HOLINESS VOLUME 2 (2016) ISSUE 3

Holiness & Contemporary Culture

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HOLINESS
THE JOURNAL OF WESLEY HOUSE CAMBRIDGE

Editorial

Andrew Stobart

I

The title of this issue, 'Holiness & Contemporary Culture', would not have been immediately recognisable to Wesley and his contemporaries. Understanding the term 'holiness', of course, would pose little trouble for the successors of Oxford's Holy Club, but 'contemporary culture' would be as unfamiliar a description of the world to them as it is a familiar one to us. The idea of cultural studies is a relatively recent one in the history of intellectual endeavour, and its crossover into the theological arena has an even shorter lifespan, taking root and flourishing only really within the present generation of theological reflectors. One can imagine having to take Wesley to one side to explain that by 'contemporary culture' we are simply referring – albeit with greater sophistication than we normally muster – to 'the world in which we live', the world within which we attempt to speak to and of and for God.

At once, Wesley is no longer standing on the sidelines of our topic, but fully immersed in it, offering us an example of how 'holiness' and 'contemporary culture' are to be related in thought and practice. Wesley's oft-quoted (and oft-misquoted) remark in his Preface to *Hymns and Sacred Poems* of 1739 reveals his hand: 'The Gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness.'[1] His use of 'social' here is in contrast to the 'holy solitaries' of the mystics, who retire from the world to cultivate Christianity in seclusion. Wesley is, of course, misconstruing the thrust of the mystic movement, but his positive affirmation is pertinent: any holiness that is not thoroughly conversant with its 'social' context is not worthy of the name. Holiness is always a lived entity, generated within the community of Christ, but also informed by and worked

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out within the cultural structures that provide definition to our daily lives. The gospel of Christ knows of no holiness but holiness within contemporary culture.

II

I have always thought that the term 'contemporary culture' has more than a hint of tautology about it. To say that we live in contemporary culture is another way of saying that we live *now*, rather than at another time, which would of course be impossible. However, on reflection, the modifier 'contemporary' is necessary because too often we seek to work out what holiness looks like within *church* culture, which may well have lost contact with what contemporary means, at times being practically oblivious to the preoccupations and priorities of the lives of others, and indeed even of our own lives beyond the sanctities of Sunday. Relating holiness to contemporary culture invites us to consider the resonances and dissonances between a culture which understands all things as proceeding from and for and back to God through Christ (the proper culture of the Church according to Colossians 1:15–20), and a culture that understands itself apart from Christ (within which we all live). The Wesleyan theological tradition, rooted in a missionary movement to those whose daily lives were being overlooked by the religious establishment, is a constantly renewed call to holiness within *contemporary* culture.

The articles offered in this issue are intended to prompt renewed attention to this task. While 'contemporary culture' is indeed the context within which we all live, it is by no means therefore straightforward to define or understand. In part, this is because we might more properly speak of contemporary cultures, highlighting the plurality of contexts that co-exist, overlap, and at times clash within our lived experience. But, as Rebekah Callow's article reminds us, our difficulty is also with finding the critical distance to observe our own culture: 'It can be hard to spot our own cultural idiosyncrasies until we step outside them, hard to recognise that what is normal for one seems strange to another' (p. 331). Callow's article, dealing with the effect of 'culture stress' or 'culture shock' on international students, emphasises the care that we must exercise if we are to journey successfully alongside others at the edge of their or our culture. This resonates far beyond the student context.

The language of journeying is one which reappears, unbidden and therefore remarkable, in a number of the contributions. It is, perhaps, a fitting trope for the status of holiness within contemporary culture, not as a citizen but as a sojourner, not as a permanent resident but as a migrant, just like holiness' incarnation in Jesus. The journey metaphor highlights the often precarious nature of holiness in our midst. Gordon Leah's reflections on the experiences of Carlo Levi in southern Italy pose the uncomfortable but necessary question: will our engagement in contemporary culture 'introduce Christ's presence into where it was thought he was not' (p. 377)? Richard Clutterbuck brings the work of pioneering Methodist missionary John Hunt to our attention, exploring how his understanding of holiness was shaped by his journey to the island of Fiji. Rosemary Power offers some further reflections on her experience of pioneer ministry in rural Ireland, a ministry which was itself a temporary sojourner within a migrating culture. Given all this, it seems appropriate that this issue includes the third podcast in our series on the hymns of Charles Wesley, focusing on 'Come, O Thou traveller unknown' and featuring a new recording of the hymn by Nicola Morrison and Ruth Jeffries.

Any journey of significance brings with it a requirement to learn a new language, or at the very least a new dialect or vocabulary, and the remainder of this issue's articles explore the languages we might need to learn if we are to take holiness within contemporary culture seriously. So, for instance, Hilary Brand asks us, intentionally provocatively, 'Whatever happened to sin?' (p. 283). How do we speak intelligibly of what ails us? If 'sin' is no longer in our vocabulary, then what, if anything, is our dynamic equivalent? Pete Phillips draws our attention to the importance of being digitally conversant, encouraging us in his stimulating lecture 'to embrace digital technology and digital culture as the lingua franca, the common ground of contemporary culture, and thus the most appropriate place for us to engage with the world in which we live' (p. 355). Tom Osborne's article, 'Pretty amazing grace', explores the use of so-called secular music in worship. Using secular lyrics as liturgy exposes our underlying confidence – or otherwise – in God's Spirit to redeem and work through all things. Mindful of the adage that 'money talks', Tim Macquiban's contribution to our regular series on John Wesley's sermons asks some searching questions about what our approach to money says about the vitality of our Christian faith. Finally, Anna Robbins' article offers a useful guide to the vocabulary of meaning in contemporary culture. While Ecclesiastes sums up the feelings of many in Qoheleth's declaration that 'all is *hebel*, meaningless' (Ecclesiastes 1:2), Robbins asserts that meaning is possible: 'That which some philosophers would deem impossible, Christ makes possible' (p. 366).

If you were hoping to find a definitive description of holiness within contemporary culture in this issue, then you may well be disappointed. These articles, in all their variety, are merely starting points for further reflection, discussion and – most challenging of all – practical application in our lives and ministries. The Reviews section introduces yet more arenas of contemporary life in which we must engage in the struggle for holiness: sexuality and desire, violence against women, music, the practice of spiritual autobiography, and, highlighting the most recent fruits of the Methodist–Roman Catholic dialogue, ecumenical understanding. The purpose of this issue is not to define holiness in contemporary culture but to promote the pursuit of it. By the end of this issue, I hope you will be stimulated to engage thoughtfully with the preoccupations and priorities of the culture that is contemporary to you, developing the vocabulary and dialect necessary to talk meaningfully to and of and for God within that context. If you feel more equipped to do this than before you read 'Holiness & Contemporary Culture', this issue will have been a success.

III

A final word is required to pay tribute to the dedication and expertise of Janet Morley, whose work as Commissioning Editor comes to an end with the publication of this issue. Her creativity continues to be evident here, not least in her podcast commentary on 'Come, O Thou traveller unknown', but also in a number of the articles which were 'commissioned' by her before my appointment. Our debt of gratitude to Janet for shaping this journal over its founding years is immense. The present success of *Holiness*, with its growing readership and developing reputation, is due in no small part to her experienced mind, hard work and fastidious attention to detail. Above all that, Janet's intuitive sense of the connection between faith and life, holiness and contemporary culture, have set the tone for the journal, which I hope to continue and develop. I know you will join with me in wishing her well.

On the holy journey to which we have been called, we are grateful for all who share their intellectual and spiritual company along the way. This journal is evidence that Wesleyan theology still knows nothing of 'holy solitaries', but rather invites us all to 'social holiness'.

Andrew Stobart, Commissioning Editor
October 2016

HOLINESS
THE JOURNAL OF WESLEY HOUSE CAMBRIDGE

Whatever happened to sin? An examination of the word and concept in contemporary popular culture

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The concept of 'sin' is rarely expressed in today's popular culture. When the word does appear it is frequently in ironic quotation marks and often used in terms of 'naughty but nice', minor misdemeanours, something disapproved of, an outmoded Catholic shame culture, Islamic oppression or fundamentalist extremism. Rarely is it used in the way the Church understands it. By analysing the use of the word in recent news reports and examining its use and absence across the range of twenty-first-century media, this study draws some conclusions about how UK secular society understands the word. It then goes on to explore how some twentieth-century cultural changes have impacted on its understanding, and concludes with some observations on how twenty-first-century Western culture still senses the underlying problem and yearns for a way to express it.

SIN • EVIL • POPULAR CULTURE • SEXUAL REVOLUTION • FRANCIS SPUFFORD

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Outdated concept, residual usage

My curiosity on this subject was first kindled when I read a quote from Paul Flowers, disgraced Chairman of the Co-op bank, who claimed that sin was an 'old-fashioned term, which I rarely use'. Given that Flowers was also a Methodist minister and had been accused of financial mismanagement, coke-sniffing and using rent boys, it seemed perhaps a term he should embrace. (To be fair, the statement, which came in response to Jeremy Paxman's *Newsnight* question, 'Do you think you've sinned?', was followed by a rather weak acknowledgement: 'Of course I have. I'm in company with every other human being for having my frailties and some of my fragility exposed.'[1])

My interest was further aroused by Paul Vallely in an article in *Third Way* magazine, where he reported that in a conference bringing US news commentators together with top religious figures, the question 'Whatever became of sin?' was a hot topic. An academic started the conversation: Google it, he said, and you'll find most mentions nowadays are metaphorical or frivolous. The concept of sin has decayed in meaning in US culture, he said. It's true in the UK too, where the media are most likely to use it in connection with the eating of cream cakes.[2]

But it was when I read Francis Spufford's book *Unapologetic* that the idea began to form. I had been surprised to find a book about Christian faith being suggested as a *Sunday Times* best read and published by Faber and Faber, not a usual stalwart of the Christian bookshops. In Spufford's book, a witty personal defence of faith subtitled *Why Christianity Still Makes Surprising Emotional Sense,* the 'sin' word is almost entirely absent. Spufford replaces it with a curious acronym: the 'HPtFTu', which, being translated, means 'the Human Propensity to Fuck Things up'.[3] Spufford's rationale for his alternative term is clear:

> One of the major obstacles to communicating what belief feels like is that I'm not working with a blank slate. Our culture is smudged over with half-legible religious scribbling. The vocabulary that is used to describe religious emotions hasn't gone away, or sunk into an obscurity from which you could carefully reintroduce it, giving a little explanation as each unfamiliar new/old term emerged. Instead it's still in circulation, but repurposed, with new meanings generated by new usages; meanings that make people think they know what believers are talking about when they really, really don't.

> Case in point: the word 'sin', that well-known contemporary brand name for ice cream. And high-end chocolate truffles. And lingerie in which the colour red predominates …[4]

So, is the word 'sin' outdated? Does it have no more than ironic usage in twenty-first-century popular parlance? It is this question that forms the basis of this article.

An initial approach

I am not the first person to address these questions in the twenty-first century: Hugh Connolly (2002), Gary Anderson (2009), Jason Mahn (2011), Derek Nelson (2011) and Paula Fredriksen (2012) have all found reason to explore the issue. Each of these, however, has begun with history and theology and rarely delved further into the thought processes of today's postmodern secular Western society. I decided to start the other way round, beginning in the twenty-first century and where necessary working backwards, to establish how the s-word got where it is today.

I began by trawling through newspaper references to the word 'sin' and attempting some analysis of where and how they appear. Although I looked at many articles and news items with some connection to 'sin' published over the last few years, I thought a more systematic approach was also needed. Therefore, using the database Newsstand and selecting at random a 16-day period, 2–17 March 2015, I made an analysis of all uses of the word.[5] The search covered all national and local newspapers in the UK and Eire, which are the parameters of Newsstand, and produced a working total of 527 articles.

My initial discovery was that to find the word used in contemporary media you must turn first to the sports pages, where half of all entries were found in the use of the term 'sin bin'. For the uninitiated, like me, this refers to the penalty box used in rugby (and ice hockey) where any player engaging in dangerous play is sent to sit out for a period of the game. During this time the player is not replaced, so there is an element of letting the side down. The term occasionally transfers over into more general usage, such as the suggestion reported in several papers that MPs in the House of Commons should be sent to a 'sin bin' for barracking opponents: 'Bring on the sin bin for MPs whose noise betrays contempt.'[6]

The word 'sin' has also found a place in contemporary financial usage with the use of the term 'sin stock' for investments in tobacco, alcohol and defence, and 'sin taxes' for levies on alcohol, tobacco and, potentially, sugar. This latter example highlights a problem of my analysis, as I tried to discern whether the word was being used seriously, or ironically of mild wrongdoing ('the worst sin of all, changing the recipe and taste of what was the best chocolate in the world';[7] 'I am about to commit the ultimate mummy sin and buy my toddler's birthday cake'[8]), or more trivially of anything provoking disapproval of some kind (Amsterdam, 'notorious as a city of legalised sin';[9] 'ScottishPower's sin was to fail to correct serious fault lines'[10]). As might be imagined, the borders are porous, but there were certainly far more examples on the ironic, trivial side (111) than were to be found of truly serious usage (53).

Within the former, there were several examples that touched on self-indulgence in one form or another ('the cardinal British sin, talking about yourself';[11] 'Coconut milk … too many sins';[12] 'middle-class men who sin abroad and feel bad'[13]). There were, however, less incidences than might have been imagined from Vallely's and Spufford's comments.

Spufford is entirely right, though, in his comment that the word is still in wide circulation, albeit as 'half-legible religious scribbling', an observation evidenced by the number of 'sin' figures of speech still in common usage.[14] The terms 'sins of the fathers' and 'seven deadly sins' were very frequent, with 29 entries each.[15] The next term most frequently employed was 'cardinal sin' (15 entries), having entirely lost its Catholic use as a mortal sin, in favour of 'an unforgivable error or misjudgement'[16] ('Help, I've committed a cardinal sin. I've fallen in love with my flat mate'[17]). Biblical echoes still occur with 'sins of omission' and ' a multitude of sins' ('perfect for covering a multitude of sins and giving you a long, lean silhouette'[18]) having seven entries each, and 'atonement for sin' and 'be sure your sins will find you out' also making appearances. Other terms include 'miserable as sin', 'guilty as sin' and 'for my sins', this last being always a jokey suggestion of punishment.

But what of more serious uses of the word? For its use in an intentional Christian religious context, one has to turn to those smaller local papers that occasionally include a column from the local vicar or a letter from some strident believer. Other than that, reports of religious statements were generally tinged with editorial scepticism, as of the bishop who felt gay people should not be parents,[19] and the preacher convinced *Fifty Shades of Grey* would lead to sex crime;[20] if not with downright disapproval, as of a Christian nursery worker sacked for 'telling a lesbian colleague her lifestyle was a sin'.[21] Beyond that, the only Christian statement getting reasonably respectful coverage came from the Pope, whose statement that 'Abandoning the elderly is a mortal sin'[22] was widely quoted.

In national papers, 'sin' linked to religion was far more prevalent in an Islamic context (nine entries) than a Christian one. Examples include the British-born jihadi who craved martyrdom, asking 'When will Allah pick me? It must be my sins',[23] and Boko Haram's repeated slogan that 'Western education is a sin'.[24]

But what are the activities that the secular UK media seriously consider to be 'sin'? On the evidence of this sample, the most prevalent were racism (six entries) and financial misconduct (five), though suicide, murder, pornography and envy were also mentioned.

To sum up, however, it seems that Boyd Tonkin's comment, that 'the audience will always root for warm-blooded sin over cold-hearted sanctity',[25] provides an apt assessment of UK newspaper attitudes.

What about evil?

To provide some comparison, I also examined uses of the word 'evil' over the same period. First to be noted is that 'evil', with 805 entries, gets a bigger press than 'sin'. From this total, 287 related to fiction: film, TV and theatre drama, novels and computer games ('evil villains', the battle between good and evil). Another 105 referred to brutal crime; while other activities include the condemnation of gay people (9), dog poisoning at Crufts (5) and cruel tweets (4). There were, of course, a fair number of ironic references (the Tories, José Mourinho, capitalism, FIFA) and more trivial ones (sugar, motorists as seen by cyclists, calories, the fashion industry). The incidences of a Friday 13th and a partial eclipse brought a rash of articles on superstition and evil spirits (33), and the Christian religious context was again mainly limited to local papers.[26]

It is noticeable that 205 mentions referred to what could be described as structural rather than personal evils: governments, ideologies, institutions, companies, etc. By far the highest of these with 105 mentions was Islam and Islamic terrorism.[27] The next highest ideology treated as a serious evil was Nazism, with 11 entries. Commercial institutions producing and promoting drugs and tobacco got six entries each, while oppressive political regimes in other countries – Russia, China and North Korea – were also mentioned.

However, at the end of all this, what is for me the most interesting statistic is the number of times that 'evil' and 'sin' appear in the same article: a mere 15 times over the same period.[28] Of these, apart from three religious articles in local papers, only six were serious: two on Catholicism, two on tobacco 'sin stocks', one on Boko Haram, and one historical reference to the slave railroad. It is to be noted that all these six refer to institutions.[29]

The only use of the word 'evil' in relation to ordinary British people was a report of a crowd of onlookers gawping at a suicidal man threatening to jump from a tall building. Some jeered, telling him to 'Go on, jump', while others took selfies. The man eventually jumped to his death.[30] No one, however, referred to these callous public reactions as 'sin'.

In summary, this analysis highlights a notable difference between the popular usage of 'sin' and 'evil'. Sin, if used at all seriously, refers predominantly to individual cases of personal, and sometimes private, misdemeanour. By contrast, evil is something done by 'the other': terrorists, murderers, Nazis, or those in political or commercial power. Evil's prevalence as a term rather than 'sin' arguably indicates a tendency to divert responsibility for the world's wrongs away from ordinary individuals, and locate it in less personal organisations and systems. The use of 'evil' and the trivialising of the term 'sin' threatens to replace an understanding of responsibility for the cumulative effect of many small wrongs with a desire for scapegoating.

Which way now?

Having gained some understanding from this overview of the newspapers, it became clear that understanding the contemporary usage of sin was a potentially massive agenda. I now wanted to incorporate as many references as possible to relevant contemporary popular culture. So, to limit the scope, just two main areas of focus are included in this paper: the first looks at the tone of irony which suffuses so much of contemporary Western culture and at the pursuit of pleasure which very often underlies it; the second deals with sex, the dismissal of 'sin' as a term for any consenting adult activity, and the fury at institutional abuse. Out of these foci it will be possible to note the way the term 'sin' has slipped in contemporary usage, and give some initial pointers about whether it ought to be recovered by the Church.

Ironic tone, indulgent trivia

A tale of two movies

Perhaps as good a way as any to begin to chart the overwhelming presence of irony in Western culture is a comparison between two films, both released in the UK in the summer of 2014, but arriving with us from outside and within Western culture respectively: *A Touch of Sin* by Chinese director Jia Zhangke, and *Sin City 2: A Dame to Kill For,* inspired by the comic books of Frank Miller.

A Touch of Sin follows four stories of violence, each based on a recent real-life case and each provoked by frustration with the widening gulf between rich and poor in contemporary China. It is an angry condemnation of capitalist injustice, painting 'a poisonous picture of people pushed beyond the boundaries of civilised behaviour by the sickness of the circumstances in which they live'.[31] The film ends with one of the protagonists encountering a performance of traditional Chinese theatre. A voice repeatedly sings, 'Do you understand your sin?'[32] A close-up of the woman, who has killed defending herself from a rich attacker, shows she does indeed understand, but the film ends with a wide shot of the audience of Chinese townspeople looking blank and untouched. Jia Zhangke's impassioned attempt to make his compatriots understand was thwarted: the film was denied release in mainland China.[33] The film's ultra-violence was inspired, says the director, by 'morally infected westerns and martial arts movies'. Nevertheless, he claims, 'I don't admire or worship violence. To fight violence with violence is a tragedy. This film seeks the roots of violence.'[34]

In contrast, *Sin City: A Dame to Kill For* is a triumph of style over substance, delighting in violence in an entirely passionless way. The film shows its comic-book roots in slick dark monochrome with occasional splashes of lurid colour – most often blood. It is always night-time in this anonymous retro-future city, the 'dames' are always scantily clad, both sex objects and female warriors, and men and women wield an impressive array of guns and other weaponry, slaughtering innocents and villains alike. All is ironic and tongue-in-cheek, but occasional snatches of dialogue express a deep underlying despair:

> 'Saturday night. Me and all the other suckers, sucking up the juice. I get that way sometimes: empty in the gut, hollow in that lonely place and wishing I had an excuse to break somebody's face. It was just another Saturday night.'
>
> 'This place stinks. I never used to notice – not when I danced. Now I smell everything … I know exactly where I am. I know exactly what I am.'
>
> 'This rotten town. What it can't corrupt, it soils … It soils everybody.'[35]

Both films have the word 'sin' in the title, both portray horrific violence, and both explore the theme of 'city'. *Sin City* makes clear that it is the city itself that corrodes and corrupts. *A Touch of Sin* vividly depicts the dehumanising effects of rapidly increasing urban sprawl. However, the similarity between the two films ends there. While the Chinese film has an urgent moral message, its amoral and world-weary Hollywood counterpart says nothing, albeit very stylishly. It is an exercise in ironic counterpoint with a surface gloss that entirely negates any horror in what it portrays. While one is motivated by righteous anger, the other seems motivated only by pushing aesthetic boundaries, cynically exploiting the taste for violence to rack up profits. Sin, as we noted above, has lost its responsibility in Western culture.

But now let us look at one particular city, and then move on to consider the indulgence and fantasy it epitomises.

Viva Las Vegas

My wider trawl through newspaper articles brought up many on Las Vegas – mainly for boxing bouts, star performances and starlet walkabouts – and in every case it was known at some point by its alter ego of Sin City. That is curious, because what epitomises Vegas these days is not vice, gangsters and drugs, but a giant simulacrum devoted to fantasy and sensory indulgence: an hourly erupting volcano, a first-floor Grand Canal, a never-ending circus show. Even its dark underbelly of gambling is rarely now enacted in the live drama of the gaming tables, rather it is the 'slots': the deadening lone interaction with a machine. It is, to use Umberto Eco's term, an 'apex of hyperreality'.[36] As Jean Baudrillard suggests, such manifestations of the hyperreal mask the fact that there is no longer an underlying reality: 'It is truth that hides the fact that there is none.'[37] There is no 'real life' outside – the simulacrum has become more real than that which it seeks to portray: 'It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real.'[38]

Does this suggest that when, as we frequently do, we find the s-word used as a metaphor for some sensory indulgence, it may be completely devoid of any assumption of a real underlying condition?

In answer, let us look at some of the products that this hyperreal metaphor has been used to promote. You can buy Sinful women's clothing, a range of rather ordinary tee-shirts and sweatshirts, emblazoned with 'Sinful' across the chest; or Sinner sunglasses, whose website proclaims 'Follow your dreams just like we do.'[39] And then there are Sinful Colors nail varnishes: 'Colour you crave at a price you love';[40] or So Sinful body spray: 'Fragrance with attitude.'[41] If you want a night out thus adorned, you could go to a Sin City Blues dance class in London: 'Feel the pulse, move to the music';[42] or hop over to Paris to the Hotel Vice Versa where each room is styled to the theme of one of the seven deadly sins: 'I wish you happy sins for sweet nights.'[43] If you want an evening in, then you may choose to play *Divinity – Original Sin* video game: 'Original Sin forces you to confront the consequences of your actions';[44] or *Sin and Punishment – Successor of the Skies*: 'Gameplay is straightforward, basically kill anything that moves.'[45]

Then, of course, there is indulgence of the taste buds. In 2003 Magnum famously launched a range of Seven Deadly Sins ice creams, under the slogan 'Give in to it'. 'Greed' was tiramisu, 'Jealousy' was pistachio, 'Lust' was strawberry, and so on. All, of course, contained chocolate. *Marketing Magazine* reported: 'The UK creative strategy for Magnum targets successful, empowered women, by suggesting that "sinning" is not a negative, but a means of indulging themselves.'[46]

The marketing for GU Puds, while it does not use the s-word, adorns each packaged dessert with a series of slogans aimed at the same effect: 'Pleasure is everything. Give in to happiness. Reject propriety, embrace variety. Prudence is sooo 1658. Life is fleeting; clasp it with both hands. Seek delight. Trust your impulses. Ordinary is pointless. Break free. All hail the GU decadents.'[47] This sort of marketing is directly pitched against the fear of calories and the shame of gaining weight, and is a subtle game. The Slimming World organisation strangely used the word 'Syn' and created an online calculator system to work out which of these 'enjoyable little extras' could be allowed.[48] Actual obesity might well be sinful in a Christian sense, being usually linked directly to gluttony and damage to health. However, when a size 8 lingerie model seen buying a cake draws the comment 'No sin goes unpunished', with the suggestion that she will need to spend the rest of the day working out,[49] then the calorific taboo is being misused – potentially dangerously so.

The sense of food transgression need not be related to calories, however; another aspect is the breaking of a taboo as expressed by the Jewish author Howard Jacobson on his pleasure in a bacon sandwich: 'Whenever I eat one I feel the very, very sweet, ecstatic consciousness of sin and the brown sauce makes it positively orgasmic.'[50]

There are several elements at work in Jacobson's use of the s-word here. Irony, of course, since contemporary reason tells us there is no real damage likely to be caused by eating pork. It also signifies defiance, a pride and gleefulness in the rejection not just of a social norm or a parental prohibition, but also of an outmoded religious code, and ultimately God. Beyond that is the clear suggestion that it is not just the taste of bacon that provides the pleasure, but the very act of taboo-breaking. The 'very, very sweet ecstatic' state, coupled with the 'orgasmic' brown sauce, give the act of eating a sexual frisson and with it perhaps a faint reminder that the ancient taboo is based around a sense of uncleanness and defilement.

The pleasure principle and beyond

Jacobson's ecstasy-inducing sandwich brings to mind the term 'jouissance'. Coined by the postmodern psychoanalyst Jaques Lacan, its nearest English translation, 'enjoyment', fails to communicate the dark edge which the French word conveys. Using Freud's definition of the 'pleasure principle' as the instinctual seeking of pleasure and avoidance of pain, Lacan suggests that 'jouissance' is a more irrational seeking of pleasure, which may lead on to pain, related to 'transgressive violations, the breaching of boundaries and breaking of barriers'.[51]

This is a very different view from that of Paul Ricoeur, who makes clear the difference between the 'finitude of pleasure' and the infinitude of 'happiness', which latter he describes as 'the perfection of the total work of man … the termination of a destiny … the fullness of … beatitude'. For Ricoeur, the temporary satisfaction of pleasure, which as something rooted in finitude, is necessarily flawed and fallible, has eclipsed the 'perfection of pleasure' found in true happiness. Drastic action is needed: 'A certain suspension of pleasure is necessary for the radical significance of happiness to be made clear and for pleasure itself to be reaffirmed.'[52]

But the twenty-first-century Western zeitgeist is, as yet, unlikely to turn to suspension of pleasure. Credos of psychological hedonism – that pleasure or pain are the only things to motivate us – and ethical hedonism – that only pleasure has value – inevitably predominate in our consumerist landscape. Propelled by capitalism, fuelled by advertising, facilitated by a massive media machine, the drive for ever-increasing indulgence has arguably never been stronger and the s-word has been harnessed as part of this consumerist drive. Far from being something from which to flee, sin is seen here as something worth flirting with, perhaps even desiring. 'Sin' is ironic. Despite this, though, does the ironic and often deliberately cynical use of the word still carry echoes of an earlier and deeper meaning? Perhaps we have discovered our first pointer for the recovery of the concept in the Church.

Sexual transition, moral revision

Nowhere, it seems, is the 'sin' word more contended than in the sexual arena. The availability of birth control and the need for population limitation has irrevocably separated sex from procreation in the Western world, and an underlying philosophical drive towards personal freedom has abolished a whole raft of taboos: primarily sex outside marriage and same-sex relationships.

Writing in 1966, Paul Ricoeur seemed to imply that sexuality would not be the future battleground for ethics:

> It is not from meditation on sexuality that a refinement of the consciousness of fault will be able to proceed, but from the non-sexual sphere of existence: from human relations created by work, appropriation, politics.[53]

Ricoeur must have been aware of the 'sexual revolution' of the 1960s, but perhaps he underestimated how much further it had to run. Nearly fifty years on, issues of sexuality are still proving to be a major field of conflict, at least within the Church. It remains to be seen, however, whether our preoccupation with this arena leads to the 'refinement of the consciousness of fault' that Ricoeur desired.

Obsolete taboo, unnatural disapproval

The underlying morality of sex had, of course, begun to shift very much earlier than the 'swinging 60s'. Writing in the 1970s, the psychiatrist Karl Menninger asked the same question as this paper in his book *Whatever Became of Sin?* He came up with a surprising answer. It was all down to masturbation:

> The amazing circumstance is that some time after the turn of the present century, this ancient taboo, for the violation of which millions had been punished, threatened, condemned, intimidated and made hypocritical and cynical – a taboo thousands of years old – vanished almost overnight! … It is not difficult to see why ALL sin other than 'crime' seemed to many to have disappeared along with this one.[54]

Whether the change was quite as instant as Menninger claims is arguable, but certainly nowadays no one believes the rumours of blindness, hairy hands and stunted growth. Even the Catholic Church has toned down much of its previous rhetoric against masturbation, while still teaching that it is 'an intrinsically and seriously disordered act'.[55] But in describing the changed views of Western society at large, Menninger is surely right that 'the great phenomenon of a deadly sin suddenly disappearing … without anyone noticing it, affected our attitude to other disapproved behaviour'.[56]

Curiously, though, masturbation is still a taboo subject, or at least it is in serious contexts. It is a different matter when it comes to humour, where it has become the source of numerous jokes: famously, there is Cameron Diaz's hair gel in *There's Something about Mary* (1998), and the incident on the *Peep Show* where the only thing Jeremy can find to arouse his fantasies at a sperm bank is the image of the Queen on a £20 note.[57] It is now even acceptable to joke about female masturbation.[58] In *Gavin and Stacey,* for example, Nessa borrows some AA batteries for 'a bit of me-time' and Stacey comments, 'I had three just watching *Cash in the Attic.*'[59]

In the internet era, however, with ever-available and increasingly extreme pornography exploitatively using women and children for arousal, and with sex addiction reported as massively on the increase, perhaps masturbation should again be taken seriously.[60]

But beyond the harm done by the practice itself is another danger. Masturbation's status in moral discourse (or perhaps, its lack of status) is a telling indicator of the contemporary attitude towards 'sin' in general. When society sweeps away a taboo such as this, the whole concept of sin is discredited. As John Portmann remarks, referring to masturbation, alongside birth control and loss of virginity: 'Since so few people believe in them any more, these over-the-hill sins risk ruining the reputation of other, genuinely dangerous sins.'[61]

Lost reputation, beleaguered institution

It is not only the sins, however, that risk losing their reputation in today's culture, but also the Church itself. Here I will focus primarily on the Roman Catholic Church, because it has been such a target for contemporary media, as an authority structure discredited and in disarray. To serve as examples, let us look at two recent films.

The movie *Calvary*, released in 2014, has one of the most original openings in cinema. In the confessional, an unseen parishioner tells the priest, 'I first tasted semen when I was seven years old.'

'That's certainly a startling opening line,' replies Father James, and the man goes on to explain that he was raped by a priest, orally and anally, for five years. He states that in revenge for this crime he is going to kill Father James in one week's time.

> There'd be no point in killing a bad priest. But killing a good one, that'd be a shock, wouldn't it. I'm going to kill you, Father … because you've done nothing wrong. I'm going to kill you because you're innocent.

Thus the film's premise is set up and it takes us through the week leading to Father James' personal Calvary. Every parishioner seems to have some dark secret to hide, and the laconic priest accepts them all, not without challenge, but certainly without blame: 'I think there's too much talk about sins, to be honest … I think forgiveness has been highly under-rated.' Despite his matter-of-fact kindness, his parishioners are cynical. One comments behind his back: 'Good man, fine man, makes you wonder what he's hiding.' The most telling moment comes when the priest catches up with a little girl walking alone down a country lane. He chats quietly, walking alongside her, until the girl's father drives up and angrily gathers up the child, his silent fury indicating the assumption that a priest alone with a child must be contemplating paedophilia.

The priest keeps his appointment at the beach and meets his death, taking upon himself the sins of the Church of which he is part.[62] The film interestingly explores the true biblical concept of the scapegoat, in which the innocent creature has the sins of the whole community it represents loaded on to it. Sins and scapegoats are perhaps never far from one another.

It is no surprise that *Calvary* was set in Ireland, where in 2009 the Ryan Report exposed 'endemic' physical and sexual abuse in church-run schools and orphanages: 800 alleged abusers in more than 200 institutions during a period of 35 years.[63]

In a recent TV series entitled *Sex and the Church*, Diarmaid MacCullough described how in recent years country after country has uncovered stories of priests abusing those in their care. It was not only a problem in Catholicism, he conceded, but added: 'Catholics have gone much further in trying to conceal it. Successive popes and bishops have been more worried about protecting the Church from scandal. The Church depends on trust. In thousands of cases it has forfeited that trust.'[64]

Another recent movie, also set in Ireland and based on a true story, told of a different aspect of abuse. *Philomena* tells of a woman whose illegitimate son was taken from her without warning by the nuns with whom as a teenager she received shelter. Her quest to find him, aided by the journalist Martin Sixsmith, leads eventually back to the old mother and baby home where they discover the son's ashes buried in the adjoining graveyard. Philomena is determined to forgive, but Sixsmith is incensed that this information had been withheld from her. The following snatch of dialogue encapsulates reactions both inside the Church and out:

> Sister: 'Those girls have nobody to blame but themselves and their carnal incontinence. What do you expect me to do about it now?'
>
> Sixsmith: 'I tell you what you could do. Say Sorry. Apologise. Stop trying to cover things up. Get out there and clear all the weeds and crap off the graves of the mothers and babies who died in childbirth.'
>
> Sister: 'Their suffering was atonement for their sins.'
>
> Sixsmith: 'One of those mothers was 14 years old!'
>
> Sister: 'The Lord Jesus Christ will be my judge, not the likes of you.'
>
> Sixsmith: 'Really? I think if Jesus was here now, he'd tip you out of that fucking wheelchair and you wouldn't get up and walk.'[65]

Sin and atonement are closely linked here; in this case the Sister's response showed she felt the mothers and babies were experiencing atonement, while Sixsmith's response indicates he felt they were being scapegoated. This difference of perspective highlights the contemporary uncertainty over where to locate and how to describe personal responsibility, which is thus a contributing factor to the slippage of the usage of the s-word.

In April 2014 Pope Francis did show himself willing to apologise, taking responsibility for child sex abuse by clergy and asking forgiveness for the damage caused. He committed the Catholic Church to stronger action on child protection and tougher penalties to offenders.[66] But despite the Pope's best efforts the Catholic Church has a long way to go to regain trust and respect. Perhaps popular reaction to Catholic scandals can best be summed up by graffiti artist Banksy, who in 2011 made a sculpture entitled *Cardinal Sin.* The work featured a replica stone bust of a cardinal with the face sawn off and replaced by mosaic bathroom tiles to give a pixelated effect. Banksy commented, 'At this time of year [Christmas] it's easy to forget the true meaning of Christianity – the lies, the corruption, the abuse.'[67]

Abuse issues are at least clear-cut. No one doubts that such institutional corruption deserves the label 'sin'. It stands in its own category of wrongdoing, more to do with power and control than lust per se, while also pointing up the dangers of repression inherent in celibacy. When it comes to sexual activity by consenting adults, however, it is a different issue. In official Catholic Church documents, the term 'living in sin' continues to be used for those in any sexual relationships outside marriage (including remarried divorcees), and the Church officially bans such people from receiving communion. Pope Francis, who is forthright and frequent in his use of the s-word, has largely avoided the term in reference to sexual matters and is working hard to loosen attitudes. In March 2015 an old family friend of the Pope leaked the news that the pontiff had privately told a divorced woman 'living in sin' that she could receive Holy Communion. The Vatican did not deny the news but said that 'if' the Pope had these conversations they were private and did not have any bearing on the teaching of the Church.[68]

All the while, as the institution resists change, its attitude to sex is frequently derided by outsiders, particularly those who were previously inside. The once logical connections between sin, atonement and salvation have been turned inside out as the Church's stance is considered utterly untenable. Pop diva Madonna, who has a long history of shock tactics using religious iconography, illustrated this recently with her song 'Holy Water', released in March 2015:

> I can let you in heaven's door
> I promise you it's not a sin
> Find salvation deep within
> We can do it here on the floor.[69]

In these lyrics what was once considered 'sin' now becomes salvation, and Madonna takes it upon herself to provide a priestly absolution.

In 2014, a newer and more thoughtful artist, Irish rock musician Hozier, had a hit single with a related message in 'Take Me to Church'. Against a video depicting gay intimacy, the lyrics claim, 'There is no sweeter innocence than our gentle sin.' The Church he describes, however, is harsh and unforgiving:

> Every Sunday's getting more bleak
> A fresh poison every week …
> Take me to church
> I'll worship like a dog at the shrine of your lies
> I'll tell you my sins so you can sharpen your knife.[70]

In an interview, Hozier explained how the song grew out of his childhood frustration with his church background: 'Growing up, I always saw the hypocrisy of the Catholic Church. The history speaks for itself and I grew incredibly frustrated and angry.'[71] In another interview, he elaborated further:

> [T]he church through its doctrine would undermine humanity by successfully teaching shame about sexual orientation … There is still that kind of public relations tactical retreat of saying 'We love the sinner but we hate the sin'. It's a backhanded way of telling someone to be ashamed of who they are and what they do.[72]

Vocal protest, quiet retreat

The use of the word 'sin' to engender a sense of shame is also recognised by the other end of the theological spectrum; for instance, Micah J. Murray, an evangelical media commentator, says:

> I'm done. I can't look my gay brother in the eye anymore and say 'I love the sinner but hate the sin' … Despite my theological disclaimers about how I'm just as much a sinner too, it's not the same. We don't use that phrase for everybody else. Only them. Only 'the gays' … It's a special sort of condescending love we've reserved for the gay community.[73]

The application of the word 'sin' to homosexual activity brings the issues surrounding the term into sharp relief. It seems that no use of the word 'sin' provokes as much rage, both considered and irrational, as when applied to homosexuals, as these news items demonstrate:

> A born-again Christian nursery worker … was fired for gross misconduct after telling a lesbian colleague her lifestyle was a sin.[74]
>
> Singer Ariana Grande turned to the Kabbalah faith after her homosexual brother was rejected by the Catholic faith. 'When my brother was told God didn't love him, I was like, "OK, that's not cool" … [The Church] said Spongebob Squarepants is gay and he's a sinner and should burn in hell …'[75]
>
> Actress Lea DeLaria unleashed an expletive-filled rant at a Bible preacher on a New York subway train … The exchange became more unpleasant when he mentioned the 'sin' of homosexuality.[76]

One of the reasons that the application of the s-word to homosexuality has brought it into such sharp contention is that, while 'love the sinner and hate the sin' is a regular mantra of the Church, it is difficult to separate identity and activity in the sexual arena. Homosexuality, as with all sexuality, not only describes certain behaviours, but also profoundly embraces someone's sense of identity, and so it is often felt that to call it 'sin' therefore implies a wholesale rejection of a person's humanity.

It is for this reason that there has in some quarters been a retreat from using the s-word in this context. So, for instance, evangelical leader Steve Chalke rocked the evangelical community in 2013 by taking a stand for gay marriage, refusing to treat gay people as 'pariahs' and 'blame them for who they are'.[77] Similarly, both Pope Francis and Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby have asked identical questions recently in relation to homosexuality: 'Who am I to judge?' The Pope asked it of reporters in 2013: 'If a person is gay and seeks God and has good will, who am I to judge?'[78] He did, however, restate the Catholic position that homosexual acts were sinful, while orientation was not. The Archbishop's comment, at a question and answer session with sixth-formers in Highgate in 2012, went a little further: 'I see my own selfishness and weakness and think "Who am I to judge them for their sins?", *if they have sins* [my emphasis]. We shouldn't demonise and dismiss and hate each other as that is so dangerous.'[79]

However, he too was careful to uphold his Church's position by reiterating opposition to gay marriage. These statements show a humility and compassion that must be applauded, but they do, of course, raise a rather large question. If the two senior church leaders of the Western world describe themselves as unqualified to judge, then who, if anyone, can evaluate what is sinful behaviour any more, and on what basis can they do it?

Silent avoidance, spiritual vacuum

The danger of avoiding sin-talk in the sexual arena is that it easily leads to throwing out the concept of personal sin altogether. It can create a strange vacuum, as theologian Patrick Cheng discovered. In his book *From Sin to Amazing Grace: Discovering the Queer Christ,* Cheng explains how, after encountering religious rejection for his homosexuality, he eventually found acceptance in the Metropolitan Community Church of New York:

> One of the things that puzzled me, however, was that sin or grace was rarely discussed from the pulpit. Yes, there was a condemnation of the evils of homophobia within religious and secular institutions. And yes, there was a condemnation of structural evils such as racism, sexism, poverty and violence. However there was little to no discussion about individual sins that separated us from God, our neighbours and our true selves. Nor was there any discussion of the amazing grace that made us whole … At best, I have found that LGBT[80] Christians try not to think too much about the issues of sin and grace … We convince ourselves that the doctrine of sin has outlived its usefulness and … downplay or avoid the topic.[81]

While Cheng acknowledges that 'This silence is understandable because so many LGBT people have been deeply wounded by sin-talk', he points out that 'Ignoring the doctrines of sin and grace deprives us of the theological tools to describe the true state of the world'.[82]

Continued need, renewed understanding

The yearning for change

There are small signs that it is not only within the theological arena that there is a yearning for the language of sin.

One of the most highly applauded TV drama series of recent times is *Breaking Bad*, where mild-mannered chemistry teacher Walter White discovers he has cancer and, wanting to provide for his family, decides to cook up and sell crystal meth. It's a story about a good man becoming a monster, though it does so without recourse to prescriptive morality and certainly not the s-word. However, it certainly evokes it. 'Sin lives at the centre of this show,' wrote one journalist,[83] while another commentator described it as demonstrating 'why society still needs sin language'.[84] The show's creator, Vince Gilligan, has described Walt as being suffused with 'sin' and as someone who 'corrodes and ultimately destroys the healthy people round him'. 'Maybe on some level what I'm intending is to explore a world where actions do have consequences,'[85] says Gilligan. 'I feel some sort of need for biblical atonement, or justice or something.'[86]

A similar sort of yearning is expressed by Katie Carr, a character in Nick Hornby's novel *How to be Good*. When she bumps into her depressed brother in church, an unlikely venue for both of them, he asks why she is there:

> 'I wanted to be forgiven.'
> 'For what?'
> 'For all the shitty things I do,' I say.
> Mark [the brother] only just made my guilt-list, and when I look at him now that seems almost laughably complacent …
> 'You don't do anything shitty.'
> 'Thank you, but I'm human. That's how humans spend their times, doing shitty things.'[87]

At an earlier point in the novel, Katie describes what drove her to the church:

> When I look at my sins (and if I think they're sins, then they are sins), I can see the appeal of born-again Christianity. I suspect that it's not the Christianity that is so alluring, it's the rebirth. Because who wouldn't wish to start all over again?[88]

The dilemma of language

It is clear that the word 'sin' is in trouble. It is no longer common currency, or at least not in the way the Church has understood it for centuries. Moreover, use of the word is frequently dismissed as a bad thing in itself – though not everyone is quite so damning as Richard Dawkins, with his assertion that 'The Christian focus is overwhelmingly on sin sin sin sin sin sin sin sin sin sin. What a nasty little preoccupation to have in your life.'[89]

However you describe it, though, society continues to have a deep malaise, which needs to be diagnosed and named. While the word itself may be in trouble, an understanding of sin is indispensable, as theologian Alasdair MacIntyre asserts: 'Christianity would collapse without a working sense of sin.'[90]

Karl Menninger maintains, ‘The clergyman [*sic*] cannot minimize sin and maintain his proper role in our culture.’[91] Without an understanding of sin, one cannot fully grasp the concepts of grace and mercy, let alone justice and restoration.

This then is the dilemma: in the face of widespread changes in meaning, can the word ‘sin’ really still be used, given that the concept remains so crucial? Since we cannot wipe the slate clean, how do we cope with its residual cultural usage, which as we have seen is often far from helpful?

Some pointers for change

In conclusion, then, what pointers for the rehabilitation of sin-talk can we draw from our survey of its use (and avoidance) in contemporary culture?

Francis Spufford, with whom we began, offers one route. He works around the difficulties of the word ‘sin’ by appealing instead to the ‘common ground’ of human experience. Speaking about ‘the HPtFTu’, Spufford suggests that ‘almost everyone recognises this as one of the truths about themselves’.[92] Spufford’s example illustrates one way of recognising that religious language, like all jargon, only communicates to the initiated. Since we live in an uninitiated society, creative communication is necessary. As Rowan Williams has suggested, ‘The most effective depictions of God and grace and Christ these days are going to be sideways on and a bit different.’[93] Spufford’s phrase is nothing if not ‘sideways’ and ‘a bit different’.

The other route, of course, is to recover the word ‘sin’ itself. If, as Paul Tillich claims, ‘There is a mysterious fact about the great words of our religious tradition. They cannot be replaced … There are no substitutes for words like “sin” and “grace”’,[94] then this must be the challenge. It does, however, require a massive degree of re-education, both inside the Church and beyond. Perhaps an important first step is to begin with concrete biblical images as opposed to abstract words.

Picture language such as ‘stain’, ‘trespass’, ‘burden’ and ‘bondage’, for example, may resonate much more with human experience (which is why the Bible is so full of it). Care must be taken, however, with metaphors that potentially convey the wrong image. ‘Debt’ and ‘disobedience’, for example, are grounded in sound biblical concepts, but, without that background, immediately conjure up images of a demanding, autocratic God, which could be counter-productive. Pope Francis uses what might be one of the more appropriate metaphors for our generation, describing the Church as a field hospital and stating that 'Sin is a wound. It needs to be treated, healed.'[95]

Whatever happened to sin? We have seen that 'sin', with its sense of personal responsibility, has slipped from our contemporary mindset, leaving behind only ironic and trivial usages, and the term 'evil' as the remaining category by which to diagnose society's malaise. Our challenge is to recover both the concept and an appropriate language to articulate it. Recognising that the residual usage of the s-word includes echoes of its former, fuller meaning is one place to start.

Appendix

Systematic trawl through database Newsstand UK of entries for 16-day period, 2–17 March 2015, http://search.proquest.com/news (accessed 16–24/03/15)

Entries for the word 'sin'

Total entries			**764**
Duplicated articles		207	
Word used in foreign language, or name		30	
Working total			**527**

Contemporary use of term			**284**
Sin bin – Rugby, ice-hockey		267	
Sin bin – general		9	
Sin stock – investments in tobacco, defence etc.		4	
Sin taxes/levy – tax on alcohol, tobacco etc.		4	

Media references			**60**
Sins of fathers/parents – ref to film *Run All Night*		23	
Seven Deadly Sins– TV series		23	
Book titles	– *14th Deadly Sin*	5	
	– *2nd Deadly Sin*	1	
	– *The Sin Eater's Daughter*	1	
Song lyrics	– 'Guilty as Sin'	2	
	– 'Holy Water'	1	
	– 'Devil Pray'	1	
	– 'Sins of St Catherine'	1	
Crossword clues		2	

Figures of speech		**111**
Use of word as provoking disapproval	23	
Use of word for ironic/mild wrongdoing	22	
Cardinal sin	15	
Sins of omission	7	
Covering a multitude of sins	7	
Sins of fathers – general	6	
Seven deadly sins – general	6	
Miserable as sin	5	
For my sins	3	
Guilty as sin	3	
Living in sin	2	
Valley of sin	1	
Atoning for sins	1	
Be sure your sins will find you out	1	
Love the sinner, hate the sin	1	
Religious use		**25**
Articles or letters in local papers	18	
Christian Science Monitor	5	
Notices of church services	2	
Use as serious issue		**28**
Abandoning elderly	9	
Racism	6	
Debt and finance	5	
Murder/violence	2	
Gay	2	
Religious education	1	
Envy	1	
Selfishness	1	
Pornography	1	
Use in other contexts		**19**
Varied historical references	9	
Islam	9	
Hinduism	1	

Entries for word ‘evil’

Total entries		**861**
(Duplicated articles	54)	
Working total		**805**
Crime		**105**
Murder (murder of 8-year-old Ayesha Ali, by mother and lesbian lover)	43	
Child abuse	19	
Attacks	16	
Sex crime/rape	15	
Other	10	
Islam/terrorists (trial of Jihadi John)		**105**
Serious		**104**
Nazism	11	
Condemnation of gays	9	
Drugs	6	
Political right/UKIP	6	
Tobacco	6	
Communism	5	
Russia post-Communism	5	
Dog poisoning (at Crufts)	5	
China power and oppression	4	
Crowd taunt suicidal man	4	
Cruel Tweets	4	
‘Possessed’ child	4	
Colonialism	3	
Climate change	2	
Tax avoidance	2	
Chemical weapons Syria	2	
North Korean regime	2	
Racism	2	
Political hypocrisy	1	
Catholicism	1	
Misused Third World aid	1	
Illiteracy and innumeracy	1	
Other	20	

Ironic		**39**
Tories	6	
Mourinho	4	
Capitalism/profit motive	3	
FiFA	2	
Rupert Murdoch	2	
Feminists	2	
Predatory men	2	
State	2	
Scottish Parliament conspiracy	2	
Fossil fuels	1	
UKIP	1	
Tony Blair	1	
British Armed Forces	1	
Other	10	
Trivial		**39**
Sugar	5	
Motorists as seen by cyclists	2	
Culinary – calorific	2	
Alcoho l	2	
Spin doctor 'evil genius'	1	
Fashion industry	1	
Baby formula milk	1	
Large conglomerates	1	
Eastern Europeans Eurovision	1	
Chocolate	1	
Other	22	
Drama: film, TV, theatre		**232**
Novels		**37**
Computer games		**18**
Historical		**20**
Superstition/evil spirits (Friday 13th, eclipse)		**33**

Religious		**18**
Local paper	13	
National papers opinion	3	
Christian Science Monitor	2	

Figures of speech		**55**
Necessary evil	19	
Hear, see, speak no evil	19	
Lesser/greater of evils	7	
Putting off evil day	2	
Give the evil eye	1	
Love of money …	1	
Root of all evil (other)	1	
Triumph of good over evil	1	
Other	4	

Entries for ‘sin’ and ‘evil’ together

Total references		**15**
Number of which are Irish	6	

Serious references		**6**
Evil tobacco etc. – sin stocks	2	
Slave railroad	1	
Mary MacAleese on Catholic reform	1	
Irish memoir	1	
Boko Haram	1	

Trivial		**3**
Evil eye-patch – Seven Deadly Sins	1	
Evil bounce – sin bin (rugby)	1	
Evil villain - *Sin City*	1	

Figures of speech		**2**
Putting off evil day – sins of omission	1	
Lesser of two evils – grave sins	1	

Religious use		**4**
Local papers	3	
Christian Science Monitor	1	

Notes

1. Paul Flowers, *Newsnight*, 25 March 2014, www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-26734513 (accessed 07/07/14).
2. Vallely 2014, p. 7.
3. Francis Spufford 2012, p. 28.
4. Spufford 2012, p. 24.
5. See the Appendix for a full analysis. Source: www.newsstand.co.uk (accessed 16–18/03/15).
6. Zoe Williams, 'Opinion: Bring on the sin bin for MPs', *Guardian*, 2 March 2015.
7. 'Cadbury is being led to disaster', *Birmingham Mail*, 5 March 2015.
8. Janine Thomas, 'Want sweet success in the kitchen?', *Daily Mail*, 10 March 2015.
9. 'Top searched destinations of 2015', *Manchester Evening News*, 14 March 2015.
10. Jeff Prestridge, 'Ofgem's "ban" is in a league of its own', *Mail on Sunday*, 8 March 2015.
11. Brian Appleyard, 'If the shoe fits', *Sunday Times*, 15 March 2015.
12. Gillie Sutherland, *Express & Echo* (Exeter), 9 March 2015.
13. Anthony Cummins, 'The Critics: Fiction', *Observer*, 8 March 2015.
14. Spufford 2012, p. 24.
15. Both these examples were artificially swollen by new media releases: the first the film *Run All Night*, where a press release must have fed the term into every review; the second a TV series, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, exploring how animals present behaviours in the same 'sinful' categories.
16. www.collinsdictionary.com.
17. Katie Glass, 'Glass House: Help, I'm a serial flat-sharer', *Sunday Times*, 8 March 2015.
18. 'It's spring and the Sun is out', *Sun*, 6 March 2015.
19. Bishop Kevin Doran, quoted in 'Gay People are not necessarily parents', *Kildare Nationalist*, 9 March 2015.
20. Christopher Woodhouse, 'Preacher claims 50 shades could cause sex crimes', *Belfast Telegraph*, 8 March 2015.
21. 'Christian nursery worker rejected yoga', *Daily Telegraph*, 4 March 2015.
22. 'Quote of the week', *Mail on Sunday*, 8 March 2015.
23. Joe Hinton, 'Dozens of UK Jihadis dying on front line', *Daily Star*, 8 March 2015.
24. 'Boko Haram swears allegiance to Isil', *Daily Telegraph*, 7 March 2015.
25. Boyd Tonkin (speaking of Jeremy Clarkson's dismissal from *Top Gear*), 'Aging, middle-class, right-wing', *The Independent*, 14 March 2015.
26. For more detail, again see Appendix.
27. Figure swollen by reports on 'Jihadi John'.
28. Of these, six appeared in Irish papers, a higher incidence noticeable in the separate usages as well.
29. Of the total number of references, the highest other category was fiction with 287 entries, followed by crime with 105. Twenty-two referred to the societal evils of various substances: drugs, tobacco, alcohol, sugar, baby formula milk (though only one mention of the evils of money). Apart from terrorists and criminals, the only individuals mentioned as evil (all ironically) were well-known institutional figures. Most others were figures of speech or ironic and trivial mentions.

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‘Lifting the shell’: expressions of emotion and cross-cultural struggle in international students

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Research has shown that while humans around the world hold various emotions in common with one another – sadness, happiness, fear and anger – the expression of these emotions can look different depending on the culture. This article explores the different expressions of ‘struggle’ that arise when a person experiences ‘culture shock’ or ‘culture stress’ due to life in a cross-cultural context. The article argues that in the increasingly international context of higher education, urgent attention needs to be given to these different cultural expressions of struggle, in order to better understand students’ experiences and provide effective coping strategies. Richard Lewis’s cultural model is developed for use in this context.

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Seperti katak dibawah tempurung –
Like a frog under a coconut shell.
(a Malay proverb)

Culture, for all its shadow and light, is essential and intimate to humanity. And like any intimacy, no one 'from outside' can ever fully share it, and no one 'from inside' can ever fully describe it. Such is human culture.[1]

Introduction: interpreting need and defining terms

A distraught face looked back at me as I opened the door. 'I've lost my knitting!' Forty-five minutes late for our meeting together, my Chinese friend looked incredibly upset. Linda had been meeting up with one of our volunteer team to learn how to knit, and a few East Asian students had joined in. The students would go away and practice, sometimes drawing in the expertise of their host families to help out. It connected cultures naturally, and significant conversations developed. What I learnt later was that they had been learning how to knit a baby's jumper. Linda said to me that she didn't feel ready to have a child yet, but as they had learnt how to knit they had discussed their hopes for the future when they would return home, and all the students expressed a desire to start a family. Out of these discussions Linda had decided to knit a baby jumper and it was this little jumper – nearly finished – that she had lost.

Days earlier Linda had been asked about her future hopes in a volunteer team meeting. Linda hadn't read the expressions in the faces of the group as they prepared to respond, despite the fact that Linda knew each member of the group well, and had spent a lot of time with them over the year. Her response had been lighthearted. However, in the knitting group, gathered around a communal, creative activity, with people from a similar cultural background, she was better able to read the expressions of those around her and make a connection with her own vulnerabilities and desires. This led to her being able to express herself more openly.

Meanwhile, back at the lost jumper. After an exhaustive search and much prayer on her part, the knitting wasn't found. Linda had to deal with the disappointment of losing something precious to her; something that she had formed over weeks and months, that she had put much work and heart into. She wrestled through the experience of 'prayers unanswered', along with a nagging fear that it somehow even symbolised a possible end to her future hopes for a family back home.

These questions of 'return' for international students are very significant struggles: once hopes and ambitions of studying in the UK have been achieved, what do students return home to? It can lead to nervous and even superstitious feelings about the future projected into present reality.

This example from my work illustrates one of the reasons for the focus of this article: that of communicating and understanding emotions across cultural spectra. International students, by the very nature of crossing cultural boundaries and stepping well out of their comfort zones, are perhaps most likely to face feeling low because of the strains of cross-cultural adaptation. This has been defined as 'culture shock' or 'culture stress'. Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines culture shock as 'a feeling of confusion, doubt, or nervousness caused by being in a place (such as a foreign country) that is very different from what you are used to'.[2] I prefer to use the term 'culture stress', because it gives a more accurate picture of an ongoing struggle, rather than a fleeting shock that passes in a single moment. Culture stress includes various stages, where a person responds to a new culture, sometimes described as 'fun, fright, flight/fight, fit'.[3] For every person these stages will take different lengths of time, some people taking months to work through each stage, others taking much shorter periods of time. When people experience the fight and flight/fight stages, the emotions can be very marked indeed, even if they had been expecting them – which many students are not – sometimes to the extent that others may think that the student is suffering from depression.

The complicated nature of depression and diagnosis thereof has been covered extensively by many authors and practitioners. It is a contentious topic and there are many opinions and theories about its diagnosis and treatment.[4] In 2012, Professor George Christodoulou wrote an article for World Mental Health Day where he names the difference between struggle and depression as being 'between an "adaptive" and a "dysfunctional" response to an adverse life event'. He notes, however, that this distinction 'is sometimes difficult' to spot.[5] When working with students who are battling through culture stress, where a new culture feels alien to them, these 'adaptive' struggles are to be anticipated and those walking alongside students need to be ready to spot the symptoms and listen through the process. Students can sometimes feel that they will not move through this difficult time and it can be hard for them to realise that even an intense struggle through culture stress will pass over time. In my own context, the fact that the majority of students I meet come to study for one-year Masters courses means that some students do not move through this painful adjustment before they return back home again.

While the focus of this article is not on depression, it has been helpful to look into research about it in order to gain greater clarity about expressions of depression in different cultures, but also to see how culture stress could perhaps be misconstrued as depression. I have also looked into material covering different communication styles, wondering whether there is a connection between a cultural style of communication and a more cultural response to struggle and depression. The World Health Organization estimates that 350 million people are affected by depression worldwide,[6] which points to the growing global awareness of depression, but also to the challenge of how to spot, diagnose and treat it. While recognising the complexities within this topic, I have found it useful to focus on the World Health Organization's definition of depression as a helpful guide to work from in this article:

> a common mental disorder that presents with depressed mood, loss of interest or pleasure, decreased energy, feelings of guilt or low self-worth, disturbed sleep or appetite, and poor concentration. Moreover, depression often comes with symptoms of anxiety. These problems can become chronic or recurrent and lead to substantial impairments in an individual's ability to take care of his or her everyday responsibilities.[7]

This heightened awareness of depression among the medical profession is helpful for the millions of sufferers who need to be heard and treated appropriately. In my own work I have seen how culture stress has led to depression, and it is important that those ministering to international students are aware of this reality and know how to enable students to seek help where necessary. However, culture stress and indeed depression may look different, depending on each culture, and support may be more usefully received in a variety of ways.[8]

This article, therefore, comes out of a desire to look more deeply at experiences of struggle that many international students face and express when they come to study in the UK – or indeed with reverse culture shock when they return back home.[9] Part of my role in working in international student ministry is providing support for students coming from all over the world, but before being able to support others, it is useful to understand how struggle might be expressed in different cultures and whether there are different cultural responses to it.

Surviving in different cultures

A body of research exists that shows that humans around the world hold various emotions in common with one another – amusement, anger, fear and sadness.[10] While this research shows that sadness occurs across cultures, in

2014 Andrea Horn, Catalina Cañizares and Yvonne Gómez focused on depression and showed that the concepts and ways in which depression is expressed have been found to vary. Furthermore, it is not just a case of recognising that one culture may show depression through physical symptoms and another through emotional expressions,[11] it is also that different cultures have such an unseen influence on human behaviour that feelings of sadness may be shown in a completely opposite way to the one we expected, making it harder for someone of one culture to see sadness or depression in a person of another culture. An example of this was found in Japanese participants smiling when experiencing distress when they were with someone of higher status, but expressing as much negativity as their American peers when they were alone.[12] It is also interesting to note that along with expressions of depression looking different across cultures, so the treatments also vary and some have argued that the Western model of psychotherapy does not fit comfortably within all cultures.[13] Michael Bond, drawing from 20 years of experience as a psychologist and his observations of Chinese culture, wrote *Beyond the Chinese Face*, in which he concluded:

> The psychotherapeutic process as practised in the West is extremely verbal, focused on the self and on the disclosure of personal information, change orientated, and non-directive … As such, it is simply not compatible with Chinese culture.[14]

Bond quotes a Chinese adage, that 'problems within the family should not be discussed outside the family',[15] illustrating a practical outworking of a particular aspect of collectivist Chinese culture rather than a contemporary, Western, individualistic one. He describes the way in which 'discussions with close friends, self-discipline, physical cures … are simply more attractive than talk therapy with stranger-professionals'.[16] Although the World Health Organization attests to depression being 'a common mental disorder', some international students continue to battle with the idea of struggling, let alone being depressed and seeking help for it from an unknown professional.[17]

Of course, within the same culture, an individual will express his or her emotions differently, going through a struggle process at a different pace from another, or perhaps getting stuck in one particular 'phase', while others move on quickly and seemingly without as much pain.[18] Still others may not go through experiences of culture shock at all and find the process of arriving in a different culture very exciting.[19] So while generalisations are helpful it is important to hold that in tension with the reality that each human being is made up of an incredibly complex network of relationships, life situations and genetic characteristics, not simply the culture they come from.

In the story of any international student coming to study in the UK, there will be a variety of main characters: the international student herself/himself, the institution that the student is studying in, and people that the student comes into contact with. However, there also exists a far more important layer, one which is almost entirely invisible to people whom they meet: that of their home culture and background. This is made up of language, family, friends, food, weather, temperament, unspoken 'norms' and subconscious reactions to social cues. Couple this with the new social norms, pedagogy, academic standards and expectations of the academic institution that they have arrived to study in and a more complicated picture emerges. This process of cultural acclimatisation fits into the 'adaptive' model Christodolou wrote about,[20] but can also move into a dysfunctional response.

Supporting learners and learning to support

I am mindful that I also come with my own background: representing the organisation that I work for, my own culture that I grew up in, my own family situation and the experiences that I go through each day. Part of the training that I go through is to be more aware of my own responses and the responses of those around me, having time to understand the students and thinking through their needs, as well as recognising my own. David Augsberger, an Anabaptist minister, who specialises in pastoral care across cultures and with people in conflict, describes this process of observation as having a 'bidirectional strength' – being able to see ourselves and to see others as we and they are.[21] He states that it requires intentional thought and study because it is akin to learning about the atmosphere around us – invisible until compared to another atmosphere.[22] A Malay proverb describes the process in a different way: 'Seperti katak dibawah tempurung' – 'Like a frog under a coconut shell'. This proverb describes the frog thinking that the shell is the whole world until the shell is lifted and the frog meets another environment. When working across cultures it is easy to fall into a trap of thinking of international students as being those for whom the shell is being lifted, but it is important to recognise that we are all 'frogs': our own environments become apparent when our shells are lifted and we see someone else's background.

The intentionality of learning and observation is perhaps all the harder to undertake in the twenty-first century, where developed countries have access to speedy travel and ever-increasing sophistication in technology. It has particular relevance for the – increasingly – affluent international students studying in the UK, because a few hours of air travel leaves little time to reflect on the upcoming arrival in a new place. Technology enables cultural 'norms' of a host culture to be analysed from afar, along with ready communication with loved ones back home. However, the same technology can also provide escapism back to a previous life and it may switch people off to engaging with one another by 'timing out' into gadgets. These challenges illustrate further that those who listen to stories and engage in 'shell lifting' cannot operate in a vacuum.[23] There is a need to engage with diversity more than ever before, to observe fully and be aware of another and of oneself throughout.

This 'bidirectional' process is well illustrated in Tolkein's *The Hobbit*. In the second chapter, the reader finds Bilbo Baggins – a home-loving hobbit – about to sit down for a meal, before being 'gatecrashed' by a group of dwarves and a wizard. His reaction is one of surprise, followed by anger and retreat. And yet, when he wakes the next morning to find them gone, 'in a way he could not help feeling just a trifle disappointed. The feeling surprised him.'[24] Tolkien paints the scene well – of Bilbo's 'coconut shell' being lifted as others came into his space, followed by the desire somehow to journey along with them rather than to return to his shell alone.

Supporting students through their and my own journey means sitting both under and outside the shell: someone who is of my own culture, and yet one who also stands with a foot in someone else's. This enables a greater opportunity to listen and share life together. In my own experience, it is more comfortable to do this when things are positive. When struggle hits, it is natural for an individual to retreat under their familiar shell; not only that, but with an expectation for others to follow. When someone retreats for comfort because they're struggling, it may be necessary to understand where it is they have found safety and perhaps try to go there with them. This love and 'being with' comes out of a Christian basis of the nature of God as love,[25] and is shown most particularly in the nature of Jesus (John 1:14; Philippians 2:5–8), demonstrating God's love through incarnational ministry with and among people. These foundations help to understand Christian hospitality and welcome, and they underpin international student ministry, working with students from all over an increasingly globalised world.

Amid the opportunities for many to travel and explore, some have criticised the growing trend of focusing on the similarities between cultures. Robert Hughes writes as *Time* magazine's art critic and, in his book *The Culture of Complaint*, he suggests that there is a need to step into engaging also with the differences in order to bring together a fragmented modern-day America. He suggests that it is necessary to acknowledge 'that the differences between races, nations, cultures … are at least as profound and durable as their similarities; that these differences are not divagations from a European norm, but structures eminently worth knowing about for their own sake'.[26] Interestingly, writing from a different context, Pat Grant has researched cultural differences within staff teams of counsellors, and he echoes the same point: to engage with the many differences in order to appreciate the individual more.[27] When encountering students from all over the world, there exists the exciting challenge of having wide-ranging world-views walking alongside each other – postmodern cultures sitting alongside cultures with 'pre-modern cultural assumptions';[28] people from one religion studying with someone from another and giving equal rights between men and women – whether or not this would take place in both cultures.[29]

Becoming aware of the symptoms of difference

Given inherent cultural differences from around the world and the sheer volume of material, my aim is to focus on a few cultures in the hope that through researching what others have written on the subject of communication, I can discover whether different ways of communication in cultures are echoed with different expressions of struggle and responses to it – for example, is a naturally talkative culture therefore more likely to talk about struggle? In order to do this, I have found a practical model created by Richard Lewis for helping businesses engage with cultural differences particularly helpful. This model has been used as a guide in Lewis's training to show 'how our own culture and language affect the ways in which we organise our world, think, feel and respond,'[30] and when someone showed me a picture of the model it led to wondering whether helpful connections could be drawn within my own field of work.

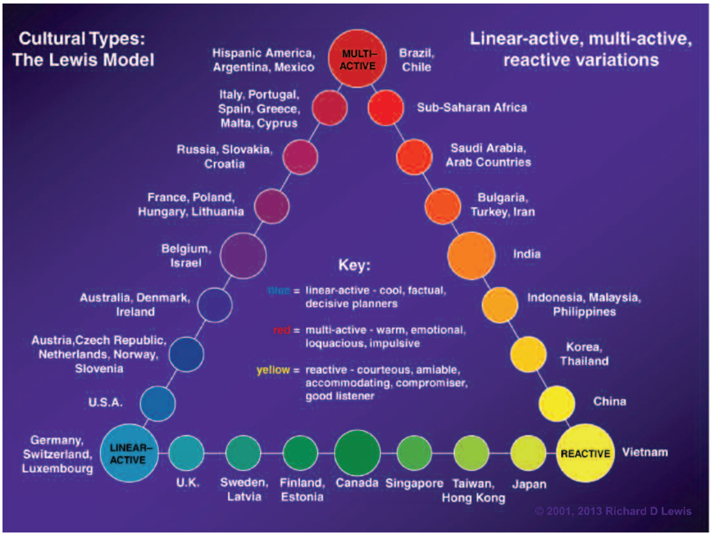
Cultural Types:
The Lewis Model
Linear-active, multi-active, reactive variations
MULTI-ACTIVE
Hispanic America, Argentina, Mexico
Brazil, Chile
Italy, Portugal, Spain, Greece, Malta, Cyprus
Sub-Saharan Africa
Russia, Slovakia, Croatia
Saudi Arabia, Arab Countries
France, Poland, Hungary, Lithuania
Bulgaria, Turkey, Iran
Belgium, Israel
India
Australia, Denmark, Ireland
Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines
Austria, Czech Republic, Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia
Korea, Thailand
U.S.A.
China
Germany, Switzerland, Luxembourg
LINEAR-ACTIVE
REACTIVE
Vietnam
U.K.
Sweden, Latvia
Finland, Estonia
Canada
Singapore
Taiwan, Hong Kong
Japan
Key:
blue = linear-active - cool, factual, decisive planners
red = multi-active - warm, emotional, loquacious, impulsive
yellow = reactive - courteous, amiable, accommodating, compromiser, good listener
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Figure 1: Richard Lewis's culture model[31]

Richard Lewis's model divides cultures into three types:[32] 'Linear-active', 'Multi-active' and 'Reactive'. I have decided to look at six countries from these categories: the USA and the UK on the 'Linear-active' spectrum; China and Japan on the 'Reactive' spectrum; and Italy and Spain on the 'Multi-active' spectrum. The diagram in Figure 1 shows this division, with countries on a scale between the different nodes.

Under these three different headings, Lewis describes attributes that he sees as common to these cultures. Those who fall into the Linear-active model – for example, the UK and the USA – Lewis suggests, have a tendency to be polite but direct, result-oriented, use restrained body language, and confront difficulties with logic. Multi-actives – for example, Spain and Italy – tend to multi-task, are emotional and relationship-oriented, use unrestrained body language and deal with situations by confronting with emotion. Finally, those from Reactive backgrounds – for example, Japan and China – have a tendency to listen more of the time, react to the actions of others, are polite and indirect, are harmony-oriented, using subtle body language, and tend not to use confrontation.

Notice that these headings do not suggest that Multi-actives are 'more emotional', nor that Linear-actives are incapable of multi-tasking. Just because those in the Reactive group tend to listen more and are perhaps more restrained in expression does not mean that they are not people-focused. It is important to note that these categories from Lewis's model are generalisations, highlighting particular traits, but do not mean that everyone from a particular culture will fit exactly within that cultural description.[33]

Linear-active cultures

In communication terms, the UK and the USA are included on the Linear-active scale, and research into emotional expression showed that people from these cultures tended to express emotion using individualistic words[34] and wanted to express struggle to others more directly,[35] rather than hold back from disclosure.

Interestingly, it has also been noticeable how facial expressions seem to be much stronger for Linear-active cultures than for Reactive cultures. A study by Rachael Jack in 2011 found that Chinese participants relied more on the subtleties in the eyes, whereas British participants' expressions were more noticeable around the mouth and eyebrows.[36] Figure 2 illustrates the difference between Western Caucasians (WC) and East Asians (EA) and how they perceive six basic facial expressions of emotion.

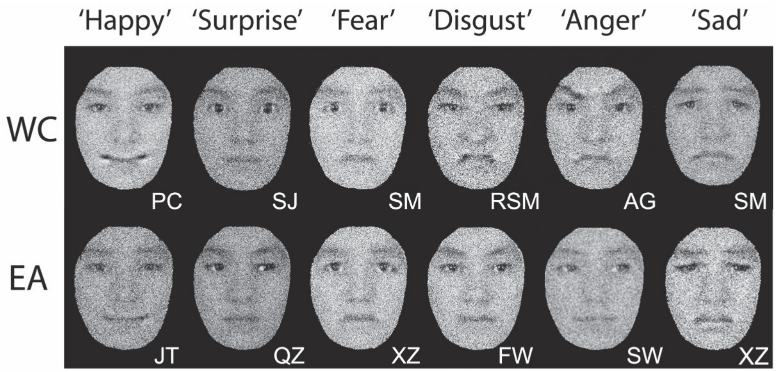

Figure 2: An illustration from research on perception of facial expressions[37]

It is interesting to note the outward expressiveness of the WC faces. The subtler expressions from the EA participants links in with the careful need to establish and maintain harmony with one another, whereas a Westerner may seek to solve an issue using a logical and problem-solving attitude.

Just as, culturally, Linear-actives tended to apply logic and task-oriented methods to a problem, so also their approach to dealing with struggle was to focus on a solution, found often through one-to-one therapy, with a GP in seeking medication, and being up-front about what they felt.[38] Where this didn't happen – for example, through embarrassment – it bucked a more common trend from that culture.[39] It was significant to discover that European-heritage participants were more likely to seek help when struggling with anxiety than their Chinese-heritage participants, even if both sets of participants were living in the USA, known for its more individualistic culture.[40]

A further question arose when looking at the categories of mental disorders, namely that Western wording and references used specifically Western psychotherapeutic models.[41] An example of this is found even in the use of the word 'depression'. Some cultures 'do not have the English equivalent term for depression'.[42] This does not mean that the experience of 'something like depression' doesn't exist, but 'rather that the experience may be embedded in a different cultural context which thus alters its meaning and subjective appraisal'.[43] Junko Tanaka-Matsumi and Anthony Marsella went on to ask Japanese nationals, Japanese Americans and Caucasian Americans for words used to describe 'depression'. Significantly, the words used by Caucasian Americans and Japanese Americans were 'references to internal mood states'.[44] A Reactive culture, such as the Japanese, may seek to live more in harmony with others and nature, but a Western model tended to name the emotion and to 'objectify the … experience'.[45]

Linear-active cultures on the Lewis model are said to communicate in a logical way and are result-oriented in purpose. Perhaps some would think that admitting to depression would not be an acceptable part of that cultural background. However, the overwhelming amount of research shows that people within Western cultures have an open expression of struggle within an individualised model and that they benefit from a boundaried, psychotherapeutic and/or medical model of care. It is interesting to note from Jeanne Tsai and Yulia Chentsova-Dutton[46] that one of the signs of depression is based on a 'depressed mood, loss of interest in pleasurable activities and decreases in self-esteem'. This demonstrates how Linear-active cultures assume 'having positive emotions and feeling good about oneself is a normal and healthy way of being'.[47] Reactive cultures may consider these 'disturbances' as being about interpersonal relationships, with the locus of importance being on social harmony rather than the struggle within an individual. Perhaps Linear-active cultures run the risk of trying to 'treat' struggle as quickly as possible[48] rather than seeing it as a natural – 'adaptive' – response.[49]

Based on the large volume of research from Linear-active cultures, there is much more I could say. However, the very availability of this research by comparison to the more limited amount available for Multi-active and Reactive cultures demands noting here, as it demonstrates the dominance of the Western psychotherapeutic model in this topic and the accessibility of help for depression within these cultures.

Reactive cultures

Reactive cultures include Japan, China and other East Asian cultures. The natural style of communication, represented on the Lewis model, is one of being good listeners, eager to compromise, accommodating and polite. The key to understanding communication in Reactive cultures is to recognise that social harmony is of paramount importance. Reading Michael Bond's book, *Beyond the Chinese Face*, was a fascinating journey for me in considering this topic of communication. To begin with, even the object of learning to communicate in written form has been described as 'a Herculean chore' – while English children need to master 26 letters in their alphabet, Chinese pupils need to learn 214 'radicals'.[50] Education begins at a much younger age and follows a stricter pattern of rote learning and quiet respect for those in authority. This method of education and learning leads to Chinese students learning in silence and repeating what the teacher says.[51] Whereas Linear-active cultures view the individual purpose to be of central importance, Reactive cultures see goals and achievement 'as being for the benefit of a group'.[52] This structured model of finding a place within society, with a strict hierarchy of superiority claims,[53] can lead to individuals not expressing emotion in case it brings shame to someone in authority. Western cultures may place high value on clear and direct consultation and communication, but Chinese culture views this as 'adversarial logic … as they believe it will leave lingering animosity',[54] because 'yesterday's opponent may become tomorrow's superior'[55] and 'a word once uttered cannot be drawn back, even by a team of four horses'.[56] The basic rule in this Reactive culture is to 'honour the hierarchy first, your vision of truth second'.[57]

This focus on social harmony isn't unique to Chinese culture. I have already recorded that research conducted by Tanaka-Matsumi and Marsella revealed that the descriptions of depressive feelings were different across the Western/Eastern divide more generally. It is perhaps not surprising to hear that Japanese nationals used 'external' words such as 'rain, dark, worries, grey, cloudy, suicide, solitude, exams,'[58] rather than internalised words. The writers concluded from their findings that whereas the list of the words from Caucasian Americans are references to individualistic 'mood states',[59] the Japanese nationals are so influenced by their non-individualistic culture that the 'larger social context which surrounds the individual' dominates.[60] Even the Japanese word for person – *ningen* – is made up from two words: 'man' – *nin* – and 'the space between' – *gen* – 'which emphasizes the space between persons as central to an encounter'.[61] If struggle is expressed, it is more likely to treat 'emotional' problems physically, hence trips to herbalists, masseurs and acupuncturists, as more acceptable types of treatment.[62] Within Chinese culture, it is far more likely for people to talk intimately within family or close friendship circles without brief blocks of time spent with a stranger.[63]

Quite apart from who to talk to, however, is the issue of whether to talk at all. One therapist wrote about her observations of being a therapist in Japan:

> Back in the 1980s I remember hearing young mothers encouraging their toddlers to have *gaman:* they were not to whine or complain but to 'endure' … However, its shadow side is that if a Japanese person talks about personal problems it can be perceived (by other Japanese people) as weak and self-indulgent.[64]

This raises a question about different models of care through a time of suffering. The idea of *gaman*, of not mentioning struggle, might feel unhelpful to our Western psychotherapeutic model, but may be the most helpful process for someone from Japan because it fits more widely into their cultural system – to which the student will return at the end of their course of study. One final passing comment is also worth noting, this time based on Chinese culture. Chairman Mao's opinion about psychology has almost certainly made a huge difference to the use of counselling and psychotherapy in China. Mao believed 'the study of psychology was 90 per cent useless with the remaining ten per cent distorted and bourgeois phoney science'.[65] It is important to note, therefore, the emotional, social and psychological hurdles a Chinese student might need to cross in order to visit first a GP, but also then a counsellor.

Multi-active cultures

On Lewis's model of communication, Multi-actives – for example, Hispanic and Mediterranean cultures – are said to be naturally outgoing and emotional, expressive about feelings and very warmly focused on relationships. Interestingly, though, finding research from Multi-active cultures about depression was much harder and there were fewer results about counselling for depression, in comparison to Linear-active (and even Reactive) cultures. Some have suggested this may be to do with economic conditions in Spanish-speaking countries, perhaps leading to fewer resources to input into research about the prevention and treatment of depression.[66] Quite apart from financial constraints, though, the more immediate expression of emotion – more naturally assumed of someone from a Multi-active culture – seemed to be somehow suppressed when it came to depression.[67] One student from Bulgaria – on the Multi-active spectrum – suggested that there was a 'psy-stigma' attached to seeing a counsellor.[68] Although Multi-active and Reactive cultures look very different from each other in methods of communication and expression, one seeming more 'open' than another, there is a strong sense in Reactive cultures to express the problem within the family,[69] whereas research in Multi-active cultures suggested that 75 per cent of participants believed that depression should be 'experienced in solitude'.[70]

Where Reactive cultures have a more collectivist mentality, perhaps reflecting a less individually expressive system, Multi-active cultures tend towards being more individualistic in expression; therefore, they 'reinforce verbal expression of negative emotion …' because 'sharing emotions represents a good form of coping'.[71] It is interesting, considering both the strong sense of individualism in Western countries, but also the communicative nature of emotions in Multi-active cultures, to find research showing a stigmatisation of depression in these same cultures. Figure 3 is a table showing the results from research undertaken in Europe, which reveals the suspicion felt by these participants about people suffering with depression. A higher percentage of participants from Spain even showed unwillingness to offer a job to someone with depression, whereas participants in Germany – a Linear-active culture – had a lower level of concern. Notice, however, the percentage levels in Spain that showed that this same stigma was not carried over into family support.

Don't hire, even if qualified

(Strongly Agree/Agree, combined)

Bulgaria	17.6%
Hungary	26.1%
Spain	29.8%
Germany	13.1%
Iceland	8.1%

Unlikely to be accepted in community

(Strongly Agree/Agree, combined)

Bulgaria	35.2%
Hungary	26.3%
Spain	30.4%
Germany	34.1%
Iceland	17.6%

Willingness to marry into family
(Definitely/Probably Unwilling, combined)

Bulgaria	56.4%
Hungary	61.6%
Spain	47.2%
Germany	46.8%
Iceland	38.0%

Figure 3: Percentage of respondents endorsing stigmatising attitudes towards depression[72]

Having seen the descriptions from Richard Lewis's model, I wonder whether Linear-active cultures see Multi-active cultures as just 'more expressive and exuberant' versions of themselves; and perhaps Multi-active cultures see Linear-actives as being more repressed! And yet, at the point of need, these cultures seem to shift in expression – Multi-actives becoming cautious about expressing depression, but Linear-actives now becoming more overt in naming how they feel. Reactive cultures, while being less forthright in expression most of the time, may come across as more positive when struggling, especially when with people in seniority – in contrast to Linear-active participants, who tended to be consistent in behaviour whatever the context.[73] A tutor may be forgiven for being perplexed about why an East Asian student is indicating that they are struggling, when on the surface she smiles and is eager to please.[74] Michael Bond gives a more detailed observation about the role of 'respectful silence' in learning in Chinese schools.[75] This has huge impact for British pedagogy when Chinese students come to study in the UK.

Symptoms, expressions and words for depression

Another interesting issue to note at this point is about symptoms of struggle and depression: that of 'guilt feelings' in Western cultures, and notably that of presenting depressive symptoms in feelings of guilt. Some have connected this with the Judeo-Christian tradition and individualism that grew from out of Western cultures.[76] Further, Phillip Kendall and Constance Hammen found that non-Western cultures – particularly East Asian and African cultures – presented depression in bodily symptoms of pain and weakness rather than in feelings of self-reproach.[77] Thus, quite apart from different cultural expressions of communication and different ways of expressing depression, there are also different ways of experiencing depression.

A Western model of treating mental illness 'with medication and some cognitive restructuring' has been challenged by some who see it as an inadequate model in comparison to community providing the first and main line of support.[78] While I agree that this challenges a malaise in Western society that has tended towards an isolated experience of living, this challenge doesn't go to the heart of the cultural differences: it is not just that Western societies could become stronger in community care towards others. It is rather that someone from East Asia, for example, may not see themselves as an individual in need of community, but rather that their very identity is made up more profoundly of those with whom they relate. If seeking societal harmony is of greater importance than how an individual feels,[79] then being in a country that doesn't operate in that way is far more fundamentally difficult.

Take an example of a student from China, whose fear of failure and the shame that would bring to his family drives him to work longer and longer hours. His moods become lower and his health deteriorates. He doesn't understand his lecturer, but to express this would bring shame to the lecturer – someone older than him and in a position of authority – so he works all the harder. This problem is not just about struggling to understand, but is about honouring relationships with his family back home – who are counting on him to succeed – as well as his seniors in his host culture. A tutor may observe the work output and see it as a huge achievement – which it is – but the tutor may not realise that the student may well be crying out for help.

Conclusion – a complementary paradigm?

I started this article with a concern for international students and how to spot struggles they may experience, particularly given that different cultures may express struggle and depression differently. The Lewis model gave me tools to understand how different cultures communicate, and how that presents in voicing – or not voicing – struggle and depression. Cultures where people use more logical methods of communication on Lewis's model do not necessarily shy away from discussing the complexities of struggle and depression; and yet people from more expressive cultures seem to hold a greater stigma with regards to depression and tend not to reveal so much of their struggle. More private and hierarchical cultures sometimes hold the group in higher regard than the individual, but struggle is communicated within intimate family groups and handled together more openly. The combination of the variety of ways in which cultures communicate and, separately, the different ways that people express struggle, make it that much harder to work through it when in a cross-cultural environment. Learning to be aware of my own 'shell' and the very different 'shells' of those from other cultures increases awareness of the problems of cross-cultural communication. Being able to lift those shells, even a little, helps to take that first significant step of comprehending the complexities of another's culture and experiences, which are so hard to understand without exposure and interaction.[80] I have gained a deeper appreciation of the task of living alongside – and living with one foot under – others' 'shells,' while also participating within and under a larger 'shell' or story.[81] This feeds into my own theological reflection and ministry to and with individuals from around our diverse globe.

Ten days after losing her knitting, Linda was cycling home, a route she had searched repeatedly in the weeks previously, only to find her knitted baby jumper in good condition lying next to the path. Elated, she returned to her host family, who rejoiced with her. It was a deeply profound faith experience for her, and a sense of hope grew for her future return home.

I began with a story about Linda's knitting and I think it is right to finish here too as I reflect on what it means for me and other Christians engaging with international students to accompany them. These small moments of deep significance for international students are so easily missed. Seeing the background behind the story being told is very hard to spot, particularly when communicated across cultures. In *The Integrity of Pastoral Care,* David Lyall reflects on the progression of practical theology over the decades and concludes that 'theological reflection is only possible when we listen to the stories of individuals and communities as well as to the stories which have shaped the Church and its message'.[82] Listening to stories occurs when we walk alongside people – whether over long periods of time or more briefly – and we take time to understand across the cultures. The knitting group grew out of a desire to enjoy creativity together. Something beautiful grew out of this small group. It wasn't on a term card, or part of a strategic plan, or providing professional care for those in need. And yet it did provide care. Linda later told me of a Japanese friend who was incredibly lonely, so much so that she ended up at the university GP who prescribed antidepressants and counselling. She felt so ashamed about this that she didn't tell her parents, who would have disagreed with this form of medical treatment. Linda told me quietly, 'I think the knitting group might have helped her too,' but by that point the student was considering quitting her course. She later returned home.

Journeying with international students as they struggle in no way detracts from the importance and necessity of professional care, but it has been helpful to reflect on a complementary paradigm of care. This pattern of care began in a different culture, and evolved over thousands of years before the Western psychotherapeutic model grew. It continues to take place in everyday stories that people live and tell around the world today. Drawing alongside international students is a multifaceted ministry, most particularly because, while it comes out of a desire to reflect God's love incarnate (Philippians 2:5–8), it also requires careful consideration of doing so among people of different faiths and backgrounds, who live on the edge of the culture they now inhabit, and often particularly on the edge of the church community in which I dwell and from which I operate.

It can be hard to spot our own cultural idiosyncrasies until we step outside them, hard to recognise that what is normal for one seems strange to another. Meeting one another not only provides the genuine possibility of discovering another person's story – and for the other to do the same about us – but also for us to better understand ourselves. I think a crucial part of my own journey in ministry has been learning both the joys of journeying with others from around the world and also the often inherent awkwardness of it. There are times when it is uncomfortable to communicate and easier to retreat. It has brought a new light and perhaps a deeper meaning for me to the text, 'And the Word became flesh and lived among us' (John 1:14).[83]

Notes

1. Veling 2005, p. 159.
2. http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture%20shock.
3. See https://internexnewzealand.wordpress.com/2015/06/26/internex-new-zealand-fun-fright-flightfight-fit/ and Robinson 2004, pp. 144–149.
4. Indeed, Blazer challenges the notion that depression is simply to be viewed as an individualised, medicalised disease and points to a wider, sociological dimension to research about depression. Blazer 2005, pp. 6–8.
5. Christodoulou 2012, p. 14.
6. www.who.int/topics/depression/en.
7. Marcus, Taghi Yasamy, van Ommeren, Chisholm and Saxena 2012, p. 6.
8. Christodoulou 2012, p. 14.
9. Returning home and experiencing reverse culture shock can sometimes affect

international students even more than the initial culture shock on arrival in the UK. Butcher 2002, p. 361.

10. Nauert 2015; SparkNotes Editors 2005; Altarriba, Basnight and Canary 2003.
11. Although, see Sartorious 1983, pp. 57 and 125–126, and Bond 1991 p. 92.
12. Fernández, Carrera, Páez and Sánchez 2008, p. 214.
13 Grant 1999, p. 115.
14. Bond 1991, p. 105.
15. Bond 1991, p. 91.
16. Bond 1991, p. 106.
17. Robinson 2004, p. 150.
18. Butcher 2002, p. 356.
19. Holder 1992, p. 98.
20. Christodoulou 2012, p. 14.
21. Augsberger 1986, p. 30.
22. Augsberger 1986, p. 18.
23. Lartey 2003, pp. 40–41.
24. Tolkien 1937, p. 34.
25. Bennett Moore 2002, p. 1.
26. Hughes 1993, p. 100.
27. Grant 1999, p. 107.
28. Lartey 2003, pp. 40–41.
29. See, for example, Edinburgh University's 'Equality and Diversity' mandate: www.ed.ac.uk/equality-diversity/about/equality-diversity.
30. http://www.crossculture.com/product/when-cultures-collide/.
31. Lewis 2016.
32. http://changingminds.org/explanations/culture/lewis_culture.htm.
33. Butcher, McGrath and Stock 2007, p. 4.
34. Robinson 2004, p. 157, and Tanaka-Matsumi and Marsella 1976, p. 389.
35. Tanaka-Matsumi and Marsella 1976, p. 392.
36. Jack 2011.
37. Jack 2011.
38. Royal College of Psychiatrists 2011, p. 62.
39. Altarriba, Basnight and Canary 2003.
40. Hofman, Asnaani and Hinton 2010.
41. Tanaka-Matsumi and Chang 2002, p. 8, and Tsai and Chentsova-Dutton 2010.
42. Tanaka-Matsumi and Marsella 1976, p. 380.
43. Tanaka-Matsumi and Marsella 1976, p. 380.
44. Tanaka-Matsumi and Marsella 1976, p. 386.
45. Tanaka-Matsumi and Marsella, 1976, p. 392.
46. Tsai and Chentsova 2010, p. 467.
47. Tsai and Chentsova 2010, p. 467.
48. Welch 2011, p. 1.
49. Christodoulou 2012, p. 14.
50. Bond 1991, p. 27.
51. Bond 1991, p. 32.

52. Bond 1991, p. 17.
53. Bond 1991, p. 36.
54. Bond 1991, p. 66.
55. Bond 1991, p. 55.
56. Chinese adage, quoted in Bond 1991, p. 53.
57. Bond 1991, p. 83.
58. Tanaka-Matsumi and Marsella 1976, p. 384.
59. Tanaka-Matsumi and Marsella 1976, p. 386.
60. Tanaka-Matsumi and Marsella 1976, p. 389.
61. Augsberger 1986, p. 40.
62. Bond 1991, p. 103.
63. Bond 1991, p. 91.
64. Hitchens 2013, p. 8.
65. Bond 1991, p. 93.
66. Horn, Cañizares and Gómez 2014
67. Dimitra 2013, p. 9; Munizza, Argentero, Coppo, Tibaldi and Di Giannantonio , Picci and Rucci 2013; and Comas and Alvarez 2004, pp. 371–376.
68. Atanassov 2013, p. 25.
69. Bond 1991, p. 91.
70. Munizza, Argentero, Coppo, Tibaldi, Di Giannantonio, Picci and Rucci 2013; Comas and Alvarez 2004, p. 371.
71. Fernández, Carrera, Páez and Sánchez 2008, p. 231.
72. Pescosolido, Olafsdottir, Martin and Long 2008, p. 28.
73. Fernández, Carrera, Páez and Sánchez 2008, p. 214.
74. Callow 2014, p. 14.
75. Bond 1991, p. 29.
76. Tanaka-Matsumi 2001, p. 272.
77. Kendall and Hammen 1995, p. 229.
78. Lister-Ford 2007, p. 81, and Welch 2011, p. 2.
79. Tanaka-Matsumi and Marsella 1976, p. 391.
80. Veling 2005, p. 159.
81. Lyall 2001, p. 181.
82. Lyall 2001, p. 31.
83. NRSV.

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Wesley's parish and the digital age?

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The following article was delivered as the annual lecture of the Methodist Sacramental Fellowship at the 2016 Methodist Conference in London. Beginning with the original context of John Wesley's well-known phrase, 'the world as my parish', this article explores the digital aspects of our global parish today. Putting the digital age on the agenda of the Church's mission is seen as a similar response to Wesley's decision to become 'more vile' and enter the world of field preaching. The lecture concludes by offering a fresh approach to Methodist identity magnified by aspects of digital culture, calling for the creation of digital Arminianism, digital field preaching, digital creativity and, ultimately, a digital parish. The article proposes that Methodism embrace a digital social holiness to spread scriptural holiness throughout the geographic and digital landscape.

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The world as my parish

If you asked me to take a guess, I would have said Wesley's famous quote about the world being his parish would have come from the second half of his ministry, after the establishment of societies and preaching houses. Instead, it actually comes about a year after his great Aldersgate experience and only a few weeks after the beginning of his foray into field preaching at the instigation of George Whitefield in the journal entry for 11 June 1739.

If you asked me to take a guess, I would have said the quote referred to overseas missions and a link to possible American adventures. Instead, it is found in a section of the journal caught up in the flurry of charismatic responses to Wesley's preaching in Newgate, Bath, Baldwin Street, the New Room and the Bowling Green in Bristol. It is found amid the controversies that Wesley's preaching was causing especially among the higher elements of society. The passage directly prior to this passage recounts an interaction between Beau Nash – the gambling-obsessed celebrity at the centre of Bath's elite, cosmopolitan set – who had publicly rebuked Wesley for his use of conventicles (public gatherings where crowds could be addressed). Wesley rightly pointed out to Nash that the Conventicle Act was meant to put down sedition not religion.

If you asked me to take a guess, I would have said the quote was from a public address, a sermon, a speech to Oxford University, perhaps a policy discussion at some gathering of Christian leaders. Instead, Wesley makes the quote in an anonymous letter as a response to anonymous comments about his unusual ministry. In direct response to a proposal that he stop preaching in other people's parishes, Wesley points out that since he does not have a parish, such a prohibition would stop him preaching at all. Instead, he says, 'I look upon all the world as my parish.'

Scholars, of course, are not sure to whom Wesley wrote this letter. Perhaps John Clayton, perhaps James Hervey, as Goodhead argues.[1] Others, including Henry Rack, suggest it could be either man.[2]

Both, of course, along with the great pioneer of field preaching, George Whitefield, were notable members of the Holy Club in Oxford, and perhaps it is there among those conversations that the sentiments would have fitted in best. Wesley and Whitefield had pushed the members of the Club to 'think of new and unconventional ways of conveying the gospel to the unregenerate'.[3] When Whitefield decided to begin preaching in public to the miners of

Kingswood in February 1739, he goaded Wesley to come and join the endeavour.[4] And, indeed, Wesley did – choosing to become even more vile for the sake of the gospel.

Whoever Wesley's correspondent was, there seems little new in what Wesley is saying here – his colleagues in the Holy Club and field preachers throughout Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales would have understood precisely the argument he was making and the context in which he was making it.

But what does he actually say?

> 11 June 1739:
>
> You say, you cannot reconcile some parts of my behavior with the character I have long supported. No, nor ever will. Therefore I have disclaimed that character on every possible occasion. I told all in our ship, all at Savannah, all at Frederica, and that over and over, in express terms, 'I am not a Christian; I only follow after, if haply I may attain it.'
>
> If you ask on what principle I acted, it was this: 'A desire to be a Christian; and a conviction that whatever I judge conducive thereto that I am bound to do; wherever I judge I can best answer this end, thither it is my duty to go.' On this principle I set out for America; on this I visited the Moravian church; and on the same am I ready now (God being my helper) to go to Abyssinia or China, or whithersoever it shall please God, by this conviction, to call me.
>
> …
>
> Permit me to speak plainly. If by catholic principles you mean any other than scriptural, they weigh nothing with me; I allow no other rule, whether of faith or practice, than the holy Scriptures. But on scriptural principles, I do not think it hard to justify whatever I do. God in Scripture commands me, according to my power, to instruct the ignorant, reform the wicked, confirm the virtuous. Man forbids me to do this in another's parish; that is, in effect, to do it at all, seeing I have now no parish of my own, nor probably ever shall. Whom then shall I hear, God or man?
>
> I look upon all the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that, in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty

> to declare unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation. This is the work which I know God has called me to; and sure I am that His blessing attends it. Great encouragement have I, therefore, to be faithful in fulfilling the work He hath given me to do. His servant I am, and, as such, am employed according to the plain direction of His Word, 'As I have opportunity, doing good unto all men'; and His providence clearly concurs with his Word; which has disengaged me from all things else, that I might singly attend on this very thing, 'and go about doing good.'[5]

The context, despite the references to Georgia, Abyssinia and China in the opening paragraphs, is not world mission but rather the mission to the poor in Bristol – to his decision to become more vile and follow Whitefield's example. In the weeks running up to the letter, Wesley talks of preaching to almost 50,000 people in the area around Bristol and Bath – a massive number of people for the time. His journal is full of revivalist experiences, of showy conversions, and spectacular healings accompanying his ministry – and the utter contempt of the Church and some of his former colleagues. It is in this context that Wesley makes use of his status as a Fellow of Lincoln College – to preach not in a parish but to every part of the Church, not stand by parochial boundaries and the niceties of the Church but instead to transcend those boundaries to bring the gospel to whoever needed to hear it – 'to instruct the ignorant, reform the wicked and confirm the virtuous' – indeed, to ensure that those who preferred the alehouses and other places of relaxation on Sundays might *still* hear the good news of the gospel – publically, openly, freely.

Evidently, this was difficult territory for Wesley: 'Pressed by those on one side', as Rack points out,[6] wishing to substitute their own church order for that of the Church of England and those on the other side condemning him even for his own 'irregularities', which he saw as consistent with an overall loyalty to the Church. But in this famous phrase, he takes the moral high ground – every grave or tombstone, every wall or mound, every market cross or tree stump was now a pulpit. Every moment, every gathering of people, an opportunity to preach the gospel. Wesley did indeed regard the whole world as his parish. When he makes the decision to answer the need in the Americas, this early saying becomes prescient of Methodism's global reach.

Reflecting on digital culture

In 2009, Pope Benedict wrote a message especially directed to digital millennials – those who have grown up within a digital world. It was entitled 'New Technologies, New Relationships. Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue and Friendship'. In it, Pope Benedict argues:

> These technologies are truly a gift to humanity and we must endeavour to ensure that the benefits they offer are put at the service of all human individuals and communities, especially those who are most disadvantaged and vulnerable.[7]

He goes on to call on Catholic believers to bring their own Christian witness to the digital world – pointing to the early Church's embrace of contemporary technology for evangelisation and the need to do just the same in our own contemporary setting:

> Just as, at that time, a fruitful evangelization required that careful attention be given to understanding the culture and customs of those pagan peoples so that the truth of the gospel would touch their hearts and minds, so also today, the proclamation of Christ in the world of new technologies requires a profound knowledge of this world if the technologies are to serve our mission adequately.

In Pope Francis' recent encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si'*, he raises a number of issues with that same technology. The two popes speak only seven years apart, but so much has happened in those seven years – from the first inklings of the power of Facebook and Twitter, to mass adoption of social media and its impact on global society. So, in a more guarded appreciation of the impact of digital culture, Pope Francis argues:

> When media and the digital world become omnipresent, their influence can stop people from learning how to live wisely, to think deeply and to love generously … True wisdom, as the fruit of self-examination, dialogue and generous encounter between persons, is not acquired by a mere accumulation of data which eventually leads to overload and confusion, a sort of mental pollution.[8]

Real relationships with others, with all the challenges they entail, now tend to be replaced by a type of internet communication that enables us to choose or eliminate relationships at whim, thus giving rise to a new type of contrived emotion which has more to do with devices and displays than with other people and with nature.

Indeed, in his earlier encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis had raised similar concerns about the impact of individualisation and consumerism in contemporary society, which can weaken 'the development and stability of personal relationships and distort family bonds'. The brunt of Pope Francis' argument in *Laudato Si'*, though, is not the dangers of social media, but the detrimental effect on the environment and human flourishing that the growth of a purely technocratic paradigm will have. When we see the earth simply as a resource to be harvested, as raw materials for consumerist technology, then we will destroy that very earth and the humanity it nurtures. This echoes Heidegger's arguments in *The Question Concerning Technology* about the power of technology to turn all creation into a resource bank for its own use.[9]

From a secular point of view, Robert MacDougall talks of our contemporary culture in terms of *Digination*, drawing strongly on Marshall McLuhan's concept of the global village.[10] MacDougall argues that technology has, by and large, become not just a desirable accompaniment to contemporary life but a necessary one. Without digital, he argues, we feel left out (FOMO[11]), lacking, incomplete. He refers to McLuhan's discussion about the role of the car in the USA in the middle of the last century: 'Although it may be true to say that an American is a creature of four wheels … it is also true that the car has become an article of dress without which we feel uncertain, unclad, and incomplete in the urban compound.'[12] In other words, technology, increasingly so with adaptability, wearability and 'embeddability' of digital technology, has become not just an 'accepted' but an 'assumed' part of the culture we live in. There are plenty of anecdotes and studies about the way in which digital millennials, especially, see technology not as a luxury but as a necessity in today's culture.[13] MacDougall notes that the pervasive use of technology in education, in the workplace, in the domestic environment and indeed throughout entertainment culture, means that humanity is not choosing to adopt technology but that it is becoming an assumed substratum to human existence. There are already parodies adding Wi-Fi connectivity to the bottom of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. We are, as Amber Case argues, already cyborgs.[14]

Benedict, Francis, MacDougall and Heidegger have other ideas about technology and media ecology – especially technology as good for humanity, as enhancement of the human identity, picking up a good deal of the conversation around the Social Shaping of Technology promoted within Heidi Campbell and Pauline Cheong's work on the interface between religious culture and technology.[15] Quoting Pope John Paul II in 1981, Francis talks of science and technology (*Laudato Si'*, #102–103) as 'the products of a God-given human creativity', enabling men and women immersed in the material world to 'leap' into the world of beauty: 'in the beauty intended by the one who uses new technical instruments and in the contemplation of such beauty, a quantum leap occurs, resulting in a fulfillment which is uniquely human.'

Or, in Heidegger's words:

> Once there was a time when the bringing-forth of the true into the beautiful was called *technē*. And the *poiēsis* of the fine arts was called *technē* … [the arts] brought the presence of the gods, brought the dialogue of divine and human destinings, to radiance. And art was simply called *technē*. It was a single, manifold revealing. It was pious, *promos*, i.e. yielding to the holding and safe-keeping of truth.[16]

So, in his message for the World Day of Social Communications 2016, Pope Francis makes the point that all communication reflects the heart of the communicator. For the Christian communicator, therefore, our digital engagement should reflect God's compassion, tenderness and forgiveness for all – communication touched by God's power and filled with his mercy. Towards the end of the message, Francis talks of the digital space as a public square:

> The digital world is a public square, a meeting-place where we can either encourage or demean one another, engage in a meaningful discussion or unfair attacks … The internet can help us to be better citizens. Access to digital networks entails a responsibility for our neighbour whom we do not see but who is nonetheless real and has a dignity which must be respected. The internet can be used wisely to build a society which is healthy and open to sharing …
>
> … This is a gift of God, which involves a great responsibility. I like to refer to this power of communication as 'closeness'. The encounter between communication and mercy will be fruitful to the degree

> that it generates a closeness, which cares, comforts, heals, accompanies and celebrates. In a broken, fragmented and polarized world, to communicate with mercy means to help create a healthy, free and fraternal closeness between the children of God and all our brothers and sisters in the one human family.[17]

Clearly, then, the need to evangelise contemporary society remains (*Evangelii Gaudium*, #68–70), embedding faith within contemporary culture by 'sparking new processes for evangelizing culture'. Modern popes seem to echo the call of Wesley and Whitefield for new ideas on evangelising all the people, not just the few who come into a church building, for flooding the public square with the gospel, for making every wall into what Charles Wesley called 'Whitefield's Pulpit'.

Digitality

Digital is everywhere. But how do you sum it up – how do you talk about it? How do you get a goldfish to discuss the water in which it lives or the human being to discuss the essence of the air she breathes? Digital is the bringing together of interpersonal communications, advanced personal computing technology, mobile technology, data-handling technology and the gradual transformation of the military's ArpaNet into Tim Berners Lee's World Wide Web. Google's thought leaders, Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen, talk of it as the greatest experiment in anarchy ever – a global network of 7 billion people able to access more and more information:

> Hundreds of millions of people are, each minute, creating and consuming an untold amount of digital content in an online world that is not truly bound by terrestrial laws. This new capacity for free expression and free movement of information has generated the rich virtual landscape we know today. Think of all the websites you've ever visited, all the emails you've sent and the stories you've read online, all the facts you've learned and fictions you've encountered and debunked. Think of every relationship forged, every journey planned, every job found and every dream born, nurtured and implemented through this platform. Consider too what the lack of top-down control allows: the online scams, the bullying campaigns, the hate-group websites and the terrorist

> chatrooms. This is the internet, the world's largest ungoverned space.[18]

If you want to see that in numbers, go to the scary Internet Stats website (http://www.internetlivestats.com), which will give you all the figures for the latest 24 hours. (When I looked there had been 116 billion emails sent that day!)

In the UK, according to government statistics, 86 per cent of adults, over 44 million people, were using the internet in 2015,[19] or, on an independent site, 91.6 per cent of the whole population or 59.3 million people. And 58.7 per cent in the UK are on Facebook – 38 million of us. Age matters, of course, with engagement tailing off with age:

> 99% among those aged 16–34
> 95% among those aged 35–54
> 87% among those aged 55–64
> 71% among those aged 65–74
> 33% among those aged 75+.

However, engagement with the internet is less prevalent among the disabled, with about 28 per cent of disabled people regarded as non-users. Moreover, despite the massive percentages using the internet, many of the so-called fringes are less well represented, with the lowest engagement figures in Northern Ireland, Pembrokeshire, Cornwall and Teesside. Interestingly, those levels of internet penetration are comparable to the larger European countries such as Germany (88.4 per cent), France (83.8 per cent), Spain (76.9 per cent) and Sweden (94.6 per cent). Indeed, Scandinavian countries are better connected than the UK. Other European countries are less well connected – such as Poland (67.5 per cent), Italy (62 per cent), Greece (63.2 per cent) and Bulgaria (63.2 per cent).

But what do people actually do online? Research measuring the behaviour of over 73,000 people in 2015 by the Internet Advertising Bureau found that the following activities were common:[20]

Social media accounts	31% – mobile/tablet 21%, desktop 10%
Entertainment	27% – mobile/tablet 8%, desktop 19%
Games	11% – mobile/tablet 9%, desktop 2%
Instant messaging	8% – mobile/tablet 7%, desktop 1%
News	7% – mobile/tablet 5%, desktop 2%
Email	6% – mobile/tablet 1%, desktop 5%

That same research found that, on average, people spend 2 hours 51 minutes online each day, at both work and at home.

Another report, from multiview.com, argues that we spend seven hours a day online and includes much more awareness of surfing activity – clicking from site to site trying to find the relevant information we need or just window shopping information. So, this report argues we spend:[21]

28% surfing social media
24% checking emails
23% surfing content
19% surfing video
6% shopping online
1% searching.

What is clear is that the entertainment number is rising rapidly with more and more access to TV on demand. Most young people no longer watch broadcast, scheduled TV. Instead, they make use of catch-up TV, Netflix, Amazon Video, Now TV and similar series. Binge-watching box sets or movies is now more and more common. Moreover, YouTube is the second largest web search engine, and YouTube and Netflix now count for over half of all internet activity at any moment, with over 150,000 hours of video being watched every minute.[22]

Moreover, there is nothing in these reports of the problem of online pornography, with an estimated 21.2 billion visits to one porn site alone in 2015 (Pornhub) where people consumed 4.4 billion hours of pornographic material. That's just one website – with the UK having the second largest per capita page views.[23]

Digital is everywhere. It's not just about smartphones, computing tech and social media. It's about Universal Credit being accessible only online; about Google Books working with academic libraries to upload vast numbers of books to help reach the so-called Singularity when all knowledge is available to support some form of machine-enabled artificial intelligence; it's about data and surveillance; it's about tracing our behaviour, our location, our likes and our connections; it's about the way that Google and Facebook know us better than we know ourselves – able already to predict when a couple will split up; able to use the data we input to relay back to us the items that would perfect our consumerist paradise. It's about MOOCS (massively open online courses) and SPOCs (small-scale private offline courses), flipped classrooms, online access to knowledge and libraries, and remote contact courses taking over from residential training. It's about television programmes being available when we want them rather than being scheduled; about theatre productions being distributed through cinema screens; about David Hockney drawing pictures on his iPad; about virtual reality, transhumanism and the ever-increasing interest in cyborgs, robots and space.

And notice what I haven't mentioned – brands of technology, levels of computing, high definition, wearables, body adaptations, drones, Twitter, Snapchat, Huffington Post, Tinder, the internet of things, the internet of everything. Digital is all that is online, but increasingly every part of our offline presence as well. It is very hard indeed not to have an online identity nowadays, as the recent Channel 4 series *Hunted* made absolutely clear. As MacDougall puts it:

> The introduction or removal of any means of communication tends to create reverberations throughout the entire cultural system. Despite their protestations to the contrary, I'm pretty sure late adopters and even [digital] abstainers are not exempt from the psychological, social, and cultural effects and side effects of modern communication technology. While there are certainly varying degrees of immersion – that is to say, while some of us live in the high-rise downtown district, some at the city limits, and still others out in the proverbial 'woods' – we all live in Digination today.[24]

The digital public square

In her Dimbleby Lecture in 2015, Martha Lane Fox talked of the possibilities for Digital Britain:

> It is within our reach to leapfrog every nation in the world and become the most digital, most connected, most skilled, most informed on the planet. And I think that if we did that, it would not only be good for our economy, but it would be good for our culture, our people, our health and our happiness.[25]

Aware of the difficulties besetting the digital world, of the negative impressions of some leading experts and of the same gulf between private virtuous reflection and excessive internet consumerism that Pope Francis raised, Martha Lane Fox still looks with hope for what could be done in digital culture. She picks up the words of the late, great Aaron Swartz: 'It's not OK not to understand the Internet anymore.' As Martha Lane Fox continues: 'It doesn't matter if you're 80 or eight, if you're online once a year or once a minute, understanding where the internet came from and what it can do will help you make more sense of the world.'

I'd take this line of argument even further: saying that the digital age is not part of the agenda of the Church is as culturally insensitive to the missional prompting of the Holy Spirit as Bishop Butler telling Wesley that what he and Whitefield were doing was 'a horrid thing, a very horrid thing' and that they should 'Go hence' from Bristol.

Like Wesley, we must become more vile and enter into our own form of field preaching, our own form of evangelisation of the masses. We may already be following Wesley's example of going out into the town squares and marketplaces, but perhaps also we are being called to go out into the digital world, the digital public spaces, to engage with people who now refuse point blank to take any notice of those of us who sit in our pews and think that society will flood back to church without us first going out to make connection with them! Again, back to Pope Francis:

> In fidelity to the example of the Master, it is vitally important for the Church today to go forth and preach the Gospel to all: to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, reluctance or fear. The joy of the Gospel is for all people: no one can be excluded.[26]

Wesley's passion for field preaching was not fuelled by rebellion against Anglican orders, nor a pre-Communist proto-Marxian dream of transforming society into a just world. Instead, Wesley was compelled to preach the good news about Jesus; to share the good news about how Jesus offered salvation for all. Or, as Wesley put it in that letter in his journal on 11 June 1739:

> If you ask on what principle I acted, it was this: 'A desire to be a Christian; and a conviction that whatever I judge conducive thereto that I am bound to do; wherever I judge I can best answer this end, thither it is my duty to go.' On this principle I set out for America; on this I visited the Moravian church; and on the same am I ready now (God being my helper) to go to Abyssinia or China, or whithersoever it shall please God, by this conviction, to call me.

In other words, to be a Christian. To be real to our identity as followers of Christ, we are called to be, to do, to go wherever we feel that we can express that Christianity. Now, there is in this a recipe for disaster – we are hooked on the idea that God lives in church, hides among the pews, sleeps under the communion table. When I worked at Cliff, we took a bunch of students to London for an 'Evangelism through the Arts' course. I abandoned them at the door of Tate Modern and said, 'Go find God'. Half of them walked straight through Tate Modern, out the other side, across the river, and into St Paul's Cathedral. Surely, here is where you find God. Another quarter looked around a floor or two and joined their friends across the river. A few wandered off down the Thames. About 10 per cent came back talking of their fascination with the presence of God in this piece of art or in that encounter with a painting or in the conversation with fellow travellers around the gallery.

The Holy Club, especially Whitefield and Wesley, seemed to have come to an awareness that they shared with Cuthbert and Aidan and their fellow northern saints. You find God, you live out the gospel, as you walk among the people out in the world. That's where God is found. Yes, you do find God in church, in the liturgy, the worship, the devotion, the Bible study, the community of those who love him. But God, if he is truly omnipresent in the world, spends much more time in forests and art galleries, on council estates and in refugee camps, in city bars and French cafes, with the poor and the despised, the persecuted and the unloved, than he does with us in church. Surely we still believe this? Remember Matthew's story of the Temple veil torn in two from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51), that which divided God from his people, which corralled the presence of God within the Holy of Holies – that was torn asunder by the power of Jesus' love on the Cross. Too often, as the chapel doors close at the beginning of the service, we seem to want to sew the veil back up again.

The digital parish

Wesley's digital parish needs to take on some of the characteristics of his field preaching and of his ministry of both evangelisation and organisation – a mixture of sharing the good news, calling to conversion and of accountable discipleship within a worshipping community centred on the Bible. I wonder whether those are the five pillars of Methodism – evangelism, conversion, discipleship, worship and the Bible – and all of them riven through not with the individualism of the age but within social holiness, *a social (community-*

centred) holiness which seeks to spread scriptural holiness throughout both the geographic and digital landscape.

Let me propose four aspects of a digital approach to working out our Methodist identity magnified by aspects of the digital culture.

1 Digital Arminianism

That 'all people need to be saved' has long been a central tenet of Wesleyan Christianity. We are an inclusive church – one that believes that salvation is available for everyone, not just a chosen few, but also that church and community is for all. We believe that God's call to find life in all its fullness in Christ is an opportunity for every human being to take up. We believe those five pillars of Methodism are for everyone – evangelism, conversion, discipleship, worship and the Bible – regardless of age, race, gender, sexuality, economic or political status, physical or mental health or ability.

It is important to note how the digital could help us to make much more of that. Because of the near omnipresence of the digital in our society, digital offers us a much greater audience and a much more diverse audience than we will ever have in the pulpits of our churches. Long ago, Marshall McLuhan referred to the contraction of world culture into a global village. Digital creates that reality, helping us to be both local and global at the same time. But also, it does this at an increasingly affordable cost, to include all members of our society within the discourse of the global village. The digital divide is increasingly one of choice rather than economics, with many developing nations leapfrogging Western nations in embracing what the digital offers through use of locally adapted technologies, zero Facebook, electronic banking and so on, and eschewing Western luxury approaches to technology.

Digital affirms opportunity for all to be connected together. But digital does more because it offers a voice to those without a voice. It offers a global village where all voices carry the same weight. Digital is a great form of democratic levelling, however much capitalism strives to give more and more power to the wealthy and to business interests. An optimistic view of digitality offers a view of all people having an equal say in the future of the world.

Moreover, asynchronous communication gives people time to think, to contribute at a slower pace so that conversation isn't always dominated by those present and confident to speak up, or by emotional outbursts, or by testosterone! It allows us to transcend some of the limitations of being present and subject to the prejudices we all too often show. It allows voices from the margins and from the global Church to speak into our conversations.

So, whether your voice has been stifled because of your age, gender, sexuality, mental health, disability, race or wealth, digital communication can offer you the opportunity to speak again. A radical digital Arminianism is both offered to all and also welcomes the contributions of all.

2 Digital field preaching

If Methodism is open to all, we need to get that message to everyone. Methodism has to reject our Babylonian captivity to our preaching house, chapels and churches. Methodism cannot afford to rely on an attractional model for growth any longer. Once children flocked to our Sunday schools. Our uniformed organisations and social events were packed with local residents. The Methodist chapel was the centre of so many communities. Too often now our churches are small and our congregations increasingly elderly. The faithful who gather are still faithful and wonderful and godly people. But there are too few Methodist churches that are reaching out into their local communities and making the gospel message accessible to all. Thank God there are some. But by embracing digital, we can break out of the church walls, pull down the chapel divide and reach out to all people. Through engaging with Facebook and local digital forums, by campaigning on local issues and learning what makes the community tick, we can earn a voice; by breaking out of the church and sharing good news online, we begin to field preach all over again!

Despite years of missional leadership at the very top of the Methodist Church hierarchy, despite our involvement in Fresh Expressions and VentureFX, despite our totemic celebrations of Mow Cop, Gwennap Pit, and Celebration Weekend at Cliff College, most of Methodism still seems to hold to the idea that as long as we keep the chapel open people will come to us. Of course, this works in several places. There are good, strong and open Methodist churches in many districts across the land. Our fresh expression and pioneer ministers, our missional deacons and lay workers, our pioneering congregations and local preachers have done a good deal of outstanding work to push out into the communities in which we all live. We must resource such ministry more and more.

On 24 June 1764, Wesley visited Whitehaven in Cumbria and made the following observation about the importance of going to the people:

> The want of field-preaching has been one cause of deadness here. I do not find any great increase of the work of God without it. If ever this is laid aside, I expect the whole work will gradually die away.[27]

But the model we still cling to by default is attractional, and, indeed, that can sometimes be seen most clearly in regard to our celebration of the sacraments – holy acts, celebrated in holy places, among holy people.

I remember going to a Cambridge college to preach. The chapel has massive bronze doors opening on to the quad. 'Do you open them during the Eucharist? You know, to let everyone what you are doing?' 'No, it's a better atmosphere to keep them closed.' I'm always puzzled by that. John's Gospel, of course, doesn't have a formal institution of the Lord's Supper, although it is quite likely that John's readers were well aware of the Synoptic references and Paul's own words on the breaking of bread. Instead, John takes Jesus into the open, among a vast crowd – he takes bread, gives thanks and distributes the bread among the people – so close to the eucharistic fourfold actions of taking, blessing, breaking and giving. Indeed, in the sermon on the manna that follows later in the chapter, he talks of his own body as the bread, his own blood as the wine – the very source of the life, which he offers.

Such open air celebrations of the Eucharist were common in the Scottish, Irish and American forms of revival – Whitefield administered communion to thousands at Cambuslang.[28] Wesley observed one such 'Scotch Communion' on Calton Hill but 'knew not what to do', and though he remained present 'did not admire the manner of distribution'.[29] The revivalist communions are mirrored in Methodism with the development of the mass public love feasts and the reservation of communion for more formal settings. So, there are no references in Wesley's journal (that I could find) that unambiguously point to a celebration of the sacrament outside of a Christian meeting room, church or chapel. As Maddox states:

> For Wesley, the chief means to [awakenment to God] was field preaching. Whenever this means was effective, he ushered the awakened person into the society where the full battery of means of grace could nourish and guide their future journey on the Way of Salvation.[30]

Perhaps there is a reflection here of our love affair with the attractional model – we keep the best hidden within our churches. Whitefield, Asbury and Coke had no such reticence to sharing the sacraments outside. The Cambuslang account talks of vast tents and tables set out; of sermons of preparation; of counselling for communicants and the giving of tokens to show they had received such preparation; of the meal set out to celebrate. In our own lifetimes, we can remember open-air celebrations, of thousands gathering at Methodist sites to share bread and wine, or in the celebration of a love feast. In my early ministry, I remember the people of Griffydam in Leicestershire talking of the crowds walking across the fields from the train station at Ashby to gather for the annual love feast there. And Celebration Weekend at Cliff will always be a treasured memory.

Surely, then, this is the time to move away from the disastrous attractional model which keeps the bronze gates closed? Isn't it time for us to see our role as looking outwards, moving outwards, going outwards into the world around us – to proclaim God's justice, love and mercy to all. Would that the Methodist Church were scandalously public with our worship! Would that we were brazenly taking the sacraments to the people – like the Archbishop of York baptising outside York Minster, or Greenbelt celebrating communion for the masses of people there. The bronze gates need to be burst asunder!

> Lift up your heads, you gates;
> be lifted up, you ancient doors,
> that the King of glory may come in.
> (Psalm 24:7)

3 Digital creativity

Matthew Fox, one of the twentieth century's less traditional theologians, once spoke at the Nine O'Clock Service in Sheffield, arguing that revival would never come to the contemporary Church unless we re-embraced creativity, the arts and the artists. It is a wonderful thing that Methodism sees again the potential for embracing the arts – with artists like Ric Stott celebrated within the Church and with those creating our Conference worship making more and more use of their own creativity (Micky Youngson and Rachel Parkinson, Applecart Theatre, Paul Wood, Alison Tomlin and Barbara Glasson readily come to mind) and the increasing focus on worship which engages all of our senses.

One of the great reaffirmations of the twenty-first-century Church is a celebration of the creativity at the heart of the Christian community – classically demonstrated in the Messy Church movement. But too often Messy Church is seen as a children's thing, rather than as an opportunity to embrace creativity at the heart of all that we do. We are called to be co-creators with God, to share in his creative activity. That means Messy Church needs to be about more than glue and tissue paper! Messy Church needs to offer outlets in all sorts of areas for the glory of God: writing workshops, music composition, drama and dance, sculpture and glass-making, alongside painting and crafts. Messy Church is about seeing church as a place of creativity rather than passivity.

And that is again at the heart of the digital revolution. That revolution talks of the need for us not just to absorb the Web but to engage with and create the Web. Digital residents are people who move from being consumers to prosumers – those people who both consume the Web but also produce the Web. What a fantastic idea for the Church – that all the congregation become prosumers of worship – not just people who sit in the pew and absorb worship, but a people who engage in the very creation of the liturgy, from baking the bread for communion, to writing the words for the epiclesis, and creating icons for meditation. What an amazing vision of a Church confident enough to commission artists and art all over again – art produced not just by Christians but art for art's sake, creativity as part of God's universal gift to humanity.

4 A digital parish!

Peter Kerridge of Premier Radio has for a while talked about the 'bricks and clicks church' – local church communities that are brought even closer together by digitality. Peter points out that we already have the technology to stream our services to the world. Indeed, the Church of England selects different churches to stream a Sunday service each week on the Periscope App in its ChurchLive Project.[31] Many other churches do the same. Broadcasting worship is nothing new – that was Web 1.0 – pumping out information to the world. Web 2.0 is about broadcasting and receiving, about true intercommunication where we listen to the Web as well as broadcast into the Web, where our audience is purposely invited to speak back!

So the advent of home broadband means that this can now be two-way – those housebound could link to services, sing along, engage with the worship, perhaps tweet in prayer requests and comments. The technology to do this is not difficult. Or the Church could offer training for those who found it too difficult.

Premier runs a fantastic service in the North East, offering free DAB radios to those who have become cut off from their home congregations. The review I did of the service was uplifting and heart-breaking at the same time – people reconnected not just to church but to their local communities. One man who lived shut away in his lounge with curtains closed received a radio and within weeks could be found sitting on his porch chatting with passers-by about the joys of football in the North East! Another woman shared emotionally how listening to hymns on the radio had helped her to learn how to sing the praises of God all over again.

There is much more that digital technology could offer – broadcasting services, Skype pastoral visiting, using protected non-public chatrooms like Slack to improve church communications, integration of Conference conversations with social media channels linked to churches and districts, remote communion, re-embracing and linking with the global Methodist community. Indeed, Microsoft's recent development of holoportation could allow global Methodists to port into our pulpits to enrich our ministries, or the housebound to join us in our chapels.[32]

Conclusion

Wesley's assertion that he looked upon the whole world as his parish was an affirmation that the whole of his contemporary culture was a mission field. He delivered this affirmation in support of his radical step to take preaching into the wild; to become more vile and preach to the miners in Kingswood. In this paper, I have attempted to argue that we too are faced with making a radical step to leave behind the analogue present of the Church and to move into the digital future; to embrace digital technology and digital culture as the lingua franca, the common ground of contemporary culture, and thus the most appropriate place for us to engage with the world in which we live. I have called us to create a form of digital Arminianism – to include all; to go digital field preaching; to embrace digital creativity; and to develop digital parishes. In short, I have proposed that Methodism embrace a digital social holiness to spread scriptural holiness throughout the geographic and digital landscape.

In what way can we make use of the digital to create Arminian, public, open, creative communities – that form of digital community built upon communication that Pope Francis calls 'closeness', an intimate communication with our members, with our congregations, with the Methodist people, but also with our local communities, with the general public, with the world at large?

The question is whether we can embrace the digital to relearn our calling to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land and to engage in a brave new world with our Wesleyan inheritance.

Notes

1. Goodhead 2010, p. 92.
2. Rack 2002, p. 188.
3. Smith 2014, p. 110.
4. Heitzenrater 1995, pp.102 and 112.
5. Curnock (ed.) 1938, vol. 2, pp. 216–218.
6. Rack 2002, p. 188.
7. Text available at: https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20090124_43rd-world-communications-day.html.
8. *Laudato Si'*, #47. Full text, and selected quotes as used here, available at: https://focusoncampus.org/content/summary-of-laudato-si-pope-francis-encyclical-on-the-environment-7016a31d-a7ce-429a-bdcd-1893d8c9fe7d.
9. Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology* (1977) – full text available: http://simondon.ocular-witness.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/05/question_concerning_technology.pdf.
10. MacDougall 2012.
11. FOMO – 'fear of missing out' – an important driver in 24/7 net addiction.
12. Marshall McLuhan, cited in MacDougall 2012, p. 8.
13. With a positive spin in Laurence Scott's *Four Dimensional Human* (2015); with a negative spin in Sherry Turkle's *Alone Together* (2013) and *Reclaiming Conversation* (2015)*;* and with a reflection on the wider culture of digital engagement in Douglas Thomas and John Seely Brown's *New Culture of Learning* (2011).
14. Amber Case's classic TED talk from all the way back in 2010: http://www.ted.com/talks/amber_case_we_are_all_cyborgs_now?language=en.
15. Campell 2005, 2010 and 2013 Digital; Cheong 2012a and 2012b.
16. Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology* (1977), p. 18: 'Einstmals hieß τέχνη auch das Hervorbringen des Wahren in das Schöne. Τέχνη hieß auch die πόιησις der schönen Künste … Sie brachten die Gegenwart der Götter, brachten die Zwiesprache des göttlichen und menschlichen Geschickes zum Leuchten. Und die Kunst hieß nur τέχνη. Sie war ein einziges, vielfältiges Entbergen. Sie war fromm, προμος, d.h. fügsam dem Walten und Verwahren der Wahrheit. (German Text, Die Frage nach der Technik available at: https://monoskop.org/images/2/27/Heidegger_Martin_1953_2000_Die_Frage_nach_der_Technik.pdf.)
17. Full text available from: http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2016/01/25/pope-francis-text-messages-and-social-media-are-a-gift-from-god/.
18. Schmidt and Cohen 2013, p. 3.
19. Figures taken from the ONS data on Internet Use available from: http://www.ons.

gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/itandinternetindustry/bulletins/internetusers/2015 and from http://www.worldinternetstats.com.

20. Internet Advertising Bureau Report, available online at: http://www.iabuk.net/research/library/time-spent-online-january-june-2015.
21. https://blog.multiview.com/2016/03/02/where-does-the-time-go-what-people-do-most-online-infographic/.
22. Intel Infographic available at: http://scoop.intel.com/files/2012/03/infographic_1080_logo.jpg. The infographic has been updated for using more recent data here: http://bit.ly/internetmin2016.
23. http://www.maxim.com/maxim-man/how-much-porn-do-people-watch-2016-1; for more information on porn addiction within the Christian community, see http://splash.nakedtruthproject.com.
24. MacDougall 2012, p. 1.
25. Martha Lane Fox, Dimbleby Lecture, 2015. Full text available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/speeches/2015/martha-lane-fox-dot-everyone.
26. *Evangelii Gaudium*, #23.
27. Curnock (ed.) 1938, vol. 5, p. 79.
28. An amazing account in *John Wesley and George Whitefield in Scotland*, chapter 37. Text available: https://archive.org/stream/johnwesleyandgeo00butluoft/johnwesleyandgeo00butluoft_djvu.txt.
29. Curnock (ed.) 1938, vol. 5, p. 77.
30. Maddox 1994, p. 229.
31. For more on the ChurchLive project: https://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/engage-with-us-online/churchlive.aspx.
32. Microsoft's holoportation project mixes their work on the Hololens Augmented Reality Project which allows computer graphics to be superimposed on a lens through which the user looks. (For more information, see here: https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/research/project/holoportation-3/.) The normal visual field of the user is thus augmented by additional computer-generated graphics. So if the congregation were wearing augmented reality glasses, the image of a preacher could be 'ported' into the church. This technology is still in the early stages but exploration of the impact for the housebound on memory-related augmented and virtual reality is growing fast. There is some interest already in taking housebound people back to church through wearing portable headsets which provide a realistic 3D visual and aural replica of the worship environment. (For more information, see here: http://www.reminiscience.co.uk.) Moreover, development of haptic (touch) technology will mean that members of the congregation could share the peace in a fully tactile way with housebound members of the congregation.

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‘It’s always right now’: framing the struggle for meaning in contemporary culture

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Late contemporary culture has seen a previously dominant existentialism give way to naturalistic determinism, and yielded a nihilism that is not conducive to human flourishing, as individuals or society. I will seek to frame a discussion whereby the fact of meaning may be posited and discussed in contemporary culture, concluding that Christianity offers a context for exploring meaning in a way that is preferable to other views because it provides a coherent approach to understanding the nature of the human being, and the problems that give rise to a crisis of meaning. The article will also offer several suggestions for further study whereby the work of meaning may be pursued.

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The meaning of life seems to be a 'subject fit for either the crazed or the comic', as Terry Eagleton points out.[1] Indeed, where the answer '42' does not suffice, the deeper search is one in which we may easily become disoriented and lost.[2] In a world where all that matters is the present moment, meaning is as fleeting as the seconds that pass. Because of this difficulty, many have surrendered the idea that life has meaning at all. In contemporary culture, Qoheleth catches our words and feelings up with those of the philosopher in the book of Ecclesiastes, 'Meaningless, meaningless. Everything is meaningless.' Full of ennui, we cry that there is nothing new under the sun, to see or do. In the face of a world of need, we amuse ourselves into oblivion, or drown in despair.

I

What are we here for? What is life all about? Why am I here? What should I do with my life? Who will love me? What will happen when I die? These are all basic questions of human existence, the answers to which will form a basic world-view through which we approach the rest of life, and which will interpret our experiences as we seek to make sense of our lives. The search for meaning is as old as human existence. In understanding who we are, we will go some way towards understanding why we are here.

In a Christian theistic view, the human being is comprised of two aspects, held together. The human being embodies the tension between naturalism and transcendence, between necessity and freedom. As a Christian theist who occasioned into philosophy, not least for his Gifford lectures during the Second World War, Reinhold Niebuhr emphasised two facts about humanity:

1. A human being 'is a child of nature, subject to its vicissitudes, compelled by its necessities, driven by its impulses, and confined within the brevity of the years which nature permits its varied organic form, allowing them some, but not too much latitude'.[3]
2. (Niebuhr calls this a less obvious fact, that) a human 'is a spirit who stands outside of nature, life, himself, his reason and the world'. This is more than the rational human being, or even the tool making human being. This is the quality of spirit that enables human beings to stand outside of themselves and make themselves their own object.[4]

These two facts of humanity emphasise that a human being is not solely or primarily a body; nor solely or primarily a spirit. To be a human being is to be a natural, biological body intrinsically held together with a supernatural, transcendent spirit.

To put this simply and starkly, there are two affirmations about what it is to be human. One, we will die. Two, we know we will die. Human beings are material, and human beings are spiritual. In the face of the first reality, the second leads us to search for meaning for an existence we know to be fleeting. Moreover, we experience these two key aspects of anthropology at once as individuals and as persons-in-relation. This relationality encompasses social and familial bonds, as well as a relationality with the created order, and a relationship with God.

Niebuhr's dialectical approach withstands the test of time and cultural shift. He shows how a Christian anthropology offers a better account of human essence and experience than other philosophies offer. His portrayal corrects the errors of contemporary understandings of what it means to be human, and enables us to recover a sense of meaning for humanity in the midst.

Philosophies of human beings, and of meaning, often falter at the point of giving due regard to *both* of these aspects of humanity. Usually, they manage to emphasise one over the other, or one at the expense of the other, providing a truncated view of what it means to be human, and therefore offering a less than satisfactory account of meaning. So, for example, empiricism neglects the spirit, restricting meaning to the material world. Materialism is a reductionistic philosophy that may posit human beings as little other than the sum of their biology, in deterministic frame. Idealism, on the other hand, neglects the body, yielding a Platonic dualism that does not satisfy the intrinsic oneness of a human being, and undermines the significance of bodily existence.

Naturalism can err in one of two directions: it can reduce human beings to their biological sum and deny their transcendence, or it can lead people to deny their contingency and imagine themselves invincible, as Robert Gall indicates. In light of natural scientific and social scientific advancement, 'What need have we of gods and superstition if we can be as gods ourselves, or create our own gods, and thereby become content amidst the brilliant logical dazzle of science and technology?'[5]

Naturalism's neglect of one or the other aspects of humanity fails to do justice to the whole of human existence; such that A. N. Wilson could haltingly, hesitantly, move from atheism to theism, as he observed:

> Watching a whole cluster of friends, and my own mother, die over quite a short space of time convinced me that purely materialist 'explanations' for our mysterious human existence simply won't do – on an intellectual level. No, the existence of language is one of the many phenomena – of which love and music are the two strongest – which suggest that human beings are very much more than collections of meat. They convince me that we are spiritual beings, and that the religion of the incarnation, asserting that God made humanity in His image, and continually restores humanity in His image, is simply true. As a working blueprint for life, as a template against which to measure experience, it fits.[6]

Some atheists work hard to try to forge meaning out of the ashes of naturalism's nihilism. Some of the most popular ones like Julian Baggini and Alain de Botton follow Aristotle in talking about happiness as meaning.[7] Others take the path of deconstruction, like Eagleton, who says we may believe

> that life is an accidental evolutionary phenomenon that has no more intrinsic meaning than a fluctuation in the breeze or a rumble in the gut … If our lives have meaning it is something with which we manage to invest them, not something with which they come ready equipped.[8]

Out of this perspectivism, Jenkins posits that for Eagleton 'the meaning of life … is like a jazz band, individuals engaged on a collective endeavour in pursuit of happiness through the mutuality of love'.[9]

How we are to travel from determinism to a mutuality of love through perspectivism is not abundantly clear. Why is happiness worth pursuit? Why is mutual love humanity's highest goal? Why pursue anything other than individual desires? We have a sense of the goodness of anything only because there is an objective standard that enables us to perceive good or justice as preferable to evil or injustice. The plunge into the absurdity of faith requires no more courage or intellect than the plunge into the absurdity of atheism; nor does it require less.

In a theologically existential view, the angst that arises from embodying the tension between necessity and freedom is framed in a way that lends meaning to the experience of human existence. A theistic view reminds the human being of the Creator–creature relationship and distinction; this gives value to the biological person, beyond the determinism of evolution. At the same time, it affirms the spiritual person, reminding human beings of the network of relationships in which we find ourselves and in which we are formed. At the moment that it affirms our value biologically and spiritually, Christian theism reminds us of our potential and our limitations. We can accomplish much as transcendent beings who can reflect upon and manage our biology. But we are reminded that there is one who is greater still, who measures our accomplishments, and clips our pretentious wings, while providing the wind to fly. Being related to the planet, to one another and to God offers a network of meaning that embraces the whole of what it means to be human.

II

The struggle for meaning is not new, but it has taken a new turn in contemporary culture. The question 'What are we here for?' is perhaps as old as humanity itself, captured in the creation myth where human beings refuse to accept their contingency, their relationality, and seek to be all in all. But as Viktor Frankl noted, in the twentieth century, the question, 'What are we here for?' has become a question of 'What am I here for?' and this solipsistic turn is significant in moving the question away from common existence and towards the individual. Frankl's post-Holocaust existential belief, that 'everything can be taken from … [a human] but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way,' is challenged in a naturalistically determined context.[10] The problem of meaning reaches crisis proportions in a consumer culture.

For a while, consumer culture offered respite from existential angst as it allowed the individual to embrace the myth that 'I am in control'. In creating endless unfulfilled desire, consumer culture allowed existential humans to find meaning in the task of creating and re-creating themselves through purchases, possessions and image. However, as Jean Baudrillard points out, a consumer process subverts meaning, as socially meaningful exchanges are replaced with price tags and the swipe or tap of a bank card.[11] In this generation, we have reached a point where human image has become free-floating, seemingly transcendent, separated from the biological self. The image of God is set up as independent of its Creator, and alienation from work, family, communities and God becomes an overwhelming experience of meaninglessness.

The existentialism of Western culture becomes challenged and displaced. A generation brought up on a mantra of *carpe diem*, and recognising there is so little we can actually seize and make a difference, grasps something of the hollow echo of nihilism. It is exacerbated by the naturalistic determinism that has worked out its implications for meaning in culture as a whole.

Determinism emerges from the dominance of science as a world-view for self-understanding. I am not being-as-becoming through experience and decision. Rather, I am that which is already made, a product of my genetic code, with enhancements or deficiencies built in by an uncontrollable environment. Determinism becomes the place where we search for who we are, whether through researching our ancestry or our genetic history. Relationships in a consumer society are also treated as functional, predetermined through uncontrollable series of events, and expendable when no longer satisfactory. Reflection on the accuracy and desirability of this state of affairs is rendered impossible, along with the potential to uncover meaning in the midst.

Religion as source of philosophical reflection on meaning is sidelined. John Canfield suggests that science has thus taken the place of religion in philosophy. Surely greater discoveries of human nature are exciting and edifying and worthy of philosophical pursuit. But scientific discoveries do not exhaust or even address the matter of why things are the way they are, nor what they are becoming, or should become when humans act upon them. We are part of the natural realm, and yet possess the ability to transcend the natural realm and influence culture's path towards alternative futures with varying desirability. This affirmation alone suggests that philosophy must engage with more than how things are in the world. The 'why' and 'how' questions are never far from the human mind, and are raised constantly in our experience.

Some suggest that scientific determinism precludes a 'need' for meaning, particularly religious meaning. Yet the lack of need does not explain the persistence of questions about meaning. Robert Gall writes:

> there may be no 'need', at least as science defines it, yet the religious questions – of meaning, purpose, of the right and true – still haunt us. One reason may be that the joys of science and the joys of human life do not always converge as nicely as … [some] … would have us believe.

Indeed, Niebuhr's dialectical understanding of the human being holds together the limits of humanity (because of sin) with humanity's potential (because of grace). Science cannot provide us with an understanding of sin or grace, and determinism undermines the potential and reality of moral responsibility. We are left powerless in the face of the moral dilemmas that scientific discoveries pose: 'The exhilaration of discovering how to unlock the vast powers of the atom or the intricacies of the genetic code does not coincide with the agony of the problems such discoveries have created.'[12]

In deterministic frame, then, human beings are rendered morally inculpable. We find a reversal at play in contemporary culture: rather than being exhorted to seize the day, we are reminded that the day seizes us. In the final scene of Academy Award-winning *Boyhood*, the main character of the film agrees with his girlfriend that rather than seizing moments, every moment takes hold of us. 'Yeah, I know it's constant, the moments,' he responds. 'It's like it's always right now, you know?' Similarly, the common phrase 'YOLO' – You Only Live Once – is used less as a motivation for risk and achievement and more as an excuse for irresponsible and nihilistic behaviour.[13]

A deterministic portrayal of how we encounter life is insufficient to support meaning. Naturalism's determinism leaves a generation bereft of meaning, as life is perceived as already made, not in-the-making, and we have no freedom over our own futures. Existence no longer precedes essence; rather, essence precedes and precludes existence. And if we do not know who we are, or why we are here, there is no meaning in life. In this closed box of cause and effect, there are no actions I can take to impact the future, to make a difference, to show that I was here. Responsibility is corrupted – I am who I am because of predetermined genetics, or environmental factors that formed my life. We should not be surprised at the epidemic of self-harm and suicide among young people in many places across the Western world.

We experience alienation as we have denied either the contingency or the transcendence of humanity. On the one hand, we think more highly of ourselves than we ought when we think we are the measure of all things. On the other hand, we underestimate our potential when we think that we are simply the sum of biological impulses. We lack meaning because we have traded our relational *imago dei* for a rugged self-dependence that relies on what or who we can buy or sell rather than on authentic social existence.

III

In a fermenting consumer culture, meaning may yet be derived from reconciliation between the image and the thing it represents. Reconciliation between humanity and God results in a restored image of God in humanity. When we live as rugged individualists, disconnected from community and self we become disconnected from the Reality that anchors the image of God in humanity. We behave as *the* authority in a consumer society, until we realise we are merely cogs in the economic wheel. Consumerism is a human experience that at once denies both our contingency and our transcendence; both our body and our spirit. Seeking meaning within a theistic context does not allow us to float free from our relational connections and obligations, for we are saved into community, not from it.

This is why a theism that is given to Hegelianism – even a fragmented, postmodern sort – is insufficient, as it runs rampant over the vagaries of human personality. A Christian, and therefore personal, theism that meets the deep longing to know and be known, and defines the essential relationality of the human person, helps us rightly to explore the meaning of life. We are not entirely alienated, for we long for love. We are not solely determined material, for we love and are loved. And with theism embodied in the self-sacrifice of the Cross of Christ comes a beckoning that extends endlessly beyond the self to other, something that Emmanual Levinas understood.[14] We are invited to love not only those who love us, but to love those considered unlovable. Here is a stable basis for human flourishing, demonstrating care for the vulnerable and the weak, while also making the most of the gifts of the strong.

Living out the image of God in humanity means overcoming the alienation that has overwhelmed our culture through determinism and consumerism. That which some philosophers would deem impossible, Christ makes possible. In the holy love of Christ, we encounter a subversive act; an act that shows us the cost of our alienation, and achieves what we could not – reconciliation. Death shows what our lives are worth. They are worth everything – enough to be sought and saved to the uttermost.[15] In the seemingly endless cycle of life and death, life has the last word. The image of God in humanity that was masquerading as independent is shown the way home. God is satisfied, removing him from the consumer dynamic that demands dissatisfaction and endless desire. The image is reconciled with the Real, and life is whispered in echoes across a nihilistic culture.[16]

A reconciled *imago dei* brings the potential for multi-layered transformation in individual and community life. Where determinism delivers fate, Christ shows human destiny. The moment that is now, even though fleeting, has eternal meaning. We are beckoned to follow Christ in subversive self-sacrificing love in a pursuit of discipleship that includes justice and mercy. In this moment we may love and discover love. In this moment lies endless potential. Where there was once despair, we find we are harbingers of hope and messengers of meaning.

Certainly Christian belief does not obliterate existential angst from the life of the believer. Nor does our faith lift us into some 'Olympian vantage point from which to view all things in an absolutely unconditioned way'.[17] Rather, it conditions our thoughts and actions in particular directions, where we appropriate meaning within a theistic frame, understood and experienced specifically in identification with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Where there is separation and alienation, a Christian theistic approach offers the possibility of reconciliation that holds together the dialectical aspects of human nature and existence.

And so we have in personal theism, in Christian life and faith, a means of holding together the vagaries of what it means to be human. Understanding what it means to be human is the key to framing our struggle for meaning. No aspects of human experience or essence are jettisoned; alienation paves the way for reconciliation; the innate desire to love and be loved has a source and a direction, interjected into history from beyond history. Although we should never be so arrogant to proclaim that we hold the meaning of life, we can yet be confident in our confession that the Meaning of Life holds us. In every moment, each one unique, we are in a place we have never been before and never will be again. Perhaps there is something new under the sun after all.

Notes

1. Eagleton 2007, p. xviii.
2. '42' is the answer to life, the universe and everything in Douglas Adams' well-known *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.
3. Niebuhr 1964, p. 3.
4. Niebuhr 1964, pp. 3–4.
5. Gall 1987, p. 1.
6. A. N. Wilson, 'Why I Believe Again,' *New Statesman*, 6 April 2009. Accessed online: http://www.newstatesman.com/religion/2009/04/conversion-experience-atheism.

7. See, for example, Julian Baggini's discussion on the creation of meaning in Baggini 2005; and de Botton's preference for finding meaning in the everyday, explored in his books, TED talks and his 'School of Life' at theschooloflife.com.
8. Eagleton 2007, p. 32.
9. Simon Jenkins, 'The Meaning of Life' book review, *Guardian*, 10 March 2007. Accessed online: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/mar/10/society1. Cf. Eagleton 2007, p. 100f.
10. Frankl 1992, p. 75.
11. Badrillard deals with these themes in a number of works. See, for example, Badrillard 1998; also Badrillard 1994.
12. Gall 1987, p. 1.
13. Cf. George the Poet's 'YOLO', widely accessible on the internet.
14. See Levinas 1969.
15. P. T. Forsyth develops the theme of God's holy love across several works, highlighting what the Cross achieves and not only what it demonstrates. See, for example, Forsyth 1910. Here, Forsyth highlights the victory and the satisfaction of Christ's work, and its regenerative power.
16. I have developed this theme more fully in 'Atonement in Contemporary Culture: Christ, Symbolic Exchange and Death' in Tidball, Hilborn and Thacker (eds) 2008, pp. 329–344.
17. Sell 2002, p. 191. Sell is here following the argument of Karl Jaspers.

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HOLINESS
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A reluctant Samaritan: reflections from Carlo Levi's *Christ Stopped at Eboli*

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Carlo Levi, doctor, organist, painter and political activist, was exiled in 1935 by Mussolini to Lucania, a remote corner of southern Italy. I consider the enormous impact his skills made on the primitive life of the area, and how, when the peasants believed that 'Christ stopped at Eboli', the town north of their region, and no Christians or outsiders were interested in them, Levi gradually, through his immersion in their life with practical, undemonstrative service, gave them new hope. Finally I consider the vital importance of practical service as a true reflection of Christ's active love for a world and for suffering people without other hope.

EXILED POLITICAL PRISONER • NEGLECTED REGION • PRACTICAL SERVICE • CONFIDENCE • HOPE • WORTH

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Between Campania and Apulia in southern Italy lies the mountainous region of Lucania, remote from the tourist route and the rest of civilisation, a region neglected and backward, stretching south down to the Gulf of Taranto. It is the region to which the writer, doctor and painter, Carlo Levi, was sent as a political prisoner for three years in 1935 for his uncompromising opposition to the Fascist regime of Mussolini, a region portrayed in his book *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, published in 1946.[1]

Eboli lies just to the north of Lucania whose inhabitants for centuries had known themselves to be abandoned by the authorities, lost in a past of violence, brigandage, feuding, lost in the lingering disease of malaria, plunged in pessimism and a feeling of being totally discarded. When Carlo Levi says 'Christ stopped at Eboli', he is referring to the local people's sense that they were at the edge of caring civilisation, and at the limit of the interest and involvement of governments and spiritual authorities. Eboli seemed to be the place at which Christian influence stopped, beyond which was a desolate, inhumane region, where, in the words of Levi in the opening pages of his account, 'Christ never came': 'Christ never came this far, nor did time, nor the individual soul, nor hope, nor the relation of cause to effect, nor reason nor history' (p. 2).

Because of their acute sense of abandonment, the people of the region were permanently plunged in a deep resignation to the inevitability of neglect and the futility of hoping for better. This was the region to which political prisoners, opponents of the regime, were sent, where the road ended, with limits set to their freedom of movement, where they had to register every day with the authorities. Levi, however, manages to make the very best of these limitations and is soon absorbed into the meagre life of the village of Gagliano, able to use his neglected medical skills to cure the sick, whereas the two local doctors had been incompetent and unsuccessful.

Levi not only makes the best of his situation, he develops a great love for the people and describes their way of life in considerable detail, only occasionally making gentle critical comments on those he meets who are insincere or manipulative. His descriptions speak for themselves as he dwells lovingly and good-humouredly on the idiosyncrasies of the local people. However, at certain times, he describes the aura of pessimism and resignation that pervades the life of the villagers around him, and his bitterness on their behalf emerges from his account. The peasants all sympathise with the fact that as a political prisoner he must have enemies in Rome, just as they have. There is a spirit of brotherliness, 'this passive brotherliness … as suffering together, this fatalistic, age-old patience'. It is 'a bond made by nature rather than by religion' (p. 3). While there are churches, priests, religious processions and ceremonies in the locality,

> there is no room for religion, because to them everything participates in divinity, everything is actually, not merely symbolically, divine: Christ and the goat, the heavens above and the beasts of the field below … Even the ceremonies of the church become pagan rites, celebrating the existence of inanimate things, which the peasants endow with a soul. (p. 116)

In September, during the feast of the Virgin Mary, the papier-mâché Madonna, a replica of the famous Madonna of Viggiano, is 'no sorrowful Mother of God, but rather a subterranean deity, black with the shadows of the bowels of the earth, a peasant Persephone or lower-world goddess of the harvest' (p. 118). The peasants pray to her for rain for their parched land, but the rain does not come: 'The black-faced Madonna remained impassive, pitiless and deaf to all appeals, like indifferent Nature' (p. 120). When Levi visits his patients and sees their bedrooms, he sees two pictures, the Madonna of Viggiano and President Roosevelt, the Madonna with her 'black, scowling face, with its large inhuman eyes' and the 'hearty grin of President Roosevelt' (p. 121). The two pictures seem to represent

> the two faces of the power that has divided the universe between them … The Madonna appears to be a fierce, pitiless, mysterious ancient earth goddess … The President a sort of all-powerful Zeus, the benevolent and smiling master of a higher sphere. (pp. 121–122)

For the peasants, America is the substitute for Rome, America the land of promise and hope, to which many young men travel in search of prosperity, whereas Rome has failed them and offers no hope or future. The pitiless Madonna is the face of grim rejection, of impassive neglect, just the excuse for the occasional boisterous celebration of the force of nature and earthly powers.

Only very rarely does Levi, despite the frustrations of his confined situation, feel this same resignation that the Madonna inspires. At the start of the New Year of 1936, when winter has set in and there is an eclipse of the sun, he sees the eclipse as a portent in the heavens: 'A plague-ridden sun looked through half-closed eyes at a world that had entered upon a war of dissolution.' And he makes one of his references in this account to the evils of the wider world that gradually preoccupy him more and more and shape his life increasingly:

> A sin lay beneath it all, and not merely the sin, committed in these early days, of massacre by poison gas … No, the sin was of the kind that all pay for alike, the innocent along with the guilty. The face of the sun was darkened in warning: 'The future holds only sorrow', the peasant said. (p. 205)

The gloom of the eclipse and of the winter in this region infects him with the same pervasive pessimism and resignation that all are doomed to endure the same fate.

The depressed mood of the people is perhaps best expressed in the story of the peasant of Gagliano who dreams of a treasure buried in a forest nearby. Frightened by the dark, ghostly night, he tells another man his dream and together they search for the treasure, which they find to be gold. But when one of the men climbs down into the hole to extract it, the gold turns into coal (pp. 145–146). This same sense of disappointment and betrayal is found towards the end of Georg Büchner's 1837 play *Woyzeck* in which a grandmother tells some children the story of a poor orphan child who, because there is no more hope on earth, strives to get to heaven, which smiles in such a friendly way, but turns out to be just a piece of 'rotten wood'. When the child then looks for the sun, it is just 'a faded sunflower'. Eventually, after more futile searching, when the child returns to earth, the world is now 'an overturned harbour'.[2] The meaninglessness of such a betrayal of hopes recalls Levi's comment when he is asked why he has come to Gagliano and he realises that he is the victim of fate. 'Such things as reason or cause and effect, do not exist; there is only an adverse fate, a will for evil' (p. 77).

However, through his service as a doctor who, though unable to achieve the impossible, is able to effect basic cures that the two incompetent local doctors are unable to effect, and through his ability to communicate with every kind of person, Levi is eventually described as 'a Christian, a real human being' (p. 264), one who has shown humanity and care, different from the authorities, the 'fellows in Rome', as the peasants frequently describe them contemptuously. In the eyes of the peasants, a Christian does not need to be a religious person, simply a human being who cares and gives love.

It seems that this is the only means at his disposal of alleviating the sufferings of these people and of bringing some love and purpose into the world. Levi does not mention his personal beliefs. We learn very late in the book that there is a Protestant Bible on his bedside table (p. 260), a fact noticed by the priest who replaces the drunken priest who has been relegated to ministering in an even remoter village in the valley. Levi is a painter, he can play the organ for the new priest, but he does not help out for more than one Mass. Whatever his personal beliefs, he mainly channels them into his service as a doctor, which he only undertakes reluctantly in the first instance, as he has not practised medicine for a long time. He demonstrates love and service through actions rather than words. He is clearly an activist, a fact that has incurred the wrath of the authorities and caused him to be sent into exile in Lucania, but in this place he has to conform to the restrictions imposed on him by the mayor, who nonetheless is pleased to have such a cultured person in their midst as a prisoner. Despite his activities as a dissident, he seems to have found a niche in Gagliano where he can use his skills in a different way to alleviate the sufferings of others while making the best of his confinement.

Despite the title of his book, after the remarkable opening chapter Christ is very rarely mentioned in the account. Christ has indeed stopped elsewhere, and has seemingly been replaced by an analysis of the life of these people, tinged with their resignation but enhanced by Levi's deeds of practical service. But does the book hold out any more hope than Levi's good deeds?

In one of the most moving passages in one of his books of meditations, Eddie Askew rewrites part of the parable of the good Samaritan. After the Levite passed by on the other side, he writes: 'Then for a long time no-one came. The sun beat down by day, the night was very cold, and the man died.' He adds: 'I call it the Absent Samaritan. Because for many people help never comes.'[3] My recent reading and frequent rereading of Levi's book has drawn my attention again and again to the plight of those regions of the world, such as the devastated parts of the Middle East, where Christ must seem to be a very distant person indeed, to remote, arid parts of Africa where help seems to be merely scraping the surface of the problems that exist, lack of clean water, medicines and helpers, corruption, violence, tribal hatreds, where, as one journalist writes, 'every minute of every day a woman somewhere dies in childbirth or pregnancy',[4] where children starve or, if they survive, have very short life expectancy, where the politicians, the equivalent of the 'fellows in Rome', seem to be slow to help and where we ordinary citizens sacrifice so relatively little from our abundance to alleviate suffering. While much has been done and the problems are being increasingly brought to our attention, I scratch my head in bewilderment that God seems to have created us human beings in his image, who so manifestly fail to reflect that image, and that he does not seem to have created us with wills that are stronger to reach out to those who stare into our television cameras out of their resigned despair as if judging us for our neglect. Has Christ perhaps stopped short of us and given up on our failure to act much more than we have done? We see this currently especially in the attitude of governments and peoples towards the plight of refugees and migrants whose situation we consider shortly.

Towards the end of his first chapter, Levi gives a pre-echo of my thoughts, as he compares the situation of the rest of humanity with that of the abandoned peasants of Lucania:

> The seasons pass today over the toil of the peasants, just as they did three thousand years before Christ; no message, human or divine, has reached this stubborn poverty. We speak a different language, and here our tongue is incomprehensible. The greatest travelers … have trodden the paths of their own souls, of good and evil, of morality and redemption.

And he goes on to say how Christian morality has bypassed the life of the people of Lucania: ‘Christ descended into the underground hell of Hebrew moral principle in order to break down its doors in time and to seal them up for eternity’ (p. 2). His use of the philosophical term ‘moral principle’ seems to isolate the doctrine from the realities of the daily existence over centuries of the peasants who remain untouched by such concepts.

The view that such moral concepts are sealed off from the real life of the people is highlighted by the fact that once Levi has stated that ‘Christ did not come. Christ stopped at Eboli’, he virtually ignores the name of Christ and concentrates exclusively on the concerns of the people among whom he finds himself (p. 2). Yet while omitting mention of Christ as a person in whom he can believe, Levi, in his love and devotion to the people, becomes for them a new, modest, unaccustomed, unexpected Christ figure. He does not perform miracles in raising sick people from the dead, and he is unable to heal the first person brought to him on his arrival, yet through his concern and his skill he is able to bring healing to almost all his patients and show loving concern for them. There is no bodily resurrection, such as occurred with the raising of our Lord and the raising of Lazarus, and such as is depicted in a famous twentieth-century film where a Christ figure returns to raise a girl to new life who had been dead for a few days.[5] The atmosphere in the community of Gagliano does not resemble the atmosphere of Palestine in the time of Christ, where supernatural events and miracles merged with the normal natural events of daily life. It seems that supernatural miracle has fled the scene to be replaced by the limited skills of well-intentioned and well-trained human beings seeking to serve humanity. But is it possible that Levi, without explicitly stating his own faith and without a conscious effort to propagate the Christian gospel, is living out, in practical ways within the limitations of his humanity, the injunction of Christ to minister and to serve; 'I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me' (Matthew 25:40). If he had failed to do his best to treat his patients and to serve the community, he would have incurred the negative condemnation: 'Just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me' (Matthew 25:45). Such familiar recorded words of Christ confront us starkly with our failure to serve our fellow human beings and convict us of one of the most obvious failures in the life of pious Christians whose piety does not reach out beyond themselves. As Graham Greene wrote through the thoughts of his priest in *The Power and the Glory*: 'God might forgive cowardice and passion, but was it possible to forgive the habit of piety?'[6] Certainly, nobody would criticise Levi for piety. He remains uncommitted to the life of the local church and sceptical of the immorality of the first priest and of the smooth urbanity of his replacement.

But has he achieved any good in the long run? After all, when an amnesty is granted to political prisoners following the end of the war with Abyssinia, he is released and allowed to return to his native Turin after only 18 months of exile. In answer to the pleas of the peasants, he promises to return, but up to the time of writing his account, eight years later, he has not done so. At one point he mentions that he rarely returns to places he has once visited (p. 158). With the amnesty, he now has the chance to resume his previous way of life, though surely his dissident activities have been curtailed. He is simply disinclined to linger longer in Lucania, despite his love for the people. So has his lack of commitment to a prolonged ministry negated what he has achieved in winning the confidence of the people and in serving them?

It seems clear that, while the obstacles to the spread of goodness seem insuperable, the loaf can be leavened by the service of one man or woman in a limited sphere. Levi has brought hope and love, the people now know that they are not forgotten. Can one claim that the act of Oskar Schindler, related in Thomas Keneally's novel *Schindler's Ark* and in Steven Spielberg's film, in rescuing a limited though substantial number of Jews from the gas chambers, has ultimately changed the world? When his colleague Stern reminds him of the Talmudic verse that says that 'he who saves the life of one man saves the entire world' we are surely reminded of the series of Jesus' parables in Luke 15 which stress the vital importance of searching for just *one* lost person.[7] The smallest good act of grace and mercy glorifies God and enhances his kingdom. And the final words of Ben Okri's novel *Starbook* tell how, amid the fluctuations of centuries of civilisation, fragments of love and beauty can shine and light up our mortal world.

> All stories lead to infinity. There is no end to them, as there was no beginning. Just an epic sensed in the unheard laughter of things. Just fragments seen in the murky mirror of mortality, when bright beings shine momentarily in the brief dream of living.[8]

When a light has shone, the darkness has been illuminated, an impression made for good and the world is never the same again.

While one would not wish to denigrate the power of apocalyptic events and doubt the power of God to work through great, earth-shaking movements, earthquakes and fire, it seems that in our fallible and imperfect world, where evil seems so rampant and the gold of so many seems destined to turn into coal, that God more often than not chooses to demonstrate his glory and power through small acts, gentle interventions, as John O'Donohue says, through 'the shy graciousness of divine tenderness',[9] even through a 'gentle whisper' , or as we know it more familiarly 'a still small voice' (1 Kings 19:12), expressing himself through the sanctified acts and service of the trophy of his creation, humankind. So perhaps, while it seems that 'Christ stopped at Eboli', he is continuing to reveal himself through the presence and love of the man who went to Lucania as a reluctant political exile and unknown to himself succeeds in glorifying God when, in his view, the worldly authorities, the 'fellows in Rome', had abandoned the people. Perhaps Christ has come to Gagliano and created a new sense of self-worth after all.

Reading Levi's post-war reflections today, it is impossible not to sense many echoes with the present refugee crisis in Europe. Perhaps Levi's memorable title suggests a contemporary reappropriation: Christ stopped at the Calais Jungle, or Christ stopped at the Greek–Macedonian border, or even, Christ stopped in the Mediterranean. What would the refugees make of our efforts, our compassion, our prayers and our cries for justice and humanity? Would they echo the sentiment of the people of Eboli, that 'Christ never came'? Are they living through their own modern-day parable of the Absent Samaritan? Or will our service, however imperfect, like Levi's, introduce Christ's presence into where it was thought he was not?

Notes

1. Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, trans. Frances Frenaye, London: Cassell, 1948. Henceforth all references to the book will be given in brackets in the text.
2. My translation. The scene is not numbered and is called 'A street'.
3. Eddie Askew, *Disguises of Love*, London: Leprosy Mission International, 1983, p. 78, and Luke 10:25–36.
4. Article in *The Observer*, 28 September 2008, p. 42, confirmed by an article in *Time* magazine, 29 September 2008, pp. 40ff.
5. *Ordet* ('The Word'), directed by Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1955.
6. Graham Greene, *The Power and the Glory* (first published in 1940), London: Heinemann & Bodley Head, 1971, p. 202.
7. Thomas Keneally, *Schindler's Ark*, London: Sceptre, 1986, p. 52.
8. Ben Okri, *Starbook*, London: Rider, 2007, p. 422.
9. John O'Donohue, *Eternal Echoes*, London: Bantam Books, 1998, p. 110.

HOLINESS
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A holiness movement, shaped *by* mission: encountering God in Oceania

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Reflecting on the author's experience of Christianity in Oceania, this article draws attention to a classic nineteenth-century Methodist text written in the founding years of the Christian mission in Oceania. Letters on Entire Sanctification *was written by John Hunt, a remarkable young missionary, published after his early death in Fiji, and can claim to be the first substantial work of Christian theology written in Oceania. Understanding Hunt's writings in their context helps to define the relationship between holiness and mission, and refocus the Methodist movement as a 'holiness movement, shaped by mission'.*

HOLINESS • CHRISTIAN PERFECTION • MISSION • OCEANIA • JOHN HUNT • FIGI • SANCTIFICATION

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Introduction

As a minister, a Christian, a human being and theologian I have been shaped by the experience of living, learning, teaching and praying in Oceania. In January 1979 I arrived in Tonga as a probationer minister and mission partner. During my three years as a lecturer at Sia'atoutai Theological College I was married, ordained and became a father – three experiences that were enriched by that cultural setting. Of course I did not (could not) cease to be English and European, but I did begin to appreciate how different the world, life, the Bible and Christian faith can look and feel within different cultures. In recent years I have been privileged to return to Oceania a number of times, visiting Fiji and Samoa as well as Tonga, and I have also come to appreciate the extra-ordinary courage and self-sacrifice of the early missionaries within the islands. A recent sabbatical visit to Oceania involved teaching and preaching, listening and reflecting. I encountered island churches in their changing cultures, developing their mission in a postcolonial setting. But these same churches still had enormous pride in the missionaries who helped to found them. Their spirituality was still an inspiration for present holiness.

In this paper I focus on one nineteenth-century missionary, who came from my own home area of the East Midlands. I offer a reading of the classic nineteenth-century Methodist text, *Letters on Entire Sanctification*,[1] written by John Hunt and published after his early death in Fiji. This book has some claim to be the first substantial work of Christian theology written within the islands of Oceania and for that reason alone deserves to be better remembered. For our own day, Hunt will help us see that engaging in mission is a transformative process that shapes us in the likeness of Christ.

The tiny island of Viwa lies just off the coast of Viti Levu in the Fiji archipelago. I visited it in a small boat, with a Fijian theological student as my guide. We took with us *kava* root (the ceremonial drink of the Pacific) to present to the chief and show our respect. Viwa is largely surrounded by mangrove swamp; it has a landing place for small boats, a cluster of houses and, perched on its only hill, a Methodist church. This speck of green on the vast blue ocean is holy ground for Fijian Methodists, for here, in the 1840s, was the headquarters of their infant church. Here a printing press produced the first Fijian Bibles, and a training institute for indigenous missionaries made it a pioneering centre for theological education. But, most of all, the holiness of Viwa is located in the memory of John Hunt, a remarkable young missionary who took Wesley's injunction to 'spend and be spent' with sacrificial seriousness. Hunt (together with the

Tongan missionary Soeli Pulu) is buried behind the church that was erected in his memory, and his grave has been a place of pilgrimage since his death in 1848. The Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma has plans for a retreat centre to be built around the spot where Hunt, rising in the early hours, would stand and pray for the cannibalistic chief on the neighbouring island of Bau. To pray where Hunt prayed is a step on the way – so Fijian Methodists believe – to being imbued with Hunt's holiness.

Holiness is not an alien concept in the cultures of Oceania. *Tapu* (from which we derive the English word 'taboo') conveys something both holy and forbidden. In Tonga, for example, a church is a *fale tapu* (a holy house) and therefore there is a strong sense of what is and is not appropriate within it. So although the missionaries who brought the Christian gospel to the islands during the nineteenth century had a profound effect in reshaping Oceanic culture, they could not help but be shaped in turn by their experience of living in the islands. Sharing in God's mission is, I want to argue, a key element in shaping us into the likeness of the holy God of Jesus Christ.

Who was John Hunt?[2]

It is easy to see why the story of John Hunt was so appealing to the early Victorian Methodist public.[3] Born in 1812 to poor parents, he grew up around Balderton, a village on the border of Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire. In fact, my home town of Newark on Trent has a school named after him. Leaving school at ten he became a farm labourer, hired by the year and with neither security nor prospects. At 16 he experienced a dramatic conversion in the village Wesleyan chapel at Swinderby, an event that catapulted him into a voyage of self-discovery. A sympathetic employer lent him John Mason's *A Treatise on Self-Knowledge*, the book (apart from the Bible and the works of Wesley) that came to have most influence on him. Mason had condensed into one volume insights on Christian piety from the Catholic and Puritan traditions, given a new perspective through forms of reasoning based on the logical arguments of the Enlightenment. Hunt's late adolescence saw him continuing his journey of self-improvement, attending night classes and gaining recognition as a local preacher. He developed immense physical strength as well as spiritual maturity and intellectual confidence.

In 1836 Hunt was accepted as a candidate for the Wesleyan ministry and admitted to the newly opened Theological Institute at Hoxton, in East London.

A seminary for preachers was a hugely controversial development for Methodists and there were fears (which do not seem to have disappeared over the last 200 years!) that the piety and enthusiasm of the young students would be dampened by the rigours of academic study. In fact, spiritual formation (as we now call it) was a conspicuous feature of life at Hoxton, with students witnessing to a fuller salvation and spurring each other on towards entire sanctification. The curriculum combined the traditional elements of ministerial training (biblical languages and exegesis, doctrine, etc.) with a catch-up general education, including English language, science and philosophy. John Hannah, the first theology tutor at Hoxton (to whom *Letters on Entire Sanctification* were dedicated), has left us a picture of the kind of theology that Hunt would have absorbed.[4] There was a strong concern for proof, for the defence of Christian belief and the establishment of Methodist teaching. Its chief theological textbook was Richard Watson's *Institutes*,[5] which seeks first to prove the reliability of scriptural revelation and then lays out a set of theological doctrines that can (he believed) be proved from Scripture and experience.

While many students spent only a year at Hoxton, Hunt returned for a second year and then began a third. He was clearly a rewarding student to teach. After two-and-half-years' college training he was married (to his childhood sweetheart, Hannah Summers), ordained by the laying on of hands (another recent development for Wesleyans) and stationed to the Methodist mission in Fiji. He would never see England again, dying on Viwa in October 1848, at the age of 36. In his ten years as a missionary Hunt became leader of a small and struggling church, the founder of schools and training institutions, a Bible translator and author. Fiji at that time was riven with violent tribal warfare, often accompanied by cannibalism. It was by no means clear that the mission would survive, let alone prosper. Regular (and often lurid) reports were sent back to England and published in *Missionary Notices* and *The Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*. Today the Victorian heroic image of the missionaries to the heathen South Sea islanders has long since given way to the (equally one-sided) picture of culturally insensitive bearers of the 'fatal impact' of European domination.[6] Somewhere between these two extremes lies an appropriate but critical admiration for the sacrificial idealism and willingness to learn that characterised most of these men and women.[7] More often than not, the early missionaries helped to forge a lasting and productive relationship between local culture and Christian commitment.

The context of the *Letters on Entire Sanctification*

Hunt's *Letters on Entire Sanctification* were written to fellow missionary James Calvert, stationed in another part of Fiji. Although Hunt often protests dissatisfaction with his own writing, it is quite clear that future publication was intended from the start. In a 'review of the year' Hunt talks about his three priorities of evangelism ('converting Fijians'), translation of the Bible into Fijian and promoting holiness in England 'with my pen'.[8] Writing had to be fitted in the little time left from Bible translation, teaching, preaching, administration – and the demanding business of staying alive in such an environment. But Hunt believed that he was fulfilling a necessary mission for the Church in Britain, even while he was building up a new Church in Fiji. Mission on the one side of the world contributed to the holiness of the Church on the other. It was Calvert who eventually edited the letters for publication after Hunt's death. They went through several editions, their popularity owing much to the saintly reputation of their author. But for all their initial popularity, Hunt's letters do not feature in the major works on Christian perfection produced by British Methodists in the early and mid-twentieth century.[9] These tended to look directly back to Wesley and locate his doctrine of perfection within the broad stream of Catholic spirituality.

Mission is the context for Hunt's writing, even if the direct references to his situation in Fiji are sparse. It was a situation of immense challenge, some trauma and considerable personal growth. Writing to his former college principal in 1841, Hunt sums up his first two years in Fiji: learning a new language and culture (he claims to have preached extempore in Fijian within five months), adjusting to marriage and family life (including the death of their first child), witnessing cannibalism at close proximity and enduring threats to his own safety, taking responsibility for a training institution for indigenous missionaries. He writes, too, of spiritual challenge and blessing, but ends on a note of extreme self-deprecation:

> Alas for me I fear my unfaithfulness has made it impossible that I should ever know so much of God as you know; even if I live as many years and from this time be faithful, I never think of you but I am ashamed of myself.[10]

So the author of the *Letters on Entire Sanctification* is someone who struggles with his own sense of unworthiness even though he can assert that he has at least 'the lowest degree of perfection'.

The style of the *Letters* is plain and straightforward. As a writer Hunt comes across as intelligent, but not sophisticated, a skilled but inelegant communicator. For Hunt, you sense, elaborate language would be as useless and dangerous as ostentatious dress.

We might see the letters as exercises in what has been called 'scriptural reasoning'; the range of references is remarkable, with Hunt darting backwards and forwards through the Bible to seek out examples to illustrate his point or (more often) exegetical evidence to build up the argument he is making. He has a clear sense of the hermeneutic that guides him:

> The Book of Revelation [ie Scripture] is to the theologian what the book of nature is to the philosopher.
>
> … The operations of the Spirit of God on the hearts and minds of believers, and the fruits of these operations, as seen in their tempers and conduct, he regards as the best helps to a right understanding of those parts of Scripture which describe inward and outward holiness. The testimony of one man, who is in every respect competent to give testimony, is to these doctrines what a well-conducted experiment is in philosophy. If we can produce hundreds of such cases, then the evidence is in proportion stronger, and confirms us in the fact, that we have not mistaken the meaning of Scripture on these important – but, from the nature of the case, difficult – subjects.[11]

Authentic biblical interpretation, even when it employs the work of linguists and exegetes, is for Hunt evidenced through the inner experience of Christians and the outward fruitfulness of their lives. This practical and experiential hermeneutic is in sharp contrast to the historical-critical method that would soon come to prevail in European biblical studies, but it does have something in common with recent emphases on the role of the interpretative community in establishing meaning.

Entire sanctification defined

What picture of entire sanctification, or Christian perfection, emerges from Hunt's reading of Scripture? He had, of course, been trained in the Wesleyan vision of a perfection that can be granted by God before death,[12] one that is not so much the unalterable perfection of God's self, but rather a perfect orientation in love towards God and others. For Wesley this (admittedly, limited) perfection is taught in Scripture and evidenced in the holy lives and spiritual experience of many genuine Christians. Its roots have been detected in his Puritan and Pietist forebears, in the broad tradition of Catholic spirituality and in the Eastern Fathers.[13]

Hunt's picture of Christian perfection seeks to be faithful to Wesley, but develops a direction of its own. He gives a definition in three parts: 'entire purity of heart', 'maturity of Christian character' and 'practical holiness'.[14] The last of these involves what Hunt terms 'a uniform attention to the claims of God and the duties we owe to ourselves and all men'. This recognition that sanctification/perfection is complex means that it cannot be boiled down to an event, an experience, or a pattern of behaviour. This is helpful because talk of Christian perfection tends to face two dangers. One is an emphasis on personal religious experience that reduces it to subjectivity. The other is an emphasis on behaviour that reduces it to moralism. Hunt is drawn more to the second; at times he so stresses the moral heavy lifting required of mature Christians that we could forget the 'easy yoke' and 'light burden' of Christ's teaching. He was clearly a driven man himself, dreading an idle moment and chastising fellow missionaries for daring to suggest that they were too tired for biblical translation after their other duties. What (just about) saves Hunt from the more unattractive forms of Christian moralism is his keen sense of the ultimate purpose and goal of Christian perfection. It is nothing less than an intimate union with the triune God.

In his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, John Wesley stressed the 'in a moment' nature of the process of perfection, though he did talk about the need for further development. While Hunt does not deny that there are key moments of transformation, his emphasis is much more on a process. 'Maturity' is a key word for him and he links entire sanctification to a series of steps in the Christian life. There are, he says, four stages of Christian holiness taught in the New Testament:[15]

1. Pardon and regeneration (John 1:12–13).
2. Destruction of 'the carnal mind' to produce the 'perfect love of God and man' (1 John 4:17–18).
3. 'Being filled with all the fullness of God' (Ephesians 3:18–19).
4. 'An intimate and constant union with the ever-blessed Trinity' (1 John 1:7).

These steps lead from the inward event of saving faith, through a process of sanctification that moves us (in St Paul's words) from 'living according to the flesh' to 'living according to the Spirit'. The third and fourth steps conform us more and more to the likeness of Christ, bringing us into ever closer communion with the Trinity.

Far from being exceptional, Hunt is convinced that entire sanctification should be the expected outcome of the normal Christian life. It comes with the maturing of Christian understanding and love. It is reflected in a life of self-denial; at times Hunt's prescription for Christian duty sounds harsh and austere in the extreme. We can picture him in his traditional Fijian hut, with only the basic necessities of life, casting a critical eye towards those back in England who take pleasure in clothes, food and pastimes. But self-denial is, he tells us, the only true form of self-love. Freeing ourselves from the desires of the world will open up for us the one true desire, which is for full union with God. By bringing us back time after time to the ultimate goal of the Christian life, Hunt is able to move from a dour sense of duty to a kind of rugged joy.

Although Hunt's prose is, for the most part, dogged rather than lofty, there are rare rhapsodic passages that remind us of the great tradition of Christian mysticism and even of the best hymns of Charles Wesley:

> In our God we find all we need, and all we need at all times … He who fills eternity with His being is ours. 'if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.' (Rom viii.17) What have we found in finding God! The more we are like God, the more we delight in Him, in all these respects; and therefore, that degree of religion which makes us like Him brings to a happy maturity this modification of Christian love. Then shall we delight ourselves in the Lord, and He will give us the desire of our hearts, and we shall every moment say, what we now always desire to say, 'Whom have I in heaven but Thee?'[16]

There is a hint, then, of a poetic imagination. Hunt read and wrote poetry in both Fijian and English. His surviving notes in the MMS archive include a poem to his wife on her thirty-third birthday and a very long (79 stanzas!) narrative poem on the death by drowning of Mrs Cross[17] on a missionary journey in Tonga. As a preacher and translator, Hunt had to master a language that is much more idiomatic than abstract. He had constantly to find culturally meaningful ways to express his faith.

There are weaknesses, of course. Hunt had no idea that he was standing in a long line of Christian spirituality that embraces Catholic and Orthodox as well as Protestant understandings of holiness. In a sermon outline sent to a friend he gives a potted version of Church history that (presumably) came from his theological training.[18] It is a story of Papist corruption and error beginning with Origen's 'wild' interpretations of Scripture and is only lightened by a line of faithful dissent from the likes of Waldo, Wycliffe and Huss. It is fair to say that Hunt – like Wesley – shared the anti-Catholic sentiments of his Protestant culture. Wesley, though, with his greater historical sense, was more aware of the long succession of the teaching and practice of Christian perfection, a succession reflected in the eclectic collection of texts in his *Christian Library*. In the *Letters* Hunt lumps 'Papists' with Muslims and heathens and regards Catholicism as a dangerous parody of true Christianity. For him, the Catholic mission in Fiji was the work of darkness masquerading as the work of light.

Readers might be surprised to find relatively few direct references to his life in Fiji in the *Letters on Entire Sanctification*. He does mention cannibalism, but also the extraordinary hospitality of which Fijian society was capable. One or two traditional customs have a mention, but that is all. One recent commentator has even suggested that by writing to Calvert in this way Hunt was, as it were, taking time out from the rigours of missionary work.[19] I would take a different view and argue that Hunt's account of entire sanctification relates to his context in a number of different and interlocking ways. He arrived in Fiji already convinced of the doctrine of entire sanctification, but his commitment to it, his understanding of it and (perhaps most importantly) his living it out were shaped by the context and demands of mission.

First, entire sanctification is essential to the enterprise of mission. Only the work of God in freeing us from sinful desire and filling us with godly love can make us fit for and effective in the work of Christian mission. Hunt is clear that without the blessing of the Holy Spirit he would not have the motivation to journey to Fiji, neither would he have the character and stamina to survive and build up the Church. Holiness, in this sense, has formed him for mission, and holiness is necessary for the desperately needed promotion of Christian mission. So although holiness has as its ultimate goal our unity with the triune God, it proximately serves God's purpose of reaching out to the nations.

Second, entire sanctification enables him to be formed *by* mission. One of the most interesting parts of the *Letters* is the section on Christian patriotism and our duty to others. Here, Hunt gives us an inspiring vision of what it means to be part of one worldwide human family:

> Have we not one Father, one Governor, Sustainer, Benefactor, one saviour, who has bought us all with a price, and has taught us how we ought to value ourselves and one another? The things that make us equal are great; the things which make us different are trifles. We are all one family, though scattered to different parts of the world, Our world itself is only large when we think of it exclusively; it is but a speck in comparison of the universe. To the all seeing eye of God we constitute but one family. Our little differences of colour, national customs, forms of government, different degrees of secular civilisation, etc, are nothing to him. He pities us all and those most who need it most. We are to imitate him, and feel that the wretchedness of the world is a family wretchedness; that we are members of the very family a part of which is utterly destitute of the blessings we enjoy. A mature Christian embraces every man in the world as a brother.[20]

This is a remarkable quotation, combining the influence of a modern scientific outlook ('our world … is but a speck') with a willingness to see his own culture and civilisation as but one way of being human. Even if sentiments like these had arisen in Hunt's native East Midlands (and it is doubtful that they would) they carry a deeper credibility when expressed in the context of Hunt's Fijian experience. The comment on culture is consistent with Hunt's immersion in Fijian life and society and his use of idiomatic, rather than literal, translation in his work on the Fijian Bible. The *Dictionary of National Biography* entry for Hunt notes his interest in Fijian culture to the point of writing an article on traditional Fijian poetry.[21] It seems likely that both Hunt's growing experience of sanctification and his expanding vision of how that sanctification affects Christian outlook and behaviour were moulded by his mission context.

Third, Hunt sees entire sanctification as a teaching to be passed on and a practice to share. Just as he has been formed in faith and holiness through his succession of communities, from the village chapel in Swinderby, through the seminary at Hoxton, to the churches and settlements of Fiji, so he, in turn, looks to develop communities in which new Christians can be formed and become holy. For the indigenous Fijian students he was training in mission he provided (at 6.00 am!) regular lectures on Christian doctrine and holiness, based on a contextual reworking of his lecture notes from Hoxton. Nothing shapes ideas better than having to teach others, and Hunt's mature understanding of sanctification must have involved putting into new language and idioms ideas that came from a very different context. In a sermon on Christian perfection,[22] Hunt (commenting on Hebrews 6) describes his text as 'a happy mixture of doctrinal and practical theology' – what Charles Wesley called 'Knowledge and vital piety'.[23]

Fourth, the evidence of Hunt's own life and ministry as holiness in action deepened and gave credibility to the picture of sanctification that he presented. That he spent long night hours in prayer for his enemies among Fiji's chiefs demonstrates both the spirituality he brought to Fiji and the spirituality that was formed in him while he was there. The chief for whom he prayed most, Cacobau (pronounced Thakombau) of Bau, came to see his body before it was buried and, some while later, accepted Christian baptism.

Conclusion

Why look back to a nineteenth-century missionary and his writing? Because both the descendants of Hunt's sending Church, and the descendants of the Church he helped to found, can still gain from a critical reflection on his story and his writing. In particular, he will help us all to appreciate the following.

First, as we seek to discern and to be equipped for the mission that God would have us share in the present, our formation in sanctification is an essential part of the process. To put it theologically, if we are to share the work of God we should be prepared to share in the nature of God. Part of my recent sabbatical involved staying in a theological college where students rise at 5.00 am for prayer each day. I was challenged by the prioritising of spiritual formation.

But, second, the converse is also true. One of the most effective ways to share in the nature and life of God – and that is what Christian perfection finally aims at – is to share in the work of God as God directs us in our situation. When that mission involves crossing cultural boundaries – as it did for Hunt, and has for me – we are more likely to depend on God rather than ourselves.

And, third, there is one key test: our love of God and of our neighbour in every situation and in all details. Hunt's life in Fiji gave him a new appreciation of who his neighbour was and what it meant to love his neighbour. How do we cultivate situations in which our love of neighbour expands and becomes more practised?

In conclusion, Methodism is ‘a holiness movement shaped *by* mission’. Hunt reminds us that if Methodism is a movement, it is primarily a movement for holiness. While discipleship may describe one aspect of the means, holiness describes the end – the *telos* – of the Christian life, and therefore the aim of Methodism. And Hunt also (by example as much as by words) reminds us that the way of holiness lies through sharing in the self-giving mission of the triune God.

Notes

1. Hunt 1849.
2. Those wanting a more detailed account of Hunt’s life will find it in the recent biography by Thornley (2000). This is a critical work, printed in English and Fijian in the same volume, though it has only a little on Hunt’s writing. There is more on the *Letters* in Birtwhistle 1954. Stringer Rowe’s (1860) biography is useful for its many direct quotes from Hunt’s letters, while Nettleton (1902) is more in the genre of hagiography. Many of Hunt’s papers can be accessed through the microfiches of the MMS archive at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.
3. As well as the extravagant obituary printed in *The Wesleyan Methodist Magazine,* James Calvert’s account of Hunt’s final illness was printed as a pamphlet and a full-scale biography soon followed: Rowe 1860.
4. Hannah 1836.
5. Watson 1823.
6. Moorehead 1990.
7. The classic account of Christian missions at this period is in Garrett 1982.
8. Rowe 1860, p. 191.
9. These include: Flew 1934, Sangster 1943, Chadwick 1936.
10. Letter of John Hunt to the Revd Joseph Entwisle, June–August 1841.
11. Hunt 1859, p. 2.
12. John Wesley’s teaching on Christian perfection can be found in a number of his sermons, eg, http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-76-on-perfection/, http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-40-christian-perfection/ (accessed 19/05/16), and his defence of the doctrine in Wesley 1952.
13. A helpful recent exposition and critique of Wesley’s teaching on perfection is in Noble 2013.
14. Hunt 1859, p. 7.
15. Hunt 1859, pp. 47f.
16. Hunt 1859, p. 106.
17. Those familiar with Gerard Manley Hopkins’ *The Wreck of the Deutschland* will notice a similarity in subject matter and theological reflection, but not (unfortunately) in poetic genius.

18. Sermon outlines presented to Richard Lyth, MMS archives, School of Oriental and African Studies.
19. Glen O'Brian, 'Holiness in the South Pacific', Wesleyan Convention, Lake Taupo, New Zealand, June 2006.
20. Hunt 1859, p.115.
21. Arnold and Samson 2004.
22. Sermon outlines presented to Richard Lyth, MMS archives, School of Oriental and African Studies.
23. Unite the pair so long disjoined,
    Knowledge and vital piety:
    Learning and holiness combined,
    And truth and love, let all men see
    In those whom up to thee we give,
    Thine, wholly thine, to die and live.
    (A Charles Wesley hymn for children.)

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HOLINESS
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Pilgrims in a barren land: pioneer ministry in rural Ireland

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This article considers a pioneer ministry in rural and small-town west of Ireland, at a time of social change and financial crash. It considers what was expected, what actually happened, how the parent denomination responded, and what on reflection may feed into the wider discussion of new ways of spreading the Christian gospel. This article is a companion to the author's article 'Modern pilgrimage in the west of Ireland', published in this journal (Volume 2, Issue 1, pp. 115–126).

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Introduction

Pioneer ministry is an attempt to serve local people, working in new or unexpected ways. It also seeks to serve the parent church, by pointing to new ways of engaging with the gospel.

It is a challenge to try to connect with people who are no longer sure what church is, whether it is relevant or true, who do not talk about God, but may have a deep experience of the spiritual, and will certainly bring issues that challenge church life. Discussion often starts with a focus on aspects of daily life that already engage them, and through which they connect to the deep human desire for something beyond themselves.

More pragmatically, pioneer ministry has arisen in the churches because traditional means of attracting and maintaining a steady body of members are not working. Sunday services have to compete with other activities. People do not join 'clubs' any more. There is often indifference, and grave suspicion of the institutions.

For *how* it happens, the context is key, because every pioneer ministry is different. This is a personal reflection on one pioneer ministry, formally constituted in an ecumenical small-town and rural setting. It may seem initially only to offer locally relevant experience, but as the churches seek to move forward into unknown territory, it is hoped that reflections from different areas may be of help in building up a larger picture. In the meantime we can gain ideas from each other.

This pioneer ministry occurred in the western Ireland context of County Clare. It was set up in expectation of the continuing situation produced by the 'Celtic Tiger', the years of economic boom. In practice it took place during the financial crash of 2008 onwards. This means that the ministry had a considerably unexpected role. Some saw it as a failure because there was no obvious increase in the number of churchgoers, still less in financial independence; nevertheless, new work was set up which developed under other auspices.

Usually, pioneer ministry is based in a place with a growing population and little church 'plant', and with a core of people willing to explore new patterns of being church. This was not the case in Clare, where at first glance a youth work specialist appeared to be needed. There were no active ministerial colleagues other than those leading new evangelical churches, often while holding other jobs, who were focusing on their own congregations. Context was significant, but so were the specific skills of the appointed minister; and these determined much of what happened and did not happen.

Pioneer ministry, because it is highly dependent on context, will have differing local forms. It is this writer's view that it has three key aspects. One is that it has to be pastoral to attract people. Another is that there has to be flexibility to look at new openings, and new ways of doing things that may come to nothing. Third, it is not necessarily about growing in numbers: in places populated by a mobile or migratory population, the work may focus on small numbers developing their faith and ministry, and then taking it with them to other places.

The background

The ministry was based in Shannon town, where there was a church and a small Church of Ireland National (primary) school.[1] The town was built when, in 1962, the airport was developed to accommodate inter-continental flights, and when it developed a tax-free industrial zone which attracted international businesses and brought in skilled people, mainly from Britain, continental Europe and South Africa. Some found the quality of life good, and stayed in what was an unusually liberal town with a mobile population. Aeroflot planes breaking the American blockade on Cuba refuelled here, and the staff, in this intensely Catholic, conservative and anti-Soviet Union nation, stayed in what became known as 'the Russian village'. Many people from Ireland, or Irish returning from Britain, made their homes there, especially after the Troubles broke out in the north of Ireland in 1968.[2]

There were three drivers that led to this project of the Home Mission Department of the Methodist Church in Ireland, in a context where there had been joint work with the Presbyterian Church for many years, and in Shannon itself a formal relationship on ministry with the Church of Ireland.

The church in Shannon had been lively but had declined numerically, despite Shannon seeing a new influx of people, including many from African Protestant churches, during the 'Celtic Tiger' years. Many came from Zimbabwe and Nigeria, often because one family member was offered work in the industrial zone, especially in aeronautics.

The second driver was the belief that there had been a substantial increase in Nonconformists throughout the county. Nearly 700 people described themselves as Methodists or Presbyterians in the 2006 census, as opposed to the usual 65 or so identified in earlier censuses.[3] This meant that various ways were considered of reaching them and seeing if their spiritual needs could be met. It was assumed that many would be African, while others would be of British or Northern Irish background, brought in by the increase of work. It was thought that the pioneer ministry might also serve disaffected Catholics as that church went through a major diminution of worshipers and social power as the historic abuse of children came to light.

The third driver related to County Clare's long coastline, some of it ideal for surfing; the Shannon basin in the east, and in the north the unusual karst limestone landscape of the Burren, which attracted scattered new residents, people with second homes and tourists, including walkers. There was a desire to develop understanding of 'Celtic' spirituality, and of what was described as the 'Celtic carpet', pilgrimage between ancient sites, with attendant exploration of the spirituality of the areas the walks would pass through. It was hoped that these would tie in with the interest in long-distance walking that is currently prevalent, and would explore the native spirituality ecumenically. This aspect of the work has been written up separately.[4]

This was not the first pioneer ministry in County Clare. Crossard were the ruins, now under official Protected status, of a late eighteenth-century Moravian church. This had had a resident minister but never touched any but the local Protestant gentry and farmers, except on major occasions, when a large Catholic audience would attend a sermon (possibly to get a free English lesson and impress their landlord, as much as for spiritual nourishment). The chapel was abandoned during the 1798 Rising, when local Protestants fled to the towns, and it was eventually sold to the Catholic parish for a school. The ruins were used in this project as a focus on prayer pilgrimages around the county, and an image for the need of both persistence and the right ways of ministry for a given time. They served as a reminder that 'speaking the language' of the people, and entering into contemporary culture are essential if new ministries are to engage with people who might not otherwise see the Christian message as relevant to their lives or open to their needs and inner yearnings. The Moravian experiment, and that of the Methodists, with whom they had an uneasy relationship, was not undertaken in Irish, and the records indicate no organic relationship with the majority culture. The same issues can be apparent today, though the parameters are different.

What happened

In a place with no ecumenical tradition, it took three years to find out what churches there were and to gain their trust. This was achieved most effectively by developing personal relationships and having something to offer, starting with small, time-limited projects.

Large events, including the opening service for the ministry, funerals and services at the end of some prayer walks, led to full churches, but many attenders were Catholics committed elsewhere, or occasional attenders, and it proved that the core members were few and they increasingly became geographically dispersed. The cost of fuel for people who were supporting family in their home country as well as struggling in the recession meant that people limited their journeys; and they worked the shifts they could get, including on Sundays.

The Nonconformists of the census were never found. Some attended new Black-majority churches, but many are thought to have left the country. The collapse within Catholicism left pastoral openings, but these did not translate into regular engagement, 'turning' having major historical and cultural resonances, even in modern Ireland. Other means were sought of addressing people on an individual level, seeking to develop house church, and reviving the use of a 'summer church' building.

With regard to walks and events in ancient churches, a few African congregation members took part in some, but on the whole there were two distinct ministries, one that involved building church in new ways based on the traditional congregation, and another developing rural pioneer ministry.

Many things evolved: worship in people's homes; prayer groups; public events, often well attended; and talks, organised by the project or in conjunction with historical societies. African traditions were used, praying in the homes of bereaved members, and singing to different rhythms and languages. Church members were filmed for the State Broadcaster's RTÉ 1 *iWitness* programme, a daily, one-minute, late-night faith slot. They included a young businessman who had been robbed twice, a business student from South Africa, another student repeating her school exams, and her mother, a middle-class woman from Harare who was working as a kitchen cleaner in a care home. Financial constraints meant that these programmes were re-broadcast several times, giving unexpected coverage. In the case of the last-mentioned woman, who was studying to become a local preacher and was the only member of the original group still living in Clare three years later, it gave her a prayer ministry in the home, to the surprise of, but with the accord of, the nuns in charge. A Sunday service was broadcast on the radio. A regular column appeared in the local paper, the *Clare Champion*, and access was ensured to this source and to local radio for advertising events. To a lesser extent the national religious papers also publicised events.

When the church building burnt down, it provided short-lived press coverage but, although the building had been in the wrong place, it proved a serious blow. Spontaneous events can only take place if premises can be used spontaneously. The Catholic community offered the use of their church. In the meantime, the local GAA[5] were approached: this proved unfeasible but it proved a healing move at a time leading to major political commemorations. The fire was also a reminder that most Methodist churches were a gift in previous times: there is no right to expect to own property, and losing it does not mean disaster.

It also showed that some people did not want the physical exposure of small numbers and a high level of commitment: for some, an occasional visit to the back row of a traditional church, and occasional associated social activities, proved more congenial.

Many forms of ministry were short-lived. Bible studies and other regular events proved difficult to establish with people working different shifts. Young people moved away. We did not wish to appear in competition with existing churches, yet as they had little experience of co-working, they sometimes grasped at an idea, perhaps in desperation, and copied it, which confused the publicity. A series of talks in one town was agreed with other churches: however, one of these set up a similar, concurrent, series. One historic church was opened up every month for three years, serving mainly the tourists who came: towards the end of the ministry a hitherto unknown group began to open it daily in summer as a historic site but not as a place of worship. Work with the county museum and the local libraries was more successful. The museum co-led a series of talks on war one November, allowing an avoidance of the controversial issue on whether to attempt to have a Remembrance service in a country with no tradition of, and some opposition to, such events.

Preaching and occasional services provided the opportunity for initiating conversation in new ways. Bible studies offered rare but lively opportunities in which the African experience of receiving Christianity, literacy and the opportunity to own a copy of the Scriptures at much the same time as colonialism, was discussed, and took on a new perspective when compared to the Irish threnody on the birth of the State. The New Testament texts that featured people from the African continent proved engaging, and opened the doors to considering other marginally represented groups in Scripture, in particular women. Similarly, but with a different indigenous audience on the pilgrim walks, it proved possible to use stories about the lives of Irish saints as pointers to their scriptural parallels, often using the references to women and marginal groups of people.

The project failed, in the timespan, in getting churches to work in sympathy and unison with each other. The traditional midnight Christmas service was emulated, so three poorly attended ones occurred at the same time. Another joint occasional service, which had been advertised publicly, was cancelled on the day by the hosting church. This was disruptive, not only of the actual event and of the forging of productive relationships, but also served to make all the Protestant churches appear erratic, in consequence limiting attendance. In Holy Week the same church suggested, without intending injury, that we abandon our publicised and prepared Maundy Thursday service and attend their service instead, a move that would have effectually cut out all African, and indeed Irish-language, input. Where communications were impossible, patient endurance was required, knowing that the independent churches and the local voluntary and community sectors also had the problem of frequent duplication of ideas, which weakened their ability to serve well.

Irish society has benefited, especially in the west, from an influx of new people in the last 20 years. It is hoped that this pioneer ministry was one of a number of small ways by which new forms of worship, new expectations and new energies have been given expression. But within the timespan the project failed in the other direction, of assisting newcomers to enter into the uniqueness of the existing culture and its spiritual assets. Discussions started with individuals on 'belongingness' and what it means, and on traditional spirituality and where it relates to Christianity, but these explorations were in their infancy. Even on a purely cultural level there was limited assimilation: some newcomers had been in Ireland for a decade without having visited the county's major tourist sites or places of natural beauty. While they had come to work, and often worked sacrificially to support a family at home, the experience they had was of the Western lifestyle, with the deeper elements of the indigenous culture passing them by. Plans to overcome this began with the practical, such as courses on food foraging, identification and access conventions.

While personal friendships were made within the Methodist district and beyond, there were times when a lack of understanding of pioneer ministry, common vision and collegiality were not present. This may be a common experience for those engaged in pioneer ministry across denominations; and where it comes to the surface, it deflects people from engaging with the churches. Yet without the support – financial, theological and ecclesiological – these projects may easily go their own way and wither.

The parish unit was clearly the Catholic parish, but the scandals to hit that Church reflected on all denominations. This affected applications for project grants, including one to adapt premises for church use. On another level, there were moving ways in which pastoral issues were being addressed. Another success was not obviously 'church' at all but consisted of the Shannon congregation's input into creating a successful social history of the town.[6]

Whole areas of potential contact proved impossible in the time frame, without a team with the relevant contacts and knowledge. One cultural example is the huge popularity of traditional music. Many Catholic churches will use the Mass settings based on traditional music tunes by the composer Seán Ó Riada (1931–1971), and others who have composed religious music along these lines. However, there is little that connects with what happens in a secular, bar 'session' where people play together, a different person taking the lead for different tunes, and others with instruments joining in as and when they can. There are some specific events, such as the annual collection for overseas aid charity Trócaire (the 'Trad for Trócaire' week), but an exploration of what is actually happening when music is played together could lead to engagement in deep conversation relevant to the living out of faith, on the nature of listening and contributing in this communal setting.

When planning for Shannon, it was assumed that the model would be the Acts of the Apostles' description of the church at Jerusalem, constantly welcoming new members. Instead, the group found the key text to be the description of the church at Antioch: small but strong enough to serve others in times of famine; brave enough as a band of different races and social backgrounds, meeting, praying and sending members to serve elsewhere; called upon to be generous, not to grow in numbers:

> Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the ruler, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for

> me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:1–3)[7]

With due notification, and under financial pressure, but just at the time when it felt that in several areas of the county the work was taking off, the finance for the post was terminated. It proved necessary to mothball some work, pass on other work, publish material for those who would seek to walk the pilgrim routes themselves, and provide a written record so the ministry could at some stage be revived.

Reflections

It proved possible to visit afterwards, to see what had emerged, what had ceased, and what had continued to function. It proved that across the county much more than had been expected had taken on new life, but in the main this was no longer under church auspices. The Shannon congregation itself no longer met as such.

Some key elements emerged, many of them familiar.

Pioneer ministry is slow. It costs money. Planning for seven years might be reasonable: an incomer businessman said he had needed four years just to establish himself. There is a need to move courteously, to allow suspicion to be allayed and relationships established. This project was beginning to take off when it came to an end.

Patience is required by the funders. A pioneer ministry may produce a lot of small successes that appear to lead nowhere, but may in time produce a network of growing activities.

It is important not to compete, or undermine: if work is being done by another church group, the required role may be to wait. This is the case with other churches, also thinly spread, as well as with small business enterprises and other groups.

Teamwork is desirable wherever possible, but the partners may be in the community rather than in other churches or their leaders. Conversely, indifference or even disruption should not itself put an end to anything that seems likely to grow.

The demographics and the focus may change. In this post the recession led to the young leaving for work or study. A church may be called to flourish by deepening the faith of a few and letting go of members graciously rather than necessarily increasing its numbers.

It is important to be sure not to raise expectations then vanish; something that has plagued church experiments in Britain. It was established from the outset whether any new project could be passed on or completed, or left in abeyance without doing harm.

Pioneer ministry needs to be flexible, to allow at times only short-term success; to allow failure; and to change ways of working. There may be no prior engagement with new churches, and the old ecumenical structures were irrelevant. There may be perceptions to overcome and communications to negotiate. In this ministry, 'Black people come to services, but won't help to run things' was balanced by, 'White people come to worship but they won't get involved.'

A church needs to be a place where questions can be asked and views challenged, as much as a place of listening. The expectation that churchgoing is a passive activity is no longer working, but the alternative is less comfortable for long-standing members and perhaps especially for church leaders. Our society is not used to listening to another speak without a question session at the end; and group sessions normally include some courteous divergence of opinion as well as 'teaching'. We need to provide for those in church leadership, and we can use pioneer ministries as a means, to expect to be challenged, and to be ready to provide in a church context the opportunities for debate.

The prayer of the wider Church, a channel of two-way contact with it, and the checks and balances this could provide, needs to be present, together with active support. Although the project was written on regularly in the *Methodist Newsletter*, there was a sense that it was perceived as peripheral, with no input to offer for ministerial development. A key aspect of pioneer ministry is whether it flows back into and influences the life of the parent church. This project felt more like sowing on the wind and trusting to a harvest elsewhere, or in years to come.

Pioneer ministries are meant to function free of traditional congregational life and structures; nevertheless, they are accountable within these structures. There are areas of tension. There is the justifiable need to preserve both the corpus of faith and the particular charism of a denomination at a time when the organisational structures that have upheld them are unlikely to survive but are being clung to tenaciously. There is also the fact that new members may have no experience of churchgoing, and no understanding of church as something with these boundaries; nor may they be aware that a financial commitment is expected. There needs to be a time of diaconal ministry, of giving without tangible return. Churches need to ask whether they can host pioneer ministries and the people they attract.

This leads on to how a pioneer ministry is regarded by the parent church. Recently, Huw Spanner indicated how hard some of the resistance is in England.[8] Pioneer ministry can seem frightening, and while some of this can be mitigated by in-house training, this only works if the attenders are present willingly. Traditional ways of working provide comfort to traditional ministers as well as attenders, and buffer the time of inevitable change. There is no guarantee that the denominational structures will continue to exist for another generation.

Confronting the possibility that ministry will not continue in its present form is not always addressed in theological colleges. Much of the preparation for pioneer ministry requires fitting the right person for the right place and time. Ideally this is someone with family backing or a small team, for without it the work is harder and depends heavily on what the individual comes with, and the extent to which they can make an impact on local society, and be accepted.

When comparing the Irish experience with colleagues in Britain, it transpired that in some ways Ireland is an easier society for the Protestant traditions to function. They are all small minorities in the Republic, so while decisions are taken in the North, the centre is not threatened by what happens in the South, and expectations outside of the cities can be limited. Traditional churches may continue in slow decline, some perhaps as sources of prayer and encouragement, and others as closed clubs, but there are also signs of new and flexible approaches to the expression of faith in community.

Conclusion

Pioneer ministry may not seem relevant to all, and some churches are good at ministering in well-trodden ways. In other places, pioneer ministry is an alternative to death, or more positively a way of dying well and passing on the inheritance to others.

Whether it is either the consequence of new growth or slow death, the experience gained from pioneer ministries must be an essential tool in discerning the way forward at a time of change. The wisdom derived from John Wesley's vision is still relevant, along with the models of conflict, growth, loss and restoration found in the early Church, mirrored in contemporary experience.

In coming years there will be challenges to all churches to support, and learn from, ventures sown without tangible guarantee of return; widening the doors to welcome the stranger from different Christian traditions, as members, ministers and enquirers. There will be new challenges to faith, to be thought out theologically, and challenges to structures, as things once taken as permanent come to their end.

This ministry was a joyful privilege, walking in new ways with many people. At a time of great change in society, in church life and ministry, the healing of old religious wounds and the gracious welcome of the stranger give a hint that much is happening in Ireland. The churches may not be the leaders, but they can be part of that process.

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Notes

1. The Church of Ireland was disestablished in 1869 but still had a social role as the expected 'lead' Protestant Church. Like all the main denominations, including the Methodists, it is organised on an all-Ireland basis, and like the other Protestant Churches, the greatest number of adherents are in Northern Ireland, where policies are formed.
2. See Carey 2014. For the Catholic parish, see also Ó Donnabháin 2014.
3. See CSO – *An Phríom-Oifig Staidrimh: Central Statistics Office*: http://www.cso.ie/en/census/index.html (accessed 29/03/16). The census is taken every five years, and by 2011 the numbers were much closer to the norm again. It is believed that in 2006 many recent incomers identified themselves by the church they had belonged to at home. Some may have joined the new Black-majority churches while others ceased attendance or saw the attachment as nominal. In 2006, 'Methodists' was among the five options that could be ticked, but by 2011 their place had been taken by 'Muslim'; a Methodist would have had to tick 'Other' and then write it in.

4. Power 2016; see also Power 2015.
5. The GAA, the Gaelic Athletic Association, has a huge social influence across Ireland as the leading voluntary provider of sports facilities and social activities. It long prevented members of the North's police forces from becoming members and was in consequence perceived as hostile to Protestantism.
6. Carey 2015.
7. NRSV translation.
8. Spanner 2016.

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‘Pretty amazing grace’: using contemporary popular music in church worship

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This article reflects upon the use within corporate worship of music created outside of the church environment. Using the practical experience of producing a Passiontide liturgy that incorporated secular popular music, and the shape of the resulting worship, the article explores the appropriateness of such use and, assuming such use is deemed appropriate, best practice in doing so. Engaging with a range of academic and popular sources, the article sees music as a key component of both church and contemporary cultures and attempts to offer a way of bridging the gap that seems to exist between them.

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I listen to music every day of my life – I'm listening to it as I write this. Very rarely, however, is that music what might be deemed 'religious', 'sacred', or 'liturgical'. My tastes are eclectic but almost entirely secular – by which I mean music created in a non-church environment for use in a non-church environment.[1] As an ordained minister, almost the only time in the week that I encounter music deliberately created for the worship of, and encounter with, God is in worship gatherings. Yet I firmly believe that within the music of my daily life I meet God – encouraging, challenging, comforting, disquieting, raging or whispering. I am not alone. In *The Day Metallica Came to Church*, John Van Sloten writes of his experiences preaching on the message of God found in a variety of cultural idioms – including the music of heavy metal band Metallica.[2]

It was with this experience of music in mind that I began work on my annual reflective service upon the Passion of Christ, which eventually became 'Outro: A Service of Words and Music Reflecting on the Seven Last Words of Jesus'.[3] Unlike much worship that features music, this service featured no congregational singing, whether hymns, songs, chants or anthems. Rather, after each piece of Scripture there was a piece of popular, secular music to assist the congregation to reflect in some way upon the Scripture heard, especially the words of Christ.

The responses from the congregation were overwhelmingly positive, much to my relief as this was the first time I had used such music as the primary driver of the liturgy – other than opening and closing prayers, the only elements of this worship were Scripture and the secular music I had (prayerfully) chosen.[4] Previously there had always been something else: liturgical scripts, images, extempore prayer, activities, a sermon or reflection, sacramental acts. On this occasion, though, the congregation was effectively being left to their own devices in how they might understand the link between Scripture, secular music and God.

This allowing of secular music to be a primary enabler of theological reflection is what makes Outro worth reflecting upon. Theologian and musician Jeremy Begbie argues comprehensively that music can offer particular ways of enabling 'theology to do its job better' and that 'theology is inseparable (though distinct) from prayer and worship – thinking appropriately *about* God means regularly engaging *with* God'.[5] In Outro there is an attempt to bring these themes together: music in a worship context to enable theological reflection, with the additional factor that the music chosen was secular popular music.

There are few in the Church today who would take the line that all music is so naturally sensual that it ought not to be used in worship at all. Methodism sometimes even declares itself to have been 'born in song', and the hymn of that title declares that singing has always been part of humanity's worship of the divine. This is not simply a hymn writer's hyperbole, it is an observable anthropological reality; religious rites and music are deeply linked in human culture and cult.[6]

Nonetheless, it is noticeable that the focus of the Church's consideration of music within patterned, communal worship (liturgy) generally relates to music specifically created for liturgical use. Frequently the battleground of the so-called 'worship wars' of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has been music, while it also shows itself in the sections on music in publications such as *The Study of Liturgy and Worship* and *The New SCM Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, where the focus is very much on 'liturgical music' as a specialist subject.[7] All this despite the fact that, as the *SCM Dictionary* notes, all music can be seen as innately theological.

What, then, of music created outside the world of worship? Is there enough, or any, of the sacred in the seemingly profane that we might use it to meet with God in our communal worship? In his *Metallica* book, Van Sloten quotes from the Belgic Confession of 1567, which points out that we know God in two ways, and Scripture is the second: the first is 'the creation, preservation and government of the universe'.[8] The Confession makes clear that God is seen everywhere. As Scripture indicates, there is nowhere we can go where we will not find God already present.[9]

In 'Pretty amazing grace', Neil Diamond eulogises on the concept of grace as a transformer of life.[10] The context of the wider album's development makes it unlikely Diamond was specifically reflecting on the grace of God as seen in Jesus Christ, yet this doesn't mean that the words and music, placed within the context of worship, and beside the scriptural account of Jesus' words of forgiveness on the Cross, cannot be seen to speak of such grace – it must be doubted that Cyrus the Great saw his releasing of the Hebrew people from exile in Babylon as being for or of Yahweh-God, yet Scripture is clear that Cyrus is anointed by God.[11] One of the great debates regarding music and theology is that regarding the natural sacredness or otherwise of music. While the likes of Zwingli have been highly suspicious of the sensuous nature of music to the extent that they rejected it (at least from worship), there are those who have taken other views, such as Augustine and Calvin, who saw it as something that could be redeemed if properly controlled. Here we have a track that very directly asks questions of whether grace 'permeates the world' placed in direct comparison to Jesus' request for forgiveness of those who are crucifying him – one of the Bible's most astounding demonstrations of God's grace.[12] A gut instinct that in secular music there is something of God that might be used in worship and theology is not enough, however, to assume that such use is appropriate.

As I worked on the order for what became Outro I was aware that just because I felt what I was doing was appropriate this did not mean there might not be reasonable objections to what I was doing.

The most obvious objection was one of style. However we understand the term 'liturgy', we must recognise that one of its components is some kind of commonality. Whether liturgy is something done 'by' or 'for' the people it nonetheless involves the people in some way, otherwise it is simply a vanity project. My expected congregation was one not generally aware of the music of Queen, Coldplay or Crash Test Dummies, though one or two would likely know music by Neil Diamond or Johnny Cash. They may have heard of U2, but it is unlikely that even if they knew Bob Dylan's 'Knockin' on heaven's door' they would also know Antony and the Johnson's haunting cover of it (let alone the contrasting Guns N' Roses version best known to most of my own generation). It was, therefore, a legitimate concern whether using such music, likely to be largely unknown to the majority of the congregation, might be unhelpful and classed as a vanity project.

In *Thirty Ways to Use Music in Worship*, John Leach suggests that one way is 'for teaching'.[13] For the purposes of Outro, in which there was no formal teaching element, the opportunity to reflect on Scripture and music, and to therefore 'do' theology for oneself, can be seen as an opportunity for teaching. The importance of this is vital to seeing beyond the style of music provided – sometimes teaching includes providing that which is uncomfortable. Methodists claim that Christ's death is for all, yet many congregations seem to find it difficult to engage with cultures beyond those they are already familiar with. As Leach points out in relation to Arrested Development's 'Fishin' 4 religion', sometimes what people need to hear from music is a challenge to their own comfortableness.[14] It therefore seemed appropriate that, alongside Scripture that can be seen as some of the most challenging in the Bible, I would use music that might add to, rather than detract from, that challenge.

A further objection I considered was whether my choices were legitimately related to the theme and the Scripture passages. As Van Sloten notes, it is perfectly possible to have a view of something, whether music or another cultural medium, that is singular to oneself.[15] I needed my own 'little modern-day synagogue' to discuss the possibilities and appropriateness of my musical choices in terms of content and theological relevance.[16] The nature of my work and the time available to me meant forming a local working group was not practicable, so I turned to another cultural phenomenon – Facebook. I posted a status indicating what my plans were and asking friends to share their own thoughts on possible musical choices and comment on my own thoughts.

All liturgy requires a communal involvement in considering its legitimacy. In the final analysis this will be seen in whether any particular component actually enables people to worship, but in the use of material that was not originally developed for the use of a worshipping community it is clearly of genuine concern that some kind of communal decision as regards appropriateness be taken beforehand. The use of Facebook enabled me to do this as best I could, since my range of friends is as eclectic as my music tastes and able to point me to music my own experience has not brought me into contact with. Certain pieces were included in the worship after direct suggestion, while other suggestions shaped my own musical explorations and the inclusion of different pieces. If, then, secular music is to be considered it must be so in community, to ensure that we are both appropriate in our understandings of particular pieces and open to as wide a range of inspiration as possible – thereby not limiting our thoughts to our own tastes and preferences.

All of the above operates on the assumption that, with appropriate caution, the use of secular music is perfectly sensible. The reality, however, is that such a position is not normative within the traditions of the Church. It is more commonly the view that music may be admittedly used in worship but only if tightly controlled. Jeremy Begbie notes in passing that Elton John played a reworked version of his song 'Candle in the wind' at the funeral of Princess Diana, yet such occurrences are likely to be infrequent in the mind of the public.[17] Clearly the advent of 'alternative worship' has begun to engage in a much more frequent cross-over: Van Sloten's book argues directly for this, while Steve Collins has written about the phenomenon in the magazine of the fairly traditional Royal School of Church Music (RSCM).[18] Nonetheless, an innate carefulness still exists in a great deal of the Church's consideration of music in worship. Then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger is clear that while music can be seen as vital within the Church's liturgy since 'mere speech is not enough', nonetheless pop music is ruled out as 'a cult of the banal' while rock festivals are seen to have a 'cultic character … in opposition to Christian worship' – strong accusations from the now Pope Emeritus![19]

One can be certain that they were not written without deep consideration, nor as a lone dissenting voice within the Church. Neither is the suggestion that popular music culture operates in ways similar to new religious movements (cults) without anthropological evidence. In his book, *Pop Cult: Religion and Popular Music*, Robert Trill specifically states that '[p]opular music cultures are a common form of popular or implicit religion'.[20] Furthermore, church concerns regarding the cultic nature of pop music and its use in worship are not helped by the very public failings of early 'alternative worship' service, The Nine O'Clock Service.

Nonetheless, the Church does not speak with one voice on this matter. Popular music forms have frequently made their way into Christian worship. Hymn writers such as Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley attained huge popularity in part because they wrote to tunes the general populous already knew. This tradition continues in John Bell and Graham Maule setting their hymns to folk tunes, and with modern hymn and song writers such as Graham Kendrick, Stuart Townend and Matt Redman writing their own tunes in an idiom most people of the baby boomers and since are familiar with. It is a phenomenon also seen outside worship, where New Christian Music takes popular music forms and attaches explicitly Christian lyrics – even to a style as seemingly in contrast to the Christian faith as death metal. Clearly, though, piggy-backing on popular styles or idioms is not the same as specifically using secular pop music in worship, including the lyrics.

It is clear that popular secular music can contain thoughts and images that are problematic for the Christian faith (one might cite, for example, John Lennon's 'Imagine'[21]). Does this mean that all secular music might be unusable? It might be argued that in the context of exploring the content there may indeed be value in exploring something like Lennon's work – consider 'Imagine' as an interesting comparison with the Hebraic mindset that may have talked of the heavens and sheol but had no concept of heaven and hell in the way we often refer to them. We can also note that certain bands and tracks stand in direct contrast to the idea that secular music is of little worship value. For example, U2's connection with worship has gone so far as inspiring the U2charist phenomenon, in which U2 music is used as the foundational platform for a celebration of Holy Communion – unsurprising with tracks to draw from such as 'Gloria', 'Rejoice', '40' and 'Crumbs from your table'. Likewise, it does not take much to see the prayerfulness of a song like 'You/you've got the love', a major hit for two different groups. Using such tracks would clearly be more appropriate than some others. Yet the Christian gospel is about grace and redemption, resurrection and new life.

Sometimes the worship value of a song comes not simply from the musical style and the lyrics but the history of a song and the artist(s) involved. Less than a week after leading Outro I led Good Friday services in two of my chapels. These services featured the normative singing of hymns, but also featured 'secular' music. It is the 'Intro' that is of most note here: I used the demo cover version of blues singer Lead Belly's 'They hung him on a cross' by Nirvana. There are clearly those who think Nirvana should never appear in worship and could never add to a sense of the sacred. However, there is a poignant connection with the grace of God in hearing some of the words of that song sung by Kurt Cobain – a man who found himself so lost in the challenges of celebrity, addiction and depression that he killed himself – during a service marking and celebrating the death of Christ and what it means for all of humanity and all of creation.[22]

In the light of the way music can be redeemed, it is appropriate that Johnny Cash's version of the Nine Inch Nails' song, 'Hurt', felt right for Outro. Admittedly Cash's version, a minor hit in 2003, is not quite as the original – it changes the words 'crown of shit' to 'crown of thorns', yet in changing just one word, and through being voiced by a man whose prophetic Christian faith has been evidenced throughout his music career, suddenly the whole song moves from the raging self-hate of drug addiction of Trent Reznor's original outpouring into a part-apocalyptic, part-psalmic reflection on the reality of death (Cash was dying when he recorded the track).

So it is that a combination of context, lyrics and artist can redeem something that originally seems to be far from a Christian ideal. What, though, of music that remains secular in its creation and production?

As we consider worshipping God with the words of the secular we find ourselves considering not only views with regards to the concept of music, but also our theology of the relationship between the divine and mundane, the sacred and profane. If we begin from a position of total depravity we might suggest that without a deliberate sense of God in the work of a particular songwriter or musician we must be wary of assuming it has value in our worship. Van Sloten, quoting Dorothy L. Sayers, suggests an alternative: that what indicates humanity's nature as a divine image is the creative tendency, and that therefore we ought deliberately to seek to find God in that which humans create, of which music is one example.[23]

This thought ties into the idea that our temptation to divide the divine and profane is problematic. Don E. Saliers, a Methodist theologian, liturgiologist and musician, has pointed out that all music has sacral potential and that 'we need not work with dichotomies between "sacred" and "secular" music as such'.[24] Communal worship is not a place where we separate ourselves from the world, but where we bring the world, what we do within it, and all that we believe to be of worth within our lives before God. We ought not to be one thing in worship and another outside of it. Unless we are to say that all popular music is problematic, we must acknowledge it has the potential for divine worth, and if it has divine worth of some kind then surely it is appropriate for worship, in which we both give God our worth and receive that worth from God – for let us not forget that God is at work in worship alongside us.

One of the congregants at Outro was an organist who had been booked to play at this service had I needed someone to. When he discovered he wasn't needed, and why, he hinted he might not come. In the end he did, despite being sceptical of what might occur. Afterwards he approached me and, clearly emotional, said, 'Thank you. I'm so glad I came.' While I'm happy to acknowledge my own part in the preparation of worship I think this flags up another factor in debate over the use of secular music in liturgy: the part the Holy Spirit plays in allowing us to meet with God in worship.

If we say that secular music should play no part in the worship of God we seem to say that there are things that God's Spirit cannot redeem and work through. While there are theologies within the Church that would posit this idea, it seems to me inimical to the Methodist position of salvation open to all. Yes, such music must be chosen carefully, as any liturgical music ought to be, and the variety of music and interpretation means a communal approach to choosing and interpreting the music is necessary. However, it does seem that there is within the use of secular music the opportunity to bring to our worship music that directly allows for God's grace, redemption, creativity and imminence to show forth.

As Metallica sing, there is within life and faith a 'pursuit of truth no matter where it lies'.[25] If we believe that the truth of God is found and experienced in the world as well as in the Bible and the sacraments of the Church then we must not be afraid to bring the world into our worship – including the music the world listens to day by day.

Note: the songs used in the service 'Outro' are available as a playlist on Spotify; just search for 'Outro – Palm Sunday 2015'. The lyrics to all referenced songs can usually be found easily by entering the title in an internet search engine.

Appendix

Outro: a service of words and music reflecting on the last seven words of Jesus

Opening Prayer

Forgiveness
Luke 23:32–34a
'Pretty amazing grace': Neil Diamond

Paradise
Luke 23:39–43
'Viva la vida': Coldplay

Family
John 19:25b–27a
'Sometimes you can't make it on your own': U2

Forsaken
Mark 15:33–34
'The unforgiven ones': Crash Test Dummies

Thirst
John 19:28
'Hurt': Johnny Cash (orig. Nine Inch Nails)

Finished
John 19:29–30
'Knockin' on heaven's door': Antony and the Johnsons (orig. Bob Dylan)

Spirit
Luke 23:44–46
'Who wants to live forever': Queen

Closing Prayer

Notes

1. There is much debate to be had over the meaning of terms such as 'secular' and 'religious'. Sadly, I don't have the space in this reflection to properly have such a

discussion, therefore I've chosen to use the term 'secular' as a shorthand for activities and items, especially music, that are not consciously related to the worship and purposes of God. Arguably this is similar to the use of the term 'profane' in Old Testament writings, in which something profane is not necessarily bad but has simply not been set apart for God and made holy.

2. Van Sloten 2010, pp. 9–29, especially noting pp. 20–21, which compare Metallica lyrics to Scripture passages.
3. The term 'outro' being the pop music equivalent of a 'coda', and therefore a reference to the musical equivalent of 'last words'.
4. The order of service is reproduced as an appendix.
5. Begbie 2008, p. 20; Begbie 2000, p. 271.
6. Brian Hoare, 'Born in song!' in Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes 2011, #21.
7. Whelan 2013, pp. 91–101. Various items relating to 'Music', especially J. M. Joncas, 'Music as Worship', in Bradshaw 2002, pp. 326–329.
8. Article 2, The Belgic Confession, 1567, in Van Sloten 2010, p. 59.
9. For example, see Psalm 139.
10. Neil Diamond, 'Pretty Amazing Grace', from Diamond 2008 (CD).
11. See Isaiah 44.24—45.19.
12. Van Sloten 2010, p. 167.
13. Leach 2011, pp. 19–22.
14. Leach 2011, p. 21.
15. Van Sloten 2010, p. 140–141.
16. Van Sloten 2010, p. 141.
17. Begbie 2008, p. 37.
18. Collins 2007.
19. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger 2001.
20. Till 2010, p. 7.
21. John Lennon, 'Imagine', from Lennon 1987 (CD).
22. Nirvana, 'They hung him on a cross', from Nirvana 2004 (CD).
23. Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker* (New York: HarperCollins, 1979), p. 22, quoted in Van Sloten 2010, p. 148.
24. Don E. Saliers, *Music and Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), p. 60, quoted in Gilmour 2009, p. 27.
25. Metallica, 'Through the never', from Metallica 1991 (CD).

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HOLINESS
THE JOURNAL OF WESLEY HOUSE CAMBRIDGE

What have the sermons of John Wesley ever done for us?

The Wesleyan legacy in issues of wealth and poverty: reflections on Wesley's sermon, 'The Use of Money'

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Wesley's sermon, 'The Use of Money', still resonates with our contemporary economic context. After a synopsis of the sermon, this article seeks to set it in its original context, understanding the key marks of Wesley's approach to poverty: the importance of personal contact with the poor, the importance of thrift, and the importance of indiscrimination, grounded in spiritual egalitarianism. The legacy of Wesley's advice, both within the early Methodist movement, and as a starting point for critical reflection today, is then considered.

MONEY • WEALTH • POVERTY • JOHN WESLEY • GENEROSITY • PHILANTHROPY • FRUGALITY

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Synopsis of Wesley's sermon

In 'The Use of Money', Wesley takes his text from Luke 16:9. Paraphrased, it says: *I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourself, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.* He then goes on to stress that the right use of money is of the utmost importance to the Christian. Too few people think about it and when they do they often regard it as a source of evil. However, money should be regarded as a gift of God for the benefits that it brings and the opportunities it offers for doing good. It can feed the hungry, clothe the naked and give shelter to the stranger (Matthew 25). With it we can care for the widow and the fatherless, defend the oppressed, and meet the need of those who are sick or in pain.

Wesley offers three simple rules on how to use money: gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can.

Gain all you can

According to Wesley we should not gain money at the expense of life or health. No sum of money, however large, should induce us to accept employment which would injure our bodies. Neither should we begin (or continue in) any business which deprives us of the food and sleep that we need. We may draw a distinction between businesses which are absolutely unhealthy and those employments which would be harmful to those of a weak constitution. If our reason or experience shows that a job is unhealthy for us, then we should leave it as soon as possible even if this means that our income is reduced.

Any employment which might injure our minds, including the pursuit of any trade which is against the law of God or the law of the land, should be avoided. It is just as wrong to defraud the king of taxes as it is to steal from our fellow citizens. Things requiring cheating, lying or other customs to provide an adequate income are contrary to good conscience and should be avoided.

What is true of ourselves is equally true of our neighbour. We should not 'gain all we can' by causing injury to another, whether to his or her trade, body or soul. Selling goods below their market price and enticing the workers that a brother or sister needs are quite wrong, as is selling those things that would harm a neighbour's health. Physicians should not deliberately prolong a patient's illness to increase income.

With these limitations it is every Christian's duty to observe this first rule: 'Gain all you can', by honest work with all diligence. Lose no time in silly diversions and do not put off until tomorrow what may be done today. Do nothing by halves; use all the common sense that God has given you and study continually that you may improve on those who have gone before you. Make the best of all that is in your hands.

Save all you can

Money is a precious gift and should not be wasted on trivialities. Do not spend money on luxury foods, but be content with simple things that your body needs. Personal ornaments too, of the body or of property, are a waste and should be avoided. Do not spend to gratify your vanity or to gain the admiration of others. The more you feed your pride in this way, the more it will grow within you.

And why spoil your children? Fine clothes and luxury are a snare to them as they are to you, endangering them with more pride and vanity. If you think that they would waste your wealth then do not leave it to them. If there is only one child in the family who knows the value of money and there is a fortune to be inherited, then it is that one who should receive the bulk of it. If no child can be trusted in this way then it is the Christian's duty to leave them only what will keep them from being in need. The rest should be distributed in order to bring glory to God.

Give all you can

Storing away money without using it is to throw it away. You might just as well cast your money into the sea as keep it in the bank. Having gained and saved all you can, then give all you can.

You do not own money. It has been entrusted to you for a short while by your Creator God who owns all. Your wealth is to be used for him as a holy sacrifice, made acceptable through Jesus Christ.

If you wish to be a good steward, then provide sufficient food and clothing for yourself and your household. If there is a surplus after this is done, then use what remains for the good of your Christian brothers and sisters. If there is still a surplus, then do good to all people.

Ask yourself honestly if you are an obedient steward acting sacrificially. If you are in doubt, pray to God: 'Lord, you see that I am going to spend this money on . . . and you know that I am acting as your trusted steward according to your design.' If you can make this prayer with a good conscience then you will know that your expense is right and good.

These, then, are the simple rules for the Christian use of money. *Gain all you can, without bringing harm to yourself or neighbour. Save all you can by avoiding waste and unnecessary luxuries. Finally, give all you can.* Do not limit yourself to a particular proportion to preserve yourself and family, the Church of God and the rest of humanity. In this way you will be able to give a good account of your stewardship when the Lord comes with all his saints. Do it with all your strength. No more waste or luxury or envy. Use whatever God has loaned to you to do good to your fellow Christians and to all people. Give all that you have, as well as all that you are, to him who did not even withhold his own Son for your sake.

The context of Wesley's sermon

The eighteenth century in Britain saw a new strand of enthusiasm and missionary zeal emerging as a product of the Evangelical Revival, most particularly in the Methodist movement, in response to a general coolness of philanthropic spirit and hardening of attitudes towards the poor. There was a new sensitivity to human distress to be found in the writings and practice of the Wesleys and others, which supplemented the variety of voluntary activities engendered by the earlier spirit of self-improvement. Was this merely a qualitative difference or something rather more radical?

Warner's judgement was that organised philanthropy added little in the field of social concern: 'It initiated no novel solutions to the problem of poverty. It produced no permanently effectual agencies for the prevention of economic destitution . . . little more than instances of the prevalent impulsive, individual relief, conducted on a larger scale.'[1] He lists instances of Methodist philanthropy under Wesley to support his thesis, on the basis of that foundational document of Methodist social concern, *The Rules of the United Societies* (1741), which enjoined the giving of money and clothes for the relief of the poor and the sick, by regular monetary giving. However, the Methodist response was more wide-reaching: work was to be provided for those out of business; a whole range of activities was established, locally generated, including lending societies, dispensaries and sick-visitation schemes, together with emergency relief schemes for the poor and the sick, the hungry and the unemployed.[2]

Who were the poor? Wesley himself offers a definition in his sermon 'Dives and Lazarus' in 1788:

> Hear this, all ye that are poor in this world. Ye that many times have not food to eat or raiment to put on; ye that have not a place where to lay your head, unless it be a cold garret, or a foul and damp cellar! Ye that are now reduced to 'solicit the cold hand of charity.'[3]

The poor are the destitute poor, deprived of the basic necessities of life, in contradiction of God's stewardship of resources which centres on a proper love of God being expressed in love of neighbour.

As we examine the way in which the Wesleys and early Methodists responded to the needs of the poor, there are a number of distinguishing marks of Methodist philanthropy which can be noted in this earlier period.

First, social concern was marked by *intimate personal contacts and the distribution of relief by personal visitation.* This was what North terms 'actual contact with conditions of need' by 'homely but far-reaching beneficence'. This accords with the words of Wesley recorded in his journal for 24 November 1760:

> How much better it is to carry relief to the poor than to send it! And that both for our sake and theirs. For theirs as it is so much more comfortable to them, and as we may then assist them in spirituals as well as temporals: and for our own as it is far more apt to soften our heart, and to make us naturally care for each other.[4]

The importance for Wesley was what such 'works of mercy' did to the inward disposition of the visitor as much as the benefits for the recipient. As Collins remarks: 'his concern over the temporal needs of the poor [is] demonstrated in his emphasis on the spiritual state of those who minister and in his critical assessment of ministerial labours.'[5]

Second, social concern was marked by *the teaching of thrift and the avoidance of luxury*, so pronounced in the sermons and actions of Wesley. Here we carry forward the traditional Protestant emphasis on the ethic of industry and work and the importance of cleanliness, a recurring theme in Methodist philanthropy. However, in Wesley this is often subordinated to a denunciation of the rich. Riches were deemed exceedingly dangerous in that they struck at the very root of personality; they could tempt people to displace love of God with love of the world.[6] There is a genuine sensitivity of approach to the poor ('I love the poor – in many of them I find pure, genuine grace, unmixed with paint, folly and affection'), in the hearts of those softened by experience, clearly visible in the Holy Club days in Oxford and in the journeying around of the Wesleys to the towns and cities of Britain and Ireland.

Third, social concern was marked by its *indiscrimination*, reflecting an Arminian emphasis, and emerging from the biblical and theological focus on Matthew 25, making as it does no distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor. Despite this, there were rewards to be gained from hard work and thrift, and the remedy for poverty was 'to gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can', in an individualistic voluntary response to the challenge of the gospel, as John Wesley enjoined in his sermon on 'The Use of Money'.

Many Methodists, Wesley included, disposed of their surplus wealth in a radical redistribution which so startled contemporaries as to consider them anti-social and a threat to order in society. Collins points to the inherent egalitarianism of Wesley's soteriological approach to the question of poverty:

> This levelling of all men and women as sinners, poor and non-poor, this universal flavour of sin, actually resulted in the enhanced status of the poor within the Methodist societies where rank and privilege, so valued by the world, counted for nothing.[7]

While the Church of England failed to provide social cohesion in a society whose established social values and systems were under such strain, the Methodist movement gave a sense of companionship, of connections in society with one's peers, and of status and belonging which underpinned the social aspirations of a class made more prosperous by the strength of sobriety, diligence and social responsibility. It helped them rise above poverty to a modest level of disposable affluence. At this stage they did not forget those from whose ranks many had been drawn, mindful of Wesley's warning that they might forget the poor: 'As many of them increase in worldly goods, the great danger I now apprehend is, their relapsing into the spirit of the world: and their religion is but a dream.'[8]

As Collins describes, Wesley's approach to the problems of the poor is more soteriological than social and economic. How the poor can be saved is a prime and overriding concern for him and his followers.[9] Donald Dayton, in summarising the Wesleyan legacy for Methodist attitudes to the poor, notes both the practical generosity which constituted the life of the movement reaching out to the poor, and also the underlying social conservatism of the theological principles enunciated by its leaders. John Wesley was systematic in his cultivation of the poor through his field preaching and the Arminian gospel peculiarly suited to their needs, grounded in a spiritual egalitarianism. Unlike others, he did not blame the poor for their poverty and did not spare the rich from the criticism due from their greed. He urged his followers to visit the sick and the poor as a vital dimension of discipleship, bringing temporal as well as spiritual relief.

There was, however, as Dayton points out, a fundamental ambiguity in the consequences of Wesley's advice, over and above the strengths and weaknesses of his social ethics.[10] The call to diligence and frugality, in the avoidance of conspicuous consumption, did lead, as Wesley feared (in his sermon 'On the Danger of Increasing Riches', 1790), to an increase in riches for Methodists. The consequent danger, sometimes realised, was that this social uplift would widen the gap with the poor in a process of embourgeoisement. Such a 'war within the soul of Methodism' led many to be torn towards the poor and away from the poor in a period of tension and change.[11]

The legacy of Wesley's sermon for today

Methodists today wrestle with the challenges of conspicuous consumption and a global economy the like of which John Wesley did not either experience or predict. However, other aspects of Wesley's context remain familiar to us, and his perspective in 'The Use of Money' continues to resonate with today's issues.

Wesley sought to follow the example he saw in primitive Christianity, especially that of the early Church with its communitarianism (Acts 2 – all things in common) as it lived out discipleship. Wesley's view was also formed by the biblical models he encountered in the Psalms and the Old Testament, with their concern for the poor, the outcast, the widows and the fatherless, and the New Testament's emphasis in the Magnificat and the Nazareth manifesto on Luke's portrayal of God's reversal of values (the 'preferential option for the poor' of later liberation theologians). Wesley created and promoted oases of radical sharing in local communities transformed by the health and work and education schemes he encouraged, as well as the activities of the Strangers' Friend Societies he promoted among the poor.

Similarly, Wesley's warnings against the love of money and wealth (love of money is the root of all evil) chime well with anti-capitalist movements of recent years in combating the perceived evils of globalisation and the stranglehold of multinational corporations in civic society. Wesley's attacks on the exploitative rich, exemplified in his sermons against the Bristol merchants and those who benefited from the ills of others, at home and overseas, could well be repeated today.

Wesley's tag line, 'Gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can', is a little more complicated in its legacy. It has sometimes been misappropriated by Christian entrepreneurs for whom the ability to bestow liberally from the gains of a free-market economy has given the freedom to practise philanthropy of an often discriminating kind (*pour encourager les autres*), quite unlike the Arminian indiscrimination Wesley had in mind. This might be more in line with the Victorian values preached and practised by a former British Prime Minister steeped in one strand of Methodism. Mrs Thatcher's quotation of the prayer of St Francis turned such spiritual values of poverty, simplicity and radical sharing on their head in an individualisation of Christian lifestyle. This view is removed from Wesley's view of social holiness, exampled for instance in the 'Rules for Helpers', which always has a community in view.

So what should our response be today as children and spiritual heirs of the Wesleys? I want to pose some questions for us to ask in the light of our reading of the sermon in its context. Whether rich or poor, from the North or the South, in work or without, we all have to formulate what is a right response for us as disciples, to use the wealth and the resources that God has given us and discover for ourselves how the just sharing and radical generosity we find in the biblical models can be interpreted and practised today.

Wesley's sermon invites us to:

- Face the facts – how do individuals and communities fare in the current uncertain financial world and in an economic climate of the meltdown of financial institutions and the credit crunch? What questions do we ask of our employers, banks and financial institutions in whom our funds and pensions are invested?
- Reflect and interpret these facts in the light of our Christian and Methodist understanding of responsible stewardship of financial resources. How do

we combat conspicuous consumption without appearing killjoys? How do we contribute to the creation of opportunities for employment and wealth creation?

- Respond with appropriate and sustainable action, appropriate to the circumstances and sustainable beyond the initial help given. Can we identify channels of Methodist-style giving like All We Can or Christian Aid who can make our money work for the benefit of others? And how do we ensure that church funds are not invested in projects and companies which bring harm to others and fail to pay a decent wage?

These questions must be asked in multiple contexts:

- in personal lifestyle, through prayer, prophecy, political action and personal moderation: how can we reflect the challenge of seeing Christ in the midst of the poor, serving and saving the lost lives we encounter?
- in the life of the Church: how should each church community be an experiment in community and sharing? What does it mean seriously to consider churches as units of micro-production, creating work and educational opportunities in eco-friendly ways which help in our care of creation in God's world?
- in the life of our society: how do we as citizens influence the policy-makers and administrators of government in our nation? And how do we speak for the powerless, especially on issues of wealth and poverty?

With appropriate reflection, Wesley's advice is as good today as it was in the eighteenth century: gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can.

Notes

1. Warner 1930, p. 218.
2. Church 1949, pp. 177–209.
3. Wesley Works 4:13, Sermon 115 on Dives and Lazarus.
4. North 1904, p. 114.
5. Collins 1995, p. 81.
6. Collins 1995, p. 80.
7. Collins 1995, p. 83.
8. Quoted in Jennings 1990, p. 14.
9. Collins 1995, pp. 79–80.
10. Highlighted by Marquardt 1992, pp. 133–138.
11. Meeks 1995, p. 90.

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HOLINESS
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Reviews

The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender and the Quest for God, Sarah Coakley (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 149 pp, £14.99 pbk

Coakley believes that traditional Christian asceticism – moral training – rooted as it was in an obsessive aversion to the body, has failed both sacred and secular society as a credible tool for achieving social restraint. Yet surely some agreed measure of moral restraint is a social and spiritual necessity? In the face of a secular society that views all restraint of desire as an offence against freedom, she seeks a new Christian asceticism that begins by embracing sexuality rather than denying it. One cannot but applaud the objective.

To read this collection of essays is, in part, to eavesdrop on anguished conversations within the Anglo- and Roman Catholic tradition. The trespass is deeply rewarding, if at times bizarre. Coakley wants a specifically Anglican treatment, and, accordingly, she trawls the Fathers and the Anglican Divines for precious, rare seeds from which to grow her new, sensual ascetic.

Chapter Two focuses on the particular difficulties of the Catholic tradition as regards women priests. Who apart from Coakley, one wonders, while attending a Eucharist, ponders how, as the male priest turns from altar to congregation, he enacts, in von Balthasar's expression, 'an endless act of fruitful outpouring of his whole flesh, such as a man can only achieve for a moment with a limited organ of his body' (p. 71)? Yet here, as she ponders how this image is creatively 'destabilized' by the female priest, is Coakley's path towards a sensual ascetic.

Chapter Three is about the inescapability of sensuality as we pray the Trinity. Coakley remarks, 'To speak thus of the trinitarian nature of sexual love at its best is a far remove from the grimy world of pornography and abuse from which Christian feminism has emerged to make its rightful protest' (p. 99).

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Chapter Four explores the relationship between Christian desire, sensuality and gender. The Trinity simply is 'the goal of a life animated from the start by *desire* for Christ' (p. 126).

In Chapter Five Coakley declares, 'The key issue in the ascetic "training of desire" … is a lifelong commitment to personal, erotic transformation, and thereby of reflection on the final significance of all our desires before God' (p. 141).

Here, then, are five beautifully written, scholarly essays about Christian spirituality and desire. They do not add up to a coherent whole, but they all contribute to the topic, and they contain much that is rewarding to the non-Catholic reader. What is intensely frustrating to this reviewer is that at no point does Coakley begin the task that she identifies as urgent – the building of a new Christian theology embracing sensual desire. She makes no reference to the erotic theology that James Nelson built upon the Wesleyan tradition. But then, she wishes above all to be Anglican.

Michael Wilson

Scars across Humanity: Understanding and Overcoming Violence against Women, Elaine Storkey (London: SPCK, 2015), 276 pp, £9.99 pbk

Scars across Humanity stayed on my desk for several weeks before I read it, even with the deadline for this review coming closer. I anticipated this being a difficult read.

Storkey's first chapter describes gender-based violence as a global pandemic which cannot be tackled with earnest pronouncements or legislation alone. Eight chapters then discuss, respectively, female infanticide in India, female genital mutilation, early and forced marriage, so-called 'honour' killings, intimate-partner violence, rape, and sexual violence in war.

Each chapter is written with careful attention to research, including brief stories and statistics. Each explores multiple strands in that particular example of violence against women: cultural beliefs and practices, changes in approach and legislation in recent years, issues of law enforcement. Storkey focuses on the ongoing impact of violence rather than telling numerous horror stories of violent actions.

I read *Scars across Humanity* remembering Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* (1979), which dealt with similar subject matter. Daly's book was angry, polemical and deliberately shocking. Storkey's tone is much more measured and reasoned. She concentrates on giving information, careful documentation and attempts to keep the focus on the global nature of gender-based violence. Her analysis is strong in outlining the complexity of cultural factors. Her account remains sickening, because of its subject, especially depressing on sexual violence in war and conflict as she traces how the danger for women and children continues in refugee camps and post-conflict. There are glimpses of similar crimes committed against men, particularly 'honour' killings and domestic violence (though not what is coming to light about sexual violence in war perpetrated against men), but always with the reminder that violence bears differently on women and men because of their different social location.

In two further chapters, Storkey discusses why such violence appears endemic, first examining the answers of evolutionary biologists, then social scientists, outlining why she believes feminist social-scientific theories offer better

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analysis. Her final two chapters discuss the role of religion, focusing on Islam and the Judaeo-Christian tradition. The final pages are Storkey's testimony to the power of the gospel to promote healing and hope.

The publisher and the endorsements suggest this book is aimed at a Christian audience. Most of the chapters are informative without overt Christian analysis or theological reflection. Presumably, then, it is aimed at Christians who do not know, or have not recognised, the impact of what Storkey has discovered in her years as a scholar, educator, campaigner and in her role at Tearfund. I would judge that Storkey has written a book that such an audience could receive, even given the horrors she writes about.

Anyone searching for a deeper analysis may be a little disappointed. The final four chapters are relatively brief and skate the surface for anyone familiar with this subject. Nevertheless this is an important, up-to-date contribution that recognises gender-based violence is very much part of contemporary contexts. It enables the reader to celebrate moves towards change, even as it recognises the complexity of cultural patterns, institutional systems and individual choices that leave gender-based violence horrifyingly entrenched.

Jane Craske

Music and Transcendence, ed. Ferdia J. Stone-Davis (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 247 pp, £65.00 hbk

Here's a remarkable and deeply challenging book, not for the faint-hearted!

At first blush, this collection of 15 essays looks like another obscure, academic, dry and unapproachable intellectual exercise, albeit handsomely and expensively produced. However, even though it is assumed that the reader will have some basic knowledge of 'philosophy', 'theology' and 'musicology', there are unexpectedly rich and precious treasures waiting to be uncovered.

As someone with a passion for theological honesty, I have long held a fascination for the idea that musical expression and performance is less an interesting pastime standing 'alongside' theology and philosophy (a sort-of-useful metaphor or a comparable 'illustration'), and more an equally valid way of pursuing truth in its own right. This book is unique because it confirms this latter conviction. Far too many approaches to a theological understanding of music regard music essentially as emotional 'entertainment' which may or may not point to the 'Other', without taking seriously the possibility that musicology can 'hold its own' in the spiritual quest.

'Transcendence' is a very complex concept, and the two-part selection of essays draws attention to the contrasts between 'absolute' transcendence and 'immanent' transcendence, while recognising that

> Music has the capacity to take us outside of ourselves and place us in relation to that which is 'Other'. This 'other' can be conceived in an 'absolute' sense, insofar as music can be thought to place the self in relation to a divine 'other' beyond the human frame of existence. However, the 'other' can equally well be conceived in an 'immanent' (or secular) sense, as music is a human activity that relates to other cultural practices. (from the back cover)

Roger Scruton's paper 'Music and the Transcendental' and Jeremy S. Begbie's 'Negotiating Musical Transcendence' are particularly helpful in identifying the scope and the depth of this notion of transcendence and how music and the arts relate to it.

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In Part 1 ('Music and Absolute Transcendence'), there are two essays which jump out of the page: first, 'Music and the Beyond in the Later Middle Ages' by Christopher Page, and, second, '*Creatio ex improvisatione*' by Bruce Ellis Benson.

Page's essay takes us through previously unchartered waters revealing important insights, especially in relation to Gregorian chant in the Middle Ages and the way its liturgical nature was part and parcel of everyday European consciousness for everyone. We are introduced to the significance of the proximity of persons in the act of singing at worship, and how the liturgical rhythm of the Church's chant and music-making breathed as one unified body creates the possibility of resonance with the breath of God.

Benson's paper, although a summary of his book *Liturgy as a Way of Life* (2013), raises the fascinating question of 'creativity'. How does God create out of nothing, as traditionally understood? Could it be, as we recognise how musical creativity develops and grows neither as a bolt from the blue nor without substantial dependence or connection to other previously worked material, that the creativity of God is essentially an act of improvisation?

Other papers in this Part 1 include an appreciation of the composer Ferruccio Busoni and his thought, the philosophy of Friedrich Schleiermacher (sometimes admired by Methodists with an emphasis upon experience and subjectivity), and an intriguing essay about sound, spirituality and sensuality in a non-Western, Indian context. Russell Re Manning's paper, 'Unwritten Theology', exposes the attraction of some of the strands of Paul Tillich's theology and George Steiner's influential aesthetic essay, *Real Presences* (1989). As we, in these ecumenically challenging days, still wrestle with the significance of 'The Ministry of the Word', this quotation from Manning's essay stimulates us: 'Music as unwritten theology is not simply a theology-in-waiting, but it is a theology without writing.'

Part 2 ('Music and Immanent Transcendence') has a more specific musical and theological focus. Joshua A. Waggener places Rudolf Otto's one-time famous *The Idea of the Holy* alongside C. P. E. Bach's anthem 'Heilig' (words from Isaiah 6), and compellingly leads us into the realm of holiness (a topic dear to the hearts of Methodists, albeit with a distinct flavour from the past).

Likewise, essays relating to Haydn's String Quartet Op. 33, no. 2, and the significance of the 1902 Beethoven Exhibition held at the Vienna Secession building, and E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Kreisleriana*, give us fascinating insights into nineteenth-century 'absolute music' and the language it can express, but we are conscious of the limitations when exploring just one short and narrow historical period.

In this regard, it is a little surprising that there are no specific references, in either Part 1 or Part 2, to the spiritual and transcendental quest in the musical works of contemporary avant-garde composers such as Arvo Paart, John Tavener, Giacinto Scelsi, Jonathan Harvey, Tommie Haglund, Gerard Pape, Bo Holten, Judith Bingham, Maeve Louise Heaney, and others.

However, the thirteenth essay in this collection, 'Religious Music as Child's Play' by Oane Reitsma, tackles the spellbinding work of H.-G. Gadamer and his highly influential hermeneutics. This paper held a particular attraction mainly because it convincingly expresses the power and importance of the concept of 'play' for both musical performance and biblical interpretation.

All in all, this splendidly rich book can be compared to 'a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old' (Matthew 13:52, RSV). Realising that many of the essays presented here were originally produced for a university conference, there is no doubt that the reader needs to take time and care to draw out the rich rewards offered by these treasures. On more than one occasion, while reading, I had to rummage through both my bookshelves and my CD collection!

Harvey Richardson

Not Eden: Spiritual Life Writing for this World, Heather Walton (London: SCM Press, 2015), 142 pp, £16.99 pbk

Heather Walton is one of Britain's leading practical theologians whose writing ranges widely around multiple themes and genres and is always intensely engaging. Muscular, intricate, fiercely intelligent even when it is at its most sensuous, her prose demands alert attention on the part of the reader at the same time as it excites and awakens. Her writing is never naive or innocent – a key trope of this book, which seeks to entice readers out of Eden into the fallen yet glorious world in which the Spirit is fully present and at work, seeding, growing, twining, ripening and entangling.

It is a book of two distinct parts and many more voices. Part 1 consists of three short chapters examining the history, nature and craft of what is now called spiritual life writing and might once have been termed spiritual autobiography. Here, Walton traces in bare outline the Western tradition of spiritual autobiography from Augustine onwards and reflects on the nature of such narratives as artful fictions, bringing to bear upon the discussion a fascinating range of authors from theology, philosophy, literary criticism, gender studies and more. She explores tensions in spiritual life writing between embrace and escape of this world, in all its bodiliness and materiality, as well as different aspects of the writer's craft, particularly as they pertain to 'writing the divine'. There is an enormous amount of wit and wisdom packed into these short chapters which will be of great use to theological teachers, students, preachers and writers.

But the heart and germ of the book, the part which will haunt me, is Part 2 – a breathtaking, original and absorbing instance of life writing itself. Given all she says about fictive narration in Part 1, we should be wary of taking this narrative as a straightforward account of Walton's own childhood, adolescence and growth into adulthood. Nevertheless, it is clearly rooted in her own history. It is both a coming-of-age memoir, a lament for innocence lost and a celebration of the body's hungers and pains as well as a coming to terms with the wild unpredictability of the Spirit's fecundity which manifests in blight as well as blossom, waste as well as abundance. Intense childhood friendships, secret play in sheds and gardens, absorption in books and the inner life of the

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imagination entwine with religious conversion and revival, radical politics, sex, travel, danger, fertility and childlessness. It is artfully and beautifully written in a voice that is all Walton's own and compelled me to read it at one sitting and to want to begin over again. Think *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* meets *Autobiography of a Soul* meets *Snow White*. There is a mythic, fairytale quality to the writing which gets under the skin; at the same time, *Not Eden* is a tender affirmation of this-worldly spirituality and politics which call us to 'live by [our] wits in the savage garden' (p. 136).

Nicola Slee

The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory. Report of the Joint International Commission for Dialogue between the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church, soon to be available from the World Methodist Council website:
http://worldmethodistcouncil.org/resources/ecumenical-dialogues/

This report has considerable significance ecumenically. Formally, it is the fruit of a quinquennium of study. It also marks a key stage in what a lay Catholic member of the Commission has called an *affective* relationship, based on the joint recognition that the two communions share an emphasis upon the universal call to holiness, the mission to all nations and the interdependence of all local churches within that context. Despite differences on some points of doctrine, ethos and worship, the two communions increasingly recognise that they have the same calling to travel on parallel paths, which should become increasingly convergent as they come closer to that unity which, together, they recognise as intrinsically linked to the call to holiness. Since 1986, the goal of the dialogue has been 'full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life'.[1] The Commission, however, has never fudged difficulties, but has always committed itself to further work on them, however long it may take.

This is the first international bilateral dialogue report devoted to the call to holiness, a key commitment for both churches. The Report appears just as the new President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference take 'Holiness and Justice' as their theme for the next year. Pope Francis, whose teaching and example (if rarely directly cited) naturally influenced the dialogue, continues with the year of mercy. Catholics and Methodists involved in these programmes will find the Report provides them with valuable material for additional reflection.

The Report states that holiness is 'relational, dynamic and holistic'.[2] It is 'practical as well as spiritual … expressed socially in the pursuit of justice and in acts of mercy'.[3] Some might feel the more purely spiritual, even mystical, side of it is under-developed in this report in comparison with Roger Walton's recent presidential address.[4] The traditional Wesleyan stress on the social nature of holiness is linked to Francis' threefold stress on right relationship with God, neighbour and nature.[5]

The Report has four main chapters, dealing, respectively, with the 'Mystery of Being Human', created for communion with God, 'God's Work of Re-Creating Humankind', which takes up issues of grace, justification and, briefly, the Catholic concept of merit, 'The Saints Below' and 'The Saints Above'. Continuing difficulties, felt by many Methodists over some Catholic devotional practices, are treated with great sensitivity, being balanced by a consideration of how some Methodists have come to appreciate particular elements in Catholic devotion.[6] The Catholics offer Benedict XVI's *Spe Salvi* as shedding light on the doctrine of purgatory in a manner which might help Methodists.[7]

Chapter 5 assesses how far Methodists and Catholics have travelled on their shared pilgrim journey. This is followed by lists of agreements and of continuing differences registered in the main chapters. For each chapter, suggestions are made of questions for local or regional discussion and practical co-operation. The Commission is aware that reception is the key problem of the ecumenical movement in general (and of dialogue reports in particular). They are determined to assist the widest possible reception of this rich and fruitful conversation. They deserve success in that.

David Carter

Notes

1. Report, para 5.
2. Report, para 3.
3. Report, para 121.
4. *Methodist Recorder*, 8 July 2016.
5. Report, paras 17–22; *Laudato Si'*, para 66.
6. Report, paras 123–124.
7. Report, para 153.