine and to function as an apologetic for the Methodist movement to the public at large. The article considers why he chose a published sermon collection as the vehicle for conveying his theology alongside exploring what the sermons tell us about Wesley as a theologian. It further considers how Wesley's sermons might prompt Methodists to think about contemporary issues.

JOHN WESLEY • SERMONS • *BOOK OF HOMILIES* • FORTY-FOUR SERMONS • *DOCTRINAL STANDARDS*

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What *have* John Wesley's sermons ever done for us? Underlying the catchy title, with its nod to the comedy of Monty Python, are rather serious questions for consideration by the people called Methodist and those whose worshipping communities trace their theological roots to Wesleyan Arminianism. What place do these eighteenth-century writings of a Church of England cleric have in forming what we believe? How do Wesley's sermons inform the way we live as Christians in the twenty-first century?

It was my colleague at Wesley House, the Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler, who proposed the question as a title for the college's Thursday evening series exploring Methodist theology and spirituality. What if, over the span of the academic year, we read a different Wesley sermon each week and had someone lead us in reflecting on what that sermon might mean for us as we engage in the theological and practical tasks of ministry? It proved to be a meaningful way of creating a dialogue between these historic writings and contemporary Methodist theology. University professors, connexional officers, circuit superintendents, a Cambridge dean, college tutors, deacons, presbyters and local preachers all rose to the task of reflecting on John Wesley's words in light of how they inform, disturb, frustrate, inspire and challenge us in our time. In order to encourage our readers to grapple with the relationship between John Wesley's writings and our contemporary understandings of being Methodists, *Holiness* is including a series called 'What have Wesley's sermons ever done for us?'

As the first in the series, this article considers John Wesley's sermons as a source for Methodist theological reflection. There is a great deal of historical evidence that John Wesley intended his published sermons to provide a standard for Methodist doctrine and to function as an apologetic for the Methodist movement to the public at large. It is important to consider why he chose a published sermon collection as the vehicle for conveying his theology alongside exploring what the sermons tell us about Wesley as a theologian.

The 'dead horse' question: was John Wesley a theologian?

Methodism's history includes long periods of ambivalence toward John Wesley as a theologian. Since his death in 1791, he has been variously portrayed as saint, dissenter, heart-warmed evangelical, liberal social reformer and 'partisan theological hero' whose words could be used to justify contradictory doctrinal

positions.[1] Prior to the 1960s, few in academic circles referred to John Wesley as a theologian, and even fewer as a theologian shaped by his Anglican background. Albert Outler, Frank Baker, Franz Hildebrandt, Rupert Davies and Gordon Rupp, to mention just a few esteemed figures in the emergence of Wesleyan studies, reassessed the significance of John Wesley as a theological influence on the development of Methodism. A generation of academics and ministers emerged in the succeeding decades to develop groundbreaking work on the published and unpublished works of the Wesley brothers and craft significant new theological writing in the Wesleyan frame. As a result, the specialist field of Wesleyan theological studies has flourished over the last 50 years, creating scholarly networks that draw together the different varieties of Methodists across the world, as well as Wesleyans, Nazarenes, Pentecostals, and others who trace their denominational origins to some aspect of Wesley's Arminianism. John Wesley holds a significant place as the subject of historical study and as a 'theological mentor'.[2]

Still, it is not unusual to hear Wesleyan scholars assert that John Wesley was not a systematic theologian. Indeed, he was not, and attempting to make him one would be both foolish and somewhat anachronistic. Systematic theology was a continental tradition evident in Catholic and Protestant Scholasticism. It was not the methodology of eighteenth-century Church of England 'divines'. Their sources were rooted in the pastoral and communal traditions of Christianity, and particularly the Church of England as it emerged after the Elizabethan settlement and re-emerged after the Restoration. For an Oxford-educated, High Church cleric like Wesley, Scripture, Patristic writings, the Thirty-Nine Articles, the *Book of Homilies*, the liturgies of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, and the Church's hymnody were taken as authoritative sources for theological reflection. Added to these was the substantial list of works that he would eventually publish as part of his Christian library, including the spiritual writings of Thomas à Kempis, Richard Baxter, William Law, and Jeremy Taylor. John Wesley's particular way of engaging with and synthesising these sources in order to communicate the message of salvation to the average person made him, in the view of Albert Outler, a 'folk theologian'. Sermons, whether oral or written, were his primary means of communicating his reflections on this living Christian tradition.

John Wesley's published sermons, therefore, have been particularly important for those exploring his understanding of Christian doctrine and praxis. It should not be surprising that his sermons comprise the first volumes in the authoritative bicentennial edition of *The Works of John Wesley* (first volume

published in 1984), widely considered the authoritative version of all of his writings. The series expands beyond Wesley's 4-volume *Sermons of Several Occasions* (noted in the editor's Preface by the rather unfortunate acronym *SOSO*) to include some 19 that were transcribed from manuscripts and 18 that appeared in *Arminian Magazine* either late in his life or posthumously. These 151 sermons, spanning from his diaconate to his last days, provide insight into themes that most concerned him in the areas of Christian doctrine and holy living. They allow readers to see both the gaps and the leaps in Wesley's thought, and to engage with some of his more speculative writing.

The significance of the forty-four sermons

For generations of Methodists, however, the 44 sermons contained in the *Sermons on Several Occasions* hold a special place. These are the sermons that Wesley published in four volumes between 1746 and 1760, noting in the first words of his oft-quoted Preface to the first volume and every subsequent edition:

> The following sermons contain the substance of what I have been preaching for between eight and nine years last past. During that time I have frequently spoken in public on every subject in the ensuing collection: and I am not conscious that there is any one point of doctrine on which I am accustomed to speak in public which is not here – incidentally, if not professedly – laid before every Christian reader.[3]

Wesley asserted his intention to put his views of true religion before a general readership in simple language. His emphasis on 'plain' language belied his considerable learning. While he may have designed 'in some sense to forget all that I ever have read in my life' and 'to speak, in the general, as if I had never read one author, ancient or modern (always excepting the inspired),' his sermons reveal through their themes that he was well read in theology and familiar with both Latin and Greek.[4] Outler affirms:

> It is obvious that he retained the substance of his reading; his voracious appetite for books of all sorts was never satiated … Moreover, he retained a rich concealed deposit of all this for use throughout his life. Thus, as a mentor to the Methodists, he digested

> this material and simplified it to the end that his 'plain people' could hear its 'plain truth' in a rhetoric suited to their needs.[5]

He intended the sermons to be accessible, so that readers might understand the need for and way to salvation, and so that his critics might see that he preached nothing that was contrary to the doctrines of the Church of England. While the latter point might be contested if one stridently adhered to the doctrine of predestination mentioned in the Thirty-Nine Articles, Wesley was certainly well within the boundaries on other doctrinal points such as total depravity and justification by faith.

John Wesley and the *Book of Homilies*

Turning to the sermon as a genre for general communication of doctrine was part of his Church of England background. What is often missed by the contemporary reader, but might not have been lost on his Church of England colleagues, was Wesley's use of language from volumes of published homilies. There was irony within the title, *Sermons on Several Occasions*. Publications of sermons preached on 'occasions' usually indicated something formal, such as a public sermon at a cathedral or national event. Wesley's use of such irony was likely intentional. After all, Wesley had earned the cool censure of the university officials and clergymen in Oxford for the content of his sermon 'The Almost Christian'. It was the last sermon he was invited to preach anywhere in Oxford. He included it at the behest of several friends in the *Sermons on Several Occasions* with a brief introduction. From 1739 onward, as invitations to preach in parish churches dwindled and hostility from his colleagues grew, he adopted the extraordinary means of preaching outdoors – in fields and market places – to the common folk. These public places formed his occasions for preaching, and the less-than-noble his audiences. Further adding to this irony is the likelihood that most of these 44 sermons were not preached by Wesley on any occasion. His preaching notes may have formed the kernel of what he later developed into manuscripts for publication, but his manuscripts were not transcriptions of his (largely extemporaneous) preaching. These sermons are his careful, thoughtful reflection and distillation of the doctrines he wished to communicate.

Wesley had a personal attachment to one particular collection of published homilies, as his language, organisation and content in the *Sermons on Several*

Occasions demonstrates. Wesley's use of phrases such as 'plain truth for plain people' echoed the language in the Introduction to the *Book of Homilies*, published by Thomas Cranmer in 1547 and reissued in 1562 after Elizabeth I's accession to the throne and headship of the Church of England. The *Homilies* were to be read (by royal command) 'plainly and distinctly' by all clergy to their congregations on Sundays and holy days.[6] The publication of a standard set of sermons for the Church of England was significant in that it marked the Church's emphasis, under Cranmer's leadership, on exposition of the Bible through preaching. The different homilies explained points of Protestant doctrine in simple language and instructed people in the practicalities of Christian living. In their original published form, each was long – perhaps longer than people could generally tolerate in one sitting. Later editions broke each homily into parts for even simpler, and shorter, reading in services.

The *Book of Homilies* was proscriptive for less-educated Church of England clergy, who were largely unaccustomed to preaching. They were to read from these authorised sermons without fail. As Heitzenrater points out, however, the canons of the Church of England allowed clergy holding the MA qualification to preach their own sermons. In such cases, the *Book of Homilies* was prescriptive, providing both doctrinal boundaries and practical patterns for what to preach during the contentious Reformations under Edward VI and Elizabeth I.[7] Their content, much like the 1546 *Book of Common Prayer*, was theologically moderate and did not have a strong emphasis on the Reformed doctrine of predestination. Therefore, Wesley could demonstrate, through publication of his own sermons, that his doctrine did not vary from what was in the *Homilies*.

The *Book of Homilies* was quite an important work in John Wesley's theological development. After his heart-warming at Aldersgate in May 1738 and his summer sojourn with the Moravians in Herrnhut and Marienborn, he turned to resources within his Church of England tradition, particularly to the *Book of Homilies*, to help him frame his understanding of justification by faith. Outler writes:

> There he had found a resolution to his doctrinal perplexities to match his new-found sense of assurance. This had prompted him to extract from Homilies I–IV an abridgement, which he then published and used as a theological charter throughout his whole career.[8]

Wesley then published an abridged version of the *Homilies*. It proved to be one of his popular works, going through 13 editions in his lifetime. His own choice of sermons as the means for explaining his doctrine was a practice influenced by his encounter with the *Homilies*.

A Methodist *Book of Homilies*

Wesley's publication of a set of standard sermons served similar purposes for the Methodist people as had both the Edwardian and Elizabethan editions of the *Book of Homilies*. Wesley did not decree that Methodist preachers must read his sermons aloud in Methodist meetings or in their outdoor preaching. He was not necessarily proscriptive in that sense, though he did not hesitate to suggest that they read some part of his sermons to their listeners. The sermons provided a pattern for what doctrine Methodists should preach, especially with regard to salvation. The publication of the first volume of sermons dovetailed with the growing use of untrained lay assistants in the Methodist movement. As questions over doctrine and the need for guidance emerged,

> Wesley responded, not with a creed or a confession, or even a doctrine treatise, but with something analogous to a set of Methodist 'Homilies' – not in this case 'appointed to be read in the churches' (as Cranmer's had been) but rather to be studied and discussed by the Methodists and their critics.[9]

It is rather generous of Outler to assert that the sermons were to be studied and discussed by the Methodists. Although Wesley's sermons were the product of a discursive theological process of preaching, considering criticism, and finally setting his views down on paper, it is hard to imagine that he would tolerate much opposition to his views on substantial matters like justification, grace, sacraments or holy living from his colleagues or lay assistants. The theological dispute with George Whitefield over predestination was one case in point. Later sermons like 'On Predestination' and 'Free Grace', neither among the 44, left little room for discussion regarding his Arminian views. Later works built on the doctrinal positions he commended to the Methodist people in the four volumes of sermons of *SOSO*. In the 1789 version of his will, he promised a printed copy of these 44 sermons 'to each travelling preacher who should remain in the Connexion six months after [his] decease'.[10] He wanted his assistants to preach the doctrine of salvation and the means of holy living that

he believed and put down in these sermons.

The bequest to the Connexion's preachers likely referred to the newer 1787 edition of *Sermons on Several Occasions*, printed by Albert Smith under the auspices of the Wesleyan Conference Office. The front matter of that edition included a note under the title, 'Consisting of forty-four sermons, published in four volumes 1746, 1748, 1750, and 1760 (fourth edition, 1787); to which reference is made in the Trust-Deeds of the Methodist Chapels as constituting, with Mr. Wesley's Notes on the New Testament, the standard doctrines of the Methodist Connexion'.[11] The reference was to the standards that were put in place as societies were constructing buildings for their meetings. The Model Deed of 1763, on which the Trust-Deeds were based, required that Methodist societies only allow preaching in the chapels that did not contradict the doctrines expressed in the 44 sermons and the *Notes on the New Testament*. The sermons provided the boundary for what was acceptable doctrinal content. There was no demand for adherence to a confession or set of Articles, since these were already present in the established Church within which the Methodist sat as a Connexion of voluntary societies. American Methodists would receive a slightly longer prescription for their doctrine. In addition to the *Sermons* and the *Notes*, the American Conference accepted the Articles of Religion, Wesley's edited version of the Thirty-Nine Articles devoid of references to predestination and loyalty to the Crown. The twenty-six Articles of Religion summarised the major points of the doctrines expounded in Wesley's sermons.

The place of Wesley's 44 sermons as a source of doctrinal reflection in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Methodism is hardly contestable. His choice of the published sermon as a means of communicating his theology was rooted in his Church of England tradition and reflected his appreciation for the *Book of Homilies*. So, we are left with the question: what role do these sermons serve for the Methodist people today?

The role of Wesley's sermons today

The sermons invite us to engage the 'salvation optimism' of an eighteenth-century spiritual and theological mentor who believed that all can be saved. When one reads Wesley's sermons, it is apparent that his rhetoric and language do not suit the twenty-first century. His use of Scripture defies any modern categorisation as exegesis. What is not necessarily hostage to his context are his doctrinal concepts and his emphasis on how one progresses toward

holiness. Many of his sermons, both in the traditional 44 and in the larger corpus, offer a wealth of material for consideration as we reflect on what it means to live as Methodists in our present context. For example:

- What might Wesley's writings on the universality of prevenient grace mean for United Methodists living amid a strong and popular revival of predestinarian Calvinism in the United States? ('On Predestination' and 'Free Grace')
- In what way do his thoughts on grace and the human condition affect contemporary understandings of mission? ('God's Love to Fallen Man', 'The General Spread of the Gospel' and 'Justification by Faith')
- How might his affirmation of Holy Communion as the primary means of grace guide discussions about worship, sacramental authority, or lay presidency? ('The Duty of Constant Communion' and 'The Means of Grace')
- What does his emphasis on holy conferencing and accountability say to those who suggest denominational schism? ('On Schism')
- How might his musings on the catholic spirit impact our discussions of ecumenism and inter-faith dialogues? ('The Catholic Spirit')
- To what extent could his concerns about both enthusiasm and Christian perfection affect Methodist attitudes toward charismatic practices and their relationships with their Pentecostal neighbours? ('The Nature of Enthusiasm', 'The More Excellent Way' and 'The Witness of the Spirit')
- In what ways might Wesley's sermons challenge us to think about poverty, immigration, economy, environmental stewardship, or care of the infirm? ('The Danger of Riches', 'On Charity', 'Caution Against Bigotry', 'The Good Steward', 'The New Creation' and 'On Visiting the Sick')

As we work through such questions, we need not justify our every position with reference to something John Wesley wrote. We need to know what Wesley thought, but we also need to recognise a model in how he worked out his theology. Theology in the Wesleyan spirit looks beyond Wesley to the treasure trove of sources in the living Christian tradition. It examines all things in light of belief in a loving God and a related commitment to loving neighbour, and guides us 'plain people' as we strive to work out our salvation amid the challenges of contemporary contexts.

Notes

1. Randy Maddox, 'Reclaiming an Inheritance: Wesley as Theologian in the History of Methodism' in *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism*, ed. Randy L. Maddox (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1998), pp. 213–225.
2. ibid, p. 223.
3. John Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions in Three Volumes*, vol. 1 of *The Works of John Wesley*, *Sermons I: 1–33*, ed. Albert Outler (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1984), p. 103.
4. ibid.
5. Albert Outler, 'Introduction', in vol. 1 of *The Works of John Wesley, Sermons I: 1–33*, ed. Outler, p. 26.
6. *Certaine Sermons or Homilies Appoynted to Be Read in Churches.: In the Time of the Late Queene Elizabeth of Famous Memory. and Now Thought Fit to Be Reprinted by Authority from the Kings Most Excellent Maiesty* (London: John Norton, Joyce Norton and Richard Whitaker, 1635), Preface.
7. Richard P. Heitzenrater discusses the similar purposes of the *Book of Homilies* and *Sermons on Several Occasions* as vehicles for doctrine in chapter 9 of *Mirror and Memory: Reflections on Early Methodism* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1989), pp. 174–188.
8. Outler 1984, p. 4.
9. Outler 1984, p. 40.
10. Outler 1984, p. 54, quoting from Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley*, vol. III (London: Hodder & Stoughton), pp. 15, 616–617.
11. John Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions*, 4th edn (London: Alfred Sharp, 1787), front matter.

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Reviews

***Aquinas and the Supreme Court**: Race, Gender, and the Failure of Natural Law in Thomas's Biblical Commentaries*, Eugene F. Rogers, Jr (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 326 pp, £68.50 hbk

The US Supreme Court consults a form of Aquinas' account of natural law in its judgements on human rights. Aquinas' story of natural law, Rogers tells us, is a story of failure. It *cannot* lead to justice. This is his urgent message to the US Supreme Court. What could be more important than that?

A reviewer struggles when an author fills them with delight. Has anyone since Austin Farrer written on Aquinas with such penetrating, teasing wit? Rogers risks paying the heavy price that Farrer paid – that the scholarly community, not amused by his playfulness, will not take what he has to say nearly as seriously as it ought.

To achieve justice, the courts need objectivity as regards ethnicity, spirituality, gender and culture. No doubt most readers (save perhaps from the USA) will be astonished to learn how frequently in recent years key US Supreme Court deliberations on matters broadly relating to human rights (sexuality, human relationships, ethnicity, just warfare etc) have examined a very specific natural law theory ascribed to Thomas Aquinas in the hope of achieving necessary neutrality. A corpus of scholarly work has appeared defending a reading of Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* that endorses the theory. Rogers writes to show how this is, in his view, a dangerous *mis*reading. Aquinas, he believes, is *always* ethnic (in a special sense), theological and culturally related. Natural law is not a matter of our acting out our lives by rationally applying eternal moral principles equally applicable to all humankind. Rather, Aquinas held, we act out culturally specific virtues (Christian or otherwise) taught by example and

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habit, and applied (in the most part) unreflectively in the heat of the day. In itself, this is, of course, no more than the classical Thomist view restated for present purposes.

Rogers greatly strengthens this classical understanding by following Aquinas' explanatory references in the *Summa* to his *Commentary on Romans*, thus leading your average Aquinas reader (and this reviewer) over totally new and fascinating ground. He claims he is the first modern to do this systematically, and, to this reviewer's knowledge at least, he is right. When Rogers has finished, one cannot possibly doubt that for Aquinas everything stands or falls by the workings of divine grace and the Christian story of redemption. The language of natural law, in its numerous guises, is but a formal cipher. Separate and objective it is *not*!

Eugene Rogers' book consists of three new chapters directly related to the present task, plus nine additional chapters which are revisions of pieces previously published (the earliest in 1996). Rogers does his best to edit his material into a coherent whole, but the end product is disappointingly messy and uneven. In particular, excellent though it is, revision cannot disguise that the material on same-sex sexuality and Romans 1 was developed long ago for a totally different campaign. That said, this is, nevertheless, high-order scholarship, and for those equipped to struggle through to the end and live with the unevenness, it is deeply rewarding.

Michael Wilson

***Towards a Theology of Universality**: John Wesley's Socio-Economic, Political and Moral Insights on British Class and Indian Caste Distinctions*, Joseph. B. Suray (New Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2015), 486 pp, £20.00 hbk

I welcome this book from the hand and scholarship of an Indian Methodist living and working in Britain. This is a courageous, commendable, insightful and important piece of work.

Joseph Suray develops a theology of universality drawing on the teachings of John Wesley. He particularly offers theological reflection on the disgrace of caste discrimination and class discrimination, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and slavery today, including bonded labour. He reflects in the light of John Wesley's doctrine of 'prevenient grace', though Suray acknowledges that Wesley never visited India.

For Wesley, prevenient grace is the insistence that God blesses all people with the gift of grace. Grace is the initiative and gift of God, and prevenient grace is a sign of the 'light which enlightens everyone' (John 1:9). This is a special Methodist reflection on religious experience, and an important eighteenth-century contribution relevant to inter-faith dialogue and theology today. The concept of prevenient grace challenges us to acknowledge the presence and work of God beyond the Christian faith, and to examine what evangelism means in a world of many religions. Sri Lankan Methodist theologian Wesley Ariarajah has suggested that the evangelistic task is to help all people to move 'from grace to grace'.

Joseph Suray recognises that the issues he reflects on are not confined to the past and have not gone away. To these we can also add child labour, cheap migrant labour, cheap house cleaners, cheap hand car washers, sex tourism, sex trafficking, sexual oppression, rape and the monstrous scale of sexual abuse of the contemporary world. Some 50 million people are displaced within their own countries, or as refugees in other countries, as a result of persecution, poverty, war and climate change. Caste and class discrimination continues to exclude people from belonging and benefitting equally in society. Racism, sexism and homophobia oppress the lives of many people. The contemporary world can

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hardly be understood without taking this legacy into account. These matters are a scar on humanity, and an assault on the image of God in human beings.

Suray argues that the doctrine of prevenient grace empowers people who have been politically, economically, socially and theologically oppressed and exploited. It further offers a theology around which people of different backgrounds can work together for common causes like freedom and human rights. This is a rich theme that merits further development.

This book makes Joseph Suray's doctoral thesis available for wider readership. It is not autobiographical theology, but Joseph brings his Indian background and spirituality to bear on his Methodist heritage and scholarship. Suray's research would have been strengthened with reference to the regular use of the concept of grace in Indian thought and theologies. The language of his book could be more inclusive also, but merits wide readership and response internationally, and in inter-faith circles.

Inderjit Bhogal

***The Letters of Charles Wesley**: A Critical Edition, with Introduction and Notes, Volume 1: 1728–1756,* Kenneth G. C. Newport and Gareth Lloyd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), xxxvi + 472 pp, £140.00 hbk

Historians of Methodism and of the wider eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival have been slow to appreciate the significance and contribution of Charles Wesley. Despite his elder brother's gnomic obituary tribute that 'his least praise was his talent for poetry', it is as 'the sweet singer of Methodism' that Charles has most often been remembered. Considerable efforts have been made to redress the neglect of Charles Wesley as an evangelical leader in his own right, and to tease out the sometimes fraught relationships between the Wesley siblings and between Charles and other early Methodists, and the editors of the present volume have already published seminal work in this field. As they acknowledge in the Introduction to this magnificent critical edition, scholarship has hitherto been hampered by the lack of reliable primary texts. Thomas Jackson, the assiduous nineteenth-century editor of Charles' journal and selected letters, adopted a creative approach to his task, and his silent omissions and emendations rendered the work of his successors even more difficult than it might otherwise have been. Professor Newport and Dr Lloyd are therefore to be congratulated on persevering with a massive project, comprising the collation of the extant letters (including some published texts and transcripts by the late Frank Baker drawing on now lost originals) and their presentation in a scholarly edition. This volume, the first of two, includes 331 letters covering the period 1728–1756. At the beginning of the volume Charles is a student at Oxford, writing a rather pert letter to his brother John; by the end he is a husband and father, dealing with family troubles and Methodist politics. The letters are spread unevenly across the years, with more than a third of the collection dating from 1748 to 1750, the period of Charles' courtship and marriage to Sarah Gwynne; Sally is naturally the recipient of many letters. As the Introduction makes clear, the editors have laboured with varying and contradictory lists of letters, Charles Wesley's habit of not dating or signing his correspondence, and his use of abbreviations and shorthand. This edition establishes the corpus of letters, and offers for each an addressee, an archival or other source, a documentary type, a date, an address and a location.

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Additional explanatory notes are included; references and allusions are explained in endnotes to each letter; and the main characters in the correspondence are elucidated in a comprehensive biographical appendix. There are indexes of people, places, subjects and scriptural references. The character emerging from these letters is thoroughly human, expressing deep affection for Sally, admiration and exasperation with his brother, misery and despair in Georgia, excitement at the impact of Methodist preaching, and trenchant opinions on the trajectory of the movement and the attitudes of other evangelicals (Moravians and Calvinists coming in for fierce criticism). This is a triumph of careful critical scholarship, and it will be an indispensable source for the early history of the Wesleys' Methodism.

Martin Wellings

Christianity and the University Experience: Understanding Student Faith, Matthew Guest, Kristin Auna, Sonia Sharmer and Rob Warner (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 256 pp, £65.00 hbk

It has become accepted wisdom that today's young adults are uninterested in church or faith commitment, and that academic institutions exercise a broadly secularising influence on those who live and study within them. There is, however, little contemporary research which engages with the ways in which students actually practise their faith. This book by Guest et al. is already, therefore, becoming a valuable resource for university chaplains and student workers alike.

The authors present the findings of extensive quantitative research, supported by qualitative research on a smaller scale. Undergraduate students were asked to declare their faith affiliation, if any, and to answer questions examining their understanding of the divine, their acceptance of various credal statements, and their social conservatism or liberalism.

The book outlines a useful – if inevitably imperfect – categorisation of universities and examines variations between the different types of institution. Its categorisation of Christian students, however, may well be controversial. It does not attempt to define the limits of Christianity, but allows for self-definition. Those students who so define themselves, it then classifies by patterns of church attendance, including variation between vacation and term-time attendance. However, to be classified as 'actively engaged', a student must attend at least weekly, which does not necessarily allow for enthusiastic participation held in tension with the many complexities and demands of student life.

The main finding is that student engagement with church is declining, but that faith commitment is not necessarily adversely affected by the supposedly secularising atmosphere of university life. Student faith is reasonably stable, but is not necessarily lived out in the context of a church commitment. This will not come as a surprise to most of us engaged in student ministry, but it is valuable to have the challenge set out starkly and supported by actual data. Interestingly, and again not surprisingly, the trend of declining church attendance is found to be less marked among evangelical students, although it does not seek to answer the question of why this might be.

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There are some key questions raised by the research. It does not examine in depth the different patterns of chaplaincy found in the different models of university, to question whether, for instance, a church-like chaplaincy on an out-of-town campus engenders different patterns of participation from a less visible chaplaincy in a more dispersed institution. Admittedly, its focus is on churchgoing, not engagement with chaplaincy, but for some students church and chaplaincy are the same thing, and this must surely have an impact. The timing of the research is also unfortunate; it was completed just as university fees payable by students were trebled and the 'university experience' began correspondingly to focus more narrowly on grades and employability. This may well render many of the authors' observations somewhat dated, more quickly than they may reasonably have expected.

While the book cannot give the whole picture, however, it presents some useful answers, opens some interesting questions, and is surely essential reading for anyone who wishes to understand and engage with the student faith journey today.

Catrin Harland-Davies

Into All the World: Being and Becoming Apostolic Churches, A Report to the Anglican Consultative Council and the World Methodist Council by the Anglican-Methodist International Commission for Unity in Mission (London: Anglican Consultative Council, 2014), xiv + 104 pp, £10.99 pbk

This report of formal conversations between Anglicans and Methodists at a world level in the period 2009–2013 builds on the theological foundations laid in an earlier round of dialogue, summarised in *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion* (1996). By investigating the significant regional developments in Anglican–Methodist relations since the earlier report was published, 'This dialogue has attempted to discern which barriers have been broken down, and which remain to be surmounted and how' (Preface).

The report is in three parts. 'Part One, Being and Becoming Apostolic Churches, represents the core theological work of the Commission' (p. xi). After a brief description of the two communions, the report investigates a number of theological topics that are central to the idea of being and becoming apostolic Churches: 'The shape of unity in mission'; 'Describing the goal of unity'; 'Discerning the apostolic tradition'; and '*Episcope* and episcopacy' in Anglicanism and in Methodism. This part concludes with a number of recommendations and a summary of 'Agreements in the area of ordained ministry'.

Part Two, 'Monitoring Dialogues', surveys a number of places in the world where there are bilateral agreements and/or continuing dialogue between Anglicans and Methodists. Besides the United Churches in the Indian subcontinent, these include the covenant relationship between Anglicans and Methodists in Ireland, in Great Britain and in New Zealand, as well as the relationship of interim eucharistic sharing between Episcopalians and United Methodists in the United States.

'Part Three, Tool Kits for Anglican–Methodist Conversations, contains practical advice for Methodists and Anglicans who want to further their relationship, and provides a number of questions that they might want to explore together. It also has some suggestions regarding ecumenical theological education' (p. xi).

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The commission is clear as to what it considers should be the next stage in Anglican–Methodist relations: 'We believe that our local and regional churches need now to decide when and how to move into closer relationships for the sake of the gospel' (Preface). According to the commission, 'Those who know Anglicans and Methodists from the outside truly wonder what prevents us from taking the next steps' (Preface).

Be that as it may, the most sensitive aspect of relations between Anglicans and Methodists concerns unresolved questions surrounding the ordained ministry, the nature of oversight, and what it means to be an apostolic Church. Methodists, in particular, will wonder what lies behind the idea of 'becoming' an apostolic Church in the context of Anglican–Methodist relations. Nevertheless, the report contains much to stimulate continuing theological dialogue and also to encourage Anglicans and Methodists to harvest the fruits of that dialogue in the shape of closer relations on the way to visible unity.

David M. Chapman

***Music as Theology**: What Music Says about the Word*, Maeve Louise Heaney, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 320 pp, £32.00 pbk

There is momentum gathering around theologians and musicologists which is taking seriously the possibility that their two disciplines are mutually inclusive. *Music as Theology* is a comprehensive account of recent developments in this exciting area, and a convincing 'apologia' for the validity of the conversation between theology and music which has been dormant for too long in recent years. Hence Heaney's insistence upon the title of her book – *Music AS Theology*.

Heaney confronts head on those theologians who regard the study of music as a 'Cinderella' discipline, and who see it as something too trivial to consider, or as something almost impossible to engage with, largely because of its notorious resistance to words and concepts.

This ambitious, almost overwhelming work employs a thoroughgoing study of musical meaning, of hermeneutics, semiotics, epistemology and aesthetic theory, and brings them together with the passions and concerns of mainstream doctrinal theology. Heaney introduces the reader to significant writers and forerunners in their fields, including Susanne K. Langer (musical meaning), Jean-Jaques Nattiez (hermeneutics), Willem Marie Speelman (semiotics), Bernard Lonergan and Rosemary Haughton (epistemology) and Hans Urs von Balthasar (aesthetics). Many of these names betray Maeve Heaney's Roman Catholic background, but she is quick to recognise this, and her style and approach to her work acknowledges the huge contributions of other non-Catholic traditions, most notably in the area of hermeneutics.

Jeremy Begbie, one of that rare breed of scholars who combines theological excellence with profound and practical musical knowledge, known to many British and American readers, is well represented, and his ground-breaking studies in 'Theology through the arts' is generously acknowledged. However, there is one significant strain of thought which appears to be lacking – the unique contributions of scholars such as Geoffrey Wainwright, Daniel Hardy and David Ford, with 'doxology' at the heart of their theological enquiry. Their involvement in Heaney's study would have appealed to many Methodists who

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should be interested in the relationship between the proclamation of the Word and the expression of music. Perhaps Heaney has unwittingly exposed the need for more work to be done in this area?

Within the penetrating christological application to music in Heaney's sixth and final chapter, it would have been interesting also to learn how she might have found a connection between the pursuit of Wesleyan Scriptural Holiness and the development of harmony and counterpoint or even the emancipation of the dissonance (as expounded by Schoenberg and others).

Although Heaney is convinced that music must not be in competition with linguistic or conceptual articulation, let alone redefine any traditional modes of theological language and thought, she is however equally and overall convinced that music is a valid means of coming to terms with the world, a genuine and unique vehicle of world disclosure, and, as such, can generate a particular form of 'understanding'.

If it is true that 'there are things which God may only be saying through music' then it is surely incumbent upon the theologian (and indeed all Christians, and perhaps all 'truth-seekers') to listen with care.

Harvey Richardson

Exodus: Gods and Kings, director Ridley Scott, music Alberto Iglesias (20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2014), DVD and Blu-ray April 2015, 150 mins, English, 12A

Exodus: Gods and Kings is an epic drama based on the biblical Exodus narrative. The work of acclaimed British director Ridley Scott, it comes with high expectations, and to some extent it is an engaging and often spectacular film.

In some respects *Exodus* can be readily identified with the biblical text; in others it seeks to flesh out the story where the text is silent: for example, the prominent issue of how Moses came to be aware as an adult of his Israelite birth.

The film features strong performances from its lead actors: Christian Bale (Moses) and Joel Edgerton (Pharaoh Ramses). The script is well thought out and the story is told in a way that is fluent, realistic and broadly portrays its characters as three-dimensional and not simple caricatures.

In light of some of the critical response to *Exodus*, it is worth stating that the biblically literate viewer will benefit from viewing it as a film on its own terms. With any kind of book-to-film adaptation, certain aficionados cry foul at significant cinematic deviation from the words on the page. *Exodus*, as a Bible-to-film adaptation, has garnered criticism on a similarly dry, pedantic basis. However, the creative licence that the film inevitably employs in bringing the story to the screen is underpinned by a commendable sense of theological sensitivity and awareness.

Exodus reckons in a thoughtful way with some of the tensions and ambiguities that are there in the biblical text. A point of particular interest is God's part in the story, and the relationship between God and Moses. The film ostensibly depicts God's character as a rather sinister and petulant child, which has raised hackles for some; however, viewed carefully, the film doesn't purport this to be the true embodiment of God's nature – rather, it imagines (as can only be imagined) the construal of God that might have been present in Moses' mind's eye. Moses himself displays self-awareness in this respect, at one point admonishing the perceived 'God-child', saying, 'I am tired of talking with a messenger!'

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Some feel *Exodus* seeks to over-naturalise the events it depicts, not taking God seriously, even portraying God as little more than a figment of Moses' imagination; but this misses the subtlety of what it actually does. At the outset, the film sets a firm marker in the sand that it treats God as a genuine player in the drama, with an opening caption stating of the enslaved Israelites in Egypt that they have 'not forgotten their homeland or their God', and 'God has not forgotten them'. The parameters thus set, the film depicts Moses' turbulent but ultimately faithful relationship with a God whose ways are often difficult to understand; and it does so reasonably intelligently, in a way that will resonate with the experience of many who 'wrestle' with God today.

Exodus: Gods and Kings is not an exceptional film. It doesn't arrest the audience and linger long after the credits have rolled; but it is well made, entertaining while it lasts, and provides some interesting angles on the Exodus text for the open-minded viewer. It raises legitimate questions: about how people really visualise God for themselves; about the theological challenge of horrors that are attributed to God on a plain reading of the biblical narrative; and – in light of some of the criticism it has received – about where ownership of the story lies.

Steven Cooper

Calvary, director John McDonagh, music Patrick Cassidy (Entertainment One, 2014), available on DVD and Blu-ray, 102 mins, English, 15

Calvary, from Irish director John McDonagh, is a film unlike any other. Its powerful and arresting story is one of modern-day Christian discipleship which, as the title implies, gets as close to the meaning of the Cross as can be imagined. It is almost impossible to assign it a genre: the medium is one of dark comedy – brilliantly sharp, witty, politically and culturally astute, in the blackest, driest way. At the same time it is a tremendously sensitive and dignified film, and its unique – one might say pastoral – amalgam of sensitivity and ultra-dark humour is perhaps the only way that it could tell its story. For behind its fictional narrative lies the deep and enduring real-life wound of the experience, so deeply felt across Ireland following recent years' revelations, of many who have suffered childhood sexual abuse at the hands of the Church.

The story is of a Catholic priest, a genuinely good priest, played outstandingly by veteran Irish actor Brendan Gleeson. This character is confronted at the film's opening by an encounter with an unseen parishioner who declares that a week later he will kill him in order to get back at the Church, having been sickeningly abused by a (now-dead) priest as a child. Moreover, the parishioner is deliberately targeting this priest *because* he is good: 'There's no point in killing a bad priest – that'd be no news; but killing a good one – that'd be a shock.' *Calvary* follows the priest through the days that follow, set in his close-knit rural Irish community, replete with an array of dysfunctional characters, and thought-provoking and unsettling encounters and events. Moreover, the film's cinematography, its interplay with the rugged Irish scenery and its use of music are masterful and beautiful.

It is a highly symbolic film. The majority of the peripheral characters are deliberately something of caricatures of various types – but they make possible a very slick and intelligent script, which captures profoundly something of the contemporary Irish zeitgeist. Real issues – of abuse, the economic crisis, a culture of nihilism, of disillusionment with an outright antipathy towards the Church, among others – are writ large for the viewer. At the heart of all this is

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the Christian disciple, Gleeson's good priest. His is a wonderfully rounded character, with great depth of humanity.

In many ways, the story runs as an allegory of Christ's Passion, with theological insight to match. Human brokenness, trust and the challenge of forgiveness are key themes, and there are points where the film evokes the pain of Jesus saying on the Cross, 'Father, forgive them; they don't know what they do.' The film could be apt for a church to show (for an age-appropriate audience) on Good Friday.

The film will strike a particular chord with anyone pursuing any kind of Christian vocation, and in the character of the priest it offers a portrayal of priestly vocation that is deeply sympathetic and realistic about what true Christian vocation can look like.

Calvary will leave you speechless. Watched recently with a group of clergy, none had any words when the film ended, the room silent for several minutes, with some quietly weeping. For me, it is the film of the century.

Steven Cooper

'An eye to God in every word' – praying the hymns of Charles Wesley

Open, Lord, my inward ear,
And bid my heart rejoice;
Bid my quiet spirit hear
Thy comfortable voice;
Never in the whirlwind found,
Or where earthquakes rock the place,
Still and silent is the sound,
The whisper of thy grace.

From the world of sin, and noise,
And hurry I withdraw;
For the small and inward voice
I wait with humble awe;
Silent am I now and still,
Dare not in thy presence move;
To my waiting soul reveal
The secret of thy love.

Thou didst undertake for me,
For me to death wast sold;
Wisdom in a mystery
Of bleeding love unfold;
Teach the lesson of thy cross:
Let me die, with thee to reign;
All things let me count but loss,
So I may thee regain.

Show me, as my soul can bear
The depth of inbred sin;
All the unbelief declare,
The pride that lurks within;
Take me, whom thyself hast bought,
Bring into captivity
Every high aspiring thought
That would not stoop to thee.

Lord, my time is in thy hand,
My soul to thee convert;
Thou canst make me understand,
Though I am slow of heart;
Thine in whom I live and move,
Thine the work, the praise is thine;
Thou art wisdom, power and love,
And all thou art is mine.

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

This is the version that appeared in the Wesleyan hymn book of 1780, and in subsequent hymn books produced by the British Methodist Church, until *Singing the Faith* (Canterbury Press, 2011), which has adapted the text in the interests of removing some archaisms (thees and thous). This affects the rhyme in some cases and has led to re-wordings that lose some important metaphors and the theological insights arising from them.

In this podcast, published in HOLINESS Volume 1 (2015) Issue 1, Holiness & Education, the setting is BECK, copyright Nicola Morrison 2010, and it is performed by Ruth Jeffries and Nicola Morrison. The spoken introduction and devotional commentary is by Janet Morley.