

HOLINESS VOLUME 4 (2018) ISSUE 1

Holiness & Leadership

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Editorial

Andrew Stobart

I

Leadership, like holiness, eludes straightforward definition. There are a couple of reasons why this observation rings true. First, and perhaps most crucially, there is no such thing as 'raw leadership', which exists in a contextual vacuum. Just as holiness is the holiness *of* God, or the Church, or Scripture, or theology, so leadership is the leadership *of* a community, an organisation, a church, a group, a family, or a nation. Leadership is therefore a derivative concept, rather than an originating one, as much shaped by the culture in which it is recognised, authorised and offered, as it gives shape to that culture. It may well be a necessary tautology to be reminded that leadership without follower-ship is not in fact leadership, no matter how much we might wish otherwise.

A second reason for the elusiveness of definition is that leadership, again like holiness, is much easier to describe in relief. Good leadership is appropriately celebrated as the success of the company of people that is being thus well led. On the contrary, failure of whatever kind is more often attributed to specific leadership deficiencies: the leader was too controlling or not in control, too tentative or too bold, too imaginative or not imaginative enough, too ambitious or too cautious, and on and on through as many binaries as you can name. In the words of one recent study, reviewed later in this issue, leadership is often thought of as the 'panacea' for the issues that befuddle society and organisations today.¹ If only we could 'get the right leaders', then all would be well. We recognise leadership in its absence, or in its failure, more clearly and readily than when it is working.

The connections between leadership and holiness, however, are not merely conjunctive. As well as sharing the difficulty of definition, the two concepts have a more intrinsic link, which can be revealed by digging into the Wesleyan tradition.

In his 'Rules for a Helper', John Wesley instructs the early Methodist leaders, 'Make "Holiness unto the Lord" your motto.'² Wearing this badge, early Methodist leaders were to attend carefully to themselves and their societies so that the outcome of their energies would be to 'build them up in that holiness without which they cannot see the Lord'. Holiness, it might be said, is the *purpose* of leadership. At their best, all the various instruments of leadership within the Wesleyan tradition are best understood as mechanisms for convening and nurturing a society of holiness, which can be presented to God and to the world as the fragrant presence of Christ.³

Leadership, in the best Wesleyan tradition, is only ever for the sake of holiness; or better, for the sake of the holy God who intends his community to inhabit and enjoy his holy, wholesome, perfect life. If, as Calvin Samuel notes in his recent monograph on holiness, this suggests that we hold out 'a self-consciously utopian vision of the world',⁴ then we are merely locating leadership on an eschatological stage, and are standing in the good company of the prophets and the apostles before us. In so far as that holy vision remains over the horizon of the future, leadership offered today will be provisional and hopeful, humble and yet confident in its dependence upon God. As we have said, leadership, like holiness, eludes straightforward definition.

II

The contents of this issue of *Holiness*, arranged around the theme of leadership, provide resources for further reflection on the role that leaders play – the place that they occupy – in the journey of God's people from here and now, to the 'there and then' of creation's divine denouement. These articles, reflections and reviews warrant careful reading and discussion, keeping the following questions in mind. Do I recognise the leadership described here? How might this subject matter challenge my view of *who* leads, and *why* they lead? What are the challenges for the leadership that I seek to offer? Who and what is shaping my view of leadership? Should these articles prompt such a discussion, then the labours of their authors, and of this journal, will have been worthwhile.

For instance, how might the findings of Leslie Francis and Adam Stevenson, in their research into the psychological type and temperament profiles of British Methodist preachers and ministers, affect the way that you view the respective offerings in worship week by week? In so far as leadership of worship in British Methodism is so often shared between lay and ordained, how might the respective gifts offered by each be celebrated and combined to help the Church navigate its onward journey in faithfulness? The next instalment of Alan Palmer's series on *acedia* contributes to this conversation, particularly with regard to introverts in the Church, who have often felt compelled to mimic a more extroverted ministerial model. Understanding the healthy contributions that both introverts and perfectionists can make to leadership enables us to recognise and moderate the less healthy aspects of introversion and perfectionism.

Neil Richardson's article opens up the often-overlooked idiom of the 'leadership of God', grappling with the difficult theological themes of suffering and judgement, concluding strikingly that 'God leads from the cross' (p. 38). Offering leadership in the context of extreme pain and loss is explored again in Gordon Leah's examination of the conversations about God in Albert Camus' novel, *The Plague*. In a quite different way, Janet Morley's personal reflections in her article prompt us to consider the role of leaders in 'guarding the "holy fire"' of spiritual life through the experience of dementia. A painting and reflection by Jane Leach, *Containment*, speaks to this involved and involving leadership task, asking readers to consider how they are holding others – and being held themselves – through their leadership.

'Holiness and Christian unity belong together as twin aspects of the same relationship with the Trinity such that the pursuit of either involves the pursuit of the other.'⁵ These words from the Methodist–Roman Catholic dialogue report, *The Call to Holiness*, stand at the beginning of David Carter's article 'Holiness and unity', describing an ambitious agenda for church leadership today as we seek to move beyond the schisms of the past. Ed Mackenzie's article acknowledges that the 'habitat of holiness' is not only the Church, but also the home, where parents in particular have a crucial role in offering appropriate and compelling leadership in discipleship to their children.

Ed Mackenzie's recent book, *Networks for Faith Formation*, co-authored with Steven Emery-Wright, is one of nine works considered in the Reviews section. From photography to policing, and Methodists in fiction to Methodists in history, the books reviewed here offer helpful pointers for your next reading after *Holiness*.

A further recent publication, *Leading by Story* by Vaughan Roberts and David Sims, stands out as a particularly significant contribution to the theme of this issue. As a result, staff and students of Wesley House made it the subject of a recorded conversation in January 2018. Written up here, 'Storying the leading' explores the central themes of Roberts' and Sims' book, applying them in a cross-cultural setting. Whatever else you read of this issue, this long review article is deserving of attention, since it offers a significant (and potentially transformative) heuristic tool to the task of leadership today: "'Storying the leading' ... is essential for all leadership today, if the Church is to be self-aware, globally conversant, and open to the many gifts that God gives through others' (p. 164).

III

As with the previous issue of *Holiness*, we are indebted to the trust fund named by and for John Newton Davies and Sarah Davies, which is currently helping to finance this open-access journal.⁶ At a time of transition and growth for Wesley House, recalling the life and witness of those who have trained to be leaders of God's people in this place is a crucial leadership task for ourselves, as we navigate today's challenges and opportunities. It is a task we fulfil with gratitude and seriousness, not least in our daily prayers as a community.

You, the readers of this journal, are, by extension, part of the Wesley House community: a global community in the Wesleyan tradition of scholarship and prayer. As editor, I recognise the hiatus in the appearance of this issue, due in no small part to my own move to be part of Wesley House's residential community as Director of Research. Joining the community in a new way, I have begun to see in higher definition how the founding aims of this House have shaped a story to which I, and you, now belong. As Roberts and Sims note in their book, at times a story can itself be the leader.⁷ Caught up in this story of scholarship and spirituality, faith and formation, research and renewal, *Holiness* is committed to offering the critical space for global, practical, informed reflection, so that the narrative of Wesleyan tradition may continue and flourish.

Andrew Stobart, Commissioning Editor
October 2018

Notes

1. Vaughan S. Roberts and David Sims, *Leading by Story: Rethinking Church Leadership*, London: SCM Press, 2017, p. 3.
2. 'The Twelve Rules of a Helper', 1753, in *Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church: Volume 1*, London: Methodist Publishing House, 1988, pp. 77–78.
3. 'But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him' (2 Corinthians 2:14).
4. Calvin Samuel, *MORE>Distinct: Reclaiming holiness for the world today*, London: IVP, 2018, p. 119.
5. 'The Call to Holiness', para 5. The full text can be found online: <http://worldmethodistconference.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/The-Call-to-Holiness-Final-copy-28062016.pdf>.
6. For further information on John and Sarah Davies, see *Holiness* 3(2) (2017), 'Holiness & Reformation', pp. 156–159.
7. Roberts and Sims, *Leading by Story*, p. 49.



Profiling Methodist leadership

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This paper explores the similarities and dissimilarities between the psychological type and temperament profiles of Methodist local preachers and Methodist circuit ministers in the British Methodist Church. New data provided by 80 male and 62 female local preachers who completed the Francis Psychological Type Scales were compared with the profiles of 693 male and 311 female ministers published in 2010. The most important significant difference between the two groups concerns the higher proportions of the Epimethean Temperament (SJ) among both the male (69% compared with 44%) and female (66% compared with 43%) local preachers. The SJ temperament brings a more conservative and conserving approach to ministry.

PSYCHOLOGICAL TYPE THEORY • KEIRSEY TEMPERAMENT THEORY • CLERGY STUDIES • METHODIST LOCAL PREACHERS

Introduction

Methodist circuit ministry in Great Britain today is maintained by the combined efforts of Methodist circuit ministers ordained to presbyteral ministry and of local preachers serving in the circuit (see *British Methodism Today* by Haley and Francis 2006). Without local preachers, circuit ministry would not be sustainable.

Lay preachers have been a feature of Methodism since its conception. Margaret Batty recounts stories of two early lay preachers, Thomas Westall and Thomas Maxfield, who were permitted to preach by the Wesleys, even though they had reservations about the added difficulties such 'irregularities' may cause their relationship with the Church of England (Milburn and Batty 1995). As Methodism developed, so did the number of lay preachers. In the minutes of meetings held from 1751 onwards it became evident that lay preachers were very much part of Methodism. Then, in 1797, Conference established the Local Preachers' Meeting and a mechanism for checking on the standards of preaching by involving both the superintendent minister and the wider body of local preachers.

The role of local preachers continued to develop, and their status and identity in the various branches of nineteenth-century Methodism was not a consistent picture. After Methodist Union in 1932 local preachers were mainly trained through the study of set textbooks with written examinations administered by the Methodist Church. In 1990 a new training course was launched using local tutors and containing units of study. This 1990 course was only superseded in 2017 by the latest training course that is modular and uses web-based learning. The Local Preachers' Meeting still conducts oral examinations for preachers, at the various stages of development, allowing preachers in training to account for their calling, development and assent to Methodist doctrine. Local preachers are first given a 'note' to preach, and during this initial stage they test their calling to this ministry, as does the local Methodist circuit. At the same time, they begin the formal training course on which they are supported by a local tutor and mentor. Local preachers move to being 'on trial' until their training is completed satisfactorily and they are 'fully accredited'. Today there are 6,602 fully accredited local preachers, with a further 655 on note and 896 on trial (Methodist Church 2017). Each person is likely to be leading between four and six acts of worship in a quarter according to the Millennial Profile (Sawkins 2002). An individual church, however, could expect half or even three-quarters of its services to be led by local preachers, depending on the ordained resources of the circuit.

Against this background, the aim of the present study is to report a new empirical survey of the psychological type and temperament profile of local preachers and to set that alongside the profile of Methodist circuit ministers published by Burton, Francis and Robbins (2010). The purpose of the comparison is to test whether local preachers and Methodist circuit ministers bring the same or different psychological preferences and gifts to their leadership of worship and to the life of the local chapel. But first it is necessary to give some broader context to psychological type theory and to temperament theory.

Psychological type theory

Psychological type theory has its roots in the observations and documentation of human behaviour by Jung (1971) and in the developments shaped by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers and McCaulley 1985), the Keirsey Temperament Sorter (Keirsey and Bates 1978) and the Francis Psychological Type Scales (Francis 2005). The basic building blocks of psychological type theory distinguish between two orientations (extraversion and introversion), two perceiving functions (sensing and intuition), two judging functions (thinking and feeling), and two attitudes towards the outer world (judging and perceiving). Francis and Payne (2002) speculated about the implication of these building blocks of psychological type theory for ways in which clergy may prefer to shape and focus their ministry style.

The two orientations are concerned with where energy is drawn from: energy can be gathered either from the outside world or from the inner world. Clergy who prefer extraversion (E) are orientated towards the outside world; they are energised by the events and people around them. They enjoy communicating and thrive in stimulating and exciting environments. They prefer to act in a situation rather than to reflect on it. They may vocalise a problem or an idea, rather than thinking it through privately. They tend to focus their attention upon what is happening outside themselves. They are usually open individuals, easy to get to know, and enjoy having many people around them. In contrast, clergy who prefer introversion (I) are orientated towards their inner world; they are energised by their inner ideas and concepts. They may feel drained by events and people around them. They prefer to reflect on a situation rather than to act in it. They enjoy solitude, silence and contemplation, as they tend to focus their attention upon what is happening in their inner life. They may appear reserved and detached as they are difficult to get to know.

The perceiving functions are concerned with the way in which people receive and process information; this can be done through use of the senses or through use of intuition. Clergy who prefer sensing (S) focus on the realities of a situation as perceived by the senses. They tend to focus on specific details, rather than the overall picture. They are concerned with the actual, the real and the practical, and tend to be down-to-earth and matter-of-fact. They may feel that particular details are more significant than general patterns. They are frequently fond of the traditional and conventional. They may be conservative and tend to prefer what is known and well established. In contrast, clergy who prefer intuition (N) focus on the possibilities of a situation, perceiving meanings and relationships. They may feel that perception by the senses is not as valuable as information gained from the unconscious mind; indirect associations and concepts impact their perceptions. They focus on the overall picture, rather than specific facts and data. They follow their inspirations enthusiastically, but not always realistically. They can appear to be up in the air and may be seen as idealistic dreamers. They often aspire to bring innovative change to established conventions.

The judging functions are concerned with the way in which people make decisions and judgements; this can be done through use of objective impersonal logic or subjective interpersonal values. Clergy who prefer thinking (T) make judgements based on objective, impersonal logic. They value integrity and justice. They are known for their truthfulness and for their desire for fairness. They consider conforming to principles to be of more importance than cultivating harmony. They are often good at making difficult decisions as they are able to analyse problems in order to reach an unbiased and reasonable solution. They are frequently referred to as 'tough-minded'. They may consider it to be more important to be honest and correct than to be tactful, when working with others. In contrast, clergy who prefer feeling (F) make judgements based on subjective, personal values. They value compassion and mercy. They are known for their tactfulness and for their desire for peace. They are more concerned to promote harmony than to adhere to abstract principles. They may be thought of as 'people persons', as they are able to take into account other people's feelings and values in decision-making and problem-solving, ensuring they reach a solution that satisfies everyone. They are often thought of as 'warm-hearted'. They may find it difficult to criticise others, even when it is necessary. They find it easy to empathise with other people and tend to be trusting and encouraging of others.

The attitudes towards the outside world are concerned with the way in which people respond to the world around them, either by imposing structure and order on that world or remaining open and adaptable to the world around them. Clergy who prefer judging (J) have a planned, orderly approach to life. They enjoy routine and established patterns. They prefer to follow schedules in order to reach an established goal and may make use of lists, timetables or diaries. They tend to be punctual, organised and tidy. They may find it difficult to deal with unexpected disruptions of their plans. Likewise, they are inclined to be resistant to changes to established methods. They prefer to make decisions quickly and to stick to their conclusions once made. In contrast, clergy who prefer perceiving (P) have a flexible, open-ended approach to life. They enjoy change and spontaneity. They prefer to leave projects open in order to adapt and improve them. They may find plans and schedules restrictive and tend to be easy-going about issues such as punctuality, deadlines and tidiness. Indeed, they may consider last-minute pressure to be a necessary motivation in order to complete projects. They are often good at dealing with the unexpected. Indeed, they may welcome change and variety as routine bores them. Their behaviour may often seem impulsive and unplanned.

Temperament theory

Drawing on the basic building blocks of psychological type theory, Keirsey and Bates (1978) distinguished between four temperaments characterised as SJ, SP, NT and NF, and to each of these temperaments they ascribe a distinctive name rooted in classic mythology. The Epimethean Temperament characterises the SJ profile, people who long to be dutiful and exist primarily to be useful to the social units to which they belong. The Dionysian Temperament characterises the SP profile, people who want to be engaged, involved and doing something new. The Promethean Temperament characterises the NT profile, people who want to understand, explain, shape and predict realities, and who prize their personal competence. The Apollonian Temperament characterises the NF profile, people who quest for authenticity and for self-actualisation, who are idealistic and who have great capacity for empathic listening. Oswald and Kroeger (1988) built on Keirsey and Bates' (1978) characterisation of the four temperaments to create profiles of how these four temperaments shape four very different styles of religious leadership.

The Epimethean Temperament (SJ) is styled 'the conserving, serving pastor'. SJ clergy tend to be the most traditional of all clergy temperaments, bringing stability and continuity in whatever situation they are called to serve. They proclaim a single and straightforward faith, committed to down-to-earth rules for the Christian life. They serve as protectors and conservers of the traditions inherited from the past. If change is to take place, it emerges by evolution, not revolution. They excel at building community, fostering a sense of loyalty and belonging. They bring order and stability to their congregations, creating plans, developing procedures and formulating policies; and they are keen that these procedures should be followed. They can be trusted for their reliability, punctuality and efficiency. They are effective pastors, showing particular concern for the young, the elderly and the weak. They are realists who offer practical and down-to-earth solutions to pastoral problems.

The Dionysian Temperament (SP) is styled 'the action-oriented pastor'. SP clergy tend to be the most fun-loving of all clergy temperaments, possessing a compulsive need to be engaged in activity. They have little need for or interest in the abstract, the theoretical and the non-practical aspects of theology and church life. They are flexible and spontaneous people who welcome the unplanned and unpredictable aspects of church life. They can bring the church to life with activities for everyone from cradle to grave. They have a flare for grasping the moment. They are entertainers and performers at heart. They are at their best in a crisis and are good at handling conflict resolution. Their fun-loving means they enjoy working with children and young people. They are better at starting new initiatives than at seeing things through. SP clergy may be particularly attracted to charismatic worship, responding to the leading of the Holy Spirit, welcoming a free-flowing form that allows for impromptu testimonials, speaking in tongues and spontaneous singing.

The Promethean Temperament (NT) is styled 'the intellectual, competence-seeking pastor'. NT clergy are the most academically and intellectually grounded of all clergy temperaments, motivated by the search for meaning, for truth and for possibilities. They are visionaries who need to excel in all they do, and they tend to push their congregations to excel as well. They enjoy the academic study and analysis of the faith, and may try to run their church as an extension of the seminary. They make great teachers, preachers and advocates for social justice. They look for underlying principles rather than basic applications from their study of Scripture. They see the value of opposing views and strive to allow alternative visions to be heard. They are more concerned with finding truth than with engineering harmony and compromise. NT clergy

need to be challenged in their ministry and to be able to move from one challenge to the next.

The Apollonian Temperament (NF) is styled 'the authenticity-seeking, relationship-oriented pastor'. NF clergy tend to be the most idealistic and romantic of all clergy temperaments, attracted to helping roles that deal with human suffering. They want to meet the needs of others and to find personal affirmation in so doing. They can be articulate and inspiring communicators, committed to influencing others by touching their hearts. They have good empathic capacity, interpersonal skills and pastoral counselling techniques. They find themselves listening to other people's problems in the most unlikely contexts, and really caring about them. NF clergy tend to be high on inspiration, but lower on the practical down-to-earth aspects of ministry. They are able to draw the best out of people and work well as the catalyst or facilitator in the congregation as long as others are on hand to work with and to implement their vision. They are at their best when leading in people-related projects, such as starting a project for the elderly or for youth. They are most comfortable in unstructured meetings where they are good at facilitating group decision-making processes.

Psychological data

Since the late 1960s there has been an established tradition of empirical research employing psychological type theory among religious professionals in the USA, reported in early studies like Greenfield (1969), Harbaugh (1984), Holsworth (1984), Cabral (1984), Macdaid, McCaulley and Kainz (1986), Bigelow, Fitzgerald, Busk, Girault and Avis (1988), and latterly Francis, Robbins and Wulff (2011), Burns, Francis, Village and Robbins (2013), and Royle, Norton and Larkin (2015). From the late 1980s this tradition has also flourished in the UK, including studies among Presbyterian Church of Scotland ministers (Irvine 1989), Anglican clergymen serving in the Church in Wales (Francis, Payne and Jones 2001), male and female Bible College students (Francis, Penson and Jones 2001), evangelical church leaders (Francis and Robbins 2002), male missionary personnel (Craig, Horsfall and Francis 2005), evangelical lay church leaders (Francis, Craig, Horsfall and Ross 2005), Roman Catholic priests (Craig, Duncan and Francis 2006), youth ministers (Francis, Nash, Nash and Craig 2007), Anglican clergymen and clergywomen serving in the Church of England (Francis, Craig, Whinney, Tilley and Slater 2007), Assemblies of God theological

college students (Kay and Francis 2008; Kay, Francis and Craig 2008), lead elders serving within the Newfrontiers network of churches (Francis, Gubb and Robbins 2009), and leaders within the Apostolic networks (Kay, Francis and Robbins 2011).

The first attempt to draw up psychological type profiles of Methodist ministers was published by Burton, Francis and Robbins (2010). They drew on data provided by samples of 693 male ministers and 311 female ministers who completed the 40-item Francis Psychological Type Scales (Francis, 2005) as part of a substantial postal survey. The core findings from this study are presented in Table 1 alongside comparable data on Church of England clergy provided by samples of 626 clergymen and 237 clergywomen published by Francis, Craig, Whinney, Tilley and Slater (2007).

Table 1: *Psychological type and temperament profiles of Methodist ministers and Church of England clergy*

	Clergymen		Clergywomen	
	C of E ¹ %	Methodist ² %	C of E ³ %	Methodist ⁴ %
<i>Psychological type</i>				
Introversion (I)	57	61	54	53
Intuition (N)	62	46**	65	48***
Feeling (F)	54	64***	74	77
Judging (J)	68	70	65	70
<i>Psychological temperament</i>				
Epimethean (SJ)	31	44***	29	43***
Dionysian (SP)	7	10	6	9
Promethean (NT)	27	18***	15	12
Apollonian (NF)	35	28**	50	36**

¹ From Francis, Craig, Whinney, Tilley and Slater (2007), N = 626

² From Burton, Francis and Robbins (2010), N = 693

³ From Francis, Craig, Whinney, Tilley and Slater (2007), N = 237

⁴ From Burton, Francis and Robbins (2010), N = 311

The first conclusion to emerge from these data concerns the psychological type profile of Methodist circuit ministers. In terms of orientation, the preference among both male and female ministers is for introversion (61% of men and 53% of women). These are people who may feel more at ease in their study and dealing with individuals and small groups of people than with social events and meeting strangers. In terms of the perceiving process, there is balance between intuition and sensing, with a slight preference for sensing (54% of men and 52% of women). The sensing types may be better at careful maintenance and the intuitive types at innovative developments. In terms of the judging process, there is a clear preference for feeling among both male and female ministers (64% of men and 77% of women). What is notable here is the contrast with the UK population as a whole where 35% of men and 70% of women prefer feeling (Kendall 1998). Here is a church led by both men and women who display a strongly feminine profile in terms of the ways in which they reach decisions and form evaluations. These are people who may feel more comfortable promoting peace and harmony than tackling tough decisions and sorting out interpersonal difficulties within the local church. These are people who may thrive in an environment shaped by women but feel less at home in an environment shaped by men. In terms of their attitudes towards the outer world, there is a clear preference for judging (70% of men and 70% of women). Here are people who are more at home in a well-organised and structured environment than one that requires flexibility and spontaneity.

The second conclusion to emerge from these data concerns the points at which there are significant differences, in a statistical sense, between the psychological type profiles of Methodist ministers and Church of England clergy. In terms of the men, there are two statistically significant differences. The Anglican clergymen are more inclined to prefer intuition than the male Methodist ministers (62% compared with 46%, $p < .001$). This suggests that the Anglican clergymen are more likely to be imaginative and innovative leaders. The Anglican clergymen are more inclined to prefer thinking than male Methodist ministers (46% compared with 36%, $p < .001$). This suggests that the Anglican clergymen are somewhat more likely to take tough management decisions when necessary, although the preference for thinking still remains much lower among Anglican clergymen than among men in general (46% compared with 65%). In terms of the women, there is one statistically significant difference. Like the situation among the men, the Anglican clergywomen are more inclined to prefer intuition than female Methodist ministers (65% compared with 48%, $p < .001$).

The third conclusion to emerge from these data concerns the temperament profile of Methodist circuit ministers. Among both male and female ministers the most prevalent profile is the Epimethean Temperament (SJ), with 44% of men and 43% women. This is the temperament characterised by Oswald and Kroeger (1988) as 'the conserving, serving pastor'. Among both male and female ministers the second most prevalent profile is the Apollonian Temperament (NF), with 28% of men and 36% of women. This is the temperament characterised by Oswald and Kroeger (1988) as 'the authenticity-seeking, relationship-oriented pastor'. Among Methodist circuit ministers the other two temperaments are less in evidence.

The fourth conclusion to emerge from these data concerns the points at which there are significant differences, in a statistical sense, between the temperament profiles of Methodist ministers and Church of England clergy. The Anglican clergymen are less inclined to prefer the Epimethean (SJ) Temperament (31% compared with 44%, $p < .001$), more inclined to prefer the Promethean (NT) Temperament (27% compared with 18%, $p < .001$) and more inclined to prefer the Apollonian (NF) Temperament (35% compared with 28%, $p < .01$). The Anglican clergywomen are less inclined to prefer the Epimethean (SJ) Temperament (29% compared with 43%, $p < .001$) and more inclined to prefer the Apollonian (NF) Temperament (50% compared with 36%, $p < .01$).

Research question

Against this background the aim of the present study is to explore the psychological type profiles and temperament profiles of male and female local preachers and to set those profiles alongside the data reported by Burton, Francis and Robbins (2010) on Methodist circuit ministers. A comparison of this nature builds on the comparison made by Francis, Jones and Robbins (2014) between Church of England clergy and Readers, the nearest equivalent within the Anglican Church to local preachers within the Methodist Church. In that study the data demonstrated significant psychological similarities, as well as some significant psychological differences, between those exercising Reader ministry and those exercising ordained ministry. The present study sets out to ascertain whether a similar situation appertains within the Methodist Church.

Method

Procedure

A sample of local preachers serving within the four circuits in four different districts (Wales, Manchester and Stockport, Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury, Leeds) were invited to participate in the survey. Usable responses were received from 80 men and 62 women.

Instrument

Psychological type was assessed by the Francis Psychological Type Scales (FPTS: Francis 2005). This 40-item instrument comprises four sets of ten forced-choice items related to each of the four components of psychological type: orientation (extraversion or introversion), perceiving process (sensing or intuition), judging process (thinking or feeling), and attitude towards the outer world (judging or perceiving). Recent studies have demonstrated this instrument to function well among clergy. For example, Francis and Village (2012) reported alpha coefficients (internal consistency reliability) of .84 for the EI scale, .74 for the SN scale, .68 for the TF scale, and .74 for the JP scale.

Participants

Among the 142 participants in the survey (80 men and 62 women), 10% were under the age of forty, 25% were in their forties or fifties, 28% were in their sixties, 29% were in their seventies, and 8% were in their eighties; 90% were fully accredited and 10% were on note or on trial.

Analysis

The scientific literature concerned with psychological type (and by extension with psychological temperament) has developed a distinctive way of presenting type-related data. The conventional format of 'type tables' has been used in the present paper to allow the findings from this study to be compared with other relevant studies in the literature. In the two type tables in this paper the profiles of male and female local preachers are compared with the profiles of male and female Methodist circuit ministers as reported by Burton, Francis and Robbins (2010). In these tables the statistical significances of differences in the profiles of different groups (namely local preachers and Methodist circuit ministers) is tested by the means of the Selection Ratio Index (I), an extension of the classic chi-square test (McCaulley 1985). The tables present the data on local preachers (Table 2 on men and Table 3 on women) and compare these

data with full data on clergy published by Burton, Francis and Robbins (2010). Although these comparative data (on which the tests of statistical significance are based) are not retrievable from the tables themselves, the relevant comparative data are included in the narrative of the text.

Results

The Francis Psychological Type Scales demonstrated satisfactory levels of internal consistency reliability among the preachers, generating the following alpha coefficients for the EI scale, .79; for the SN scale, .70; for the TF scale, .72; and for the JP scale, .74.

Table 2 presents the psychological type profile of the 80 male local preachers and compares them with the psychological type profile of the 693 male Methodist circuit ministers provided by Burton, Francis and Robbins (2010). These data will be discussed in two steps.

The first step discusses the psychological type profile of the male local preachers. In terms of the dichotomous preferences they display preferences for introversion (56%) over extraversion (44%), for sensing (73%) over intuition (28%), for thinking (51%) over feeling (49%), and for judging (85%) over perceiving (15%). In terms of dominant type preferences, they display the following hierarchy: dominant sensing (43%), dominant feeling (21%), dominant thinking (20%), and dominant intuition (16%). In terms of the 16 complete types, the most frequently occurring types are ISFJs (20%), ISTJs (19%) and ESFJs (16%). In terms of psychological temperament preferences, the most frequently occurring temperament is SJ (69%), followed by NT (18%), NF (10%) and SP (4%).

The second step compares the psychological profile of the male local preachers with the male Methodist circuit ministers published by Burton, Francis and Robbins (2010). In terms of the dichotomous preferences there are three significant differences between the two groups. While 54% of the male ministers preferred sensing, the proportion rose to 73% among the local preachers; while 36% of the male ministers preferred thinking, the proportion rose to 51% among the local preachers; while 70% of the male ministers preferred judging, the proportion rose to 85% among the local preachers. The difference in terms of the perceiving process is also reflected in the psychological temperament: while 44% of the male ministers preferred the Epimethean Temperament (SJ), the proportion rose to 69% among

Table 2: Type distribution for male local preachers compared with male Methodist circuit ministers reported by Burton, Francis and Robbins (2010)

The sixteen complete types				Dichotomous preferences							
ISTJ	ISFJ	INFJ	INTJ	E	<i>n</i> = 35	(43.8%)	<i>I</i> = 1.11				
<i>n</i> = 15	<i>n</i> = 16	<i>n</i> = 2	<i>n</i> = 7	I	<i>n</i> = 45	(56.3%)	<i>I</i> = 0.93				
(18.8%)	(20.0%)	(2.5%)	(8.8%)	S	<i>n</i> = 58	(72.5%)	<i>I</i> = 1.34**				
<i>I</i> = 1.64	<i>I</i> = 1.09	<i>I</i> = 0.31	<i>I</i> = 1.08	N	<i>n</i> = 22	(27.5%)	<i>I</i> = 0.60**				
+++++	+++++	+++	+++++								
+++++	+++++		+++++								
+++++	+++++			T	<i>n</i> = 41	(51.3%)	<i>I</i> = 1.44**				
+++++	+++++			F	<i>n</i> = 39	(48.8%)	<i>I</i> = 0.76**				
+++++	+++++			J	<i>n</i> = 68	(85.0%)	<i>I</i> = 1.21**				
				P	<i>n</i> = 12	(15.0%)	<i>I</i> = 0.50**				
ISTP	ISFP	INFP	INTP	Pairs and temperaments							
<i>n</i> = 0	<i>n</i> = 0	<i>n</i> = 1	<i>n</i> = 4	IJ	<i>n</i> = 40	(50.0%)	<i>I</i> = 1.09				
(0.0%)	(0.0%)	(1.3%)	(5.0%)	IP	<i>n</i> = 5	(6.3%)	<i>I</i> = 0.43*				
<i>I</i> = 0.00	<i>I</i> = 0.00	<i>I</i> = 0.17*	<i>I</i> = 1.58	EP	<i>n</i> = 7	(8.8%)	<i>I</i> = 0.57				
		+	+++++	EJ	<i>n</i> = 28	(35.0%)	<i>I</i> = 1.45*				
				ST	<i>n</i> = 27	(33.8%)	<i>I</i> = 1.86***				
				SF	<i>n</i> = 31	(38.8%)	<i>I</i> = 1.07				
				NF	<i>n</i> = 8	(10.0%)	<i>I</i> = 0.35***				
ESTP	ESFP	ENFP	ENTP	NT	<i>n</i> = 14	(17.5%)	<i>I</i> = 1.00				
<i>n</i> = 1	<i>n</i> = 2	<i>n</i> = 2	<i>n</i> = 2	SJ	<i>n</i> = 55	(68.8%)	<i>I</i> = 1.55***				
(1.3%)	(2.5%)	(2.5%)	(2.5%)	SP	<i>n</i> = 3	(3.8%)	<i>I</i> = 0.38				
<i>I</i> = 1.24	<i>I</i> = 0.51	<i>I</i> = 0.35	<i>I</i> = 1.08	NP	<i>n</i> = 9	(11.3%)	<i>I</i> = 0.56				
+	+++	+++	+++	NJ	<i>n</i> = 13	(16.3%)	<i>I</i> = 0.64				
				TJ	<i>n</i> = 34	(42.5%)	<i>I</i> = 1.50**				
				TP	<i>n</i> = 7	(8.8%)	<i>I</i> = 1.21				
				FP	<i>n</i> = 5	(6.3%)	<i>I</i> = 0.27***				
				FJ	<i>n</i> = 34	(42.5%)	<i>I</i> = 1.02				
ESTJ	ESFJ	ENFJ	ENTJ	IN	<i>n</i> = 14	(17.5%)	<i>I</i> = 0.65				
<i>n</i> = 11	<i>n</i> = 13	<i>n</i> = 3	<i>n</i> = 1	EN	<i>n</i> = 8	(10.0%)	<i>I</i> = 0.53*				
(13.8%)	(16.3%)	(3.8%)	(1.3%)	IS	<i>n</i> = 31	(38.8%)	<i>I</i> = 1.15				
<i>I</i> = 2.72**	<i>I</i> = 1.68	<i>I</i> = 0.68	<i>I</i> = 0.32	ES	<i>n</i> = 27	(33.8%)	<i>I</i> = 1.64**				
+++++	+++++	+++++	+								
+++++	+++++			ET	<i>n</i> = 15	(18.8%)	<i>I</i> = 1.53				
+++++	+++++			EF	<i>n</i> = 20	(25.0%)	<i>I</i> = 0.92				
	+			IF	<i>n</i> = 19	(23.8%)	<i>I</i> = 0.64*				
				IT	<i>n</i> = 26	(32.5%)	<i>I</i> = 1.39				
Jungian types (E)				Jungian types (I)				Dominant types			
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>Index</i>		<i>n</i>	%	<i>Index</i>		<i>n</i>	%	<i>Index</i>
E-TJ	12	15.0	1.68	I-TP	4	5.0	1.28	Dt.T	16	20.0	1.56
E-FJ	16	20.0	1.32	I-FP	1	1.3	0.12**	Dt.F	17	21.3	0.82
ES-P	3	3.8	0.63	IS-J	31	38.8	1.30	Dt.S	34	42.5	1.19
EN-P	4	5.0	0.53	IN-J	9	11.3	0.70	Dt.N	13	16.3	0.63

Note: *N* = 80 (NB: + = 1% of *N*)

p* < .05, *p* < .01, ****p* < .001

the local preachers; while 28% of the male ministers preferred the Apollonian Temperament (NF), the proportion fell to 10% among the local preachers.

Table 3 (see p. 21) presents the psychological type profile of the 62 female local preachers and compares them with the psychological type profile of the 311 female Methodist circuit ministers provided by Burton, Francis and Robbins (2010). The data will be discussed in two steps.

The first step discusses the psychological type profile of the female local preachers. In terms of the dichotomous preferences, they display equal preferences for introversion (50%) and extraversion (50%), and strong preferences for sensing (69%) over intuition (31%), for feeling (73%) over thinking (27%), and for judging (90%) over perceiving (10%). In terms of dominant type preferences, they display the following hierarchy: dominant sensing (39%), dominant feeling (27%), dominant intuition (21%) and dominant thinking (13%). In terms of the 16 complete types, the most frequently occurring types are ISFJ (26%), ESFJ (21%) and INFJ (11%). In terms of psychological temperament preferences, the most frequently occurring temperament is SJ (66%), followed by NF (23%), NT (8%) and SP (3%).

The second step compares the psychological type profile of the female local preachers with the female Methodist circuit ministers published by Burton, Francis and Robbins (2010). In terms of the dichotomous preferences there are two significant differences between the two groups. While 52% of the female ministers preferred sensing, the proportion rose to 69% among the local preachers; while 70% of the female ministers preferred judging, the proportion rose to 90% among the local preachers. The differences in terms of the perceiving process are also reflected in the psychological temperament: while 43% of the female ministers preferred the Epimethean Temperament (SJ), the proportion rose to 66% among the local preachers; while 36% of the female ministers preferred the Apollonian Temperament (NF), the proportion fell to 23% among the local preachers.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the similarities and dissimilarities between the psychological type and temperament profiles of Methodist local preachers and Methodist circuit ministers. It did so by assembling a new database provided by 142 local preachers (80 male and 62 female) who completed the Francis

Table 3: Type distribution for female local preachers compared with female Methodist circuit ministers reported by Burton, Francis and Robbins (2010)

The sixteen complete types				Dichotomous preferences							
ISTJ <i>n</i> = 6 (9.7%) <i>I</i> = 2.01 +++++	ISFJ <i>n</i> = 16 (25.8%) <i>I</i> = 1.34 +++++	INFJ <i>n</i> = 7 (11.3%) <i>I</i> = 1.21 +++++	INTJ <i>n</i> = 2 (3.2%) <i>I</i> = 0.84 +++	E <i>n</i> = 31 (50.0%) <i>I</i> = 1.07	I <i>n</i> = 31 (50.0%) <i>I</i> = 0.94						
				S <i>n</i> = 43 (69.4%) <i>I</i> = 1.33**	N <i>n</i> = 19 (30.6%) <i>I</i> = 0.64**						
				T <i>n</i> = 17 (27.4%) <i>I</i> = 1.20	F <i>n</i> = 45 (72.6%) <i>I</i> = 0.94						
				J <i>n</i> = 56 (90.3%) <i>I</i> = 1.30***	P <i>n</i> = 6 (9.7%) <i>I</i> = 0.32***						
ISTP <i>n</i> = 0 (0.0%) <i>I</i> = 0.00	ISFP <i>n</i> = 0 (0.0%) <i>I</i> = 0.00	INFP <i>n</i> = 0 (0.0%) <i>I</i> = 0.00**	INTP <i>n</i> = 0 (0.0%) <i>I</i> = 0.00	Pairs and temperaments							
				IJ <i>n</i> = 31 (50.0%) <i>I</i> = 1.34	IP <i>n</i> = 0 (0.0%) <i>I</i> = 0.00***						
				EP <i>n</i> = 6 (9.7%) <i>I</i> = 0.65	EJ <i>n</i> = 25 (40.3%) <i>I</i> = 1.25						
				ST <i>n</i> = 12 (19.4%) <i>I</i> = 1.72	SF <i>n</i> = 31 (50.0%) <i>I</i> = 1.22						
				NF <i>n</i> = 14 (22.6%) <i>I</i> = 0.62*	NT <i>n</i> = 5 (8.1%) <i>I</i> = 0.70						
ESTP <i>n</i> = (0.0%) <i>I</i> = 0.00	ESFP <i>n</i> = 2 (3.2%) <i>I</i> = 0.72 +++	ENFP <i>n</i> = 3 (4.8%) <i>I</i> = 0.65 +++++	ENTP <i>n</i> = 1 (1.6%) <i>I</i> = 0.84 ++	SJ <i>n</i> = 41 (66.1%) <i>I</i> = 1.52***	SP <i>n</i> = 2 (3.2%) <i>I</i> = 0.37						
				NP <i>n</i> = 4 (6.5%) <i>I</i> = 0.30**	NJ <i>n</i> = 15 (24.2%) <i>I</i> = 0.93						
				TJ <i>n</i> = 16 (25.8%) <i>I</i> = 1.61	TP <i>n</i> = 1 (1.6%) <i>I</i> = 0.24						
				FP <i>n</i> = 5 (8.1%) <i>I</i> = 0.34**	FJ <i>n</i> = 40 (64.5%) <i>I</i> = 1.21						
ESTJ <i>n</i> = 6 (9.7%) <i>I</i> = 2.01 +++++	ESFJ <i>n</i> = 13 (21.0%) <i>I</i> = 1.45 +++++	ENFJ <i>n</i> = 4 (6.5%) <i>I</i> = 0.63 +++++	ENTJ <i>n</i> = 2 (3.2%) <i>I</i> = 1.25 +++	IN <i>n</i> = 9 (14.5%) <i>I</i> = 0.56	EN <i>n</i> = 10 (16.1%) <i>I</i> = 0.73						
				IS <i>n</i> = 22 (35.5%) <i>I</i> = 1.30	ES <i>n</i> = 21 (33.9%) <i>I</i> = 1.37						
				ET <i>n</i> = 9 (14.5%) <i>I</i> = 1.41	EF <i>n</i> = 22 (35.5%) <i>I</i> = 0.97						
				IF <i>n</i> = 23 (37.1%) <i>I</i> = 0.92	IT <i>n</i> = 8 (12.9%) <i>I</i> = 1.03						
Jungian types (E)				Jungian types (I)			Dominant types				
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>Index</i>		<i>n</i>	%	<i>Index</i>		<i>n</i>	%	<i>Index</i>
E-TJ	8	12.9	1.74	I-TP	0	0.0	0.00	Dt.T	8	12.9	1.15
E-FJ	17	27.4	1.11	I-FP	0	0.0	0.00**	Dt.F	17	27.4	0.75
ES-P	2	3.2	0.59	IS-J	22	35.5	1.47	Dt.S	24	38.7	1.31
EN-P	4	6.5	0.69	IN-J	9	14.5	1.10	Dt.N	13	21.0	0.93

Note: *N* = 62 (NB: + = 1% of *N*)

p* < .05, *p* < .01, ****p* < .001

Psychological Type Scales (Francis 2005) and by setting these new data alongside the profiles of 693 male and 311 female Methodist circuit ministers compiled and published by Burton, Francis and Robbins (2010). The motivation for conducting this research stemmed from the recognition of the crucial role that local preachers continue to play in sustaining circuit ministry placed against the background of declining numbers of ordained ministers, and the dwindling strength of some local chapels.

In this context, psychological type theory and temperament theory may generate insight into the different and distinctive potentialities, strengths and weaknesses that Methodist circuit ministers and local preachers may bring to circuit ministry. From the range of detailed data generated by the study two particular findings are of particular salience and importance for appreciating the implications for the practical outcomes of sustaining the day-to-day and Sunday-to-Sunday ministry within local circuits. One of these findings is rooted in temperament theory and the other is rooted in psychological type theory.

In terms of temperament theory, the crucial finding concerns the place of the Epimethean (SJ) Temperament. In terms of men, the Epimethean (SJ) Temperament accounted for 31% of Anglican priests, 44% of Methodist ministers, and 69% of local preachers. In terms of women, the Epimethean (SJ) Temperament accounted for 29% of Anglican priests, 43% of Methodist ministers, and 66% of local preachers. Oswald and Kroeger's (1988) conceptualisation of the Epimethean (SJ) Temperament as 'the conserving, serving pastor' crystallises both the strength and weakness of allowing this style of ministry to dominate. Here are devout and serious people deeply committed to the traditions that they have inherited and deeply committed to transmitting the traditions to those who follow them. They bring stability and continuity to the chapels that they are called to serve. Yet herein also lies the problem. They are not people likely to identify or to espouse new pathways to the future. Indeed they are likely to resist the very changes needed to secure that future.

Other strands of research have identified the Epimethean (SJ) Temperament as a strong character of church congregation, both in England (Francis, Robbins and Craig 2011) and in Australia (Robbins and Francis 2011). Indeed one of the battles often faced by Anglican clergy and by Methodist ministers alike concerns motivating congregations to see the point of the vision for change and development. In such battles the Epimethean local preacher may well be able to identify more readily with the congregation's voice than with the minister's voice. There are strengths and weaknesses in this situation,

depending on whether the primary concern is to care for what remains from the past (and these people deserve care) or to envision a different future (and these visions may not always be attainable).

In terms of psychological type theory, the crucial finding concerns the judging process and the place of the thinking function within evaluation and decision-making. While the feeling function privileges the importance of subjective personal and interpersonal values and the goals of harmony and peace, the thinking function privileges the importance of objective and impersonal logic and the goals of truth and fairness. There are, moreover, important sex differences in predicting the preferences for thinking and for feeling. According to the UK psychological type population norms published by Kendall (1998), while 70% of women prefer feeling, 65% of men prefer thinking. As a consequence feeling may be conceptualised as a feminine orientation while thinking may be conceptualised as a masculine orientation. In terms of women, the feeling function accounts for 74% of Anglican priests, 77% of Methodist ministers, and 73% of local preachers. The picture is consistent. In terms of men, the feeling function accounts for 54% of Anglican priests, 64% of Methodist ministers, and 49% of local preachers. The picture suggests that the ministry of local preachers may be accessing and drawing on a wider and (slightly) more representative pool of men. They are more likely than the ministers to wish to grasp the nettle and to sort out problems in the local chapel, whether or not it disrupts long-seated relationships.

Other strands have identified church congregations to be strongly comprised of feeling types, both in England (Francis, Robbins and Craig 2011) and in Australia (Robbins and Francis 2011). Methodist ministers feel more at home than local preachers in appreciating the dynamics of communities so dominated by the feeling preference. Yet at times the ministers may be unable or feel reluctant to deal with the underlying issues and tensions that may be disruptive (and indeed unhealthy) within such communities. The right chosen local preacher may help to find a way through such issues.

The weakness with the present study concerns the small (and possibly unrepresentative) nature of the sample of local preachers, especially when considered alongside the systematic survey of the Methodist circuit ministers reported by Burton, Francis and Robbins (2010). The findings, however, carry sufficiently important practical implications for the effective delivery of Methodist circuit ministry to make worthwhile a more systematic replication study among local preachers.

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The leadership of God

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This article explores the theme of God's leadership in the Bible and its interpretation for today. Two major themes will be explored: the humble, non-coercive nature of divine leadership and its corollary, wrath and judgement (themes all too often misunderstood). Finally, the question, 'Where is God taking us?' involves revisiting the biblical understanding of the parousia, the 'second coming' of Jesus.

LEADERSHIP • CROSS • JUDGEMENT • WRATH • PAROUSIA • NON-COERCIVE
LEADERSHIP • DIVINE INTERVENTION

Introduction

In a fast-changing world we find ourselves in the throes of theological change – even a theological revolution. Old models and concepts of God which served previous generations well are increasingly seen to be more problematic and questionable for us. This should neither surprise nor dismay us. The Bible itself reflects a process of continuity and change – a constant interaction between revelation and context. How we are to understand the leadership of God today is an important example of this interaction.

We do not normally speak of God's leadership. The concept is, I think, largely absent from theological reflection and Christian discussion – except when we speak of individual Christians or local churches being 'led'. I am not questioning such language here – it is important. But the *nature* of God's leadership requires some theological exploration, and, equally important, so do the *consequences* for the world of rejecting that leadership. I turn first to some of the biblical material.

Old Testament foundations

What does the Bible say about the leadership of God? The first books of the Old Testament – Genesis to Joshua – are suggestive yet question-begging. God leads his people Israel to the Promised Land – that much, at least, seems clear: 'And all the time the LORD went before them, by day a pillar of cloud to guide them on their journey, by night a pillar of fire to give them light; so they could travel both by day and by night' (Exodus 13:21¹). This verse follows the story of the Exodus, including the plagues visited on Egypt; it precedes Israel's wanderings in the wilderness and the subsequent conquest or part-conquest² of Canaan.

Here a major interpretative question needs to be faced – and, in my experience, rarely is. If we take Old Testament stories such as the Exodus and the Conquest as fundamentally historical, then we have to reckon with an overwhelmingly coercive God who, among many other coercive actions, inflicts plagues on Egypt and annihilates entire Canaanite cities. The Christian interpreter must surely say: a Christlike God does not do such things.³

But what are we to say of God's action in human history, God's providence and guidance, God's 'answers' to prayer? In short, how coercive – if coercive at all –

is the leadership of God? Does God, for example, ever *intervene*? This word, widely used among Christians, needs to be re-examined, and its implications for the leadership of God more thoroughly explored.

There is a stark contrast between biblical and modern ways of thinking of God's relationship to the world. In the Bible there is no concept of secondary causation – God does everything:

I make the light, I create the darkness;
author alike of wellbeing and woe,
I, the LORD, do all these things. (Isaiah 45:7)

By contrast, in contemporary secular thought God hardly features at all: the 'God-hypothesis' is, apparently, unnecessary. But we need to do justice to the biblical view in a way that is faithful to the non-coercive nature of God (on this, see below), and that also takes into account contemporary cosmology and physics.

The language and imagery of the psalms is important here. The poetry of the psalter is problematic for many today; perhaps contemporary neglect of poetry makes it harder for us to appropriate the psalms in our prayers and worship. With reference to our theme here, their imagery of God as Lord, Shepherd and King testifies to a continuing belief in God's leadership and sovereignty of the world – even in the presence of other gods. (Among many examples, see especially Psalms 82, 90, 93 and 138.)

The psalms and the prophetic writings show that Israel continued to believe in God's leadership of Israel, even if it was ignored for some or much of the time. The question of a British MP recently, 'How can you be a leader if you haven't any followers?' raises a very important question when applied to the world's Creator: since God can hardly abdicate, how does the Creator 'react' to marginalisation and rejection?

In the later history of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah, Assyrian and Babylonian aggression led to the destruction of Samaria and Israel in the north, and, in the south, to the devastation of Jerusalem and exile in Babylon. The latter events led to a theological crisis: where was God in all this? The prophets attributed the disasters to God; they were his punishments for Israel's and Judah's apostasy. Modern commentators and interpreters have tended to elide history and theology, implying that these events were, indeed, divine punishments. But, as I have argued above, a Christlike God does not act in

history in this violent, direct way.⁴ We must rethink what I am calling God's 'leadership' of the world.

After the Babylonian exile, in what direction was God leading his people? Was permanent, uncontested occupation of the Promised Land the sum total of God's aims? Or was there more? There are hints in the Old Testament (eg, Isaiah 19:18–25; 49:6) of wider and deeper divine intentions. We turn, then, to the person of Jesus, who is to be thought of as not only a role model for human leadership but also as an icon of God's own leadership.

New Testament teaching

I begin with the Synoptic Gospels, and the explicit teaching of Jesus about leadership in two almost identical passages in Mark and Matthew:

Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that among the Gentiles the recognized rulers lord it over their subjects, and the great make their authority felt. It shall not be so with you; among you, whoever wants to be great must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'⁵

In the interpretation of these texts, we tend to focus on their implications for the life of the Church. John 13:1–17, for example, is rightly cited as an icon of diaconal and presbyteral ministry. But what do they tell us about the leadership of God? What is the nature of divine authority and power, and how does God exercise them?

Word counts on the subject of God's leadership are not helpful. Explicit words for 'leader' in the New Testament are few and far between, and portraits of political leaders, especially the Herods, Pilate, Felix and Festus, contrast sharply with the teaching of Jesus: 'It shall not be so among you.'

Another saying of Jesus is relevant here: 'The first shall be last, and the last shall be first' (Matthew 19:30; 20:16; Mark 10:31; Luke 13:30). The contexts of this recurring saying are not identical, but they shed light both on human discipleship and on what I am calling divine leadership. In Matthew, for example, the saying forms a literary *inclusio* around the preceding parable of the labourers in the vineyard and the subsequent third prediction of Jesus' Passion.

The Gospel of John is similar yet different from the Synoptics. In his book *Is Scripture Still Holy?* A. E. Harvey writes of the question addressed in John's Gospel of 'how an essentially *noncoercive* God can make himself known to an indifferent and unresponsive world'.⁶ One verse, above all others, gives us this Gospel's distinctive perspective on the nature and aim of God's leadership: 'And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself' (John 12:32). The word 'draw' here (Greek *helkō*) is used in the New Testament of physical effort and even of violent action: the dragging of fishing nets to shore (eg, John 21:6, 11) and of dragging apostles before the authorities (Acts 16:19). But it is also used to denote 'the pull on a person's inner life';⁷ and in Jeremiah the 'pull' of Yahweh's compassion.⁸ This is a vital concept in our attempt to understand the nature of God's leadership. There is a parallel to this biblical image in twentieth-century process theology, particularly in the concept of the divine 'lure' expressed in the writings of A. E. Whitehead.

John 12:32 reflects John's distinctive perspective on the cross and resurrection: the crucifixion *was* the exaltation of Jesus, his 'finest hour'. That does not mean that the resurrection did not 'happen'. The quotation marks here indicate that 'historical event' doesn't do justice to the mysterious, elusive – *yet utterly real* – nature of the resurrection. While John's own resurrection narratives (John 20—21) show that the resurrection cannot be simply equated with the crucifixion, even so, many details in John's Passion narrative show that the crucifixion is to be understood *also* as his exaltation: especially John 19.30, with its *double entendre* in the final clause: 'Having received the wine, he said, "It is accomplished [*tetelestai*]!" Then he bowed his head and gave up [handed over] his spirit [the Spirit].'

The writer probably intended the Greek word *tetelestai* to recall an earlier verse: 'He had always loved his own who were in the world, and he loved them to the end [*eis telos*]' (John 13:1b). If this is so, then the resurrection was not so much the reversal of the cross as the revelation of the cross's meaning. Of course, the divine 'verdict' implied in the resurrection reverses the human verdicts of Caiaphas and Pilate, but the cross and resurrection *together* are the ultimate revelation of God's love and power and, therefore, of the leadership of God. This is how God leads (and rules); this is how God saves (and judges). It transforms our understanding of the doxology added to the Lord's Prayer by the early Church: 'Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever.'

There are hints in the parables of Jesus about the paradoxical (ie, contrary to expectations) nature of God's leadership and authority – notably, the unpatriarchal patriarch of Luke 15:11–32, the unreasonable remuneration practice of the vineyard owner in Matthew 20:1–16, and even perhaps the portrait of the employer in the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14–30.⁹ In the first parable the behaviour of both the younger son and the father is a *skandalon* to the elder son; in the second, the generosity of the vineyard owner is, similarly, a *skandalon* to the workers who had toiled all day in the vineyard. *Skandalon* is St Paul's word for the preaching of the cross (1 Corinthians 1:23): by all reasonable 'religious' and moral standards it is an 'offence'. The apostle's conclusion summarises all that is wrong, from the world's point of view, with the leadership of God: it is weak and foolish (1 Corinthians 1:25).

It is the extraordinary claim of Christian faith that the cross of Jesus epitomises the nature of the leadership of God: 'I, when I am lifted up, will draw all people to myself.' The end of Jesus' life was the climax and summary of his life and teaching: the cross, for example, was both his final definitive statement about the kingdom of God and his ultimate act of healing. The imagery of the Passion narratives hints that the 'weakness' of God is stronger than it appears to be: note, for example, the darkness over the whole earth, the rending of the Temple veil, and the testimony of the centurion at the foot of the cross.

If the testimony of the Gospel writers and of St Paul points to the fundamentally non-coercive leadership of God, what are we to say of God's authority? Perhaps it suffices here to quote a definition of 'authority' that seems to describe well the kind of authority to which the New Testament points: it is *the source of life, truth and growth*.¹⁰ (See especially Matthew 7:29.)

The cross of Jesus, therefore, is the supreme, definitive example of what I am calling the non-coercive leadership of God. Theologian Keith Ward writes:

Those who take the life of Jesus to be a revelation of the character of God may well be disposed to think that a vulnerable love is the best exercise of a power which works through love and not compulsion.¹¹

The cruciform leadership of God

A distinguished Jewish leader and scholar has recently written of ‘the self-effacement of God’.¹² No Christian need question or dissent from those words, but would want to add ‘... and the cross of Christ is the definitive revelation of the divine self-effacement’. But when we speak more precisely of God’s *cruciform* leadership, it is St Paul, of all the New Testament writers, who has most to say about this. His profoundly theological passages are largely overlooked, though, because they are ‘disguised’ as apostolic self-portraits.

These self-portraits – mostly in the Corinthian letters – have been called ‘catalogues of hardships’, and such they are. But that is why they have been described as ‘near the heart of Paul’s understanding of God’.¹³ The sequence is simple: first, Christ the image of God (eg, 2 Corinthians 4:4); second, Paul the ‘imitator’ of Christ (eg, 1 Corinthians 11:1). Paul reflects the lowliness and suffering of Jesus, Jesus reflects the lowliness and sufferings of God.

These apostolic self-portraits deserve a section to themselves, but it must suffice here to quote from one of them, and draw some conclusions. The language of all of them is vivid – even iconoclastic – and especially the language of 2 Corinthians 4:7–12:

But we have only earthenware jars to hold this treasure, and this proves that such transcendent power does not come from us; it is God’s alone. We are hard pressed, but never cornered; bewildered, but never at our wits’ end; hunted, but never abandoned to our fate; struck down, but never killed. Wherever we go we carry with us in our body the death that Jesus died, so that in this body also the life that Jesus lives may be revealed. For Jesus’s sake we are all our life being handed over to death, so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in this mortal body of ours. *Thus death is at work in us, but life in you.*

I italicise the last sentence in order to illustrate the creative nature of this cruciform leadership: it leads others to life. It has been well said that Pauline passages like these constitute essential, regular reading for all in ordained ministry – and, indeed, all Christian ministry.¹⁴ They should be part of every core curriculum in ministerial training programmes.

Why do we find it so hard to believe in a fully, consistently Christlike God? Behind this theological shortcoming (as I would call it) lies a spiritual failure.

We may assent with our minds to the belief that God is love; to know and feel it in our hearts is another matter, while to live by it means a kind of dying – a crucifixion. Cruciform leadership, reflecting God's own leadership, is demanding and costly. There is much else that could be said. Religious bullying is not uncommon in the churches, and the prayers of all of us can easily degenerate into ego-centred petitions.

The Declaration of Chalcedon in 451, the classical expression of the mystery of the humanity and divinity of Christ, maintains that the human and the divine co-exist in Christ 'without confusion, change, division or separation'. Paul's description of Jesus as 'the image of God' (eg, 2 Corinthians 4:4) has a twofold significance: Christ is the 'image of God' like every human, male and female, made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) – 'yet without sin' (Hebrews 4:15) – and also the image of God in the Johannine sense: 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14:9). This is why we must say: the life and death of Jesus image divine as well as human leadership.

God's leadership and God's judgement

The revelation in the cross of Jesus that God *is* love (1 John 3:16; 4:8, 16) is therefore the hermeneutical key to Scripture.¹⁵ It is not possible to offer a consistent hermeneutic of the Bible unless these texts are given their due weight. Our understanding of God's holiness, wrath and judgement (for example) must not compromise the clear meaning of the first epistle of John that God *is* (100 per cent) love. As Archbishop Michael Ramsey once remarked, 'God is Christlike and in him there is no unChristlikeness at all.'¹⁶ We have a long way still to go, I suggest, in explicating – let alone living – the full implications of belief in a Christlike God.

But now we must turn to our second major theme: what are the consequences, according to the Bible, of rejecting the leadership of God? I turn to the widely neglected and misunderstood biblical themes of wrath and judgement.

'How can you be a leader if you haven't any followers?' That question, natural enough in human contexts, hardly applies, I suggested earlier, to the Creator of the universe. 'Non-coercive' expresses an essential dimension of the Christian understanding of God. God compels no one to believe in him. Yet God is still God, and, according to the Bible, there are consequences if we do not follow the leadership of God.

Here we must note two seriously defective theologies, all too prevalent in the churches. One champions the authority of Scripture at the expense of the Christlike character of God. Put simply, 'If the Bible says God annihilated Canaanite cities, then God must have done.' The other emphasises the kenotic, non-coercive nature of God at the expense of God's 'wrath' and judgement. On this view, the love of God precludes both wrath and judgement. 'Judge not ...' has become one of the leading mantras – though selectively employed – in our contemporary world.

The theme of divine judgement – and even punishment – is too prevalent in the Bible to be ignored or explained away. The Old Testament image of God 'hiding his face' is especially suggestive in helping us to explore this theme. God hiding his face means that God 'withdraws', and lets human beings experience the consequences of their own wrongdoing, as in Isaiah:

you have hidden your face from us
and left us in the grip of our iniquities. (Isaiah 64:7b)

This is the opposite of 'the light' of God's face: 'may the LORD make his shine on you and be gracious to you' (Numbers 6:25).

But what does this image, and other language in the Bible about God's wrath and judgement, say about God's leadership? Is that leadership coercive after all?

The consequences of ignoring the leadership of God are expressed in many places in Old and New Testament alike. Here I can only offer a sketch. First, evil has a tendency to self-destruct. Time and again the Psalmist insists that the wicked fall into their own traps, (eg, Psalm 57:6). People reap what they sow, (eg, Galatians 6:7). That, of course, does not always seem to happen – at least, not in this life or in this world. And yet great wealth selfishly hoarded, ruthless ambition and cruelty to others can and often do wreak terrible damage on people's souls – that is, their deepest, truest selves. Charles Marsh's fine biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *A Strange Glory*, notes the depraved enjoyment taken by Nazis who volunteered to torture prisoners: what damage were they doing to themselves?¹⁷

Yet for all the biblical emphasis on the self-destructive nature of evil, behind it lies the conviction that 'God is not mocked' (Galatians 6:7 again). There is a divine 'reaction' to human idolatries and sin. St Paul, in Romans 1:18–32, sets out clearly the downward spiral from idolatry to the dehumanisation that leads

to the distortion and destruction of relationships and communities. In this process, minds are 'darkened' and human hearts hardened. God does not intervene to save us from the consequences of our wrongdoing.

In this passage, two verbs are key. Three times Paul says humankind 'exchanged' (*metellaxan*) its divine birthright for what a contemporary politician might call 'fake' glory: 'they boast of their wisdom ... exchanging the glory of the immortal God for an image shaped like mortal man' (Romans 1:22–23); 'They have exchanged the truth of God for a lie' (1:25; cf verse 26).

The divine response, like the human 'exchange', is threefold: God 'gave them up' (*paredōken*) to experience the consequences of their wrongdoing (1:24, 26, 28). That is, *God did not intervene*. That is how, in response to human disobedience, God's leadership of the world is expressed. Worship what is less than God, and we become less than human (Psalms 115; 135). As playwright and theologian Dorothy Sayers trenchantly put it, 'you get what you want'.¹⁸

And yet God has not left humankind bereft of his presence. There is a parallel revelation or *apocalypse* here in Romans: not only God's *orgē*, but also God's saving goodness (lit. 'righteousness' – *dikaïosunē*) is being revealed (*apocalypsetai*) (Romans 1:17–18).

According to the Bible, where humankind declines to follow the leading of God, human beings lose the capacity to distinguish right from wrong and truth from falsehood; societies fall apart into division and injustice; human relationships grow shallow and manipulative; trust and fidelity decline.¹⁹ The law and the prophets point ominously to ecological consequences (eg, Jeremiah 4:23–28). 'This is the judgement': the light has come, and we have preferred the darkness to the light (John 3:19).

These biblical themes of wrath and judgement may indicate the limitations of the image of the leadership of God. God's leadership is indeed non-coercive – perhaps frighteningly so. For, unlike human leaders, whose leadership ends or fades away when no one follows, God still 'leads' – period. Some of the models and images of God inherited from the Enlightenment are inadequate here. God is not simply 'up there' or 'out there', as if God were *a* Being greater than all others. God is Being Itself or, as earlier centuries put it, the *ens realissimum*. The doctrine of creation is not so much about how the world began, but that the world *is a creation* – utterly dependent on its Creator. God is the reality in which or in whom 'we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28, NIV). The breath or spirit of God animates creation (eg, Genesis 1:2; 2:7; cf Psalm 104:29–30).

Bonhoeffer's haunting words from his prison cell – 'God allows himself to be edged out of his world on to a cross'²⁰ – are powerfully true, and yet not the whole truth. For God is closer to us all than we are to ourselves, and if humankind rejects God's leadership, we experience our Creator not as love but as 'wrath'. When that happens the divine image in us begins to fade, and communities and creation itself begin to disintegrate.²¹ Whether as love or as wrath, God is inescapable.

The 'second coming' of Jesus

So where is God leading us? What the Church has traditionally called 'the second coming' of Jesus needs to be treasured as an essential article of faith – and reinterpreted. We can no longer hold a literalist view of a figure coming on the clouds of heaven (Mark 14:62 etc).²² Other biblical themes can help us towards a reinterpretation.

The covenant theme in the Bible indicates that cooperation with humankind is the Creator's chosen way of fulfilling his creative purposes. In the early chapters of Genesis, the Creator, exasperated at humankind's disobedience, destroys the world he has made, and starts all over again with the fourfold assertion 'Never again ...' (Genesis 8:21; 9:11). That is, never again will the Creator destroy his creation (though that is what we humans are now increasingly capable of doing).

There is another theme, not sufficiently noticed in biblical interpretation. The Son of Man does not 'return'²³ alone. It might appear to be so in the Danielic quotations in Mark 14:62 and Matthew 26:64. But one 'like a son of man' in the original Danielic context is actually plural, not singular: 'the holy ones of the Most High' (Daniel 7:18; cf verse 27). St Paul expresses more than once the corporate nature of the parousia; Jesus will not 'return' alone (1 Thessalonians 3:13; 2 Thessalonians 1:10). Paul's clearest (and perhaps last) reference to the parousia is uniquely expressed in Romans: 'The created universe is waiting with eager expectation for God's sons [*sic*] to be revealed' (Romans 8:19). Rowan Williams writes:

By the time we get to Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians ... there's relatively little about the end of the world ... I don't think that Paul changed his mind about the future hope of Christ returning in glory. But his interest seems to be more and more to be

in how we experience now the life that Christ will give in fullness at the end of time. And in such a perspective, the end is something like the world blossoming into its fullness under the hand of Christ, until finally the history of the world and the presence of Christ come together at the end of all things.²⁴

What then of the final book of the Bible, where there appears to be divine destruction and violence in plenty? That is to be expected, given the nature of the Roman Empire and, indeed, all empires. Love and wrath are two sides of the same coin. But the covenant with Noah in Genesis 8 and 9, 'Never again', will not be abrogated, as the image of the rainbow (Revelation 4:3) suggests, and 'the Lamb' upon the throne of God endures as an eternal testimony to the cruciform leadership of God. 'The final victory of truth over illusion lies not in overwhelming force but in the power of sacrifice.'²⁵

Conclusion

God leads from the cross: that is the startling claim of Christian faith, and from that cross God will draw all people to himself (John 12:32). That is his leadership and his reign. What a book on prayer calls 'the magnetism of God' is never far away.²⁶ The universal Creator 'draws' people all over the world in unexpected ways and in surprising places. The dark biblical themes of wrath and judgement do not contradict this, for love *is* the judgement (eg, Matthew 25:31–46). Wrath and judgement are the consequences of rejecting a passionate Love that is as constant and unconditional as it is almighty and invincible.

This twofold understanding of God's leadership can only serve to enrich biblical interpretation, Christian theology and, not least, leadership in the Church and Christian action in the world. For example, prayer is not so much asking God to adjust life and the world to our specifications as opening our hearts to the love of a non-coercive God and going with the flow. Believing in Providence means recognising, in the words of the Psalmist so beloved by Karl Barth, that 'all things serve you' (Psalm 119:91b). Paul's doxology in Romans expresses well the transcendent leadership of God:

How deep are the wealth
and the wisdom and the knowledge of God!
How inscrutable his judgements,
how unsearchable his ways!

'Who knows the mind of the Lord?
Who has been his counsellor? ...
From him and through him and for him all things exist –
to him be glory for ever! Amen. (Romans 11:33–36)

Notes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from the Bible in this article are from *The Revised English Bible*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
2. Compare, for example, Joshua 10:40 with 11:19 and Judges 3:5.
3. On this crucial hermeneutical question, see my *Who on Earth is God?*, London: Bloomsbury 2014.
4. Richardson, *Who on Earth is God?*, ch. 3.
5. Mark 10:42–45; compare Matthew 20:25–28. Luke 22:25–27 is similar in content, though less so in vocabulary; it has some resonances with the foot-washing story in John 13:1–17.
6. A. E. Harvey, *Is Scripture Still Holy?*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012, p. 16. Italics mine.
7. Plato's *Phaedrus*, 238A, cited in W. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich (eds), *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1957.
8. Jeremiah 38:3 (LXX): 'I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you in [lit. into] compassion.'
9. Verse 26 – the response of the employer to the third servant is best translated as a question: in effect, 'So this is the kind of man you think I am?'
10. N. Lash, *Voices of Authority*, London: Sheed & Ward, 1976, p. 4.
11. K. Ward, *Religion and Creation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, p. 259.
12. Jonathan Sacks, *The Great Partnership: God, Science and the Search for Meaning*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2011, p. 94.
13. N. Richardson, *Paul's Language about God*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994, p. 121.
14. In addition to 2 Corinthians 4:7–12, see especially 1 Corinthians 4:9–13, 2 Corinthians 6:1–10 and 12:7b–10.
15. Richardson, *Who on Earth is God?*, pp. 211–213.
16. A. M. Ramsey, *God, Christ and the World: A Study in Contemporary Theology*, London: SCM Press, 1969, p. 99.
17. C. Marsh, *A Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, London: SPCK, 2014, p. 383.
18. D. Sayers, *Dante: The Divine Comedy*, Baltimore, MD: Penguin, Introduction, p. 16.
19. On this, see the eerily prophetic words of W. Pannenberg, *Christian Spirituality and Sacramental Community*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1982, pp. 90–91.
20. D. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, London: Fontana, 1959, p. 122.

21. On this, see also my *God in the New Testament*, London: Epworth Press, 1999, ch. 3, 'When the Image Fades'.
22. The debate rumbles on about whether the ambiguous Greek word *erchetai* means 'coming' or 'going'. In Daniel 7:13, one 'like a son of man' was presented to 'the Ancient of Days'.
23. The quotation marks here serve to indicate the tentative nature of all our words about 'the coming again' of Jesus; there are other ways of imaging 'the End', as I go on to illustrate.
24. Rowan Williams, *Meeting God in Paul*, London: SPCK, 2015, pp. 80–81.
25. Markus Bockmuehl and Michael B. Thompson (eds), *Vision for the Church: Studies in Early Christian Ecclesiology*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997, p. x.
26. A. Ryrie, *The Prayer of Silence*, Oxford: Fairacres Publications, 2012.



Debating God: conversations about God in Albert Camus' *The Plague*

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This piece considers the narrative of Albert Camus' 1947 novel The Plague, in which a team of doctors led by Doctor Rieux, and other helpers, combat the plague at Oran in North Africa. After a consideration of Camus' religious (or a-religious) views, a number of episodes from the novel are explored in detail, to reveal Camus' own journey of understanding throughout the novel. The recent assertion of Giles Fraser that many have misunderstood the nature of God's power is always kept in mind. The appropriate response to suffering is a commitment to loving service, rather than an attempt at explaining the reasons for suffering's existence. Even when God appears to be 'hidden', compassion and love may be considered marks of his presence.

CAMUS • SUFFERING • DIVINE POWER • LOVE • PLAGUE

Introduction: God and power

In his article 'God Is Not the Puppet Master' Giles Fraser writes about the answers some Oxford undergraduates whom he was teaching gave to the question, 'If God is all-powerful and all-loving, how can suffering exist?' Typical answers were: 'Suffering makes us better people', 'Without suffering the world would become the sort of toy world where nothing has moral weight', and even 'Devils are responsible, not God.'¹ After some discussion Fraser attributes the students' responses to a false understanding of the concept of 'power'. He writes with characteristic pungency: 'The idea of an omnipotent God who can calm the sea and defeat our enemies turns out to be a part of that great fantasy of power that has corrupted the Christian imagination for centuries.'²

However, the problem facing so many Christians is that miracles involving the avoidance of suffering feature so much in our Christian traditions and teaching. If we consider only the first written Gospel, the Gospel of Mark, there are at least 14 miracles of healing, plus the feeding of the 5,000, the 4,000, the calming of the storm, the walking on water and the withering of the fig tree. Many of these miracles are also recorded in other Gospels. The miracles of healing are performed mainly in direct response to the pleas of sufferers whom Jesus meets. The first miracle Mark records is even in the opening chapter of the Gospel. It looks to many Christians as if people Jesus meets only need to be present and open their mouths for him to heal them. In our day the impression is that such miracles rarely happen now, and that when a Christian witnesses the acute suffering of a loved family member she is destined to be disappointed and feels either that she has not sufficient faith or that God is uninterested or impotent to meet the fervent pleas of his followers.

In this study I wish to consider the issue of unwanted or unwarranted suffering in the light of Albert Camus' novel *The Plague*, written in 1947, the iconic statement of the problem in twentieth-century literature. Through a study of key scenes in the novel, I will consider whether, in Camus' view, God exists and is present in the sufferings of the victims and the heroic endeavours of the team of doctors and their assistants in the fight against the plague.³ There will be no consideration of the suggestion that the novel has political implications as an allegory of the French nation's entrapment during the 1939–45 war. Instead I wish to retain contact with Giles Fraser's assertion that Christians have misunderstood the notion of divine 'power' and to consider his alternative view that, as he says, enables him to keep his Christian faith.

God, *The Plague* and some antecedents

The plague takes place in Oran, an Algerian coastal city, where Camus had lived for several years and which he describes in a 1939 piece not only as 'this extraordinary city where boredom sleeps',⁴ but also as 'a city where nothing attracts the mind, where the very ugliness is anonymous, where the past is reduced to nothing'.⁵ Oran is geographically isolated and cannot have been infected from outside. The plague first appears in hundreds of rats that emerge into the daylight and die, and then it spreads to human beings and the rats suddenly disappear. Doctor Rieux, the main character of the novel, and his team of doctors, administrators and volunteers strive tirelessly to stem the spread of the plague. Medicines, serums and other means of prevention are in very short supply.

Rieux cannot understand how the city could have been infected: it seemed to defy all reason. When he meets Grand, an eccentric citizen attempting to become an author constantly writing and rewriting the first sentence of his book in order to achieve perfection, who becomes a volunteer in the effort to contain the plague, Rieux 'couldn't picture such eccentricities existing in a plague-stricken community, and he concluded that the chances were all against the plague's making any headway against our fellow-citizens' (p. 42). However, his optimism is soon confounded, though he is cautious in declaring absolutely that the plague has indeed arrived. He is able to devote himself totally to his task, as his sick wife had been moved to a sanatorium away from the city and his mother, who plays a significant part later, has arrived to care for him. Incidentally, Rieux's wife is not a victim of the plague.

At this point religion becomes an issue in the thoughts of the characters in the novel. It is generally thought that Camus did not believe in God. However, his experience of Christians gave him a good knowledge of the doctrines of the faith and a great deal of respect for Christians he knew from his days during the Occupation. Writing about *The State of Siege*, the play that he wrote immediately after *The Plague* and on the same subject, he says: 'In my novel, I had to do justice to those among my Christian friends whom I met during the Occupation in a struggle that was just.' On the other hand, in the play that he sets in Cadiz in Spain he is very critical of the Spanish Church, which he describes in the next sentence as 'odious'.⁶ We know that in 1936, at the University of Algiers, he studied Christian metaphysics and St Augustine, reading Pascal and Kierkegaard among others, and that after the completion of *The Plague* he read Simone Weil and edited several of her works.⁷ Differences

of opinion have arisen about his exact position in relation to Christian belief. Philip Thody, the Camus scholar, talks of 'Camus' agnosticism',⁸ with 'agnostic' defined in the Oxford Dictionary as 'a person who believes that nothing is known or can be known of the existence or nature of God or of anything beyond material phenomena'.

However, the theologian John Macquarrie, writing frequently of Camus' atheism, states at one point Camus' belief that 'There is no God ... man is entirely abandoned to fixing his own norms and determining his values and what he will become.'⁹ Yet he too admits the greater complexity of the issue when he writes that 'the unfaith of Camus has elements of belief'.¹⁰ In *The Plague*, Camus' ambivalence in relation to the existence of God is demonstrated and there is evidence that God is more relevant to events in the novel, if only because of the amount of discussion about him and some important observations by the character Rieux.

In his collection of early writings, including *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus writes about the nature of the absurd and at one point he expresses the familiar dilemma that Giles Fraser poses above: 'In the presence of God there is less a problem of freedom than a problem of evil. You know the alternative: either we are not free and God the all-powerful is responsible for evil. Or we are free and responsible, but God is not all-powerful.'¹¹ As, according to Camus' statement, God is not all-powerful, humankind must strive to use its strength with maximum effective effort to compensate for God's limitations: 'There is but one moral code that the absurd man can accept, the one that is not separated from God: the one that is dictated. But it so happens that he lives outside that God.'¹²

The futility of speculation and the necessity of concentrating on what can be achieved concretely leads us inevitably towards *The Plague*, which also grapples specifically with Camus' assertion developed in *The Myth of Sisyphus* of the futility of repetitive human effort that leads to nothing and means constant repeated attempts at the impossible. At this juncture we need to consider simply one use of the term 'godless' that Camus employs when he writes: 'This absurd, godless world is ... peopled with men who think clearly and who have ceased to hope.'¹³ The term 'godless' in itself does not confirm that Camus is denying the existence of God. It was used for instance by Dietrich Bonhoeffer several times in his *Letters and Papers from Prison*, written in 1944, when he was describing his concept of 'religionless Christianity'.

When Bonhoeffer describes how God is the 'God who forsakes us' at the moment of the sense of abandonment that Christ experiences in Gethsemane and at Calvary, he says:

Man is challenged to participate in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world ... he must therefore plunge himself into the life of a godless world, without attempting to gloss over its ungodliness with a veneer of religion or trying to transfigure it.¹⁴

Paradoxically, by living a 'worldly' life, a person is participating in the suffering of God. He continues:

Jesus does not call men to a new religion, but to life ... When we speak of God in a non-religious way, we must not gloss over the ungodliness of the world, but expose it in a new light. Now that it has come of age, the world is more godless, and it is for that very reason nearer to God than ever before.¹⁵

For Bonhoeffer, a 'godless' world is one in which humanity is increasingly dependent on the true God stripped of mere institutional religious affiliation. For Camus, a 'godless' world is one where humanity is reliant on their own efforts, which demand lucidity and intelligence if obstacles are to be overcome, but which are in his view inevitably doomed to repetitive failure. Both are rejecting traditional ecclesiastical allegiance that does not reflect their experience.

Camus always retains his consistent fairness towards the Christians he knew and respected during the Occupation when, in his historical and philosophical analysis in his 1957 work *The Rebel*, he writes about Friedrich Nietzsche's view of 'the death of God'. 'Contrary to the opinion of certain of his Christian critics, Nietzsche did not form a project to kill God. He found him dead in the soul of his contemporaries.'¹⁶ He continues this a little later when he says: 'God had been killed by Christianity, in that Christianity has secularized the sacred. Here we must understand historical Christianity and "its profound and contemptible duplicity".'¹⁷ Camus distinguishes between active, committed Christians and the historical institutionalised Church, which he sees as reflecting the death of Christian service and commitment to the world. Thody sees Camus as recognising that 'religious faith was dead in the here and now, an acknowledgement that fewer and fewer people believed in God in any real sense.'¹⁸

This brings us back to the qualities necessary to combat the evils in the world as he sees it. Clear thinking or 'lucidity', clearly stated in the sentence 'I establish my lucidity in the midst of what negates it',¹⁹ is the virtue of the one who sees his role as furthering the morality of non-speculation and action in the face of the problems confronting the world. Even in his earliest work, *L'Envers et L'Endroit* (*Betwixt and Between*), published in 1939, 'lucidité' is seen as a prime virtue in the attitude of the enlightened, aware person, a term that occurs either as a noun or in its adjectival form four times in this short work and will be considered in greater detail shortly.

Before we return to consider *The Plague*, we should reflect briefly on some thoughts of the Turkish novelist Elif Shafak, who, writing about the way in which novelists' own personalities and attitudes develop and change in the course of writing a novel, says in a recent article:

A novelist is always wiser when inside a novel than when outside. Stories shape their storytellers as much as storytellers shape their stories. We are a different person when we start a book and by the time it is completed, something deep inside has shifted for ever.²⁰

While it is accepted that Camus was agnostic and highly critical of religious orthodoxy, as Elif Shafak says, a creative novelist develops as the characters and situations in the novel develop, which must allow for significant changes in attitude towards God to take place in the course of the novel. This must be borne in mind as we now return to our consideration of *The Plague*.

The first sermon

When the plague has spread widely within the city, the Jesuit priest Father Paneloux preaches the first of his two sermons that are crucial to our understanding of the issues in our theme. He had already gained a reputation from lectures he had given of being a 'stalwart champion at its most precise and purest' (p. 78). A week of prayer had been organised for the city. In his opening salvo he makes his views very clear to the citizens: "'Calamity has come upon you, my brethren, and, my brethren, you deserved it'" (p. 80). This opening is in fact the gist of his entire sermon, which he develops from a historical, biblical viewpoint as follows:

'The first time this scourge occurs in history, it was wielded to strike down the enemies of God. Pharaoh set himself up against the divine will, and the plague beat him to his knees. Thus from the dawn of recorded history the scourge of God has humbled the proud of heart and laid low those who hardened themselves against Him. Ponder this well, my friends, and fall on your knees.' (p. 80)

He then divides the citizens into two groups, the just men and the evildoers. The former have nothing to fear, he says. When he states "this calamity was not willed by God" (p. 81), he appears to be contradicting what he had originally preached, but his argument becomes clearer when he talks of God's long-suffering compassion and patience. But "His eternal hope was too long deferred, and now He has turned His face away from us. And so, God's light withdrawn, we walk in darkness, in the thick darkness of this plague" (p. 81).

When he continues with a lurid description of the "angel of the pestilence" hovering over their rooftops, biding its time before destroying them, all the citizens will perish "with the chaff" (p. 82). The citizens have failed God in worship and with what he calls their "criminal indifference" (p. 82). Yet this does not exclude "the fierce hunger of His love" (p. 82). He maintains that "God wished to see you longer and more often; that is His manner of loving, and indeed, it is the only manner of loving" (p. 82). Thus God's compassion and love have ordained "good and evil in everything; wrath and pity; the plague and your salvation" (p. 83). This, he believes, is the light of God that "illuminates the shadowed paths that lead towards deliverance. It reveals the will of God in action, unfailingly transforming evil into good" (p. 83).

This is the consolation that Father Paneloux offers the people, a consolation that he had never felt more strongly, "the immanence of divine succour and Christian hope, granted to all alike" (p. 84). It is not clear from this how he sees victims of the plague benefiting from the hope of salvation, unless it is a purely inward, spiritual grace offered to the dying. The author's subsequent ironical comment is that Paneloux ends on a note of faith and hope, 'that our fellow citizens would offer up to heaven that one prayer which is truly Christian, a prayer of love. And God would see to the rest' (p. 84).

By 'love' it is not specified whether it is God's love in healing the citizens of their diseases or a love that is expressed in some other form of response as yet unknown. This will emerge in the course of the novel. In the meantime, the team of doctors, administrators and volunteers have to combat the spread of

the plague. Responses to the sermon differ from an acceptance of the priest's 'irrefutable arguments' to resignation or determination to continue the fight. Tarrou, one of the volunteers who becomes the close friend and collaborator of Doctor Rieux, understands the priest's fervour and the tendency to use rhetoric to make the point especially at the outbreak of the plague, but counsels silence and waiting (p. 98). The response of the people is to grab at any opportunity to lighten their load, either in seeking pleasure or in grasping for any consolation to follow the words of one zealous evangelist: "God is great and good. Come unto Him" (p. 102).

Debating God (1)

The reader has not yet learned of Rieux's reaction to Father Paneloux's sermon. This emerges in a discussion with Tarrou in which Rieux minimises the punitive implications of the sermon by saying charitably, "Christians sometimes say that sort of thing without really thinking it. They're better than they seem" (p. 105). This is the tolerant and understanding Camus remembering the Christians he knows from the Occupation. While Rieux agrees that the plague "helps men to rise above themselves" (p. 106), he is determined that the plague must be fought, and he believes that Paneloux who has never experienced a plague and is a man of learning has little knowledge of the truth in what he says.

When Tarrou asks Rieux if he believes in God, Rieux is evasive, as he says, "fumbling in the dark" (p. 106), wanting a definition, unable to answer in terms other than a practical effort to alleviate suffering. When Tarrou is puzzled that Rieux can show such devotion to the cause of healing when he cannot believe in God, Rieux replies that

'if he believed in an all-powerful God he would cease curing the sick and leave that to Him. But no one in the world believed in a God of that sort ... not even Paneloux who believed that he believed in such a God.'

Rieux believes that he is on the right road: 'in fighting against creation as he found it' (pp. 106–7). He has stated his position – that it is his job to cure the sick, against all the speculation about Providence, or love or good and evil.

At this point Rieux makes a statement that reveals a crucial strand of Camus' thinking about the nature and presence of God in the world. Having said "I've

never managed to get used to seeing people die", and having specifically raised the imminence of death, Rieux continues:

'Since the order of the world is shaped by death, mightn't it be better for God if we refuse to believe in Him, and struggle with all our might against death, without raising our eyes towards the heaven *where He sits in silence?*' (pp. 107–8)²¹

Whether Camus is an agnostic or not, this remark put into the mouth of Rieux demonstrates clearly that the doctor sees God as present in the universe, but so hidden from our sight and our efforts that one might as well assume his absence and set to work in our own strength to rectify the evils of the world and strive with our whole wills to bring about as much healing as is humanly possible. Speaking of the rejection of God in our own day, Rowan Williams says in a recent article:

The violent rejection of a God who has failed to save or protect may open up a new picture of a God who isn't there to save or protect but just as what He is, the silent centre of a moral world.²²

In Williams' view, while God is present in the centre of our world he is silent, presumably invisible to the agnostic eye, but nonetheless visible in the selfless service of those striving to alleviate the sufferings of the plague-stricken world of Doctor Rieux and his colleagues. Perhaps God, who has created our human faculties for fulfilment of his purposes, stands back deliberately in order to allow us the freedom to use these faculties to the maximum. The philosopher of religion David Pailin even suggests that God has to be largely invisible for humankind to be given the incentive to act autonomously and responsibly:

It is arguable ... that the divine activity must be largely, if not wholly, hidden in order for creatures to be relatively free to fulfil the divine will, that they may be in their own way responsible, autonomous and genuinely creative.²³

Rieux's sense of God's hiddenness is frequently expressed by God's servants in the Old Testament, but in those instances his absence is usually seen as temporary, alleviated by his return to comfort and strengthen. In the first of just two examples reflecting estrangement from God, Psalm 27 has David pleading with the Lord:

Do not hide your face from me,
do not turn your servant away in anger. (Psalm 27:9)

And in Lamentations we read:

I called on your name, O LORD,
from the depths of the pit.
You heard my plea: 'Do not close your ears
to my cry for relief.' (Lamentations 3:55–56)²⁴

In the question posed by Tarrou about whether Rieux believes in God, the answer is evasive, reflecting Rieux's great uncertainty. It is perhaps useful to examine two questions: whether one believes in God and whether God exists. The former might well elicit the answer that God exists, but that he is irrelevant to my life and to the activity of the world. An answer to the latter surely allows for a denial of the very existence of God, in which case humankind is either the product of chemical forces that have arisen by pure chance over billions of years or the product of a relentless evolutionary process, which, however, still presupposes an original prime cause. In any event, Thody's reference to 'the empty protest against a non-existent God which takes up so much time in *La Peste*'²⁵ is surely misplaced. Rieux is not protesting against a non-existent God, but an absent one, thus accepting that as human beings have been endowed with skills and resources we have to do the very best to achieve a victory over the plague. But, as he then admits, he is facing "a never-ending defeat" (p. 108) and reverts to his original point that we cannot speculate on a subject on which we know "next to nothing" (p. 109).

When Rieux then questions Tarrou on his motive for helping to deal with this crisis, Tarrou specifies his code of morals, and when pressed to define this his reply is simple but, for the purposes of our study, enlightening: "Comprehension" (p. 109).

'Comprehension' might also be expressed as 'lucidity', a virtue that, as said above, is with Camus since his earliest work and underpins Rieux's and Tarrou's approach to the task facing them. 'The evil ... in the world always comes of ignorance, and good intentions may do as much harm as malevolence', writes the narrator of this novel (who eventually turns out to be Rieux himself), as the attention now switches to Tarrou's attempts to gather a team of workers around him. Camus has stated the vital importance of 'lucidity', an intelligent systematic approach to tackling this impossible task in order to minimise its effects. In

previous works, 'lucidité' occurs very frequently. When disoriented on his arrival in Prague, recorded in *L'envers et L'endroit*, a moment of lucidity cures him of his anxieties over money,²⁶ but also later when confronting his confusing impressions of the city, he realises that he must exercise the two virtues of courage and awareness, to be 'courageous' and 'aware'.²⁷ Awareness – intelligent understanding of a problem – needs to be supplemented by courage. These two strengths accompany Camus in his thinking throughout his life and certainly underpin Rieux and his team in their attack on the plague, even when, as in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, the result is a 'never-ending defeat' epitomised in the gods' condemnation of Sisyphus in rolling the boulder repeatedly up the hill only to see it rolling back again. But 'the lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory'.²⁸ In recognising clearly the futility of his repeated failure, Sisyphus, and in our case Rieux, achieves the fullness of his humanity, what Camus describes elsewhere as 'the staggering evidence of man's sole dignity: the dogged revolt against his condition, perseverance in an effort considered sterile'.²⁹ In our novel, this doggedness is also reflected in the character of the volunteer Grand, who throughout the story is attempting to perfect the first sentence of his novel and is doomed to failure, but, in Camus' eyes, achieves greatness in the effort. Patrick McCarthy suggests that 'Grand's inability to go beyond the first sentence is a parody of the anonymous narrator's inability to explain the plague'.³⁰ Repeated persistence is also epitomised in the character of the journalist Rambert, who finds his attempts to escape from Oran constantly frustrated and finally decides to remain in Oran to help the team in its efforts.

At this point love starts to assume greater importance in the fight against the plague. Rieux declares that he is not only concerned with doing his job as well as possible, but he also says: "'What interests me is living and dying for what one loves'" (p. 136), a difficult task now that 'the plague had gradually killed off in all of us the faculty not of love only, but even of friendship' (p. 150). The shift of focus on to love takes us back to the original response of Giles Fraser to the findings of his students. When Fraser dismisses the idea of 'that great fantasy of power that has corrupted the Christian imagination for centuries',³¹ he has attempted to respond to the question why suffering exists in a world where God is believed to be all-powerful and all-loving. His response, 'that Christians are called to recognize that the essence of the divine being is not power but compassion and love', raises questions that we will attempt to answer from now on. To approach this, we need to digress into the reflections of some other religious writers and thinkers.

The American scholar Harold S. Kushner gives a clue in the title of one of his well-known books *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. He is not answering the question 'Why?' but the question 'When?'³² This shifts the focus on to one of practical action, as opposed to attempting to find answers to questions inviting God's reasons for causing suffering. Philip Yancey attempts to answer the question posed in the title of his book, *Where is God When It Hurts?* Rhetorically questioning whether God desired the Holocaust and the death of his own Son, Yancey says that since both happened and God, because of his character, could not possibly desire atrocities such as the Holocaust, 'the question then moves from the unanswerable "Why?" to another question, "To what end?"'³³ The implication is that religious people have to focus on the results of the calamity and attempt to deal with what arises out of it and how the situation can be remedied. This means that even if the reasons for the calamity in the first place remain hidden, people of good will may at least seek to apply concrete measures to minimise the effects and possibly prevent a recurrence. And this is undertaken in a spirit of love and compassion, enhanced by clarity of thought (lucidity) and courage. The question of faith does not arise in the response of Rieux and his colleagues. They are showing their love and compassion in their response, even if the results are negative despite their 'flashes of lucidity' (p. 150). The narrator admits that their love, though it persists, serves nothing and often is ousted from all their hearts by 'blind endurance' (p. 152).

Paneloux, Rieux and the second sermon

The next important development in the novel is that Father Paneloux offers to join the team of volunteers and is particularly affected and influenced in his thinking and preaching by his presence at the bedside of the small boy whose death from the plague is so graphically described by the narrator. As the child is dying in such agony, Father Paneloux sees that his fervent prayer, "My God, spare this child" (p. 176), remains unanswered. In his ensuing conversation with Rieux after the death of the child, Paneloux has to admit that, contrary to his reproaches in his first sermon, the child was innocent. His exchange with Rieux, from which we have extracted their words, confirms that Paneloux is not able to discard his religious language, but demonstrates that he and Rieux are united in the same cause. Rieux speaks first:

'There are times when the only feeling I have is one of mad revolt.'

'I understand. That sort of thing is revolting. But perhaps we should love what we cannot understand.'

'No, Father, I have a very different idea of love. And until my dying day I shall refuse to love a scheme of things in which children are put to torture.'

'Ah, doctor, I've just realized what is meant by "grace".'

'It's something I haven't got; that I know. But I'd rather not discuss it with you. We're working side by side for something that unites us – beyond blasphemy and prayers. And it's the only thing that matters.'

'Yes, yes, you, too, are working for man's salvation.'

'Salvation's much too big a word for me. I don't aim so high. I'm concerned with men's health; and for me his health comes first.' (p. 178)

When Paneloux apologises for his outburst of emotion, Rieux confirms the unity existing between them: "'God Himself can't part us now'" (p. 179).

When Paneloux preaches his second sermon, his tone is quite different from his earlier one. He is still absolute in the choice he poses, but he now addresses the people as 'we', whereas previously he had addressed them as 'you'. He now confesses to ignorance and uncertainty concerning the reasons for the plague, but says that the choice is either to "'believe everything or to deny everything'" (p. 183). In his words, he has gained the humility to say:

'It was not easy to say what he was about to say – since it was God's will, we, too, should will it. Thus and thus only the Christian could face the problem squarely and ... pierce to the heart of the supreme issue, the essential choice. And his choice would be to believe everything, so as not to be forced into denying everything.' (p. 184)

While Rieux would object to this choice, he would probably agree with what Paneloux now says: "'We must go straight to the heart of that which is unacceptable, precisely because it is thus that we are constrained to make our choice.'" But he now resorts to the religious language that Rieux finds unacceptable: "'The sufferings of children were our bread of affliction, but without this bread our souls would die of spiritual hunger'" (pp. 184–5). Paneloux's next note, however, is of total involvement in the task of healing: "'My brothers, each of us must be the one who stays!'" (p. 185).

While he wishes to be fully involved in the fight against the plague, he trusts fully in God's goodness at all costs and states that there is no middle course between faith and unbelief, even to the extent that if we do not love God we must hate him. "And who would dare to hate Him?" the narrator has him ask (p. 186). This is the first and only time that hate has been suggested as a reaction to God, but Rieux has never spoken about hate. Paneloux is unable to resist the temptation to create division and to make the distinction between good and evil into a source of conflict in the response to the crisis. But, fortunately, Camus does not pursue this course and the story continues on a note of compassion and love.

Debating God (2)

Following Paneloux's death, probably from the plague though this is uncertain, Rieux and Tarrou discuss Tarrou's history and motivation in combating the plague and get to know each other as friends. This phase in the story, which becomes an idyllic interlude, is a welcome distraction from the struggle against the plague and represents Tarrou's attempt to find peace in his spirit. Through his upbringing, the influence of his severe father, the Director of Public Prosecutions whose life is dominated by the desire to punish, Tarrou feels that he is part of a general, collective plague pervading society and the human spirit, and he finds himself on the side of the victims. He is dedicated to alleviating suffering and finding peace. While unable to believe in God, he nonetheless is hoping to become a saint, but, he asks: "Can one be a saint without God?" (p. 208). The term 'saint' is commonly applied to a particularly virtuous person whose character reflects an almost superhuman goodness. Tarrou may well be in that position, but this does not help us in our understanding of the issue whether God is present in these events and in Tarrou's nature. 'Sainthood' is clearly not a concept that appeals to Rieux, who nevertheless values Tarrou's dedication. When Rieux says, "Heroism and sanctity don't really appeal to me" (p. 209), he is confirming that his concern is with carrying out the task of healing, not cultivating any personal heroic aura. Lev Braun's observation that 'Camus tends ... to regard heroism and sanctity as secondary virtues' is confirmed by the fact that Rieux's eyes are set primarily on the unselfish task before him.³⁴ 'Sanctity' is a spiritual concept, which, like 'salvation' in Rieux's conversation with Paneloux, means nothing to the doctor who is intent solely on physical health. But from this conversation there emerges the important point that the plague may be interpreted as pervading

the entire human race, which a Christian theologian might well equate to the corruption of humanity through original sin. Camus, however, sees this all-pervading plague as the catalyst for a corresponding act of solidarity in our response to alleviate it through collective human effort. The interlude ends with the two going for a swim together. It is almost as if the plague has receded. Perhaps Camus felt the need for temporary relief from the sternly challenging course of his narrative.

When it looks eventually as if the plague is receding and the rats reappear, there is the suggestion that the wheel has turned full circle, and that the reappearance of the rats may signal an eventual return of the plague. Ironically, Tarrou now falls victim to the plague at this late stage. He has shown admirable courage and sympathy during his struggle for the victims, but now in the midst of his illness he finds love, the love of Rieux's mother who tends him and watches over him as he is dying. Tarrou, who has avoided strong human relationships throughout his independent life, now finds a strong affinity with her, 'gazing so intently at her that Madame Rieux rose and switched off the bedside lamp' (p. 234). It is almost as if she is switching off the light of his life and letting him find the peace of final sleep.

When Tarrou dies, Rieux wonders if he has indeed found the peace that he had been seeking. Rieux is as if benumbed by events and this is his state of mind when he calmly hears and accepts the news of his wife's death in the town so far away. With the plague now virtually over, life returns to normal, but there is always the possibility of the return of the plague. The final note recalls *The Myth of Sisyphus*, in that 'the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good' (p. 252). The reappearance of the rats is a reminder that the plague could reappear, even though the people and the medical teams have found some temporary respite.

Conclusion

So how can we assess whether God has been present and active in the events of this story when the author is so sceptical and agnostic? Bearing in mind the words of Elif Shafak quoted above, that 'stories shape their storytellers as much as storytellers shape their stories',³⁵ in the words of Jean-Claude Brisville, Camus lives with 'an enigma at the centre of his universe, and everyone hastens to interpret it in his own way'.³⁶ On this basis each reader is entitled to her own view, and one could say that the values are only present when the reader finds

them. Marcel Proust writes: 'We feel that our wisdom begins where the author's finishes, and we would like him to give us answers, but all he can do is give us wishes.'³⁷ The historian David Reynolds, in his consideration of First World War literature, says: 'There is nothing definitive about an author's intention. Most significant works of art can be read in various ways; their open-endedness is, indeed, what helps make them significant.'³⁸ Clearly, an author may be unaware of the unconscious influences pervading his work and the impressions created in the reactions of his readers. All the same, if a work is consistently atheistic and amoral, we would probably be unable to find God enshrined in it in any way.

However, Camus is not only understanding of his Christian contemporaries – even if he disagrees with them – but he also indicates in *The Plague* that Rieux acknowledges that God is present in "the heaven where he sits in silence" (p. 108). Because he sees God as silent and absent from their immediate situation it is better, in his view, to try to combat the plague without God and simply not believe in his relevance.

Camus believes that our humanity is, for practical purposes, all we have to rely on. Rowan Williams raises the point that other human beings often ask a question that is different from the one that Christians ask. He writes: 'For a great many people, the burning question about faith is not just "Can anyone believe this?" but "Can anyone live like this?"'³⁹ They feel that the Christian life is for living and, as ultimate values are so uncertain and matters of faith, they must pursue the course of action that meets the specific need. Rieux in his conversation with Paneloux shows his distrust of religious language, and Tarrou too says that "all our troubles spring from our failure to use plain, clean-cut language" (p. 208). Paneloux from his traditions, which have become instinctive and ingrained, talks of salvation, while Rieux talks of health and healing. However, Jesus himself healed and still heals and the healing in the Gospels is only occasionally specifically linked with the forgiveness of sins. And in the Gospels we find clear evidence that Jesus regarded practical action and the ability to meet the immediate need as more valuable in his sight than statements of belief alone. When Jesus specifies the two great commandments, love for God and love of one's neighbour (Mark 12:30–31),⁴⁰ love for one's neighbour is not separated from love for God. Rather, love for God is evidenced in our love for our neighbour. A brief glance at the parable of the good Samaritan is sufficient to demonstrate this.

Having earlier proclaimed that he has come to fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah to 'preach good news to the poor' and 'proclaim freedom for the prisoners and

recovery of sight for the blind' (Luke 4:18–19), Jesus speaks specifically, according to Matthew, of the essentially practical ministry of the Christian to her less fortunate neighbour when we are instructed to tend to the needs of the hungry, the thirsty, the prisoners, the homeless and the sick as acts that we are performing as to himself (Matthew 26:34–45). Rowan Williams continues the reflection begun with his question above when he says in relation to the Easter message:

When all's said and done, the call is to every one of us. We need to hear what is so often the question that's *really* being asked when people say, 'How do you know?' And perhaps the only response that is fully adequate, fully in tune with the biblical witness to the resurrection, is to say simply, 'Are you hungry? Here is food.'⁴¹

It is difficult to attempt to judge the inspiration for loving and caring actions that we see every day and that may or may not be directly related in the mind of the doer to the force of the love of God driving them. In Jeremiah we read that our covenant with God will no longer be a matter of outward observance:

'This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time,' declares the LORD.
'I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts.
I will be their God and they will be my people.
No longer will a man teach his neighbour,
or a man his brother, saying: 'Know the LORD,'
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,'
declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 31:33–34)

It is the ideal of all religion that love should be so deeply implanted in the hearts of the people and that our loving actions should have become so natural and instinctive to us that we become unaware of the very nature of our motivation. This is echoed in the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus tells his hearers and his disciples that 'where your treasure is, there your heart will be also' (Matthew 6:21). If our deepest desire and our greatest interest is buried deep in our hearts, if it is the matter of the greatest importance to us, it drives and fills our motivation and our actions. This means that a doctor, carrying out his duties and healing the sick, obeying the deepest instincts born of training and

experience, from love of the patient and from the impelling desire to work his best for the patient, could be said to be fulfilling the deepest desires of his heart where his treasure is to be found, whether or not he is specifically aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit within him. Perhaps God is best glorified when we are unaware of what we are bringing to his cause. We are told, again in the Sermon on the Mount: "when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret" (Matthew 6:3–4). While it is good to feel the movement of the Spirit of God working in our hearts, and this can happen without spiritual pride, there are many who do his will who, throughout their lives, remain ignorant of how the Spirit moves within them without their knowledge, but simply do what needs to be done and thus further his kingdom.

If we return to the thoughts of Giles Fraser expressed in response to the speculations of his students, he states his position on the undeserved suffering of the innocent and what it says about an all-powerful and all-loving God: 'Christians are called to recognize that the essence of the divine being is not power but compassion and love.'⁴² *The Plague* shows abundant evidence of both compassion and love, but it is clear also that God's 'power' is not confined to miraculous demonstrations of healing power or acts that change the workings of nature as in the calming of the storm. God's power is demonstrated in gentle, humble, less obvious ways, countless examples of which can be seen in acts of unselfish and sacrificial service known to us all throughout all time. The 'gentle whisper' that Elijah hears following the powerful wind that 'tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD' and the earthquake that follows it (1 Kings 19:11–12) is evidenced in the quiet determined actions of active faithful Christians who, while uncertain of the beliefs of the Bible, the Church, the priesthood and Jesus himself, know in their hearts that they must respond to the needs of the world about them according to the compelling inner voice of conscience and sheer good sense. From what Camus says, expressed in his writings and in this case through Rieux, the Church's theology of an incarnate Son of God, Saviour of the world, bearing the world's sin in his crucifixion, are tenets to which he is unable to subscribe. However, whether Camus believes in God or not, and whether Rieux and his team believe in God, their sacrificial response to the needs of the victims of the plague could be taken to demonstrate that Rieux, Tarrou and even Camus himself are in the position of the man who comes to Jesus asking: "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" When Jesus sees that he has answered with the two key commandments, to love God and love his neighbour, Jesus tells him

"You are not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark 12:28–34). Just as Rieux demonstrates that his business is not salvation but healing, dealing with the immediate medical needs of sufferers, thus showing his love for them in their plight, so we are inevitably driven to the conclusion that Jesus makes: 'whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me' (Matthew 25:40). The person who responds to the immediate physical, material needs of her neighbour is in fact ministering both to her neighbour and to Jesus himself and demonstrating both her faith in him and her love for him.

Notes

1. Giles Fraser, article in *The Guardian*, 8 January 2005, reproduced in Giles Fraser, *Christianity with Attitude*, London: Canterbury Press, 2007, p. 43.
2. Fraser, *Christianity*, p. 44.
3. Albert Camus, *The Plague* (French: *La Peste*), trans. Stuart Gilbert, London: Penguin Modern Classics, 1960. As this is the main text in our study, all further references to it will be in brackets in the text.
4. Albert Camus, 'The Minotaur or The Stop in Oran', from *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien, London: Penguin, 1975, p. 160.
5. Camus, 'Minotaur', p. 149.
6. Albert Camus, 'Documents' to *L'État de Siège* (The State of Siege), Paris: Gallimard, 1998, p. 210. My translation.
7. Jean-Claude Brisville, *Camus*, Paris: Gallimard, 1956, pp. 23 and 25 respectively.
8. Philip Thody, *Albert Camus*, London: Macmillan, 1989, p. 3.
9. John Macquarrie, *Existentialism*, London: Pelican, 1973, p. 50.
10. Macquarrie, *Existentialism*, p. 200.
11. Albert Camus, in 'An Absurd Reasoning', from *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 55.
12. Albert Camus, in 'The Absurd Man', from *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 64.
13. Camus, 'The Absurd Man', p. 85.
14. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, London: Collins Fontana, 1960, pp. 122–123.
15. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, pp. 123–124.
16. Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (French: *L'Homme Révolté*), trans. Anthony Bower, London: Penguin Modern Classics, 1971, p. 59.
17. Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 61.
18. Thody, *Camus*, pp. 89–90.
19. Camus, 'The Absurd Man', p. 82.
20. Elif Shafak, *The Observer*, 22 March 2015, p. 47.
21. My emphasis.
22. Rowan Williams, 'Blasphemy can provoke violence – and be a progressive force within religion', *New Statesman*, 4 June 2015, p. 42.
23. David A. Pailin, *Groundwork of Philosophy of Religion*, London: Epworth Press, 1986, p. 154.

24. Biblical references are to the New International Version.
25. Thody, *Camus*, p. 59.
26. Albert Camus, *L'envers et l'endroit*, Paris: Gallimard folio, 1958, pp. 76–77. My translation. The book is also translated as 'Betwixt and Between'.
27. Camus, *L'envers*, p. 94.
28. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 109.
29. Albert Camus, 'Absurd Creation', from *The Myth of Sisyphus*, London: Penguin, 1975, p. 104.
30. Patrick McCarthy, 'The Plague', in Harold Bloom (ed.), *Albert Camus*, New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989, p. 110.
31. Fraser, *Christianity*, p. 44.
32. Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, London: Pan Books, 1992.
33. Philip Yancey, *Where is God When It Hurts?* London: Marshall Pickering, 1990, p. 157.
34. Lev Braun, *Witness of Decline – Albert Camus: Moralist of the Absurd*, Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1974, p. 97.
35. Shafak, *The Observer*, 22 March 2015.
36. Brisville, *Camus*, p. 48. My translation.
37. Marcel Proust, *Sur la lecture* (On Reading), Arles: Actes Sud, 1998, p. 32. My translation.
38. David Reynolds, *The Long Shadow*, London: Simon & Schuster, 2013, p. 206.
39. Rowan Williams, *Choose Life*, London: Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 174.
40. Also in Matthew 22:37–39 and Luke 10:27.
41. Williams, *Choose Life*, p. 179. Author's italics.
42. Fraser, *Christianity*, p. 44.



Holiness and unity: praise, meekness and love in ecumenical dialogue

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The report of the tenth session of the Methodist–Roman Catholic International Commission makes the point that there is an inextricable link between the holiness of God, the holiness that God demands of his people and the call of Christians to unity. While this thesis could be defended and explored using the theological riches of other major Christian traditions, in this article it will be unpacked and developed using primarily Roman Catholic and Wesleyan/ Methodist theological sources. Christian unity is located both in the holiness of God, as triune, and in the universal hope of God's purposes. Past schisms are being addressed by the ecumenical movement today, with the most important concern being that of reception in a spirit of generosity and humility.

ECUMENICAL RECEPTIVITY • UNITY • HOLINESS • METHODIST–ROMAN CATHOLIC DIALOGUE

The call to holiness

The call to holiness is also a call to unity in the Church ... Holiness and Christian unity belong together as twin aspects of the same relationship with the Trinity such that the pursuit of either involves the pursuit of the other.¹

It is the conviction of the Judaeo-Christian tradition as a whole that the holy God, whose mercy is over all his works and who is eternally faithful to his covenant promises, calls human beings into a relationship with himself in and through which they work with him as stewards of his creation and towards the fulfilment of his redemptive purposes.² Human beings are created in the image of God, that is, with the capacity to relate to him. They are called to reflect his nature in all their doings with him, with each other and with the rest of the created order. Christ, the eternal Son of God, perfect alike in both divinity and in the human nature that he takes on in his incarnation, teaches this: 'You shall be all goodness as your heavenly Father is all goodness.'³ By God's grace – creative, redeeming and sanctifying – they are to be holy, with a holiness deriving from and dependent upon his eternally faithful holiness.

The Eastern Christian tradition interprets the two metaphors in Genesis 1:26, 'image and likeness', by associating 'image' with the potential for holy love with which human beings are created and 'likeness' with the goal of that potential, reached in the saints, which is described as a sharing in the mind of Christ. Within the Wesleyan tradition this goal is the 'spirit of finished holiness' in which life is to be, as Charles Wesley sings, 'all praise, all meekness and all love' – the praise being praise of God in his holiness, displayed also in all his saints, the meekness being humility before God and others, and the love being the catholic spirit, doing good to all people, but especially to those that are of the household of faith (as commended by St Paul).⁴

Governing and controlling everything is the knowledge and worship of the one true God, involving hearty assent and diligent devotion to his holy will, which is for the beneficent development of all that he has made in preparation for its consummation in the glory of the new creation as described in the last two chapters of the book of Revelation.

I propose now to look at the link between holiness and Christian unity from three angles, that of the holiness of God, that of the holiness of his plan for human salvation and that of the implications of both for Christian discipleship, corporate and personal.

The holiness of God and Christian unity

From the earliest of times, primitive human beings seem to have had some awareness of the numinous and of a transcendent dimension to their experience of the world as something which they could not define, but before which they were in awe and sometimes even terror. There was a sense that this numinous other was qualitatively different from anything else in their experience, that it had to be acknowledged and in some sense placated. Human beings began early to bury their dead, and cave paintings show signs that seem to point to primitive forms of worship. Every human tribe, even those few still at a Stone Age level of culture, appears to have had some form of religious belief and worship, however much it may be mixed up with what would now be regarded as superstition and error.

How we account for and explain this development remains a moot question. Perhaps, the emphasis within both the Catholic and Wesleyan traditions on prevenient grace, of the grace of God acting upon us from before we can become aware of it, let alone of its precise significance and implications, is here relevant since, if we accept that we developed as a species particularly made in the image of God, then some divine preparation for development must have been involved even though its exact nature and progress cannot be precisely established. It seems to have been the view of several of the early fathers of the Church that the primitive religions of their time contained seeds of the truth later fully revealed in Christ, however imperfectly they were apprehended.

Certainly, the sense of awe which characterises much early religion remains important within the later development of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. People became aware of a transcendent and eternal Other that they could not fully understand, yet that demanded homage, worship and obedience. A sense of awe in the presence of One who can never be fully encompassed by human understanding remains part of the later Judaeo-Christian tradition. It is witnessed to by the prophets, such as Isaiah and Hosea, and is implicit in the Mosaic prohibition on graven images (the Other can never be adequately represented by such). It is continued particularly in the Eastern Christian tradition with its stress upon apophatic theology and the un-knowability of God outside of those aspects of his nature that he has seen fit to reveal to us.

As far as the full implications of the revelation of the holy will of God and of his nature as holy love are concerned, these begin, in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, with the call of Abraham and, for Christians, reach their consummation in

the paschal events and the subsequent coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, completing the process of the revelation of the triune God in all his self-giving glory.

In the call of Abraham, God confronts an individual with his universally salvific will and calls for a specific response, integral to his plan for his creation. He calls on Abraham to migrate to a new land where he will become the father of a race that will play a particular role in the salvation of the world, 'in you will all the nations of the world be blessed'.⁵

Abraham is called to holiness: 'Walk before me and be blameless'.⁶ It is from this point that the ethical consequences of holiness for human behaviour begin to be revealed to Abraham and his descendants. Israel is to be a holy nation, set aside for and devoted to God's purposes. The understanding of this is deepened through the subsequent experience of its liberation from slavery in Egypt. It is there that the link between holiness and justice begins to be appreciated. God is experienced as a liberating and merciful God. He hears the cry of his specially adopted nation in their woes and exerts his power on their behalf. However, this is complemented by the giving of a law that affects the relationship of the chosen people with outsiders and indeed the rest of creation. Thus, they are told that the holy day of rest is sacred not only to them, but to others. The stranger within the gate, the slave, even the farm animals must share in the Sabbath rest. The God who has given Israel liberating justice wills that justice be shown to others. The God who lays down for their benefit a system of sacrificial worship by which his people may honour him, wills also that they worship and honour him through the pursuit of justice in all their relationships. It is also increasingly indicated that true spiritual worship involves more than the repetition of cultic acts. It involves the giving of thanks and the expression of reliance, in every need, upon God. As the author of Psalm 50 presents God as saying: 'Do you think that I eat the flesh of bulls and drink their blood? Offer unto God thanksgiving and call upon me in the time of trouble.'

The holiness of their liberating God reflects the even greater truth that 'his mercy is over all his works'.⁷

The ethical demands of holiness reach their highest level of development before Christ in the teaching of the prophets. They recognise not just the demands of the holy God upon his people, but also the incredible depth of his merciful commitment to his people. They speak of the disasters that were to overcome their people with the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests as just punishment for Israel's disobedience to the divine covenant and call to

corporate holiness of life, but they also speak of God's forgiving and restoring love, a love that is even more awesome than the demonstrations of divine wrath. Hosea, in particular, develops the theme of the divine love that will not be faithless to the covenant, even despite its constant breaches by a faithless people.⁸ God teaches Hosea that he is God and not human, that his punishment of his people is not to be confused with human revenge and that it is precisely because he is God and not man that his heart recoils within him and he repents of his fierce anger. The extraordinary generosity of God is revealed also by Jeremiah and by Joel. Both look forward to the Pentecostal gift, Jeremiah in terms of the new covenant which will be written on the hearts of the people and Joel specifically in the pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh.⁹

Though God remains unknowable, he nevertheless expresses sentiments analogous to those of human pity for others. His heart recoils within him at the thought of cutting off his disobedient but chosen people. Hosea relates God's comparison of his compassion with that of a father for his toddler son and Isaiah speaks of the walls of Jerusalem as engraved on God's hands, for Christians a striking anticipation of the cross, as expressed in Charles Wesley's line, 'Jehovah crucified'.

Several of the prophets, and Isaiah in particular, present visions of the final coming of God's kingdom, of the enormous feast that will take place at the end of time as the nations of the world gather together at Mount Zion and receive the law of God, the law of harmony and peace by which all nature will live.¹⁰ To them is granted the knowledge of God's redemptive purposes, which will be achieved across the whole of creation to the very point where the lion and the lamb lie down together. The holiness of God is no longer perceived simply in the awesomeness of creation or even in terms of his salvific work among his specially chosen people, but in terms of a holistic plan for the whole created order. What is not vouchsafed to the prophets is the way in which these promises are to be fulfilled; there is left in them that spirit of longing summed up in Isaiah's plea, 'O that you would rend the heavens and come down',¹¹ a prayer that, for Christians, is answered in the Incarnation.

It is important to note the spirit within which this developing revelation is received by the prophets and the other true Israelites who loyally act according to the requirements of God's covenant with them. It is a spirit in which both the deepest humility and the most trusting love are united and balanced. They are amazed at God's regard and love for them. The Psalmist sings in wonder at the human vocation: 'What are human beings that you are mindful of them,

mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honour.¹² They recognise that it is their duty to 'walk humbly with their God', being guided in everything by him. It is their duty to follow God in loving mercy and acting justly. Elsewhere, the Psalmists celebrate the comprehensive benevolence of God in providing for all the physical and spiritual needs of human beings and in asserting his universal benevolence.

It is, however, only in Christ that the full extent of the self-giving love of the triune God is revealed alongside the revelation of his eternal nature as triune communion, utterly sufficient within that communion, yet also reaching out in compassionate love to his creation and most fully to sinful and wayward human creatures, made in his own image. God remains awesomely transcendent, yet reveals a human face in the incarnate Christ, who responds to the prayer of Isaiah in revealing himself as the one who is both the Father's pleasure and is also well pleased to meet human beings where they are in the midst of their distortion, both personal and corporate, as a result of sin.¹³ The Father reveals through his beloved eternal Son his holy will to be eternally reconciled with all human beings to the full extent of adopting them into a relationship of grace that corresponds with the relationship that the Son has by nature with him from all eternity.¹⁴ He does not hold back from 'sparing his only Son', but rather truly participates in human nature and exposes himself to all the frailties of human flesh, precisely as a sign that he will also 'give us all things with him'.¹⁵

It is in the paschal events that both the awesome grandeur of God's holy love and his utter loving patience with human beings are revealed. His holy love and its power are revealed in both cross and resurrection, with full power to redeem and to sanctify. Charles Wesley sums up the full effect of the paschal mystery on sinners in these lines:

Vouchsafe us eyes of faith to see
The man transfixed on Calvary,
To know thee, who thou art,
The one eternal God and true:
And let the sight affect, subdue,
And break my stubborn heart.¹⁶

The nature of the triune God is revealed in these events: the Son responding to the Father's will, the Spirit enabling Christ's offering on the cross, the Father raising the Son to glory in the power of the Spirit.¹⁷ A new dimension is added

to the previous understanding of the holy God, now seen as the God whose own internal communion reveals the nature of the communion that he both demands and makes possible for all humankind, in which its myriad of hypostases are called, in virtue of their nature as created in his image, to become one communion with each other in him. The pattern for this is revealed at Easter, when the Father raises the Son in the power of the Spirit; the power to enable its realisation is given at Pentecost.

God's redemptive plan and the unity of the Church

God's plan for universal redemption and new creation is foreshadowed in the Hebrew Scriptures, particularly in the promise of universal blessing made to Abraham and in the prophetic visions of the gathering of the nations referred to above. However, at the beginning of his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul states that the fullness of God's plan was revealed only in Christ – a plan to unite all things in him, which can be seen both as a restoration of all things to the unity originally intended by God, which had been sundered by human sin, and, also, as a new and glorious transformation, transcending even the glory of the first creation.¹⁸

According to the gospel that Paul proclaimed, Christ, through his victory on the cross, has transcended the age-old division between the chosen Jewish people and the Gentiles. God now calls both to unity in the one undivided Christ, a unity that it is the duty of the Church to proclaim and to embody in its fellowship of mutual love and service.

The Church continues the work of Christ in all aspects save only that of offering his perfect and all-atoning sacrifice, a sacrifice that only he, in his sinless nature, human and divine, could offer.¹⁹ In the New Testament, the Church is called both the Body of Christ – the agent of the continued action of the risen and ascended Lord among those whom he has gathered to himself – and the Bride of Christ, the latter title indicating particularly the close relationship in holiness to which the followers of Christ are called corporately and in which they are promised the ultimate gift of corporate holiness without spot or wrinkle. The members of the apostolic churches are addressed by Paul as saints, the word carrying not the later canonical implications but the original understanding of the term as those who are called and set aside for the specific service of the holy God, equipped with all the means of grace commended to the Church and all the special charisms given to particular individuals for the building up of the whole Body.

The Church is called to be holy, that holiness being not just that of its individual members but of the entire body in all its interrelationships. God's saving intention is not limited to the salvation of particular individuals out of the world but encompasses the vision of the whole of humanity, in all its relationships, being brought into the realm of the new creation. That is why, as George Tavad puts it, the Church is called progressively to image the kingdom even though, of course, it is only God who can bring it in, in its final fullness.²⁰

Human beings are inescapably social beings, thus all have been affected in varying ways by the sinful nature of the world into which they have entered, but all are also called to be saved from within that weakened human nature into a nature that will ultimately reflect the glory of God in Christ, as promised in 1 John 3:2. Just as all are affected by the solidarity of the human race in sin, so all in Christ are called to co-operate in the growth in holiness of life of others within the Christian community. They are called to 'together travel on' and 'kindly help each other on'.²¹ The holiness of the Church must involve not simply the sanctification of its members as individuals, but the sanctification of all their relationships, whether they be those at the most local level of small fellowship group or congregation, those between ordained and lay members, those between churches living according to different styles of church life that are nevertheless consonant with the one apostolic tradition.

The processes of sanctification, individual and corporate, can be slow, but they are guided by the presence of the Holy Spirit at every level, from that of the individual disciple, living out his or her vocation in the situation in which they find themselves, through to the life of the gathered congregation and local church, through to that of the universal Church. The Church is holy Church and without its holiness it cannot be catholic and apostolic and certainly not one (a point to be developed in the next section).

Entry into the Church involves entry through baptism into the paschal mystery of dying to self, rising to Christ and receiving the Holy Spirit.²² All such are the adopted children of God, sharing with Christ in his worship of the Father, alike in prayer, in sacramental celebration and in the sacrificial offering of all that they have and are to him. Within this process, it is necessary to grow. In Romans 8, Paul paradoxically refers to Christians both as already adopted and yet not fully of their final stature and glory as God's children. He talks of the way in which the whole creation groans as it awaits the revelation of the sons of God, a time that will come when the whole Body, as a result of its incessant meditation upon all the words of God and its faithful use of all

the means of grace, finally discovers that all the promises of God have been fulfilled in it.²³

The Church is called to grow in that communion and unity that is God's will for it, in fulfilment of Christ's prayer that they may all be one, as the Father and the Son are one. The Church is called to reflect the life-in-communion of the Trinity, a life of faithful trust and confidence between all its members and all its ministers in which each affirms and upholds the particular gifts and calling of the others. It is called to enable the light of Christ to shine through each and every member and local congregation, so that the promise contained in Psalm 34, that the members of the people of God shall 'look to him and be radiant', can be fulfilled. It is called to affirm and respect all differences that contribute to the rich diversity-in-communion of the whole. The unity to which the Church is called is a unity in legitimate and enriching diversity in which, as Adam Mohler teaches, true individuality is not suppressed but makes its disciplined contribution to the whole.²⁴

In the search for this, each and every Christian is aided by the indwelling Spirit of God. The Spirit enables alike the discernment of God's will and gifts in fulfilling that will that he bestows. Each congregation is enabled corporately to make that discernment according to the edification it needs for the work of mutual edification, and outward mission and service.

For most Christians, the unity of the Church is lived primarily within the local congregation. It is, as Charles Wesley sings in his celebration of the unity of the early Methodist societies, the unity of those who, being 'touched by the lodestone of thy love', 'ever towards each other move (in love), and ever move towards thee'.²⁵ It is the unity of those who, having the blessed end of perfect love in view, join with mutual care 'and kindly help each other on, till all receive the starry crown'. It is the unity that results from the patiently loyal exercise of all those virtues towards which Christians are called as a result of their being raised with Christ. As Paul puts it in Colossians, they are called to 'seek the things that are above', thereby practising, 'as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness and patience, forbearing one another, and ... forgiving one another'.²⁶

The responsibility for living in that way extends also beyond the local church or congregation. It lies behind Paul's famous injunction, 'Do good to all people, but especially towards those that are of the household of faith'.²⁷ Christians must pay attention to the *sensus fidelium*, that sense of what is Christianly appropriate in their relationships with others both within the church

community and beyond it. They must remember that they are called to live a life of fellowship with each other that points towards God's kingdom and helps people outside to see the Church as the God-given beacon of hope and true community living in a world in need of such a model. They must also, of course, seek to recognise the signs of kingdom values and living in others who do not profess Christ, but nevertheless profess and live by values that are consonant with those of the Christian faith and to which those of other faiths, indeed even some of no faith in a religious sense, may be moved by the prevenient grace of the Holy Spirit operative in their ideals and their practical expression of them.

Such grace, the Methodist–Roman Catholic International Commission stresses, is always related to fulfilment within the Church.²⁸ As 'sign, instrument and first fruits of the Kingdom', the life of the Church is meant to point towards that life of true community and communion that God wills for all people. Its unity is demanded by God's gracious saving plan for his creation and particularly for his human creation as called to be a kingdom of priests for all creation.

The unity of the Church is thus an integral part of the holy and eternal will of God. It is at the heart of the eternally unalterable counsel of God.²⁹ Through the Son and the Spirit, all the necessary means of grace have been given to the Church and all the charisms continue to be bestowed upon particular persons, specially called communities and local churches as deemed necessary in God's wisdom. To this unfailing generosity of God, the Church, in and through all its members and ministers, must offer a united response since the grace given is always responsible grace, the grace of a faithful God who empowers us to give and requires of us a faithful response.

The unity of the Church is thus focused in Christ, who is not to be divided but to be the source of human unity, a unity expressed in 'his last and kindest word', establishing the Eucharist as the proclamation and celebration of the saving events, celebrated within each local church but always in communion with each other local church and with the Church above. To fail to maintain unity in the one mutually recognisable Eucharist is to contradict the prayer of Christ and the holy will of God.

Implications for the life of the churches today

The search for unity is, sometimes, sadly seen as a sort of add-on for a few enthusiasts who place special emphasis upon it. However, it is an integral part of Christian daily discipleship, a duty incumbent on all Christians and all churches. This is the clear teaching of both Roman Catholics and Methodists. The Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council states it clearly: 'Concern for unity pertains to the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike.' It stresses the importance of the basic Christian virtues of common life: 'We should therefore pray to the divine Spirit for the grace to be genuinely self-denying, humble, gentle in the service of others and to have an attitude of generosity towards them.' The Methodist Conference of 1820 called on the Methodist people to 'ever maintain the kind and catholic spirit of primitive Methodism towards all denominations of Christians holding the Head'.

A key rediscovery in both communions has been the understanding that the assertion of their own catholicity does not thereby deny that of others and that it is the duty of all churches to recognise wherein their catholicity may be wounded by separation from others, a point clearly made in the Decree on Ecumenism, and wherein it is their duty to learn from them as a result of that embellishment of the *koinonia* that has occurred across the ages through God's ever generous inspiration. To generously and graciously affirm these points in no way means disloyalty to the claim of the Methodist people to have been raised up by God to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land, nor to the Roman Catholic claim to have preserved the petrine ministry as vital to the communion and well-being of the universal Church.

Humility, generosity of spirit and praise of the work of God among other churches are at the root of Catholic and Methodist approaches to ecumenism, rightly understood. They depend on a spirituality that stresses that relationships are based on 'all meekness, love and praise'. Fr Hocken, in his book *The Glory and the Shame: Reflections on the Twentieth-Century Outpouring of the Holy Spirit*,³⁰ stresses the importance of recognising the work of God across the spectrum of the denominations and movements. The contribution of each to the whole must be discerned and received. This was the teaching alike of the Wesleyan ecumenical pioneer William Shrewsbury and the Roman Catholic pioneer Abbé Paul Couturier.³¹ Shrewsbury remarked that the Wesleyans of his day were the 'debtors to all the churches' – to the Puritans, to the Anglican fathers, to the Pietists of the Continent. Couturier never ceased to insist that in certain respects other Christians had developed parts of the tradition more

thoroughly than had the Roman Catholics of his time. Thus, he extolled the sense of the cosmic dimension of salvation so strong among the Orthodox and the Protestant devotion to the detailed study of and reflection on Scripture.

Reception, by the entire people of God, is essential to any lasting ecumenical progress. It is never enough for theologians alone to reach accords, a point which was sadly shown in the failure of the reunion accords of 1273 and 1438–39, when the people, particularly in the East, failed to accept them. In modern times, important accords on justification and on Christology have been reached, the first involving Catholics, Lutherans and, latterly, Methodists, the latter involving Catholics and Oriental Orthodox, but they still need to be more firmly received by the entire communities involved.

For the people of God to be able to receive such agreements they must attentively and lovingly receive the teaching and vision of Paul as he contemplates the wonder of God's uniting work across barriers in his time. They must hear him saying to the people of Rome, both Jews and Gentiles, that they must not quarrel over things that are trivia or simply matters where opinion can legitimately vary.³² They must hear him announce his own great desire to be with the Church of Rome in order that both he and they may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.³³ They must hear again his prayer for the Ephesians that, through the indwelling Christ and their own resultant grounding in love, they might 'have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the height and depth, breadth and length' of that love.

In particular, churches must be penitent for their past sins and offences against believers of other traditions. This was a key stress of the fathers of the Second Vatican Council, who accepted that, in the schisms of the sixteenth century, there had been faults on both sides. The late Pope John Paul II reinforced this by visits to countries like the Czech Republic where he showed repentance for the persecution there by Catholics of Protestants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Christians must never forget how far it is possible to fall from grace in the process of showing zeal. *Petit Histoire des Camisards*³⁴ recounts the history of the Protestant guerrillas who in the early eighteenth century tied down a high proportion of Louis XIV's forces sent to repress them. In the context of this conflict, atrocities were committed on both sides as vicious as those currently being committed by Isis and other Muslim jihadist groups, a standing reproach to those who remember Christ's unstinting refusal of force. Faced with Peter's determination to defend him, he said, 'Do you not know that I could appeal to my father and he would send me at least twelve

legions of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled?'³⁵ God's Church must work by God's methods, those appropriate to their nature as created and recreated in his image.

What is needed above all as the divided churches seek to respond to the Lord's prayer for unity is that they act in a humble spirit, seeking always to discern what they should be receiving from the other. The ambient atmosphere must be one in which all is meekness, praise and love: the meekness that prefers the other in honour and seeks to work with the other in deepening a common understanding of the riches of Christ; the praise that rejoices in the gifts given to the partner; and above all the love that seeks to understand, to enter sweetly and more fully into God's design and into the common doing of his will.

Major schisms of church history which are the focus for today's ecumenical work can be seen as examples of what results when the Church fails to recognise and receive legitimate differences or the complex factors that led to each side hardening its position.

The first period of lasting schism was in the fifth century over the nature of the unity of divinity and humanity in our Lord. It resulted in the separation of the Oriental Orthodox churches from those churches in the Latin and Byzantine Greek traditions, or, as the Orientals would understandably put it, the separation of the Latin and Greek churches from their communion. Many factors were involved in the schism, including especially the interference of emperors in church life and their determination (so often later imitated by Henry VIII, Louis XIV and others) to have uniformity of religion within their realms. While conflict at the time became inevitable, later sensitivity to nuances enabled a recognition that the rival formulae of Ephesus and Chalcedon were not incompatible and thus need not have been Church-dividing.

The second schism was the eleventh-century separation of East and West, occasioned partly by disputes over the procession of the Holy Spirit, but, above all (as is now more clearly recognised from the fruits of modern scholarship), over the nature of the primacy that can be attributed to the see and Bishop of Rome, a matter on which East and West had begun to divide seven centuries earlier. The most recent report of the Roman Catholic–Orthodox dialogue accepts that the two traditions began independently to drift apart in their ways of understanding the primacy, a fact that makes the question of the rightness of either development a matter for prayerful and measured reflection rather than assertion of the exclusive rightness of either development. In addition, the need of the Western papacy to defend the Church against the secular arm

inevitably encouraged bishops of Rome from Gregory VII to take a tough line with anything that they saw as threatening their unity, which was confused at times in their minds with uniformity.

The third period of historic schism is, of course, that of the Reformation, where the waters were even more muddied than in the earlier periods by secular influences, political ambitions and resentments of forms of corruption, rife in some ecclesiastical circles. The Reformation was really more a series of reformations, of which there were two main types: the magisterial variety, involving state control or sustenance in its three main varieties, Anglican, Lutheran and Reformed, and the radical Reformation with its stress on congregational independency of both state and higher-level ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The radical reformers experienced persecution alike from Catholics and state Protestantism. That the key theological issue of justification might have been capable of solution is shown by the famous Colloquy of Regensburg in 1541 where Melancthon and Cardinal Contarini proposed a reconciling formula, which in some respects foreshadowed the later Catholic–Lutheran Joint Statement of Justification of 1541. Other issues, particularly those of authority, were more difficult.

It has been the habit of some to decry the effectiveness of the ecumenical movement, particularly over the last generation. However, when we contrast the foregoing historic schisms with the ecumenical movement's achievements, particularly through patient theological dialogue, we realise how far the Christian world has travelled, if not to full unity certainly to a far more positive evaluation by communions of each other. We have learnt the lesson of Colossians 2:2, that the desired order is not understanding the other that we might love, but rather loving so that we might come more fully to understand. We have learnt to seek out what it is that we can affirm in each other as truly of the gospel and thus of the Church. We are increasingly learning the importance of looking for those qualities and ways of Christian service and devotion that we ought to receive from others. Such learning will be integral to the continued development of the Anglican–Methodist Covenant and other similar ventures towards greater unity.

Notes

1. *The Call to Holiness*, para 5, <http://worldmethodistconference.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/The-Call-to-Holiness-Final-copy-28062016.pdf>.
2. Psalm 145:9.
3. Matthew 5:48. I prefer 'all goodness' to the traditional translation of perfect. Human beings can be all goodness in intention and action but cannot, as finite and fallible human beings, be guaranteed against ever making honest mistakes.

4. *The Wesleyan Methodist Hymn Book* (1877 edn), no. 341, verse 4. Galatians 6:10. The term 'the catholic spirit' was the title of one of Wesley's sermons, in which he called on all Christians to 'love alike': 'If we cannot all think alike, let us at least love alike.'
5. Genesis 12:3.
6. Genesis 17:1.
7. Psalm 145:9.
8. Hosea 11:8–9.
9. Jeremiah 31:31–34; Joel 2:28.
10. Isaiah 25:6–9.
11. Isaiah 64:1.
12. Psalm 8:4–5.
13. See, for example, William Cowper's lines, 'Myself the Father's pleasure, / And mine, the sons of men'. Cf also in the hymn traditionally used at the Methodist Covenant service, 'And if thou art well pleased to hear, / Come down and meet us now'.
14. W. B. Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology* (1880), vol. 3, p. 4.
15. Romans 8:30.
16. *The Wesleyan Methodist Hymn Book*, no. 122.
17. Mark; Romans 1:4; Hebrews 9:14.
18. Cf *The Call to Holiness*.
19. See Benjamin Gregory, *The Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints*, London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1873, p. 15.
20. George H. Tavard, *The Church, Community of Salvation*, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992, pp. 49–50, 92.
21. From 'Thou God of truth and love' by Charles Wesley.
22. *Encountering Christ the Saviour: Church and Sacraments*, Ninth Report of the International Catholic–Methodist Commission (Durham, 2011), pp. 9–14.
23. *Dei Verbum*, para 9.
24. J. A. Möhler, *Unity in the Church or the Principle of Catholicism* (1825).
25. From 'Jesu, united by thy grace' by Charles Wesley.
26. Colossians 3:12–13.
27. Galatians 6:10.
28. *The Call to Holiness*, para 71.
29. Psalm 33:11: 'The counsel of the Lord shall endure for ever: and the thoughts of his heart from generation to generation.'
30. Peter Hocken, *The Glory and the Shame: Reflections on the Twentieth-Century Outpouring of the Holy Spirit*, Guildford: Eagle, 1994.
31. See David Carter, 'Two Ecumenical Pioneers', in M. Woodruff (ed), *The Unity of Christians: The Vision of Paul Couturier*, London: Catholic League, 2003, pp. 64–75.
32. Romans 14.
33. Romans 1:12.
34. Eugène Bonnemère, *Petit Histoire des Camisards*, Paris: E. Dentu, 1877.
35. Matthew 26:53.



Guarding the 'holy fire': dementia and the mystery of love

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Starting from personal experience, this article looks at how the 'holy fire', or spirituality, of a person can be protected as part of the dignity of a person living with dementia. Dementia sufferers can often be portrayed as less than fully human, but this 'normal practice' ought to be challenged. The neurological explanation for dementia does not tell the whole story, and a more person-centred approach seeks to remember the longer narrative of a person's life to understand ongoing communication and to affirm the continuing personhood of the dementia sufferer. Awareness of spirituality is crucial to this approach, and Wesley's line, 'acts of faith and love repeat', gives some framework to how this might be developed.

DEMENTIA • PASTORAL CARE • SPIRITUALITY • IDENTITY • WESLEY'S HYMNS

This article is a transcript of the annual Joseph Winter lecture, delivered in July 2017 to the churches in Wakefield. Most references to this original context remain in the text in order to retain the tone of delivery.



The Shetlandic poet Christine de Luca, who is probably about the same age as myself, has written an extraordinary little poem addressed to her adult children. In it she refers to Suilven, which is a very distinctive and much-loved Scottish mountain range. It's called 'What's in a name?'

If and when I have mislaid my name
and stare at you disconcertingly

let me spend a day parked by Suilven,
perplexed by broken water. Turn

my calendar to the mountain's season,
and set my watch by shadows on the loch.

Forgive me if I lose the reasons that we came
or my gaze clouds in a cod-fish kind of way

or if the name I chose for you eludes me.
I'd still sense mountain, water, love.¹

It's remarkable because it's the only poem I know where someone who does not have dementia has made an effort to imagine what she will need and feel if and when she does. In the past few years I have done a good deal of thinking about mortality, and how we need to prepare for our deaths, but deeply resist doing so – something which is as true inside the Church as it is generally in our culture. But if we find the thought of death difficult, it is as nothing compared with the prospect of contemplating dementia. Yet there can be few of us past midlife who have not been touched by it, needing to accompany older relatives or friends for years, as they live with what is currently an irreversible condition, largely untreatable by medical means, which will increasingly rob them of crucial aspects of their brain function and leave them confused and helpless to manage their own lives. And unless there is a startling breakthrough soon

(and so far nothing potentially viable has emerged), we need to recognise that, with our extended lifespans, dementia is a future that may very well be our own.

Let me say something about myself and why I chose this theme for my lecture, which on reflection I realise could just as well have been titled 'Love and the mystery of dementia'. I have not made an academic or professional study of dementia or dementia care, though I have read around the subject.² My qualification to speak on the subject is because I realise that for the whole of the twenty-first century so far, dementia is something I have been around and coping with at one remove, whatever else my day job has been: first with my mother, who died in 2007 with advanced vascular dementia, who until her final hospital admission lived at home, cared for by my father. I gave as much support as my dad was willing to accept, including helping with a lot of the paperwork around powers of attorney, attendance allowance etc. Then with a very dear aunt, who had no children of her own and for whom I held powers of attorney. She suffered a couple of crises and I, with another cousin, eventually persuaded her to accept a fortnight's respite care in a residential home, from which she decided not to go home again. (In a lovely coincidence, this aunt had a local connection here. She lived in Sandal for some years when she was Director of Nursing for the West Riding.) And finally my father, who will be 97 this year, began a couple of years ago to exhibit odd behaviour and neglect himself at home. He was persuaded by my brother and me to take himself to a residential home. However, when he got there, his geographical disorientation was fully revealed, and he could not settle, or recall the decision he had made, but went wandering and had to be rescued regularly by the police. He was asked to leave, and is now in a dementia wing of an MHA residential home, and I am relieved to say seems now both settled and contented with his care.

Those of you who have sought to assist older relatives in this situation will be familiar with the many practical and emotional dilemmas that can arise, when you need to insist on intervening to care for the generation that first cared for you. The need arises gradually, but you can be made aware of it only when crisis looms. When my mum went into hospital for a major vascular operation, it suddenly came to me that I should sit in on the interview with the surgeon while she gave consent. It turned out that the wrong leg was about to be operated on, but she did not have the power to notice the error and contradict it. Later, as my father started to grasp that he was becoming my mother's carer, my dilemma was how I could help without taking over. Was it appropriate to

point out that correcting mum's mistakes crossly was never going to work and only made her anxious? From a distance, what could I do in a practical way about helping them cope with housework or gardening, when dad refused to employ anyone? And then, with a fiercely independent aunt, how could I encourage her to accept respite care, which was the only thing that was going to prevent an emergency hospital admission? What about my own feelings as things changed? When my dad was asked to leave his first residential home, how was I to handle the sense of shame that the person who first taught me to behave was now acting aggressively with those trying to look after him?

Practical responsibility and emotional complexity are interwoven in the major renegotiation of relationships that dementia requires.

But I want the main focus for this lecture to be how we should protect a particular dimension of a person's dignity, namely their spirituality – the 'holy fire', in Charles Wesley's language, in the well-known hymn we just sang (reproduced here at the end). Incidentally, I wondered recently where this image of the undying sacred fire came from. It's from Leviticus 6, and concerns God's instructions to Moses and Aaron about sacrifices. The altar fire was to be kept burning always, and not allowed to go out. Wesley has taken this image and applied it not to ritual burnt offerings, but to the sacrifice of his whole life, up to and including his death. Behind this usage will be the words of Jesus quoting Hosea: 'For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.' The hymn expresses very powerfully the commitment of the Christian life, to 'work and speak and think for thee', thus guarding the 'holy fire'. What then is our role as loved one, or as church, if someone becomes unable to do this for themselves? All three of the people to whom I have been close during their experience of dementia have been lifelong devoted churchgoers; and my dad was a licensed lay reader who only gave up preaching in his eighties. Their relationship with God and with the Christian community has been central to who they are or were. But supporting this spiritual identity is hard, and one of the reasons for this is our culture's demeanour towards those with dementia.

We know that dementia as a disease – or, I should say, group of diseases, as there are several different kinds – has a wholly different status from that of other diseases in our society. It undoubtedly arises in the body. Physical changes happen within the brain. Though these can only be fully confirmed in a post-mortem, they can also be detected by an MRI scan. They eventually render a person completely dependent on the 24-hour care of others; yet

unlike other diseases, this treatment has to be largely funded by the patient. But there is another way in which dementia is distinguished from almost all other conditions. John Swinton has highlighted the way in which dementia, and dementia sufferers, experience what he calls 'malignant social positioning'.³ So instinctive and extreme is our culture's attitude towards the condition, that when Swinton told a colleague, who is both a psychologist and a committed Christian, that he was developing a theology of dementia, this was her response: 'Is there such a thing as a theology of dementia? Is it not just demonic?'⁴ It seemed to me during the 2017 general election campaign that the reason Theresa May appeared to have to row back very fast regarding her proposals for the funding of social care was the phrase 'dementia tax' that critics applied to these proposals. The very word 'dementia' is completely toxic in political terms, rather like the word 'death', which was in an earlier election applied to Labour proposals about inheritance tax.

Let's spell out what constitutes this malignant social positioning, and consider the effects it may be having on dementia sufferers and those near to them. Eileen Shamy, who was one of the pioneer clergy working with the spiritual needs of the very old, tells this anecdote about a lecture given to a class of graduate nurses, who were presented with a case study.

The patient: white female. She neither speaks nor comprehends the spoken word. Sometimes she babbles incoherently for hours on end. She is disoriented about person, place and time. She shows a complete disregard for personal appearance and makes no effort to assist in her own care. She must be fed, bathed and clothed by others. She is toothless so her food must be pureed. Her sleep pattern is erratic. Often she wakes in the middle of the night ... Most of the time she is friendly and quite happy. Several times a day, however, she becomes quite agitated without apparent cause and screams loudly, until someone comes to comfort her.⁵

The nurses were then asked how they would feel about taking care of this patient, and they used words like 'frustrated', 'depressed' and 'annoyed'. The lecturer remarked that he enjoyed taking care of her and their response was disbelief, until he passed round a photo of the patient – his 6-month-old daughter. Now, caring for a helpless infant and a helpless older person are not identical – for one thing we know that the stage of infancy will pass so fast that you can almost see the brain developing, whereas a brain with dementia is

going in the other direction. But this story demonstrates that there is nothing inherently evil or demeaning to human dignity about a state of dependence on others, and nothing instinctive or normal about our culture's reaction to it as disgusting or burdensome. This is crucial, because what people most fear about this stage of life as a prospect for themselves is largely, I think, to do with this cultural disgust, and what dementia is construed as meaning. (I don't want to underestimate the actual deficits and suffering inevitably experienced within the condition, but whatever these are, they are magnified and worsened by what we think dementia means.)

One of the most common assumptions that goes along with this malignant social positioning is that dementia somehow robs us of our personhood. You will hear this assumption frequently within ordinary conversation about people who have the condition or died with it. 'He's just a shell of the person he used to be.' 'You have to remember the person that she was.' Unfamiliar behaviour – typically frustration, anger or disinhibition – is described in terms of 'having become a completely different person'. Sometimes it is even implied that reaching a certain stage of dementia is equivalent to having died, and that therefore a relative suffers actual bereavement of the person they loved, while their body still survives. 'You've already done your grieving by the time they die.' Now let me be clear – many people who say this sort of thing are nevertheless demonstrating through their actions that they continue to love and care for the person whose current state baffles them, and leaves them mourning the loss of the companionship they used to enjoy. But this is the kind of conversational discourse about dementia available to us in our society, and I agree with Swinton that the discourse is potentially toxic and can affect attitudes in devastating ways.

Christians are not necessarily immune from believing in the kind of 'de-personing' this can result in. One particularly startling example of this kind of thinking was produced by the televangelist Pat Robertson, in response to a painful phone-in question. He was asked to advise someone whose friend had a wife with severe dementia who no longer recognised him. The friend felt bitter against God, and had started to see another woman. After indicating how difficult this situation was, Pat Robertson said: 'I know this sounds cruel, but if he's going to do something, he should divorce her and start all over again, but to make sure she has custodial care, someone looking after her.' When challenged about the marriage vows, 'till death do us part', Robertson said, 'This is a kind of death.'⁶ This was a conservative evangelical speaking. To be fair, his remarks sparked huge controversy in the evangelical community, but you see

the assumptions here. The wife with dementia was no longer the person her husband married. Theologically she was dead. Anyone might sympathise with the situation of the lonely and burdened carer, but what seems shocking and heartless in the evangelist is the recommendation to divorce, presumably to preserve the decencies regarding adultery.

Why do we see dementia sufferers as less than persons? Swinton suggests that there are two crucial reasons. One is the priority we give to individual autonomy in our society, de-emphasising the interdependence that we in fact rely on in order to survive, let alone thrive, as human persons. The other is the entirely exaggerated importance we apply to cognitive competence, particularly our capacity for memory.

These assumptions feel as if they are truly hard-wired into us in the West. Anyone who has needed to take over the management of someone else's financial affairs will have experienced how intensely difficult it is for a hitherto financially independent person to allow this, and what an immense line it is to cross for the person who needs to insist on it, in the best interests of their loved one. Even when we have sensibly decided to give someone power of attorney, it feels as if this will never be needed in fact. I notice that when I set up an old enduring power of attorney for myself, I then hedged it about with various legal caveats which I now know would make it very irritating and difficult to apply should the need arise. I thought I trusted my attorneys but clearly I could not contemplate actually doing so. I attend a monthly women's group – we call ourselves crones – who discuss different aspects of life as a woman growing older, and recently we tackled the tough question of how to manage our future care. Independence for as long as possible was a number-one priority, and it was fascinating to see where the imagination of the group failed. Frailty and the need for practical help was foreseeable: the surrendering of the management of our financial affairs was anathema. 'Never that!' cried one of the group. But we all know from experience of being a carer that with dementia that moment will certainly come. We just cannot believe it could apply to us, even though we have watched the older generation deny and deny the reality.

And then, second, the importance of cognitive competence as a measure of personhood. The very term 'dementia' means 'with loss of mind', and it is the case that a diagnosis of dementia will usually be made as a result of observing a range of defects in mental capacity, which can't be explained by other causes such as delirium, certain kinds of vitamin or thyroid deficiency, or other central

nervous system conditions like brain tumours, Parkinson's etc. There is no doubt that multiple cognitive deficits may occur, characterised by gradual onset and continuing decline: memory impairment (especially short term); disturbance in language; difficulty carrying out motor activities; failure to recognise familiar objects, people or landscapes; disturbed executive function, such as planning, organising, sequencing, abstracting. All these things gradually make it difficult and then impossible for a person to cope independently. There clearly are neurological changes, which are profound and not ultimately recoverable. However, does this reality in fact take away someone's personhood? If someone has lost key aspects of memory, let's say about relationships, does that mean those relationships are lost? I would say not. Each week I take my youngest grandson to visit my father. Dad can't remember Jesse's name, and enquires each time. He then can't recall that Jesse is a boy and not a girl. Somehow although I remind him of Jesse, the father of King David, he cannot grasp that this is not Jessie with an 'i' – quite a common girl's name when he was young. Dad can't remember who Jesse's father is, ie his own grandson Adam. But he is completely clear that Jesse is related to him and gives him great joy. Jesse brings his toys to share and chats away to his great-grandpa in the confident conviction that he is relating to a full person who loves him, and who is as likely as the next grown-up to take a keen interest in his Fireman Sam rescue helicopter. Personhood – even personality – can be recognised by the attentive, even under the most unpromising circumstances. I remember my mother's last hospital visit, after she broke her hip. She was really barely able to speak at all, even to make her needs known. Yet after she died, the nurses (who had never known her before) spoke to me about her gentle personality in terms that enabled me to understand that they had indeed met the same person that I knew.

It is quite hard to know how much of what a dementia sufferer displays through their behaviour is a result of the undoubted neurological changes that are taking place in the brain, and how much results from the social context and the construction we put on the sufferers' reactions to what they are experiencing. One of the common mantras we are offered in our busy lives is to cultivate the art of 'living in the present' rather than obsessing about the past or worrying about the future. This may be excellent advice for those with typical neurological function, but if you contemplate what it must be like to be living solely in the present – lacking all memory clues about where you are or who is controlling your movements, or what is likely to happen next – I think most of us could accept that this must be a very frightening place to be, a sort

of abyss of meaning, in which your brain will be desperately trying to make some sense of what you are experiencing. You will ransack your long-term memory for some explanation of what is going on, and this is why so often you will come up with scenarios from the past – often associated with responsibilities you feel you must have forgotten. Women often believe they need to meet children from school; my dad sometimes believes he has neglected work tasks; someone who was once a dairy farmer always needed specific reassurance at about 4pm in the afternoon that the cows had been milked.⁷ These people have not just 'lost their minds'; often they are deliberately employing all their efforts to do what the brain does naturally – tells itself narratives around the data that is available to it. They are seeking to exercise their adult responsibilities. How we describe dementia and its symptoms is crucial. It is often noted that a typical feature of the behaviour of sufferers is 'pacing' or 'wandering' – both words suggest a sort of vagueness or meaninglessness in the restless movement they engage in. But a better term might be 'searching', as someone who does this will frequently have a purposive approach, and somewhere, however currently inaccurate, to which they are trying to get. It is not uncommon for someone to become very frustrated when they are stopped from going out, because of this urge to seek some landscape they will recognise and that will therefore provide the meaning of which they feel the lack. In the first care home my dad was in, this need to go searching was a total headache, because he was living somewhere quite different from his home village, so he would never find the place he sought, and then he couldn't get back by himself. It was, in terms of an open residential home, a burdensome problem. Now he is in a secure dementia wing, should he want to go out someone walks with him, and soon he is ready to return. Now that he's settled he recognises the place he set out from, and interprets it as home. One of the most comforting things that was said to me by the manager of the MHA home when he arrived (with a history of irritable and occasionally aggressive behaviour when thwarted) was that what they do in a dementia wing is to interpret that behaviour as an attempt to communicate, and to work out first of all what was being said. These days he is regarded by staff as a 'perfect gentleman' who is generally the soul of politeness.

And so here we have some of the mystery of this progressive disease of the brain: what is neurology, and what is context or social construction? Is my dad an inevitable problem to be contained, or is he a person with particular difficulties to negotiate, who can be helped to find contentment? As Swinton points out, we should always offer 'the benefit of the doubt'.

One of the key people who challenged normal practice in dementia care, and proposed a 'person-centred' approach that is now applied in most good care homes (and that was pioneered in MHA), is Tom Kitwood. He pointed out that the solely neurological explanation of what is happening will not do when we consider the evidence.⁸

- There is a lack of continuity between the level of neurological damage and the manifestations of dementia. Sometimes people have displayed these and later have been found to have no more brain damage than others who have not displayed the symptoms.
- There is an issue of rapid decline. It is well documented that people can deteriorate very much faster than the neurology can account for, when they are taken into an unfamiliar context, whether that be a care home or hospital. I noticed that my mother, when taken into hospital, suddenly became incontinent within the space of an afternoon having waited for hours on a trolley. Many sufferers rapidly lose some cognitive functions or mobility when they move from their homes into care. If everything is based on inherent neurological decline, why does social change and uncertainty have this sort of impact?
- And then there is the issue of stabilisation or so-called 're-menting'. People can improve when treated in certain ways. My aunt was in a parlous state when she went for respite care, and she wasn't really thriving for a couple of months – we all thought she was on her way out. She wouldn't eat. But then it was her ninety-fifth birthday and 30 of her extended family including children came to her care home for tea. Suddenly she was into singing herself Happy Birthday, blowing out her candles and grabbing a sandwich in one hand and slice of cake in the other. And then she began to thrive again and lived another couple of years. She knew that her family knew where she was and she was dramatically 're-membered'.

So, the person-centred approach offers a real challenge to the perception that dementia destroys our essential personhood. He focuses on trying to understand sufferers by adopting as far as possible the perspective that currently makes sense to them. This involves knowing something about the past achievements and preferences of that person, so that any guesswork about what might be worrying or preoccupying them may have a greater chance of accuracy. It involves assuming that old interests may be reawakened by particular kinds of activity session or conversation. We attempt to understand

what gestures or frustrations may be trying to communicate. People who are important to that person are encouraged to visit whenever it suits them, so that these crucial guy ropes of a sufferer's identity may be kept strong.

Sometimes you hear people say that there is no point in visiting people with dementia because 'They don't remember who I am any more' or 'She forgets my visit instantly, so what's the point?' But this view is surely mistaken. After all, we, the visitors, *do* remember both the person and the visit, and their personhood is held securely within the relationship with them that we continue to maintain – a relationship that is special and has deep roots, and is not the same as the connection that even the kindest carer can develop. Personhood is not confined solely to a person's individual autonomy; it exists between us, in relationships of love and respect. Staff observe that the pleasure of a visit in terms of mood can last much longer than the memory of the event; and over time, someone who is regularly visited often displays improved mental well-being. One of the very moving experiences I have with my dad is that now he is settled and well cared for, and has come to understand that he needs to be cared for, he has been able to let go of some of his anxieties, which he couldn't do while he had the responsibility to look after himself. I always knew he loved me, but now he says this much more than in the past, and he likes to sit with me and hold my hand; he has become quite touchy-feely. Some of his habitual carapace of worry has been shed. Nobody suggested to me that dementia, well cared for, could bring actual benefits. And yet I would say that this relaxation on his part has an important spiritual dimension, which is about the last part of his journey on this earth.

An awareness of the spiritual dimension, which of course is well recognised by MHA, makes a significant contribution to the person-centred approach. As Swinton points out, it is not enough to say that other people preserve the personhood of the dementia sufferer; for what are we to say about those sufferers who do not have loved ones who maintain their identity for them? We have to go further than this and affirm that for all of us, whether we remember ourselves or not, our very existence depends on being remembered by God, being held in God's memory.⁹ This reality is painfully clear in the case of the dementia sufferer. Margaret Hutchison recounts the case study of a woman who paced the corridors of her nursing home repeating endlessly just one word: 'God, God, God.' The staff didn't know what was causing her distress or how to help. Then one nurse had an inspiration, and enquired, 'Are you afraid that you will forget God?' 'Yes, Yes!' she replied emphatically. So then the nurse said, 'You know that even if you forget God, he will not forget you. He has

promised that.' Immediately the woman became calmer, and she ceased this distressed behaviour.¹⁰

We should not underestimate the spiritual pain that dementia sufferers can feel, especially when they have been devout, and they feel that their spiritual practices are slipping away from them. There is a remarkable little book written by Robert Davis and his wife, dating back to the late 1980s, *My Journey into Alzheimer's Disease*. Davis, an evangelical pastor of a huge and successful church in the USA, was struck very suddenly with early onset Alzheimer's, which had a big impact on his whole experience of faith. He made the effort, before his symptoms became too severe, of writing down what this felt like from the inside, and this book remains one of the most significant testimonies from a dementia sufferer about spirituality. Not everyone will experience the same things, of course. But Davis found an immediate impact on how he experienced his faith. Having been able in the past, when he prayed, to recall many inspiring visual memories for which he was thankful, he entirely lost this capacity all at once. Instead, he frequently felt the descent of a fog or a darkness which filled him with horror; he felt gripped by paranoia instead of the easy willingness to trust in the Lord, which he had rested in before. And here he gives us some additional insight about the impulse towards 'pacing' that I spoke of earlier. He affirms that vigorous exercise really helped dispel this fog, so he used an exercise bike, as well as asking others to gently point out to him when his paranoia was taking over. It is also interesting to see which parts of Christian practice remained helpful to him, and which things fell away. Having been a passionate user of modern translations of Scripture, and modern church music, these things became no longer helpful. The old translations were better, especially the Psalms and the sayings of Jesus. And the only kinds of music that remained important were the old gospel or traditional hymns he grew up with. But these did still carry important emotional resonance and comfort.¹¹

There was a lovely article by Nicci Gerrard in the *Observer on Sunday* about a new parliamentary report on dementia and the arts, and she tells this story:

Sitting in a church in Essex on a Sunday in June, I look across at my friend's mother. She is in her 90s and has dementia. There are days when she is wretched, chaotic and scared, but each Sunday she is soothed and even enraptured by singing the hymns that she sang when she was a girl. The music has worn grooves in her memory and while she may not be able to speak in full sentences any more, she can sing 'Abide with Me' in a true voice and her face, lifted up, looks

young, eager, washed clean of anxiety. My friend thinks that at these moments her mother's brain comes together, 'like a flower reviving when it's being soaked in water.' People with dementia, she says, need to be drenched in art.¹²

Now, I'm sure this woman's daughter is not wrong about the power of art and music. But this story is clearly also about her mother's spiritual life, her walk with God, which she is free to celebrate in this familiar hymn.

I have certainly witnessed something like this in the MHA care home. They have a special large-print hymn book with 100 favourites in, and I was delighted to see, when Dad started at the Meadow, that they hold substantial 'proper' services and include plenty of old hymns. My dad sings out lustily, and so do many of the residents, even if they can no longer read, because the words, tunes and no doubt the feelings associated with them are reawakened in this context. The chaplain uses the King James Version of the Bible, and she offers proper sermons, brief though they may be. There is clarity but no patronising of this congregation. They are addressed as full grown-up people with needs, regrets and longings such as we all have. They are expected to need confession as well as affirmation. They do not need simple words or childish phrases: they need old words which their long-term memories and their years of religious practice have invested with personal meaning. Music seems to address and involve multiple parts of the brain, and hymns of course carry the familiar words too. My dad, who had come from a much more typical care home where a very short communion service was offered, minus any hymns, only once a month, evidently fell on this twice-weekly worship as balm in Gilead. He had re-entered a world where his sacred fire was being guarded and nurtured.

But this is not true for many sufferers of dementia, and I think it's a huge issue for the Church as a whole, not just those of us who have immediate loved ones for whom we have responsibility. I think the Church's ministry to this community of people is inclined to be patchy and not well thought through. It's so easy for gradually declining members of congregations just to fade out of sight and then perhaps be moved away and beyond their church's radar, even if they have devoted a lifetime of service there. Let's think about the different forgotten populations:

- Churchgoers who become housebound, who need help to get to church or to manage the service when they are there.
- Churchgoers who have to move away to be nearer relatives or into

residential care, which may be a good distance away so that visiting becomes impossible.

- Churchgoers who move into the area for the same reasons, who used to have strong church connections elsewhere, but need real help to be welcomed into a new context and get to a new church. Their relatives may or may not know how to support their particular spiritual needs.
- Churchgoers and sympathisers who are now housebound in residential care locally to us and who would really appreciate Christian visiting and regular worship, especially in care homes that have no chaplain.
- In the wider community, local dementia sufferers and their carers who would come to weekday activity sessions and socials – and maybe gentle worship – if these were dementia friendly.

Why should we make these communities a priority in ministry? I'm sorry to say that I have heard ministers speak disparagingly about how they don't want their own ministry to be about 'palliative care', and take it as read that targeting the young is much more important for the future of the Church. Well, if we only consider these things in a self-interested way, let's remember that all of us are being touched by dementia these days: our friends, partners, parents, grandparents, great-grandparents. Just as no one ever forgets how they have been treated by the Church around the death and funeral of someone they love, so they never forget how the Church embraces or neglects the spiritual needs of their loved ones with dementia. When, for reasons of what she could afford and where a care home place was available, my aunt had to move beyond visiting distance from her usual church, I discovered that the village's parish church, which had a connection to the home, was in an interregnum. A local Methodist minister was covering, so I rang him and explained my aunt's move and her lifelong, inspiring Christian faith, and asked him to make a visit. He refused. No doubt he was stretched to breaking point, but so was I, and so was my aunt. At the same time I have a powerful, very different memory about my mother. My dad cared for her and used to take her with him to all the activities they used to do together, including choral society. One day they were singing a Mass in the local Catholic church, and the Eucharist was taking place. The choir were in the gallery, and I attended in the body of the church to look after my mum. Non-Catholics were not expected to go up for communion, but Mum was past making distinctions, and went forward in a determined way. The priest was fully aware that she was Anglican, and I had no idea what he would do. She beamed at him. 'May I?' she enquired. He beamed at her: 'You

may', and gave her the host. I still weep when I think of how effortlessly and graciously that man broke his Church's rules in the interests of respecting the personhood of my mum, who had become one of God's little ones before whom we must not place a stumbling block.

Of course, the Church should minister to dementia sufferers for their own sakes, because they need us and because we have, in the name of God and of the wider Church, made promises to all of the baptised that we ought to keep. Where they can no longer guard their own holy fire, we should seek them out and help to guard it for them. We should do this because they are held in the memory of God even when their own memories have partly or wholly failed, and because it is for us to act in God's name and to show forth that steadfast love which is what God requires of us. Going back to Charles Wesley's hymn, I think one of the most significant words in it is that word 'repeat' – 'my acts of faith and love *repeat*'. Such an ordinary little word, but potentially covering so many years of devotion. Love in this context is frequently a matter of repeating what needs doing, over and over. Nothing as dramatic as a burnt offering; just faithful, loving repetition.

Dementia is very unsettling, and presents spiritual challenges for both sufferers and those who accompany and witness it. It upends our expectations about relationships and it invites us creatively to break many social rules. It makes us question the nature of human autonomy and what we mean by dignity. It denies us the normal logical rules by which a conversation proceeds, and invites us to enter a reality that is not the reality that we, the caretakers, recognise as accurate here and now. It asks of us that we strip down our ways of relating to people so that we prioritise the communication of love and touch, surrendering quite a lot of the knowledge, reason and status that is normally negotiated between adults. It takes us to a place where babies and toddlers instinctively show us the way to connect warmly and directly with those we love. It asks us to step outside of the malignant social attitudes that surround our thinking about this condition. It invites us to prioritise people who are more vulnerable than any we will ever come across, and who are never, in this life, going to get better. It asks us not to be afraid. It asks us to keep faith. It asks us to become like God.

O Thou who camest from above
The pure celestial fire to impart,
Kindle a flame of sacred love
On the mean altar of my heart.

There let it for thy glory burn
With inextinguishable blaze,
And trembling to its source return
In humble prayer and fervent praise.

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
To work and speak and think for thee;
Still let me guard the holy fire,
And still stir up thy gift in me.

Ready for all thy perfect will,
My acts of faith and love repeat,
Till death thy endless mercies seal,
And make the sacrifice complete.¹³

Notes

1. Christine de Luca, *Dat Trickster Sun*, Edinburgh: Mariscat Press, 2014, p. 29. Used with permission.
2. Readers are directed to an earlier article in *Holiness* by Christopher Collins, 'Reimagining dementia: seeings ourselves more fully in the dementia-diagnosed', *Holiness* 3(1) (2017), pp. 57–69.
3. This concept, developed by Tom Kitwood and Steven Sabat, is discussed extensively in John Swinton, *Dementia: Living in the Memories of God*, London: SCM Press, 2012, especially pp. 88–91 and 122–134.
4. Swinton, *Dementia*, p. 281.
5. 'Food for Thought – on Caring', *World Federation of Occupational Therapists Bulletin* (1985), quoted in Eileen Shamy, *More than Body, Brain and Breath: A Guide to the Spiritual Dimension of Care for People with Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia*, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2003, p. 34.
6. Erik Eckholm, 'Robertson Stirs Passions with Suggestion to Divorce an Alzheimer's Patient', *The New York Times*. Access at: www.nytimes.com/2011/09/17/us/pat-robertson-remarks-on-alzheimers-stir-passions.html, quoted in Swinton, *Dementia*, pp. 117–118.
7. Shamy, *More than Body, Brain and Breath*, p. 136.
8. The following points are taken from Swinton's summary of the work of Tom Kitwood, in Swinton, *Dementia*, pp. 72–74.
9. Swinton, *Dementia*, p. 149.
10. Margaret G. Hutchison, 'Unity and Diversity in Spiritual Care', paper presented at the Sydney University Nursing Society Conference in NSW, September 1997. Access at: http://members.tripod.com/marg_hutchison/nurse-4.html. Quoted in Swinton, *Dementia*, p. 196.

11. Robert and Betty Davis, *My Journey into Alzheimer's Disease*, Amersham: Scripture Press, 1993, pp. 133–135.
12. Nicci Gerrard, 'Art Can Be a Powerful Medicine against Dementia', *Observer on Sunday*, 16 July 2017.
13. Charles Wesley.

Update from the author

At the time of editing, in October 2018, Janet's father Frank is still living contentedly in The Meadow, and has recently been delighted to meet his latest baby great-grandchild. He cannot retain her name, but spontaneously sings to her, 'Happy birthday, dear darling', making her smile.



Echoes of acedia: introverts and perfectionists in the Church

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This article continues the series on acedia, which began with the history and development of the term in the last issue of Holiness. Two areas are considered in this article: first, introversion, and second, perfectionism. In both cases, relevant psychological literature is reviewed to develop the understanding of the concept. The impact this can have on leadership and ministry in the life of the Church is then considered, along with some reflective suggestions for embracing the healthy aspects of introversion and perfectionism, while avoiding the unhealthy aspects, which lead to depletion of personal, spiritual and pastoral resilience.

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Introverts in the Church

Introvert

a shy, reticent person.

in psychology, a person predominantly concerned with their own thoughts and feeling rather than with external things.

origins: mid-seventeenth century (as verb in the general sense 'turn one's thoughts inward (in spiritual contemplation)'); from modern Latin *introvere* to turn. Its use as a term in psychology dates from the twentieth century.¹

Henry David Thoreau noted perceptively that 'What a man thinks of himself, that it is which determines, or rather indicates his fate.'² As we have seen, acedia is a multifaceted complex, involving within the term theological, spiritual, geographical and psychological components. The 'acedia complex', as we might term it, could be enlisted as a paradigm for all that depletes clergy in terms of their spiritual well-being and their ability to work effectively as pastors and Christian leaders. One echo of acedia that impacts clergy in the twenty-first century relates to the psychological condition commonly known as 'introversion'.

In her remarkable book *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Won't Stop Talking*, Susan Cain explores the challenges that introverts face in society today, personally, socially and corporately. She perceptively and helpfully notes that 'personality' is as powerful a shaping force in our lives and outlook as perhaps gender and race. She writes:

Our lives are shaped as profoundly by personality as by gender or race. And the single most important aspect of personality – 'the north and south of temperament' – is where we fall on the introvert-extrovert spectrum. Our place on this continuum influences our choices of friends and mates, and how we make conversation, resolve differences, and how we show love. It affects the careers we choose and whether or not we succeed in them.³

Reading Cain's words one can see immediately that if Cain's premise is even partially correct, being an introvert will have significant effects on modern clergy and their ability to maintain resilience and to be effective in pastoral ministry.

In recent years, there has been significant and exhaustive research into extroversion and introversion within the academic discipline of personality psychology. There has also been much work done on issues relating to introversion, Christian spirituality and ministry, as we will see later.

Introverts in an extrovert society

The reason introversion is an important subject to consider is because we live in a society, and perhaps a church, that is dominated by what Cain calls the 'extrovert ideal'. This is the omnipresent belief that the ideal self is gregarious, alpha and comfortable in the spotlight. 'The archetypal extrovert', Cain notes, 'prefers action to contemplation, risk-taking to heed-taking, and certainty to doubt. He/she favours quick decisions even at the risk of being wrong.' Cain considers introversion, alongside its cousins, sensitivity, seriousness and shyness, to be considered 'second-class personality traits, somewhere between a disappointment and a pathology'.⁴

Introverts do not fit in well with society's dominating models and expectations. According to Cain, they are to be compared to women living in a man's world. Introverts tend to be discounted because of a trait that goes to the core of who they are. As seen in media models and to some extent in popular literature, Western society apparently finds extroversion an extremely appealing personality trait/style.

We should also note that a majority of teachers believe that the ideal student is extrovert. Educators consider that pupil-led learning, discussion and explorative group work are the best models for learning. This approach holds true at both secondary- and at university-level education. When the 'extrovert ideal' drives pedagogy, those who are more introverted can find it extremely difficult to engage with the learning process. This general societal emphasis on the extrovert ideal and bias against 'quiet' causes introverts personal and social discomfort, sometimes in the extreme. Cain notes that being prodded to come out of one's introvert self can cause psychic pain. However, it has become an oppressive standard to which most of us feel we must conform. Interestingly, conformity to this 'extrovert ideal' may well have infiltrated the Church's consciousness in terms of ideal personality types for ministerial work. We shall return to this later.

It has been noted that a great deal of unthinking, or perhaps culturally intuitive, preference is given to those who exhibit an extrovert personality type. For example, society apparently considers extroverts, those who are talkative, to

be more intelligent, better looking, more interesting and more desirable as friends. Apparently, velocity of speech counts as well as volume. Research has shown that in a group setting the voluble are considered smarter than the reticent, and that the group is often swayed by the person who dominates the conversation. Again, this has significant implications for clergy engaged in parish ministry.

The 'extrovert ideal' is viewed positively by society, as we have noted. It is logical then that introversion is not viewed in the same positive light. The word 'introvert' suffers under the burden of being a stigma. The psychologist Laurie Helgoe notes that introverts describe their own physical appearance in vivid language, but when asked to describe generic introverts they drew a bland and distasteful picture ('ungainly', 'neutral colours', 'skin problems').⁵

The terms extrovert and introvert stem from the work of Carl Jung in 1921. In his ground-breaking book *Psychological Types*, Jung popularised the terms *introvert* and *extrovert* as the building blocks of personality. Jung perceptively recognised that introverts are drawn to the inner world of thought and feeling, and extroverts to the external life of people and activities. However, we should be aware that there is no all-purpose definition of introversion or extroversion; these are not unitary categories. In the online publication *Psychology Today*, Todd Kashdan notes:

It is easy to talk about extroverts and introverts as if there is a clear divide between the two groups of people. It is easy to take a test and pigeonhole ourselves as one or the other. In reality, we ignore the power of the situation. When we respond in a similar way to the same situation at different times, we can think of this situation as a trigger for how we behave. In this case, we can view situations as part of our personality.⁶

Understanding introversion

The so called 'Big Five School' of personal psychology (ie, academics who contend that human personality can be boiled down to *five primary traits*) defines introversion not in terms of a rich inner life but as a lack of qualities such as assertiveness and sociability. This appears to be an unnecessarily negative approach to introversion, describing what it is not rather than positively noting the beneficial aspects of being an introvert. However, modern psychologists do agree on the fact that introverts tend to need less external stimulus to 'enjoy life'

than extroverts. Todd Kashdan notes: 'At its core, introversion is about deriving less reward from being the center of social attention.'⁷

The introvert may feel drained (emotionally depleted) by social interaction. The extrovert personality, on the other hand, needs much more external stimulus for an activity or pursuit to be considered worth engaging in. Again, Kashdan notes that the extrovert loves social attention: 'It energizes them, it brings out their best qualities, and it bolsters their stamina, extemporaneous thinking, and productivity.' Extroverts tend to be stimulated by high-octane, risk-taking activities. More cerebral pursuits emotionally replenish introverts. Extroverts tend to tackle tasks quickly and can make fast (rash?) decisions; they can multi-task and enjoy new challenges personally, socially and in terms of career. On the other hand, introverts tend to work more slowly and deliberately. They focus on one task at a time and can have pronounced levels of prolonged concentration.

In a parallel idea to what has been stated above, Hans Eysenck described extroversion–introversion as the degree to which a person is outgoing and interactive with other people.⁸ These behavioral differences are presumed to be the result of underlying differences in brain physiology. Extroverts seek excitement and social activity in an effort to heighten their arousal level, whereas introverts tend to avoid social situations in an effort to keep such arousal to a minimum. Eysenck designated extroversion as one of three major traits in his PEN model of personality, which also includes psychoticism and neuroticism.

Building upon the work of Jung, the Myers-Briggs approach to personality testing states that the first pair of psychological preferences is extroversion and introversion. They have a list of characteristics for each personality type, with which a client can compare themselves.

Extroversion (E)

I like getting my energy from active involvement in events and having a lot of different activities. I'm excited when I'm around people and I like to energise other people. I like moving into action and making things happen. I generally feel at home in the world. I often understand a problem better when I can talk out loud about it and hear what others have to say.

The following statements generally apply to me:

- I am seen as 'outgoing' or as a 'people person'.
- I feel comfortable in groups and like working in them.
- I have a wide range of friends and know lots of people.
- I sometimes jump too quickly into an activity and don't allow enough time to think it over.
- Before I start a project, I sometimes forget to stop and get clear on what I want to do and why.

Introversion (I)

I like getting my energy from dealing with the ideas, pictures, memories, and reactions that are inside my head, in my inner world. I often prefer doing things alone or with one or two people I feel comfortable with. I take time to reflect so that I have a clear idea of what I'll be doing when I decide to act. Ideas are almost solid things for me. Sometimes I like the idea of something better than the real thing.

The following statements generally apply to me:

- I am seen as 'reflective' or 'reserved'.
- I feel comfortable being alone and like things I can do on my own.
- I prefer to know just a few people well.
- I sometimes spend too much time reflecting and don't move into action quickly enough.
- I sometimes forget to check with the outside world to see if my ideas really fit the experience.⁹

We should note at this point that introversion is not necessarily related to shyness. Louis Schmidt of McMaster University, who studies the biological underpinnings of personality, especially shyness, states: 'Though in popular media they're (i.e. introversion and shyness) often viewed as the same, we know in the scientific community that conceptually or empirically they are unrelated.'¹⁰

A question to raise at this point is: are we born extroverts or introverts (nature), or do we become introverts or extroverts via socialisation (nurture)? Are we determined biologically to be either one personality type or the other, or is there space for free will and autonomous development? Jerome Kagan's insightful work on the *amygdala responses* is relevant at this point.¹¹ The amygdala is thought to be the emotional centre of the brain and serves as the brain's emotional switchboard. Kagan's work with children demonstrated that those with an excitable amygdala tend to be 'high responders' to external stimulus, and tend to grow up to be more introverted. He also noted that those children with a less excitable amygdala tended to be 'low responders' to external stimuli and need more external stimulation for them to become excited and fully engaged. These children tended to grow up with extrovert personality traits.

Eysenck also thought that the basis of differing responses to stimulation observed in extroverts and introverts was due to the structure of the individual's brain – in a brain structure called the *Ascending Reticular Activating System* (ARAS). Eysenck posited that the ARAS functioned differently in introverts and extroverts: introverts have wide-open information channels, causing them to be flooded with information and over-aroused, while introverts have tighter channels making them prone to under-arousal.¹² Cain states:

Over-arousal doesn't produce anxiety so much as the sense that you can't think straight – that you've had enough and want to go home now. Under arousal is something like cabin-fever. Not enough is happening: you feel itchy, restless, and sluggish, like you need to get out of the house already.¹³

Neurological science does indeed point to the shape and function of the brain as having a significant impact on whether we are extroverts or introverts. It is known that the amount of dopamine being produced in the brain has a significant impact on introversion and extroversion. Also, genetic influences play their part: for example, the SERT gene, which is linked to the neurotransmitter serotonin and affects the transport of the serotonin. Biology and genetics do play a fundamental role in forming our personality types, but not necessarily our temperaments. The formation of our temperaments tends to have been in the realm of how we were raised, how we were treated, and how we were shown love and affection. The personality and expectations of our parents are also a significant factor.

As we have previously noted, many find that they do not fit neatly into either category; most of us tend to be to some extent 'ambivert'. Carl Jung stated that 'There is no such thing as a pure extrovert or a pure introvert. Such a man would be in a lunatic asylum.' Whether or not we are genetically biased towards either extroversion or introversion there is something that the author Susan Cain thinks we should understand in all this:

Once we understand introversion and extroversion as preferences for certain levels of stimulation (whether we are 'high reactors' or 'low reactors' to external stimulus), then we can begin consciously trying to situate ourselves in environments favourable to our personality – neither overstimulating nor under stimulating, neither boring nor anxiety-making. We can organise our lives in terms of what personality psychologists call 'optimal levels of arousal' and what I call 'sweet spots' and by doing so feel more energetic and alive than before.¹⁴

Cain poses what at first seems a slightly facile question, but one that has serious implications for Christians in general and serving clergy in particular: In 'Does God love introverts? An Evangelical Dilemma?' Francis notes that the issue of personality types and clergy needs addressing without delay. He writes, 'Further work, further research is urgent.'¹⁵

Introverts in the Church

This question has been picked up and addressed by the American Presbyterian Adam McHugh in his book *Introverts in the Church: Finding our Place in an Extroverted Culture*.¹⁶ It is to the subject addressed in McHugh's book that we now turn. We will attempt to show that introversion is an echo of the ancient 'depletion agent' acedia, in that both negatively impact the personal and spiritual well-being and resilience of modern clergy in the performance of their ministerial task.

Recent research has shown that close to 50 per cent of the population could be classified as introverts, an increase from earlier studies that indicated a figure nearer 25 per cent.¹⁷ If this is the case, and there are different views on this, it means that it is likely that 50 per cent of church congregations have introvert personality traits. Following on from this, and recognising that there are psychological variables within the constituency of Christians who enter full-time ministry, we can safely say that introverts are well represented among

modern clergy. Therefore, we need to take an in-depth look at the material that McHugh presents on introverts in the Church.

The origins of the book *Introverts in the Church* lie in a time when McHugh was considering resigning from ordination training because he was under the strong impression that 'ordained ministry required social skills ... and being in social situations which drained and exhausted him'. He realised that the issue was not vocational per se, but primarily about personality and temperament. He writes: 'Even before I began pastoral ministry, I was convinced that my personality (Introvert) excluded me from it. There was no room in ministry for someone of my disposition – or so I thought.' McHugh continues:

In my mind at the time, ideal pastors were gregarious, able to move through crowds effortlessly, able to quickly turn strangers into friends. They could navigate diverse social circles and chat about a number of topics. They thrived in the presence of people and were energised by conversation and social interaction ... they were charismatic and magnetic, capable of drawing people to themselves by the virtue of their likeability and able to persuade people to follow them based on charm alone. I, by contrast, relished times of solitude, reflection, and personal study. Even though I enjoyed spending time with people I liked, I looked forward to moments of privacy. I found crowds draining. I could stand up in front of a large congregation and preach without nervousness, but I often stumbled through the greeting time afterward because my energy reserves were dry.¹⁸

To combat this sense of alienation and lack of 'ecclesiastical fit', McHugh thought that he should attempt to squeeze himself into the extrovert model of church leadership instead of becoming 'the kind of leader that God had designed him to be'. McHugh is surely representative of many introverted clergy who find that the ethos of the Church is extrovert. Like McHugh, they find particularly that evangelical churches are difficult places for introverts to thrive for both theological and cultural reasons.

McHugh discovered that the North American 'extrovert ideal' had infiltrated the Church and the image and model of church leadership. He notes that there are historical reasons for this. The roots of the extroverted church leadership model go back to the Great Awakening in the USA during the eighteenth century. George Whitefield, whose preaching made a huge impact on both

sides of the Atlantic at that time, had a pronounced extrovert style of preaching to the masses. Church historian Mark Noll comments on Whitefield's extrovert homiletic style: 'In the pulpit he seemed to exude energy; his speech was to the highest degree dramatic; he offered breath-taking impersonations of biblical characters and needy sinners; he fired his listener's imagination; he wept profusely, often and with stunning effect.'¹⁹ McHugh also cites the emotionalism of the Camp Meetings held during the Second Great Awakening in America. The speakers at these meetings emphasised that a conversion had to be sudden and dramatic (emotional) to be truly authentic.

According to McHugh, evangelical churches today still put a great emphasis on the more extrovert and public expressions of faith, piety and passion and particularly speaking about faith. Modern evangelical churches seem to have fallen foul of E. M. Forster's character Mrs Moore's jibe, 'poor little talkative Christianity' in *A Passage to India*. Extroversion can lead to verbosity and this is something with which not all are comfortable. Henri Nouwen, for example, is often concerned that our 'wordiness' might be a mask for a spiritual void.

Extrovert Christianity also appears to evidence a 'performance-based' approach to faith. Perhaps we get an understanding of the origin of this approach from the work of the German sociologist Max Weber and his book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904–05). The *Encyclopedia Britannica* explains Protestant ethic, in sociological theory, as the value attached to hard work, thrift, and efficiency in one's worldly calling. These things, especially in the Calvinist view, were deemed signs of an individual's election, or eternal salvation.²⁰ Extrovert Christianity seems to see 'busyness' as next to godliness. For McHugh, an extrovert Christian is a very active Christian in the terms of 'doing'. Eugene Peterson candidly comments that American Christianity is typified by 'its messianically pretentious energy'.²¹

In a church culture that is built upon an extrovert expression of faith, it is easy to see how introverts might feel uncomfortable and excluded. This may be especially true when it comes to church leadership and pastoral ministry. How do introvert clergy fit into an extrovert Church? How will introvert ministerial candidates fair in terms of success at selection committees or conferences? How will introvert clergy fair in terms of being invited to a church to take up a new ministerial role? McHugh notes that our 'action-orientated culture' does not always value people who are (quiet?) thoughtful and reflective. Perhaps the extroverted church is in danger of excluding introverted clergy who may be able to take a community to its reflective and meditative centre. McHugh is

insightful when he writes that, 'The truly healthy church is a combination of introverted and extroverted qualities that fluidly move together.'²²

Contemplative leaders

J. I. Packer notes that 'The healthy Christian is not necessarily the extrovert, ebullient Christian'.²³ Considering such statements, more thought must be given to ecclesiastical space for a more 'quiet', reflective and even apophatic approach to spirituality. Thought must surely now be given to a recalibration of our understanding of spiritual leadership. McHugh is convinced that the best way to achieve the extrovert/introvert balance within our Christian communities is by calling different kinds of leaders. The introvert pastor will naturally bring a different spirituality to that of the extroverted clergyperson. Introverts, according to McHugh, bring much-needed balance to a leadership team. McHugh suggests that churches work their way through the following questions when they are looking to appoint new pastoral staff or augment an existing clergy team:

1. What are our measures for gauging leadership potential (considering extrovert and introvert expressions of leadership potential)?
2. How do we identify and select our leader's potential (considering extrovert and introvert expressions of leadership potential)?
3. Is our evaluative lens extroverted?
4. Do we exclusively look for charismatic, gregarious pastors?
5. How important is it that our leaders are skilled at listening as well as talking?
6. In selecting lay leaders do we elevate those who attend the most activities and are most popular?
7. Are we open to different kinds of leaders, people who are thoughtful and contemplative and who lead by example?²⁴

I would add a couple of additional questions to this list:

8. Are we factoring personality traits into our selection and training for ministry in the Methodist Church in Great Britain, and elsewhere?
9. Are we ensuring that there is a policy and a practical structure that sensitively supports differing personality types in their ministry?

Ian Cowley brings us to a well-balanced conclusion:

Finding the balance between engagement and disengagement will be different for each of us. Some of us are extroverts who gain energy from being with people, while others are introverts

who need time and space on their own to renew their energy and their enthusiasm for being engaged with people and their needs. There must be some disengagement for each of us if we are to have time for prayer, knowing God and listening to Him. In our contemporary culture the overwhelming pressure is to be doing too much, to be overly engaged in doing and not sufficiently invested in being.²⁵

Perfectionists in the Church

Perfectionism

a refusal to accept any standard short of perfection.

in philosophy, a doctrine holding that perfection is attainable, especially the theory that human moral or spiritual perfection should be or has been attained.

Another echo of the ancient 'acedia complex' is what writers on the subject call 'bad perfectionism', the belief that 'unless everything is absolutely right ... it is absolutely wrong'. As we shall see, this 'bad' brand of perfectionism has a detrimental effect on the personal well-being of clergy; it diminishes and depletes their reservoir of resilience and it may well lead to burnout, breakdown or depression. If unchecked, perfectionism can cause a clergyperson to become a victim of *akrasia*, the inability to make decisions (*ataraxia* being the preferred condition, one of 'tranquillity'). Perfectionism can lead to ministerial paralysis and ineffectiveness.

Understanding perfectionism

We now will examine the origins and the consequences of perfectionism. One of our guides, with others, will be the psychiatrist Richard Winter, who has written extensively about perfectionism among Christians and Christian leaders (see his *Perfecting Ourselves to Death*²⁶).

The English word 'perfect' derives from the Latin *perficere*, which means 'to make thorough or complete'. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (fourth edition) states that the word 'perfect' means 'complete in all respects; without defect or omission; flawless; in condition of complete excellence; faultless; completely correct or accurate; exact; precise'. The Greek word translated 'perfect' is *telos*, which means end or purpose.

The concept of *telos* is significant in the writing of the fourth-century BCE Greek philosopher Aristotle. Aristotle considered that a thing or a person is 'good' if it achieves the purpose (*telos*) for which it was designed. For example, a good human is one who reaches full physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual maturity – that person has reached their *telos* or perfection. Aristotle believed that by using the *Golden Mean* a balanced and virtuous (*aretaic*) life between the vices of deficiency and excess could be achieved (a perfect life in the sense of *telos*). He also considered that by using *phronesis* (practical wisdom), humans could learn to flourish, achieve *eudaimonia*, a disposition of 'well-being' or 'flourishing'.

Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), Dr Angelicus as he was known, while teaching at the University of Paris and accessing Aristotelian material via Muslim scholars, took the Aristotelian philosophy of *telos* and *eudaimonia* and applied it to Christian theology. Aquinas introduced the element of theological rationality and Christian-based concepts of purpose. The major focus of *telos* (purpose/end/perfection) for Aquinas was to focus on the worship of God.

The issue that now confronts twenty-first-century secular societies is how, without the Aristotelian and Thomist Christian structure of *telos* (purpose/perfection) or any other religious framework for that matter, we know what the 'end' or perfection is towards which we are working. In a society that has disengaged from major metanarratives, the pursuit of perfection becomes one of individual customisation. In a world that rejects any hint of absolute guidelines (secular relativism) it is left to the individual to decide what perfection is and how it will be achieved. We then become vulnerable to what Winter calls 'the seductive sirens of perfectionism'. These sirens can come in the form of media advertising. These media adverts highlight the inadequacy and imperfections in our lives. In the individualised pursuit of this virtual perfection our society has turned to technology in the hope of securing twentieth-century *telos*. This is highlighted in the film *Gattaca* (1997, directed by Andrew Nicol), where embryos are screened for height, sex, IQ and vulnerability to disease; which is in point of fact the ongoing search for the infamous 'designer (perfect) offspring'.

Over the past decade and a half there has been a great interest in 'perfectionism' in professional psychological literature. It was not until 1930 that the word 'perfectionist' was coined. Winter points out that it was then commonly accepted as describing a person who is only satisfied by the highest standards. More recently research has homed in on whether all perfectionism

is harmful and destructive or whether some forms of it can be helpful and constructive. Some psychologists have claimed that there is a normal, healthy adaptive form of perfectionism – the pursuit of high standards and excellence – that can be distinguished from neurotic, unhealthy, maladaptive perfectionism. Other researchers state that perfection is impossible and therefore attempting to reach it is obviously unhealthy.

The spectrum of perfectionism

Flett and Hewitt put forward a positive view of perfectionism – it is the healthy pursuit of excellence.²⁷ They define perfectionism as ‘the striving for flawlessness’. They note that extreme perfectionists are people who want to be perfect in all aspects of their lives. Simply put, it’s the *tendency* to set extremely high standards; the use of the term *tendency* implies for Flett and Hewitt the possibility of being on some part of a perfectionist continuum, that is, there are degrees of perfectionism. The important point here in terms of emotional, social, mental and spiritual well-being is how *intensely* we strive to reach those standards that we classify as constituting excellence or perfection, and how we respond when we do not come up to expected standards. How much we strive (are we obsessional?) and how much we ‘crash’ emotionally when we ‘fail’ are indicators as to whether we are adaptive in our perfectionism or maladaptive; whether it is a healthy or unhealthy form of perfectionism. Winter notes: ‘The size of the discrepancy between what is possible and what is pursued is a critical factor that makes all the difference between health and sickness – so also is the intensity with which one attempts to overcome the discrepancy.’²⁸

There is evidence that high levels of perfectionism are associated with vulnerability to mental health problems, relational and social problems, and career problems. In terms of seeing perfectionism as a spectrum, neurotic perfectionism is at one end of the continuum and non-perfectionism is at the other, and somewhere in the middle (like Aristotle’s *Golden Mean*) we find normal, healthy perfectionism. Healthy perfectionism, for our purposes here, is characterised by high standards, high levels of organisation and striving for excellence. Healthy perfectionists:

- are usually full of energy and enthusiasm
- have positive self-image
- rarely procrastinate over decisions
- are realistic about strengths and weaknesses

- are driven more by positive motivation to achieve than by negative fear of failure.

Psychologist Don Hamachek notes:

Normal perfectionists ... are those who derive a very real sense of pleasure from the labours of painstaking effort and feel free to be less precise as the situation permits ... Normal perfectionists tend to enhance their self-esteem, rejoice in their skills, and appreciate a job well done.²⁹

However, perfectionism is often seen as a two-edged sword. A seminar arranged by the University of Southampton was described in this way:

Perfectionism is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, perfectionism motivates people to give their best. On the other, perfectionism makes people despair and doubt themselves. Moreover, perfectionism is associated with various psychological problems such as stress, anxiety, and depression. Perfectionism, however, is a complex characteristic. There are various forms of perfectionism, and some are more harmful than others. In particular, it is important to differentiate perfectionistic strivings (striving for perfection) from perfectionistic concerns (concern over mistakes).³⁰

In contrast to healthy perfectionists, neurotic, unhealthy perfectionists set unrealistically high standards. Their sense of self-worth depends almost entirely on performance and production according to the goals they have set themselves. They are continuously self-critical; they find mistakes confirm their feelings of uselessness and they often doubt that they can do anything right. Whatever they do, it is never quite good enough.

This type of unhealthy perfectionism can be seen in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Scholars note that *A Portrait* acts as a transitional stage between the 'realism' of Joyce's *Dubliners* and the more esoteric symbolism of *Ulysses*. There is little doubt that *Portrait* is a thinly veiled autobiography of Joyce's early life. Stephen, the focus of the novel, is never quite satisfied with his life and with his writing; he struggles with language, wrestling to encapsulate his ideas in words. In the last part of the novel he resorts to using words in a sort of nihilistic stream of consciousness. Stephen (Joyce) cannot find fulfilment in the Catholic Church, in his family, in his writing

or in his relationships. Nothing is quite what he wants it to be. He was like the mythical Icarus: he had times when he flew high, only to find himself crashing to the ground singed by the sun of circumstances. In real life, Joyce, in a fit of frustration, threw an early version of *A Portrait* into the fire. He always saw this novel as incomplete, a work of an inexperienced young author, never perfect in literary terms; hence it is a portrait by a young and developing, yet not complete (imperfect) artist.

The English essayist and author George Orwell also seemed to share some of Joyce's perfectionist angst. He writes:

I knew that I had a facility with words and a power of facing unpleasant facts, and I felt that this created a sort of private world in which I could get my own back on my failure in everyday life.³¹

Neurotic, unhealthy perfectionists tend to set unrealistically high standards and their sense of self-worth depends entirely on their own performance and production according to the goals they have set themselves. Unhealthy perfectionists also tend to 'catastrophise' everything as either completely right or completely wrong. Clergy who 'suffer' from this malady can be wildly over self-critical if they get one word wrong in a sermon, for example. As you will see from the list below, unhealthy perfectionism will adversely impact all those who experience it. However, those engaged in public ministry may find this even more depleting. Unhealthy perfectionists experience the following:

- continuous self-criticism in the form of concern over mistakes and doubts that they are doing the right thing.
- noticing failures more than success; one error or flaw obliterates any satisfaction in their endeavours.
- over-concern with organisation, precision and order.
- thinking in 'black or white', 'all or nothing' categories.
- a desire to excel at any cost, and a tendency to being over-controlling in relationships.
- motivation by fear of negative consequences, failure, rejection or punishment.

It is important to note that some other approaches state that all perfectionism is neurotic and unhealthy and what some label as ‘normal perfectionism’ is not perfectionism at all (normal would be called conscientiousness or an ‘oriented work-style’). Tom Greenspon believes that ‘healthy perfectionism’ is an oxymoron. Greenspon continues: ‘Pursuing excellence, including pushing yourself to do better, constantly improving, setting your goals high, are all fine and are completely different from perfectionism.’³² This non-spectrum view pushes towards an unequivocal definition of perfection, in an attempt to avoid ambiguity. However, this may not be a subtle enough instrument to discuss the complexity of this personality trait; the *spectrum view* is perhaps a more helpful way forward.

We should note in summary that pursuing excellence, high standards personally and professionally, and having a good work ethic is healthy. However, a minefield of potential problems awaits those persons (especially clergy) who pursue flawless perfection with too much intensity. We need to be able to spot when healthy striving for excellence becomes unhealthy perfectionism in ourselves and others. (See Table 1.)

Unhealthy perfectionism (perfectionist)	Person of excellence (healthy perfectionism)
Idealistic	Realistic
Strives for the impossible	Strives for the doable
Fears failure	Views life as a challenge
Product-minded	Anticipates success
Has to be the best	Process-minded
Views life as a threat	Wants to do their best
Hates criticism	Values criticism
Dwells on mistakes	Learns from mistakes (see Matthew Syed’s book, <i>Black Box Thinking</i> ³³)
Values self for what they do	Values self for who they are

Table 1: *Perfectionism, healthy and unhealthy*

We should also note that ‘defeated perfectionists’ often become victims of their own standards. They tend to carry a partially subconscious picture of their ‘ideal self’. This works well when things go well but when they don’t, when a flaw becomes public, their all-or-nothing thinking takes hold. They often perceive themselves as complete disasters, despicable, unreliable, incompetent people.

Defeated perfectionists often suffer from what sociologists call 'the looking-glass self'. This is where you become what the most important person in your life thinks you are. Derren Brown, in his book *Happy*, also states that we see ourselves in terms of the stories we 'concoct' about ourselves and our abilities.³⁴ Our view of ourselves in these stories often falls short of the perfectionist ideal we believe goes with love and approval by others in our lives. This failure to live up to the standards expected by, for instance, parents' narratives becomes deeply ingrained and in many ways defines us. Brown writes:

It is hard to think about your past without tidying it up into a kind of story: one in which you are cast as the hero or the victim. Some of these stories are consciously constructed, but others operate without our knowledge, dictated by scripts handed to us by others when we were young. We can carry around a psychological legacy from our parents for our whole lives, whether bad or good. Where they have unfulfilled wishes or regrets, these are commonly passed to us as a template for storytelling. Many of these templates make it hard for us to feel happy: 'You must achieve impressive things to be happy/loved.' Or, 'You must sacrifice your own happiness to make others feel better: that is the measure of your worth.'³⁵

Brown continues:

Similar insidious directives can also come from the Church, our peers, classmates and teachers, the cumulative effect of the news media we encounter daily or any number of ideologies in which we find ourselves enmeshed.³⁶

'Defeated perfectionists' can suffer the double torment of believing the myth of omni-competence and failure.

Types of perfectionism

Perfectionism is, of course, multifaceted, and the following categorisation can be helpful:

1. Performance perfectionism

- a Sense of value is highly dependent on how they perform.
- b Measurable productivity and achievement is vital to their sense of well-being.

- c If unable to perform at the highest levels, can become anxious and depressed.

2. Appearance perfectionism

- a Must look perfect – on every occasion.
- b Surroundings must look perfect (office and/or home).

3. Interpersonal perfectionism

- a Have set ideas on how things should be done – tends to make relationships difficult. Also, will make delegation to others stressful for the interpersonal perfectionist.
- b With an 'outward focus' may be very critical and demanding of others and therefore become socially and professionally isolated.
- c With an 'inward focus' may be very self-critical and therefore avoid relationships for fear of being discovered to be 'less than perfect'.

4. Moral perfectionism

- a Keeps rules meticulously.
- b Sense of identity rests on perfect behaviour.
- c Legalistic and judgemental.

5. All-round perfectionism

- a Tends to be an obsessive personality.
- b Prone to OCD.

Academic classifications of personality traits

In 1991 Hewitt and Flett developed an approach to understanding perfectionism called the *Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale*, which has been highly influential, yet not without its critics. They based their approach not so much on the area of life involved but on the *direction* of the perfectionism. They came up with three types of perfectionism:

1. self-oriented perfectionism
2. socially prescribed perfectionism
3. other-oriented perfectionism.

We should note that there are very few people who would combine all three of these categories. We will briefly look at these three types, beginning with ‘self-oriented perfectionism’.

Self-oriented perfectionism

Note in Table 2 below that self-oriented perfectionism has a healthy set of characteristics and a neurotic and unhealthy set of characteristics.

Normal healthy	Neurotic unhealthy
Self-assured	Depressed
Assertive	Impatient
Conscientious	Self-blaming
Organised	Shame and guilt
Disciplined	Irritable
Determined	Angry
Diligent	Fears criticism
Thoughtful	Avoids challenges
Courteous	Suicidal tendencies
Empathetic	
Helpful	
Strong moral standards	
Sensitive conscience	

Table 2: *Healthy and unhealthy characteristics of self-oriented perfectionism*

Self-oriented perfectionists

- set high and often rigid standards for themselves.
- work hard to attain perfection and avoid failure.
- are self-critical and tend to focus primarily on flaws and failures.
- take responsibility for their lives and don't blame others when they fail.
- are often very successful people, usually described in positive terms by others.
- are usually self-confident, charming and quietly assertive.

There is much about self-oriented perfectionists that is adaptive and healthy. They are very often competent in dealing with difficult and stressful situations.

However, when they move into the realms of unhealthy perfectionism and the neurotic range of this personality trait, things become more negative. For example, problems begin to surface in their relationships. The person who is a self-oriented perfectionist has feelings of inferiority and feels unworthy of friendship. They live in the constant fear that friends will find out what they are 'really like' and will then be rejected. So, to protect themselves, self-oriented perfectionists tend to keep their distance from other people. This inevitably leads to shallow friendships and lack of intimate relationships.

Self-oriented perfectionists might well be friendly on the surface, often anxious to please, though not often very self-revealing. Often they are so focused on organising their lives with 'to do lists', and making a good impression, that they find difficulty in just 'being' in a relationship. Also, because they are so intent on being perfect themselves they can appear aloof, impatient and competitive. Being hypersensitive to any form of rejection, self-oriented perfectionists often react defensively to criticism.

Under certain extremely stressful conditions, this type of perfectionism can be destructive: normal coping mechanisms are overwhelmed, maybe leading to depression, shame and guilt, and sometimes sadly to suicide. It is not difficult to see what self-oriented perfectionism might do to a clergyperson with this personality trait. He or she is very likely to encounter highly stressful situations, distressing experiences, and so on. They are also in a very public profession, having to preach, lead worship and chair meetings. In ministry, there can be a lot of criticism aimed at clergy too. So, if the clergyperson is a self-oriented perfectionist he or she is going to find plenty of opportunities to experience deep feelings of rejection, self-criticism and perhaps guilt and shame.

The next personality trait to be considered is potentially even more depleting and destructive for a clergyperson.

Socially prescribed perfectionism

Socially prescribed perfectionists tend to feel that they must meet *other people's expected standards* – at all costs. They worry to an abnormal degree about what others' expectations of them are, and fear rejection when they don't meet these expectations. These are some of the perils of socially prescribed perfectionism:

- excessive checking and seeking reassurance
- anxiety and worry
- decreasing productivity and performance

- impaired health
- eating disorders
- depression
- suicidal ideas
- obsessive-compulsive symptoms
- scrupulosity
- relationship problems.

Again, it is not difficult to see how destructive this would be in terms of a clergyperson's life and ministry. If you project the following symptoms of socially prescribed perfectionism on to a clergyperson in a parish setting you will see how depleting and debilitating this might be. For example, socially prescribed perfectionists feel that they are under the spotlight all the time; they are being rigorously evaluated by others. This often leads clergy to become workaholics. Their work is Sisyphean – it is never completed. They can never do enough for God. They can never do enough parish or pastoral work to satisfy themselves or to feel that others are satisfied with them. Anne Jackson, in her book *Mad Church Disease*, writes:

The fear of letting people down, especially in spiritual matters, can often cause us to feel obligated or pressured into meeting unrealistic expectations, or worse, spending more time doing things for God instead of being what God wants us to be. That can lead to serious stress.³⁷

Clergy particularly need the support of the Christian family, 'the Church'. However, sadly the ministry context for many clergy is often part of the problem. Some parishes are what Winter describes as a poisonous environment of 'un-grace' or 'dis-grace'.³⁸ David Seamands, in his article 'Perfectionism: Fraught with Fruits of Self-Destruction', in *Christianity Today* writes perceptively:

Many years ago, I was driven to the conclusion that the two major causes of most emotional problems among evangelical Christians are these: the failure to understand, receive, and live out God's unconditional grace and forgiveness; and the failure to give out that unconditional love, forgiveness and grace to other people ... We

read, we hear, we believe a good theology of grace. But that's not the way we live. The good news of the Gospel of grace has not penetrated [to] the level of our emotions.³⁹

Philip Yancey cites Paul Tournier's book *Guilt and Grace*, where he writes: 'I cannot study this very serious problem [of guilt related to perfectionism] with you without raising the very obvious and tragic fact that religion – my own as well as that of all believers – can crush instead of liberate.'⁴⁰ Ecclesiastical legalism and rigidity linked to expressions of perfectionism are never far below the surface. Leo Tolstoy, who battled legalism all his life, understood the weaknesses of a religion based on externals. As Yancey notes, one of Tolstoy's books, *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, says it well.⁴¹ According to Tolstoy, all religious systems tend to promote external rules, or moralism. In contrast, Jesus refused to define a set of rules that his followers could then fulfil with a sense of satisfaction. One can never 'arrive' in light of such sweeping commands as 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind ... Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.' Tolstoy drew a contrast between Jesus' approach and that of all other religions:

The test of observance of external religious teaching is whether or not our conduct conforms with degrees. [Observe the Sabbath. Get circumcised. Tithe.] Such conformity is indeed possible. The test of observance of Christ's teachings is our consciousness of failure to attain an ideal perfection. The degree to which we draw near this perfection cannot be seen; all we can see is the extent of our deviation.⁴²

The German Reformer Martin Luther appears to have suffered from an unhealthy dose of religious perfectionism too. He writes:

Although I lived a blameless life as a monk, I felt that I was a sinner with an uneasy conscience before God. I also could not believe that I had pleased him with my works. Far from loving that righteous God who punished sinners I actually loathed him. I was a good monk, and kept my order so strictly that if ever a monk could get to heaven by monastic discipline, I was that monk. All my companions in the monastery would confirm this ... And yet my conscience would not give me certainty, but I always doubted and said, 'You didn't do that right. You weren't contrite enough. You left that out of your confession.'

Clergy who are socially prescribed perfectionists, like Luther, will also exhaust themselves endlessly checking that they have got things 'right'. This too can lead to anxiety and anxiety disorders. It can also lead clergy who are socially prescribed perfectionists to put off doing something, to procrastinate. This procrastination is a safety net; if one doesn't begin a task one cannot be judged to have failed in the eyes of society or congregation. An article on the Open Culture website entitled 'The Neuroscience and Psychology of Procrastination and How to Overcome It' states:

Chronic procrastination is 'not a time management issue,' says Ferrari, 'it is a maladaptive lifestyle.' Habitual procrastinators, the [Wall Street Journal] writes, 'have higher rates of depression and anxiety and poorer well-being.' We may think, writes Eric Jaffe at the Association for Psychological Science's journal, of procrastination as 'an innocuous habit at worst, and maybe even a helpful one at best,' a strategy Stanford philosophy professor John Perry argued for in *The Art of Procrastination*. Instead, Jaffe says, in a sobering summary of Pychyl's research, 'procrastination is really a self-inflicted wound that gradually chips away at the most valuable resource in the world: time.'⁴³

Clergy who are socially prescribed perfectionists can be prone to *akrasia*, a 'weakness of the will'. They know what is the right thing to do, but because of fear of failure and fear of displeasing others they are frozen into inactivity. In an article by James Clear, 'The Akrasia Effect: Why we don't Follow Through on What we Set Out to do and What to do about it', the author cites Victor Hugo as an interesting example of *akrasia* or procrastination. In 1830 Hugo was facing an impossible deadline. Twelve months earlier the French author had made an agreement with his publisher that he would write a new book entitled *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Instead of writing the book, Hugo spent the next year pursuing other projects, entertaining guests, delaying his work on the text.⁴⁴ In Matthew Syed's terminology, this is an example of *pre-closed loop behaviour*. He writes: 'You are so worried about messing up that you never even get on the field of play.'⁴⁵

Other-oriented perfectionism

By contrast to the foregoing, other-oriented perfectionists are only disparaging and judgemental about others. Not only do they expect other people to be perfect, but they can also be highly critical of those who fail to meet their

expectations. One can see how those who are operating under other-oriented perfectionism could be judgemental and hypercritical in terms of church life. This could apply to clergy and to members of a congregation.

Related problems caused by maladaptive perfectionism

There are several associated serious problems that can be caused by maladaptive perfectionism ('bad', 'neurotic', 'unhealthy' perfectionism). These problems are:

- depression
- burnout
- suicidalness
- anger
- eating disorders
- shame and guilt.

Be perfect?

Before we leave this section, we must deal with a thorny question that perfectionist clergy and perfectionist lay people must face: didn't Jesus specifically command us to 'be perfect ... as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Matthew 5:48)? It seems to be there in simple black and white: a core essential for the Christian is to be perfect. However, maybe we are being a little hasty in our conclusions here. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for perfection is תָּמִים (*tamim*). Strong's online concordance informs us that one way to render the Hebrew term is 'complete', or 'to bring to completion'. It has echoes of Aristotle's use of *teleos*, which for him meant 'goal' or 'purpose'. So, in both the Hebrew and the Greek usage of the word, 'perfect' can be seen as 'bringing something to full completion' or 'something achieving the purpose for which it was made'.

The same idea is found in the New Testament. Someone who fulfils the purpose for which they were made is in that sense 'perfect'. The New Testament concept of perfection is found in the Greek word *teleios*, meaning 'design, end, goal and purpose'. St Paul uses this word to speak of 'maturity', and maturity in our relationship with Christ (see Colossians 1:28; 4:12; Ephesians 4:13–14). St James uses the same word to express similar ideas of maturation among believers (see James 1:4; 1:8).

Lastly, Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount, 'be perfect' (Matthew 5:48), should probably be understood in this manner. The word used is a verbal future indicative, implying that this is our goal; it is not something we have already achieved; perfection (complete maturity) is not something we should expect to achieve right now. We are on a journey to 'perfected maturity'. There will be a time when this is realised (see 1 Corinthians 13:10), but until then we will strive to reach that future goal by taking one (imperfect?) step at a time (see Philippians 3:12).

Strategies for overcoming unhealthy perfectionism

One coping strategy for clergy and those in other intense caring professions is termed 'aiming for average'. This means training ourselves to become more content with less than perfection – even though we may aim high – using the technique of living day by day, with small and specific goals. We can train ourselves to overcome the inertia of procrastination by adopting the attitude that failure is not catastrophic but an opportunity to adapt and learn. We can look for others to help and support us; this may be interaction with family or friends or by engaging with a mentor or counsellor.

Many churches have imbibed society's schemas of perfection and success; many churches give the impression that their first priorities are performance and appearance. Where this is the case, clergy will inevitably suffer; those who are burdened with unhealthy perfectionist personality traits will suffer greatly. Clergy may well experience feelings of isolation from the community they are most meant to feel a part of, the local church. When this happens, as Rachel Rettner notes in her article 'The Dark Side of Perfection Revealed', the individual's (clergyperson's) physical health will invariably suffer. She writes: 'Those who feel others expect them to be perfect might also experience declines in health as a result of distancing themselves from other people.' 'We know', Rettner continues, that 'social support is a huge indicator of physical health. If you tend to have strong bonds with people ... you tend to be healthier.'⁴⁶

Clergy who have perfectionist tendencies need to remember that 'in Christ' they are accepted and loved by God, not based on personal performance but by the salvific work of Christ. It is, as Paul states, 'by grace we are saved' (Ephesians 2:8: 'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith ... and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.'). As Yancey says, grace comes from the outside, as a gift and not an achievement. Will van der Hart and Rob

Waller expand on Yancey's statement explaining the impact of grace and self-compassion on our lives and ministries. They write:

When we are loved, that's when we are dangerous. Grace is the knowledge of the love of God for us despite our unworthiness, despite not matching up or deserving a reward. This is why the Christian gospel is good news for perfectionists. The very economy of God's grace inverts the underpinning principle of perfectionism: that you have to achieve to receive. Grace says that, 'While we were sinners, Christ died for us' (Romans 5:8). Self-compassion could be described as agreeing with the compassion of God for you, and what could be more life changing than that?⁴⁷

Clergy do not have to experience what Smedes describes in his book *Shame and Grace* as 'a glob of unworthiness, that I could not tie down to any concrete sins I was guilty of'.⁴⁸ We cannot make God love us more by our futile strivings towards an impossible level of Christian or ministerial correctness; and when we inevitably fail, we should remember that in our failure God does not love us less. John Bunyan puts it succinctly in his classic, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*: 'It was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse; for my righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.' Following on from Bunyan, Brennan Manning further reinforces the sufficiency of God's grace in Christ in terms of meeting our needs. As Manning puts it, 'Grace is sufficient even though we huff and puff with all our might to try to find something or someone it cannot cover. Grace is enough. He is enough. Jesus is enough.'⁴⁹

Jung said that the greatest burden a child must bear is the unlived lives of their parents. However, our identity is not found in what our families have told us about ourselves or the weight of their unfulfilled dreams. Our identities are not found in what society or the Church implies in terms of what constitutes perfection; our identities don't come from other people's stories about us, which are invariably distorted. Our identities come from being a beloved son or daughter of God (1 John 3:2: 'Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is').

Clergy, and all Christians, are accepted, and will slowly mature (be perfected) throughout their spiritual journey. C. S. Lewis sums it up 'perfectly' when he writes:

He meant what he said. Those who put themselves into His hands will become perfect, as He is perfect – perfect in love, wisdom, joy, beauty, and immortality. The change will not be completed in this life, for death is an important part of the treatment. How far the change will have gone before death in any particular Christian is uncertain.⁵⁰

Recently, I was reading a thesis on 'Freedom and Determinism' which explored the variety of ways Christian theologians have grappled with the issue of divine will and human autonomy. The writer managed the whole piece with just only passing reference to Calvin's view on the matter. A strange omission, I thought. But perhaps I am being equally guilty here in discussing perfection without any reference to John Wesley. However, reflecting on Wesley's *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* is beyond my remit on this occasion. That being said, I can use Charles Wesley's hymnody to continue the theme of C. S. Lewis's thinking – that we are on a journey towards perfection. Wesley writes in 'Love Divine':

Finish then Thy new creation;
pure and spotless let us be.
Let us see Thy great salvation
perfectly restored in Thee.
Changed from glory into glory,
till in heav'n we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before Thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise.

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

‘On Family Religion’: discipleship within the home

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Wesley’s sermon ‘On Family Religion’ points to the importance of the home as a sphere of discipleship and focuses particularly on the importance of parents in shaping the faith of their children. Drawing on Joshua 24:15, Wesley explores what it means to serve the Lord, who is included within the home, and how parents can help their children grow in faith. In an age when many parents fail to prioritise faith within the home, Wesley’s insights on family discipleship remain challenging and helpful.

DISCIPLESHIP • FAMILY • HOME • FAITH • CHILDREN

Introduction

A key influence on the faith of John Wesley was the religious formation he received at home. Raised by Samuel and Susanna Wesley, it was particularly the influence of Susanna that helped young John learn and know the faith.¹ Even if studies of Wesley often focus on the significance of the Aldersgate experience of 1738,² it was his family upbringing that laid the foundations of his faith.

It is not surprising, then, that John Wesley stressed the importance of faith formation within the home. The theme is particularly clear in three sermons published in 1783–1784, with the first of the three – ‘On Family Religion’ – providing a helpful entry point into Wesley’s view of faith within the home.³

The sermon provides a fine example of Wesley’s approach to what we might call ‘family discipleship’. For Wesley, parents are called by God to model and teach faith within the home, and when they do God blesses them in the endeavour. Although there is no guarantee that the children of Christians will retain their faith, the home is a crucial setting for helping faith to grow.

Such a theme is not unique to Wesley. Scripture itself attests to the influence of parents on children; Deuteronomy 6 calls parents to repeat and discuss the words of the Law with their children (Deuteronomy 6:6–9), while the apostle Paul encourages fathers to bring up children in the ‘discipline and instruction of the Lord’ (Ephesians 6:4b). Theologians and pastors throughout history have similarly encouraged parents to teach and model the Christian faith,⁴ and the theme was particularly prominent among the Puritans.⁵ It was the Puritans, in fact, who influenced Wesley’s thinking in this area.⁶

The significance of parents for the faith of their children is a theme, however, that is often missing in today’s Church. Many Christians do not intentionally pass on their faith, and some fail to see its importance. As a Church of England report noted in 2014, the majority of self-identified Anglicans see passing on the faith as a low priority compared to other values.⁷ The same seems to be true of Christians in other traditions.⁸ If parents are concerned about the faith of their children, they often look to the youth group rather than the home as the primary place of nurture.

But for Wesley, the family plays a key role in the faith of children. As Wesley points out at the beginning of the sermon, adopting ‘family religion’ will lead to church growth and the glorification of God. Without it, the religious revival he had witnessed would come to an end.⁹

Before we sketch out the argument of 'On Family Religion', it is worth noting that the sermon reveals the patriarchal side of John Wesley.¹⁰ As the sermon shows, Wesley sees the man as the head of the home, expects that many in his audience would have servants, and assumes that parents will play a key role in guiding their children's career choices and decisions about who to marry.

It would be a shame if this feature of the sermon distracts from Wesley's insights. Wesley offers an approach to faith within the home that rightly points to its importance in helping the next generation grow in love of God and love of neighbour. In light of the neglect of family faith in the contemporary Church, Wesley's words challenge parents and church leaders to reclaim the importance of teaching and modelling faith within the home.

Wesley takes as his sermon text a verse from Joshua 24, a verse that comes in the context of a covenant renewal ceremony. Within the ceremony, Joshua tells the story of how God has redeemed Israel before calling the Israelites to fear God and reject idolatry (24:1–15). Joshua ends with an invitation for the Israelites to choose whom they will serve, declaring, 'as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD' (24:15b).

'On Family Religion' is divided into three sections, each focusing on an element of this verse. In the first, Wesley explores in broad terms what it means to 'serve the Lord'. Such service involves not simply outward obedience but also inward devotion. Faith, love and obedience are all expressions of such service.

In the second section, Wesley explores who is included in the house that serves the Lord. As well as spouse and children, the household includes servants and visitors. All are invited to be shaped by the household ethos where God is the centre.

Finally, Wesley turns in the third section to discipleship in the home, or, as Wesley puts it, 'what can we do, that "we and our house" may "serve the Lord"'.¹¹ It is here that Wesley offers advice for parents, focusing particularly on how parents can teach and model faith to their children.

Serving the Lord

In the first section, Wesley offers an exposition of what it means to 'serve the Lord'. While brief, it draws on key themes of his theology and offers an inroad into Wesley's view of discipleship.

For Christians, serving the Lord involves – first and foremost – faith, believing in Jesus.¹² This is the ‘spiritual worship’ of God, the service that God sees as acceptable. Citing Galatians 2:20, Wesley echoes the Pauline and Reformation emphasis on faith as that which takes hold of God’s grace in Christ.¹³ Christians live by ‘faith in the Lord Jesus’, the one whose love is demonstrated in the cross.

Second, serving the Lord involves love, a love that comes in response to our realisation of God’s love for us (1 John 4:19). Such love for God is poured into our hearts by the Spirit (Romans 5:5), and, while it may vary, it remains a sign that we belong to God.

Third, love for God needs to be accompanied by love of neighbour. Echoing 1 John 4:19–20, Wesley sees love of God as leading to love of others. Those who serve God demonstrate love for ‘every child of man’, as well as loving other ‘children of God’. Wesley cites Colossians 3:12–13 as a description of such love, and quotes Ephesians 4:32 to highlight the need for forgiveness within the Church. As Collins notes, the freedom to love God and neighbour was for Wesley a positive expression of being saved by Christ.¹⁴

Finally, serving the Lord involves obedience, walking in the ways of God unveiled in the gospel. Such obedience comes from the heart, and is driven by a desire to avoid offence towards God or others. Wesley was against a faith simply of words, and points here to the importance of living out one’s faith.

In this terse description of serving God, Wesley shows his commitment to the double-love command of Jesus and highlights the importance of faith and obedience. Such a combination reflects the ‘theology of holy love’ that Collins sees as central to Wesley’s practical divinity.¹⁵ As the sermon develops, Wesley seeks to show that serving the Lord in such a way can be nurtured and modelled within the home.

What is the home?

In the second section of the sermon, Wesley explores who is included in the household that serves the Lord. While the ancient Israelite home included a vast extended family,¹⁶ and home today can still connote the nuclear family,¹⁷ home for Wesley includes parents and children but also servants. Although in other sermons he addresses both parents,¹⁸ here he instructs fathers (and husbands).

Wesley begins by encouraging husbands to care for their wives as those who claim their 'first and nearest attention'.¹⁹ Alluding to Ephesians 5:25–29, he calls husbands to follow the example of Christ for his Church, loving their wives sacrificially and helping them to walk 'unblameable in love'.²⁰ Marriage is not simply a space of mutual support, but a relationship through which each spouse can help the other to grow in love and faith.

Next, Wesley notes that children are a key part of the household. Wesley advises parents to see them as 'immortal spirits whom God hath for a time entrusted to your care, that you may train them up in all holiness, and fit them for the enjoyment of God in eternity'.²¹ Children are not just there for their own good, or for the good of their family or society, but are created by God to become like Christ and so enjoy God for ever. Since children belong to God, parents will give an account to God for the way they have dealt with them.

Wesley also suggests that the household includes servants, whom he describes as a 'kind of secondary children'.²² This includes indentured servants employed for a fixed period, hired servants employed for short-term work, and those employed for a day or a week. Although the language is paternalistic, Wesley's intent is that servants are included within the wider family. They too should be encouraged to 'serve the Lord', and so leave their employment with something far more precious than pay. The household also includes visitors; Christians should look out for the 'stranger within the gate' (Exodus 20:10) and invite such guests to serve God too, or at least help them avoid sinning against the Lord.

Serving the Lord at home

In the third section of his sermon, Wesley explores how heads of the household can enable all within their homes to 'serve the Lord'. Wesley has already described such service in terms of faith, love and obedience, and here begins to explore what family discipleship might look like.

Wesley begins by calling fathers to ensure that all within the home are restrained from 'outward sin', such as swearing, taking God's name in vain or Sabbath-breaking. Preventing such sins is a 'labour of love', and fathers should ensure that all within the home avoid them. This should even be true of visitors, who can be dismissed from the home if they continually undermine the family ethos. Servants too should be reproofed if they fail to avoid such outward sins, but should also be dismissed if they consistently refuse.

What about wives who continually yield to 'outward sins'? Here, Wesley refuses to allow that a husband can divorce his wife for such a reason, nor that he can strike her. Instead, husbands should seek to 'overcome by good', and persuade their wives through their example and their words. If nothing in the situation changes, husbands must 'suffer' the situation and persist in prayer, trusting all the while that God is at work. Again, it is noticeable that Wesley does not similarly instruct wives who have unbelieving husbands, a theme that the New Testament addresses (1 Corinthians 7:12–14; 1 Peter 3:1–6).

Children should also be 'restrained from evil' while young, with fathers persuading and advising their children on the right path. Fathers can also use 'correction', corporal punishment, as a last resort, but must do so without passion or harshness. Responding to those who claim fathers should never use such a means of discipline, Wesley refuses to allow a universal rule against it and appeals to Proverbs 13:24 and 19:18.²³

As well as preventing outward sin, fathers should instruct in the faith all within the home, wives and servants as well as children. At regular times, and especially on the Lord's Day, there should be time set apart for teaching 'all such knowledge as is necessary to salvation'.²⁴ Instruction should also embrace practices of the faith, with time given to the 'ordinances of God',²⁵ including reading, meditation and prayer. Families should also spend time praying together. For Wesley, God works through such means of grace in shaping his people, and establishing a rhythm of practices within the home is an important feature of Wesley's vision.

Instructing children requires special care, and so Wesley discusses the theme at some length. We can note in passing that Wesley was concerned throughout his life in helping parents in this task, including through preparing simple catechisms and guides for households.²⁶ Wesley's interest in schools and education also reflects his interest in childhood faith, with his educational philosophy underpinning his advice to teachers as well as parents.²⁷

Parents should instruct their children in the faith, 'early, plainly, frequently, and patiently'.²⁸ Parents should begin early because children are able to grasp key concepts about God as soon as they can reason. As they teach them to talk, parents should not hesitate to explain to children the 'best things, the things of God'.²⁹ But parents should also speak plainly, avoiding difficult words and connecting their learning about the world with the reality of God. As an example, Wesley suggests that as children feel the warmth of the sun and see its brightness they can be encouraged to think about the great God who made

it! Just as God has shown such love to them, so they too should love God. As they continue in such instruction, parents should pray that God's Spirit might open their children's hearts.

Parents need to continue in such instruction frequently. Just as the body needs food daily – indeed, three times a day – so the soul needs regular nourishment. Wesley calls parents to weave the reality of God into the everyday, echoing a theme found in Deuteronomy 6. And yet Wesley also recognises the difficulty of such a task, and so calls parents to persevere with patience. Instructing children in the faith can be tiresome and difficult, and so Wesley advises: 'You will find the absolute need of being endued with power from on high; without which, I am persuaded, none ever had, or will have, patience sufficient for the work.'³⁰ For parents who have been faithful in instructing their children but fail to see any 'fruit' from it, Wesley offers encouragement. He advises them to keep praying, knowing that the seed that has been planted will bear fruit in time.

What about parents whose children have embraced the faith, for whom the work of instruction has borne the 'fruit of the seed they have sown'?³¹ In such cases, Wesley suggests, there is still more to consider, including the education and future marriages of their children.

In terms of education, parents need to consider the school environment that would best help their children grow in faith. Parents should not send their sons to larger public schools, where peer pressure might lead them astray, but to small private schools where teachers are known for their faith.³² They should also avoid sending their daughters to boarding schools, and instead teach them at home or send them to a 'pious mistress' who can help to raise them in the faith.³³

Parents should also consider how best to please God in steering their sons to a future business. The first consideration should not be how their sons might best prosper, but rather how they might best 'love and serve God'.³⁴ If sending their sons to a 'master', parents should look for one who follows God. Helping young people become holy is more important than securing them a financially rewarding career.

Finally, Wesley calls parents to think with wisdom on guiding their son or daughter into marriage. In the eighteenth century, parents had far more sway in choosing partners for their children, and such decisions would often be made for financial reasons. Wesley advises against such a rationale for marriage,

suggesting that parents should find spouses for their children by aiming ‘simply at the glory of God, and the real happiness of your children, both in time and eternity’.³⁵

Wesley concludes his sermon by encouraging Christians that those who walk this path will be serving God rightly and that such labour will not be in vain. Christians should seek to shape their families to reflect Christ, knowing that God is with them in the task.

Learning from Wesley

What, then, should we make of such a sermon? How might Wesley’s advice, formed in the eighteenth-century context, shape our understanding of family life today?

There are, to be sure, some features of the sermon that we might question, and perhaps the most obvious – as noted in the introduction – is Wesley’s patriarchal view of the family. At least in this sermon, Wesley seems to assume that the father has the primary role in shaping the faith of his children, as well as making choices about their education and future career. This seems odd since Wesley’s own faith was shaped so decisively by his mother,³⁶ and – indeed – other sermons highlight the crucial role of mothers as well as fathers.³⁷ As recent research also shows, fathers and mothers are *both* important to the faith of young people.³⁸

Some readers might also accuse Wesley of promoting religious indoctrination. In the strongest form, some argue that bringing up a child in any faith is a form of ‘child abuse’, as Richard Dawkins infamously claimed.³⁹ In a softer version, others believe that children shouldn’t be taught what to believe or how to pray – even if it’s fine to bring them along to church – since the child’s own spiritual choices should be respected.⁴⁰

The charge of indoctrination, however, fails to recognise that we all bring up children with sets of beliefs and values that shape them, and so some sort of ‘indoctrination’ is inevitable, however we choose to parent.⁴¹ In fact, if parents do not teach and model the faith, such ‘neutral’ parenting communicates to their children that faith is not particularly important in the larger scheme of things. As a number of studies have also shown, raising children within a faith is in fact beneficial for their general well-being.⁴² While there are of course harmful ways of passing on faith, there are many approaches to teaching and

modelling faith that can help children encounter and experience the love of God for themselves.

What, then, are some of the key insights of Wesley's sermon? What can it 'do for us' today, particularly in its vision of discipleship within the home?

First, Wesley offers a model of discipleship that is holistic and transformational – and sees this as applying within the home too! For Wesley, serving the Lord involves faith in Christ and obedience to the call of God in the everyday, love of God *and* love of neighbour. Such ways of service are not just for the individual, but are also to be worked out within families.

Approaching the family through the lens of discipleship means that parents come to view their homes as habitats of holiness. If Christ is the greatest treasure, then parents will naturally seek to guide their children in the faith. Such an approach is driven by love of God and love of one's children, and recognises that God has a claim on the lives of our children greater than our own. By helping children turn to God, parents point them to the fullness of life.

We might also see here a reflection of Wesley's stress on social holiness, the recognition that community and relationships are key in becoming like Christ.⁴³ As David Field explains, Wesley sees social holiness as 'the concrete manifestation of "holiness of heart" in our relationships with other people through concrete acts which promote their good'.⁴⁴ Family is a setting in which such 'concrete acts' can take place as parents and children together seek to grow in love of God and love for one another.

Discipleship within the home knows that the Christ who is Lord of all is Lord of the family too. Our children are not our own, but belong to God. Such a perspective can lead Christian parents to reflect on how faith is embodied within the home, and to explore how the shape and rhythm of family life can reflect the values of the kingdom.

Second, and flowing from the first point, Wesley calls parents to pursue intentional practices that help their children grow in the faith. Parents are called under God to instruct and to teach their children the ways of God. Faith is not an unseen contagion passed by osmosis from one generation to another, but a body of teaching and a way of being that involves intentional instruction and modelling.⁴⁵ This does not disregard the need for young people to 'own' the faith for themselves, but it does point to the importance of creating a context where such faith can form.

While Wesley's own aim of worshipping together three times daily looks rather ambitious, incorporating regular practices of faith within the home remains crucial for helping children discover faith. God works through parents as they model faith, speak of God within the everyday, and lead worship. Such practices can become part of what James K. Smith calls the 'liturgies of home'. Homes should be shaped by the wider worship of the Church, with families pursuing practices and rhythms that reflect the kingdom of God.⁴⁶ Even if it is not always easy, this is part of what it means to be a disciple.

The impact of parents on the faith of their children is confirmed in a range of sociological studies. Such studies show that parents who model and teach faith within the home are more likely to pass it on to the next generation.⁴⁷ Significantly, the quality of the relationship between parents and children is also crucial. Mark notes the importance of 'close, affirming, and accepting relationships with both parents',⁴⁸ while Bengtson draws particular attention to the need for parental warmth (and the negative effects of emotionally distant fathers).⁴⁹

Discipleship within the home begins by making parents aware of their responsibility, and church leaders, including youth and family workers, have an important role in encouraging parents in this area. Rather than seeing themselves as the primary 'disciplers' of young people, children and youth workers need to work *with* parents to help young people grow in faith. This does not mean that children and youth workers are unimportant – far from it! – but parents need to reclaim the important role that they have in passing on the faith.⁵⁰

In pursuing such discipleship, families can speak of God within the everyday, serve together, and develop simple practices of prayer and Scripture reading.⁵¹ Churches can create opportunities for parents to talk about what faith looks like within their homes, perhaps sharing resources and practices that have been helpful. In an age when faith has sometimes skipped a generation, grandparents can also be encouraged to share faith appropriately in their relationships with grandchildren.⁵²

Third, Wesley shows that discipleship within the home includes issues of educational choice and vocational discernment. Wesley encourages parents to think about the long-term impact of where their child attends school, which vocation they pursue, and who they decide to marry. All such issues are part of discipleship.

While Christian parents may not follow Wesley's advice on where to send their children to school, they do need to think carefully about how children will be affected by the peers they meet there. If children have few Christian friends, parents need to consider how to embed them within other Christian relationships beyond the family, including through youth groups, church camps and mission events. Such friendships have a huge impact on the faith of young people.⁵³

Wesley also advised Christian parents to guide their children into a profession where they can best serve God. For Christian parents today, this may mean helping their children think through issues of vocation. Such a focus on vocation should not be limited to those entering ordination, or simply to adults, but is crucial for young people too. If children are encouraged to grow in a life of faith that focuses on love of God and love of others, they can begin to explore how that might shape their choices for the future as well as their service of God in the present.⁵⁴ Wesley's encouragement that parents seek out a godly master for their children entering business points to the importance of elders who can offer guidance to young people. While it will not be possible for young people to always have Christian employers, mentors are particularly helpful for young people as they grow in faith,⁵⁵ including for those beginning work.

Wesley's view on guiding children to a good future marriage partner reflects a context that differs greatly from today. Whereas parents would have had a significant role in helping their children choose a spouse in the eighteenth century, changing social conventions – including people marrying in later life – means that this is unlikely to be the case in twenty-first-century Britain. Nonetheless, Wesley's approach recognises that those we marry – and before that, those we date – significantly shape our lives. Christian parents can guide their children to think about future partners with wisdom and an eye to the kingdom.⁵⁶

Finally, Wesley encourages a view of the home as missiologically open to the outside world. As we saw earlier, Wesley saw the 'home' as including both servants and visitors, and encourages families to see how both could be drawn into the ethos of the Christian family. Those within the home offer instruction in the Christian faith to all within its walls, and encourage all within the home to avoid 'outward sin'.

Wesley's more expansive sense of family challenges the tendency towards insularity within the home, a particular temptation for modern-day families. For Wesley, the household is not confined to those in the nuclear family, but

includes those whom the Lord brings across its threshold. While we may cringe at Wesley's description of servants as 'secondary children', the challenge of making all who are with us feel at home surely remains a good one.

Wesley also calls households to be places where instruction in faith takes place. Today, Christian households might consider what it means to be a place where people can learn something of God, whether through example or conversation or the hospitality offered. As Rodney Clapp has argued, Christian homes should see themselves as 'mission bases' for God's work in the world, living together in the light of the coming kingdom.⁵⁷

Wesley also challenges us to consider the importance of establishing a Christian ethos within the home. While we may react against imposing a moral code on our guests, the examples of outward sins that Wesley considers – Sabbath-breaking, swearing and blasphemy – are those that particularly undermine the vision and values of a Christian household.⁵⁸ In today's context, Christian parents might consider how to retain the key values of their home as others come into its orbit. Since technology now allows 'virtual guests' to enter the home, Christian parents need to consider how best to manage technological innovations in ways that reflect the values of the kingdom.⁵⁹

Conclusion

In an age where the majority of parents wish their children to be happy and successful, Wesley's vision of family discipleship is a challenge to check our priorities. Is the happiness we seek for our children the happiness of holiness or the happiness of pleasure?⁶⁰ And is the success we seek for our children growth in character and grace or achieving certain grades or a coveted career?

For Wesley, children are entrusted to us by God, and our calling is to help them trust Christ and to grow in love of God and neighbour. 'On Family Religion' demonstrates that Wesley's view of social holiness extends even to the home. We are shaped to be like Christ in the company of others, including in the company of our children.

As the church faces decline in numbers, it is helpful to be reminded that Wesley saw the recovery of 'family religion' as a key means of its renewal. Alongside mission and evangelism, church leaders need to emphasise again the role of parents in passing on the faith. Just as Jesus blessed the children brought to him (Mark 10:13–16), so too our children are blessed when we point them to the Saviour – in our homes as well as our churches.

Notes

1. On this point, see Newton 2002, pp. 11, 15.
2. The significance of which continues to be debated; Lancaster 2010, pp. 304–306.
3. The other two sermons are 'On the Education of Children' and 'On Obedience to Parents'. For an exposition of the three sermons, see Oden 2012, Kindle location 2677–3489.
4. For a helpful discussion of the biblical and historical emphasis on 'family religion', see Jones and Stinson 2011.
5. On the importance of faith within the home within Puritanism, see Wakefield 1957, pp. 55–65.
6. Wesley included key Puritan treatments of the theme within his 'Christian Library', as Outler notes in Wesley 1985, p. 333. The influence of the Puritans on John Wesley's mother Susanna, and so their influence on John, is argued by Newton 2002.
7. See Voas and Watt 2014, p. 18.
8. See Mark 2016, pp. 27–28.
9. Wesley, 'On Family Religion', pp. 334–335.
10. This, of course, reflects Wesley's historical context, although it should be noted that – in other respects – Wesley undermined patriarchy in the roles he gave to women within the early Methodist Societies. See English 1994, pp. 26–33.
11. Wesley, 'On Family Religion', p. 336.
12. Wesley, 'On Family Religion', p. 336.
13. For Wesley's understanding of faith, see Maddox 1994, pp. 172–176.
14. Collins 2007, pp. 226–228. See also Collins' quotation from Wesley's sermon 'On Zeal' that demonstrates the centrality of love for Wesley, p. 227.
15. Collins 2007.
16. See Block 2003, pp. 35–40.
17. The nuclear family still has a hold on the popular imagination, even though the reality of many homes today is very different. See The Methodist Church 2017, pp. 8–10.
18. See Wesley, 'On the Education of Children'. Wesley also addresses children in 'On Obeying Parents'.
19. Wesley, 'On Family Religion', p. 337.
20. Wesley, 'On Family Religion', p. 337.
21. Wesley, 'On Family Religion', p. 337.
22. Wesley, 'On Family Religion', p. 338.
23. Note that some commentators on these texts today would point to the significance of the *principle* of discipline rather than the *means* of discipline, Longman III 2002, pp. 56–57.
24. Wesley, 'On Family Religion', p. 340.
25. The 'ordinances of God' here is equivalent to the 'means of grace'. Wesley is interested in shaping the *practices* of people within the household as well as their beliefs.

26. See Maddox 1994, pp. 225–227. See, for example, Wesley’s sermon, ‘On the Education of Children’.
27. For a guide to Wesley’s approach to education, see Towns 1970.
28. Wesley, ‘On Family Religion’, p. 340.
29. Wesley, ‘On Family Religion’, p. 340.
30. Wesley, ‘On Family Religion’, p. 342.
31. Wesley, ‘On Family Religion’, p. 342.
32. For the variety of schools in the eighteenth century, see Marquardt 1992, pp. 49–51. ‘Public schools’ refer to private, fee-paying schools that would only be affordable to well-off families.
33. Such private schools were found in a range of rural areas, and Wesley explains that such mistresses can be found in several locations.
34. Wesley, ‘On Family Religion’, p. 344.
35. Wesley, ‘On Family Religion’, p. 345.
36. Newton 2002, pp. 97–129.
37. In his sermon ‘On the Education of Children’, for instance, Wesley notes the important role that mothers have in speaking with their young children about God.
38. Mark 2016, p. 12.
39. See Dawkins 2006, pp. 349–387.
40. See Mark’s comments on the value given today to the autonomy of young people; Mark 2016, p. 27.
41. Mark 2016, pp. 17–18.
42. Mark 2016, pp. 18–19.
43. For a brief ‘theology of relationships’ that defends this point, see Emery-Wright and Mackenzie 2017, pp. 1–11.
44. Field 2015, p. 183.
45. On the importance of *teaching* the faith to teenagers, see Smith with Denton 2005, p. 267.
46. Smith 2016, pp. 111–136. Smith explores a range of practices for households, and helpfully suggests that families carry out an audit of daily routines to explore how they are shaped by them.
47. See the important work of Bengtson with Putney and Harris 2013, pp. 165–83. For a summary of other significant studies, see Mark 2016, pp. 43–60.
48. Mark 2016, p. 59.
49. Bengtson with Putney and Harris 2013, pp. 71–98.
50. For an exploration of how youth leaders can work alongside parents and others within the church, see Emery-Wright and Mackenzie 2017, pp. 115–116.
51. There are now a range of resources available in this area. For two recent examples, see Mackenzie and Crispin 2016, and Turner 2010. See also the new ‘Parenting for Faith’ website developed by Bible Reading Fellowship: www.parentingforfaith.org.
52. For the importance of grandparents, see Bengtson with Putney and Harris 2013, pp. 99–112.
53. See Emery-Wright and Mackenzie 2017, pp. 47–57.

54. For the importance of helping young people grow in the skill of discernment, see White 2005.
55. Emery-Wright and Mackenzie 2017, pp. 58–70.
56. For a helpful discussion of marriage as a relationship of 'covenantal fidelity' for the sake of the kingdom, see Clapp 1993, pp. 114–132.
57. Clapp 1993, pp. 149–69.
58. While many Christians do not 'keep Sabbath' in the way that Wesley recommended, it is interesting to note the call by some writers to reclaim Sabbath for churches and families. For one example, see Dawn 1989.
59. For a superb recent guide on this issue, see Crouch 2017. Among his many helpful suggestions, Crouch suggests that the 'Sabbath principle' might apply to technology too, pp. 83–106.
60. For the link in Wesley between happiness and holiness, and the influence of Peter Böhler on this, see Collins 2007, pp. 199–200.

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Holy containment and the supervision of leaders in ministry

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In this devotional article, the artist reflects on the process of creating a work entitled Containment. Both the artwork itself and the process of creating it prompt reflection on the nature of pastoral supervision, especially as it relates to leaders within the Church.

CONTAINMENT • LEADERSHIP • SUPERVISION • BOUNDARIES • POIESIS



Containment pastel on paper by J. Leach 2016

I am painting. I am painting in dust. Chalk-stained fingers drawing orange and blacks and greens from within, posting emotions on the page. Lines emerging and changing, defining boundaries and spaces, responsibilities.

I am painting to think. Making is an art form, but a thought form too.¹ My right brain alert.² Making connections. Drawing on feeling and living and on the making of others – a Shona sculpture in my mind's eye – a community of responsibilities and spaces and boundaries carved from a single block of stone.

The thinking is about leadership – about the responsibilities and spaces and boundaries – about the stories of leadership brought into supervision: stories of intractable problems; of resource constraints; of theological conflicts; of dying churches; of pastoral need; and stories of leaders – of burnout and of illness, of isolation and burden, and of depression – stories of leadership under pressure. And I wonder about the role of the supervisor and how – now that supervision will be compulsory for ordained ministers³ – this might be not just another burden in an impossible diary, but might be a means of grace;⁴ a structure of redemption⁵ through which we might help one another to dance in the rain.

On the page the lines reveal a woman holding a child. The holding is costly. It demands all that she has. And perhaps the baby will live and perhaps the baby will die. And how will she hold it well? And I think of all that ministers need to hold – the hopes and the fears of others; the births and the deaths; the tensions and the conflicts; the unanswerable questions. And I think about the loneliness of holding it all alone. And I remember the day when as a probationer minister I gathered stones from the congregation, invested, as I had requested, with whatever weighed them down, and how by the time the basket was full, each whispered to each as they passed it along the line, 'Careful! Its heavy,' and how I, receiving it at the communion rail thought, 'I cannot hold it.' And I remember how I wondered as I placed it on the table what it takes to hand it all to God and what kind of holding God does, when in the morning it would be largely me who had to find a way to support these people and to lead them on.

I look at my work. The woman holding the child. Is God the mother-figure and I the child? Can I, who must lead, allow myself to admit smallness and helplessness, when even here I must stand behind the table, and never kneel at the rail with my hands outstretched to receive? And even if I can admit my need, can I bear then to receive the burdens back, to become again the mother who must hold so many things?

The painting is not finished. More colours. More light, and out of the blackness of the page another figure emerges and takes shape. A father-figure. An other. He presses against the woman, his arm around her. He holds her as she holds what she must hold and does not interfere. It is not his role to take her role away. Instead he bears with her. His breathing steady. His body close. Anxiety contained, he keeps watch for all that she might miss as she gazes steadily at the bundle that demands her attention.

Is God the father-figure and I the mother? Is it the case that I have work to do that only I can do? Burdens to carry that only I can carry, and yet burdens that I need not carry alone? Burdens that can only be borne because I too am held? Not as a child, but as an adult, as a leader, as a mother to a people?

Or, is the invitation for me to become the father? To become the one, not who tries to carry what others must carry – their grief, their anger, their hopes, their responsibilities – but the one who acknowledges the weight of what they carry, and lends my weight to help them stand? The one who keeps watch and alerts them to what they might otherwise miss ... even the presence of the God who holds us all in being, and all things?

I think about supervision and the role of the supervisor and the hosting and containing work that needs to be done.⁶ I think about the temptation to invade the space between the mother and the child.⁷ I think about the stories I hear of leaders trying to rescue their people from their problems; their churches from decline; their warring colleagues from the consequences. I think about the assumption they miss that the role of the leader is to find the solution; to intervene; to be the saviour of the day.⁸ And I realise that the role of the supervisor is not to try to put my face between the supervisee and what she or he must carry; nor to help her or him to get between those they serve and the things they must face, but to come alongside; to lend my weight; and keep watch for what they might miss ...⁹

... not least how difficult it is to dance when you are weighed down with other people's stones.

Notes

1. Heather Walton points to the possibilities for *poiēsis* in practical theology with reference to the work of Henri Lefebvre, the dialectic materialist, for whom *poiēsis* refers to the 'supreme, restless, transformative capacity of human beings to reshape their world and create meaning out of the mundane'. (Walton, 2014,

- p. 13). She quotes Lefebvre saying that in our playful creativity 'another reality is born, not a separate one, but one which is "lived" in the everyday, alongside the functional . . . It is a domain without limits' (Walton, 2014, p. 13).
2. Iain McGilchrist's recent book on the dominance of left-brain thinking in Western culture is reviewed in *Holiness* at: www.wesley.cam.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/12-review.pdf.
 3. In July 2015 the British Methodist Conference decided to introduce compulsory supervision for all ordained ministers. I have responsibility as Connexional Director of Supervision for the implementation of the Interim Supervision Policy adopted by the Conference in 2017.
 4. When John Wesley spoke of means of grace he partly meant 'works of piety': 'outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace' (John Wesley, Sermon 16: 'On the Means of Grace', 1739). But he also meant 'works of mercy': 'Are there no other means than these, whereby God is pleased, frequently, yea, ordinarily, to convey his grace to them that either love or fear him? Surely there are works of mercy, as well as works of piety, which are real means of grace?' (John Wesley, Sermon 98: 'On Visiting the Sick', 1786). In particular, Wesley believed that pastoral visiting could be a means of grace as one person puts themselves at the disposal of the other for their deep good and so that God might visit them both in the process. I explored this thinking in a previous article in *Holiness*: www.wesley.cam.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/08-leach.pdf. Following Wesley's thinking, if supervision is to be a means of grace it needs to be:
 - 1 Eccentric – the person supervising needs to put themselves out of the centre in order to host the concerns of the supervisee.
 - 2 Prayerful – making intentional room for God to speak (praying before; praying during; praying afterwards; praying silently; praying aloud).
 - 3 Structured – Wesley had a clear structure for pastoral visiting in order that it be an intentional use of time and not just a chat. This was in order that the conversation might reach beneath the surface of things.
 5. According to Reformed practical theologian Ed Farley, a redemptive structure is:
 - a social, economic or political system or practice
 - that shapes the encounters and interactions that happen within it
 - in ways that promote human health and well-being
 - in the light of God's self-revelation.Supervision that attempts inappropriately to use power or to rescue or 'fix' supervisees might be considered idolatrous (displacing power from its proper place). Supervision that empowers might be considered redemptive.
 6. In *Pastoral Supervision: A Handbook* (2nd edn, 2015), Michael Paterson and I link the role of the supervisor as one who contains the supervisee with the notion of hospitality – the making of space for the other to be received. At the practical level this is about creating a physical space that is conducive to the task, and making the space in the diary in a reliable way. At a deeper level it is about being

emotionally available and allowing ourselves to be fully present to the supervisee and what they bring.

7. In considering the kind of parenting that infants need, psychologist Carl Goldberg identified three kinds of looking that the mother-figure can offer as she holds her baby. The healthiest kind that is of the most developmental use to the infant is the gazing upon that allows the infant to look back and see into the inner world of the mother; what this gazing does is to establish that both the parent and the infant have inner worlds to be cherished and explored. By containing her own anxiety and making it safe for the infant to gaze openly at her, the mother makes a safe enough space in which the infant can become a person with their own inner world.

Goldberg's second kind of looking maintains the gaze but does not allow the infant access to what's within, resulting in the sensation for the infant of being looked at. This is often because the parent is aware of their anxiety and wants to push that anxiety away and protect the infant from it. Unfortunately the child does not receive a message of protection, but a sense of distance and loss.

Goldberg's third kind of looking at an infant is the kind that is overwhelmed by anxiety each time the gaze is engaged. The child learns to fear their own inner world and intimacy with others.

The consequences of Goldberg's theory for supervision relationships is to highlight the importance of the supervisor working on their own fears and anxieties and their healthy containment – neither pushing these fears away, nor allowing themselves to be overwhelmed by them, but letting the negative emotions have a place, contained by something more solid. This is also true in healthy pastoral work, and part of the role of the supervisor is to support the development in the supervisor of the management of their own anxiety in the face of others' fears.

8. Another resource for thinking about these unconscious patterns in ministry is the drama triangle presented by Leach and Paterson (2015, pp. 100–104).
9. One of Donald Winnicott's important contributions to the world of psychotherapy is his notion of the third space or what is sometimes known as the nursing triad. The importance of such a figure is twofold according to Winnicott, for whom this figure is paradigmatically the father. This figure, at one remove from the visceral business of birth and umbilical ties, at his best, can provide both physical and emotional holding for the mother without being consumed by her fears and anxiety, and at the same time can see in broader perspective what is happening in the environment and so hold this holding work in time and in space. In this picture, the father-figure, though physically close to the mother and child, faces away from them, keeping watch for what she, absorbed, might miss.

As a minister it is my experience that I need this kind of support, helping me to hold what at times feels uncontainable, and yet that is not all I need. I also need a supervisor who is not only absorbed in my stuff and in my version of events; who is not only validating the fact that, yes, I have a lot to hold, but who is able to see more of what is happening in the wider environment and help me gain some greater perspective and – if necessary – some distance; who is able

to put me in touch not only with the part of myself that can contain the work, but with the part of myself that can see and explore and take a view.

There are three consequences for supervisory work of seeing the kind of holding that God does through Winnicott's notion of the third space. First, the restorative dimension of supervision in which the supervisor makes space for the supervisee, identifies with their state of mind and conveys to them that she or he has done so is crucial to effective supervision. Second, the supervisor needs to offer not only containment, but a broad horizon. A wide-ranging perspective that feels unsympathetic or disconnected from the supervisee's concerns will not lead to a productive supervision session or an owned change of perspective in the supervisee, so discerning when that connection is already in place and when it needs reinforcement is a crucial skill. Third, while the attention of the supervisee as carer is on the person cared for, they too, to be effective, need to be able to stand in the place of the one gaining more perspective and distance in order to offer care that is safe and directed towards the horizon of God's justice and care. In helping the carer as supervisee to achieve such perspective, the supervisor needs not only to offer their own perspective, but to try to create the kind of space in which alternative perspectives can be considered and, in the case of those supervisees for whom this matters, in which they might reconnect with their own fundamental sense of who God is and how God's priorities and perspective might shape their work.

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'Storying the leading': curating narratives of leadership in conversation with Vaughan S. Roberts and David Sims, *Leading by Story*

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*This article has been developed from a conversation held and recorded at the Wesley House community in January 2018, as part of its regular Thursday evening Methodist Studies sessions. The session used Roberts' and Sims' recently published book *Leading by Story* to consider how leadership is embodied in ministry. Sharing stories of leadership in Wesley House's cross-cultural community led to significant insights, which arose as one particular leadership story was explored using Roberts' and Sims' central concept of 'curating stories'. This article offers the conversation as a reflective review of the book. Staff, students and friends of Wesley House present at the conversation represented many different contexts, including Methodist churches in the USA, Britain, Fiji, Hong Kong, Kenya, South Korea and Zambia.*

Leading by Story: Rethinking Church Leadership, Vaughan S. Roberts and David Sims (London: SCM Press, 2017), 256 pp, £25.00 pbk

LEADERSHIP • CURATION • CROSS-CULTURE • CONVERSATION • NARRATIVE

The value of stories

Over the past three decades, storytelling has become a key tool across a number of disciplines within theology and the social sciences. In their book *Leading by Story*, Vaughan Roberts and David Sims apply this 'narrative turn' to the concept of leadership, especially as it is understood within the Church. They note that this is an appropriate application, not only because of the prevalent understanding of the human person as *homo narrans narratur* (both a storyteller and a story), but also because the Church is specifically a community of disciples who follow Jesus, the storyteller par excellence.¹

Attending to the connection between leadership and stories – or, as Roberts and Sims pleasingly put it, 'storying the leading'² – offers a fresh approach that avoids the heroic nature of much leadership literature with its search for reliable leadership 'traits' or for the most effective psychometric combination. Stories, in contrast to traits, are able to contain multiple smaller interactions, and, crucially, allow numerous characters to play a part in leadership. Indeed, stories can themselves become 'the leader', as different people choose to embed their own actions within the story: 'The story is not just a vehicle for leadership; it is what leads.'³ In order to verbalise what kind of leadership is operative in any context, it is important to listen carefully to the stories that are being told to us, and the stories that we ourselves tell.

Engaging in cross-cultural conversation is a recognised way of exposing the values and perspectives that are otherwise difficult to see when we are only talking to people who share our assumptions. Telling stories of leadership – whether good, bad or otherwise – in a cross-cultural group setting enables us to begin to pick out the values embedded in those stories. A healthy practice, as recommended in a pastoral setting by Gordon Lynch, is to record leadership encounters verbatim in order to enable an interrogation of the interventions made, the ideas communicated and the patterns of language used.⁴ In a session at Wesley House, those gathered were invited to tell a story of leadership that had made an impression upon them. These are recorded verbatim below, and while this is second-order reflection (reflection upon reflection), it is a productive exercise to consider what themes are embedded in them as you read them:

- 'I'm in circuit ministry and within our circuit we have a leadership team which comprises the ministers and circuit stewards. We always meet in the afternoon because the circuit officers are retired and the presbyters, who have entire control over our diaries, quite like not to go out in the

evenings. A very able working-age person came to me and said, "I would love to be part of the leadership team and would love to help shape the vision of the circuit going forward." So I went to the leadership team and told them about this person who really wanted to be involved in what we do. They said, "But we would have to meet in the evening." And that was their resistance to having an able, working-age lay person involved in leadership in the church.'

- 'A similar story: I'm a Circuit Steward and the only woman officer on the team. I thought it would be nice to have another woman – and someone who is below the age of about 50 – and so I asked a capable young woman I knew if she would be prepared to become a circuit steward. She thought about it a long time, and then she came back and said "Yes". But when I brought it to the meeting of the circuit stewards, one of the stewards said, "But she has a baby! So how are we going to cope in the meeting if she brings her baby?" That was the reaction I had.'
- 'The church where I had the pleasure of working was a medium-sized church, but there were a lot of volunteers. The church office was essentially run by volunteers. One man in particular would always come in at least two or three times a week to ask if anyone wanted coffee. He was retired, and had been a very accomplished journalist for the major local paper, reviewing art, music and other entertainment. He would serve by going to get coffee for anyone who wanted it. He would be the first person to greet people coming to the church. He would also very dutifully and kindly edit the worship bulletin, and fold all 160 copies of the bulletin each week. He was an amazing person, who passed away recently. He was a very durable saint.'
- 'I have something to share about one of the ministers in the church in my country [a southern African state]. He's retired now, but I want to share the story of when he disobeyed an instruction from the President of the country. It was common practice in the 1980s, if a minister of the government died – whether he or she was a Christian or not – the State would simply instruct one of the churches and say, "Conduct a service for this person. It will take place, so get organised." One of the government ministers died, and the office of the President instructed that this particular church, which could accommodate about three to four thousand people, should organise the service. The minister of the church received a phone call from the office of the President to say, "Would you

prepare a church service for this government minister tomorrow. He is being given a state funeral at your church.” The pastor asked for the name of the official who had died, and when he was told, he said, “Let me first check through my records and see if this person is a communicant member.” The policy of the national church was that the body of the deceased could not be taken into a church if that person was not a communicant member; those were the regulations. This particular government minister was not on the roll of the church, so the pastor responded saying that he did not qualify to be brought into the church, and the church service could not be conducted there. However, the state representatives insisted that this was an instruction from the President, so he should just go ahead and obey. So the minister said “OK”, but the following day he locked up the church building, and left. As far as the government was concerned, everything was arranged, so when the body was brought up to the church building, there was confusion because they found the door locked. Even the state President was there. So they got the police to come and break into the church, and the service went ahead. Afterwards the President instructed the leadership of the national church to deal with the minister of the church. That very night, the minister was transferred out from that congregation to a very far-away place. I’m just sharing that story to look at the cost of his actions, whether they were brave, bold, courageous or fundamental.’

- ‘This story made a profound impression upon me: it must have been about 1956 when our very first long-playing record player was delivered to our house. Of course, the new player couldn’t play our old records, so we had to buy our very first long-playing record. My parents bought a record of the songs from the Gilbert and Sullivan opera *The Gondoliers*. In *The Gondoliers* there is a character called the Duke of Plaza-Toro, and there is a song about what a wonderful duke and general he is. There is only one line that I remember from this song, but at the age of six or seven it made a huge impression on me. It said, “He led his regiment from behind, he found it less exciting.” I have a feeling that this line has actually shaped my style of leadership throughout my ministry.’
- ‘The principal of a Methodist theological college in the South Pacific really impressed me as a leader. He lives in one of the most conservative societies that I’ve ever encountered and, as principal of the college, acts like a chief. He runs the college to make sure that in every detail it fits in with the protocol, ritual and tradition of the local culture. At the same

time, he is leading the college on a path of excellence in academic work and is being quietly subversive. For instance, he is bringing people in to run seminars on postcolonial biblical study and is making suggestions about ways in which women can move into leadership in the Church. He says "While I can't change the culture on my own, I can do something to make things a little better."

- 'My story is of a minister who recently requested to be moved, even though he was in a good circuit that had plenty of resources to pay him well, which is rare in my country in East Africa. He is serving with another minister, who is his superintendent. When I asked why he wanted to be transferred, he told me that he doesn't want to reach a point where he would disagree with the superintendent minister, which might taint his ministry for the future. He told me that he had better leave that circuit and go to another where he would feel comfortable serving, without any issues with the superintendent. I asked him if he was sure he was not the problem, and then he shared with me the reasons he had at first been reluctant to share. Finally I told him, "Fine, if you feel that is what is going to make your ministry good, then so be it." He replied, "I would like to continue serving my present circuit" – it is very lively (and in fact he is loved by the people) – "but I mean to sacrifice this and leave for the sake of my ministry." I prayed for him that when the time comes he will leave properly and comfortably.'
- 'My story is from East Belfast, where I was minister of a church for one year. During that year the Boys' Brigade celebrated their eightieth anniversary and we had a big celebration. After the service there was a supper and I was walking around, talking to all the old boys of the Boys' Brigade who'd come back. Many of these men were very successful in their careers, and by the end of the evening my cassock pockets were full of cheques that they wanted to give to the church to say thank you for what the Boys' Brigade had done for them. That evening a story emerged of a Boys' Brigade leader who, throughout the Troubles in Northern Ireland, which lasted more than 30 years, would drive the church minibus around every night to transport boys from the community to activities connected with the Boys' Brigade. Those boys, who were now men, kept saying to me, "If it had not been for him, I would have been in the paramilitaries. I might even be dead by now." A day or two later I told this man, who was now a church steward, that I'd heard all these stories, and I said, "That's amazing!" And he said, "Well, anybody would have done

that." And I said, "No, they didn't, you did!" He was actually awarded the MBE for that work a couple of years ago. He had no idea of the worth and the impact of the way he had led that community to keep their children out of the paramilitaries.'

- 'I want to tell you a story. My friend led a mission trip to a Central African state. He went with his generator and his PowerPoint and his very slick talk to tribal groups in villages in Central Africa. They went as a team and they set up their tent and generator outside the village and my friend waited for people to come and sit where they'd provided some seating. The first day came and went, and no one came. The second day came and went, and no one came. On the third day he thought, "Well, I might as well make use of the generator." So he got his hair clippers to clip his hair. As he started, some small boys came out of the village to see what he was doing. They sat on the seat and pointed to their hair. And he thought, "I don't want to cut their hair – it's never been cut. It will be like cutting a bird's nest." But then he thought, "Well, I somehow have to communicate with these people." So he started to cut their hair, and as soon as he started to cut the first boy's hair there was a queue right back to the village. He was thinking, "My poor clippers! They will never be the same again after cutting all this hair that's never been cut before!" The next day, the chief came out of the village, got in the queue and sat on the seat. My friend thought, "This is the chief." So he asked, "What can I do for you?" And the chief replied, "Cut my hair." So he cut the hair of the chief, and when it was done, the chief said to him, "What have you come here for?" He replied, "I came to tell you about the love of Jesus." The chief said, "Now you have cut our hair, we will listen to you."

By paying attention to the way and words in which these stories were told, a number of themes began to emerge, which can be understood as the values that have informed why these stories were chosen as stories that in some way exemplify leadership. The following themes were initially identified:

- 'One thing I noticed is the role that *humility* plays in leadership. Several stories had that theme. So, for example, if the church volunteer were to know that we spoke his name in this context of leadership, he would be shocked – he would not believe that we would think of him. But God uses very humble people doing small tasks to make a difference in people's lives.'

- 'We talked about *risk*, being willing to go to a place where you're not going to be in control.'
- 'We talked about leadership being *gifted*. In other words, it is not something that we assume ourselves, but rather something which is granted by the church or whatever other organisation we lead.'
- 'We talked about the potential misuse of power, and the *responsibility* of using leadership to make bridges between different camps. In a way, the stories illustrated how to bend the rules when needs arise.'
- 'We talked about the way we all made up our minds and came to our conclusions about the *motivations* for how people acted (or didn't act) in the stories. The more we talked about it, the more we realised that there were far more possibilities underneath the surface than the ones we leapt on when we first heard the story.'
- 'We recognised a *diversity* of leadership styles, whether it's a chief leading from the front, or, like the song lyric, from behind, or a kind of servant leadership which would not see itself as leadership but which is yet still a style of leadership.'

Multi-storied stories

Storytelling is a powerful heuristic tool to examine leadership. As we have seen above, the particular way a story of leadership is told will inevitably foreground one or more themes or values while obscuring others. One of the contributions made by Roberts and Sims is their nuanced approach to such stories. Stories can be told about beliefs, buildings and people; about the past, present and future; to protect identity, encourage transformation, or rally supporters. Importantly, the nature of stories means they are rarely monolithic. However much we may resist the notion, as Roberts and Sims insist, 'We live simultaneously in many different stories.'⁵ Developing narrative leaders whom we trust to tell stories that include us and the things that are important to us is only possible when we recognise that we inhabit a kind of 'narrative ecology', in which different stories can live alongside each other, interacting in convergence, healthy contest and fruitful clarification.⁶ The possibility that stories may be told differently, to foreground different themes or values, provides the space in which leadership can exercise its gift to enable a community or organisation to thrive.

Chapter 5, 'Who Owns the Story?', contains significant insights that inform the development of narrative leadership in the remainder of the book. Roberts and Sims note that stories lend themselves to being polyvocal and multi-authored, meaning that their ownership is often unclear. As a story is passed on and told by a variety of people, it can in fact take on a life of its own, moving out of the close control of the original narrator. Such stories, which 'refuse to be disciplined',⁷ are often the most exciting and interesting stories for all concerned. However, they can be troublesome for those who are seeking to lead narratively in their context or organisation, because stories that invite participation and interaction cannot be tightly monitored or regulated. This is an issue worth noting and exploring. Narrative leadership 'works best' when the story has 'a measure of independence from the person who is telling it'.⁸ So, narrative leaders require a generous dose of *humility* – disciplined attentiveness to the stories that are being told, retold, and reshaped in the retelling by others, as well as oneself.

The concept that Roberts and Sims reach for to summarise this complex process is 'curation'. Leading by story is compared with curating an exhibition:

The art of curating is not only the selection of objects, but the creation of a story that puts those objects together, that turns them into a narrative. So curating is itself a way of crafting the story, both by the selection and encouragement of some elements of the story, and in giving a plot line to the way that the elements of the stories are seen together.⁹

Curation, by its nature, recognises the broad narrative ecology mentioned above. There are many different kinds of story that might sit alongside one another and interact in meaningful ways. Roberts and Sims develop an ecology that acknowledges three main genres of story that are present in churches: interpretive, identity and improvised. Interpretive stories give a big picture of the mission and work of a church. Identity stories provide self-understanding in particular local contexts. Improvised stories are 'stories being cultivated or improvised in local churches which – depending upon specific climate and conditions – can grow in a wide variety of different ways'.¹⁰ Over three subsequent chapters, these genres are further subdivided:

Interpretive stories:

- Theological narratives
- Ecclesial narratives
- Liturgical narratives

Identity stories:

- Historical narratives
- Organisational narratives
- Personal narratives

Improvised stories:

- Finance
- Architecture
- Governance
- Pastoral
- Mission
- Education
- Media
- Art
- Untended narratives

In Chapter 9, Roberts and Sims offer a case study of the introduction of Natural Church Development (described as a 'managerialist approach to ministry'¹¹) to a Church of England diocese, in which Roberts himself participated with his congregation. Their experience of the process is helpfully mapped on to the narrative ecology delineated above, and significant gaps in the NCD approach are identified by the kinds of stories that were left underdeveloped or omitted entirely. By contrast, where the NCD approach generated fruitful results in Roberts' local context, this is attributed to the more narratively holistic way in which it was implemented there. In particular, five practical points about leading by story are illustrated by this worked example:

1. Leaders need to be aware of stories circulating.
2. Leaders can modify negative stories.
3. People are empowered if they can contribute to the story.
4. Leaders need to know that all their actions can become stories.
5. Leaders recognise multivocality.¹²

A curated leadership story

Recognising the rich ecology of narratives that populates the landscape of our churches is one of the significant lessons to be learned from Roberts' and Sims' book. In our exploration of leadership narratives at the session at Wesley House, we tested the fruitfulness of this approach by choosing one of the stories that

had been told, considering the different narratives that were at play within it. Considering the stories that were present in the situation – and those that were hidden or absent – led to a careful interrogation of the leadership that had been offered, and stimulated a more holistic, contextually aware approach. The story we considered was that of the minister who refused to officiate at a state funeral. Here, the stories identified by the Wesley House group have been recorded according to the narrative ecology outlined above.

- *The story of the deceased (Identity Story>Personal Narrative)*
The story of the government minister who had died was notable for its absence in this situation. It was pointed out that the deceased's wishes had not been part of the consideration of the funeral arrangements, since it was government policy at the time that any government minister who had died, Christian or not, should have a Christian state service. This person had not, to the knowledge of the narrator, been to any church in his life as a regular worshipper.
- *The story of government policy (Improvised Story>Governance Narrative)*
The 'disappearance' of the personal narrative of the deceased indicates the precedence of the story of the government and its policy of state funerals. This is an improvised story because it arose in the particular circumstances that prevailed at the time: while there were many stories of government corruption circulating at that time, the Church and State were not in conflict at that moment, providing a rationale for the state funerals to be conducted; while all Christian denominations were included in the policy, this particular church was used regularly because of its ability to accommodate a large congregation. Following this incident, the government began to use a different church building instead, and this church was no longer approached to conduct state funerals.
- *The echo of a story (Identity Story>Historical Narrative)*
This incident prompted one British participant in the conversation to reflect on the only state funeral they had witnessed in person: the state funeral of Winston Churchill in 1965. Churchill was not a Christian, and did not express sympathy with the Christian faith, and yet St Paul's Cathedral must have been approached in a very similar way to the church in our leadership story. It is easy for us to balk at the practice of this southern African state; however, it has formed part of the history of the United Kingdom, and other places, too.

- *The story of funeral practice (Interpretive Story>Liturgical Narrative)*
The story of a church that has a policy of only holding services for people on the roll is of significant interest. This practice was brought into sharp relief by the experience of one participant who that day had conducted funeral services in a church for two people who were not members of the church, neither of whom would have expressed an explicit Christian faith. Further conversation clarified the practice of the church in the leadership story. The national policy was that if a person who was not a believer died, then their body could not be taken into the church building for a funeral service. This policy stood, even when the close family members were believers. In that case, support would be offered through prayers at the home, but no church funeral service would be conducted.
- *The minister's espoused rationale (Improvised Story>Pastoral Narrative)*
The minister in this leadership story was basing his actions on the notion of justice in applying the church's policy. According to our narrator, he had explained his rationale in the following way: 'For the sake of justice, if I have denied some members of my congregation who have lost their dear ones, saying that the body of your relative is not going to pass through the church, then why should I allow this person simply because he is a government minister? I cannot do that for the sake of justice.' The minister was bringing a wealth of other pastoral narratives into play, weighing the demands of the situation against integrity towards the other stories he had been part of over his ministry in that place. And he stood his ground, even when instructed by the state President, arguing that there were no exceptions in the policy for government ministers.
- *The story as kingdom parable (Interpretive Story>Theological Narrative)*
The new insight brought by the preceding information began to transform our understanding of this leadership narrative, by highlighting the theme of justice towards other people. Now, the stories of other people – 'little people' – who have had the church's policy applied to their loved ones are recognised, and it is perceived important that their stories are not to be diminished by changing the rules for someone else, just because that person is significant in the government's eyes. As one participant notes, 'I think for me it suddenly becomes something of a parable. I could almost imagine reading it in the Gospels!'
- *The congregation's story (Identity Story>Organisational Narrative)*
It is interesting to consider the response of the minister's congregation

as this story unfolded. They apparently had no issue with the decision that he had made, since they had all in some way been affected by the policy in the past. When they understood that their minister had been pressured to bend the rules for someone 'important', and that he had instead stood his ground, they were adamant that the minister had been right: 'The minister is correct that we are all equal in the eyes of God.' This view was shared by other members of the clerical fraternity too, who had also upheld the policy in their own churches. The ministry of the church 'organisation' had been shaped by this policy over many years, and the minister in question was now throwing light on an ill-considered attempt to undermine it.

- *The story of the Church's relationship with the State (Interpretive Story> Ecclesial Narrative)*

The actions of this minister had repercussions because the national church leaders viewed the incident through the lens of the Church–State relationship. There was concern that his subversive actions would reflect badly on the Church, especially if it were perceived that the Church sanctioned what he had done. Therefore, the national Church moved quickly to discipline the minister, responding also to the request of the State that the minister be transferred immediately. The Church could not readily dismiss or discharge the minister, since he had in fact only been upholding their own policy; instead, they removed him from this prestigious church and sent him to a far-flung rural appointment. The minister reluctantly agreed to the move, but was clearly unhappy, exclaiming that it showed the Church 'was a Church led by cowards'. In his mind, the repercussions showed that the church leaders were operating under the State's tutelage, rather than as an autonomous Church whose freedom from interference was protected by the Constitution. The failure of the Church to challenge the government's attitude therefore indicated a more syncretist operant relationship.

- *Future stories (Improvised Story>Untended Narrative)*

Having considered the various narrative strands that were present at the time of the situation, it is interesting to think about the 'future stories' that encapsulate the expectations of the characters at the time, and the reality of what became of those expectations. So, for instance, the national church leaders anticipated that their disciplinary action against the minister would regain the trust of the State; but, in actual fact, subsequent state funerals were held in another denomination's building, and didn't

return to this church, despite the building's merits as a venue. The minister's own narrative was dramatically impacted by the incident. From an initial move to a different province, he was supported by the national Church to study overseas for a doctorate, and then seconded to another national Church for theological education. It could be argued that, rather than being curtailed, his scope of influence expanded as a result of this situation. These may be characterised as 'untended narratives' since they recount the consequences of the choices made by both Church and minister that were not perceived at the time.

There are undoubtedly other strands that could be extracted from this densely woven narrative. However, the value of the approach offered by Roberts and Sims is not merely in the identification of these varied strands, but especially in noting the way in which they were curated together. There are, of course, two levels at play. First, and most immediately, there is the way in which this leadership moment was narrated to the group at Wesley House. Comparing the initial telling with the list of further narrative strands identified above provides an indication of the leadership themes that were important to the initial narrator, and those that were hidden or absent. This brings into focus cultural differences in the aims and practice of leadership: for instance, the story of the deceased man and his family, which was absent from the initial telling, was considered to be of crucial significance for the discussion group members who had experience of ministering in the British context. Noting this in turn challenged both assumptions: the one is challenged to consider where room might be found for the deceased and the grieving in a story that is otherwise about Church–State relations; the other is challenged to look beyond immediate pastoral concerns to the influence of funeral practice on the wider church community's thinking and being. 'Storying the leadership' is thus an important reflective tool to interrogate one's own leadership priorities and assumptions. Whose story is being told? Whose story is being muted? What themes are highlighted or obscured by the way I curate stories of leadership?

Second, reflecting on this leadership *narrative* in turn provides a platform from which to interrogate and reform leadership *practice* itself. This is one of the most significant contributions to be developed from Roberts' and Sims' book. Observing the gaps in a particular curation of a leadership narrative sends the reflective leader back into practice, alert to the different stories they might now want to 'curate into' the story they are leading.

Conclusion: leadership as curation

In order to apply Roberts' and Sims' work to their own leadership practice, the group at Wesley House was asked to reflect on alternative ways of responding to the narrated situation that would have led to a differently curated leadership story. This led to three significant observations that were considered to be conclusions drawn from the discussion, and areas for further reflection and research.

First was the role that *consultation* could have played in this situation. As one group member said, referring to their own experience of curating art:

When you curate something, as I have, you are conscious of some factors, but there are other factors of which you are not conscious. I wonder if there are unconscious dimensions to this situation to which the minister himself was not alert. So, for instance, he may or may not have been alert to his instinct not to consult, but it seems to me that that is a feature of the way he curated the stories – he acted out of his own principles, and did not consult to find out what perspectives other people had on the situation.

Consultation may have brought new insight, or at least a greater awareness of the other narratives at play. Wise curation acknowledges the need to consult with others whose stories are intertwined in the situation. Leaders who 'lead by story' are thus not simply good storytellers; they are also good facilitators and listeners: 'Leading needs to involve enabling people to tell their stories, hearing the stories that are being told, and enabling others to hear the stories too.'¹³ Leadership is therefore not a set of principles to follow, but rather a skill to cultivate – a wise marshalling of the various narrative strands that are present in any moment in order to curate a faithfully innovative story for the future. By consulting and learning from a wide range of perspectives, especially cross-cultural, the repertoire of possible narratives available to a leader expands, increasing the opportunity for effective leadership.

The group identified a further important leadership exercise: the *rehearsal* of leadership narratives. Had the minister in this story rehearsed what he was about to do with others in leadership around him, his eventual response might have been helpfully modified or moderated. Rehearsing a leadership response in a safe, intentional context helps to avoid distorting the experiences of those we are leading, and to reduce unintended consequences. It is one of the many

things that can usefully be included in the practice of regular pastoral supervision, which is currently being implemented in the British Methodist Church.¹⁴

Finally, understanding leadership as curation highlights the *shared holding* of an organisation's or community's story. So often leadership literature focuses on the person or persons who hold responsibility, who can reasonably talk about 'my leadership' or 'our leadership'. Leaders who are curators, however, are keenly aware that the stories they curate do not belong to them. In other words, leadership is not owned, but *held*. On behalf of others, the leader listens and tells and retells – curates – the various narrative strands that exist in a situation, so that those others may ultimately find themselves again in the new, shared narrative.

Vaughan Roberts and David Sims have offered a profound insight into the nature of leadership that both provokes and requires further reflection and experimentation. *Leading by Story* is an eminently readable book, full of vivid examples and quotations that locate the argument in the wider leadership literature. It would make an excellent resource for leadership teams seeking to explore and expand their own understanding and practice.

Two further comments may be made by way of review of Roberts' and Sims' book, as a result of our shared reflection at Wesley House. First, the conversation that Wesley House hosted was made possible only because of its cross-cultural richness. As noted earlier, intentional cross-cultural dialogue is a reliable way of both observing and moving beyond the hidden assumptions that we often operate with in a particular setting. Cross-cultural stories do not figure prominently in this book, which is essentially located in a Western and Northern church context. How might we be more intentional about hearing *global* stories of leadership? Where might we access them if the kind of cross-cultural conversation enabled at Wesley House is not on offer to us locally? How much energy are we willing to give to find a range of conversation partners who can help us to consider and curate the leadership that our churches (and other organisations) need?

Second, Roberts and Sims are to be encouraged to be bolder in holding out their work as a tool for church leadership today. In their conclusion they note: 'In offering a narrative understanding of leadership in churches, we are not saying that here, at last, is the true understanding of how to lead.' Their motivation is, of course, commendable; they do not wish to claim a false monopoly of the field, and so they simply wish to add narrative leadership 'as

a contribution to the menu of ideas and options that you bring with you to situations in which you wish to lead or to support leadership'.¹⁵ This might, however, claim *too little* for the role that narrative leadership could play as a heuristic tool for leaders today. Leaders as 'curators' may well be better placed to receive insights from other leadership styles than if curation were simply one in a menu of many equally valued approaches. The concepts of curation and narrative ecology helpfully open up space in which varied kinds of leadership can be recognised, explored, critiqued and re-membered as part of the ongoing life of the Church. 'Storying the leading', then, surely, is essential for all leadership today, if the Church is to be self-aware, globally conversant, and open to the many gifts that God gives through others.

Perhaps the most telling commendation of this book is the observation that Roberts' and Sims' idiom – leader as curator – has trickled into the shared discourse of Wesley House. It is not uncommon to hear it used in conversation, in sermon or in committee.¹⁶ While this is by no means the most prominent conclusion of Roberts and Sims themselves, it is the notion that has stuck most firmly with the group who told stories of leadership together that night in January. 'Curation' is a profoundly generative idea, capable of steering leadership discourse in a new direction, with new language and fresh possibilities. In the midst of today's 'narrative turn', the challenge for leaders set by Roberts and Sims is not merely to understand the stories by which people give meaning to their lives but also to become competent and confident curators of these stories, as so many items in the exhibition of God's good news.

Notes

1. Vaughan S. Roberts and David Sims, *Leading by Story: Rethinking Church Leadership*, London: SCM Press, 2017, pp. 24–25.
2. See Chapter 2, 'Leading the Stories and Storying the Leading'.
3. Roberts and Sims, *Leading by Story*, p. 49.
4. G. Lynch, *Pastoral Care and Counselling*, London: Sage, 2002, p. 27.
5. Roberts and Sims, *Leading by Story*, p. 57.
6. This concept is taken from Yiannis Gabriel, 'Narrative Ecologies and the Role of Counter-Narratives', in S. Frandsen, T. Kuhn and M. W. Lundholt (eds), *Counter-Narratives and Organization*, London: Routledge, 2016. See Roberts and Sims, *Leading by Story*, pp. 70–72.
7. Roberts and Sims, *Leading by Story*, p. 73.
8. Roberts and Sims, *Leading by Story*, p. 82.
9. Roberts and Sims, *Leading by Story*, p. 86.
10. Roberts and Sims, *Leading by Story*, p. 125.
11. Roberts and Sims, *Leading by Story*, p. 151.

12. Roberts and Sims, *Leading by Story*, pp. 169–176.
13. Roberts and Sims, *Leading by Story*, p. 199.
14. For an example of 'rehearsal' within the context of pastoral supervision, see Jane Leach and Michael Paterson, *Pastoral Supervision: A Handbook*, 2nd edn, London: SCM Press, 2015, pp. 152–156.
15. Roberts and Sims, *Leading by Story*, p. 181.
16. Or even, thanks to the Principal, on BBC Radio 4's 'Thought for the Day', 22 January 2018.



Reviews

Methodist Heritage and Identity, Brian E. Beck (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 188 pp, £105.00 hbk; £25.99 e-book

As Principal of Wesley House, Secretary and President of the British Methodist Conference, and Co-chair of the Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies, Brian Beck has occupied a unique position at the intersection of church and academy, theological reflection and ecclesiastical and ecumenical praxis. In *Methodist Heritage and Identity*, Dr Beck has gathered 18 essays, written over two decades, and reshaped them to consider salient themes around the distinctive Methodist way of being Christian, covering Methodist history, polity and discipline. The treatment is incisive, lucid, honest and challenging. Many of the papers were first written for general audiences, and so, although grounded in profound scholarship, they are also eminently accessible to a wide readership.

The volume opens with a tercentenary reflection on John Wesley, 'encounter or embarrassment?', admitting the hagiography, but identifying six key Wesleyan emphases which still repay thought today. Two essays then consider Charles Wesley's hymns, suggesting why they may have fallen from favour in the modern Church, and recommending their use as a devotional resource. A deft summary of 'Methodism after Wesley' leads into a section on connexionalism and Conference *episcopē*, moving from the nineteenth-century exponents of a high doctrine of the pastoral office to the dialogue between connexion and koinonia. A biographical study of the Cambridgeshire barrister Richard Matthews (1796–1854), defender and critic of the Wesleyan hierarchy, and ardent abolitionist, rounds off the first part of the book.

Part Two begins with a consideration of 'the elusive Methodist identity', finding the essence of Methodism in a rich blend of ingredients, from Arminianism and experience to collaboration in ministry and commitment to mission. A Methodist perspective is brought to bear on the idea of a National Church (not the same as an Established Church), on the Porvoo Common Statement and on the Turnbull Report's proposals for restructuring the Church of England. A 1993 paper on 'Unity and Conscience' refutes the simplistic dismissal of all disagreements between Christians as sinful, while also refusing to rest comfortably with division; the companion piece on unity and eschatology insists that Christian unity is not a matter of simple progress, but of patient striving in the light of God's ultimate purpose. The final paper, 'What is a Divinity School for?', holds the tension between tradition and critical evaluation, and emphasises a lifelong commitment to learn.

Most of these chapters began as lectures, addresses or brief articles, demanding concise treatment of big subjects. To summarise without oversimplifying is a rare skill, but it is certainly achieved here. And, although deeply rooted in the traditions of Methodism – its theology, its polity and its hymnody – Dr Beck is willing to reflect critically on the tradition, whether in the light of contemporary culture or from the perspectives of ecumenism or mission. His questions are insightful and prescient, and repay further pondering.

Martin Wellings is Superintendent Minister of the Oxford Circuit, and Co-chair of the Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies. He has served as a member of the Faith and Order Committee and of the Methodist Heritage Committee, and is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

Oxford, UK

Yet Alive: Methodists in British Fiction Since 1890, David Dickinson
(Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016),
148 pp, £41.99 hbk

The author of this short, intensive study of Methodist literature over the last two centuries enjoyed years of experience teaching English before entering the Methodist ministry. He therefore combines detailed and penetrating literary skills with an intimate knowledge and understanding of Methodists in British fiction.

‘Yet alive’ is from Charles Wesley’s hymn that opens the British Methodist Conference, and each chapter is headed by a line from other hymns, symbolising the importance of Methodist hymnody for his theme. There are full notes, bibliography and index. The book follows two distinct strands of argument, each keeping the other in its sights. First, Dickinson explores and relates the history of novels reflecting Methodism both from 1890, as the subtitle suggests, and earlier in the nineteenth century, before analysing Methodist issues in works, among others, by Quiller-Couch, Arnold Bennett, Howard Spring and, more recently, Peter Hobbs. The other strand suggests ways in which, with Methodist numbers decreasing since about 1920, literature can profitably convey matters of belief that might appeal to non-believers and arouse interest in faith that conventional Methodist means such as preaching and hymnody are failing to achieve. Dickinson believes that in reading a novel he is exploring theology. This second strand of his argument, together with a succinct history of Methodism, features mainly in his excellent Introduction, which is a stimulating study in itself.

His study of Methodist literature concentrates very much on the role and importance of preaching. There is, however, a tendency, having related the plots of works in some detail, to repeat himself when he returns later to considering the preaching in the books he has already covered. Some of the novels, such as Quiller-Couch’s and Joseph Hocking’s, even Howard Spring’s *Fame is the Spur*, analysed in detail, are less read today. Nevertheless, the lessons are very profitable for us and should encourage Methodists to read more novels and see faith differently.

Dickinson deals well with the snares awaiting preachers, the temptation to self-aggrandisement, self-dramatisation and self-blame, as well as the criticisms from outsiders. He discusses effectively the way critics analyse Christians' failings. A particularly interesting case is that of Peter Hobbs' *The Short Day Dying* (2005) where the story set in Cornwall in 1870 reveals declining numbers of worshippers and an effective analysis of the young preacher's spiritual difficulties. Preaching is so important to the studies in this book that the author includes a most useful 'Analytical Kit for the literary criticism of sermons in fiction'. From fiction one can learn to avoid the pitfalls of personal failure by assuming the role of a critical observer – a useful way of reading and imbibing truths of the gospel for the uncommitted who enjoy literature for what it can teach at second hand about ourselves and God.

Though some of the novels covered are less fashionable today, the book is highly commended for its originality, clear writing, stimulating arguments and incentives to explore faith through fiction.

Dr Gordon Leah publishes on matters of Christian belief reflected in literature. He is a retired languages teacher and Methodist local preacher.

Worcester, UK

Networks for Faith Formation: Relational Bonds and the Spiritual Growth of Youth, Steven Emery-Wright and Ed Mackenzie (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017), 168 pp, £33.00 hbk; £17.00 pbk

The message of this book is clearly articulated in the Introduction: 'It is ... when teens' family, school, friends, and sports lives and religious congregations somehow connect, intersect, and overlap that teens exhibit the most committed and integral religious and spiritual lives' (Christian Smith and Melinda Denton; p. xiii)

This book reflects on the faith formation of young people within a Christian tradition, although the title does not infer that it reports only one religion. The presentation and layout of this book is clear and easy to follow. It is a pity more attention was not given to the photograph used on the cover to ensure the body language in that picture brought the message of connection and communication that Emery-Wright and Mackenzie strive to convey.

The authors propose eight strands that weave together to form a network that shapes the young person's faith, namely bedroom practices, the church, families, friends, mentors, small groups, events and gatherings, and commission and service. A chapter is devoted to explaining each of these strands, with a concise overview and helpful 'Putting It Into Practice' and 'Further Reading' suggestions in the conclusion of each section. There is also a helpful appendix explaining five principles regarding 'Youth and the Online World'.

In my opinion, a disappointment with this book is that some theological terminology and language used could impede the reader's understanding of the subjects discussed. This is made more cumbersome by the heavy referencing on almost every page.

However, the book is excellently researched, with an extensive bibliography quoting highly respected theologians. Despite this, there are times when conclusions are drawn that needed the authority of other sources.

Unfortunately only one cursory statement is made to safeguarding, without explaining how vital this is. It is a pity that other resources regarding safeguarding are not given in the 'Helpful Reading' section of the 'Mission' chapter.

I would have liked to hear more definitively the voices of young people regarding what they perceive is needed for the future.

The most helpful and exciting section of this book is the final 'Way Forward'. My advice would be to read this chapter first because this section is most likely to be the one that will motivate the reader to take time digesting the information presented in each of the different threads. This is a comprehensive piece of work – which at times perhaps would benefit from editing to give it a 'lighter touch' – which, given due study, could significantly impact the life of churches, not only for the young concerned but for the spiritual health of the entire Church. As the authors note, 'When churches and Christians genuinely engage with the youth in their midst, they discover that not only young people mature in their faith, but that all ages benefit from a deepening relationship with God and with each other' (p. 120).

Val Mullally MA, parenting author and founder of Koemba Parenting

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Darlington, UK*

Radical Leadership: In the New Testament and Today, Michael Green
(London: SPCK, 2017), 101 pp, £9.99 pbk

The aim of this little book, stated clearly at the start, is to commend the principles of leadership found among Jesus and his earliest followers within the New Testament. It recognises the existence of a wealth of books on leadership, including Christian leadership, but does not seek to engage with any work other than the New Testament, so there are no footnotes or bibliography. In so far as Green undertakes any kind of critique it is an appraisal of Christian ministerial training institutions and theological seminaries, coloured by personal experience of Anglican ordination training, along with an assumption that most denominations have a similar pattern.

The book provides a basic overview of key material concerning leadership in different strands of the New Testament, comparing today's norms as it does so. The first two chapters, drawing from the Gospels as a whole, explore how Jesus himself led and how he trained his followers. Moving on to the rest of the New Testament the approach is sometimes an exposition of particular passages, so 'Peter on leadership' (Chapter 3) draws seven principles from 1 Peter 5:1–11, while Chapter 6 takes a similar approach to Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20. In contrast, chapters on 'Leadership at Corinth' and 'Luke on leadership' gather characteristics from across the Corinthian correspondence and the Acts of the Apostles respectively.

In a chapter on 'Women in leadership' Green offers his understanding of texts that are used to disallow such within some churches. He is evidently addressing a particular audience, the result being a very detailed exegesis (relative to anything else in this book) of 1 Timothy 2:12, resulting in a chapter section six pages long, while everywhere else the text is broken by regular subheadings and/or verbally numbered points within them so that no section extends beyond two pages. The chapter ends by allowing that, while ministry is male and female, leadership might be 'normally male' (p. 80) – a view clearly at odds with the position of the British Methodist Church. Another theme where Green may carry some of his generation but fewer younger Christians is his denouncement of church leaders who advocate 'homosexual marriage' (p. 83) and claim that to regard same-sex marriage as acceptable is to be 'not strong on biblical content' (p. 87).

The brief final chapter entitled 'Lessons for today' lists common themes emerging from the different New Testament perspectives and then indicates ways in which current practice of training Christian leaders does not match up well. The author's biggest concern is that shutting students away in college for two or three years with minimal hands-on experience is no way to prepare for ministry or leadership. Many readers may feel that case was won several decades ago, or that their denomination in their country has never followed that pattern.

Those who are used to rigorous scholarship, including Michael Green's in some of his books, might be dissatisfied with the lack of detail in the exposition of texts and the summary nature of conclusions. But the book could be stimulating for people just beginning to think about Christian leadership, and could certainly prompt worthwhile discussion among those involved in it or training for that purpose, even though, to be fair, there is nothing 'radical' here apart from in the title.

Stephen Mosedale is a retired Methodist minister. After training at Wesley House, he served in West Africa and Scotland, subsequently teaching New Testament and Homiletics and Liturgy at Cliff College; he was then a senior connexional secretary for the British Methodist Church, and a circuit superintendent.

Exeter, UK

The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World, Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, Douglas Abrams (London: Hutchinson, 2016), 351 pp, £12.99 hbk; 7.99 pbk; £9.49 Kindle

In April 2015, Archbishop Desmond Tutu visited the Dalai Lama. During the course of a week, they discussed various topics to answer one question: how do we find joy in the face of life's inevitable suffering? This book is the outcome of those meetings.

Although the visit was videoed, the discussions are not presented as transcripts. Douglas Abrams serves as co-writer, and has woven together the conversations on various topics as well as offering many thoughts of his own.

The two religious leaders speak from within their own traditions, namely Buddhism and Christianity. They also draw upon their own experiences of suffering. The Dalai Lama is in exile from his home country of Tibet, having escaped as a young man. Desmond Tutu chaired the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, set up after the abolition of Apartheid.

The book is structured by day and topics, namely 'The Nature of True Joy', 'Obstacles to Joy' and 'The Eight Pillars of Joy'. A final section offers 'Joy Practices', which do not presuppose any faith.

The tone is engaging and conversational. The reader feels as if she were present as the two men tease each other before returning to the serious topics at hand. This makes for easy and enjoyable reading for those who have little exposure to theological discussion. Both the Buddhist and the Christian views are put forward without any expectation that the reader is well versed in either religion.

The very strengths of the book are also its downside. Tutu speaks from a very liberal approach to Christianity, and those of more conservative outlooks might not agree with his views. The Dalai Lama calls into question the long-term value of religious belief, and his optimistic view of humanity's future could be seen as simplistic: 'Human beings, through wider contact and more education, are becoming more mature' (p. 296).

Readers will not find structured arguments on the nature of suffering, evil and death. Personal experience, rather than Scripture or tradition, is often relied

upon in order to advance the discussion. Abrams sometimes brings examples into the narrative which did not feature in the conversations, such as the case of Anthony Ray Hinton, who was falsely accused of murder, yet found it within himself 'to hold on to his joy' (p. 262). At times, these inserts served as a distraction from the ongoing conversations.

As an example of how two leaders from two different religious traditions interact and discuss major life questions, this book is highly recommended. The intersections between Christianity and Buddhism (and the points of divergence) are intriguing. Although not a heavy theological tome, there is much here upon which the reader can reflect. The overall tone is hopeful, focusing more on what is good in the world than the evil that is so often highlighted.

The Revd Chrys Tremththanmor left the world of finance to become a full-time priest in the Church of England. After serving ten years in parish ministry, she is now full-time Clergy Training Officer in Peterborough Diocese. Her hobbies include travel, photography and fiction writing (under her pen name Chrys Cymri).

Northampton, UK

There Your Heart Will Be, Gordon Leah (Bracknell: Newbold Academic Press, 2016), 242 pp, £14.50 pbk

Gordon Leah, a retired teacher of modern languages and a Methodist local preacher, greeted his loss of religious belief in the face of family trauma (in 1996) with a sense of relief that he no longer needed to pray or to act out his public roles. God, he felt, having created the world, had left it and him to their fate. Faith returned in 2003, and over the next decade came the 15 essays (all previously published in various theological journals) that comprise this volume. Leah's conviction is that true religion is a heartfelt wish to do what God wishes, beyond all doctrine, dogma and laws. The task is, of course, far beyond our capacity to sustain. Failure and recrimination are inevitable. In these essays, Leah reflects on his understanding of the human condition through his reading of some of the great fiction writers of the last century. Thus he leads us through the likes of Franz Kafka, Winfried Sebald, Graham Green, Thomas Hardy and Evelyn Waugh. Kenneth Grahame's is the only lighter contribution.

These essays are for those who read novels for insight as much as for entertainment. Leah demands of the reader technical knowledge of neither theology nor literary criticism, but only a literary sophistication adequate to read these novels and an enquiring mind. Although he maps out the relevant elements of each plot for us, some knowledge of each novel and its author is helpful.

It is not necessary to agree with Leah to appreciate his work. I find myself at odds over elements of his reading of Grahame's 'The Piper at the Gates of Dawn', for instance. No matter. What is fascinating is how Leah's reading of fiction and his personal faith journey intersect. He bids us read and do likewise.

This is an instinctive tragedian at work. The prevailing mood is sombre. Kafka, Green and Waugh are central. Life is both a deadly serious struggle and a darkly amusing puzzle, a Quixote-like quest. Yet beyond the gloom there lies a reconciled life of moral and spiritual peace and integrity, emerging out of and despite the grim realities of human nature and the perversely obstructive quality of secular and religious structures. Our tilting at windmills is not to be taken lightly.

In general, Leah does not over-theologise. He is content to tell us what he finds in these authors, and to let us make up our own minds. He is rather more directive in his handling of biblical material, where perhaps the preacher can be heard at work. The quality is uneven. But one may skip. There is no absolute need to read sequentially.

Yet a broad programme is discernible. The collection begins with Kenneth Grahame's Mole and Ratty discovering that (of necessity) the beatific vision fades, and that life has to be lived with only its dim echo. It ends with Waugh's Julia Flyte raging at the sheer inescapability of the crucified Christ, and Chesterton's Father Brown fishing with his 'invisible line which is long enough to let [his quarry] wander to the ends of the world, and still to bring him back with a twitch upon the thread'. Between those two, we must find our way through our world, obeying as best we can our heartfelt wish to do God's will.

Michael Wilson is a retired Methodist minister. He has taught in various British universities, specialising in philosophical theology. He publishes in the broad area of body theology.

Sawston, UK

Spirituality in Photography: Taking Pictures with Deeper Vision, Philip J. Richter (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2017), 120 pp, £9.99 pbk

This slender volume comes across as a labour of love by the author. Richter is both a keen amateur photographer and a Methodist minister. His book attempts to combine both an appreciation of photography with spiritual insights about vision and perspective.

The format is structured like a workbook or a journal. Each chapter opens with the author offering several pages of reflection on an aspect of photography, such as 'Framing' or 'Sunrise'. He provides suggestions on how to approach the topic with a camera or camera phone. Then the chapter will move on to musings about what our photography can tell us about our spiritual life. For example, in the chapter on 'Framing', he goes on to write: 'You might find yourself regularly excluding from the frame particular things and people, and even aspects of yourself, that you tend to shy away from.' Each chapter provides a section on how to use a camera phone, then provides a challenge, a list of questions with space for answers, and a page on which a photo taken by the reader can be affixed.

The author provides examples from his own photos (reproduced in black and white). At other times he refers to famous photographs which are not reproduced in the book, although the notes at the back provide the necessary web links.

The book is an easy read, and would benefit anyone who is new to photography or who has only recently started to explore spirituality. The attention given to the use of a camera phone would frustrate someone who uses a high-level SLR for photography, and might have wanted technical insight into camera settings or the benefits of shooting in RAW. Similarly, those who have already spent a number of years deepening their relationship with God might find rather obvious such statements as, 'In your own spiritual journey you may not always be what you seem to be', or 'One of the reasons why we lose a sense of perspective is that we are not always good at managing our time.'

Those who are interested more in images than the technical knowledge required to take better photos would enjoy this book. The connections

between aspects of photography and spirituality might appeal to anyone who is happy with insights rather than sustained theological thought. Readers looking for more profound instruction, however, would be better off looking elsewhere.

The Revd Chrys Tremththanmor left the world of finance to become a full-time priest in the Church of England. After serving ten years in parish ministry, she is now full-time Clergy Training Officer in Peterborough Diocese. Her hobbies include travel, photography and fiction writing (under her pen name Chrys Cymri).

Northampton, UK

Blue: A Memoir – Keeping the Peace and Falling to Pieces, John Sutherland (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2017), 275 pp, £16.99 hbk

Television companies regularly feed viewers with new police series. Often the characters will face a major crisis, and how they deal with it is part of the attraction. Rarely will a central character go into total meltdown and be sidelined for months. They need to be back in action for the next episode, or at least the next series. Since the demise of *The Bill*, television no longer shows us the stresses and strains for the ordinary copper working on the streets of London. This is what John Sutherland has done in his memoir, *Blue*.

This is the story of his life, how he became a policeman, how he handled the experience of working in the Metropolitan Police, how he rose through the ranks, and then how he handled the moment in April 2013 when everything fell apart. The significance of that moment is stressed in the way in which it forms the introduction to the book. As the Borough Commander for Southwark, he was in the Control Room and suddenly thought, 'I don't know if I can do this anymore.' He had literally fallen to pieces. What then follows is his exploration of what had brought him to that moment. He shares his memories of family life BC, 'before coppering', as well as his own marriage and family.

There are many books written by soldiers, sometimes as a way of coming to terms with what they have had to face and the things they have been asked to do. This is a book about operating on a different front line. The police memorial in The Mall is a reminder of the fact that for some the sacrifice is total. At one point in the book, Sutherland lists the 20 members of the Met who have died on duty between the date he joined in 1992 and 2013. It does not include PC Keith Palmer, murdered outside the Houses of Parliament on 22 March 2017. There is a high probability that in any one year more police will die because of terrorist acts than soldiers will be killed on operations. The average police officer in London is more likely to be involved with a violent death, tragically all too often a victim of a teenage knife attack, than a member of the armed forces. It is Sutherland's experience of that world that makes this book worth reading.

Early in his career Sutherland was taught Locard's Principle of policing: 'Every contact leaves a trace.' Throughout the book this was not only a guiding principle in his work, but also something that he carried over into his understanding of life. It is this idea of connectivity that gives anyone interested in theology the opportunity to find traces of Sutherland's spiritual journey, even when he is not able, or perhaps willing, to make such connections as he explores his life. Written out of a broadly Christian background, it is an honest, painful, challenging and thoughtful book. The last chapter is entitled 'The Long Road Back'. It is a different road from the one Sutherland expected to tread. As such it offers us all an insight into how to cope with a moment when life suddenly become too much.

Peter Howson is a supernumerary presbyter who spent 25 years in military chaplaincy. After returning to circuit work he studied for a PhD in the development of army chaplaincy in the late twentieth century. He has several authored articles and books on military chaplaincy. He is currently a Methodist Research Fellow at Oxford Brookes.

Andover, UK

Being Disciples: Essentials of the Christian Life, Rowan Williams (London: SPCK, 2016), 86 pp, £8.99 pbk

In his introduction, Rowan Williams describes this as ‘a little book’. It is certainly brief, but within it lies a depth of wisdom that rewards slow, careful reading.

The book has its origins in addresses given at different times to a wide variety of audiences, but its six chapters are all concerned with aspects of Christian discipleship: ‘Being Disciples’, ‘Faith, Hope and Love’, ‘Forgiveness’, ‘Holiness’, ‘Faith in Society’ and ‘Life in the Spirit’. Each chapter begins with a biblical passage and ends with questions which would be suitable for both private reflection and group discussion.

It is impossible in a brief review to do justice to the range and depth of these essays, so it may be helpful to look more closely at the chapter that gives the book its name.

It begins with the statement that ‘Discipleship, as the title of the book implies, is a state of *being*’ (p. 1, my italics). It is not about ‘turning up from time to time’ but about *staying*, and we are called to stay with Jesus in an attitude of awareness and expectancy. But, Williams argues, this also requires us to have a similar expectancy in the way we regard other Christians (‘What is Christ giving me through this person, this group?’, p. 8). Moreover, staying close to Jesus will also mean staying, like Jesus, close to the Father, so that the heart of discipleship is bound up with the life of the Trinity. This closely argued writing pulls us gently from seemingly straightforward beginnings to the suggestion that being disciples will involve a totally transformed perception of our relationship with others and with God: ‘our discipleship in the company of Jesus is a Trinitarian mode of life’ (p. 17). After reading this I feel the need to go back to the beginning of the chapter and start again; and this, I would argue, is precisely the attraction and challenge of Rowan Williams’ writing: that it requires us to wrestle with ideas to which a response will actually cost us something, will make a difference to the way we see and live out our faith.

One minor quibble: some of Rowan Williams’ smaller books originate in series of addresses given in a particular context – in Lent, for example, or a retreat. This book, however, is a stylistically varied collection of talks given at different

times to different audiences, where some chapters are more immediately accessible than others. Does this matter? Not really; but readers expecting a new book from Rowan Williams may feel a tinge of disappointment to discover that this is essentially a reworking of past addresses which do not naturally belong together.

That said, there are great treasures to be found throughout this book and it deserves to be read and reread. Rowan Williams expresses the hope that these addresses 'may be a starting point for exploring ways in which we can go on growing in the life that Jesus shares with us' (p. x). In this intention, the book succeeds wonderfully and it will prove a rich resource for anyone seeking to reflect upon what following Jesus means.

The Revd Judy Davies is a Methodist minister. She trained at Wesley House, Cambridge, and has worked in circuits in South Wales and Reading. For over 20 years she has been a full-time health care chaplain, specialising in palliative care within the NHS and latterly in an independent hospice.

Reading, UK