Entering the New Theological Space

Blurred Encounters of Faith, Politics and Community

Edited by
John Reader
and
Christopher R. Baker

ENTERING THE NEW THEOLOGICAL SPACE

This book presents theological reflections on the changing nature of church mission and Christian identity within a theology of 'blurred encounter' – a physical, social, political and spiritual space where once solid hierarchies and patterns are giving way to more fluid and in many ways unsettling exchanges. The issues raised and dynamics explored apply to all socially-produced space, thus tending to 'blur' that most fundamental of theological categories – namely urban vs. rural theology.

Engaging in a sharper way with some of the helpful but inevitably broad-brush conclusions raised by recent church-based reports (*Mission-shaped Church*, *Faithful Cities*), the authors examine some of the practical and theological implications of this research for the issue of effective management and therefore church leadership generally. Speaking to practitioners in the field of practical theology as well as those engaged in theological and ministerial training, key voices encompass dimensions of power and conflict, and identify some of the present and future opportunities and challenges to church/faith-based engagement and leadership arising from blurred encounters.

Contributors – practitioners and theorists – cover a wide spectrum of interdisciplinary professional contexts and academic/denominational interests. Contributors include: John Atherton, John Reader, Helen Cameron, Martyn Percy, Malcolm Brown, Karen Lord, Clare McBeath and Margaret Goodall.

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Entering the New Theological Space

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Christopher Baker is Director of Research for the William Temple Foundation and part-time lecturer in Urban Theology at the University of Manchester. He writes extensively on the role and identity of faith communities in contemporary civil society and urban environments. His latest books include *The Hybrid Church in the City: Third Space Thinking* (Ashgate, 2007) and *Building Utopia: Seeking the Authentic Church for New Communities* (with Laurie Green) (SPCK, 2008).

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John Reader has been ordained for over 30 years and has served in mainly rural parishes in the Dioceses of Ely, Manchester, Carlisle, Hereford and Worcester. He has also been Director of Pastoral Theology at a theological college as well as teaching on three non-residential training courses. He is currently Rural Officer for the Diocese of Chester and parish priest of Chelford and Lower Withington, a Research Associate with the William Temple Foundation in Manchester, an honorary research fellow with Manchester University and senior tutor for the Diploma in the Christian Rural and Environmental Studies course. His publications include *Local Theology* (SPCK, 1994), *Blurred Encounters* (Aureus, 2005) and *Reconstructing Practical Theology* (Ashgate, 2008).

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Jane Winter is the Director of Community Ministry with Church in Society, a charitable company serving the Kent dioceses. She has developed Community Ministry as the foundation for the company's work which works to release the gifts of local people to bring about positive change in their communities.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Entering the New Space of the Blurred Encounter Between Faith, Politics and Community

Christopher Baker and John Reader

The genesis of this book of collected essays emerges from a number of theories and methodologies already developed by the editors of this volume. John Reader's book *Blurred Encounters*[1] represents a systematic attempt to reflect on his experience of the fragmentation and yet also creative reworking of his identity as a parish priest ministering to four village communities on the edge of the West Midlands conurbation. He found himself working within a fluid and shifting space in a number of different spectra, the fixed points at either end of which have hitherto been interpreted as normative.

Three examples of 'blurred encounter' from Reader's book will suffice to illustrate this different type of space. The geographical location in which he was working was technically rural in that the group of villages in which he ministered were on average five miles from the outermost suburban fringes of the West Midlands conurbation. However, recent immigration into these four villages from largely younger, middle-class, affluent and globally mobile workers had within half a generation impacted upon the socio-economic and cultural identity of those communities. Many homes in the village were family accommodation for those who could afford to commute to Birmingham and beyond. Some recent residents had come for the perceived health and safety advantages of living away from increasingly congested, diverse and so-called 'dangerous' urban and suburban spaces.

Reader recalls that conflicts arose when the new incomers were perceived to have different expectations of what local services (especially concerning childcare) should provide. They tended to have higher expectations of existing services which cut across the longer-term traditions of the older village communities. This 'village' space therefore is neither local, rural nor suburban; rather it is an in-between exurban space (i.e., a quasi-rural identity beyond the fringes of the current suburbs), in which local attitudes, customs and behaviours are as much influenced by globally produced patterns as indigenous ones.

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[1]   John Reader, *Blurred Encounters: A Reasoned Practice of Faith* (St Bride's Major, 2005).

Another blurred encounter emerges from Reader's then voluntary role as a board member of a local housing association, which was seeking to provide affordable housing for local families on low incomes who were priced out of their own housing market by the pressure for exurbanised homes from highly mobile professionals. Thanks to the growing political importance of housing associations as intermediate hubs offering a wide range of local services as well as housing (e.g., training and education), Reader found himself increasingly inundated with information and statutory obligations as a board member. These new governance obligations placed on him required not only greater professional training and time commitment, but also the possibility of being remunerated for the level of knowledge, expertise and accountability now expected. Whilst not necessarily considering this a negative development, Reader was concerned at the creeping professionalising of the community and voluntary sector which could impair its independence and integrity. He thus found himself with a 'limbo identity', no longer a volunteer in the traditional sense of the word, but never likely to be trained or qualified to what might be considered a professional standard in an area of work that was only a part of his own full-time commitments

A third encounter emerges from the different languages and discourses surrounding local crises such as the foot-and-mouth outbreak of 2001, in which he was pastorally involved. Language and discourse represent the world view held by a particular individual or group. When the mass culling of infected sheep occurred within his parish, Reader was confronted with the internalised pain of those farmers forced to witness the destruction of their stock; internalised because the farming community feels rather than articulates the deep bond between animal and human. This pain however, was doubly repressed by the official discourse of the then Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF), which expressed the situation in terms of rational science and spoke the discourses of culls, vaccinations and exclusion zones. Reader, as the priest, as someone who is both an insider and an outsider, and as someone who was caught in the midst of both human and non-human suffering, found himself in the blurred encounter of what he terms the pre-autonomous and the autonomous levels of human functioning. The former is the level of emotional response and basic trust which we need as the basis for any rational decision (the autonomous). It forms one of the spaces between faith and reason, the relationship between which he depicts as being 'stood on mountain tops facing each other and occasionally shouting using words that the other cannot understand'.[2] However, his solution to this traditional polarising of pre-autonomous and the autonomous is to suggest the possibility of a third type of autonomy – namely the post-autonomous, which is a space where new possibilities for the future can be imagined based on open rather than closed identities and in which 'notions of justice, of care for the whole of the created order, of respect between different beings and different orders of being' are allowed expression.[3]

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[2]   Ibid., p. 22.
[3]   Ibid., p. 112.

Reader sees close parallels between this space and Manuel Castells's idea of a 'project identity' in which social actors (e.g., the environmental movement, feminism, civil rights movements) consciously attempt to establish new and changed identities that redefine their condition and aim to transform structures as a positive force for change.[4]

Meanwhile, Christopher Baker in his book, *The Hybrid Church in the City: Third Space Thinking*[5] developed similar ideas of a new and fluid space lying at the intersection of two polarities, also based on pastoral praxis. His book outlines research carried out by the William Temple Foundation which analysed qualitative based data on the experience of nine church communities engaging with both the rhetoric and methodology of urban regeneration in Manchester in the early 2000s.[6] The themes and experiences that emerged showed that many of these churches were either strategically or intuitively working in a number of in-between spaces. Here are some case studies showing what he is referring to.

In terms of its structure for example, one church community was creating community empowerment networks, and indeed presenting itself as a network of networks, whilst at the same time being resourced by an ecumenical consortium of institutional churches and trying to feed its learning and experience back into the institutional sector. It was therefore working at the interface of both network and institution. Another church, which ran a drop-in centre for the elderly frail and those suffering serious mental illness, in a highly marginalised community awaiting demolition and re-gentrification, offered free aromatherapy and reflexology via a small amount of health grant funding. The nurse's massage table was set up in the middle of the church building, which was also awaiting demolition itself, and yet was the only public space the client group concerned felt confident enough to enter. The space of the church was made available for an unconditionally free health and healing service which deployed both voluntary and professional personnel and crossed over some thresholds of what traditional Christian expectations of healing might conform to: namely an excursion into practices commonly associated with more Eastern and pagan religions and philosophies. In other words this project was

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[4]   Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity: The Information Age: Economy, Culture and Society*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1997).

[5]   Christopher Baker, *The Hybrid Church in the City: Third Space Thinking* (Aldershot, 2007).

[6]   See Christopher Baker and Hannah Skinner, *Faith in Action: The Dynamic Connection Between Spiritual and Religious Capital* (Manchester, 2006); Christopher Baker, 'Entry to Enterprise: Constructing Local Political Economies in Manchester', in John Atherton and Hannah Skinner (eds), *Through the Eye of a Needle: Theological Conversations Over Political Economy* (Peterborough, 2007), pp. 191–206; and Christopher Baker 'Blurred Encounters? Religious Literacy, Spiritual Capital and Language', in Adam Dinham, Robert Furbey and Vivien Lowndes (eds), *Faith in the Public Realm: Controversies, Policies and Practices* (Bristol, forthcoming).

an excursion into the fluid space between sanctuary, healing, religion, spirituality and professional healthcare.

Meanwhile a black-majority church (BMC), whilst often expressing an explicit theology of God's love and redemption within public settings, also recognised the need for a more implicit approach as part of their overall contribution to civil society. They set up an umbrella organisation called the Grace Incorporation Faith Trust (GIFT) which combined four existing community-based organisations into one loose entity in order to attract greater pots of funding and combine resources more effectively. The projects included initiatives providing counselling, mentoring and support to vulnerable young black people and supporting victims of gun crime. This intra-partnership approach is designed to connect with secular agencies more effectively than projects with an explicit church-based identity. This form of 'arms-length initiative' was designed to present an implicit Christian identity for the sake of becoming more deeply involved in civil society initiatives. The deliberate and strategic use of implicit identities also recognised what this church community called the 'bad press' some BMC churches had with some of their potential clients and partners based on perceptions of over-moralising and judgemental attitudes.

Indeed, the fluid but strategic use of explicit and implicit identities was a feature that many churches deployed in the pursuit of partnerships with other faith-based and secular partners, in order to achieve the pragmatic outcomes they desired for their local communities. The shift towards increased partnership working (a classic space for blurred encounters which we will explore later in this book) reflects the Third Way of the current policy field (i.e., partnerships between government, business and the community and voluntary sector for the sake of achieving nationally set outcomes and targets at the local neighbourhood level). It also reflects a realistic assessment by most churches and other faith groups that the problems often encountered at the local level are too intractable and complex to be resolved by single agencies in isolation.

The theoretical framework identified by Baker which helps to understand and recommend this continuing type of praxis is the concept of the hybrid or Third Space. Borrowed from literary criticism and postcolonial literature, the concept also found its way into political analysis, thanks to the writings of Homi Bhabha whose text *The Location of Culture* became a seminal contribution to this field.[7] The Third Space is thus the space that exists in the middle of any set of binary opposites. Bhabha (after Said)[8] notes that binarism is the method most closely associated with the projects of modernism and colonialisation, whereby the Other (the unfamiliar culture or ethnic identity encountered in the course of colonial/ missionary activity) was labelled and catalogued within a category of inferiority depending on perceived cultural or ethnic proximity to the white, male, Christian, Western, European norm. With the collapse of Empire from the 1940s onwards

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[7]   Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York, 1994).

[8]   Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978).

however, many former colonised peoples resisted the pressure to return to a purist and imaginary identity that existed before 'the white man's rule', but retained the right to forge a new identity made up of both modern and pre-modern identities: European and indigenous and beyond.

Postcolonial theory and literature thus reinforces what other disciplines, particularly postmodern philosophy, have said previously: that the present epoch is never predetermined, but comes as a result of ever fluctuating developments in culture and language. In other words, culture, language and identity are never static (fixed) or teleological (moving inexorably towards a preordained, evolutionary and developmental end point) but constantly fluid and changing. In simple terms therefore, the Third Space between the either/or spaces of binarism is the *space of the both/and*, a space that constructs a pragmatic response to local conditions based on any number of resources (local/global, present/past, etc.). Politically it is also the counter-hegemonic space of partnership or coalition, where a number of different partners, each with their own world views and methods of working, come together to forge an alternative space where the rights of all are respected and heard. However, by definition, this Third Space is constantly evolving and changing: if it were to become too static, it would end up at either end of an existing spectrum and so lose its genuinely creative and disturbing power. Thus Bhabha is probably right when he says that the Third Space (especially politically) is more 'interrogatory' than strategic in its outcomes, since many partnerships and coalitions are short-term and so disband once their objectives have been partially or wholly achieved.

The thesis of both Reader's *Blurred Encounters* and Baker's *The Hybrid Church* therefore is that theology and ecclesiology ought to be engaging in Third Space/hybrid theory as a way of connecting with the rapidly changing, diverse and pluralising context of the early twenty-first century, some twenty years after their development in other disciplines. Both volumes attempt to construct a theology of the 'blurred encounter' and the Third Space (which there is not space to go into at this point). However, since the contributions in this book will seek to develop further ideas about both the theory and praxis of this kind of new theological space, it is probably worth putting down at this early point what we think a church method based on Third Space/blurred encounters might look like.

The churches and communities we journeyed with in our respective books are, in the words of Baker, 'operating in the spaces between the local and the global, between the explicit and the implicit and between the solid and the liquid'.[9] He continues:

> This blurring of boundaries emerges from a growing recognition of the need to adopt flexible, multidisciplinary … spaces, and achieve solutions that work in the absence of overarching methodologies and ideologies … However for some churches, this hybrid way of working cannot be restricted to that of methodology.

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[9]   Baker, *The Hybrid Church*, p. 132.

> The hybrid encounter has also wrought a significant change in outlook and identity, characterised by an expanding of boundaries and a deepening of understanding … through a willingness to take risks, an openness to learning and a conscious relinquishing of power, being changed by their encounter with the Other.[10]

This is the new theological space we want to map and delve more deeply into.

Other Forays into the New Theological Space

If we take the principle ideas emerging from blurred encounter/Third Space theory as applied to practical theology and the role of the church – namely the mapping of shifting and fluid spaces between hitherto fixed but increasingly contested norms and binary polarities, then writers from other disciplinary perspectives are also beginning to identify similar dynamics. We explore briefly just three of them.

First of all, an important new contribution to the sociology of religion literature in the UK paints an increasingly blurred and complex account of the place of religion in the twenty-first century.[11] The collection of essays within the volume seeks to 'break out of the constraints' of an uncritical and teleological account of a triumphant secularism that 'predicts the eventual collapse of organised religion and the disappearance of Christianity in the public domain'.[12] Its main thesis is that this secular meta-narrative of inexorable decline has always associated rapid social change as a crisis for the church, and defined Christians only as those people it can count in attendance and membership statistics. What this meta-narrative underestimates is the ability of Christianity, as both a cultural system and an institution, to mutate and reform itself in surprisingly robust and relevant ways.

Redefining Christian Britain offers three different perspectives by which this mutation can be described and assessed. The first is the idea of authenticity. The book suggests that questions of authenticity may have moved away from concerns about doctrinal purity to concerns about cultural relevance and performance of faith, but these questions can still represent a force for renewal rather than a slide into irrelevance. Several chapters in our volume reflect implicitly on this theme, in particular the chapter by Martyn Percy on local parish baptisms, and the chapters by Jonathan Miles-Watson and Ian Ball on the contemporary understanding and experience of pilgrimage.

Second, is the theme of generation. Callum Brown's thesis that the early 1960s saw the breakdown of cultural transmission between Christian values and secular

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[10] **Ibid.**

[11] **Jane Garnett, Matthew Grimley, Alana Harris, William Whyte and Sarah Williams** (eds.), 'Introduction' to *Redefining Christian Britain: Post 1945 Perspectives* (London, 2007), pp. 1–19.

[12] **Ibid.**, p. 1.

society is challenged by the ongoing Christian framework that informs ethical, cultural and public discourses. These range from the dialectical impact of Christian art within the apparently neutral and secular setting of the art gallery (such as recent El Greco and *Seeing Salvation* exhibitions) to the Christian metaphysical cosmos that underpins Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy. This idea is developed implicitly in Clare McBeath's chapter in this volume which reflects on the liturgy as space where for example, cinematic representation of the Dementors in the popular Harry Potter films serves as a trope by which to explore the pervasiveness of mental health and depression within deprived and industrialised communities on the edges of urban gentrification.

Finally there is the idea of virtue, by which is included the persistence of Christian-inspired ethics and values at the heart of postmodern searches for redefined ideas of the common good and understandings of political economy. For example, there is a sustained discussion within *Redefining Christian Britain* on the inherent tension between a liberal, secular vision of public reason (as enshrined in legal frameworks such as the 1998 Human Rights Act) and the need/right of religions to express themselves from the perspective of their comprehensive doctrines (i.e., their transcendent, theological world views).[13] Within this collection of essays, both John Atherton and John Reader, from the perspectives of economics and science studies respectively, reflect on other areas of public debate where the standpoints of religion and Christian theology are making positive and substantial contributions to what were hitherto perceived to be purely secular areas of competence. Indeed, all the essays in this book are a testament to the ongoing adaptability and robust mutability of Christian thought and the church (in both its solid and fluid forms) posited by Garnett et al. as evidence of new 'currents, cross-currents, shallows and sustaining depths' rather than the predicted 'melancholy, long withdrawing roar' of faith and religion from public life.[14]

Our second case study of mapping increasingly blurred and overlapping religious and faith-based spaces concerns present thinking on the shape and application of the discipline of practical theology itself. This is outlined in a two-volume work by Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward.[15] In the introduction to their first volume, the authors chart the historical development of practical theology over a series of six phases since the earliest development of Christian communities, culminating in what (following Tidball's typology) they describe as the shift from a therapeutic model (whereby Christian ministry attempts to mimic secularised notions of professionalism and technical ability) to a hermeneutical model in which the activity of theological reflection takes

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[13]   Raymond Plant, 'Liberalism, Religion and the Public Square', in Jane Garnett et al. (eds), *Redefining Christian Britain: Post 1945 Perspectives* (London, 2007), pp. 254–66.

[14]   Garnett et al., 'Introduction', p. 2.

[15]   Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London, 2005); and Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward, *Theological Refection: Sources* (London, 2007).

centre stage.[16] It is during this phase (from roughly the 1980s to the present day), profoundly influenced by educationalists such as Donald Schon and David Kolb, together with earlier theorists such as Paulo Freire, that theology becomes more 'reflexive, problem-based, intuitive and synthetic'.[17] Graham, Walton and Ward, whilst extolling the virtues of this new hermeneutical phase (not least because it has 'democratised' the understanding of what theology is and who 'does it'[18]), are nevertheless realistic enough to list its shortcomings.[19] The point in relation to the task of entering and mapping the new theological space is that in their 'seven models of theological reflection' typology, they are keen to promote a wide variety of epistemological approaches that combine the canonical, scriptural, empirical and narrative. In other words, practical theology and theological reflection are no longer a case of either/or, conferring a false dichotomy (which has existed up to now) between systematic and practical approaches. Rather it is a both/and activity in which human experience and narrative is triangulated within a public and empirically based scrutiny but also by its 'faithfulness' to the ongoing and evolving tradition of the church and its doctrines. In short, theology (as it always has been) is understood as a critical reflection on faithful practice in a variety of settings, and it is precisely this task, undertaken with an integrated and multi-disciplinary methodology, that constitutes an accurate reflection of the aims and methodologies of this book as it attempts to combine theoretical, narrative and praxis-based reflection on what it means to engage in the new blurred spaces of a postsecular, postindustrial society.

A third area of shifting and fluid space, following on from the sociological and theological fields identified above, is the legal/political domain; in particular the search for a new political and legal dispensation that reflects the current pastoral paradox that has emerged so powerfully in the first decade of the twenty-first century, namely the emergence of the postsecular. Anyone present in the UK in early February 2008 would have been only too aware of the heightened sensitivity and profile of this issue when Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, suggested the theoretical possibility that certain aspects of Sharia law (operating in those areas of specific cultural sensitivity such as arrangements for marriage and divorce) be allowed to operate within the continuing protection offered to citizens within a universal and secularised legal system based on notions of equality and human rights. The subsequent political furore was immense, and the tone of the condemnation of Williams in the tabloid sections of the UK press in particular, verged on the hysterical. However, despite the glare of publicity, Williams has been determined in public lectures to map out the new space between religion and secularism, by attempting to describe certain concepts and ideas that provide the

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[16]   Graham et al., *Theological Reflection: Methods*, p. 3.

[17]   Ibid., p. 4.

[18]   Ibid., p. 3.

[19]   Ibid., pp. 6–7.

basis renewed debate about how a multicultural and diverse society like Britain might recognise and negotiate the existence of multiple discourses and identities.

The first theme Williams explores is the distinction between programmatic and procedural secularism. Programmatic secularism creates an empty public square because it presupposes an 'almost value-free atmosphere of public neutrality'.[20] It therefore functions as 'shorthand for the denial of the public legitimacy of religious commitment as a partner in political conversation' and is thus potentially a '"totalising" spirit which stifles critique by silencing the other'.[21] Procedural secularism, by contrast:

> is the acceptance by state authority of a prior and irreducible other or others; … it can move into and out of alliance with perspectives of faith, depending on the varying and unpredictable outcomes of honest social argument, and can collaborate, without anxiety with communities of faith in the provision for example of education or social regeneration.[22]

Procedural secularism is thus one concept by which a diversity of voices can be accommodated within the public square. Other concepts Williams employs to describe the possible relationship between faiths and secularity is to develop the Rawlsian notion of overlapping consensus to argue for the right to overlapping jurisprudential services, whereby ethnic and religious minorities would be able to benefit from certain culturally specific and sensitive legal services within a liberal and overarching universal framework. In a world of multiple identities, citizens in a postsecular dispensation should be seen as having more than one set of defining relationships with the law, and should therefore have the right to properly recognized 'supplementary jurisdiction'.[23] Other concepts he uses are clustered around notions such as 'multiple affiliations',[24] and 'transformative accommodation' which he defines as 'a scheme in which individuals retain the liberty to choose the jurisdiction under which they will seek to resolve certain carefully specified matters, so that power-holders are forced to compete for the loyalty of their shared constituents'.[25] Finally, he uses 'interactive pluralism'[26] as a concept which avoids putting 'a gun to the head' of minority faith communities by making them choose between loyalty to one's culture (including religious practice and belief) and loyalty to the state. All these concepts are suggestive of a

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[20]   Rowan Williams, 'Secularism, Faith and Freedom', *The Archbishop of Canterbury* (23 November 2006), para 9, http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/654 (accessed 20 June 2008).

[21]   Ibid., para. 20.

[22]   Ibid.

[23]   Ibid., para. 10.

[24]   Ibid., para. 13.

[25]   Ibid., para. 20.

[26]   Ibid., para. 21.

new vocabulary by which one might begin to understand the new religio-secular landscape of civil society and public governance. At the heart of this new type of language, however, is the concern to 'provide a moral energy for a properly self-critical society':[27] a moral energy that Williams believes is sapped by secularism's universalizing stress on instrumental views concerning the maximizing of individual happiness.

Having reviewed some of the other areas of discourse which are starting to map the new theological space of the blurred encounter/Third Space, we now move on to describe briefly the structure of this volume.

Structure of the Book

The aim of this book is to map the new theological space by means of a triangulation between narrative, praxis and theory. The purpose of this method is not only to give a 360° perspective, but also to offer some idea of the complexity and interdisciplinarity associated with this new space. Working with a variety of different voices also allows us to identify new clusters of experiences and themes which will develop further the thinking that began with our two volumes (which is what is attempted in the final chapter). All the contributors to this volume perceive themselves to be working in the new space of the blurred encounter, and have chosen to emphasise one or other of the components of *narrative*, *praxis* and *theory*.

However, most of our contributors also bring into their primary mode of analysis, strong elements of the other two components. To that end therefore, rather than group the contributions within clusters according to the primary mode of analysis, we have decided to opt for a simple alphabetical order. We hope that this will allow the reader to follow a path that crosses over into the different modes of experience and analysis on a fairly regular basis, thus creating a cumulative effect of what it means to map and enter the new theological space.

It is clear however that much of the ground covered by our contributors conforms to Reader's levels of analysis for understanding the significance of blurred encounters. These levels include the changing nature of geographical space, the changing nature and status of professional and voluntary work, the contested and evolving relationship between faith and reason and science, between religion and spirituality, between the local and the global and between the institution and the network.

So for example, many of the contributions chart the changing nature of both rural and urban locations with a view to reflecting on how these changes have wrought significant alterations in notions of time, space, belonging and identity. These alterations in turn are forcing the church to develop increasingly fluid and experimental forms that nevertheless reflect the ongoing significance of stability,

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27   Ibid., para. 9.

faithfulness and continuity in some way. David Grimwood and Jane Winter locate their discussion of the pressures facing the church to retain an authentic faithfulness and seek to define a theology of God's kingdom or presence within the rapidly changing landscapes of Kent, now predicated on the twin drivers of retailing and mobility.

Philip Wagstaff unpacks similar themes in his odyssey through a series of rural pastoral callings but is perhaps more optimistic than Grimwood and Winter that the church can negotiate its way into new expressions of identity and being without losing its core mission values, and the ever-increasing significance of its physical place in a rapidly evolving landscape. Malcolm Brown maps the changing face of London's traditional suburbs and seeks to find out within them, 'the extent of social atomisation, the attenuated anthropology bequeathed by consumerism and the spiritual implications of rootlessness'. He concludes by asking paradoxically, whether the early history of the suburban church offers clues as to how to generate new social ties in relatively displaced and rootless communities.

Owain Bell reflects on the shifting identity and purpose of former industrialised towns in the West Midlands such as Kidderminster and the impact this has had on the public space in these communities. He charts the role and identity of the Bangladeshi community in Kidderminster since the earlier decades of immigration, and how a research project designed to help identify the needs of religious and ethnic minority communities actually exposed deep fault lines within that community. His chapter raises important questions about how multi-faith and interfaith space is constructed and engaged with sensitively and creatively.

Clare McBeath returns us to the heart of the inner-city and those communities on the eastern flank of Manchester waiting in a strange liminal state of destruction and construction, but whose citizens are essentially disempowered from any decision taken about the future of their communities. The depression and inertia created within these formerly proud but now forgotten communities is often reflected in the lives of those who still remain and those who are sent to live in them, usually temporarily housed refugees and asylum seekers. Those churches that still remain in these spaces therefore find themselves negotiating the blurred encounter between mental illness and spiritual insight, depression and hope, and working with people's bodies as well as their minds, and in spaces in which the barriers between what is liturgical and non-liturgical space are ultimately broken down to form a holistic entity.

Moving away somewhat from a location-based perspective, other writers focus on the new spaces opening up between faith-based and secular economics from a more theoretical perspective. John Atherton takes a walk down the Royal Mile in Edinburgh and reflects on key religious sites that have historically been locations of encounter between faith and politics, literature and economics. He moves on to show how in more recent years, thanks to the growing influence of faith-based economics such as Drop the Debt and Fair Trade campaigns, issues of virtue and ethics, that were marginalised by mainstream economics in the latter half of the twentieth century, are now becoming a central part of economic theory, driven in

part by the current debate on human happiness and well-being. This contribution by religious traditions to economics is what Atherton calls 'faithful economics' and inhabits a fluid space on a continuum between ethical economics and theological economy. Meanwhile, Phillip Jones, from his long experience as an industrial chaplain in the West Midlands, reflects on the changing nature of work from the solidity of industrially based manufacturing within the cohesive communities which it created, to the 'weightless' identities we now inhabit within postindustrial communities. As human society in the West becomes more mobile and consumer-oriented, and values themselves, like prices, become more fluid and less fixed, Jones asks rhetorically, what it means to function as an industrial missioner, and (by implication) as the church, in this new gravity-free environment. Jones seems less optimistic than Atherton that religion or the church can provide a sufficient counter-cultural force by which to shape economics towards more pro-ethical and human happiness ends.

A cluster of other chapters analyse the new interface between religion and spirituality, or between what Martyn Percy in his chapter calls (after Wade Clark Roof) 'received' and 'operant' religion. Ian Ball and Jonathan Miles-Watson offer contrasting perspectives on the way in which understandings of pilgrimage have evolved in the postindustrial, postsecular era. Ball reflects on the emergence of what he calls the 'developmental' pilgrimage. This type of pilgrimage seeks to provide an educational activity (i.e., providing historical and geographical notes for those walking through what for them might be a new part of the country) and personal and interpersonal skills (the sharing of communal tasks but also the framework for personal space and reflection). It also however, provides the opportunity to reflect critically on the meanings of sites (both religious and secular) that through their association with historical events or people, allow resonances to be created for understanding present issues such as Fair Trade, the Iraq war, global warming and so on. In other words, this is a new blurred space that appeals to the postmodern sense of the reflexive and autonomous individual who is nevertheless held within a wider sense of critical enquiry and solidarity with the sharp political and economic questions of the day. In this way Ball hopes that the art of making pilgrimage does not fall into a solipsistic or narcissistic exercise.

Jonathan Miles-Watson meanwhile reviews a wide variety of perspectives on the phenomenon of pilgrimage from an anthropological perspective, featuring the work of Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner and Edith Turner and Mary Douglas, and focusing on the significance of liminality, thresholds and rites of passage as helpful concepts by which to understand the significance of blurred encounters. We develop further some of his important thinking in our chapter at the end. Martyn Percy, in his chapter on the rite of baptism, enquires into the nature of the cultural forces that still prompt its request from non-churched families. This enquiry not only takes us to the blurred encounter between institutional and folk religion, but also to the significance of understanding the rite as part of a cultural dialogue. He encourages us to develop a theology of culture as a tool for mapping the new theological space because it enables us to see the infusion of religion in

culture and vice versa; especially in those increasingly significant spaces outside institutional religion where people, stirred by the significance of the birth event, need to connect with their sense of what he calls 'the rumour of God and the sense of the numinous'. For this to be capitalised on, Percy argues, the institutional church needs to be more willing to offer a sensitive yet purposeful hospitality to this implicit religion for the sake of a deeper reconnection with secular culture.

The renegotiation of Christian identity within secular culture is also the theme of Karen Lord's chapter, but argued from the perspective of faith-based individuals seeking to express their religious identity within secular workplaces. This highly topical debate uses both psychology of religion theory and recent high-profile legal case studies involving the right to wear religious symbols at work. The chapter concludes by recognising the frequently painful complexity involved in trying to handle the multitude of identities now offered within diversified and pluralised societies, and the importance of negotiating face-to-face with the person behind the mask.

The pain of finding and maintaining identity is also starkly examined by Margaret Goodall in her chapter on dementia. The first half of Goodall's chapter relates the differing medical models of approach to this degenerative mental illness, before describing some of the emerging theological reflection on the experience of those suffering and caring for those with this condition. A key motif to emerge from this reflection is the significance of the blurred space between death and resurrection – between loss and redemption – namely Holy Saturday, which in Christian theological terms is the liminal space of emptiness and non-being before the threshold of new life and identity is reached. Holy Saturday is the new theological space poised between powerlessness and power, again themes that we will return to at the end of this book.

Our final two contributions map at a fairly theoretical level, (but again, rooted in case studies) other dimensions to the blurred encounter/Third Space of the new theological field. John Reader describes the way in which science acts like 'faith' in the way it offers propositional and public statements about its ability to exercise control over the spread of viruses such as foot-and-mouth disease, or potential nuclear fallout from damaged reactors. Reader focuses on the work of Bruno Latour and his theory of 'circulating reference' whereby the language of scientific breakthrough, rather than being separated from the non-scientific discourses of the rest of civil society, actually engages and deploys other public discourses (for example the media) for the sake of credibility. The more connected the scientific discovery or claim can be in relation to other discourses (many of which are based on affective rather than empirical criteria) the more credible and 'accurate' it is perceived. This raises profound questions, reflected upon by Slavoj Žižek and others, as to the nature of truth and the references we make about it – the ultimate question in respect of epistemological blurring.

Helen Cameron traces the ambiguity of an organisation such as the church in respect of organisational and network theory. Cameron carefully makes the case for seeing the church as a blurred identity in its own right – a hybrid organisation

that occupies the interface between a variety of points between institution and network; between bureaucracy and association – and to see this hybrid identity as a useful mechanism for blurring what Cameron calls the 'rationales of the institution and the market'.

It is with these ideas in mind that we now make the journey or pilgrimage into the new theological space – the blurred encounter between faith, politics and community.

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Chapter 1

Mainstreaming the Edges: Reflections on Edinburgh's Royal Mile and Fair Trade

John Atherton

Living on the edges can become a way of making a living off marginalisation – a charge brought against some academic exponents of hybridity, including Homi Bhabha. For example, Ramachandra talks of such postcolonial theorists as 'affluent, self-exiled Asians ensconced in the Western academy'. They play on 'postcolonial Western guilt' and also on 'the romantic image of the intellectual "exile", epitomizing the fissured identities and hybridities generated by colonial dislocations and celebrated in some postmodern works'.[1] Even its more creative exponents, like Sandercock, can weave powerful narratives criticising contemporary urban living and developing alternatives as mongrel cities – yet examples of the latter are often ephemeral and fragile. For Baker, 'her cosmopolis still works powerfully as an activating concept rather than a practical guide'. Depressingly, for Baker, her practical case studies of feasible alternatives 'are almost all short-lived'.[2]

Similarly, analysis of the contemporary context presents a number of scenarios, for example, as three fields of operating, as empires, capitalism and globalisation. These can be interlocked, by Hardt and Negri, as a new empire of global capitalism.[3] This recognises the dispersion of power through new technology flows, yet also its strong focusing in terms of fields of power as Bourdieu has so carefully argued.[4] Yet Hardt and Negri's 'Multitude', as countermovement to Empire, like Sandercock's mongrel cities, does not generate feasible alternatives

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[1] Vinoth Ramachandra, 'Who Can Say What and To/For Whom? Postcolonial Theory and Christian Theology', in T. Yates (ed.), *Mission and The Next Christendom* (Sheffield, 2005), pp. 119–46 (131).

[2] Christopher Baker, *The Hybrid Church in the City: Third Space Thinking* (Aldershot, 2007), p. 35.

[3] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA, 2000).

[4] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Social Structures of the Economy* (Malden, MA and Cambridge, 2005).

to current mainstream political economy.[5] It does not persuade by its credibility. In other words, postcolonial theorists like Bhabha, urban planners like Sandercock, and political–cultural theorists like Hardt and Negri, share a feature of many more radical theologians. They are strong on the critique of established orderings, and often creatively and powerfully so. Yet they are weak on developing feasible alternatives to global mainstreams. Their criticisms, often ethically informed, frequently inspire.

Yet I am increasingly concerned that, unless accompanied by proposals for more adequate and workable alternatives to the defective mainstream, they are open to the charge of irresponsibility. Max Weber's seminal studies of the relationships between religion and economics, too easily over-identified with his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, rightly included work on India and China, now once again at the heart of the emerging economies and their growing dominance in the world economy. Importantly for this argument, his work also included reflections on an ethic of responsibility. This involved a critique of charismatic and prophetic authority, and related to his distinction between 'an ethic of responsibility and an ethic of absolute ends'.[6] These reflections are very relevant to what I am arguing for in terms of developing feasible alternatives to the present social order.

What I am interested in is that problem of *edges*, in my case, as ethical economics. Baker, in his *The Hybrid Church in the City*, used my work on Christian political economy, with ethical economics as one of its key constituents, as an example of hybridity. More importantly, for this project on blurred encounters, ethical economics is a strong example of location on the edges, in this case, of mainstream neoclassical economics, and its associated market economies and economics. These dominate the world economy and the discipline of economics. They are plumb in the middle of whatever mainstream means and is. Yet the story is more complex, more blurred than that. Historically, economics has been identified with two dimensions; on the one hand, positive economics (or technical, 'scientific' or, for Sen, engineering); and on the other hand, normative (or, for Sen, ethical) economics.[7] Recognition of that ethical dimension (as well as the positive side) represents a long and distinguished history from Adam Smith, through Malthus, Marshall, Keynes and now Sen and Stiglitz (both recent Nobel Laureates in Economics).

Almost from its origins, certainly including Ricardo in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century, modern economics has been increasingly dominated by the positive strand. By the mid-to-late twentieth century the divorce was almost complete, with a clear agenda that positive economics was essentially

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[5] Leonie Sandercock, *Cosmopolis II: Mongrel Cities in the 21st Century* (London, 2003); and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude* (New York, 2006).

[6] Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (London, 1970), p. 9.

[7] Amartya Sen, *On Ethics and Economics* (Oxford, 1988), p. 3.

scientific in the way the natural sciences were, and therefore claiming to be value free. Ethical economics became quite marginal to that development if not, indeed, irrelevant. That is still the case in economics text books and policy-making. So for Henderson, this prioritising of the positive in economics has constituted what he calls 'the dominant economic tradition'.[8] Interestingly, this resonates with Radical Orthodoxy's work on economics in which Long writes of the dominant tradition of mainstream liberal Christian social ethics.[9] That dominant tradition of positive neoclassical economics in the hands of one of its later twentieth-century major exponents, Nobel Laureate in Economics Milton Friedman, becomes 'fundamentally a positive social science', essentially independent of every value proposition or of every ethical position. Its interest is not 'to describe what "ought to be the case", but what is the case… In short, positive economics is, or can be, an "objective" science in precisely the same way as any of the physical sciences'.[10]

Yet both within and outside the discipline this deep imbalance is increasingly questioned. For example, from within the discipline of economics, Amartya Sen has powerfully promoted the need to rebalance the positive with the ethical dimension of economics: 'The wide use of the extremely narrow assumption of self-interested behaviour … has seriously limited the scope of productive economics'. Indeed, the 2002 Nobel Prize in Economics was shared by Kahneman and Smith, 'individuals who questioned the extreme view of rational behaviour as the basis for economic decision-making'.[11] Outside this discipline, there is also a growing interest in the need to reformulate economic understandings of neoclassical economic behaviour, for example, the work of the sociologist Bourdieu, and his reflections on the 'Principles of an Economic Anthropology'.[12] Yet despite this reawakening of interest in the role of ethical economics in the wider economic task, it remains significantly on the edges of mainstream economics.

It is that situation which I will address not least because globalisation processes and problematics, particularly since 1990, have sharply brought to the fore the multidimensionality of the economic task, and particularly in necessary conversation with other disciplines. These global problematics include: the environment; poverty reduction; trade; work (see the International Labour Organisation and the World Council of Church's conversations on decent work);[13] the well-being/happiness

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[8]   James Henderson, 'The Christian Perspective and Economic Scholarship', in James Henderson and John Pisciotta (eds), *Faithful Economics: The Moral Worlds of a Neutral Science* (Waco, 2005), pp. 1–14 (2).

[9]   D. Stephen Long, *Divine Economy: Theology and the Market* (London, 2000), p. 7.

[10]   In John Atherton, *Marginalization* (London, 2003), p. 151.

[11]   Henderson, 'The Christian Perspective and Economic Scholarship', pp. 3–4.

[12]   Pierre Bourdieu, 'Principles of an Economic Anthropology' in *The Handbook of Economic Sociology* (Princeton, 2005), pp. 75–89, 193–4.

[13]   Katherine Marshall and Lucy Keough, *Mind, Heart and Soul in the Fight against Poverty* (Washington, 2004), ch. 7.

hypothesis literatures, with their reference to a post-scarcity and post-absolute-poverty anthropology, and entry into the 'paradoxes of prosperity' (as increasing economic growth *and* inequality, and the stubborn refusal of happiness to increase commensurate with income growth and its link with increasing social ill-being or disease as crime, addictions, mental ill-health, reduced volunteering and trust, etc).[14] The growing and extensive literatures on well-being and happiness particularly include a strong focus on the essential contribution to well-being of the moral and religious dimensions of life. For the economist Layard, a philosophy of life figures as one of his 'Big Seven' features of happiness, and includes reference to personal values but also ethically oriented social arrangements formulated as 'the common good'. In the most direct language he also concludes that 'people who believe in God are happier'.[15] The philosopher Anthony Kenny and the economist Charles Kenny in their study, subtitled *Happiness in Philosophical and Economic Thought*, included a chapter on 'Happiness and Morality'.[16]

The task therefore for me and for others is how to reinforce that ethical dimension in conversation with economists and with other related disciplines (including psychology, neurophysiology, epidemiology, sociology and anthropology). This is likely to involve finding ways to mainstream ethical economics by bringing it into the centre of economics. Such a strategy does not mean removing its distinctive character. It does mean recognising that it will be changed in that process, as will the mainstream. So, for Mudge, bringing alongside each other in conversation different stories of similar realities (in our case ethical and engineering economics), a process he calls parallel hermeneutics, invariably results in a mutual benefit. For in that process, the task is not to produce a common belief or doctrinal merger. It rather involves pursuing a *parallel* relationship with one another, each asking questions in their own way within their traditions, acknowledging that others alongside are doing it in their ways too. In this way, cultures, religions or theories act back upon themselves with respect to information coming from other cultures, civilisations and theories. 'Such solidarity often involves a move toward a place materially weaker but spiritually stronger than one's own. The gift (of one story to the other) is not merely given; it turns out to move more strongly in return.'[17] The benefits of that reciprocal action are reinforced by important work on how traditions, including religions (but here, for us, economics), faced with the challenge of rapidly changing contexts, can reformulate and become more

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[14] Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, *Prosperity with a Purpose: Exploring the Ethics of Affluence* (London, 2005), ch. 2.

[15] Richard Layard, *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* (London, 2005), pp. 71–2.

[16] Anthony Kenny and Charles Kenny, *Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Utility: Happiness in Philosophical and Economic Thought* (St Andrews, 2006).

[17] Lewis Mudge, 'Covenanting for a Renewing of our Minds: A Way Together for the Abrahamic Faiths', in Julio de Santa Ana (ed.), *Beyond Idealism. A Way Ahead for Ecumenical Social Ethics* (Grand Rapids, 2006), pp. 163–208 (193).

adequate and effective. So Baker and Brown both use MacIntyre to illustrate how traditions can develop through a process of reformulation through interaction with context, a process of mutual learning from and to the Other.[18]

To test this hypothesis, as the importance and possibility of mainstreaming ethical economics within the dominant economic tradition of neoclassical economies, two brief case studies began to elaborate this proposition. The first is a pilgrimage down the Royal Mile in central Edinburgh to explore places where 'edges' have become mainstream. The second examines questions raised by mainstreaming Fair Trade in secular production and exchange systems. As a combination of narrative and analytical forms, the two studies exemplify multidimensional approaches to the increasingly multidimensional nature of economics. Both illustrate the feasibility of Reader's thesis of eating well so that being devoured by the Other need not necessarily result in a complete digestion but can involve the survival of the marginal entity within the mainstream body.[19]

A Journey down Edinburgh's Royal Mile: Stories of How the Edges Engage with Dominant Traditions

Walking down the Royal Mile from the castle to Holyrood Palace is not the simplest of journeys, particularly in August at the height of the Edinburgh Festival. Progressing down this crowded thoroughfare can be a turbulent leisure activity. Yet if it is done with a commitment to encountering stories from the past with deep meanings for the present and future, then the transformation of a simple journey into a pilgrimage begins to occur. For Davie, it becomes the enactment of story and symbolic memory, reinforcing her recognition of the growing significance of pilgrimages and sacred place in the formation of modern cultural and religious identities. Palmer rightly extends this understanding into the rich tapestry of the world's major faiths.[20] For example, in Europe, the Iona community off the west coast of Scotland was the religious base from which St Columba brought Christianity to northern Britain. The existing community grew initially as a place of retreat from inner-city Glasgow. It now welcomes visitors on pilgrimage to its rebuilt abbey. The haj in Islam represents the obligation for every Muslim to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime. Both examples reflect the significance in religious and spiritual life as journey or pilgrimage, and its potential for physical embodiment.

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[18]   Baker, *The Hybrid Church*; and Malcolm Brown, *After the Market: Economics, Moral Agreement and the Churches' Mission* (Oxford, 2004).

[19]   John Reader, *Blurred Encounters: A Reasoned Practice of Faith* (St Bride's Major, 2005).

[20]   Grace Davie, *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates* (Oxford, 2000), p. 157; Martin Palmer with Victoria Finlay, *Faith in Conservation: New Approaches to Religions and the Environment* (Washington, 2003), pp. 60–61.

In my pilgrimage, I will stop at four locations on the Royal Mile, to illustrate the nature and extent of mainstreaming the edges to the mutual benefit of both.[21]

The first stop is Edinburgh Castle, dominating the Royal Mile and the City of Edinburgh, and perched astride the ancient volcanic solid-basalt feeder pipe. One of the most beautiful, and certainly the oldest mediaeval section of the castle, is rather hidden and incongruous (in the context of such massive architecture) and is right at the top of the castle, the extremely small Chapel of St Margaret. The marriage of the English Margaret to Malcolm Canmore, King of Scots in 1069, represented the interaction of two histories and cultures, certainly to the benefit of Scotland. She died in 1093, and was later canonized. It was probably her son, King David (1124–1153) who built the stone chapel, replacing an earlier one on the site. David was the great builder of monasteries, particularly in the Borders. In the sixteenth century, with the Calvinist Reformation in Scotland, it fell into disuse as a chapel, and became a gunpowder magazine. It was rediscovered in 1845 and restored to its original use. It is now a place of great beauty and peace, giving the castle a sense of wholeness or holiness (more on this at the pilgrimage's end, at the bottom of the Mile). The chapel now contains a copy of the gospel book owned by St Margaret. It is therefore very much about mainstreaming an edge: symbol, for me, of a growing significance of the religious field globally, as 'resurgent' religion (probably the most important feature of religion today, and probably not much about 'blurring'!), reinforced, I would argue. with a reformulation of Christianity in Europe and Britain, including the growing recognition of faithful and religious capital.

Down the Mile a little, we come to the second stop, St Giles Cathedral, centre of the Reformed faith in Scotland, quite different from the more confused 'mongrel' English Reformation. Visit any English cathedral and you will immediately see the difference. The continuities with their mediaeval history are obvious and celebrated. Not in St Giles; it is stuffed full of post-seventeenth-century military insignia, on the backs of cleared out mediaeval memories. Bringing the daunting statue of John Knox into the cathedral from its vantage point outside, as first Presbyterian minister of St Giles and Scotland, is tangible evidence of that stark difference in Reformed traditions. As a historical example of *furious religion* today, it has a vicious and violent side, including the execution for heresy of a silly young student, Thomas Aikenhead, as late as 1697.[22] And yet, the cathedral has recently installed a great beautiful west window, in very contemporary Scandinavian designed glass, to the glorious memory of Robbie Burns, great poet, fornicator and drunkard, totally on the edges of strict moralistic Presbyterianism, and indeed, of its successor, the rationality of the Scottish Enlightenment, with Edinburgh as Athens of the North. Yet now quite in the mainstream of Scottish life and kirk!

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[21]   Relevant tourist guides include *Edinburgh Castle* (Edinburgh, 1994); and *A Guide to the Royal Mile. Edinburgh's Historic Highway* (Edinburgh, 1979).

[22]   See James Buchan, *Capital of the Mind: How Edinburgh Changed the World* (London, 2004), pp. 56–7.

Much lower down the Mile is the third stop, the Canongate Church and churchyard. Built in 1688, in its churchyard, and not easy to find, is the grave of Adam Smith, deeply distrusted and marginalised not only by mainstream mercantilist economics but equally by mainstream Scottish and English churches, particularly after he published a beautiful tribute to the death of his dear friend, the atheist (probably), philosopher David Hume. It was quite unacceptable that someone, at best on the very edges of faith, could die in such a stoical and graceful and peaceful way. That religious hostility to ambiguity, prominent in resurgent religion today, is represented by John Knox's house, a few yards from Smith's grave. Yet, it is Smith who laid the foundations of modern economics, including, very firmly, its ethical dimension. He mainstreamed it. Its re-emergence is a return to, and very serious development of, that original positioning of economics in the broad discipline of moral philosophy. The multi-disciplinary approach I propose, including theology, would have delighted him. The fact that Manchester is now an important source for that development would have also delighted him because his inspiration was drawn partly from the beginning of commercial and industrial change in Glasgow in the mid eighteenth century. He regarded Oxford as the pits!

Right at the bottom of the Mile is the final stop, the splendid new Scottish Parliament building, fortuitously built on the site of the old Holyrood Brewery (from its original brewing by the monks across the road!) Opposite that is Holyrood Palace, religious and secular together in the same location, but very different. And quite on the edges is the origin of both, the ancient abbey of Holyrood, adjacent to the palace, a wondrous ruin, but ruin nonetheless. It was Professor Will Storrar who introduced me to these sites, and reflected on the centrality of the abbey for Scottish life, and indeed, for me, for human well-being itself, including as demonstrated by the happiness hypothesis today. For Holyrood is about holiness, which is about wholeness (central to well-being) – the root of the English word *holy* is the Old English word *halig* – and developed into the holyrood, or holy cross as the means of our redemption, wholeness and holiness.[23] This incorporates the remarkable connecting now, in secular disciplines, of spirituality and mental health, at the heart of the modern disease of, and cure for, what one contemporary psychologist has described as Affluenza.[24] It is not a mainstreaming as achieved goal, which the three other stories represent, but it does confirm their strength in terms of potential. They, in turn, encourage the development of that potential into their realities.

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[23]   Will Storrar, 'Democracy and Mission: The New Context for Doing Social Theology,' in Will Storrar and Peter Donald, *God in Society. Doing Social Theology in Scotland Today* (Saint Andrews, 2003), pp. 10–34 (18–19).

[24]   Oliver James, *Affluenza: How to be Successful and Stay Sane* (London, 2007).

Fair Trade: The Argument for Mainstreaming the Ethical in Production and Trading Systems

Fair Trade is an important and very relevant topic for this exercise. First, it is a quite major feature of the global economy/capitalism, particularly as the remarkable growth in world trade (and production) since 1945. Second, it is intimately related to poverty reduction strategies, and the Millennium Development Goals of the UN (2000). Poverty reduction is also intimately part of the happiness/well-being agendas (as attacking the other end of a spectrum, running from happiness to unhappiness, etc.). Third, it is linked to the anti-globalisation movements, and to questions of free trade, and protecting poor nations, a concern also shared by such mainstream economists as Bhagwati and Stiglitz.[25] Fourth, it is linked to faith communities, for example from Anglican dioceses in England becoming 'Fair Trade' dioceses and so on, to faith NGOs (CAFOD, Tear Fund, Christian Aid, etc.) and to faith traditions. The latter includes renewing the mediaeval European churches' promotion of a just wage and just price, both centrally part of Fair Trade, which links to Radical Orthodoxy today, and to Muslim interest-free banking.[26] There is therefore potential here for contributing towards the emerging key area of interfaith social ethics.

Fair Trade is therefore a particularly useful case study in terms of the possibilities and problems of mainstreaming the edge, and not least because in global trading terms its market share is miniscule. If it is to become more influential, then the task of mainstreaming it within the secular systems becomes a high priority. In addition, its strong ethical character and its connections to faith communities and traditions, give it added value as a case study for the religious encounter with blurred margins.

Historically, ethical consumerism has deep roots in the modern era. For example, it figured large in the Christian Social Union's campaign on low pay, with the use of white lists of employers who paid reasonable wages as the preferred shopping source. Their campaigning contributed to the passing of the Trades Board Act in 1909, forerunner of the Wages Councils for the low paid, and today's minimum-wage legislation.[27] The current movement as Fair Trade, re-emerges in the historic context of the generation of change after 1945, a generation informed by globalization, environmental crisis and resurgent religion. Indeed one of the important attributes of fair trade is that it addresses these problematics. Interestingly, Moore traces an origin of Fair Trade to the

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[25]   Jaimini Bhagwati, *In Defense of Globalization* (Oxford, 2004); and Joseph Stiglitz, *Making Globalization Work: The Next Steps to Global Justice* (London, 2006).

[26]   See John Atherton and Ian Steedman (eds.), *A Place for Faith Based Economics: A Preliminary Statement from Muslims and Christians in Manchester* (Manchester, 2006); Long, *Divine Economy*.

[27]   John Atherton, *Social Christianity: A Reader* (London, 1994), Introduction.

Mennonite Central Committee in the USA, and its trading with poor communities in the South in the 1940s.[28]

It is that religious tradition which inspires two major theologians of faith-based alternatives to mainstream politics and economics, namely Yoder and Hauerwas. Northcott similarly traces the origins of Traidcraft, pioneer of Alternative Trading Organisations (ATO) in Britain, to religious origins, including the work of Christians at St John's College, Durham.[29] Both are reminders of the ethical–religious continuum in the origins and structuring of Fair Trade. For Hira and Ferrie, Fair Trade is therefore 'a movement to integrate ethical principles in consumer decision-making'. They also rightly recognise that 'fair trade implies that ethical principles are intimately and necessarily tied in with the process of production'.[30] These dimensions are all incorporated into the FINE definition of Fair Trade as 'a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect, which seeks greater equity in international trade'. Its objectives are therefore to improve the livelihoods and well-being of producers by paying 'a better price' and 'providing continuity in the trading relationship'; 'to promote development opportunities for disadvantaged producers' especially women and children; to raise awareness among consumers of the negative effects on producers of international trade; and to protect human rights by promoting social justice, sound environmental practices and economic security'. Despite the attraction of these ethically practical commitments, the total sales of Fair Trade worldwide was only US$500 million (2002 research), with US$240 million outside Europe. Tesco's turnover in 2003 was US$45 billion, ninety times the worldwide turnover of Fair Trade.[31]

However, this cautionary note does not remove the significance of Fair Trade in terms of its commitment to justice as fair prices and wages, including for producers, their families and communities. This is strongly reinforced by its location in a grossly unjust global free trading context, with its massive subsidies and preferential tariffs levied by wealthy nations, essentially 'protectionists masquerading as morality'. Against that backcloth, Fair Trade becomes the 'operationalization of an idea of what just trade would be'. That commitment to equity is also reflected increasingly in consumer preferences, embodying an ethical dimension in consumer decision making. One recent study divides consumers into three main groups: ethical consumers (23 per cent), semi-ethical (56 per cent) and selfish (17 per cent), with the first two gradually increasing at the expense of the

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[28]　G. Moore, 'The Fair Trade Movement: Parameters, Issues and Future Research', *Journal of Business Ethics* 53 (2004): 73–86 (73).

[29]　Michael Northcott, 'The World Trade Organisation, Fair Trade and the Body Politics of St Paul,' in John Atherton and Hannah Skinner (eds), *Through the Eye of a Needle: Theological Conversations over Political Economy* (Peterborough, 2007), pp. 169–88 (183).

[30]　Anil Hira and Jared Ferrie, 'Fair Trade: Three Key Challenges for Reaching the Mainstream', *Journal of Business Ethics* 63 (2006): 107–18 (107–8).

[31]　Moore, 'The Fair Trade Movement', pp. 73–4.

selfish group.[32] It is this ethical dimension, including the giving to the marginalized by the affluent, which figures so prominently in current happiness hypothesis literatures, and is increasingly acknowledged as essential for human well-being.

On the basis of this actual and potential dimension in mainstream consumerism, the task becomes how to capitalise on that commitment by developing Fair Trade from its existing restricted achievement and into mainstream retailing, particularly supermarkets. This would involve creating what one researcher has called 'new networks of exchange that escape the bonds of simple price competition', but within the market economy and system.[33] It is essentially the movement from Fair Trade as radical alternative to the mainstream to its reform. The first supermarket to begin this journey was the Co-op, leading to a Fair Trade product turnover of £10 million in 2003 (as its own-label products).

What is clear is that such a programme and process will require facing up to major issues in order to ensure such mainstreaming does not dilute basic Fair Trade principles, particularly justice for producers and consumers. For example, most commentators raise the issue of the certification of Fair Trade products in terms of the clear acknowledged identification of Fair Trade principles and processes. This particularly applies to large retailers using their own brands. Without such safeguards, the consequences, at worst, can result in 'image laundering' by commercial operations, such as Nestlé, not noted for its strong ethical standards. The promotion and protection of ethical economics has to be always conducted in a context of transnational corporations 'constantly seeking to capture these initiatives and redefine them in ways that advance not progressive agendas, but their own private profits'.[34]

Yet the challenge presented by mainstreaming is not a one-way street from Fair Trade to commercial organisations. Important legitimate questions are equally raised by the latter, particularly in terms of basic positive economics. For the economist Steedman this means questioning unduly value-oriented theological judgements on economic matters and including as the promotion of Muslim interest-free banking, and its theological condemnation of usury or interest.[35] These engineering economics questions raised for Fair Trade include: its undue emphasis on primary commodities, like coffee, in long-term price decline, exacerbated by an increasingly prosperous world inevitably spending a declining proportion of their incomes on such products, and particularly on food; the major disruption of the supply and demand of the market and price mechanism by price fixing; guaranteed prices can encourage dependency, and an unwillingness to move into necessary higher added-value production and trading – raising questions regarding exit strategies for Fair Trade organisations; an undue focus on cooperative enterprises as an ethical priority ignores the much greater problem of the poorest and most

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[32] Ibid., pp. 76–7, 81.
[33] Ibid., p. 81.
[34] Ibid., p. 83.
[35] Faiths and Finance, *A Place for Faith Based Economics*, pp. 25–33.

marginalised workers being located on greater commercial private estates. Many of these questions can be addressed and may well need to be. For example, it could be possible to agree 'a minimal percentage of the final price to farmers, thus preserving the efficiency and flexibility of the price signal to reflect market supply-and-demand conditions'.[36] Progress on such agendas could encourage the ethical economics raised by Fair Trade to become embedded in routine public policy, for example, following the history and achievements of minimum-wage legislation (fair wages being a central part of Fair Trade). For Hira and Ferrie, their hope is that 'fair trade principles will become like worker safety and environmental regulations in the North – minimal standards that are a given for all international production, and not just a niche market'.[37] It is the objective of mainstreaming ethical economics.

Conclusion

Reflecting on these brief case studies into the feasibility of mainstreaming ethical economics rightly reinforces the creative and productive, necessarily critical, interaction with the mainstream. A two-way relationship between edges and mainstream is both inevitable and potentially creative. Both Edinburgh and Fair Trade stories illustrate this. A critical and constructive exploration of Fair Trade emphasises how ethical and engineering economics are both essential for the promotion of human wellbeing. Equally, both studies reveal how it is possible to reinforce the ethical and its embodiment in basic and routine economic practices and theories.

In terms of the Christian and theological engagement with this task of mainstreaming ethical economics, it can and should now be seen as part of a wider commitment best described as promoting and elaborating 'faithful economics'.[38] This replaces earlier use of the concept of Christian political economy, not least because it may well be able to engage more effectively as Christian involvement in interfaith economics. It can also run alongside the use of faithful capital, for example as deployed in *Faithful Cities*. The William Temple Foundation's exploration of religious and spiritual capital could then be used to amplify faithful capital, as religious outputs and spiritual motivation.[39] Faithful economics should also be seen as incorporating a continuum from ethical economics to a theological economy. This allows it to engage strategically with mainstream economics,

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[36] Hira and Ferrie, 'Fair Trade', p. 114.

[37] Ibid., p. 116.

[38] See Henderson and Pisciotta, *Faithful Economics*; further elaborated in John Atherton, *Transfiguring Capitalism: An Enquiry into Religion and Global Change* (London, 2008).

[39] Chris Baker and Hannah Skinner, *Faith in Action: The Dynamic Connection between Spiritual and Religious Capital* (Manchester, 2006).

and its continuum from positive (engineering) to ethical (normative) economics. Mainstreaming ethical economics, illustrated through the story of Fair Trade, therefore becomes a shared commitment of both economics and theology given the clear overlap of their respective continuums.

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Chapter 2

Brief Engagements, Processional Encounters

Ian Ball

In this article I intend to explore the value that walking pilgrimages have as a means of experiencing a variety of the 'blurred encounters' that are a feature of this book. Part of the argument being presented here is that traditional methods are often limited and fail, in our present time, to engage people in exploring aspects of themselves and others that are frequently termed 'spiritual'. The chapter:

- raises questions about the manner in which the metaphor of journey is used;
- outlines the style and purpose of walking pilgrimages, called at times 'development' pilgrimage, used for over 30 years;
- provides examples from route guides and notes produced for participants and which are designed to emphasise the serendipitous nature of the pilgrimage.

The pilgrimages are what could be called 'action research'. They ask participants to engage with open minds in learning from what they encounter. In some ways they are the same as those who engage in deep scientific research but insist on remaining 'bench' scientists. As with such people the pilgrimages are in their own way concerned to produce the traditional excitement of chemistry when it focuses on creating 'bangs and stinks'.

Despite social changes, including the loss of meaning of traditional language and positions, there is a continuing interest, through many forms of enquiry, in increasing understanding of the nature of humanity. The blues–gospel singer Blind Willie Johnson, whose life story encapsulated a rolling tragedy common to many from the 'Deep South',[1] poetically presented the issue: 'Won't somebody tell me, answer if you can/Won't somebody tell me, what is the soul of a man?' he asks, adding that he has travelled 'in different countries … and foreign lands' in order to find the answer to this question, but he has found 'nobody' to tell him.[2]

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[1] For more details see 'Johnson, Blind Willie', in *Encyclopædia Britannica* (2008), http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9002882.

[2] Text copied from web site (various available) http://www.brianzahnd.com/index. php?app=blog&p=143; http://www.oldielyrics.com/lyrics/eric_burdon/soul_of_a_man.html. It is not just the words that matter in Johnson's song but the 'growled' delivery. It is the sound he makes as much as the words he sings that create a sense of exploration.

Once upon a time, it was the norm to conceive of life as a journey to a distant land beyond the grave. However actual travel, as with most other aspects of life was restricted. In pre-modern times there was no sense of 'landscape' to be explored and therefore no 'journey' to be had. All was established, revealed and encapsulated. Life was lived within fixed boundaries. Pilgrimage was one of the few ways our mediaeval peasant ancestors could travel – but even then only with permission of their spiritual and temporal masters. Such a journey gave one spiritual credit, a certificated easement to be claimed in purgatory.[3]

Such eternal certainties having departed, we now exist in the shimmering obscurity of the bright white light of analytical scientific reason. There is no journey to be had. Yet 'travel', 'exploration', 'journey' are now important. The harsh realisation that humanity is on, at best, a road to nowhere has not prevented the use of 'journey' as a metaphor for life. Johnson's question still resonates. The exploration of meaning, even when there is none in absolute terms, is something that occurs as inevitably as breathing.

Being bound to be what we are includes curiosity and a desire for knowledge and understanding, 'a thirst for knowledge'. Why ask for more? Is that not sufficient to keep a species happily engaged, however pointless may be their engagement? Organised religion however, is (for good reason) structured and despite any self-serving purposes, has always expressed the reality of our insignificance.

The journeys referred to in this chapter, created and completed in recent times, and an explanation of which is attempted here, arise from a desire to escape and engage in a process of discovery at will, by accident and without constraint of any formal 'programme'.[4] Released from conceptual, intellectual and physical constraints 'journey' itself is freed and becomes a vehicle in itself. Exploration

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The African American music usually classed as 'gospel' is an adventure into a wide range of personal and social experiences. Whilst it passionately adheres to Christianity, it is clearly a massive experimentation in music, spirituality and social dynamism – and with an impact way beyond what present normative 'Christianity' even begins to understand. The deep cultural value and expression of profound 'truths' is often sensed by those well outside conventional religious boundaries. There is a sensitive interpretation of the song available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e4kBv3twle4&feature=related, and he even has a MySpace page containing a curious mix of tributes and adverts as well as examples of his singing http://www.myspace.com/blindwilliejohnson

[3]   The word 'landscape', from the German *Landschaft*, was originally only used of dwellings within a cultivated zone, beyond which was wilderness. This unknown wilderness was targeted by monks not because it was where they could 'commune' with nature and God (a very 'Romantic' notion) but because it required 'taming', bringing within the boundaries of Christian faith, namely 'The City of God'. Mediaeval pictures are focused on their particular subjects. 'landscape' gradually creeps into painting – and its arrival parallels the other conceptual changes of the Late Middle Ages – one of which was to travel not in order to control and 'cultivate' but to 'investigate and explore'.

[4]   The journeys began with a four-day walk involving nearly 100 school students and were simply an exercise designed to develop, in a practical manner, the meaning of the

and pleasure-seeking abound. Journey becomes a useful metaphor to describe the process of personal development. There is no ultimate destination, but life, however purposeless, gains meaning simply by becoming an exploratory process, a movement. The 'movement' or process-ion through life is of discovery and creative action. The process now, in formalised education is frequently headed 'life-long learning'.

The journey is all with no final answers to Johnson's 'soul' question – we will never know fully or be fully known, but acceptance of that is exciting. Knowing more and engagement in the process through simple curiosity is captivating. How much better to be captivated by one's own seeking than to suffer capture by another's controlling ideology. The process in which Romantics from Byron to Kerouac engaged has become embedded in Western society. It is not only the adventurous or disturbed spirit that leaves all behind. From Heritage Rail to Gap Year Global, journeying for journey's sake, is now normal. Similarly for even the most traditionally based pilgrimage, there is a recognition that however important the goal is, the journey plays an important role.

Dimensions of the Pilgrimage

The form of pilgrimage described in this chapter, called 'development pilgrimage' (see below), involves a walk of several days or even weeks, to a significant goal. There are distinguishing features evolved during 30 years of practice.

The word 'pilgrimage' is composed of two Latin words: *per ager* meaning 'to pass through the land'. That is all these development pilgrimages claim to do. 'Passing through' is the key, what happens in that process being dependent on who, when and what. Who does it? When do they do it? What do they encounter? Using these elements the journey can become a pilgrimage.

The word 'pilgrimage' can be an obstructive term, associated with imposed religious beliefs and formalities. In contrast, it can instantly introduce a quite opposite sense, of freedom, adventure and good company; in a word, 'Chaucerian'. So the word 'journey' is commonly used when creating these events. They are 'journeys' which can become, by choice, pilgrimages. 'Pilgrimage' indicates a purposeful journey. 'Travel' and 'journey' imply something of more significance, intent and effort rather than simply a 'turn round the park' or a 'trip to the shops'. Pilgrimages are purposeful journeys driven by a conscious desire for experience and to 'gain' deeper than physical need. The pilgrimage can simply be an exploration to discover or, as will be considered later, to 'express', that inner need. A visit to Stratford-upon-Avon or Wembley Stadium can be 'a pilgrimage'. 'Pilgrimage' for religious groups is usually associated with travel to a well-established pilgrimage centre with the activity on the journey aimed at confirming, deepening and celebrating

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word 'pilgrimage'. They have developed into something else. The term 'pilgrimage' is still used – but because the word does not always resonate positively, it is used with care.

existing faith. The 'trials and tribulations' are but barriers to be overcome on the way to a deeper 'truer' faith. The exercise is designed to further embed the participant in an existing physical, intellectual and emotional structure.

'Development pilgrimage' does not follow this approach or care to stay with established routes to places whose significance is decided by others: 'Thank you: we may choose to use established routes and places but we write our own script, make our own interpretation and create our own performance'.[5] Whilst there may be, through the inevitable process of a group making a slow-stepped journey, a removal from day-to-day existence, the walks do not attempt to remove participants from present realities. They are about discerning more of such reality, real physical places in real time speaking whatever can be heard to those passing.

For example, in walking into Sandbach (Cheshire), through suburban normality, a scruffy footpath linking houses and industrial units led the group past the old town football ground. There was a decaying wooden 'pavilion' and somewhat sadly leaning concrete lamp standards from the 1950s (probably worth listing!) The club has 'moved on' (maybe they still use the pitch, but it is clearly not their main ground). The day before the route followed Gresty Road into Crewe. On weekdays the football ground, was (comparatively recently) open to anyone curious enough to enter and stand on the pitch (and very 'traditional' it was!) Now the surrounding spiked metal fences even manage to prevent a decent view of this place that is the base of one of the oldest 'League' clubs in England. The final day of this walk passed close to the exclusive private school that proudly boasts of providing education to the children of some very famous soccer stars whose residences ('houses' would hardly justify as a description) are carefully concealed in the locality. For those prepared to engage, there is much to be learned from these brief accidental moments featuring on a six-day walk. What is being noted here is that the tradition of industrially based League Football (and Crewe Alexandra certainly was part of that) was that of 'the Labour Party at prayer'.[6]

All sites and sights can be iconic. The places and people, the actions and the interactions are all capable of revealing something, thus adding to a deeper understanding of ourselves and our place. As much as may be revealed, there is much more which remains unseen, unnoticed and disregarded. There is always

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[5]   This approach also applies to the chosen routes. Once an appropriate destination and starting point are decided then the route is as direct as possible. The route may use established trails but only when they are part of the direct line between the two points and the pilgrimage and is never designed around following a specific established trail. The particular journey is all, everything else adjusts (as far as possible) to that.

[6]   This is a reference to a circulating quote that appears to originate in *English Football and Society 1910–1950* by Nicholas Fishwick: 'the football grounds of England were the Labour Party at prayer'. For example, 'The Labour Party at prayer' was one eloquent description of traditional football crowds. (The Old Labour Party at prayer as opposed to New Labour!) www.football-research.org/fitda/FITDA-chapter5.htm-39k. This link, related to Birkbeck College and whilst appearing in Google, no longer operates.

place for further revelation. At the end of the journey we still know very little, maybe only gaining satisfaction from knowing not what we have discovered but that we have tried to discover.

Humanity has been a shifting species – and the detail is marked in many ways. Even the 'passer-by' can absorb something if attention is paid to details. There is therefore an 'uncertainty principle', of greater significance than just the uncertainty of the journey. The whole process of planning is imbued with a degree of uncertainty. Thus for those planning the action it could be said that the pilgrimage begins when the initial decision to travel a particular route is made. The departure point and destination are chosen almost instinctively, arising often in conversation: 'It would be nice to go to …' followed by 'From where?' Once such decisions are made the route is as direct as possible accepting whatever the route can offer. There is no compromise, no adjustment to avoid the ugly – in fact 'dross' is to be welcomed as there are always hidden joys and delights. The spirit is of acceptance of what is there, not what we would wish to have there.

The Pilgrimage 'Rule'

A 'Rule' has been established (but is hardly ever totally adhered to by all who participate). The *form* of the journey is to walk to a suitable destination in an appropriately simple manner. The *function* of such a journey is to act as a temporary travelling community by sharing all aspects of the journey. Simplicity provides as cost-effective a journey as possible and allows maximum access. Thus, such a journey, with its space for informal socialising, provides opportunities for insight and understanding into life, land, culture and history, to who and what we are and to what we may become. The journey can thus be a personal and social search, or quest, or a pilgrimage.

Required commitment; a spirit of acceptance (and tolerance) in the following ways:

- *Directness of the journey.* The journey is destination-centred with a direct route on footpaths and minor roads. The daily destination and approximate timetable, provide a framework, essential when travel is difficult (it really is necessary to be able to answer the question 'Are we nearly there yet'). Diversions can damage the overall purpose and directness of route requires 'acceptance' of whatever lies in its path (but hostelries for lunch feature!) Practicality has precedence over charm and allure.
- *Accommodation* is in village or church halls providing basic washing and cooking facilities and floor space for sleeping bags. Sometimes conditions are cramped. Occasionally, when there is a lack of basic amenities, an available public building (usually a pub) provides water, lavatories and shelter for cooking.

- *Food* is simple and lacking choice, but each group is encouraged to improve matters! Catering can feature in pre-journey planning to accommodate, for example, vegetarianism, but a walking group cannot expect to achieve the choices of sedentary life. The organisers usually provide the first evening meal, after which it is usual for the group to co-operate in planning and delivering the morning and evening meals.
- *Sharing duties and responsibilities, pains and pleasures.* The closeness of lives (and habits) can be challenging. Harmony is normal but not inevitable. The details of cooking, cleaning and so on need to be managed. The shared socialising of duties, meals, lunch-breaks and evenings are important elements. The journey essentially requires commitment to the whole process. Others may join (but arriving 'late' removes some of the quality gained from being part of the whole), but it is important to join and stay rather than leave prior to the final 'evaluatory' evening 'wind-down' session following arrival. The journey can then become a 'gathering body purposefully moving towards a common goal'.
- *Personal belongings should, ideally, be carried.* However it is normal for some to bring cars, moved each morning and evening: these carry the baggage. Though normal, all who have 'shuttled' cars find it disruptive to the sense of progression that the walk creates, but the costs of hiring a minibus and driver are usually prohibitive. The organisers try to arrange transport details before the walk to ensure the minimum numbers of motor vehicles.

Imagination, having the correct dream or vision (beginning, surviving, finishing), needs to be the focus. 'Will power' never wins when in conflict with dreams (or nightmares) of the imagination. The vision of imagination that caused the initial decision to participate, sustains individuals and groups as they drag themselves across the frequently unforgiving land. Realising the 'imaginative vision' brings, at the end at least, relief, a sense of completion, communal celebration and, often, a form of joy – thus staying together for the night following arrival is an important part of the whole experience.

Participating in the Developmental Pilgrimage

The word 'developmental' expresses the idea of the pilgrimage being an educational activity and concerned with improving personal skills, so that it acts to increase the ancient sense of pilgrimage as 'the mirror of life'. Developmental pilgrimage requires the following elements, which can be condensed into a set of principles and norms:

- appropriate goal and route;
- graduated challenge;

- creative time for discussion and reflection centred on detailed awareness of the varied environments through which the pilgrimage passes.

Developmental pilgrimage is distinguished by providing moments and ceremonies, appropriate to the group and occasion, that:

- mark
- acknowledge
- celebrate[7]

aspects of the journey.

Thus developmental pilgrimage will enable the building of:

- trust
- companionship
- teamwork

amongst those with whom one travels and meets.

By increasing sensitivity to the route detail, developmental pilgrimage will provide greater:

- understanding of varied environments;
- self-understanding and self worth;
- sense of mutuality and co-operation;
- awareness of the 'significance' of everyday life.[8]

Thus developmental pilgrimage, a temporary travelling community, becomes, at various levels, pilgrimage as a progressive revelation. Most developmental pilgrimages are constructed for groups and depend on nurturing companionship. The method of travel may vary, as what is a 'challenge' for one person may be inappropriate for another

Developmental pilgrimage creates a series of dynamic encounters and thus makes a contribution to personal and social development. They are also experiences in environmental education.

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[7] 'Celebrate': this aspect is natural, in some form or another, to most similar activities; at the end of a difficult section or the final point most groups 'celebrate' in some way. These development pilgrimages however attempt to create celebrations which, whilst remaining simple in form, are more elaborate and carefully planned than would be the case for a conventional long-distance walk.

[8] 'Significance': in this context a valuable word, being constructed from the word 'sign'. Even the detail of everyday life can indicate, point to, and mark important issues underlying the nature of our selves and our existence.

A developmental pilgrimage is a quest, intended to heighten awareness of who and what we are and to stimulate questioning of accepted positions. They make no assumptions as to participants' personal beliefs and are open to both those of religious faith and none and assist in the building of new relationships. In their physical exploration of environment, of heritage and received tradition and of human relationships, they become revelations of outer ethics and morals, inner spirit and of much that makes our-self. They therefore provide a means of viewing and shaping the future.

Six Reflections: Beyond Development

Beyond 'development': pilgrimage thus becomes an exploration, a means of expression and creation – as something that is way beyond what is normally proposed by religious groups and that relates to the way we feel about issues such as 'place' and 'space'. It is in particular 'the land' that provides the material for the growth of self. Whatever 'the landscape', it provides reflective space. Consciously there is a structure within which issues of 'faith' (in its widest possible sense) can be explored. The route, the participants, the action and the land itself are the means to greater understanding of Blind Willie Johnson's question.

1. 'We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.'[9] This, written over 40 years ago, summarises what the pilgrimages can become; an uncovering of that network of connecting points

2. We are bodies in transit, composing ourselves as we go. We are both material and seekers and users of material. The traveller can then become both 'the beggar' and 'the mocker at the gates'; staring in on those who have settled and who express their choice and belief. Most amusing (and possibly most common) are the seekers after idyll. They are found everywhere but particularly in the suburbanised countryside.[10]

3. There is in these slow, measured journeys a tension between place and space. The traveller is the consumer of space and the observer of place.

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[9]   Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces (1967), Heterotopias', http://www.foucault. info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html (accessed 13 January 2009).

[10]   Being in a travelling collective creates, through the commonly experienced vicissitudes, a sharing of attitude and view. A commitment to a style of living, even for only a few days, that is stripped of many regular and 'normal' comforts, produces a sense of belonging which is special to the group. This often finds expression in observing (and commenting on) the details of the way in which 'settled' humanity strives to create comfort zones around their habitations and the observed results, great and small, form as much part of the reflective learning process as any other aspect of the journey.

Maybe such a traveller is using space as a means of discovering place. Our place, human place. Who have we been? The land holds clues – some clear, others obscured by layer on layer of human action which the pilgrim snail attempts to expose.

4. We are also trying to compose, or maybe to rediscover what has been composed, an attempt at rediscovering 'the word' or maybe, as with the scientists at Jodrell Bank (destination for a recent pilgrimage) more of 'The Word'.

    We are creating our spirituality as we move along.[11] No longer can it just be a matter of accepting 'received' doctrine, which, as everyone who bothers to consider knows, has always been 'doctored'. As much as the Augustines and Aquinas's developed ideas within their own time, so then do those now who participate in the 'passing movements through the land'. Thus, I will suggest, the pivotal seventeenth and eighteenth centuries provide both for our creative, intellectual and physical structures as the period during which our current sense of self began to emerge. If the pilgrimage is 'soul searching' it is often through encounters with aspects of this history that such occurs.

    An extract of the notes produced for a Buxton to Lincoln pilgrimage in 2003, just as the invasion of Iraq was in 'full swing', illustrates the point:

Our route passes Tunstead near the birthplace of James Brindley, the canal engineer whose work was of prime importance in the first Industrial Revolution …

   After Tunstead there is a steep descent and rise to Tideswell which contains 'the cathedral of the Peak'. Here there was a 'king's larder' and many of the forest officials resided nearby. Here also resided on Samuel Slack, the 'chief eccentric celebrity' (Highways).[12] He had a bass voice so strong that it is said to have frightened a charging bull and had a direct manner of speaking. George III appreciated his voice to which Slack replied 'Oh he were pleased, were he? I thowt I could do 't' (Highways). He is said to have enjoyed 'low society' – 'and made no effort towards self improvement' (Highways) – Ha! He seems to have had a pretty successful career but simply refused to borrow 'airs and graces'. He became a leader of the local Catch and Glee Club often singing 'Life's a bumper, filled by Fate'. There was also a poet in Tideswell – Mr. Beebe Eyre who wrote:

   'Tideswell! Thou art my natal spot
   And hence I love thee well;
   May prosperous days now be the lot

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[11]   The term 'spirituality' is used without any real sense of what it might mean. The word, as used in common parlance is so vague as to be of almost no meaning. However it seems to indicate something that is more than simply material.

[12]   J.B. Frith, *Highways and Byways in Derbyshire* (London, 1905).

Of all that in thee dwell!'

Apparently his poems were 'written in deep adversity' (all from Highways).

Tideswell was the home of William Newton 'The Minstrel of the Peak' (who operated a humane version of the 'prentice system at his mills at Cresswell), whilst at nearby Litton there is the home of William Bagshawe 'The Apostle of the Peak'. Maybe today we can call ourselves 'The Vagabonds of the Peak'…?

Bagshawe wrote some very improving pamphlets from which we could take note and learn: 'Waters from a thirsty soul', Rules for our behaviour everyday and for sanctifying the Sabbath, with Hints for Communicants', 'The ready way to prevent Sin', The Sinner in Sorrow and a Humble sinner's Modest request' 'Trading Spiritualised' etc. (Dictionary of National Biography).

Litton was original home to the Lytton family – various members famous in Victorian times (one as Viceroy of India). Their fortune was originally based on mills using child pauper labour brought in from the cities (an early form of a Youth Employment Scheme – it kept them off the streets). 'The children were apprenticed to the mill owner until they were 21, but many died … often their fingers were bruised and maimed … the day began at five o'clock with a horse whip in the sleeping quarters, … Slow starvation, filth, and brutality led to broken spirits, fevers, and death, until the mill owner thought it wise to bury the dead in different churchyards to hide their growing numbers.'

At the time of this 'normality' the campaign to abolish slavery was beginning – and some recognised its form in England. We can look back with horror – and wonder what horrors our successors will choose from our time. The first Baron Lytton (Edward George Bulwer-Lytton) wrote the famous words: 'the pen is mightier than the sword', which whilst accurate is not quite what he was saying as the previous line stated: 'Beneath the rule of men entirely great …'. Thus recognising what we all know – George Dubya has the real power, not Will Self. He also produced the phrase 'poverty has strange bedfellows' – not that he knew much of poverty… As for bedfellows…?[13]

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[13] This route to Lincoln later passed near the homes of both D.H. Lawrence and Lord Byron. Quotes expressing their concerns with power, its uses and abuses, proved particularly apposite for this pilgrimage. 'They [the women] go dragging along what is left from the pits. They're not interested enough to be very immoral – just a question of pit-wages. The most moral duke in England makes two hundred thousand a year out of these pits. He keeps the morality end up … How terrible it was! The terrible fascination in it – human bodies and life subjected in slavery to that symmetric monster of the colliery' (D.H.Lawrence, *The Rainbow* [Harmondsworth, 1966], p. 349). Meanwhile Byron refers to the Freedom's banner, 'torn but flying/Streams like the thunder-storm against the wind' (Lord Byron, *Childe Harold* IV. xcviii. lines 874–5, in J.D. Jump [ed.], *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage and other Romantic Poems* [London, 1975]).

These 'route guides' are intended to both inform and provoke. Ancient and mediaeval times may provide some interest and amusement but the greatest influence is 'modernity'. Part of the process of knowing more fully 'who' we are requires an understanding of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. From 2006, here are parts of the notes made about Gloucester once again illustrating the significance of an earlier period in our history:

Accommodation: St. Mary de Crypt – 'originally Norman' then mediaeval 'largely. Perp(endicular)' – but restored in 1844. Mediaeval it may be but it provides no escape from the considerations of our present condition. The parish was home to George Whitefield, Robert Raikes and John Biddle was Master of the School in the 17th century. Whilst Biddle is called a Unitarian, that really only describes his anti-Trinitarian theology. He represents a movement – away from the controlled beliefs of a dominant party (Catholic, Presbyterian or whatever) – to one where individuals thought freely and formed or re-formed groups as appropriate. For him it was not dogma that was important but moral attitude. As a dissenter against all formal views of the time he was frequently imprisoned and died two days after release from prison in London, of 'prison fever'. He is claimed as the 'Father of English Unitarianism'.

The flow of ideas generated during the 16th and 17th centuries began to crystallise into thought patterns formed, during the 18th century, the basis of our present belief systems. Whitefield stands as one famous example of the development of these ideas. Biddle took an individual approach to belief – but in a time when conformity to a formal position was essential. For such as Whitefield however, truth, to be sought through personal commitment to a passionate and inner-grounded belief, had become more acceptable. He joined with others who followed the Oxford Method of regular study and took their ideas into a Calvinistic structure – working largely in the American colonies (and Wales). Methodism represents a profound shift, drawing on Pietistic ideas, and was an heir to the individualism of those such as Biddle.

The emphasis, which was to become standard, regardless of religious or non-religious position was on feeling and emotion; 'truth' (in Whitefield's case, religious truth) was available to all, individually and regardless of social status. In the preface to his Hymn Book he writes: '…as the Generality of those who receive the Gospel are commonly the Poor of the Flock, I have studied Cheapness, as well as Conciseness. Much in a little is what God gives us in his Word'. Meanwhile Hymn 5 states:

HITHER ye Poor, ye Sick, ye Blind,
A sin disorder'd trembling Throng;
To you the Gospel calls, to you
Messiah's Blessings all belong.
Reason's and Virtue's boasting Sons
Derive no Blessings from this Tree:
For Sinners only Jesus dy'd,

Then sure I hear he dy'd for me.
Awake each Heart, arise each Soul,
And join the blissful Choirs above:
May nothing tune our future Song,
But heav'nly Wisdom, heav'nly Love.[14]

The struggle to 'improve' is intensely personal and not subject to direct command of any human agency. Further, the attack on 'reason and virtue' refers to the 'early' enlightenment views that proposed a firm conformist social order for humanity – thus underscoring the need for individual decision and expression.

Whitefield, along with other Methodists, was often regarded as an aberration – and dangerous. Mockery from most of the establishment was usual – due to a squint in one eye he was known as 'Dr. Squintum'. It was Whitefield who successfully encouraged John Wesley to step beyond the boundary of the Parish Church and preach in the open countryside – free expression was free for all to share – it was a sort of combined street-culture and Rave Party of its day, with the exhortation of preaching serving as the 'mind enhancing' element. In his first sermon at St. Mary's there were complaints to the Bishop that he had driven fifteen people mad. 'Whitefield' wrote a biographer, 'was all life, fire, wing, force'.

Establishment objections arose from a fear of free expression – emotions were not 'individual' – there were masters and servants – and servants had to keep their place, freeing emotions could be dangerous. Even the apparent 'liberators' were 'controlling' in that reading was required in order to absorb received truth and wisdom. It was not expected (or desired) that the 'lower orders' should actually begin expressing themselves as it was well known that, being brutish, they were incapable of sensible thought.

Revolutionary stuff at a revolutionary time and the release of the spirit in a religious context leads to other forms of release, as from overbearing government. The Western world begins to express feelings, and hopes and fears. The increased exploitation of metal and fuel, the ordered improvement of transport systems and the consequent rapid expansion of industrial process, yet all set in a social context based on a traditional attitude towards social order, creates a context for the ideas of those such as Biddle and Whitefield, to produce fascinating results which remain part of our world view today.

… 'cheery, talkative, flamboyant and warm-hearted' Robert Raikes provides an immediate example. Like Whitefield he was similarly concerned with the poor, but in a most practical manner by establishing a school for poor children of chimney sweeps and those working in pin factories, held on Sunday as they had time then to attend. The origin of institutions such as Sunday Schools lay directly in the growing problems created by the Industrial Revolution but arising

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[14] **George Whitefield**, *A Collection of Hymns for Social Worship* (CD Rom; Oswestry, 2000).

from the new consciousness that placed value on each person, as, whatever their social context, an individual.

The struggle continues: societal and institutional requirement so often set against personal choice, freedom, expression and liberty.

In Gloucester the radical continues. On the political map for many years in the 20th century Gloucester (and the nearby Forest of Dean from which had come much local wealth) were strangely isolated, 'red' overwhelmed by 'blue' (just as years before in the Civil War it had been an isolated Parliamentary outpost). Today the 'red' remains the colour – but less isolated. However the present parliamentary representative Parmjit Dhanda, exemplifies, by name and family history, the New Britain – a land in a global world, a land of many cultures, struggling, as much as in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries to make sense of a changing existence.

Gloucester: land of boundaries, of breaking boundaries a place become 'a turning point for England', a criss-crossing of route, product and idea. A city reshaping itself, sharing the recent delight in converting the grimed world of the industrial into a resort of sensual indulgence and shuffling slowly, like the rest of us, into the uncertain future.[15]

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[15] The extracts provided here are somewhat slewed towards the historical and religious. The 'guide notes', many of considerable length, are the personal and therefore selective culling by the author of a wide range of material including 'living' issues. Thus the introduction to a pilgrimage from Boston, Lincs to Bury St. Edmunds in 2007 contains the following:

'Giving meaning to Boston – a place as a signpost, an avatar'

A merging of perceived needs, and not the only such merging that is relevant to present day Boston.

Now and again, some native Bostonians like to gather eggs and stones and drive past The Volunteer, hurling them as they pass. Portuguese, European and British flags have been stuck on the pub's door, as if it might make a difference. In the poorer corners of rural Britain, this is how many immigrants still live – even the ones who are white, Christian and members of the EU. (The Guardian 23/01/06)

Frontline Boston. Across much of rural, especially the increasing horticultural rural, UK another aspect of the changing economic background of the late 20th century occurs. Is it, in fact, any different from the changes in post-war Western Europe – just a little later? Things always are 'later' in rural areas.

Their town is not an aberration; it is just old-fashioned and poor, with virtually no experience of immigration. At the last census, in 2001, there were 55,750 people living in Boston, among whom the largest non-white community was the Chinese, totalling 161 people. The town, in other words, is a reminder of what most of Britain used to be like. As it was for the Jamaicans in London 50 years ago, so it is for the Portuguese in Boston today, but with better policing. (ibid)

5. *Whatever is not Scripture can be written off as journalism, a disposable daily instalment of lies.* Maybe in a sense pilgrims are trying to write personal scriptures gained through understanding the meaning of the ground over which we tread. The writing is internal and occasionally is manifested in speech and script. The pilgrims are creating narrative not repeated doctrine

    We may be creating and composing with the material that is uncovered both from within ourselves and the context within which we find ourselves. There is a constant discovery and re-discovery, interpretation and re-interpretation. The arguments of rationalists, 'enthusiasts' and Romantics of the eighteenth century still resonate powerfully. The walks have evolved their own form of Blakean reconstruction.

6. *Rediscovery*. These issues matter as the development pilgrimages have always created actions: moments of significance or remembrance or celebration. It is the celebratory moments that make the most creative use of gathered material. That may be literal gatherings of material from the walk turned into creative art; pictures, figures, circles with appropriate words and music. It is improvised and never repeats exactly. What works for one group may not for another. But overtly religious music and parts of ancient liturgies often feature along with songs sometimes composed specially.

    The sense of freedom and release invoked by the 'enthusiasts' fits well with the spirit of these pilgrimages. Religious practice is to be used for our needs, and adjusted as necessary. As much as we are heirs to an industrial past, yet reject its extremes (child labour, slavery, etc.), we are heirs to its religious expression (whilst not accepting its formal theology).

    This 'rediscovery' reverses traditional religion which is no longer to be accepted as a 'truth' but is another 'resource' to be used as is deemed necessary and valuable. 'We', the pilgrims 'are the masters now': so, Charles Wesley, whose verses are 'available' having, as poetry, an inspirational archaic, mythic feel. As with the Bunyan hymn (in its original form) whatever the beliefs of the writers the metaphoric language 'works' now. As John Wesley wrote the hymns are of 'the true Spirit of Poetry. … By labour a man … may heap together pretty compound epithets … but unless he be born a Poet, he will never attain the genuine spirit of

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What was once a development experienced almost entirely in cities now occurs across the country, and the rural horticultural east of England is the area of greatest increase in migrant labour (15% of post-2004 EU migration is in Anglia region).

The researched information contained in the Boston to Bury guide-notes was exemplified, and amplified, by the experience of the walk which in passing through a countryside largely ignored by tourism ('too flat', 'too agribusiness', etc.) witnessed the details of modern agricultural methods required by our supermarket-shopping selves.

Poetry'. We may argue the point about being born 'poetic', but his words could well be heeded by some present so-called hymn writers!

The need is to supply the hungry consumer with intellectually edible fare. These are consumers in transition, absorbing encounters, gathering a range of new experiences, shifting, changing, moving in briefly, then moving away. The Wesleys worked outside the boundaries of conformity. It is not that these pilgrimages follow their theology but they do follow an underlying spirit of 'release', vision and freedom; a 'spirit' which acknowledges individual expression in contrast to bureaucratic and hierarchical control.

Thus in October 2007 a pilgrim group leaving a stone circle bound for Jodrell Bank astronomical telescope approved, then learnt and sang one of Charles Wesley's less-well-known hymns. It was carried with them and taught to a church congregation by the pilgrims at the completion of the journey. The hymn, entitled 'Light of the World, Thy Beams I Bless', hints at the themes of navigation and celestial guidance with its reference to being 'guided … through all I go' by the 'bright Sun of Righteousness' on which 'my faith hath fixed its eye'.[16] Their acceptance, learning and singing marked not a statement of belief but one of 'sufficient relevance'.

Thus the development pilgrimages are for consumers. No longer a means of embedding in a belief system, it is a process of ingesting the passing contact, of absorbing the moment and expressing the delight of it all. This is a rediscovery of 'place' in a context of 'space' and beyond the mathematical measurement or judgement simply based on the relationship of one thing to another. It is the honouring of an older (?) view of things valid simply for what they are (there was no 'landscape' in the Middle Ages as argued earlier). Such rediscoveries are exemplified by our increasing concern for the minutiae of a place, including a recognition of the value of the microscopic. Thus the pilgrimages attempt to develop a relationship between the pilgrim and the places through which she passes – a series of intimate engagements.

7. *Serial Intimacy.* The compounding effect of several days of engagement with others and their stories (told through the landscape, physical structures and random conversations) whilst performing and completing a comparatively arduous activity, is intense and can be transforming. Freedom and release, whilst not as explosive as that associated with the eighteenth-century enthusiasts, is of the same type. There is a 'flow'; it excites at the moment of departure and accumulates as the journey develops. The consumer of time, space and contact can be moved, and express that creatively. Tears of abounding joy are not unusual at the end and even the most phlegmatic of British participants can admit to 'having a lump in the throat'.

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[16] Text taken from http://wesley.nnu.edu/charles_wesley/hymns/wesley_lyrics-b. htm#Light_of_the_world.

It may be that these development pilgrimages have their own 'development' and mutate into the actions of 'creative consumers'. The pilgrim is, by attention to the detail of what is 'out-there' at the same time re-enacting a mediaeval ritual, discovering something personal and creating new forms and expressions that are in essence 'of the Spirit'. This is not 'New Age' religion emphasising 'green' behaviour and laying claim to some form of esoteric 'truth' that others should adopt. It is not the pilgrimage of conventional church groups busily engaged in strengthening the faith of their confessing adherents. And whatever others may judge, they do not claim to be 'postmodern'.

So what may be left? Categorisation is pointless. They seem presently to be relating to some form of Critical Romanticism. Maybe ultimately we are just playing at being alchemical magicians, desirous of transforming our base selves into something more pure by brief contact with each other and a vast range of 'others'. The transformation of self through a thorough embedding in the mundane. Maybe, as applies to so many other forms of Romanticism these purposeful interloping excursions are simply a search for continuity of past in the present. The old certainties have gone. There is no personal continuation after death; the Victorian obsession with death and its rituals could be said to have arisen out of a deeper awareness of this situation. Yet we all seem to need some form of sense of 'our' place in the strange piece of space that is the earth.

There is much more to be explored in considering the above point. Undoubtedly some of the participants, (such as the school students and homeless young people for whom specific walks have been created) the purpose is primarily associated with challenges, overcoming difficulty, developing a sense of achievement, building self-esteem. However for some, especially those who have been regular participants over many years the process is more difficult to define. Continuity and connectedness are for them, more significant.

Thus the process allows a deepening sense of connection both through time and with space. It becomes a means of understanding better the boundaries and thresholds of our human existence and allows a participant, particularly through the slow, measured, natural movement that is walking, to be literally 'earthed'. Such a person can feel closer both to that which was but also that which is – and maybe even that which could be. As the ancient Welsh triadic saying puts it: 'Tri pheth a dylai dyn ystyried: Ble mae, O ble mae'n dod, a ble mae'n myned'.[17]

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[17] 'There are three things which a man should consider: where he is, where he is coming from, and where he is going' (Henry Halford Vaughan, *Welsh Proverbs: British Reason in English Rhyme* [London, 1889]).

Conclusion: Journey's End?

When time permits guide notes are produced, intended to encourage the creative and transformatory response. These notes, being gleaned from whatever source is found useful, wilfully juxtapose whatever is capable of researched discovery prior to a walk. The juxtaposition attempts to create links for the imagination of participants to develop. They are also an increasingly important element and expression of the belief that fires the whole peregrination process: that we are composed imaginatively by a host of scattered and disparate elements that can never be defined precisely and that we use our imagination to then compose and re-compose our 'selves' and the landscape of our existence. We are myth and we make myth to confirm myth. Our personal myth thus colours all we do and view, our decisions great and small and our judgements. It is as well to be aware of this situation as it helps us assess who and what we are and the manner in which we behave within our wider world. Awareness helps us be more honest and truthful.

A creative intensity of 'knowing'; absorption into context such that factuality is transcended. Ah! The mystical escape!

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Chapter 3

A Blurred InterFaith, InterCultural Experience: A Kidderminster Story

Owain Bell

Introduction

This is the story of an event that took place in Kidderminster, Worcestershire in January 2006. It is the story of an attempt by the wider community to interest itself in, engage with and support a minority ethnic/faith community in the town. It is the story, too, of an initiative that went badly wrong and of an encounter that became not only 'blurred' but angry, confused and baffling. It is also the story of an encounter that highlights the complexity of identity and of multiple identities, the importance of words and, ultimately, a story that suggests that in situations like this there is no alternative to the seeking out and nurturing of personal contacts and friendships.

The Story

In 2005 Worcestershire Racial Equality Council (WREC) commissioned an experienced research scholar to produce a report on the needs of the Bangladeshi community in Kidderminster. He was also asked to detail possible solutions to those needs. The study, financed jointly by West Mercia Constabulary and Social Services (Worcestershire County Council), grew out of a widespread perception within the mainstream community that Kidderminster's relatively small but close-knit Bangladeshi community was experiencing disadvantage in education, employment and other service provision by virtue of its isolation.

The researcher was asked to focus on two wards in the town, Broadwaters and Greenhill, where the Bangladeshi population are concentrated.[1] This part of Kidderminster is a mixed, residential area with 'hot spots' of real deprivation

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[1]   Broadwaters, with a total population in 2005 of 6,740, included 61 Bangladeshis, 1 Pakistani, 11 Indians and 6 Chinese. Amongst Greenhill's total population of 6,554 were 105 Bangladeshis, 5 Pakistanis, 14 Indians and 9 Chinese. According to the 2001 census figures the total number of people from a Bangladeshi background in the Wyre Forest (the council area which includes Stourport and Bewdley as well as Kidderminster) was 453. Overall in the Wyre Forest, of a total population of 96,981, less than 1 per cent come

and poverty. The run-down area immediately surrounding the Madani Mosque in Radford Avenue is known as the Horsefair. Its name betrays origins as a place for horse-trading. In the eighteenth century it became home to many Romany families, followed a century later by Irish navvies building the railway and railway viaduct. The same streets in the twentieth century received a substantial Polish population. It has always been the place to which newcomers or outsiders are initially drawn.

At the present time this area of Kidderminster is receiving significant support: efforts are being made by the Local Strategic Partnership to enhance the environment, improve housing, reduce crime, address well-documented under-performance in education and the circumstances that make statistics for public health such depressing reading.[2] The researcher, who agreed to undertake the project in 2005, was born in Pakistan and has degrees from Pakistan, Japan and the UK. He is also a devout Muslim. All these things made him, for those commissioning the Kidderminster Report, a natural choice to carry the project forward. During the late summer of 2005 work began. Over 60 people from different walks of life and several institutions, including local schools, were consulted. In retrospect, Wyre Forest's Hate Crime and Diversity Liaison Officer would say that the researcher's work was inhibited from the start by the limited number of local contacts that those commissioning the report were able to furnish him with.[3] The fact that the president of the mosque, an enormously influential figure, felt unable to participate in the process, also had an impact.

By November 2005, however, an enormous amount of data had been gathered and the report, running to some 40 pages, had been written.[4] The author's executive summary claimed to show that, as suspected, the Bangladeshi Community was the most disadvantaged minority group in the area due mainly to 'its i) high level of racial harassment victims, ii) low levels of literacy, iii) under-performance of Bangladeshi pupils in education, iv) lack of training and skills, v) high unemployment, vi) low levels of health, vii) inadequate housing and recreational facilities, viii) language and cultural barriers in the case of women, and ix) inadequate access to social services'.[5]

The author warned that 'if the present trend continues, it will be a serious setback to the process of community cohesion and the overall socio-economic development of the town'. And so the report urged the initiation of a three-year 'Community Development Project' for the two wards, to be administered

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from a minority ethnic group (information supplied by the Wyre Forest Community Safety Partnership).

[2]   *Working to Make our Area a Safer, Cleaner and Greener Place to Live and Work* (unpublished Horsefair, Broadwaters and Greenhill Partnership Delivery Plan, 2007).

[3]   Email correspondence with the author, July 2007.

[4]   The report was titled *Minority Community Needs Analysis in the Broadwaters and Greenhill Wards of Kidderminster* (November 2005). It was circulated to the appropriate parties as a feasibility study for discussion, but was never published.

[5]   *Minority Community Needs Analysis*, p. 3.

by WREC and aiming 'not only to coordinate various community development activities' but also to 'mobilise internal and external human and financial capital to bring a positive change to the community'.[6] All seemed well.

The next step was for the report to be made public. In the meantime it was sent to those commissioning the project and was seen by a significant number of interested parties. Many of the latter, together with the Bangladeshi Community itself, were invited to a public meeting on 17 January 2006 at the Sladen (Church of England) Middle School, a building familiar to many children from within the Bangladeshi community. This made it a neutral and safe venue.

What took place next was totally unanticipated. The report was presented and angrily denounced by some present as 'defamatory'. Harsh words were used. Tempers became frayed. And a great number, though not all, of those from the Bangladeshi community walked out. Subsequently a critique of the report was produced by the mosque itself, signed by the president, vice-president and secretary.[7] Some of the evidence was challenged on grounds of factual inaccuracy. Some of those who had participated in the report's publication were accused of 'making a mockery of this successful and peaceful community'. There was a demand that some (named) individuals should 'answer to the Bangladeshi community of Kidderminster'. The paper was clearly written in anger and hurt by members of a community which felt itself 'degraded and marginalised'.

What had Gone Wrong?

The report had been commissioned with the best of motives. The research had been undertaken conscientiously by an experienced practitioner. But the result was a disaster. The author was left hurt and bruised, the community bitter and angry and those who had commissioned the report baffled and disheartened. A painful encounter had taken place. It was blurred, too, in the sense that everyone involved was left feeling more uncertain about the nature of inter- and intra-community boundaries. It would clearly take time to understand the encounter and to build trust. A steep learning curve!

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[6] Ibid., p. 4.
[7] Issued in February 2006, 'in the name of Allah, the most Beneficent and most Merciful'.

The Background to the Story

The first Bangladeshi migrants to Kidderminster arrived in the late 1960s, attracted by the high wages then being offered in the town's carpet factories.[8] The first migrants were all men who shared rented (and often cramped) accommodation. Almost all of them came from the village of Syedpur in the Sylhet district of what is now Bangladesh, an area with a long history of migration. For some the adjustment to long hours and a closed environment was far from easy. The men, many related, worked hard sending the bulk of their earnings 'home', hoping that after a few years of work, they could return.

Life was difficult. As the president of the mosque and one of the pioneers once said to me, 'you can't live in two places at the same time'. During the course of the 1970s and early 1980s, wives and families were encouraged to join their husbands, moving initially into council accommodation often in the Horsefair. Later houses were purchased a few streets away, but adjustment was often very difficult. During the 1980s the once flourishing carpet industry in Kidderminster went into deep recession. Factories closed. Men and women were made redundant. Many Bangladeshi families moved away from the town to join relatives in Sunderland. The two towns, both with significant numbers of people with roots in Syedpur, have become known, within the Bangladeshi Community, as 'Syedpur One' and 'Syedpur Two'. As a result of the recession in the carpet industry the Bangladeshis who remained in Kidderminster sought other employment often in catering. Today there are 14 successful restaurants and take-aways, licensed and unlicensed, offering employment and making a significant contribution not only to the local economy but to the recreational life of the district. It is a success story.

Philip Jenkins, tracing patterns of migration in the 1970s and 1980s, has written that 'generally, people who came from the same home region tended to settle close to each other in their new countries, so that social and cultural patterns from the homeland were reproduced on European soil'.[9] This has been true in Kidderminster too, though as time has passed, the picture, as we shall see, has become more complex. The older generation, for whom the UK may be home but who struggle with the language, still have an emotional investment in their 'motherland' while for those of the second (and even more, third) generation Bangladesh is becoming a totally foreign country.[10] Virtually all the community are practising Muslims.

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[8]   Some years ago Mrs Pam Protheroe, a teacher of English as a Second Language (now retired), produced a briefing paper, 'The Bangladeshi Community in Kidderminster', since reissued by the Community Safety Department of the West Mercia Constabulary.

[9]   Philip Jenkins, *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam and Europe's Religious Crisis* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 110–11.

[10]   One of the Mosque elders once said, in reply to my question, 'Do the youngsters want to go to Bangladesh?', 'Ah, no. I think they'd rather go to Florida or Disneyland'.

In 1975 a mosque, a terraced house in Radford Avenue, was opened.[11] On a Friday it is very crowded; larger premises are urgently required.

Over the years various attempts have been made to support the community, though the record is intermittent and inconsistent. Some initiatives, like the Wyre Forest Elders Minority Club,[12] launched in December 2004 seem, sadly, to have been short lived. Others, such as the Bangladeshi Women's Group, founded over 20 years ago, is currently less active than it was some 15 years ago when 'men, women and children across the community would get together and bring ethnic food to celebrate special occasions'.[13] The Bangladeshi Community Forum was launched in April 2002,[14] offering a range of activities, especially among young people. Others are currently trying to establish a Wyre Forest Islamic Social and Learning Centre for all Muslims living in the Wyre Forest District. Both groups are committed to improving education. Another recent initiative has been the formation of a local Faith Leaders Meeting, including the president of the mosque, which first convened in St Mary's Vicarage early in 2007.

Individuals within the Bangladeshi community have increasingly engaged actively and creatively with the wider community. One second-generation businessman, for example, co-owner of a restaurant in Bewdley, has served as a governor of St George's (Church of England) First School and is an active participant on the recently created Horsefair, Broadwaters and Greenhill Partnership Board. His brother, a lawyer, recently stood as a candidate for the Liberal Democrats in local elections. One of his political opponents in the contest for Broadwaters ward (from the Conservative Party) is also another member of the community. He has also been proactive in the very recent (2007) creation of the Horsefair Community Safety Group, in which residents and police work together to improve life and

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[11]   Warm tributes are paid by the president of the mosque to the efforts of my predecessor as vicar of St Mary's, Kidderminster, the Revd Alan Postlethwaite, for all he did to make this possible. Both Alan and the then vicar of St George's (Canon Nick Barker), also helped the community obtain a section of the town cemetery for burials. Relationships between church and mosque have been courteous and respectful. On one occasion, when a BNP march spilled into Kidderminster a few years ago, worshippers in the mosque felt threatened and I was phoned with the request that I contact the police for help. 'We look to you as our friends', I was told. It is a relationship to be prized.

[12]   Launched in St George's Church Hall in December 2004 with support from WREC and the WCC to provide a regular meeting place for elders and to improve information and links.

[13]   From evidence submitted by Katrina Richardson (Assistant Team Manager, Wyre Forest Family Support Programme) (*Minority Community Needs Analysis*, p. 20).

[14]   The main objectives of the forum are to (i) represent the Bangladeshi community in the Wyre Forest, (ii) enhance cultural awareness, to provide easier access to education, to develop youth facilities and to actively develop and assist community projects, (iii) to help reduce crime and poverty and enhance harmony amongst members of various communities, (iv) to provide access to facilities for the elderly members of the community, (v) to enhance the profile, interests and views of the local minority communities.

safety in the area. Yet another member of the second generation serves on the Worcestershire Inter-Faith Forum

It appears the picture commonly held in Kidderminster, of a completely isolated and defensive community, hidebound by tradition and ignored by the wider community for 40 years, needs to be qualified by evidence, especially among second- and third-generation members, of greater participation and active engagement with local issues and concerns. The problems which may exist within the community and which the 2005 report highlighted need to be balanced by stories which suggest confidence, pride and achievement. In the last ten years, for example, 13 young people from the community have graduated from university. One is now a science teacher in a local secondary school. Another is a builder.

Reflections on the Story

Despite the undoubted expertise and professionalism of the researcher the process which resulted in the 2005 feasibility study was flawed, though this was only clear with the wisdom of hindsight. It is true that the community were consulted. It is also true that the necessity for the community to feel 'ownership' of the project was also acknowledged.[15] But crucially, the community were not fully or actively engaged in preparation for the research process or in the actual collection of data. The work was undertaken by the external consultant himself, as requested, unfortunately creating a sense, within the Bangladeshi community, of being 'done to' rather than 'doing with'. For some a hint of neocolonialism hung in the air; once again, a dominant culture was apparently trying, albeit benevolently, to tell another community how they should live and order their lives.

The process and the marginalising effect of the process contrasts with the experience of Kington, a small town in Herefordshire where a community-led bid for Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funding, though unsuccessful, was entirely fruitful in uniting the community itself with rigorous consultation 'entirely devised and delivered by the local community with very little external assistance'.[16]

Interestingly, a subsequent attempt by the Local Authority in Kington, working this time through external consultants, resulted in an acute sense within the community that the initiative was now completely 'out of their hands'. The people of Kington now felt entirely disconnected from the process and thoroughly marginalized recipients of a course of action rather than active participants in it.

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[15]   'The Bangladeshi community should feel ownership of the project and its members should realise that the project is not a charity for them, but rather that it has been i) started by themselves, ii) for their own development, iii) managed by their own people, and iv) that they have full control of it' (*Minority Community Needs Analysis*, p. 26).

[16]   Christine Forrester, 'A Tale of Two Consultation Processes', *Journal of Community Work and Development* 1/3 (2002): 8–15.

Kidderminster's experience bears out Christine Forrester's conclusion: 'Participative process needs to encompass more than just consultation; it should skill through active involvement in doing, in making members of the community active participants in the process of undertaking the research and needs assessment'.[17] A member of the Bangladeshi Forum argues persuasively that a report designed to establish needs and secure funding will inevitably highlight problems rather than achievements and give an unbalanced picture. In both cases a top-down approach has left people feeling hurt and betrayed, whereas the initial community-led approach in Kington commanded great support. Sadly, in Kidderminster's case, it has also meant that findings and proposals that could have had positive incomes have fallen on deaf ears. A painful lesson.

The Kidderminster story also brings to the surface a number of other factors and lessons that need to be borne in mind in relationship to ethnic and religious minority communities. The first, and most important lesson, is encapsulated in something said to me by my friend and colleague, the Revd Mary Austin, who is Superintendent of the Stourport Methodist Circuit: 'While we are very aware of the diversity within our own community, we often assume other communities are homogenous.' Even a small community, like Kidderminster's Bangladeshi community, is far from homogenous. Whilst virtually all, as we have seen, are sincere and observant Muslims, there are some, mostly older people, who naturally cling to their cultural and religious roots in Bangladesh. By contrast many of the younger generation, also faithful Muslims, want to separate their religion from a culture that is no longer theirs. They will insist vigorously, 'I am British'. For instance, I asked one of the younger businessmen what his dream is. 'Ultimately', he said, ' I'd like a place in the country growing a few things and keeping a few animals'. 'That sounds like a very English dream', I replied. He responded 'Of course, I *am* English!' Older members of the community may dream of Bangladesh when their heads touch the pillow at night. For most younger men and women Bangladesh is a foreign country.[18] First generation migrants may, sometimes, nurse fantasies of return. Younger people will, more likely, dream of providing their children with a better education, of success in business and a nice home to live in. Underlying all this is what a member of the community described to me as an 'identity crisis' with different people negotiating different ways of being Muslim and British, of being a parent and a citizen. We need, therefore, to avoid over-hasty generalizations and a tendency to label.

A second lesson to be learnt arises from language. There is no doubt that a great deal of the damage caused in Kidderminster arose from the fact that whilst a common language was being employed, at crucial points, the same

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[17]   Ibid., p. 15.
[18]   Whilst on holiday in Bangladesh recently a young girl said, 'When are we going home, Dad?' For the father too, Bangladesh is an entirely foreign country where, he says, 'We in turn are seen as foreigners'.

words had very different connotations for those using or hearing them. Two examples must suffice.

The report's author wrote: 'the community elders … are very conservative in their outlook when it comes to religious and cultural traditions'.[19] The use of the word 'conservative' caused great offence. 'How would you like to be called conservative?', I was challenged by one angry elder. In trying to respond I defined the word as suggestive of 'valuing tradition' and 'being reluctant to change for change's sake', admitting that, in some respects, I probably am conservative (but less so in others). To my horror I began to realize that in some minds at least, including that of the gentleman to whom I was talking, 'conservative' was being equated with 'fundamentalist'. It was a short jump then to 'conservative' equals 'terrorist'. Was the report accusing the mosque leaders of fundamentalism and worse? Of course not, but the misunderstanding was serious.

In the same passage of the report it is claimed that 'the younger generation of Bangladeshis … want to see a more "progressive" approach to religion that complements their life here in Britain'. What did this mean? How can you 'progress' beyond a final revelation? Is this an encouragement to abandon faith? Or, as I understood it myself, and as I am sure it was intended, is it simply a matter of the younger generation seeking teaching and preaching that would help them relate their faith to the particular demands and needs of twenty-first-century Britain? There are numerous other examples of misunderstanding and misperception in the report. What is clear is that in these sensitive areas great care needs to be taken in defining terms and in checking that words are being used in the same way. 'I don't know what I've said until you tell me what you've heard' is a useful reminder. Good intentions are not enough.

The events of 2005–2006 in Kidderminster were bruising and confusing, but lessons have been learnt. Dust has settled. Fences are being mended. Conversations take place. For me the experience has confirmed something I have long suspected. Whilst legislation, enquiries and consultations all have their place in ameliorating lives, the only sure foundation on which to build and which may prevent encounters from not only being 'blurred' but downright destructive, is for people to make and enjoy personal contacts. With personal contacts (and given plenty of time) comes trust and with trust the correction of misperceptions and prejudice and the possibility of really working together, with no sense of 'us' and 'them', on problems that exist and which really do need addressing.

References

Forrester, Christine, 'A Tale of Two Consultation Processes', *Journal of Community Work and Development* 1/3 (2002): 8–15.

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[19] *Minority Community Needs Analysis*, p. 11.

Jenkins, Philip, *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam and Europe's Religious Crisis* (Oxford, 2007).

Minority Community Needs Analysis in the Broadwaters and Greenhill Wards of Kidderminster (November 2005)

Working to Make our Area a Safer, Cleaner and Greener Place to Live and Work (unpublished Horsefair, Broadwaters and Greenhill Partnership Delivery Plan, 2007).

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Chapter 4

Blurred Encounters in the Suburbs: Problems of Place and Problematic Places[1]

Malcolm Brown

It is significant that the geographical context for much of John Reader's *Blurred Encounters* is a part of England that is neither urban nor rural in any traditional sense. It is a place redefining its relationships to the city and to the land itself. But before we spend too much time coining new terminology for places which no longer fit time-honoured categories, it is worth considering the limitations of the urban/rural dichotomy and remembering that this bipolar distinction has not been sufficient, even in common currency, for a very long time indeed.

And yet we still have practitioners in the distinct fields of Urban Theology and Rural Theology. The Church of England has a National Rural Officer and an Adviser on Urban Affairs. There is an academic journal called *Rural Theology* and an Evangelical Coalition for Urban Mission. The attention of practitioners, theologians and the churches' missioners seems to be predicated on a simple division between the urban and the rural. Most significantly, this taxonomy was both reflected and reinforced by the publication in 1985 of *Faith in the City* and in 1990 of *Faith in the Countryside*. The first was a report of national, even international, significance which represents, perhaps, the acme of the Anglican approach to Social Theology. The latter remains a report of considerable significance in rural studies, both secular and ecclesiastical. Their weight and impact has helped to sustain a context in which all that is neither urban nor rural on those terms is consigned to the sidelines. There never was a *Faith in Suburbia*. I submit that, until we have given more attention to the phenomenon of suburbia, both in terms of social geography and ecclesiological consequences, we will neither understand the urban and rural contexts with sufficient nuance nor be well-placed to reckon with taxonomies of place which are emerging in new ways.

The lack of attention given to suburbia may constitute a tacit acknowledgement that the 'context' of contextual theology is instinctively understood to be about problematic contexts. Moreover, the absence of a third book in the *Faith in…* series implies that the suburban experience of church is not only unproblematic, but normative; the standard against which other contexts are judged to be deficient and to which all reasonable Christian structures and relationships ought to aspire.

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[1]   This chapter is adapted and developed from my monograph, *Faith in Suburbia: Completing the Contextual Trilogy* (Contact Pastoral Monographs, 15; Edinburgh, 2005).

Too often absent from contextual theologies, and indeed from most accounts of postmodernity, is an adequate account of power, particularly economic power. It is when economic issues are factored into questions of location and relationship that the dynamics start to reflect real politics, and serious theology.

The Urban and the Rural, and How they Claimed the Agenda

The twin categories of urban and rural theology have been with us for some time. It is not surprising, given the traumatic social upheavals of the 1980s, that a theological response to urban change should have emerged strongly in Britain, nor that this rise of urban theology should have shone the spotlight on its rural counterpart. But the lack of serious traffic between urban and rural theologies is less easily explained. The methodological congruencies between theologies which start with geographical context, and root social analysis and theological reflection in the experience of place, would lead one to expect a greater degree of common endeavour than has actually been the case.

Faith in the Countryside echoed *Faith in the City* in perpetuating the idea that because certain kinds of location had problems or were overlooked they were therefore abnormal. Indeed, the concept of calling for special measures undermined the notion that marginalization was an issue which touched upon the lives of all citizens.

And then, sponsoring the second report was an attempt to achieve even-handedness by taking the troubles of the rural and urban contexts equally seriously (which implied a degree of commensurability that was not plainly apparent). Politically, the urban communities (with their subtext of ethnic diversity) were not allowed to claim a monopoly of marginalisation. The predominantly white, 'English' and 'traditional' rural communities could claim attention too. But this was a form of balance achieved at the cost of neglecting those social contexts which could not be characterised as problematic.

Where is Suburbia?

But where exactly is suburbia? Some estimates suggest that it is home to 86 per cent of the UK population,[2] and if that is true it is plainly not a single, monochrome phenomenon. It is conceived both as an attractive place expressing human longings and a place from which to escape. As that *locus classicus* of suburbia, *The Good Life* sitcom, shows, it is a context which embraces Tom and Barbara's

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[2]   *Guardian Unlimited*, 'Suburbs "at risk of becoming new inner cities" ', http://www. guardian.co.uk/uk/2003/dec/31/britishidentity.housing (accessed 1 April 2004).

counter-cultural longings alongside Margo and Jerry's conformism.[3] A central characteristic of a market-dominated society is the fostering of diversity and difference in small things whilst leaving intact a hegemonic narrative of individualism, monetary freedom and the rules of exchange. Suburbia is a market creation.

The diversity of suburbia also embraces the gated executive estate and the jerry-built 1930s terrace. There are steep social gradients under the veneer of uniformity. But today's suburbs share the sense of being places with little history; settlements imposed on the landscape in response to Victorian and Edwardian transport improvements.[4] It was as if the territory they covered had no significant past. But what history the suburbs *have* recorded frequently displays a spirit of optimism. For many, these settlements replaced the slums of the industrial revolution and the poverty of declining agricultural communities. They gave relief from the polluted and overcrowded city and the agricultural worker's primitive tied cottage. And this was possible because increased mobility allowed the separation of home and workplace, begun under the factory system, to extend way beyond walking distance. In turning consciously away from the urban lifestyle, the suburb aped the rural idyll in a strangely uncomprehending way; the half-timbering of the semi, the allotment society, the pub and parade of shops around a patch of green. Suburbia was often shaped as a parody of the countryside, interpreted for an urban people; and yet, by its relative neglect of community, history and multi-layered social relationships, it reflected enough that was urban to become part of the rural-dweller's image of the city. 'In any urban setting there has always existed a certain conceptual flexibility about where precisely suburbia begins'.[5] It is because the notion of suburbia embraces many disparate factors that empirical definitions

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[3]   The conference in September 2004 which launched the Centre for Suburban Studies at Kingston University was, perhaps predictably, entitled *The Good Life*.

[4]   Whilst the council estates and garden cities can plausibly be included within a definition of suburbia, they retain sufficient distinctiveness to have been the subject of significant research in their own right. Chris Baker's work on garden cities (The William Temple Foundation, *Regenerating Local Communities: A Theological and Strategic Critique. End of Year One Report: Mapping the Boundaries* [Manchester, 2003]) is important here. Hunt sees a sharp division between them, with the development of garden cities seen precisely as a reaction against the attenuation of civil society inherent in suburban life (Tristram Hunt, *Building Jerusalem: The Rise and Fall of the Victorian City* (London, 2004). Tim Gorringe in *A Theology of the Built Environment: Justice, Empowerment, Redemption* (Cambridge, 2002) notes that a very important difference between council estates and private suburbs is the degree of control which residents can exercise over their environments, and to that extent the classic understandings of suburbia do not apply with precision. Given such distinctions, and the fact that others have considered council estates and garden cities in depth, these are not the main focus of this monograph, although some of the facets of suburbia which I will consider may still apply.

[5]   Hunt, *Building Jerusalem*, p. 303.

are unlikely to be adequate for the purposes of theological reflection.[6] So I will look instead at literature and history to evoke the suburban context in ways, perhaps, more sympathetic to the poetics of theology.

'The suburbs are as old as the city itself', says Peter Ackroyd, in his 'biography' of London, and their presence was once sinister.[7] But he goes on to note how the suburbs became locations of choice for the prosperous. Wholesome air and the ability to create homes from scratch generated whole new settlements such as Peckham or Kentish Town, both of which sprang up toward the end of the eighteenth century. As these locations, in turn, come to resemble the innermost parts of the city, the process of suburban development has continued outwards, wherever builders and developers can sell to those with sufficient disposable income. As Ackroyd notes, 'the suburbs, like the rest of London, were established upon the principles of commercial gain'.[8]

Suburban development and suburban values changed the nature of rural communities as much as urban ones. In his introduction to Flora Thompson's account of rural life in the late nineteenth century, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, H.J. Massingham identifies how a new suburban social stratum exemplified a baleful modernity:

> The top stratum, symbolised in the row of new villas that began to link Candleford Green with Candleford Town, is a modern suburbia. This wholly novel class in itself had shed the older differentiations and possessed no rural background other than the accident of place. It was the vanguard of the city blackcoats and proletariat, governed by the mass mind … It has no fixed principles; its aim was quantitative imitation and to 'keep up appearances'.[9]

John Betjeman is frequently perceived as a poet of suburbia, most famously for his celebration of 'Metroland', the development promoted and made possible by the metropolitan electric railway. It is often the architecture of suburbia that captures his imagination. Metroland is notable for the conscious aesthetic that lay behind its architecture, celebrating visual diversity in its housing designs. But there is another voice in Betjeman's work which expresses a more condescending

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[6]   Although, I go on to argue that the churches will gain a better understanding of the social context of suburbia through a more coherent engagement with economics, that does not mean that I am reverting to a purely empirical approach to data. Economics – or, more properly, political economy – extends well beyond its image as 'number crunching' (which is rather more the preserve of econometrics) into the realm of the humanities.

[7]   For example, Charles I attributed riots in Whitehall to the 'meane and unrulie people of the suburbs' (quoted in Peter Ackroyd, *London: The Biography* [London, 2000], p. 728).

[8]   Ibid.

[9]   H.J. Massingham, 'Introduction' to Flora Thompson*, Lark Rise to Candleford* (Oxford, 1944). pp. 9–10.

fondness for the people of the suburbs. His poem 'Beside the Seaside' (1948) is a study in the nuances of class among the British on holiday, and the central, plainly suburban, family knows to a scruple where it stands in the social pecking order. The motor car which takes them to the seaside marks an early stage in another highly significant influence on suburban life – private transport. This family drives a Morris 8, but, in the mass exodus to the sea, are overtaken by richer people driving Rovers, who live 'farther out', whilst themselves passing poorer families walking to the railway station.

The suburban dweller, caught up in its subtle gradations of class, is nothing if not aspirational.

But attitudes to suburban life in Betjeman's poems are not all affectionate. The 'friendly bombs' invoked against Slough are retaliation for the crass suburbanisation of a once autonomous town, and the role of the planner is mercilessly lampooned.[10] For Betjeman, it is only when the suburb maintains an illusion of organic development, concealing its plans and logic, that it becomes admirable. Yet it is in its planned aspects that the suburb is most characteristically itself. The variegated house designs of Metroland were deliberately planned to generate an impression of organic development contradicting the rapidity with which they were built.

The Suburbs and Uniform Individuality

Michael Frayn's novel, *Spies*, moves in time between the Second World War and the present, and focuses on a south London suburban cul-de-sac of 14 houses beside a railway line. (Uncannily like the cul-de-sac in which I grew up). Frayn's novel discerns the suburb's evolution over half a century of change:

> As the first shock of familiarity subsides, though, I begin to see that everything's not really as it was at all. It's changed completely. The houses have become tidy and tedious, their disparate architectural styles somehow homogenised by new porches and lamps and add-on timbering. I remember each of them as being a world unto itself … Each of them, behind its screen of roses or honeysuckle, of limes or buddleia, was a mystery. Now almost all the luxuriant growth has vanished, and been replaced by hard standing and cars. More cars queue silently along the kerb. The fourteen separate kingdoms have coalesced into a kind of landscaped municipal car park.[11]

Frayn makes a highly significant point about the character of suburbia. It is a place where the aspiration to individuality segues into a strangely uniform outcome, everyone appearing to want to express their individuality in the same way. Again, the economic forces that shaped suburbia come to the foreground, for the tension

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[10] 'The Planster's Vision (1945)'; 'The Town Clerk's Views' (1948).
[11] Michael Frayn, *Spies* (London, 2002), p. 10.

between uniformity and individuality captures something of the ambiguity of human freedom under consumer capitalism. Tim Gorringe, commenting on James Richards's defence of suburbia, notes that:

> Twentieth century suburbia was in his view, a response to a world made unsafe for self-sufficiency. Suburban architecture is the attempt to create a kind of oasis in which everything can be accounted for and the unpredictable excluded.[12]

Self-sufficiency is anathema to consumer capitalism, as is unpredictability unless it is tightly corralled. Personal choice becomes the shibboleth through which the economic structures gain and retain the allegiance of the people. Yet the rhetoric of the free market is constantly challenged by its inherent tendency to create cartels and monopolies which stifle genuine choice. Those modern temples, the supermarkets, offer a bewildering array of different olive oils or yoghurt drinks, but no genuine Kentish apples or other products which are tricky to present as uniform. Even more significantly, they do so through a small and phenomenally powerful grouping of maybe five companies. The supermarkets and brand marketeers understand human psychology rather well (they pay a great deal to do so) and know that the aspiration to individuality is always in tension with the yearning for safety and familiarity.

As Frayn's character observes his suburban close across the decades, to the child, it is the differences, the touches of individuality that are striking; to the man it is the essential sameness of taste and aspiration. Both are suburban truths. These are places where people may feel that they have extended the choice principle to almost every area of their daily lives: and yet, by the way they do so, they demonstrate their desire for the security of conformity. It is as if there is a suppressed yearning for the certainties of established communities which confer identity and, at the same time, a vigorously proclaimed individualism impatient with the limitations of real communities where people know and trust and impinge upon each other in all sorts of ways.

It seems that there is something intrinsic to the character of suburbia which militates against strong social and community ties. Or, to put it another way, suburbia offers the conditions in which those virtues find it hardest to flourish. As late as 1933 a resident of the new Northwood Hills development in Middlesex commented that: 'I was to find that residing in a suburb adds a thrill and a zest to life. It is an experience in having no traditions to live up to.'[13]

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[12] Gorringe, *A Theology of the Built Environment*, p. 209.

[13] Quoted in Christian Wolmar, *The Subterranean Railway: How the London Underground was Built and How it Changed the City Forever* (London, 2004).

The Suburbs and Anonymity

The notion of one unit as one family is indeed central to the later development of suburban life, where the yearning for safety and the relative anonymity of isolation have been equally powerful.[14] Anonymity is a two-faced virtue. On the one hand, it is possible to remain most anonymous when surrounded by, and sharing in, the greatest degree of uniformity and conformism. On the other, it is precisely where the appearances of uniformity are fostered that the consequent lack of interest in one's neighbours creates conditions wherein difference can covertly flourish. So it is in the 'anonymous' suburbs that the alien can come to appear normal or inconspicuous.

Of course, the real nature of suburban anonymity is silence more than invisibility. Visible ethnic difference has made for a tough time on suburban streets for many black people. Yet as the economic profile of different ethnic groups evolves, some pockets of suburbia have seen a major shift in their ethnic composition. The interesting question is whether suburbia will come to embrace multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism, or whether suburbia's role as the bearer of nostalgic images of what is 'normal' will rapidly turn those suburbs which are home to significant Black and Asian populations into 'problem areas'. Nonetheless, the over-hasty identification of suburbia with tedious social conformity ought to be challenged by a more thoughtful analysis of what the associated anonymity can offer to certain groups. Urban living is often presented as vibrantly multi-cultural, non-judgemental, tolerant and inclusive – a deliberate antithesis to the received image of suburbia. But it remains true that suburban anonymity, reinforced by an almost militant privacy, has sometimes offered safety and refuge wherein difference can at least exist unmolested, if uncelebrated. This is not a negligible function in any society where tolerance of difference still has distinct boundaries.

The Suburbs and Contextual Theology

If we turn to *Faith in the City* and *Faith in the Countryside*, how do we find the urban and the rural churches explaining themselves? Both reports seek to expose pressing problems and celebrate perceived strengths and gifts, but both do so in the character of misunderstood and marginalised minorities. Neither report examined the nature of the constituencies which determined and supported the *status quo*, thereby reinforcing the incomprehension between urban and rural communities, each mythologising the other.

And so the urban church, defining itself partly by what it was not, understood the oppressiveness of suburban values but failed to distinguish the rural from the suburban. The rural church looked at the non-rural context, saw the commonalities between the urban and suburban and perceived them as essentially similar.

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[14]   Ackroyd, *London*, p. 729.

Both looked at the Other; the 'not like us'. Both saw (or imagined they saw) the power, choice, space and mobility they lacked. Both, in fact, perceived suburbia.[15] And the result was that those whose lives were most disrupted by change, who lost most and were rendered most powerless by impersonal economic trends, were divided among themselves. If contextual theology serves to entrench division among the powerless, it is hardly worthy of attention.

What is not explicit is often covertly normative. We ought to be suspicious of a context which is not singled out for attention because it may well have a strongly controlling ideological influence. The absence of the third report, *Faith in Suburbia*, is a telling indication of the kind of life the church regards as normal, uncontroversial and non-problematic. So that is precisely where we ought to look for underlying structural, ideological and theological problems. Yet the picture is made more complex by the hidden history of suburbia itself.

The Church in Suburbia

The historical geographer, Rex Walford, notes that the market mechanisms which created the suburbs shaped its churches too. Suburbs created by speculative builders allocated land to the highest bidders, and the churches were often relegated to rather insignificant locations away from the High Streets. Nevertheless, the denominations raised considerable sums to erect what were sometimes architecturally noteworthy church buildings to serve the new communities. Even more interesting are the roles those churches often played in building communities out of a society of strangers. Walford shows that, within a very short space of time, churches had developed extraordinarily complex organisations of clubs and societies catering for all age groups, for women and men, and for numerous leisure interests. Their social impact was immense.[16]

As Walford notes, one reason for the obscurity of suburban church history may be the fact that the great growth of the suburbs coincided with the most strident assertions of the death of Christianity. Historical surveys of the period dismiss the church as essentially irrelevant.[17] This seems to stem from an aesthetic judgement that suburbs are, of their very nature, soulless. If one starts from that premise it

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[15]   For instance, Alison Webster (*Wellbeing* [London, 2002]) speaks of 'large, wealthy, urban evangelical congregations'. 'Urban', in this sense is clearly not the 'urban' of *Faith in the City* or the Urban Priority Areas, wherever these congregations are geographically located.

[16]   Rex Walford, *The Growth of 'New London' in Suburban Middlesex (1918–1945) and the Response of the Church of England* (Lampeter, 2007). Walford reproduces on p. 170 a diagram of the numerous organisations set up in the parish of John Keble Church, Mill Hill, within three years of its inception, as a way of exemplifying this argument.

[17]   e.g., A.J.P. Taylor, *English History, 1914–1945* (Oxford 1965); S.J. Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire 1870–1920*

becomes necessary to render the activities of the suburban churches invisible. But the missionary endeavours of the church in the new inter-war suburbs were far from negligible.

What happened to all those church-based networks and community-building ventures? There were echoes of them in the suburban parish of my own upbringing during the 1960s, in the Men's Society, the Mothers' Union, the Young Wives' Group, the Youth Fellowship and the uniformed organisations, the flourishing Sunday Schools. But during the 1970s and 1980s these mostly dwindled, faded from view or disbanded.

What happened was that the suburbs came of age; no longer composed primarily of people defining their identities with reference to pre-suburban narratives and histories. As the burgeoning suburbs of the 1920s and 1930s offered new ways of life to people from the crowded inner cities and drew on rural imagery to express the distinctive suburban environment, it is unsurprising that the relatively tight-knit social structures of the inner city or village should have been regarded as embodying transferable virtues for the new environment, since there was no contrary model or experience on offer at that point. The tension between individualism and choice on the one hand, and strong supportive structures of community on the other, was not immediately apparent and the expectation was widespread that the church would play a central role in the generation and provision of 'community'.

For the generations which followed, suburbia remained a place epitomising choice and consumer freedoms, but the very exercise of those characteristics had eroded the sense that the suburb had any significant meaning or conveyed serious ideas of shared identity. Not only were many suburbs dormitories from which people commuted to work and returned at night; the growth of private car ownership deepened the trend begun by cheap public transport, uncoupling any necessary connection between where one lived and one's other activities; whether work, leisure, shopping or church. Church events are now openly in competition with other such claims on people's elective time – another aspect of the creeping suburbanisation of life even in the cities and the countryside, for it was in the relatively rootless suburbs that the discontinuity between one's address and one's community was most easily realised.

The story which much contemporary suburban church-going tells about itself is rather different from the earlier suburban narratives chronicled by Walford, and far more conformable to market ideology. It is a story about mobility, choice and transience in which consumers of religion must be attracted by the church that offers them the best deal – what Grace Davie has called the application of Rational Choice Theory to the practice of faith.[18] It is a model which requires a relatively dense, mobile population and sufficient resources to provide the

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(Cambridge, 1996); E.R. Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City* (London, 1957). See: Walford, *The Growth of 'New London'*, pp. 2, 386.

[18] Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case: Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London, 2002), pp. 42ff.

surplus of provision which is the prerequisite for a market to operate. Mobility and consumeristic attitudes are not, however, the whole story.

Davie has noted that, in Western Europe, the concept of doing something because it is an obligation or duty, or because it is constitutive of social (rather than individual) identity, has almost disappeared among those aged under 40. A society with only the thinnest understanding of obligation and duty is not only facilitated by the transient, anonymous and unrooted nature of suburban life, but serves to entrench that social atomisation. All this helps turn the market economy's model of the individual rational agent into the phenomenon of the self-creating consumer. Once the suburb is established, lacking the perceived need of one another that creates solidarities in the UPA (Urban Priority Area) and the hard-pressed rural community, notions of a common good, a shared fate, and networks of loyalty evaporate to leave suburban humanity with no richer story than that of the self-chosen, purchased, identity.

In response, the churches have faced a choice between social marginalisation and going with the flow. The group reviewing the Pastoral Measures, on behalf of the Church Commissioners[19] was besieged by respondents arguing that 'postmodern people' have no allegiance to place and that 'contemporary society' only understands the language of consumer choice and instant gratification. Therefore (it was claimed) the parish must be abolished so that a footloose, consumeristic church could be free to compete in a market place of religions. Here, by implication, there is no room for the 'unsuccessful' and no mutuality across doctrinal or liturgical difference.[20]

Postmodernity and Place

Typically, postmodern approaches are excited about the city. Some of Chris Baker's work, for example takes largely at face value Castells's assertion that the postmodern world conceives of space as 'flow' rather than 'place'.[21] Whilst I recognise the extent to which discourse and language are turning their backs on the kind of located interpretations of 'community' with which we are accustomed, Baker neglects the distinction (made so well by Charles Taylor[22]) between an ontological and an advocacy position. To offer an analysis which helps to explain

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[19]   This group produced the report, *A Measure for Measures: In Mission and Ministry* (GS1528; London, 2004), known as the 'Toyne Report' after Prof. Peter Toyne who chaired the working group.

[20]   See, e.g., the vision of the future church in Alister McGrath, *The Future of Christianity* (Oxford, 2002).

[21]   Chris Baker, 'From Garden City to Heteropolis: A Theological Dialogue with Urban Aesthetics' (paper delivered to the Contextual Theology Seminar, Dept. of Religions and Theology, The University of Manchester, 15 November 2002).

[22]   Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1995).

what is happening is not the same as promoting that state of affairs as the way things should be. Identifying a trend is not to say that such a trend is inevitable and cannot be modified or even reversed, yet this is precisely the point which much enthusiasm for postmodern social analyses obscures. Once such an analysis has been adopted as a hermeneutical key, the political question of whether the implications are desirable or can be resisted becomes inconceivable. As one respondent to the Commissioners' Working Party[23] commented (after regaling us with his enthusiasm for postmodern ideas): 'The only people to whom "place" matters these days are the poor who can't escape from the place they're in'. Good description: bad advocacy position. The link between dislocatedness and the imperatives of late capitalism (especially the imperative to open up new opportunities for surplus capital) commands little attention. Yet the culture of constant change and personal reinvention is one of the key ways in which consumer expenditure can be maximised for, without inculcating dissatisfaction; consumer wants and desires are unlikely to match up with productive capacity.

Baker does, however, make the important point that urban, suburban and rural contexts cannot be considered in isolation from each other. New terminology attempts to capture this connection in ideas like 'postmetropolis' and 'heteropolis', seeking to recognise the impact of a city on a vast hinterland and to express the simultaneously interconnected and fragmentary atmosphere of postmodernity. But, in taking an ontological position which emphasises the fluidity of the postmodern *polis*, it becomes all too easy to make that one's advocacy position and to attenuate any Christian anthropology or theological account of the virtues.

It is significant that both the evangelical theology of O'Donovan, who is suspicious of postmodern pretensions, and the rather different approaches of Radical Orthodoxy which celebrate the freedom in postmodernity to 'take a half turn back towards pre-modernity',[24] reject the rootless, atomised individualism and consumerism which they see as marks of decaying modernity. Without giving careful attention to Taylor's ontological/advocacy distinction, much postmodern analysis gives little assistance in distinguishing that which is truly postmodern and that which is an instance of modernity in decay.[25]

'It's (Still) the Economy, Stupid!'

One question which theology needs to address is this: 'How can human virtue flourish in places where social relationships are so attenuated, yet which now

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[23] To which I acted as theological consultant.

[24] John Milbank, 'Postmodern Critical Augustinianism: A Short *Summa* in Forty Two Responses to Unasked Questions', *Modern Theology* 7/3 (1991): 225–37 (225).

[25] This is not just gratuitous abuse on my part. I have more than once heard enthusiasts for postmodern approaches to mission speak of 'this postmodern paradigm within which we live', apparently oblivious to postmodernity's inherent suspicion of paradigms.

face some aspects of the economic decline experienced by the inner cities and rural communities twenty years ago?' Work by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggests that some suburbs are at risk of becoming 'the new inner cities'.[26] Not all suburbs are flourishing.

Suburbs which were created by a transport revolution wither when transport economics change. The Rowntree research identifies different suburban types which it characterises as the 'public-transport suburb' and the 'car suburb'. The complexities of empirical definition are here short-circuited helpfully by a little constructive labelling. Rowntree takes Ruislip as a prime example of the public-transport suburb and Bushey Heath as typifying the car suburb. Ruislip, then, has a medium density population with only moderate levels of home ownership and services grouped close to each other. Its functioning still relies almost entirely on the presence of effective networks of public transport to link the suburb as living space and the city as workplace. The car suburb, in contrast, has high levels of home ownership, lower density housing and dispersed services. Whilst both types of suburb are affected by the relative decline of public services, including transport and local retailing, it is very clear which stands the greater chance of adapting to survive. Moreover, it is precisely the trend to greater car ownership which simultaneously causes the deterioration of public services and concentration of resources, and which is itself exacerbated by such deterioration and concentration. The survival of the car suburb comes with significant new social costs attached.

Amid the changes that have taken place in the suburban self-consciousness, and the physical aspects of the housing stock, amenities and infrastructure, the first generation of suburbanites has not always departed. On inter-war suburban estates the elderly, often those who arrived when the houses were new, miss out on the extension-building, double-glazing-installing and privet-hedge-removing bonanza taking place around them. Economic trends mean that some suburbs share many difficulties which have hitherto been compartmentalised as rural or urban problems. Will the suburban churches have the capacity and the will to return to their community-building functions and find ways once again to express the virtues of neighbourliness, solidarity and social cohesion?

A Contextual Theology of Suburbia

The ambiguities of suburbia, and, indeed the whole 'blurred encounters' project, suggest that we might find a more helpful hermeneutic key in the 'both/and' aspects of Christian doctrine. The classic Christian eschatological vocabulary speaks of the rule of God as inaugurated but not yet fully realised; present and yet to come. We live in the theological interim; between Pentecost and the Parousia; between the coming of the Holy Spirit and the second coming of Christ; coping simultaneously with glimpses of Heaven and the persistence of sin. It is characteristic of the interim

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[26]   Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 'Sustainable Suburbs', *Findings* (February 1999).

that God's truth is perceived in apparently contradictory elements. To find the signs of salvation present within a world still mired in sin is to raise immediately the problem of how the things of God and the things of the Fall are to be distinguished, and to recognise the human capacity to mistake the one for the other. More than this, an interim theology recognises that the danger of idolatry is present even within those things which are – for now and in their proper context – true signs of God's presence and grace. Christian theology, therefore, requires a careful notion of correctives – opportunities to re-evaluate cherished metaphors and priorities and the ability to discern the presence of God and the call of the gospel in things which appear to contradict long-held perspectives. In other words, a proper attention to classic Christian doctrine endorses the anti-universalist convictions of contextual theology and offers the possibility that theology may be able to preserve itself from mistaking trendiness for eternal truth.

It becomes possible, then, to begin a moral and theological evaluation of suburbia which recognises its corrective potential in the face of an over-emphasis on community. As Harvey Cox noted in *The Secular City* in 1965, social anonymity may enable repentance and change. Communities are not always benign – they may become toxic. A way of life which preserves space for the dead past to remain buried may be making a significant theological point. Yes, the resurgence of community as a theological motif is a necessary corrective to much that is problematical about contemporary living, but that does not make it an unalloyed good. We need suburban models to prevent the rhetoric of community from becoming stifling and reactionary.

That said, the dominance of suburban values and the creeping suburbanisation of other spaces should make us suspicious of the values which suburban life obscures or denies. Despite the theological centrality of metanoia, it remains that there is no possibility of repentance and reordering if there is no continuity of identity in relation to God. And the market economy's foundational belief in the impossibility of moral agreement eradicates the idea that 'the good' is anything other than that which I desire at this moment. The challenge of a contextual theology of the suburbs is to find a vocabulary for faithfulness, authentically rooted in Christian theology and performable by marginal and socially weak congregations of Christian people.

In contrast to the enthusiasm for novel modes of 'being church', it is worth considering the idea that, to do a familiar thing in an unfamiliar context may be to do something radically new. In many ways, the community-building efforts of the suburban churches described by Walford, unashamedly seeking to serve the whole population and not just their own adherents, conformed to a very traditional Anglican ecclesiology and yet, in the uncharted context of the new suburbs, fulfilled a community-building function that was both 'fresh' and effective. Rather than a premature acceptance of social change as 'inevitable', the power of resistance contained within traditions of Christian practice is well worth revisiting. The idea, for example, of saying prayers, alone or collectively, at regular times, might offer a corrective to the carelessness with time which typifies the 24/7 commercial

society; the notion that the Eucharist binds communicants into a divine and global fellowship united in the image of sacrifice is a corrective to the atomised self-absorption of constant consumption; the thought that baptism might mark not only personal regeneration but also symbolise the regenerative presence of the church within political and economic life, a corrective to managerial and ideologically vacuous politics[27] – these could become powerfully subversive concepts if the voices preaching a theology of success to the suburban church dared take them up instead.

Conclusions

Urban theology exemplified contemporary plurality in ways which informed the study of Christian ethics as well as the disciplines of pastoral and contextual theology. Rural theology has done much to restore a consciousness of the church as a body with an effective narrative of community for today. It may be that suburban theology will play the spotlight on the extent of social atomisation, the attenuated anthropology bequeathed by consumerism, and the spiritual implications of rootlessness, in ways which illuminate bigger theological questions. Suburban theology might revisit the early history of the suburban church to generate new social ties in an assembly of displaced people and thus enable rootless communities to be at least moderately functional. Yet to be written is the story of hitherto hidden suburban populations – of minorities who found the anonymity of the suburbs to be worth the pretence of social conformity so that difference could be traded for safety.[28] Already there is an important story to be heard about growing old in the suburbs.

Since *Faith in the City* and *Faith in the Countryside*, the emphasis in contextual theology has drifted away from economics to focus more on culture. I submit that it is time for rural and urban theologians alike to reconsider the place of economics in their analyses. The spur to do this might come from reassessing how we look at theology and place, choice and power, in suburbia where the theological potential is very rich indeed.

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[27] I am indebted to Wendy Dackson for this insight into the nature of baptism which, she argues, is of crucial importance in understanding the political ecclesiology of William Temple. The sacrament of baptism secures the church's commitment to those who are not yet its members (Wendy Dackson, *The Ecclesiology of Archbishop William Temple (1881–1944)* [Lampeter, 2004]).

[28] Melita Norwood, the spy who passed secrets to the Soviet Union (died June 2005), was the daughter of a Latvian émigré who gravitated to the suburbs. Her unostentatious life in a south London suburban semi was the cause of much comment and surprise when her activities were unmasked. Her husband, himself a Jewish refugee from Russia who changed his name from Nussbaum, had been a long-standing colleague of my father's. Their suburb was my suburb.

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Networks – The Blurring of Institution and Networks: How Should the Church Engage?

Helen Cameron

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to recognise the growing significance of networks as a form of social coordination and to acknowledge that the church in its 'blurred encounters' with society will need to engage with them. The network is a distinct social form that blurs the rationales of institution and market. Churches and faith-based organisations typically adopt a hybrid organisational form, the voluntary agency, which blurs the rationales of bureaucracy and association. The chapter discusses why the institution is declining in favour of the network. Finally, a case is made that there are disadvantages to the network that the church needs to be wise to in its engagements.

This book uses a mix of praxis, narrative and theoretical methodologies. This paper adopts a theoretical approach arguing that terms such as network that are being used widely need to be used with precision if they are to have any explanatory force and that they then need to be challenged by real examples. In particular, the ideas of power embedded in them need to be excavated if the emancipatory purposes of the gospel are to be pursued.

The book focuses on different ways in which societal encounters are becoming blurred (rural/urban, religious/spiritual, local/global, faith/science, institution/network) and the way in which this affects the churches' engagement with society. This chapter seeks to contribute by sketching changes in the means of social coordination and developing their implications for the church.

The language of organisational theory is largely a foreign one to theology.[1] Understandably it is greeted with suspicion as serving the interests only of the powerful.[2] However, in a society where the relationship between the individual and society is so often mediated by organisations, I would argue that it is a language worth learning if the church is to describe the power dynamics of its own

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[1] Stephen Pattison, 'Management and Pastoral Theology' in James Woodward and Stephen Pattison (eds), *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology* (Oxford, 2000).

[2] Richard H. Roberts, *Religion, Theology and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge, 2002).

institutional arrangements with precision and respond prophetically to its context. This is particularly so when one branch of organisational theory, management, has gained huge cultural salience and many of its concepts are so embedded in everyday language that they escape critical attention.[3]

The Uses and Definitions of Network

This section of the chapter sets out three key ways in which the term 'network' is used and tries to offer definitions. However, like all words that come into popular prominence the word 'network' is applied widely in ways that lack precision. For example, 'network' is now sometimes used to update the image of associations which nevertheless continue to have a constitution and membership criteria. It is also used to explain to customers a complex set of contractual market relations as in Network Rail or an airline network.

Use 1: Network as an Organisational Form

Institutions adopt particular organisational forms that suit their purposes and which relate to their ownership, governance, coordination of work and means of achieving social legitimacy.[4] The most common organisational form is still the bureaucracy in which owners of assets engage a hierarchy of paid staff to coordinate and execute the work of the organisation being held to account by the owners and through them to the public. Workers in a bureaucracy do so in a public capacity and cannot appropriate the resources of their office privately. There are other organisational forms which I will discuss later.

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[3]   **Martin Parker**, *Against Management: Organization in the Age of Managerialism* (Cambridge, 2002).

[4]   **Helen Cameron and Mahnaz Marashi**, *Form or Substance in the Learning and Skills Sector: Does Organisational Form affect Learning Outcomes?* (London, 2004). A fuller definition of organisational form taken from this report is:

> 'Organisational form can be defined at the legal ownership and constitution under which an organisation operates. It affects:
> - The way in which work is coordinated and managed,
> - The way in which governance structures and processes render an account to stakeholders,
> - The ways in which the organisation can secure resources,
> - The way in which the assets of the organisation are protected and managed,
> - The way in which the organisation can allocate its resources to pursue its mission,
> - The ways in which the organisation can establish its legitimacy in the eyes of its users' (p. 4)

There are now scholars of organisations who argue that we live in a post-bureaucratic age[5] with new forms of organisation 'which view the old virtues of specialization and clarity as inhibitors of responsiveness to rapidly changing opportunities and demands'.[6] Some would argue that the network is now an organisational form in its own right. Stalder reviews the literature and defines a network organisation as one in which two or more actors pursue repeated enduring exchanges but lack any legitimate organisational authority to arbitrate and resolve disputes that may arise during the exchanges.[7] They exist by mutual adjustments between the actors who know each other personally. Given this definition it seems that this is an organisational form where ownership remains with the individual actors, work is coordinated by personal relationships and governance is a process of mutual adjustment rather than a formal authority that can be held to account either by the actors or by the public. Stalder describes Castells's understanding of the advantages of the network as, 'an unprecedented combination of flexibility and task performance, of co-ordinated action and decentralised execution, of individualised expression and global horizontal communication which provides a superior organisational form for human action'.[8] This is a ringing endorsement that I will query later in the chapter.

Use 2: Network as Model of Inter-Organisational Relationships

Some writers are using network to describe the relationship between organisations rather than the form individual organisations take.[9] Most of these writers are interested in the relationship between firms (bureaucracies) in the market. Markets are seen as impersonal episodic transactions guided by price, whereas networks are seen as personal ongoing transactions where information and reputation may be involved as well as money. I would argue that this description of markets is an over-simplified one developed by economists for the purposes of creating models and that as sociologists have described how markets work they have uncovered a more personal reality that was always present. For example, supply chains where a retailer buys a product from a manufacturer who has bought the components from other firms with each link in the chain being built on relationships as well as price.

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[5]   Anna Donnellon and Charles Heckscher (eds), *The Post-Bureaucratic Organization: Perspectives on Organizational Change* (London, 1994).

[6]   Hugh Willmott, 'Organization Theory as a Critical Science?', in Haridimos Tsoukas and Christian Knudsen (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Organization Theory* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 88–112 (see also p. 89 n. 1).

[7]   Felix Stalder, *Manuel Castells* (Cambridge, 2006).

[8]   Ibid., p. 183.

[9]   Jeff Gulati et al., 'Organizational Networks', in J.A.C. Baum (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Organizations* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 281–303; and Grahame Thompson et al. (eds), *Markets, Hierarchies and Networks: The Coordination of Social Life* (London, 1991).

Other examples of relationships integral to markets include, trade associations, inter-locking directorships and trade unions. However, there is now a substantial literature about whether inter-firm networks enhance or impede performance, the broad conclusion being that networks offer a mix of opportunities and constraints and that actors that are powerful and well-located in the network achieve a more favourable balance. At a personal level, we know that there are firms that try to generate more personal relationships with us so that we engage in repeated transactions with them and become less sensitive to the prices they charge: for example, supermarkets.

Whilst this literature started with the commercial firm, there are now scholars who see networks as a model of inter-organizational relationships in the public sector.[10] Since the mid-1980s in the UK, the public sector has become more fragmented. Areas of public-sector service provision have been switched from publicly owned, funded and managed bureaucracies to private and voluntary organisations. These services are still coordinated and regulated and largely funded by the state but some scholars would see these quasi-markets as networks of organizations.[11] Government itself has become fragmented into many separate agencies, quangos and trusts. The number of public bodies is not precisely known but the number of data-protection registrations for public bodies exceeds 100,000. It is argued that the direct line of accountability between citizen and politician has weakened and that rather than government we now have governance[12] whereby it is the interaction between this plethora of public agencies that finally determines public policy. Whilst this argument has some force, there is probably a better case to be made for 'public policy by network' in addressing some of the so-called 'wicked problems' identified by New Labour on coming to office. These are in policy areas such as crime prevention, truancy, illegal drugs and homelessness where it is difficult for organisations in any single field to make a difference. New Labour was energetic in setting up partnerships to draw together the relevant actors. Sometimes these partnerships had strong central coordination with money to facilitate shared objectives but often the relationships and resources were more dispersed. This much more contextual approach led to different policies in different areas and so the inevitable concern about 'post-code lotteries'. This can be understood as a tension between formal and substantive rationality. Formal rationality deems a decision to be rational if an agreed process has been followed,

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[10]   **Janet Newman (ed.)**, *Remaking Governance: Peoples, Politics and the Public Sphere* (Bristol, 2005).

[11]   **Ewan Ferlie et al. (eds)**, *The New Public Management in Action* (Oxford, 1996); and Norman Flynn, *Public Sector Management* (4th edn, Harlow, 2002).

[12]   This is a different use of the word 'governance' from that used earlier to indicate the structures and process by which an organisation is governed and held to account, although the relations in meaning are clear. Newman argues that networks of governance help square the circle of simultaneous managerialism and marketisation (see Janet Newman, *Modernising Governance: New Labour, Policy and Society* [London, 2003]).

whereas substantive rationality recognises a decision as valid if the substance of the issue has been dealt with even if this involved diverging from agreed processes. A domestic example might be a parent who treats two children the same irrespective of need and a parent who treats them as individuals. Both approaches have their merits but the outcomes differ. This chapter will explore this distinction in greater detail later.

Use 3: Network as Social Coordination

Some writers, following Castells, have made even larger claims for the 'network' concept arguing that it has become the dominant means of social coordination superseding the state and the market. This argument is supported by citing the rapid development and widespread use of information and communication technologies as a fundamental change in the way in which societies can coordinate their efforts. The face-to-face chain of command of the institutional bureaucracy and the impersonal price signalling of the market can both be replaced by exchanges of information that can coordinate activity irrespective of time and place. This is seen as a key driver of globalisation, enabling transactions to take place in the most advantageous location, rather than close to actors in time and space. The internet is seen as the network of networks in facilitating this process. It is difficult to evaluate these more far-reaching claims when the term network is often used without definition, but Castells sees the network as important in marking a decisive break with modernity in social arrangements.[13] However, global markets are still dominated by hierarchically controlled global corporations: nation states still play a substantial role in international relations as do large NGOs. Indeed many of the scholars writing about networks are located in universities which are either controlled by trustees, or by associational process in which they themselves participate.

So far this paper has looked at three ways in which the term network is used: to denote a particular organisational form, as a model of inter-organizational relationships and as a model for wider social coordination. From the definitions of network offered, I conclude that networks blur the rationales of institution and market in that they enable actors to pursue a common task but there is no overarching source of authority to which actors can appeal.

Before looking at the reasons for the growth of networks, the chapter will locate the institutional church in this discussion as a prelude to drawing conclusions about blurred encounters.

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[13]   Financial services would offer an example. Capital is now seen as moving around the world to where it gets the best return rather than being allocated by face-to-face relationships between stockbrokers and traders. In the past these were sometimes family firms with loyalties and trading patterns built up over generations.

Church and Faith-Based Organisations as Already Blurred

In this section, I describe how churches and faith-based organisations mostly adopt organisational forms and models of inter-organisational relationships that are characteristic of the voluntary sector. This involves moving beyond the mainstream literature on organisational theory which focuses mostly on the relationship between firms and markets and to a lesser extent on public bureaucracies and their inter-relations. There is a much smaller literature on the voluntary sector[14] and it has made much less impact on social theory, although the explosion of literature on social capital has led to a greater interest in civil society.[15]

Billis argued that the voluntary sector has a distinctive organisational form for bringing together citizens to pursue jointly agreed ends, the association.[16] Associations are formally organised, follow rules, coordinate work and have an agreed (usually democratic) form of governance. They are hierarchical but in a different way from bureaucracies in which a chief officer (accountable to the owners) is the single source of authority from which lower tiers in the organisation derive their authority. In an association, the members appoint officers who, whilst remaining accountable to them, coordinate their work and propose policy. Although associations share with bureaucracies authority legitimated by formally rational means, they are better at maintaining contact with the substantive rationality of their members' purposes because members dominate governance in a way that customers/citizens rarely do in bureaucracies.

It is recognised that associations have limitations when it comes to delivering services beyond their membership. The level of coordination and discipline required is often (but not always, see for example St John's Ambulance) more than people wish to accept in a voluntary capacity. Billis notes that a hybrid form of organisation exists in the voluntary sector – the voluntary agency – which blurs the rules and rationales of association and bureaucracy. A voluntary agency is governed by an association of members or a board of trustees (sometimes both, for example the National Trust) who employ a hierarchy of officers to achieve goals they have determined.

Drawing on empirical work I have done, I have argued that churches and faith-based organisations have many associational features but that on occasions they adopt the hybrid, voluntary agency form.[17] Examples might be the Connexional

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[14] David Billis, and Margaret Harris (eds), *Voluntary Agencies: Challenges of Organisation and Management* (Basingstoke, 1996), p. 19.

[15] Peter A. Hall, 'Social Capital in Britain', *British Journal of Political Science* 29 (1999): 417–61; and Paola Grenier and Karen Wright, 'Social Capital in Britain: Exploring the Hall Paradox', *Policy Studies* 27/1 (2006): 27–53. Robert Furbey et al., *Faith as Social Capital: Connecting or Dividing* (Bristol, 2006).

[16] David Billis, *Organising Public and Voluntary Agencies* (London, 1993).

[17] Helen Cameron, 'A Perspective from the Study of Religious Organisations', in Helmut K. Anheier (ed.), *Organisational Theory and the Non-Profit Form: Proceedings of*

Team of the Methodist Church, organised in a bureaucracy, but accountable to the membership through the annual conference. At a local level, a social action project in a church might have its own management committee to supervise the staff who work for it whilst having accountability to the governance structures of the church. The advantage of this form is its ability to maintain close contact with the substantive goals of the governing association. The disadvantage is the confusion that can be caused by trying to operate a hybrid form of governance.

Churches are the 'rare breeds' of the organizational world in that they mostly belong to different denominations that have distinctive polities.[18] The Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England are formally hierarchies of bishops and priests with parishioners having no membership role in the organisation. In the case of the Church of England this has been overlain with elections to PCCs and synods as more associational forms of governance. Other denominations tend to have polities which are variations on the associational form, such as the connexional structure of Methodism which is a Russian doll of associations nested inside each other. Churches are also unusual in being able (in some cases) to appeal to traditional and charismatic bases for legitimating authority.

It is worth noting that as the bureaucracy flourished and rose to prominence in the nineteenth century, the association became the dominant means by which leisure time was organised and by which citizens were able to unite for freely chosen purposes including political parties.[19] Just as the bureaucracy is changing, so the association is seeing decline in all its traditional forms.[20]

This section of the chapter has located churches and faith-based organisations within organisational theory so their distinctive features can be noted in their social encounters. These features include their tendency to blur bureaucratic and associational forms of organising and the particular combinations of reason, tradition and charisma which legitimate their ways of working.

Reasons for the Decline in Institutions and the Rise of Networks

Although this chapter has raised questions about the way in which the term 'network' is used and the claims that are made for it, I would not want to argue that trust in bureaucratically organised institutions is intact. The popular use of the term 'bureaucratic' to mean 'inefficient' is not without foundation. Bureaucratically

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a Seminar Series at the LSE Centre for Civil Society (London, 2001), pp. 52–61.

[18]   Malcolm Torry, *Managing God's Business: Religious and Faith-Based Organizations and their Management* (Aldershot, 2005).

[19]   In addition to political parties and trade unions, sports clubs, youth clubs and women's organisations adopted an associational form.

[20]   Helen Cameron, 'Social Capital in Britain: Are Hall's Membership Figures a Reliable Guide?' (unpublished paper presented at ARNOVA Annual Conference, Miami, November 2001).

structured organisations are notorious for delivering formal rationality (technical reason) but failing to grasp the substantive rationality (hermeneutic reason) of the situation. This criticism was known to Weber who suggested that the more personal world of the association offered a better balance between substantive and formal rationality. Critical theorists have continued the project of looking at the disadvantages of formal rationality, of which I find the work of Habermas particularly useful in relation to organisational theory.[21] Habermas argues that the division of labour that characterises bureaucracies tends to result in redefining problems to meet organizational structures and roles rather than the holistic solution their clients hope for. The public nature of these organisations means that they are often experienced as impersonal, reducing people to numbers. Furthermore in their employment practices at senior level they normalise the white, educated man whose private needs are serviced by a secretary and wife.[22] This wrong-foots and discriminates against other workers who are seen as needing to balance their work and private lives. The secular identity of bureaucracies means that they have been perceived as insensitive to those whose lives are framed by religious or ethnic identities. The unitary authority of bureaucracies can make it difficult for them to listen to marginal voices. There are historic and current examples where bureaucracies have been instrumental in pursuing totalitarian ends and corrupt ends.[23] Sometimes the sheer scale and complexity of the bureaucracy make it difficult for those in positions of governance to be clear about what is being done in their name. Sociologists such as Sennett[24] and Bauman[25] argue that when all levels of society experience economic uncertainty, we choose to live in more provisional and fluid ways. For those who have been 'down-sized' or 'out-sourced' by a public or private bureaucracy this seems a rational response.

The decline of associations is also linked to a decline of trust in formally rational processes, in this case, the ability of democratic processes of governance to yield substantively rational ends. The economic uncertainty already referred to has led to an intensification of work for many and so a decreased appetite for holding office in precious and fragmented leisure time.

The increasing valorisation of the market as a model for social as well as economic relations has led to flexibility and choice being seen as key indicators of organisational effectiveness, even although this is not always what markets deliver. The network seems to offer exchange rather than hierarchy, a blurring of public and private identities in the interests of building trust. It offers access to

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[21] Willmott, 'Organization Theory as a Critical Science?'

[22] Michael Roper, *Masculinity and the British Organization Man since 1946* (Oxford, 1994).

[23] Jean Lipman-Blumen cites examples of the Nazi government in Germany and more recent corporate corruption (see Jean Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders* [Oxford, 2005]).

[24] Richard Sennett, *The Culture of the New Capitalism* (New Haven, 2006).

[25] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge, 2000).

power through influence and knowledge rather than position, and a choice about continuing participation.

A key conceptual debate is the continuing role for rationality in social coordination and organisational life. I want to argue that rationality is essential if accountability in social relations is to be sustained and coercion avoided. My assessment is that the network is being characterised as attractively informal and therefore more likely to achieve substantive goals than the institution (whether bureaucracy, association or agency in form) which is seen as unattractively formal. This is obscuring the lack of accountability inherent in networks.

Bureaucracies are subverted not only by an over-emphasis on procedural formality which means they fail to achieve their substantive goals but also by informal networks in which the resources of the organisation are appropriated personally and rent-seeking behaviour occurs, that is, corruption. There are countries where the state, the market and NGOs repeatedly fail to achieve their goals because discretion is replaced by rent-seeking behaviour.[26] We know that UK society is not immune to this but that on the whole, social coordination is possible because a rational distinction between public and private identities and resources is legally enforceable. Debates about the difficulties in regulating the internet reflect the cultural welcome given to networks but puzzlement about some of their adverse social consequences. In the case of the internet this would include the facility for criminals to disguise their intentions in building relationships with vulnerable adults and children.

Evaluating Church Engagement with Networks

If the church is seeking to relocate itself in a post-Christendom society, then there can be real advantages in participating in networks as a means of exerting influence and learning about other actors. Indeed not to participate may lead to isolation and a failure to witness to the gospel.

However, I would want to urge a 'wise as serpents' approach on the following four grounds. First, the church needs to seek its legitimacy from its intrinsic task of expressing the gospel rather than its membership of networks. Its legitimacy may need to suffer if its values clash with the dominant social mores in the networks it joins. Second, in its own internal polity, governance, accountability and transparency are nurtured rather than being neglected in favour of mutual adjustment to other network members.[27] Third, the church is committed to processes of theological reflection that enable it to evaluate the constraints placed

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[26]   A Radio 4 documentary about employment conditions on cruise liners (28 August 2007) depicted behind-the-scenes staff charging a rent for their cooperation with front of house staff who were more likely to pick up tips from passengers.

[27]   I wonder whether the Church of England has migrated from being an organisational field held together by a traditional respect for episcopal authority to being a network where

on it by network membership. Fourth, the church does not lose its willingness to speak truth to power, even though there may be no legitimate way in which it can speak on behalf of a network it joins.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to explore the network as a means of social coordination that is growing in significance. It argues that its attractiveness lies in its ability to blur the rationales of institution and market. The institutional church has been described as having distinctive organisational features. I conclude that these features need to be understood as a basis for wise engagement with networks.

My provisional conclusions are threefold. That if the church wishes to deliver services beyond its immediate membership, it should adopt the agency (that is the hybrid of association and bureaucracy) rather than the network as its preferred organisational form. That when involved in an inter-organisational network, the church should always be willing to ask whether an association would be a preferable means of coordination. This is because associations have procedural and substantive rationality as integral to their design. And finally, that it is unhelpful to abandon rationality in the search for informality. Good order can be achieved without deference.

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How to See the Wood for the Trees:
A Multi-Disciplinary Approach to Dementia

Margaret Goodall

Introduction

Since the early 1990s, the amount of literature that has been written on the subject of dementia has increased dramatically, as both neuroscience and the social sciences have developed their understanding of the disease. However, one consequence of this increased scientific interest, is that the medical model of diagnosis and care can fit so well with the clinical condition that the person at the centre of the disease can become lost. The prescribing of medication becomes, it seems, the only tangible way of delivering appropriate care.

To look at the complexity of dementia in any depth requires us to cross many disciplines, just as its true nature remains covered by beliefs and suppositions that may, or may not, be rooted in fact. The word 'demented' is in use in our everyday language to mean uncontrolled, frantic or wild. Science, literature and experience have shown us that this stereotype should not be assumed. More recently it has been in the area of biography, autobiography and fiction (both for adults and children) that the reality of dementia has been exposed to general view.[1] Our language, background and belief systems all contribute to our attitude towards dementia, and either enables us to see just the problem of the disease or the person as a whole

Until recently there was little thought given to the possibility that dementia might be worthy of theological consideration, perhaps because there was believed to be no need to take seriously the experience of those suffering from the condition. Those with dementia were perceived to be like children, unaware of their plight and content with their small dependant world. They could not be seen as entering into the world of salvation history, being unable to respond to Christ by 'accepting him as Lord', as this response demands reason and considered decision-making, capabilities which become lost as the dementia takes hold. Those who have faith have been thought unable to worship with others; for example it was suggested at a conference run by evangelical Christians (2007) that churches should make a crèche available for them.

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[1] e.g., **John Bailey**, *Iris* (London, 2000); Christine Bryden, *Dancing with Dementia* (London, 2005); **Michael Ignatieff**, *Scar Tissue* (London, 1994).

But this writing-off of a group of people who need help with every aspect of their lives will not do. Science and medical innovation offer us one view of dementia, but it is in the telling of stories and the listening to others' experience that the problems and the possibilities become real. It is this social dimension, the way dementia is lived and how it becomes a part of life and death, that requires a blurring of boundaries between specialist areas and requires a rereading of the Christian story and a re-evaluation of what it means to be human.

The Story of Two Homes

Consider the story of Mrs A. She was admitted to a dementia nursing home from hospital where drugs had been prescribed to enable her condition to be managed.

The decoration of the home had been carefully chosen and coordinated, and her breakfast was served in her single en-suite room, so meal time was easier to manage. Wonderful hotel service, the family thought, but Mrs A rarely ate when alone. When people came to visit she was seated in the lounge in her own space. Visitors went away content that she was in the right place and happy that everything was 'nice', though they said 'it was a shame that she didn't speak any longer'.

Now consider David, admitted to a dementia care home from hospital where he had also been prescribed drug treatment to control his behaviour. The home was not always spotless and was often alive with voices, but it felt home-like. When his wife came to visit she brought a friend for company as she said 'there was no-one there to talk to'. Under professional advice the drugs were gradually withdrawn, and David seemed to enjoy his breakfast with others around the kitchen table. A few months later David and his wife were seen eating cornets as they walked back to the home from the ice cream van in the street. She had brought a picnic and David had on a sea-side hat and both were laughing. She later wrote to the staff: 'Thank you for letting me find my David again.'

What these two examples of care show us is that there is perhaps confusion in the care we offer those with dementia. There appears to be a market-driven model as seen against a relationship model. But it is not even as straightforward as that. We need to ask what is important? Is it the look (and sometimes the smell) of the place where the person living with dementia is placed? Is it the judicious use of medication that enables staff to work efficiently and the patient to be safe? Or is it the care of the person whose needs may not be obvious and who requires help with simply being himself? All these questions are part of a larger question about what it means to be human and if this can be cost effective. The following discussion, with examples of current practice, shows why the alternatives are so important.

The Clinical/Medical View of Dementia

Dementia has a long history. An ancient Egyptian script laments: 'Oldness has come … the heart is forgetful and cannot recall yesterday.'[2] One of the earliest definitions of dementia comes from Blanchard's 'Physical Dictionary' of 1726, where it is described as, 'the extinction of the imagination and judgement. The Latin root "demens" meaning to be out of one's mind was already in use by the eighteenth century.'[3]

Early scientists who tried to fathom the intricate workings of the brain were denounced for treading on forbidden territory, and were accused of heresy.[4] During the eighteenth century the term 'dementia' had a clinical and a legal usage and referred to states of psychological incompetence regardless of age, reversibility or pathological antecedents. This broad view was gradually narrowed down so that by the nineteenth century the view was that it was an irreversible disorder of intellectual functions. It was mainly seen as a condition of the elderly that affected the memory. In 1835, James Prichard, a senior physician to the Bristol Infirmary offered what he called 'four degrees of incoherence'. These were 'impaired memory, irrationality and loss of reasoning powers, incomprehension, and finally the loss of instinctive and voluntary action'.[5] These stages are still accepted today as being useful in charting the gradual deterioration of individual patients. Alzheimer's disease (named after the German physician who discovered it), was coined 100 years ago to describe these processes of progressive decline in the intellectual and physical abilities in the brain leading to dementia, although it had been observed for centuries and described as senility. In the glossary offered at the end of his book in 1969, *Pastoral Care of the Mentally Ill*, Norman Autton further defined dementia as 'a term used to refer to the advanced chronic cases of psychotic illness' and a psychosis as 'a severe mental disorder'. He concluded that, 'the sufferer has little or no insight into his condition'.[6]

By the middle of the 1970s life expectancy had increased in most Western countries which raised the profile of age-related illnesses as the demographic change was represented as a threat to society.[7] In 1982 the Health Advisory Service published a report titled, *The Rising Tide: Developing Services for Mental Illness in Old Age*. This emotive title conjured up a picture of an ageing population

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[2]   Carmelo Aquilina and Julian C. Hughes, 'The Return of the Living Dead: Agency Lost and Found?', in Julian Hughes, Stephen Louw and Steven Sabat (eds), *Dementia: Mind, Meaning, and the Person* (Oxford 2006), pp. 143–61.

[3]   David Jenkins and Bob Price, 'Dementia and Personhood: A Focus for Care?', *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 24 (1996): 84–90.

[4]   Isabel Gidley and Richard Sheards, *Alzheimers* (London, 1988).

[5]   Sherwin B. Nuland, *How we Die* (London, 1993).

[6]   Norman Autton, *The Pastoral Care of the Mentally Ill* (London, 1969).

[7]   Richard Cheston and Michael Bender, *Understanding Dementia: The Man with Worried Eyes* (London, 2000).

with illnesses that would cause the health service to collapse. The same problem was foreseen in Australia where the report was called *The Coming Epidemic of Dementia*.[8] Tom Kitwood, writing of this period, reflects: 'In effect the person with dementia did not exist; "going senile" was a sentence to radical exclusion.'[9]

The latter half of the twentieth century therefore saw little improvement in the understanding of the causes of the disease,[10] although there were general improvements in its diagnosis and the care of patients. Once the demographic implications of the disease were understood, increased research funding became available to look into causes and treatment. To emphasise the change in attitude in this period, Sherwin Nuland, writing in the early 1990s remarked that 'a malady thought in my medical school days to be so unusual that it was used as a trivia question in late-night study sessions had emerged as one of the leading causes of death in World Health Organisation statistics'.[11] He goes on to observe there has been considerable progress made during the last few decades in the care of patients; for example, the official recognition that dementia is an arbitrary disease rather than one consigned to those of lower classes is a real change from views put forward only 20 years before.

However, there have still been no discoveries of any 'distinct causes of the disease, a method of curing it, or any way in which it might be prevented'.[12] Nuland describes the challenge that dementia will present to health and welfare systems over the next 50 years, and comments that while there has been research into stress and coping, it seems that we have 'become preoccupied with the negative and pathological aspects of care and neglected the sources of satisfaction and reward'.[13]

He concludes his writing on dementia by reminding us of the journey in which there is no dignity, and which is 'an affront to the humanity of its victims'.[14] Reisberg, a US gerontologist, concurs with this view: 'The loss of a mind is too

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[8]   Ibid., p. 39.

[9]   Tom Kitwood, 'Personhood, Dementia and Dementia Care', in Susan Hunter (ed.), *Dementia: Challenges and New Directions* (London, 1997), pp. 9–23.

[10]   There is still much confusing advice given, either because of vested interests or because of lack of understanding. For example Jane Brotchie states that under-use or over-use of the brain does *not* cause dementia (Jane Brotchie, *Caring for Someone with Dementia* [London, 2003]), while neuroscientist Susan Greenfield has lent her name to a brand of PC-based software which she says will stave off dementia by keeping the mind alert (see Daniel Martin, 'Mental Gymnastics that Could Help You Fight Alzheimer's', *Daily Mail* [27 August 2007]: 27. In the same article the Alzheimer's Society is quoted saying that there are 700,000 people in the UK with dementia).

[11]   Nuland, *How we Die*, p. 115.

[12]   Ibid., p. 115.

[13]   Ibid., p. 195.

[14]   Ibid., p. 117.

terrible for conscious contemplation. Dementia mercifully protects the individual against the horrible effects of this loss.'[15]

As we enter the twenty-first century, dementia was still being defined in terms of 'a loss of brain function which is usually progressive and eventually severe'.[16] The most recent definition of dementia, published in a report by the National Audit Office in 2007 is, 'a term for a range of progressive terminal organic brain diseases … caused by structural and chemical changes in the brain'.[17] This further lays out the stark reality of the disease. The report also acknowledges that dementia has historically suffered from poor awareness and understanding with a lack of urgency to diagnose and address the disease, usually because of the popular belief that nothing can be done in the face of its arrival and to face it is frightening. Many GPs collude with patients over this attitude and have little real knowledge of the disease.[18] One of the possible reasons for this is that studies of dementia encompass many specialist areas and so medical practitioners who are established within a discipline seem reluctant to comment on areas outside their expertise.[19] When faced with a person whose main problems are with memory, language and reason, it ceases to become simply a medical problem. Dementia reaches to the heart of what it means to be a person with social, ethical, psychological and philosophical implications as well as the medical and clinical ones.

With the lack of clear understanding about dementia, its diagnosis and possible causes and what can be done, there is a vacuum within which myths, folklore, fear and even quackery develop.[20] On consecutive days in 2007 for example, the *Daily Mail* carried articles which suggested preventative cures against the onset of Alzheimer's. Keeping the mind active on one day, was followed by 'How Statins can Help Guard against Alzheimer's'[21] and advice concerning the importance of eggs in boosting the amount of choline in the body.[22]

In concluding this historical overview, we have observed a growing awareness of the problem of dementia, but still a lack of real knowledge regarding its causes and origins. Even the understanding of dementia as an illness, of having a brain which

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[15] Quoted in Gidley and Sheards, *Alzheimers*, p. 108.

[16] Harry Cayton, Nori Graham and James Warner, *Dementia: Alzheimer's and other Dementias* (London, 2002).

[17] National Audit Office, *Improving Services and Support for People with Dementia* (London, 2007), p. 4.

[18] The Audit Commission report includes a quiz on dementia and the results from a group of GPs whose average score was only 44 per cent.

[19] Kitwood, 'Personhood, Dementia and Dementia Care'.

[20] Nancy Mace and Peter Rabins, *The 36-Hour Day* (London, 1999).

[21] David Derbyshire. 'How Statins can Help Guard against Alzheimer's', *Daily Mail* (28 August 2007): 4.

[22] Daily Mail Editorial, 'Brainbooster Eggs', *Daily Mail* (28 August 2007): 46.

is dysfunctional, it is argued 'has contributed significantly to the impoverished care environments that are so often seen around people with dementia'.[23]

Biomedical or Biopsychosocial Approaches?

How we use language tells us much about how we have constructed our view of the world. In the sections above, dementia is spoken of as an illness, which is a medical disease, an organic deterioration of the brain, and also a psychological condition as it affects people's cognitive functioning.

In 1948 the World Health Organisation defined health as 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and … not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'.[24] But the biomedical model asks us to look at people as if they are biological machines, with everyone at some point on a 'wellness continuum' of health and illness. It deals with illness and how it develops rather than how to promote good health. With the invention of antibiotics, medical science has enabled us to cure diseases that at the turn of the twentieth century were the most common cause of death. However these have been replaced by diseases that do not have a known simple cause such as heart disease and cancer, yet we still expect that there will be one remedy that will bring a cure. Richard Dworking comments: 'Demented people in the late stages have lost the capacity to recognise, appreciate or suffer indignity. … It is expensive, tedious and difficult to keep seriously demented patients clean, to assure them space for privacy, to give them the personal attention they often crave.'[25]

It is because dementia is a disease that encompasses the psychological and social as well as the physical that the biomedical model is not enough. An alternative is the biopsychosocial model. This model does not look for a single cause, but, as Banyard states, starts from the assumption that health and illness have many causes and 'looks for the connections between mental events and biological changes.'[26] This view is supported by Thomas Kitwood, who wrote of the 'malignant social psychology' that people with dementia suffer from and proposed a 'new culture of dementia care' which he argued was necessary as the biomedical model led to a depersonalisation of the individual.[27]

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[23]   Cheston and Bender, *Understanding Dementia*, p. 267.

[24]   Philip Banyard, *Applying Psychology to Health* (London, 1996).

[25]   Quoted in Trevor Adams and Jill Manthorpe. *Dementia Care: An Evidence based Textbook* (London, 2006).

[26]   Banyard, *Applying Psychology to Health.*

[27]   Kitwood, 'Personhood, Dementia and Dementia Care'.

Stigmatising Beliefs

As we have already recounted, the National Audit Office 2007 report found that there is still much fear and ignorance of the disease, even among GPs, and their report draws parallels between dementia now and cancer in the 1950s, when there were few treatments and patients were commonly not told the diagnosis for fear of distress.

Petzsch writes in his study of attitudes to 'dementing people', that while the stigma of mental illness has diminished in the last 20 years we still in the UK 'adopt the technique of sweeping society clean. We aim for a sanitated society, not a healthy one.'[28] As a society, we do not like to be reminded of disease and decay and conditions we cannot cure, we are inclined to get rid of those members of the community by institutionalisation. The title Petzsch gave to his study was *Does He Know How Frightening He is in His Strangeness?* With diseases that affect the body the 'person' is intact, though damaged, and we can offer help and support. With dementia what can be interpreted as frightening is the inability of 'normal interaction'. While dementia has been acknowledged as 'the disease of the century',[29] the paradox is that the disease has 'cast us back to the dark ages with families being ashamed to admit they have someone in their midst with a disturbed mind'.

Two contrasting beliefs that are commonly held about dementia are outlined by Orbach.[30] One is that 'dementia reflects the deterioration and decay of the person or self". The other that, 'with the confused you can chat heart to heart. You can touch people where we really come together.' Orbach says that which attitude is held depends on one's definition of the self. If selfhood is seen as, 'a fading to vanishing point with the loss of memory, because we cannot interpret the present in the light of the past or know our intentions for the future',[31] then there is no self. However Orbach uses the insights of Jung to examine what might be occurring within the person as the brain ages and decays. These insights suggest that with the coming of old age, inner images play a larger part in life and that these images of the inner world of the unconscious are not held in the brain but come from the accumulated wisdom of the race. Orbach suggests that it is the self which holds together the accumulation of these images, in contrast to the dying brain. If we are truly able to chat to those with dementia heart to heart, and touch where we really come together, Orbach suggests that 'we need to rid ourselves

[28] H.M.D. Petzsch, *Does He Know How Frightening He is in His Strangeness? A Study of Attitudes to Dementing People* (Edinburgh, 1984), p. 4.

[29] Gidley and Sheards, *Alzheimers*, p. 9.

[30] Ann Orbach, *Life, Psychotherapy and Death: The End of our Exploring* (London, 1999).

[31] Ibid., p. 152.

of the preconceptions of the past and hopes for the future and meet the person as someone living only in today … freed from memory or anticipation'.[32]

Changing Attitudes

Several factors have contributed to these changing attitudes to dementia identified by Orbach. As we have seen, the number of books published in recent years that have either used dementia as the theme of a novel or books that have been written by, or about, people who have dementia such as Ronald Reagan and Iris Murdoch, and whose families have named it and thus made it visible. Another factor is the number of people who are currently diagnosed with dementia. It is now unusual to find people who have had no awareness of the disease either because a member of their family has dementia or they know someone else who has.

Dementia has become visible because of the cost, to society as well as to the person and those who care for them, and, as people became disillusioned with the existing service provision, it was no longer feasible to write all these people off. People were looking for an alternative that would allow 'a compassionate and human approach with a focus on the person with dementia'.[33] By listening to all the accounts of those with dementia, either first hand or from their carers, it was realised that all have a different journey.

A Theology of Dementia

We now move on from our mapping of the models, approaches and attitudes towards dementia to exploring some of the emerging theology arising from reflection on the personal experience of the disease and its impact on those directly involved in the case of dementia sufferers.

Until quite recently dementia was ignored by the church. This is not surprising as when we think of dementia in relation to a life of faith we have even more problems. Over and over again the bidding prayers within our liturgies ask us to 'remember'. There is importance placed by the church on memory. We are asked to remember who it is who made us; remember what we believe; remember what we need to repent of, remember who it is who saves us.

Faced with an increasing number of people with dementia, theologians began to think in a different way, not about what we could teach those with dementia about God, but what we could learn from them by looking at texts that showed times of great loss or pain. It was understood that if theology did not attempt to speak to the situation of dementia then there was the assumption that there was one area of life about which God in Christ had nothing to say.

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[32] Ibid., p. 153.
[33] Adams and Manthorpe, *Dementia Care*, p. 9.

Jesus came to bring 'good news', but for those with dementia there seems little to rejoice in. However God is not bound by our constraints and his love, mercy and grace are not dependent on how we feel or what or know at that moment. Malcolm Goldsmith reminds us that, 'his love is there freely and unreservedly'.[34] The good news, not only for those with dementia, but for all of us, is that we are remembered by God and that we do not have to earn that recognition because it is a gift of God's grace. Goldsmith tells us that it is 'the very essence of the Christian faith that we discern the presence and activity of God in brokenness and weakness'. He continues: 'It is when we are at the limits of our powers and strength that we allow God to break through our defences and to support and sustain us.'[35] At times like that, he says, faith encourages us to relax into the glory of God, what Studdart Kennedy called 'the unutterable beauty'.

The story of the time the people of Israel were in exile in Babylon is used by Goldsmith who quotes Psalm 137: 'By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept … How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?'[36] He reminds us that this time in exile was important as the people of Israel discovered that God was accessible to them even in a foreign land. New understandings of God's involvement in their lives were discovered and through the loss of the temple, new patterns of worship developed. Goldsmith observes that 'from a situation of apparent disaster and despair, new insights about the nature of God emerged and new experiences of God's presence and continuing care and love became clear to them',[37] and suggests that this reading of the text might inform our experience of dementia.

Dementia: The Journey into Chaos and Despair?

There are passages in the Old Testament which are rarely used in public worship and enter into this kind of despair. Psalm 88 is one example. This psalm is of the genre of 'individual lament', probably the type most neglected by Christians today. These individual laments carry us from our baseline sense of security downward to the nadir of a person's anguish and misery. By the use of poetic parallelism the writer enables us to think and feel the condition of helpless anguish:

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[34] Malcolm Goldsmith, 'Dementia; a Challenge to Christian Theology and to Pastoral Care', in Albert Jewell (ed.), *Spirituality and Ageing* (London, 1999), pp. 125–35.

[35] Malcolm Goldsmith, *Dementia, Ethics and the Glory of God* (Derby, 1998), p. 8.

[36] Malcolm Goldsmith, *In a Strange Land: People with Dementia and the Local Church* (Edinburgh, 2004).

[37] Goldsmith, *In a Strange Land*, p. 14.

> Your wrath has swept over me;
> your terrors have destroyed me.
> All day long they surround me like a flood;
> they have completely engulfed me.
> You have taken my companions and loved ones from me;
> the darkness is my closest friend. (Ps. 88:16-18, niv)

The book of Genesis tells us of an original creation that was formless; it was understood as chaos. Then God intervened and brought order and pattern to creation. Any process which threatens the order of creation is seen in the Old Testament as that which separates us from God. The psalmist sees a return to chaos in the separation from friends and family and, because personal identity was to be found in community with others, he sees his identity slipping away.

Dementia can be seen as a journey into chaos as a result of the neurofibrillary tangles that characterise the progression of the disease, especially as these tangles occur in the part of the body, the brain, which is most central to our imaging of God in this life. And yet there are those with dementia for whom the disease, in Thomas O'Connor's words, 'lowers many of the defence mechanisms and gives an opportunity for unresolved issues to be addressed … Their disease puts them in touch with the need to resolve issues and … [gives] them a wisdom.'[38] Other commentators record similar insights. Lisa Synder reflects: 'Having Alzheimer's disease made me face ultimate realities, not my bank account … [it] transferred me from what I call the trivial plane to the spiritual plane. I had to face the absolute horror of the 'A' word and I began a dialogue with my existence, a dialogue with my life and my death.'[39] Meanwhile, Dominic Regan had Jeff Smith claim that Alzheimer's can be seen as a 'clearing the dark corners of the mental attic',[40] and a wanting to reflect on what has been achieved, or not achieved, as the end of life is approached.

The Time Between

Goldsmith reminds us that at the heart of the Christian faith is resurrection. But, he observes, 'some people still wait, unsure, living in the "space" between crucifixion and resurrection. The horror and immediate pain of death is in the past, but no sense of meaning or hope for living.'[41] Suzanne McDonald takes up this idea of the time between crucifixion and resurrection, Holy Saturday, as a way of locating

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[38]   Thomas St. James O'Connor, 'Ministry without a Future: A Pastoral Care Approach to Patients with Senile Dementia', *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 46/1 (1992): 5–12.

[39]   Lisa Snyder, 'Satisfactions and Challenges in Spiritual Faith and Practice for Persons with Dementia', *Dementia* 2/3 (2003): 299–313.

[40]   Dominic Regan, and Jeff Smith, *The Fullness of Time* (London, 1997).

[41]   Goldsmith, *In a Strange Land*, p. 206.

dementia within our theological reflection. It is in the space of the 'empty' day between the cross and the resurrection, where apparent defeat is not immediately followed by triumphant vindication, that we are enabled, tentatively, 'to speak theologically of dementia.'[42] By confronting Holy Saturday and the apparent dissolution of identity within the being of God, yet still held within the bond of the Spirit, we find it is the echoing empty space of God's 'absent presence' in which God embraces the ultimate threat of the complete negation of identity and being. MacDonald concludes: 'Holy Saturday shows us God in the emptiness and God taking the emptiness into himself.'[43]

This speaks to those who visit those with dementia too, as this is often seen as a 'waste of time'. MacDonald claims that 'where visitors persevere through their own discomfort and disillusion … there is a faithful commitment to the other, even in the midst of apparent emptiness, which reflects the nature of God'. She continues: 'Yet God does not simply encounter, but also transforms the emptiness. Easter Day follows Holy Saturday, and only resurrection, while not cancelling out death and burial, can reveal their true meaning.'[44] It is the long 'day' of Holy Saturday, a day that seems without end or hope that can speak to those with dementia, a condition which also seems without end or hope. McDonald says that we do this by holding the identity of the person through relationship. 'It is the triune God who has taken into himself and overcome the rupture of Holy Saturday who upholds, and will transform, the apparently lost identity of those trapped in memory's tomb.'[45]

Identity on the Margins

To suffer from dementia means that the person finds themselves at the margins of society. They are powerless and voiceless and not valued as a member of society, but rather seen as a drain on its resources. Maureen Russell writes of the experience of caring for her husband's aunt, Mae.[46] In reflecting theologically on the care of Mae, Russell speaks of the 'transcendent love of God' that reaches through the pain and despair of dementia, and the work of the Spirit who searches our dark places and offers us new possibilities.[47]

We are told too that Mae cannot remember upsetting events a few moments after they happen. Russell, as her carer, also has to make the effort to 'forget' and 'let go' of anger. 'By recognising that we both … share the same deep needs, our

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[42] **Suzanne McDonald**, *Memory's Tomb: Dementia and a Theology of Holy Saturday* (Derby, 2003).

[43] Ibid., p. 6.

[44] Ibid., p. 7.

[45] Ibid., p. 13.

[46] **Maureen Russell**, 'Listening to Dementia. A New Paradigm for Theology?', *Contact* 135 (2001): 13–21.

[47] Ibid., p. 20.

relationship is one of mutual inter-dependence.'[48] It is this type of relationship that Russell says offers a renewed vision of God. She cites the radical message of Jesus, of God's unconditional love, that challenges our notions of power and status. We see this theme picked up in the Magnificat, the Beatitudes, in Jesus' saying that the last will be first, and in the idea of losing our life in order to save it. All these turn our usual ways of thinking about status and power upside down.

Becoming through Meaning

Christine Bryden, who wrote of her own journey into dementia, offers another theological model, that of 'becoming'. She quotes a friend, also with dementia, who said to her, 'I think the most releasing realisation I came to early in my journey with dementia was that the further I progressed with the physical/psychological decline the more my spirit man increased in proportion.'[49] She writes that while cognition is fading, emotion and spirit are increasing. She perceives herself as changing, becoming a new person. She writes, 'I am becoming who I really am.'[50]

To describe the journey made by others who have survived traumas, Bryden quotes Vicktor Frankl: 'From illusion, denial and anger as first responses, through to apathy and humour as defences, people eventually found inner peace in the spirituality of religion, art and music. For people struggling with the journey of dementia, it is the similar path of survival, illusion, denial, anger, apathy, humour and a search for meaning.'[51] Bryden claims that it is through finding meaning in life that she has managed to create a new sense of becoming and overcome the fear of loss. Process theology takes up this idea that nothing is lost. It is an understanding of God's sensitivity to all events that allows process theology[52] to concur with Tillich's insight that 'nothing truly real is absolutely lost or forgotten'.[53] All the suffering, struggle, loss and triumph are held in the divine experience, and 'are finally endowed with eternal meaning, [and] whatever occurs … can contribute to the beauty that takes shape in the compassionate embrace of God'.[54]

Relationship and Person-Centred Care

What enables those with dementia to live fully in the world is experiencing relationship with others. The best practice of dementia care is 'person-centred' care.

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[48]　Ibid., p. 20.
[49]　Bryden, *Dancing with Dementia*.
[50]　Ibid., p. 162.
[51]　Ibid., p. 162.
[52]　John F. Haught, *God after Darwin: A Theology of Evolution* (Oxford, 2000).
[53]　Paul Tillich, *The Eternal Now* (New York, 1963).
[54]　Haught, *God after Darwin*, p. 128.

The ethos of person-centred care is that the carer responds to the whole person and this is demanding both of attention and intuition. Christine Bryden says that because those like her who have dementia 'live with a depth of spirituality … rather than cognition, you can connect with us at a deep level through touch, eye contact, smiles'.[55]

It could be that the main difficulty of putting this person-centred care into practice is that we are not used to being so attentive to others. This loving attention is at the heart of good care, both for those with dementia and for everyone as people often find their deepest personal meaning in relationships. Relationship is especially important for those with dementia, because, as already intimated, dementia is a degenerative disease of the brain in which reasoning ability and the resources with which to reason and express one's thoughts are gradually lost. Yet, even in the final stages of the disease, many sufferers are still able to respond within a relationship. It is through these relationships we observe that for those living with dementia feelings and emotions do not go. The Christian faith is at heart relational. The incarnation affirms that even in our imperfect state we are worthy of God's love. So those with dementia should not be excluded, but be placed at the centre of our care and compassion.

Conclusion – Dementia and Human Nature

When looking at the main themes concerning dementia, it is those of identity, relationship and meaning that occur most often. In this respect those with dementia are little different from the rest of the population as these themes are those that connect us all as human beings. In order to understand dementia we need to look at the medical, social, psychological and spiritual aspects of what it means to be human. It is not enough to diagnose the disease and treat the medical condition, because the disease of dementia affects the identity as well as the brain.

To be fully human we all need to be secure in our identity, to be able to form relationships and to have some meaning in our lives. With dementia these become even more important as the masks that many of us have and use to hide the real self eventually disappear. Those with dementia are vulnerable mainly because they have no masks: they are truly themselves. They cannot demand acceptance and respect, or even acknowledgement of their being. They are dependant, and yet they offer us a new way of looking at the world and faith that can enrich us as we enable them to live fully.

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[55]   Bryden, *Dancing with Dementia*, p. 162.

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Kent – The Garden Of Dilemma

David Grimwood and Jane Winter

Introduction

Kent provides diverse encounters, containing overlapping rural, suburban and exurban spaces, and experiences a range of influences and forces at work in shaping the lives of its communities. It is contained by the sea on three sides, the fourth side dominated by London. It is an area profoundly affected by change created by major urban regeneration along its north coast, known as the Thames Gateway; by its location as a corridor between mainland Europe and the United Kingdom; by the impact of the expansion of the European Union and by the cultures of twenty-first century living

We identify these encounters as points of contradiction. Contradictions lead to unpredictable outcomes for those caught up in them. They can mask dependencies and the maintenance of existing relationships by an unwitting pretence. More often they appear to be shaped by forces beyond the influence of those affected. However, in theory, there is also potential arising out of the contradictory dynamics. A theology of blurred encounters allows us to expose and deal with contradictions and competing forces in the light of the divine community and kingdom values gifted by God. This leads us to ask: 'What is the nature of God's kingdom and presence that emerges from the contradictory encounters experienced in Kent?' The following scenarios are examples of the contradictory encounters that emerge from the Kent Story.

Encountering Migration

Look up at the skies above Kent today and there will be the vapour trails tracing the steady stream of aircraft heading east and west, to and from destinations anywhere in Europe and Australia. On a clear day, the trails show the main air lanes to and from all of the London and local airports, as well as aircraft overflying the United Kingdom. In 1940, rather than the straight lines of today's airliners, the sky was the arena for the acrobatics of fighter aircraft locked in combat, attacking and defending Britain. Not long after came the long lines of bombers on their way to deal out their destructive weapons in the name of national pride and power.

These contrasting images of Kent's skies reflect the essence of life experienced at a boundary, a strategic point of arrival or departure for Britain. There is a constant

flow of people and traffic, bound for destinations elsewhere, with goods to trade and dreams to realise, ever striving to reach over horizons. But such movements are not always smooth or welcome, especially when ambition and cultures clash. Being at the boundary is then a place of uncertainty and insecurity, indeed danger. Yet the same resources can be used effectively for both welcome and resistance. For example, radar was a crucial development for the defence of Kent and Britain during the Second World War, the network of stations able to pinpoint advancing enemy before it reached the Channel, and for many years the masts could be seen still standing at Dover and Dunkirk. Yet the same technology has proved crucial for the safe and free passage of air and sea traffic in peace time.

Kent's proximity to mainland Europe is of course not merely a twentieth century phenomenon. Its location has exposed Kent to all sorts of invasions and incursions, with the dilemma of whether to welcome the new arrivals or to defend the resident cultures. The long serving Kent motto 'Invicta' means unconquered or untamed.[1]

Kent was one of the earliest parts of England to become settled, boasting the oldest recorded place name in the British Isles (Rusthall, now a suburb of Tunbridge Wells). When Julius Caesar briefly invaded Kent in 55 BC he found it the most civilised part of Britain, already colonised by people from Northern France. The Romans later settled permanently, and one of their centres, at Lullingstone, even included a Christian chapel. In the sixth century, mercenaries from Jutland were invited to defend the principality from outside attack, and within fifty years had established the Saxon kingdom of Kent. In 597 King Ethelbert, welcomed Augustine and his forty companions, who rather than moving through to London as they had planned, established their first community and cathedral at Canterbury, followed by a second one at Rochester Kent. However, the people of Kent appeared to be less welcoming towards the Normans, fending off an attempted landing at Romney in 1065, and later resisting Norman attempts to introduce bondsmen and to replace the inheritance law of *gavelkind*, ensuring the division of land between all children, not just to the eldest. Gavelkind remained legal in Kent until 1925.[2]

This episode is one of the origins claimed for the tradition of 'Men of Kent', who lived east of the River Medway, who resisted the Normans successfully, and 'Kentish Men' who lived in the west, who did not. Other suggestions refer to the one being descended from the Saxons, the others from the Angles. The tradition is strengthened by the existence of two cathedrals and dioceses from as early as 604. As Douglas Hall notes, '… the story's origins are uncertain and its perpetuation equally ambiguous'.[3] Rev Samuel Pegge noted in 1735 that some contended that

[1]   www.kent.gov.uk/community/kent-and-its-people/history-of-kent

[2]   Bryan Waites, '[Man of Kent… or Kentish Man?', http://www.angelfire.com/tn/goldengreen/manokent.html (Accessed 29 July 2007).

[3]   Douglas Hall, 'Man of Kent, Kentish Man' in *Finest Hour Journals* 111 http://www.winstonchurchill.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=302 (Accessed 29 July 2008).

the phrase is merely a 'distinction without a difference'.[4] Somehow this tradition captures the contradictions of Kent, both welcoming and resisting incomers and change, and the whole becoming enshrined in a blurred but popular myth.

The contradiction may reflect the economic forces bearing on Kent. 125,000 people travel out of Kent each day to their work, primarily in business and finance, 98,000 of whom head for nearby London and the City. A quarter of residents travel out of their own area to work, creating flows of commuters across the county as well as out of it. 50,000 people travel into the county to work. All of this movement favours the west side of the county, and explains why the majority of commuters live there. The east is disadvantaged economically by distance and restricted transport access.

Kent is currently part of the South East region, one of the most prosperous in Europe. However, Kent has failed to attract the enterprise and new industry of other parts of the region. Earnings are 20 per cent below those of the rest of the region. It has been described in conversations that we have participated in as the 'back yard of the region'.

According to Kent County Council, more than half of the UK's goods pass through the Kent ports or the Channel Tunnel. Dover is the busiest port in the country for both freight and passenger traffic. Less than 10 per cent of local economic activity relates to producing goods, whereas 25 per cent concerns distribution and retailing. Kent is, in effect, a corridor. Freight is not the only cause of movement through the area. In 1998, 5.5 million tourists stayed in Kent, and no fewer than 32.8 million people paid a day visit, many on their way through to the Continent. On a typical weekday, car drivers travel more than 6 million miles through the county.[5]

Such mobility itself creates contradictions. 'Proverbially Kentish miles were extra long' according to the proverb 'Essex stiles, Kentish miles, Norfolk wiles, many men beguiles'[6]. Drivers might still agree, as they endure gridlocks and traffic queues which are now part of everyday life, ironically created by a culture that prizes mobility and easy personal access. One motorway, the M20, is even cleared of traffic and converted into a lorry park when congestion becomes severe at the Channel ports, while alongside it, Eurostar trains pass by at over 180 miles an hour.

Transport encounters may influence the encounters of people themselves. For some, travel is necessary as a daily experience, whether in or out of the county. For others, the lack of access or opportunities maroons them. The Isle of Sheppey has throughout its history been accessed by only one crossing point, originally a ferry, and then more recently a lifting bridge, even though it is a matter of metres from the mainland. In 2006, a new dual carriageway bridge was opened, giving twenty-four hour access to and from the island. The new crossing and its culture of free flow and movement, stands in stark contrast not only to the low-lying meadows

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4   F.F. Smith, *A History of Rochester* (London, 1928)

5   Janice Hill, *We are the people of Kent* (Kent, 2005) p. 25, 44.

6   Fran and Geoff Doel, *Folklore of Kent* (Stroud, 2003) p. 6.

around it but to the island culture of the settlements (including the three prisons!). People who have grown up and remained on the island, some never leaving it, now find themselves exposed to the rapid and fragmented change of the Thames Gateway regeneration programme. At the same time, this insular community includes Sheerness, a deep water port through which is imported vast quantities of cars and fruit. The irony is that Kent remains renowned for its fruit growing, making this an example of a blurred encounter of imports and exports.

Insularity may not be experienced only in geographical terms, but spatial terms as well. Gated estates are appearing rapidly in Kent as elsewhere. The hoardings advertising riverside 'gated' flats in Maidstone made this a selling feature. A more subtle form of insularity may be found in the very places designed for the highly mobile, well-travelled professional. For example, 60 per cent of the homes on one estate in Northfleet, highly praised for its design, were sold for letting. That means that the residents are likely to be short-term, and unwilling or unable to participate in local community life. The provision of new schools has been significantly reduced in the area, compounding the pressure on residents to look elsewhere for the resources and facilities that encourage engagement in wider civil society. Such an estate becomes a dormitory, closed off to the surrounding area.

Migration patterns have shaped Kent from earliest days. The Romans discovered settled communities originally from northern Belgium. The Normans found settled communities of Saxons. Today, there are settled communities of Roma people, Polish people, Geordies from the north east and others originally brought in to work the Kent coalfields, families on benefit and migrants from overseas living in the hotels around the Thanet coast. Today, migration into the county accounts for 88 per cent of the increase in population. The largest influx has come from London, while most of those leaving move out of the south east altogether. However, the lack of affordable housing is threatening the age and skills balance of the area, and it is anticipated that over the next few years, the population of elderly people will rise rapidly to a level not seen previously. A question might be how this will impact on the traditions of welcoming and resisting newcomers?

Kent has never been dependent on a single dominant industry, nor influenced by any one dominant family. The contradictions of this area on the edge of Britain, pointing towards mainland Europe, arise from the complex interactions between different peoples and cultures, different expectations and ambitions, different streams of culture and tradition that have flowed and still flow through it. The Men of Kent and Kentish Men tradition may be one way of holding on to the idea that there is a distinctive culture and identity for people of Kent, but in reality, that culture can only be explored and valued in encounters that can negotiate contradiction, and contradiction that is itself blurred.

Encountering the Environments

Kent is described traditionally as the Garden of England feeding London, but a new colleague arriving from another part of the country could find no evidence now of a flourishing garden. The farming industry is struggling with very few livestock farms left. The only crops with a profitable return are soft and top fruit. All in the garden is not rosy, brick and glass are beginning to be the harvest on what were once green fields and London 'consumes' the lives of its residents not, just their work skills, preferring to feast from a global table. For the past two years the South East has been threatened with drought, and within living memory areas of low lying coast such as Kingsdown have disappeared under rising tides. There are serious concerns about the capacity of the use and supply of water to sustain the massive growth in housing and related facilities which are not alleviated by assurances in delivery frameworks.[7]

Flood prevention displaces rising water from towns so villages and water meadows take an impact increasing in frequency and devastation as more and more building is planned for these areas. In the Thames Gateway, attractive water features in places like Bluewater belie the need for constant control of water levels to prevent flooding. This man-made need raises contradictions for a church seeking to promote environmental good practice; how does it positively challenge environmentally-threatening practice and at the same time provide a genuine welcome to new residents.

Rural areas within the Thames Gateway development are unseen but vitally important. Many classified as sites of outstanding natural beauty or sites of special scientific interest are now juxtaposed against major road and railway networks, restricting access and biodiversity. One alternative response from Kent County Council has been to create a beautiful country park within the area of outstanding natural beauty incorporating ancient woodland and restoring historical buildings. This initiative, and others like it, provide a wonderful, bought 'day out' experience complete with activities, guides, tea and gift shops. The question is, 'Does this provide a little bit of safe pretence, paying lip service to the real country a few miles down the road?' There is something rather surreal about the provision of well marked footpaths and cycle routes neatly bound by major rail and road networks, against the freedom of engaging with the countryside with all its beauty and scars beyond such limits. Drive only ten miles along the motorway from the country park and it is possible to escape into the silent world of the Downs, finding hidden hamlets totally unspoilt by the intrusion of development where community values are high even if facilities and services are minimal. The opening of a room in the church in Brook, which provided the only common meeting space for that community, and thus created journeys to and from that space and people's homes, thus created

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[7] http://www.eipsoutheast.co.uk/downloads/documents/20061220152213.doc (Accessed 29 July 2008).

opportunities for conversation and networking which transformed the local community, releasing a vibrancy generated by relationships, not consumerism**.**

Kent is full of hidden landscapes forgotten and unseen by the majority who pass through to London or the continent, landscapes that hold the story of an ancient history of trade and community life. Churches open and hidden in little valleys, a landscape that has not been domesticated or manufactured and remains for the most part protected. The contradiction between protection and mission, regeneration or preservation is very real. The Church has struggled to know how to respond. Some of the issues feel far too big, and outside the experience of what it is to 'be church', for it to be able to have an effective input at the macro level (for example challenging the wisdom of building on flood plains at Cheesemans Green, Ashford, using land previously owned by the Church Commissioners). In other places the Church however small, has remained a stable and faithful presence at the micro level drawing communities together and providing a place of safety to hold memory and celebration.

Perhaps this comment from a personal website may be a useful summary of Kent's contradictions: 'Kent is the epitome of England, for the past and for the future. It exhibits historical continuity of a high order from prehistoric times to the Battle of Britain and the Battle of the Channel Tunnel. Its beautiful landscape and townscape exemplify every stage in this process. The new Man of Kent will continue to be under more stress than almost everyone else – the countryside is filling up and urban sprawl looms large; motorways, airports, reservoirs and the tunnel rail link threaten the environment; coastal pollution, the decline of the Thames Estuary, nuclear power stations, natives being edged out of country villages by high house prices and newcomers, the increasing use of Kent as a concentrated zone of passage – all pose long-term threats. Worst of all, according to geologists, Kent and the south-east are sinking slowly but surely into the sea. Life will certainly not be monotonous for the Man of Kent or the Kentish Man in the future!'[8]

Conversations with people living in rural areas of the Thames Gateway reveal very different life styles from the planned exurban model, and having little interest in the developments literally on their door step. This does not reflect NYMBISM so much as a disinterested detachment. Clergy have commented that the plans have nothing to do with them, and genuinely struggle to know how to engage.

Suburban growth resulting from London overspill has been a feature of Kent since the end of the Second World War. In the 1950s and 60s people were relocated often from the East End while some moved from choice. Where people were re-housed, the shattering of community ties and the shock of an alien culture created disaffection resulting in ghettoisation and sink estates. The evidence for this can be seen on the periphery of market towns such as Ashford, Maidstone, Canterbury and Rainham. Some forty years later many residents have created genuine community spirit in spite of continuing social, economic and environmental need. The Stanhope

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[8]   Waites, 'Man of Kent …or Kentish Man?'

Estate in Ashford and the Tree Estate in Dartford exemplify community spirit by people choosing to remain, local people campaigning for local facilities such as bus services, and working together for local activities such as children's clubs.

Current relocations into new housing areas in Kent are a result of housing or social investment, or dominated by well paid, if short term, work opportunities in London. Those moving for the former reason have little understanding of rural living and superimpose their suburban culture which is resented by local people fearful of the changes incomers bring. The search for a better quality of life in and around attractive countryside is not always matched by a local hospitable welcome. Those moving for short term contracts have little interest in the local environment and are supporting the investment of landlords.

Economically and demographically Kent needs to attract new residents if government targets for employment and house dwelling are to be met (40,000 homes and one million new residents by 2026).[9] The package presented to potential house buyers is of rural idyll and easy access to London, contradictions offered as a reasonably successful marketing tool. The garden dream has been reinforced with attractive street and area names and the current vogue for urban villages. New area developments planned for Ashford are named 'Cheeseman's Green', and the Thames Gateway delivery plan divides thousands of homes into village areas.[10] There lies a contradiction between the suburban estates and the inherited relationship between small country towns and outlying villages which characterize the area. The small town is much loved and is a feature people regularly return to. Each seeks to retain an identity, helped through tourism, even if the focus of the identity such as cattle markets has long gone. The parish church often features in this identity, holding memory of local benefactors and local history as well as being a physical presence and spiritual space. This contribution is welcomed by a range of residents, partners and visitors.

In contrast, the features of suburban living encourage an 'out of town shed' culture. Market towns such as Faversham and Rochester have become living histories, exploiting a theme park model. This is evidenced in the success of events like the Dickens weekends and the preservation of buildings and culture. However market towns such as Maidstone are 'buying into' a new culture, based on a consumerism replicated in regeneration schemes across the country, paying lip service to local history. Where traditional towns are experiencing rapid growth a new identity may well emerge based on three new types of citizen: hidden transient communities from Eastern Europe (working in the building and hospitality industries); students (for example, Canterbury, where, 34,000 students match the year round population and are in excess of the 25 per cent manageable

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[9]   http://www.cprekent.org.uk/news/2007/news-2007-19/index.htm)(Accessed19June 2008).

[10]   http://www.kt-s.co.uk/kts02/pages/KTSPG_001.asp?page=13 (Accessed 19 June 2008).

national level[11] and short term London based workers (for example, North Kent). The commitment to the small town community is reduced and the life style is generally one of take not share. For example people no longer visit one another in their home locations, but agree to meet out in pubs and eating places. The life of the town is driven by imported cultural influences.

The Thames Gateway presents an opportunity to discover what twenty-first century urban living will be like. Rochester Diocese has decided to respond to the influx of new populations by investing in existing churches, both buildings as well as people, rather than be lured into the 'new build' temptation. Anecdotal evidence from clergy suggests that if people want to relate to the local church they will choose an iconic church which holds history rather than a new build. One exception, however, would be St Edmund's, Temple Hill, Dartford, rebuilt in the presence of the established community which it serves. From being a building literally falling down, it is now a thriving community hub, providing social, educational, health, employment and spiritual services. Its success is related to the ability to constantly ask itself, 'What does it mean to be church as we are?' It uses the question as a benchmark to evaluate its work and the demands of other partners sharing the site. The success of church in this place is built not so much on the facilities or use of the premises, but on the deep relationships developed with the town and different partnerships within it out of huge struggle to understand contextual church over a period of considerable time.

In search of genuine icons

Thames Gateway developers are keen to include iconic buildings to create identity, using weatherboarding and fake oast houses (Waterstone Park, Greenhithe) but failing to recognise the icons that exist from an industrial age, or retain only the façade, thus belittling the community history. This happened at the naval dockyard, Chatham, where the buildings now house university campuses for Christchurch, Greenwich, Kent and Medway. Icons can not be fabricated; rather they emerge over a period of time and for specific local reasons. Kentish examples include: the statue to Pocahontas in Gravesend, maritime memorials, including stained glass windows in St. Mary's Church, Dover, the pit head in the mining village of Aylesham, as well as the hops and apples that are still cultivated in the county landscape. The church uses icons to demonstrate the presence and person of God through its artefacts, buildings, and sacraments. Local icons provide revelation of God's local presence but can only be genuine if they are recognised by the community. In Maidstone, a developer was willing to grant a local church space for a car park, based on their assumption that a vibrant church sells houses. In Herne, local people have contributed financially to the 'icon' of their local

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[11]   http://privatesectorhousing.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=4846949 (Accessed 19 June 2008).

church, irrespective of whether they worship there or not. Icons have no meaning when they are prefabricated, such as the plethora of Kentish icons built into the Bluewater complex. These include an image of Kent's horse symbol projected onto the quarry walls surrounding the shopping mall, oast tops which disguise the air-conditioning units, sails which billow in the mall itself to circulate the air (Kent is surrounded on three sides by water), wall friezes into which are carved various guilds associated with Kent's industrial and pre-industrial past, and carvings of various plants picking up on the garden of Kent theme. A challenge for the church is to recognise established and emerging icons such as the high speed rail link, and use them to interpret faith in the changing context. A challenge for developers is to recognise and use existing icons which are damaged or forgotten in the march of progress, in order to respect the local history and community identity.

An interesting feature of the Anglican churches in the Thames Gateway area is that many are literally icons on the edges of cliffs created by chalk excavation and current development. They stand as a symbol of resurrection and hope on a landscape scarred by years of economic development, surrounded by communities of forgotten pride. Exurban living is a phrase used in the Thames Gateway context but its reality is yet to be realised. Developers are working in the dark to provide facilities for exurban lifestyles because it is impossible to predict what these will be. Our hunch is that such life style will be short lived proving to be unsatisfactory, having no depth and root, with people constantly moving. Hence the wisdom, in our opinion, of the policy already alluded to within the Diocese of Rochester of building up the current faith communities (i.e. existing buildings and congregations) so that a depth and rootedness is available in local communities for when people who have recently moved there recognise they are missing it.

We have all seen the chocolate box images of the garden of England but the pictures do not tell the true story of rural houses flooded with security lights and electric gates, or work patterns demanding more and more time away from home or home workers isolated in village communities. One church is considering a group for home workers to provide the natural breaks for socialising and support associated with a traditional work environment. The desire to live in the village and participate is contradicted by the four-wheel drive escape vehicle dropping children off at the local school on route to the station or place of work. Closure looms over many village schools, a number of which are Church affiliated, through falling rolls as the demography changes in favour of an ageing population. How can the Church respond, caught in the contradiction of being expected to support or head the local campaign to keep the school open, while centrally recognising that the argument for closure is clearly the correct one?

One example of a micro-environment in which the conflicts and contradictions inherent between the built, natural and social ecologies are apparent is St Mary's Island, a new development in the Thames Gateway, linked to the mainland by a draw bridge. It is a community proud of its Christian image through the school, doctors surgery and church, but it has to import service providers including church ministers and congregation, and has no historical identity. It has won prizes for

attention to environmental concerns. However, its publicity does not promote an area built for local people. It encourages new residents to conform to a particular style of exurban living, with many external attractions and little reflection on the development of holistic lifestyles.[12]

Encountering Contradictions – the Church's identity and mission in Kent

Church flourishes and spirituality grows when it contributes to the current celebrations and stresses of local community life. Without that contribution, it is in danger of becoming a contradictory myth, a tourist attraction or an icon of the past rather than the living soul and sanctuary of fast changing environments. We question our own reflections on the contradictions of Kent indicating where we have found useful insights and reflection from others. Such encounters reveal the impact of and by 'church' as a 'distinctive and critical Christian identity. Is the nature of church as a point of encounter with the potential to spot the kingdom or as a place of pastoral escape in which little changes although comfort is offered?

God's kingdom expresses human community. Its values of faithfulness, hospitality, justice, love, reconciliation and truth grow maturity and offer transformation, in contradiction to the kingdom of powers and dominions, demonstrated in the perpetual search for control and personal identity which is expressed in much of the physical changes to Kent's landscape. Walter Wink is right to encourage us to use the values to engage with these powers in our contemporary context, pointing out that Jesus' repudiates the very premises on which domination is based: 'the right of some to lord it over others by means of power, wealth, shaming, or titles.'[13]

It is too easy, however, to blame recent change for current disturbance, not recognising that change for Kent has always been a constant feature of its life. A recent comment from a senior regeneration leader indicated that it is too simple for the church to point the finger of blame with little understanding of what is happening. Blame becomes the easy escape from responsibility. The loss of Kent's story means that people are unaware of the constancy of change, initiated through the arrival of Christianity which in itself created a disturbing presence. Encounters are always disturbing, forcing us to reassess our own identity against that of another. The need to build the 'iconic' as a selling feature contradicts the integrity of the genuine icons that have emerged over time. Authentic icons tell significant stories, linking local experience with spiritual meaning. Our challenge as Church is to see the signs of the time in new icons[14] and to recognise 'church' as a point of encounter as well as a place of escape. When we define church as

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[12]   (Accessed 19 June 2008).

[13]   Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers* (Minneapolis, 1992), p. 112.

[14]   Peter Graystone, *Signs of the Times: The Secret Lives of Twelve Everyday Icons: Modern Icons and Their Meaning* (Norwich, 2004), p. 2.

more than buildings, we see it at the forefront of encounter through those of its members who hold a range of positions in local government and delivery boards. The kingdom through them is expressed in new initiatives. Their insights release spiritual understanding in their work place and their local church, processes of exchange that should influence and shape engagement with the constant processes of change in the public arena, and create opportunities for people of faith to be 'counter signs' of the times.

For this to be possible we believe that there needs to be a new challenge to the church to live by kingdom values not alluring programmes of in-house maintenance. Unpublished research by the William Temple Foundation within a feasibility study for a Thames Gateway Faith Observatory suggests that such programmes create an imploding of social bonding capital, leading to the loss of prophetic voice. Rising to the challenge calls for the kingdom values to contribute to the benchmark of growth, alongside government targets and statistical results. However, there appear to be few people of faith prepared to ask these challenging questions at how church responds to such blurred encounters. Do such encounters either risk new possibilities and failures, or by countering each other, simply maintain existing relationships and expectations?

Consumerism sells false dreams and abuses hope. Such hope is short lived and never satisfies.[15] The Papal Encyclical '*Spe salvi*'[16] speaks for the need to rediscover the communal nature of hope, taking us beyond immediate satisfaction to a faith in things hoped for yet not seen. Faith in consumerism results in high levels of debt and ensuing social breakdown, evident on new build estates and the crowds that flock to shop each day at places like Bluewater. Faith is abundant, but the challenge for the church is to find ways to ensure that faith and longing is well placed in the kingdom promised by God, not misplaced in the false promises of economic satisfaction.[17]

While community cohesion is desired as an overarching priority, the reality is development driven by economic targets, leaving the building of community to an under resourced voluntary sector dependant on public funding streams. Hence the agenda relating to community cohesion is driven by economic targets rather than organic growth. Those new arrivals to the Thames Gateway who benefit from economic development are free to fly. Those who cannot, create local community by their very captivity (Jeremiah: 33.9). In this setting of 'captivity', honesty and vulnerability reveal truth and create a sure ground for hope, but only where failure is respected, and never used as a tool to belittle or devalue. Truth and hope have been identified through the impact of community learning centres hosted by local

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[15]   Graham Ward, Cultural Transformation and Religious practice (Cambridge, 2005), p. 157.

[16]   http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict-xvi-enc-20071130_spe-salvi_en.html (Accessed 19 June 2008).

[17]   Peter Selby, Grace and Mortgage (London, 1997), p. 161.

churches, where skills, self-esteem and work opportunities have been realised.[18]
It may appear that faith communities fail against economic targets, but the stories
of these communities tell of a transforming contribution giving value and worth
to people marginalised and ignored by developers. The constant presence of the
church is a sure foundation on which other voluntary sector and faith groups can
develop strong community links. Models of these encounters cannot be mapped
theoretically or in a laboratory. Creative possibilities emerge through community
relationships, shaped by imagination and hope, in particular moments and places.

Can such encounters expose the nature of alterity expressed in action and choices?

Kent's experience as a corridor and threshold demands that its people meet with
the Other. The model of communicative ethics indicates that 'ultimate value rests
in the acknowledgement of the 'Other' as significant, not incoherent, despite the
boundaries of difference.'[19] Such meetings expose hopes and dreams as well as
dangers. The experience of facing the Other compels us either to face our own
nature and culture as well as that which is different, or to retreat to busyness, and
to defend who we are against the Other. This dynamic is played across the county
through expressions of welcome and resistance, as previously illustrated.

Alterity calls for a hospitality that is able to offer the gift of respectful
acceptance. Bretherton's exploration of hospitality indicates the potential for
entering into the conversation with the thought and action of others.[20] 'The life
together of Christians is fashioned out of the life together of their neighbours.
Instead of clearly demarcated lines separating Christians and non-Christians,
questions about what to reject and what to retain confront Christians constantly as
they participate in God's transfiguration of their context.'[21] Strategies of welcome,
tolerance and resistance collide within the mix of Kent's people, such as holiday
makers and asylum seekers, imported skilled workers and local workers. This goes
beyond the hospitality played out in bistros and bars, and electronic communication
which keeps relationships at arm's length.[22] One of the greatest opportunities for
the Church is to rediscover the homely hospitality of welcome and eating together
demonstrated daily at the local Sikh Gudwaraha. Hospitality is a key Christian
value. Welcome and acceptance are indicators of the Kingdom amongst us. We are
urged not to sell out to secularism and at the same time need clarity and confidence
about what we defend. If we cannot grow trust and acceptance of other ways of
living well through the points of encounter between rural, suburban and town,

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[18]   Alison Gilchrist, The Well Connected Community (Bristol, 2004), p. 54.
[19]   Elaine Graham, *Transforming Practice* (London, 1996), p. 155.
[20]   Luke Bretherton, *Hospitality and Holiness* (Aldershot, 2006), p. 151.
[21]   Bretherton, *Hospitality and Holiness*, p. 115.
[22]   Miroslav Volf *Exclusion and Embrace* (Nashville, 1996), p. 85.

there is a danger that Kent could be come a county of twenty-first century ghettoes. How do such encounters reveal the nature of forces at work, in spaces where once solid hierarchies give way to fluid unsettling changes?

Although well-known as the Garden of England, Kent has been the location for significant heavy industries, including coal mining, dockyards, railway locomotive manufacture, steelworks and marine engineering, now swept away and largely forgotten. Some traditional industries remain, such as fishing and farming, both struggling to survive. Economic success achieved elsewhere in the region has left Kent struggling to establish a distinctive future based on pharmaceuticals and research, with nothing that it can call on from its former strengths.

Kent has never been dominated by a single landowning family or by one industry. It is therefore not protected by a powerful advocate or tradition, thus making it vulnerable to rapid change in response to fluid forces, or being used by London and the rest of the South East region for their benefit. Recent plans to build a major four-runway airport at Cliffe suggest that Kent people are seen either as unlikely to marshal enough support to prevent it, or being used as unwitting players by government policy makers to ensure successful campaigns at Stansted and Gatwick. This opens opportunities for faith groups to offer a legitimate voice, which is respected.[23] The contradiction is that faith groups are often scared to use their voice, or use it only in a way that is confrontational.

Distinctive icons of the county are disappearing within a theme park of pretence. 'When the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning.'[24] Examples of theme-park vernacular include the use of very local architectural features indiscriminately across the county, and the tourism advertisements on trains reminiscent of a bygone age. Icons acquire status and cannot be pre-determined, otherwise they become a subconscious symbol of economy not an expression of faith.

Where is hope when it has been eroded by false and undeliverable promises, and the loss of jobs, 'place' and identity? Church members are caught up in this loss and at the same time trying to live out hope. There is a sense of living the contradiction. Hope is not grounded in an immediate better place, but more subtly expressed in positive relationships, building trust. Blame is still placed somewhere and developers or the council become the scapegoat which is very hard when those same workers are committed to positive change, and may themselves be residents and key leaders in faith groups.

Will such encounters lead to change that is no change, itself a contradiction?

So what is the nature of God's kingdom and presence that emerges from the contradictory encounters experienced in Kent and where does this leave us in facing

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23   David Smith, *Mission after Christendom* (London, 2003), p. 44.

24   Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Michigan, 1994), p. 6.

change, the Church and understanding community? If the reality is that change is no change then are we living in a mythical kingdom. The opportunity presented to the Church is based on the fact that God's Kingdom offers genuine deep change, not of facades and false aspirations, but of lasting hope and a faithfulness which is foundational to the expression of Christ present in history and future.

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Chapter 8

Weightless Identity in Post-Material Communities

Phillip Jones

Andrew Marr in his *History of Modern Britain*,[1] in one of those sweeping journalistic conclusions, told us that the demise of coal mining and other heavy industries in the 1980s combined with the 'big bang' of deregulation in the City of London with its conspicuous consumption and the Lawson economic boom caused work to be replaced by consumption as the way we defined ourselves. I suspect that may be viewing the events of 20 years ago through the spectacles of today. There is no doubt that heavy unemployment in some parts of the country and growing wealth in others together with readily available credit caused people to question the meaning of work and some to enjoy spending as they had never done before. Materialism was certainly to the fore, but whether people at that time were deriving meaning from the act of consumption as is now argued[2] I am not certain. It does, however fit with some of my own previous experience.

One of my abiding memories as a vicar in Redditch in the early 1990s was of taking the funerals of men and women who had worked in the needle or fishing-tackle industries for 40 years or more – all their working life. One of my stock tributes was that such loyalty – of both employee and employer – was rare these days. For even then, the firms for which they had worked were no more: even many of the old buildings could no longer be found.

Redditch was the world leader in producing needles in the Victorian era, with this developing into fish hooks and then fishing tackle. A few people may still remember the famous names, but during my time there the last big needle manufacturer closed and production went to China. All that was left were a few specialist firms producing surgical needles, but Redditch had been designated a New Town sometime before and continues to be host to many new firms, though even some of the big names who came in the early days are equally no longer there.

A little while ago I found some papers dating from about 1980 advertising a job for an industrial chaplain in Kidderminster, which stated that 20,000 people worked in the carpet factories. When we did a count recently of the number of people working in the four factories then visited by the local chaplain, representing

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[1]   Andrew Marr, *History of Modern Britain* (BBC1, 12 June 2007), but see also Part 4 of his *A History of Modern Britain* (London, 2007).

[2]   Archbishops' Council, *Mission-Shaped Church* (London, 2004), p .10.

a fair proportion of the industry in the town, the total employed was less than 1,200. Where some of those carpet factories once were is now a shopping centre known as 'Weaver's Wharf'.

In Worcester, where I now work, a similar story can be repeated with well-known names relocating abroad or ceasing to exist. Royal Worcester Porcelain which celebrated its 250th anniversary in 2001 has recently moved all its production abroad, but has a thriving visitor centre on that part of the site that has not been sold for housing. The Fownes Gloves factory has been a hotel for a number of years. The former site of a well-known machine tool firm in the city is now a retail park selling electrical and household goods mainly made in other parts of the world.

A more widely known example would be the demise of MG Rover. The Longbridge factory, which straddles the boundary of Birmingham and Worcestershire, closed in 2005 just a few months short of 100 years of manufacturing of Austin and then Rover cars with the loss of over 6,000 jobs and still more in the supply chain. Twelve months after the closure, Advantage West Midlands (the regional development agency) claimed 75 per cent of those made redundant had found training or jobs. It appears that the very best people were cherry-picked by other firms practically straight after the closure. Indeed I was present as a chaplain at the 'walk-in' as it was called when employees 'collected their cards' and there was a large-scale jobs fair underway with many invited employers from the engineering and aerospace industries seeking to attract recruits. Training institutions and other bodies as well as Job Centre Plus were there to in order to help as part of a concerted response to such large-scale job losses. I have been told since that many of the workers who were not the more fortunate ones but who have subsequently got jobs have often found they are not as well paid, but justify this by saying the pressure is not as great as it was in the car industry.

In its heyday Longbridge, like many other motor manufacturing plants (and indeed many other manufacturers), employed many times the 6,000 people who were there when it finally closed. Production was much more labour intensive than it is today. Not only has the amount of manufacturing in the UK declined but much has been automated so reducing the need for labour. It is very striking to visit a modern car plant as compared with say 20 years ago and see how many robots are now carrying out much of the process. Most of the body is assembled by robots whilst people are still used to install parts inside the car, even though many of these come as complete units.

Although there are still some big factories in large urban areas, by and large workplaces are smaller and a significant number of firms are what are called SMEs (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises). The majority of businesses in the UK employ between one and ten people. Although Worcestershire is not necessarily typical of the whole country, 85.3 per cent of firms employed between one and ten people and only 6.9 per cent of firms employed 25 or more as Figure 8.1 shows:[3]

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[3] Worcestershire County Council, *Worcestershire County Economic Assessment 2007–2008* (Worcester, 2008), p. 70.

Table 8.1   Worcestershire   County   Economic   Assessment   2007–8
(© Worcestershire County Council)

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Of course, a small number of large firms employing many hundreds of people could still employ nearly as many people as all the small firms put together, but the trend is clear: the large, and particularly the large, single-site, employer is the exception rather than the rule. In a listing of the 30 largest employers in Worcestershire (who between them employ 69,000 people), there are only six manufacturers and the largest two appear at numbers. 10 and 11 in the list, employing around 1,800 people. The vast majority of those above them are in the public sector, either NHS trusts or the County Council, whose largest group of employees are teachers and others working in schools. Thus service industries, whether public or private sector, greatly outnumber manufacturers as employers.

Many public sector service providers will have to be located in the area where they are to provide for their public, but many in the private sector will be more footloose. The old economic theories about location being determined by primary inputs, for example, Birmingham and the Black Country becoming centres of 'metal bashing' because of the proximity of coal and iron ore, or in more modern times the proximity of transport networks, are now less significant in determining location. That is not to say that transport links are not important and traffic congestion continues to be a concern, but the overriding determinants of location may well have more to do with history and serendipity. Among the economic-development professionals that I am in contact with, the view is that retaining firms and encouraging inward investment has more to do with 'soft' factors such as perceptions of the attractiveness of the location and personal preferences among decision makers. Except where significant grant aid is available firms are rarely swayed by purely financial factors.

Large parts of the site of the factory at Longbridge are now rubble, though some manufacturing, even of cars, is to continue on part of it and a new 'innovation centre' is ahead of schedule and filling up rapidly with new tenants. The rest of the site, owned by a property company and in the Central Technology Belt, which aims to bring high tech ideas out of universities and other research establishments

into production, will be redeveloped as a mixture of R&D, production, retail and housing. It has recently emerged, although apparently it was always known by those who understood the project, that the 10,000 jobs that were announced with a great flourish when the redevelopment of Longbridge was unveiled will take 10 to 15 years to come about as the site is gradually redeveloped, and that in any case these are indicative figures for the types of developments that are projected for the site. There can be no specific promises about jobs except for those that are already there or immediately in prospect. And yet for all this upheaval and the sense that regeneration takes a long time there is little sign of significant changes in the levels of unemployment in the area. Similarly, for all the change in each of the towns in Worcestershire mentioned earlier unemployment is below the national average, and across the West Midlands it is around the average, which is historically low for the last 30 years at least. This story could be repeated many times over in much of the UK.

One of the questions I often wondered about is what happened to all those who have had well-paid, full-time jobs in manufacturing when so many alternative jobs appear to be part-time and not so well-paid – and any effect on the economy this might have. It seems the answer may be that some have indeed had to find work which does not match their previous earning power, and which may be in a completely different sector to what they were doing before. There was a tendency for those who were younger and still needing work to try self-employment, particularly when the economy was less buoyant. As employment picked up many were happy to go back to being employees. Others were able to take early retirement when pension funds could still afford to provide for this possibility, perhaps being prepared or having to sacrifice income, or else supplementing a pension with some part-time work. The economic activity rate for the UK for those aged 50+ is just 39.4 per cent as compared with around 80 per cent for those aged 20 to 49.[4] Others for various reasons have become recipients of incapacity benefit, which at times it has been alleged has been used to keep the unemployment figures down.

As the economy has boomed the issue of 'worklessness' has come to the fore. Out of a population of 550,000 in Worcestershire, 275,000 people are classed as economically active: either in employment, on government training schemes or unemployed but actively seeking work. A further 80,000 are early retired, on incapacity benefit, single mothers or those who choose not to be employed who would traditionally be called 'housewives'. For a number of reasons, which may only partly be related to improving the economic well-being of those concerned, a considerable effort is being made by various statutory agencies to reduce this worklessness, particularly amongst those on incapacity benefit and lone parents. This change away from manufacturing as the backbone of employment in the UK[5]

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[4]   Worcestershire County Council, *Worcestershire County Economic Assessment 2007–2008*, p. 64.

[5]   The percentage employed in manufacturing in UK is 13.2, the percentage employed in service sector is 76.5 ('Annual Population Survey 2006/7', in Worcestershire County Council, *Worcestershire County Economic Assessment 2007–2008*, p. 67).

to the so-called 'weightless economy' (the service sector that does not actually 'make' anything) and the change from a job for life to the need to change jobs and indeed occupations regularly throughout one's working life, has led to significant changes in the way work is perceived and perceptions of self-worth and where a sense of personal value is derived.

When I began my working life in the late 1970s the objective for me and many of my contemporaries was to climb the career ladder as quickly as possible. And progress could be identified in what were then still hierarchical organisations with clearly delineated job gradings. One could define success in those terms as well as finding value in the type of job one did. A frequent question at social gatherings would be: 'What do you do (for a living)?' For jobs with some social or vocational standing or some pride in the craftsmanship or product made this would have been a question that one might be proud to answer. This was at the time just before the great shake-out of the early 1980s, where, living close to the Black Country, I saw manufacturing there decimated and once household names and employers who supported whole communities go to the wall, accompanied by mass unemployment. There have been some high profile regeneration schemes, such as the Merry Hill Shopping Centre, which was developed on the site of the former Round Oak Steel Works, which employed the men in the community, and a pork-pie works, which employed the women, but generally the road back to some sort of prosperity has been through many smaller schemes and a gradual realignment of the economy. Whilst such trauma was not universal, such huge upheavals began the process of a change of perceptions, which were linked to the wider changes in the economy and the country alluded to in Marr's analysis at the beginning of this chapter.

Not everybody, of course, would have derived value from their work in a way that defined their existence; studies in the decades before had shown that many people had an instrumental view of work: they went to work for the money, either out of necessity or in order to be able to enjoy life outside work. Many of the people working on the production lines of the factories mentioned earlier would be enabled by the routine to think of more enjoyable activities that they would participate in after the end of the shift or the holidays they might be saving up for. But even for those who did derive a sense of self-worth from their work, successive waves of unemployment in the last three decades and the job insecurity that went with that has badly shaken that belief. The fragmentation of corporate Britain as explored above, where apart from a small number of ever consolidating corporate giants, most people work for much smaller firms and in much smaller units, means that the hierarchies of old have also broken down. Downsizing and de-layering have added to this so that today's lean businesses with much flatter structures do not necessarily expect people to stay with them but to move on to advance their careers. In many areas of business, breadth of experience is what counts. In firms where the philosophy of human resources or personnel is influential

'competencies' are what count. People are valued for the skills they bring to the task in hand and training is offered to increase competence when needed. The deal lasts as long as it is mutually beneficial. For more experienced or senior people in core jobs particular experience or competences will be wanted, but for many other posts, particularly at a junior level, education and background is more about attitude and aptitude to learn. Employers take the view that they will provide the specific training required. There is now some recognition of the limitations of this perspective as far as 'key talent' and 'hipos' – 'high potentials' – are concerned, where some longer term investment might be deemed worthwhile.[6] On the other hand, for unskilled tasks there is still a demand for labour but this is being priced down by migrant labour that may be prepared to do work that the indigenous population is unwilling to do or at a wage they are not prepared to accept. Among economic-development officers there is a view that migrant workers have been beneficial to the economy notwithstanding some social pressures, though there is some concern that as the balance of the economics become less favourable to working in the UK compared with other countries or the home nation that this will not last.

People, therefore are more prepared to move around to secure the jobs they want. This may be because of the lack of security in the job they hold or it may be to advance their career, which may involve incremental advances between employers and even back to a former employer at a higher level because the old structures for advancement are no longer there. This may not mean that commitment to the job is no longer there, but it may be manifested in a different way. At one time there was loyalty to the company or to a profession or craft. That has broken down, but a shorter term commitment to the task or to the role may still be important. A colleague of mine who visits part of a shopping centre as a workplace chaplain has commented on the targets that shop workers may have and particularly management, which may produce a considerable commitment to their work in order to achieve the rewards, financial or otherwise, that come from achieving the targets. It may be argued that this is an instrumental response because of the financial reward involved, but it also produces a particular attitude to work.

This was also true amongst those who picked and packed goods in a bonus-driven system at a large mail-order warehouse I used to visit as a chaplain. There was though also a mutual loyalty and sense of identity amongst the longer-standing staff, which they criticised as not being present amongst the temps. When the place was threatened with closure, whilst the battle was about saving their jobs, one of the arguments employed was about the mutual support and goodwill amongst staff that meant productivity was higher that at other comparable warehouses. In the end it still closed, partly because there was overcapacity in the firm as a whole but not least because the site was more valuable for redevelopment to the ultimate owners of the business who were primarily a property company.

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[6]   Simon Brittain, 'How to … Manage Key Talent', *People Management* (14 June 2007): 46–7 (46).

Another large employer, which was formerly in the public sector and employed highly qualified staff on long-term projects, now finds it necessary to work in a very different way to satisfy the profitability requirements of investors and the stock markets. This has led to a number of significant reorganisations and many changes in working practices along with redundancies and increased staff turnover. Inevitably this changed environment has produced considerable stress for some employees and a very different way of looking at working life. This change in the way work is experienced and from a world where production was everything in order to recover from the economic trauma of war in the first decades after the Second World War, to a time now where there is an unprecedented plethora of consumer goods and ever increasing pressure from retailers, and indeed the whole economic system, to buy, means that there has been a major shift in attitudes to the purpose of life.

What is clear though is that it will be no more fixed than any previous outlook on life may have been, however significant it may have seemed at the time. Vanstone in his analysis of the Western world's need for people to be productive and the sense of importance that went with it commented: 'the public attitudes to the present have their roots in the quite recent past … our tendency to identify the unique dignity of man with his manifold capacity to work and achieve has much to do with the need of an expanding capitalist system for a multitude of human producers'.[7] None the less he identifies in the Protestant work ethic something that was implicit in the religious inheritance of mediaeval Europe which reaches into the deep and fundamental deposit of Christian doctrine which was the inheritance of the Middle Ages. Writing in the early 1980s, he saw the change from people being needed as producers to consumers but still feels that the ethical principles implanted in an earlier age will persist as the presuppositions of a new phase. Whether we would now think that to be the case and if not, what ethical or philosophical principles might underlie consumerism, merits continued examination. The inclination to now find value in the act of consuming rather than in work does not mean that work is of no value, particularly if we do not 'make' anything physical. Many people still get satisfaction and derive interest from their work even if in a sense they are making 'virtual' products. There is satisfaction in problem solving and providing a service even if it may be done through IT instead of with the tools of old. And many service jobs involve face-to-face contact with other people, which can be difficult if the 'customer' is not happy but equally can give considerable satisfaction if someone has been helped or sold a worthwhile service or product.

However, our attitudes as shaped by our changing view of work and the other economic pressures upon us that highlight our role as consumers affect our attitudes in other spheres of life too. As Reader[8] illustrated with the story of the

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[7] W.H. Vanstone, *The Stature of Waiting* (new edn, London, 2004).

[8] John Reader, *Blurred Encounters: A Reasoned Practice of Faith* (St Bride's Major, 2005), p. 67.

demise of the older play-group rooted in the stability of longer standing residents in his village parishes which did not satisfy the more mobile, demanding and consumerist incomers who expected more, but who equally might not be around in the long-term, the experiences and expectations of many people are rather different to what they were some years ago. Not only were those who moved into the new estate prepared to shop around for the best for their child and travel to nearby towns if necessary to get it, but it was quite possible that they would in time move on so that their commitment only lasted for as long as they were directly deriving some benefit from the mums-and-toddlers group that took the place of the play-group. There was a continuing anxiety that as children grew up mums would return to full- or part-time work to help finance their lifestyle or that the whole family would move because of a change of partner's job. That the mums-and-toddlers group provided a meeting place and engendered loyalty so that some people tried to organise their commitments around it is a tribute to its value in such a pressured world.

In such a world even if geographical horizons extend with greater commuting distances and holidays to places further afield, time horizons shorten and combined with the increasing pace of life lead to an increasingly short-term culture. This is buttressed by a similar sense of short-termism which pervades wider society driven by that same culture in finance, business and politics. Combine this with the pressure from retailers and others because our economy has become so unbalanced by relying so heavily on consumption,[9] and there is little surprise if many take the view of 'enjoying it today while you can' and borrowing if necessary to do so. As Selby has observed, not only does credit (as the preferred term to debt in this context) 'take the waiting out of wanting' as the slogan goes, but this limits future possibilities because with increasing indebtedness more and more energy goes into repayment and this in effect mortgages the future, not just of individuals but of the whole of society. If we have considerable debts to pay off then the pattern of our future life becomes largely determined. If certain expectations about rising standards of living have to be met to achieve this then whatever the government does in pursuit of those goals will be accepted, whatever the cost in civil liberty or social justice.[10]

But financial pressures are only one part of the story. The nature of society in the UK (and other Western countries) has changed too. *Mission-Shaped Church* suggests that with the breakdown of geographical place because of increased mobility, both in terms of travelling for work and leisure as being the things that locate us, we have become a network society. This may be through the people we know in each of these different places where we live, work and relax, and, with

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[9]   Two thirds of the US economy is derived from consumption (Ashley Seager, 'Back to Gold and Bonds for the Future', *The Guardian* [5 November 2007]: 280) and the UK is never far behind the USA in these kind of economic fundamentals.

[10]   Peter Selby, *Grace and Mortgage: The Language of Faith and the Debt of the World* (London, 1997), p. 67.

the increasing use of IT, it may also be a virtual network. Our connection with our work has become more fragmented, though, as I have argued, still of some importance. None the less, as *Mission-Shaped Church* says, we have become more of a consumer culture. It suggests[11] that we have moved from a society that shaped its members primarily as producers – those who believed in progress and in producing something that contributed to the better life that was certain to come through education and hard work – to a society that shapes its members first and foremost by the need to play the role of consumer. Now, it quotes Lyon as saying: 'We are what we buy. We relate to others who consume the same way that we do. And the overarching system of capitalism is fuelled by consumption, and geared to stimulating consumption.'[12]

The conclusion is that this means the core value of society has moved from 'progress' to 'choice'; the absolute right of freedom to choose. Everyone becomes a consumer and should be able to exercise choice. There is an important caveat, which is that the amount of money that people have for consumption varies so that the poor have fewer resources than the rich and other groups may be disadvantaged in this society, but even so everyone is a consumer to some degree and all are enmeshed in the consumer culture. And everything will become a consumer choice where all things will fit exactly what we want so that in the not too distant future this will be applied to all aspects of life – health care, education, and patterns of work, relationships and religion. Perhaps there is a reflection here of the way the newer people in Reader's village above, viewed education and the mums-and-toddlers group. Furthermore, consumerism will also affect the way that people evaluate truth claims. The way people think about shopping also becomes the way people think about 'truth'.

> When many voices can be heard, who can say one should be heeded more than another? When the only criteria left for choosing between them are learned in the marketplace, then truth appears as a commodity. We hear the people 'buy into' a belief or, rather than rejecting a dogma as false, they say the 'cannot buy' this or that viewpoint.[13]

If consuming drives our living then the price of whatever we consume begins to drive our perceptions. Bosshart[14] says that today we compare everything with everything else, for our economy and society are moving towards existing increasingly in real time with the power and spread of information technology. We are able to compare in an instant the price of many articles for sale so that price becomes the controlling factor and something which suppliers must control

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[11] Archbishops' Council, *Mission-Shaped Church*, p. 9.

[12] Ibid., p. 9.

[13] Ibid., p. 10.

[14] David Bosshart, *Cheap? The Real Cost of Living in a Low Price, Low Wage World* (London, 2007), p. 165.

in order to operate profitably and survive. The corollary of this is that all fixed values become fluid values. The ultimate parameter for evaluations, for ratings, for appreciation, for categorization, but also for motivation, is money, or in a real-time world, price. In many sectors fixed prices are on the way out – it is expected that a discount can be negotiated and this is taken further, particularly in the travel sector in hotel bookings, airline tickets and so on, with yield management and dynamic pricing, where the price varies in real time according to the demand. This, of course cuts two ways: the consumer can search for the best price, but the goal for the supplier is to encourage customers to consume more, to make it more difficult to swap to other suppliers and to reduce comparability of prices. As there are fewer fixed prices (even supermarkets juggle prices of essentials to stay ahead of competitors) we lose sight of the relationship between the cost of producing products and their selling price. Thus, Bosshart contends, 'individualization', 'flexibilization' and 'economization' have permeated our consciousness and each of the three reinforces the other two.

Individualization, he says, means that there are no wishes that cannot be expressed legitimately and satisfied in the form of a product or service. Taken to its extreme he suggests that hyper-individualisation can lead to what he calls 'hyper-democracy', which means that there is no value that does not have a legitimate claim to political realization and in the process distorting the agendas of parliaments and executives. If there are no limits to individualization then flexibilisation means that the volatility of values becomes unlimited and pragmatism takes over. 'No one wants a return to the old ideologies', he says. 'But we have lost the ability to think deeply about ideas or the direction we want to take.'[15] This leads to economization where it is difficult to determine what anything is worth but prices remain the most important parameter and anchor. To advance the argument in each of these categories he assumes each is taken to the 'hyper' level but even if the argument is not taken that far, the implications can still be seen in the direction of our society.

This whole argument is quite complex and multilayered. Not everyone has bought the consumerist way of life, and some will actively resist it. Those who remember determining their purpose in life through their work may particularly resist, but the direction of travel seems to be clear and the forces that shape and drive that travel are very powerful, if difficult to define exactly. Our view on all of this may be related to our age, though not just chronological age but through other influences that affect our outlook. This is brought out in a recent study, *Making Sense of Generation Y: The World View of 15–25-Year-Olds*,[16] which shows that this age group has a world view that finds this world and all of life meaningful as it is. However, we are not all quite the same, and it quotes the American pastoral theologian Tex Sample, who says:

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15   Ibid., p. 172.

16   Graham Cray, Sylvia Collins-Mayo, Bob Mayo and Sara Savage, *Making Sense of Generation Y: The World View of 15–25-Year-Olds* (London, 2006).

Our senses, our feelings, our bodies, and our ways of engaging life are culturally and historically structured. We do not have some singular human nature that is the same in all time and all places, but rather we are in great part made up of the practices, the relations, the form of life and the times of which we are a part. I really am 'wired differently' from my children and my grandchildren. What speaks to me does not speak to them.[17]

It goes on to comment that: 'Sample is not denying that all human beings are made in the image of God and thus have a common core, which unites them as human. He is pointing out the power of culture to shape how we live in the world.'[18]

But for all of us the fragmentation of our experience of work, and of our lives more generally, means that that our perceptions and self-understanding is less clear cut. Our receptiveness to the powerful forces of consumerism is affected by being less rooted in clear values (however beneficial or not we may now consider them to be) and this in turn is shaping the wider values by which we determine our lives and our society. It remains to be seen what effect the credit crunch and the down turn in the economy have. There is concern about the reducing sales in the shops and many retailers are struggling but this has not yet fed very much into long-term thinking. Many commentators still think that the down turn will last no more than a couple of years and the UK will be back to normal. Some others are more pessimistic and talking about recession. The Governor of the Bank of England says the 'nice' decade is over (no inflation, continuous expansion) but for rather more than 10 years the UK has had an unprecedented consumer boom which has seriously distorted the economy and there will be an inevitable correction – the question is how long and how painful it will be. Many people have got used to the 'nice' decade and indeed anyone under about 35 has not known anything different in their adult lives.

As well as the effects on other aspects of contemporary society and politics (see Bosshart, above) there is the question of whether consumerism truly satisfies. In his critique, *Affluenza*,[19] Oliver James distinguishes between needs and wants and the danger (*pace* Erich Fromm) of promoting 'having' over 'being'. This critique has also been made of Layard's Happiness project.[20] The challenge to the churches is apply a serious and relevant critique to present-day culture – much of the literature is more descriptive – without retreating into comfortable thinking based on the past such as the 'zombie categories' identified by Reader.[21] In a background paper for a debate of 'Faith Work and Economic Life' at the July 2008 sessions of

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[17]   Ibid., p. 141.
[18]   Ibid.
[19]   **Oliver James**, *Affluenza* (London, 2007).
[20]   **Richard Layard**, *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* (London, 2006).
[21]   **John Reader**, *Reconstructing Practical Theology: The Impact of Globalization* (Abingdon, 2008).

the Church of England's General Synod the Mission and Public Affairs Council (MPA) of the Archbishop's Council comments that the literature on theology and work is surprisingly thin[22] though it mentions approvingly Atherton and Skinner's *Through the Eye of a Needle*[23] as a good example of contemporary theological reflection on economics. It is to be hoped that the symposium and following work which is proposed will help to fill this gap.

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[22]   Archbishop's Council, *Faith, Work and Economic Life* (London, 2008).

[23]   John Atherton and Hannah Skinner (eds), *Through the Eye of a Needle: Theological Conversations over Political Economy* (Peterborough, 2007).

Chapter 9

Negotiating Identity: The Christian Individual and the Secular Institution

Karen Lord

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to examine the interactions that occur between the secular identity of institutions and the religious identity of individuals, especially in those areas where Christian principles come into conflict with, or are constrained by, the secular ethos. The formation of individual identity will be discussed with respect to the environment in which the individual is situated and the degree of attachment the individual feels towards various aspects of identity. In the case of institutional identity, the differences between the corporate image of a government agency as opposed to a private enterprise will be described. Examples of conflict situations will be given, and their outcomes will be assessed by comparing the different sources and levels of motivation for the institutions and individuals involved.

The construction of identity is a process of developing frameworks for understanding life and operating within it, and of incorporating the influence of existing frameworks. These frameworks have been variously called world views,[1] schema,[2] life-worlds[3] and implicit religions.[4] While there are differences in the definition and interpretation of these terms, they all refer to systems of

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[1]   Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York, 1967), p. 32; Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (London, 1967 [1966]), p. 20; and Mark E. Koltko-Rivera, 'The Psychology of Worldviews', *Review of General Psychology* 8 (2004): 3–58 (25).

[2]   Daniel N. McIntosh, 'Religion-as-Schema: With Implications for the Relation Between Religion and Coping', *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 5 (1995): 1–16 (2).

[3]   Peter L. Berger, Brigitte Berger and Hansfried Kellner, *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 62.

[4]   Edward Bailey, *Implicit Religion in Contemporary Society* (Den Haag, 1997), p. 49.

purpose and meaning in life that shape and are shaped by the individual's identity and community.

Collective forms of identity may also be experienced in businesses and community groups. An individual must reconcile their personal framework of purpose and meaning with the frameworks of the groups to which they belong. It is in the overlap, or even conflict, between different groups and between groups and individuals that the blurred encounters develop.

John Reader uses the term 'blurred encounters' to describe those encounters which take place between individuals, ranging from the one extreme where two persons pass each other without any interaction whatsoever, and the other extreme where one person overcomes and dominates the other.[5] I will be using the term in a similar fashion in order to focus on issues of power, integrity and the degree of engagement during encounters, but instead of restricting the term to encounters between individual human beings as Reader does, I will extend it to cover encounters between identities. This usage will permit a discussion of the wider, public encounters between individual identities and corporate identities, and it will also be helpful in describing the inner conflicts between the component identities that constitute one person's overall identity.

The question of religious identity presents an interesting case. Some European societies expect religion to be private and not public. If privacy in religion means that frameworks influenced by or based on religious world views are not permitted to overlap with secular frameworks, this can create cognitive dissonance for individuals and groups attempting to operate within both religious and secular frameworks.[6] A negotiated compromise between the demands of the differing frameworks becomes necessary. It may be argued that integrity is maintained when the frameworks do not have to be irreparably distorted in order to reach a satisfactory compromise, but this is a matter that depends on how the participants interpret the outcome of the negotiating process.

Some persons and groups attempt to maintain integrity by opting out of frameworks which they believe demand too great a distortion of their core values in order to achieve compromise. However, to opt out of a framework does not mean that one remains unaffected by it, and this is another kind of blurred encounter. Integrity for the individual becomes even more of a challenge due to 'the plurality of life-worlds' in modern society and the low degree of integration and overlap among them.[7]

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[5] John Reader, *Blurred Encounters: A Reasoned Practice of Faith* (St Brides Major, 2005), p. ix.

[6] Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford, 1957).

[7] Berger, Berger and Kellner, *The Homeless Mind*, pp. 62–3.

Individual Identity

Although this section is intended to explore the identity of the Christian individual, the reality is that no individual can fully separate their religion from the rest of their life. In his book *Civil Society, Civil Religion* Andrew Shanks states that 'all religion is about identity – but which identity?' The question gains complexity as he speaks about the 'discipline of coming to terms not only with one's confessional identity, but also with one's class identity, one's national identity, one's racial identity; with the whole historical burden of those identities, all that they morally imply, how they have to do with God'.[8] Therefore the following discussion will summarise those issues that relate not only to the Christian component of identity, but also to other aspects of identity that may be present within an individual.

Settings – Neutrality, Masks and Distinction

The components of an individual's overall identity may be located in different settings, and these settings will affect how the development of their components is viewed, both from the perspective of the individual and from the perspective of the observer. The presence of 'the Other' causes the individual to interrogate more closely the components of their own identity. In a society characterised by homogeneity of religion, class, colour and nationality, the image of that Other is too distant, mythical and easily manipulated (or misappropriated) to have the effect of inspiring a sincerely critical self-examination of the internalised frameworks that shore up identity. For an individual from that type of society, the true encounter with the Other can be a shock. An even greater shock can result from the experience of not merely encountering the Other, but becoming the Other, that is, being immersed in a social or professional environment where one is considered by the majority to be representative of a minority group or a minority view.

Components of identity which are considered normative in a mainly homogeneous society may be considered as located in a neutral area. In other words, these components form an aspect of identity which is shared and understood by the majority, and as such this aspect is rarely questioned or challenged. The other is sufficiently distant as to be all but absent. Components that are normative but exist in a heterogeneous society form an aspect of identity which is understood by the majority, but not necessarily shared by the same. The Other may be present, but they either wear the mask of the normative, which makes them blend in, or the mask of stereotype, which is a stylised perception of the Other by the normative group. This role of Other is filled by individuals exhibiting non-normative components of identity in a heterogeneous society.

Although the mask of stereotype may have its origins in the true image of the Other, it is at best an ill-defined picture that the outsider sees 'through a glass darkly', and at worst a deliberately warped or falsified interpretation. Some

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[8] Andrew Shanks, *Civil Society, Civil Religion* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 2–3.

components of identity lend themselves more easily to blending in and avoiding stereotype than others. A radical thought or belief system is not superficially discernible unless the individual chooses to make it so by putting on a recognised symbol of that group, or by being vocal and public about their group allegiance. Visible biological traits, language, accent and other external aspects are difficult or impossible to camouflage. However, sometimes the mask of stereotype is accepted by the individual precisely as a means of communicating difference, inviting challenge or emphasising solidarity with similar individuals who are also categorised as other.

There is yet another setting where, willingly or unwillingly, the other becomes ghettoised within the normative society. In that case, the Other becomes normative within their own community, and the outside society may even become sufficiently distant to become the non-normative Other. Although the ghettoised Other is still subject to the mask of stereotype when they venture into the outside normative society, they have another option besides the mask of the normative. The presence of their community equips them to create for themselves an image of distinction by which they can identify themselves as members of the community. As different levels of ghettoisation exist, so there will be varying degrees of distinctness from the normative in the self-created image of communities.

When considering these settings, it is important to remember that it is not the individual as Other that is being discussed, but the components of that individual's identity. There will usually be some aspects of self that fit the expected norm. No human is ever wholly Other to other humans. Another somewhat paradoxical reality to bear in mind is that to some extent all images and masks of the Other are shaped and influenced by the critical gaze of the normative. The mask of stereotype is a perception imposed by the normative, and the image of distinction is created in reaction to the presence of the normative. The roots of this theoretical position are summed up in the following paragraphs from Richard Ryan:

> Many current research paradigms in personality emphasize a multiplicity of selves housed within individual persons. Indeed, the trend among cognitive theories of personality is to eschew the idea of a central or core self, in favor of ... a collection of more or less isolated schemas, scripts, possible selves, and identities, each cued up by immediate social contexts.
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> Although the theoretical traditions that inform these cognitive perspectives are varied, many of them can be linked either directly or indirectly to the assumptive framework of symbolic interactionism and Cooley's (1902) concept of the looking-glass self (McAdams, 1990). In this tradition one's self is largely derived from construals of how others view us (Harter, 1988). Since the mirrors of self differ from context to context, one can potentially have as many different

selves as there are significant relational contexts in which one finds oneself (James, 1890).[9]

Styles of Allegiance – Integrated versus Casual

Each individual will set different levels of priority on different components of their identity. This prioritisation is not set in stone; it depends on the stages of life that the person passes through, and also on the degree and type of commitment that the person gives to each group and ethos that contributes to their overall identity.

Some individuals favour a highly integrated commitment. In this case, the component of identity with highest priority exerts a subordinating influence on other components of identity. For example, a person who studies the environment may become committed at such a high level that, rather than leaving the information and ethos of the subject behind in its surroundings (the lecture room or the research location), they bring its influence into their home (what to eat, how to run the household), their recreation (where to go, how to travel, what hobbies to pursue), their relationships (whether to be part of a community that practices or at least understands the ethos), and their discernible extensions of identity (what to wear, what car to drive, whether or not to adopt the stereotype of the group).

At the other extreme is the casual approach, where the influence of the main area of identity is mitigated by concerns in other areas of identity. For example, the urge to live the environmentalist ethos may be undermined by a fondness for cars and the reality of living in an area with poor public-transport facilities. An individual may be vegetarian for ethical reasons, but find these reasons overridden by the need to ensure that meals for their family are both nutritious and culturally familiar. Either it requires too much effort to live the ethos in a location where the norm encourages the opposite behaviour, or the effect of the ethos on the lives of others who have not signed up to it becomes an issue. Of course, there are individuals whose level of commitment is so casual that good public transport and a willing family do not stop them from overlooking the ethos more often than not.

It goes without saying that this situation has its counterpart in religious identity, where the phenomenon of the 'Sundays-only Christian' is well known. However, religious identity is difficult to use as an example in this context because of the degree to which cultural aspects mix with and complicate religious aspects. In other words, it is not always clear whether a dedicated Christian carries their religion beyond Sunday because of their faith, or because they see the parish committee as an 'in group' whose membership confers social benefits.

Various studies on religiosity have explored types of religious commitment. The concept of intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity was created by Allport and Ross to differentiate between those who live their religion as their main priority

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[9]   Richard M. Ryan, 'Psychological Needs and the Facilitation of Integrative Processes', *Journal of Personality* 63 (1995): 397–427 (417).

(intrinsic) and those who use their religion as a means to other ends (extrinsic).[10] The secular counterpart of this concept is the model of motivation developed by Ryan and Deci, which defines both the type of motivation (intrinsic or extrinsic) and its locus (impersonal, external or internal).[11]

This figure has intentionally been removed for copyright reasons. To view this image, please refer to the printed version of this book

Figure 9.1   Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being (© Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci)

A full exploration of these two models is beyond the scope of this chapter, but two key differences should be emphasised. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are opposite ends of a spectrum whose locus ranges from impersonal to external to internal, with the intrinsic end of the spectrum characterised by greater self-determination (see Figure 9.1). On the other hand, intrinsic religiosity and extrinsic religiosity are considered as two separate scales by many contemporary researchers.[12] The interaction of religion with culture, especially an established or national religion, can be so extensive and so complex as to make it possible for a person to exhibit both intrinsic and extrinsic traits: to genuinely enjoy religion for its own sake, and also to be aware of the societal and personal benefits that religion can bring and to actively seek them.

Another difference is the definition of intrinsic. The Ryan and Deci model classifies only the most disinterested commitment as being intrinsic, whereas the

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[10]   Gordon W. Allport and J. Michael Ross, 'Personal Religious Orientation and Prejudice', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 5 (1967): 432–43 (434).

[11]   Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, 'Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being', *American Psychologist* 55 (2000): 68–78 (72).

[12]   Lee A. Kirkpatrick and Ralph W. Hood, 'Intrinsic-Extrinsic Religious Orientation: The Boon or Bane of Contemporary Psychology of Religion?', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 29 (1990): 442–62 (452).

Allport and Ross scale also includes some aspects of religiosity that the Ryan and Deci model would define as extrinsic motivation with an internal locus.

The part played by identity in both intrinsic religiosity and internal motivation is of particular interest. From looking at these two models, it may be said that casual commitment has but a weak influence on identity as it lacks both the internal locus that centres it in the self and the power to override the demands of other components of identity. Should another identity present itself, one that is more easily internalised and more smoothly integrating, the individual will make the transition with relatively little disruption to their sense of self. It should however be noted that an integrated and strong commitment to a religion may be the result of a casual commitment to the doctrines and beliefs of that religion but a strong identification with the community and culture that has developed around that religion.

Another dimension to commitment is duration. Some individuals make deep commitments with the expectation that they will last for the long term, perhaps even for life, with an emphasis on the importance of stability. Others see their commitments as temporary agreements to be modified according to changes in life and circumstances, thus emphasising the importance of seeking. This calls to mind another aspect of religiosity that is well known in the psychology of religion. The dimension of religion as quest, which sometimes forms a triad with intrinsic religiosity and extrinsic religiosity, is characterised by an 'open-ended, questioning approach' to religious matters.[13]

A seeking individual with changing allegiances will at times find their identity mostly normative, and at other times mostly non-normative. They may find it more difficult to form close bonds in a community that is based on an identity which they may hold deeply for a short duration, or casually for a long duration. They may also find their open approach to identity challenged as inauthentic (not a true Other), dishonest (only pretending to be or not to be the Other), selfish (only claiming to be Other when it suits them), or simply confused (not even sure who or what they are). Those who refuse to accept and maintain set definitions of self complicate the scripts which people use to identify and play out their roles in society. Conversely, an individual that values stability may acquire a greater stock of social capital in their community by virtue of having exhibited both strength and longevity of commitment. However, they may also find that being unwaveringly linked to one group can be condemned as a flaw rather than praised as a virtue. To some, continuity, tradition and loyalty are but one step away from refusal to change, adherence to custom just for the sake of custom and insularity.

This demonstrates that the style of commitment can be viewed as being either normative or non-normative in the same way as the object of commitment, and is similarly perceived as being a facet of identity. A personal preference for seeking may have to be suppressed in a conservative culture, just as a desire for stability will

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[13] C. Daniel Batson, Patricia Schoenrade and W. Larry Ventis, *Religion and the Individual: A Social-Psychological Perspective* (New York, 1993), p. 166.

find little sympathy in a bohemian environment. Certain cultures and subcultures will value stability over seeking or vice versa, and will punish or reward according to which is seen as deviant.

Corporate Identity

The identity of institutions is an extensive and complex topic that shall be simplified in this section in two ways. Firstly, as the focus of this chapter is on the Christian encounter with secular institutions, only secular corporate identity shall be considered. However, the effect of other aspects of corporate identity will be partially acknowledged by treating private institutions separately from public, state-funded bodies. Secondly, the aspect of corporate identity that shall be given the greatest consideration is the question of power and influence. This analysis will be achieved by identifying the influential stakeholders in these institutions: that is, not only who stands to benefit, but also who has the power to ensure that they will continue to benefit.

Government Institutions

The first stakeholder with influence in government institutions is the voter. This could sound like a naïve and simplistic statement to the cynical observer for many reasons: voters only hold power on election day, voters are easily manipulated by spin doctors, voters prefer charisma to sound policy. In spite of this, the fact remains that candidates are conscious that if they do not first get the support of their electorate, they will have no opportunity to either serve them or use them later on. Voters react not only to what the government does, but to what the government appears to be doing, and their memories can be long enough to affect the next election day. Non-voters may also be quite influential stakeholders. For example, the government's image can still be seriously impacted by their policies that affect children, those with mental illness, and foreigners within and beyond the boundaries of the nation. Some of the concerns of both voters and non-voters may be taken up by lobby groups, which can also be quite powerful stakeholders. In addition, many private organisations are in a position to influence government through their funding of political parties. The media is not included, as it often represents the viewpoint of another group and is in this way more of a tool in the hands of stakeholders than a stakeholder in its own right.

While the majority of voters may find at least some aspects of their identity to be *in sync* with the normative group in society, lobby groups tend to represent interests which may be called non-normative, minority or specialised, depending on how they are viewed. However, some non-normative groups can achieve voting power by being geopolitically located (sometimes with the assistance of gerrymandering) so that they control the results of a particular constituency. This situation is exemplified by districts that have been claimed by immigrant

communities, or urban areas that have become the central location for people of a particular occupation or sexual orientation. For this reason, local government policies may be geared to benefit the normative for that community, but may as a result be in conflict with national government policies.

Private Institutions

The list of influential stakeholders for a private institution depends on the *raison d'être* of the institution, but it includes the clients, the customers, the shareholders, the owners and the employees. The interests and world view of the rank and file employees may not be the same as that of the executives, but while the executives may appear to have greater power, the other employees may have the additional influence of their trade unions.

The Corporate Image

All institutions also have multiple identities. There is the corporate identity which can be consciously forged, with mission statement, motto, emblem and branding. This is similar to the image of distinction formed by communities in reaction to being located in a non-normative environment, but with the difference that the corporate image is actively rather than reactively crafted – institutions want to stand out and be recognised. There is also a corporate equivalent to the mask of stereotype: how others view the institution. This will vary widely depending on the degree to which the individual or group making the judgement identifies with the institution, or sees it as an enemy or a competitor. Some people believe that certain characteristics, such as greed, indifference or incompetence, are characteristic of certain institutions, and will therefore anticipate those characteristics in the institution's representatives.

The Individual and the Institution

Secular and Religious

There are different understandings of what it means to be secular. For some, it means that religion and spirituality are located in a blind spot, never to be displayed or acknowledged. In other words, there can be no encounter with what is not there. For others, it means that there is acknowledgement, but in a context where the aim is not to give preference to any particular religious (or non-religious) stance. The reality is that even though some institutions may aim to be secular according to the first definition, they employ and provide services for people who are likely to have some religiously or spiritually based facet of identity. The hope to avoid issues of religion and spirituality is, ultimately, a vain hope.

There are also different understandings of when and where it is acceptable to show one's religion. The field of social work is described as having a 'deep-rooted, historical antipathy towards religion' in Western societies, though this has seen some change in the UK in recent times.[14] When questioned on the appropriateness of religious and spiritual interventions, social workers and students of social work gave very different answers depending on their background. British students were more likely to disapprove of such interventions than both American students and fully qualified British social workers. Almost double the number of Muslim students felt that certain interventions were appropriate as compared to Christian students.[15]

The authors of this study note that there are situations where it can be a liability to be too secular:

> Many practitioners continue to equate a 'religion-blind' and 'spirituality-blind' approach with what they see as 'anti-oppressive practice'. As a result, they frequently risk imposing culturally incompetent 'secular' and 'rationalist' interventions on service users, who may have very different actual needs and wishes. Hence, we continue to hear informal anecdotes, such as that about a Muslim elder with mental health problems whose medication was repeatedly increased in response to his reports of being visited by angels, until a fellow Muslim explained to colleagues that this was more likely to indicate a greater sense of calm and a reduction in symptoms than it was an increase in delusions.[16]

The Encounter as Negotiating Process

The encounter between the religious individual and the institution is special in a number of ways. First of all, it is not quite the same thing as dealing with an isolated personal issue. The treatment of an individual on a matter which involves their Christian identity is likely to attract the attention of other Christians, who will view the incident as an indicator of how they are likely to be treated in a similar encounter with the institution. The incident may also attract the attention of Christian leaders and the media, who may feel they must comment and report. The situation thus draws in more observers and commentators, both Christian and non-Christian, taking sides in the debate over the actions of the individual and the institution. If this sounds extreme, one need only consider the case of the British Airways employee who was banned from wearing a cross on a chain in such a way that it could be seen over her uniform. The circumstances were reported in the

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[14]   Margaret Holloway, 'Spiritual Need and the Core Business of Social Work', *British Journal of Social Work* 37 (2007): 265–80 (268).

[15]   Philip Gilligan and Sheila Furniss, 'The Role of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work Practice: Views and Experiences of Social Workers and Students', *British Journal of Social Work* 36 (2006): 617–37 (628–30).

[16]   Ibid., p. 634.

media, and those commenting on the issue included the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Archbishop of York and the prime minister.[17]

The encounter between identities can be described as a negotiation for the following reasons. First, there is often a power imbalance, acknowledged or not, between the negotiating parties. Second, each party has an approach which is defined by two main positions: the point at which they get everything that they want, and the point beyond which they will yield no more. Compromise lies somewhere between these two points. Third, the winner may not be the party who achieves a compromise closest to their ideal position. It may rather be the party who feels that they have won. The outcome of a negotiation may produce not merely a winner and a loser, but two winners and even, in some cases, two losers. Much depends on the perception of the participants and the observers, hence the importance of not losing face. Paradoxically, the stronger party may even lose face by winning outright, thereby appearing to be a bully who has disadvantaged the weaker party.

Examples and Outcomes

Context is essential. Both parties need to have an awareness of which aspects of identity are expendable and which are non-negotiable. This is particularly evident when considering visible symbols which represent either the corporate image or the image of distinction. An illustration of this is the situation with the British Airways check-in worker wearing the cross represented a conflict between the individual's identity as a Christian and the company's image. Crosses were categorised along with jewellery and other religious symbols on chains as appropriate only when worn under the uniform. Symbols that could not be hidden, such as the hijab and the turban, were permitted. This suggests that the motive for banning may have arisen from a sense of what constitutes a professional image rather than any desire to restrict religious expression. For some companies, their corporate image requires that employees not stand out in any way as individuals. However, the negative media, political and religious attention that was brought to bear on the case achieved the exact opposite of the positive, professional image that British Airways was hoping to maintain. Willie Walsh, chief executive of British Airways, was reported as saying: 'Unintentionally, we have found ourselves at the centre of one of the hottest social issues in current public debate.'[18] Institutions need to be alert in case one individual's non-negotiable aspect turns out to be not a mere personal quirk, but a potential flash point for a significant section of society. British Airways misread the desires of the normative society towards a group they considered as non-normative. Contrast this with the situation of BBC newsreader Fiona Bruce whose wearing of a cross necklace was discussed 'in the context

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[17]   BBC News, 'BA Drops Ban on Wearing Crosses' (19 January 2007), http://news. bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/6280311.stm (accessed 31 August 2007).

[18]   Ibid.

of a wider debate about impartiality and religious dress'. The BBC emphasised that no ban had been imposed on the newsreader. This separate but related issue demonstrates how certain jobs which require an employee to represent the institutional image will also require that employee to set aside anything that represents their own identity, or the identity of another institution. Unlike British Airways, the BBC hedged their bets by turning the incident into 'news' and asking their client base for their opinions on the matter.[19]

The requirement for identity neutrality need not always lead to conflict. A cross necklace is a Christian symbol, but it is also common enough in secular style that it may be worn by those for whom it has little or no meaning beyond the cultural or fashionable. For such, the choice to wear or not to wear does not impact on their sense of identity. Given this range of commitment to the symbol, and the fact that a publicly funded institution may not feel the same urgency to present a non-religious face as a consumer-dependent business, it is unsurprising that different reactions and solutions arise from the display of a cross necklace.

Symbols that are directly connected to particular institutions or causes, which cannot be mistaken for statements of fashion, are a different matter. For example, Channel 4 newsreader Jon Snow refused to wear a poppy on air, giving the following reasons:

> I am begged to wear an Aids Ribbon, a breast cancer ribbon, a Marie Curie flower … You name it, from the Red Cross to the RNIB, they send me stuff to wear to raise awareness, and I don't. And in those terms, and those terms alone, I do not and will not wear a poppy.
>
> Additionally, there is a rather unpleasant breed of poppy fascism out there – 'he damned well must wear a poppy!' Well I do, in my private life, but I am not going to wear it or any other symbol on air.[20]

A symbol that has a casual connection to a religious belief may not immediately acquire the status of 'religious symbol'. A related news report on the 'Chastity Ring Case' demonstrates that if the individual's choice appears to be more representative of a personal conviction rather than a shared belief, the outcome is not likely to be in their favour. Lydia Playfoot lost a legal challenge against her school for threatening her with expulsion if she did not comply with the rules against the wearing of jewellery in school. The jewellery in question was not a cross, but a ring from the Silver Ring Thing movement, which encourages members to abstain from sex before marriage and to wear a specially engraved ring as a visible sign of that commitment. The judge decreed that there had been no infringement of

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[19]   BBC News, 'Cross Row Stokes Christian Anger' (15 October 2006), http://news. bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/6051486.stm (accessed 31 August 2007).

[20]   Jon Snow, 'Why I Don't Wear a Poppy on Air' (Channel 4, Newsroom Blog, 8 October 2006), http://www.channel4.com/apps26/blogs/page/newsroom?entry=why_i_don_t_wear (accessed 1 September 2007).

human rights because, just as the school had decided, 'the ring was not an essential part of the Christian faith', nor was it ' "intimately linked" to the belief in chastity before marriage'. The cost of losing the case was £12,000 in legal fees, which the judge ordered the claimant's father to pay. This large sum was likely covered entirely or in part by supporters' donations to the group Christian Concern for our Nation, an affiliate of the Lawyers Christian Fellowship.[21]

The stakes were different for both the claimant and the institution in this case. The symbol under scrutiny was not as universally acknowledged by all Christians, and so was perceived as matter of a personal idiosyncrasy rather than a mark of collective significance. In addition, the institution was not as susceptible to loss of revenue resulting from negative portrayal as the customer-oriented British Airways and thus, with its identity less bound up with public approval, had less to lose.

Conclusion

This chapter began by expanding Reader's definition of blurred encounters from encounters between human beings to encounters between identities; however, it will conclude by affirming his declaration that 'it is only human beings who truly encounter one another'. The multiplicity of identities, the different styles of commitment to and development of these identities, and the effect of the imbalance of power on the outcome of encounters between identities; these all combine to create a complex situation with no simple answers. Negotiation of identity in general, and Christian identity in particular, may be assisted by an awareness of the underlying issues, but it is only when humans encounter humans that they learn which identities are present and how to communicate with them.

We must, after all, negotiate not with the mask, whether normative or stereotypical, but with the person behind the mask, with all their shifting allegiances, varying commitments and different styles of being religious. To quote Fanon, 'why not the quite simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself?'[22] A similar sentiment has been written by C.S. Lewis, spoken by a fictional character who had spent most of her life behind a mask: 'How can they [the gods] meet us face to face till we have faces?'[23] It is here, at the point of meeting face to face, that the negotiation of identities can begin.

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[21]   BBC News, ' "Chastity Ring" Girl Loses Case' (16 July 2007), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/6900512.stm (accessed 31 August 2007).

[22]   Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (trans. C.L. Markmann; New York, 1967 [1952]), p. 231.

[23]   C.S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces* (Orlando, 1980 [1956]), p. 294.

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Chapter 10

Sanctuary and Liminality: Stories, Reflections and Liturgy Exploring the Blurred Encounters Between Mental Health and Illness as an Inner-City Church

Clare McBeath

The Dementor's Kiss

The lights are dimmed. There is a shuffling sound as people get settled in their seats and, yes, the rustle of sweet wrappers as two of our older members decide now is the time to pass the bag of mints along the row. As the opening credits roll there is an almost unheard of hush of expectation and everyone sits back to enjoy the show.

The music begins with the deep, sweeping, haunting notes of the orchestra's brass section and a grandiose red steam train races majestically across the countryside. Inside an old-fashioned carriage sit three students and a somewhat dishevelled professor dressed rather strangely in what look like formal academic gowns. The music turns sinister and spine chilling as a faceless black hooded figure floats centre screen its cloak hanging in tatters like the rumpled feathers of a scavenging crow reaching out with skeletal like claws. The atmosphere turns cold as the chill of despair sets in and happiness and treasured memories are drained out leaving only an empty shell, a mere trace of the life that had been before.

Five minutes later, the lights are switched back on and the projector turned off much to the disappointment of the congregation who only got to see the theatrical trailer to the long-anticipated and much-hyped third Harry Potter film, *The Prisoner of Azkaban*. As the congregation blinks and comes back to reality it is not the ministers who proceed to lead the service but the two 11-year-olds who had been to see the movie the night before.

They begin by explaining that the terrifying, faceless hooded figure in the movie trailer is a dementor, one of the guards of Azkaban, the wizard's prison. In their own words, 'a dementor is a "soul-stealer" that feeds on a victim's happy memories ultimately sucking out the soul and leaving only an empty shell'.[1]

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[1]   As quoted in Clare McBeath and Tim Presswood, *Crumbs of Hope: Prayers from the City* (Peterborough, 2006), p. 44.

We then move on to a discussion around the times when we feel down as individuals and as a congregation and how it feels and whether the metaphor of the dementors is a good description of depression or other mental illnesses. Over the course of the sermon slot our discussion engages everyone within the congregation (the under sixes having gone out this week to make a beautiful collage picture out of rubbish) from the two 11-year-olds to older members in their eighties and nineties to a woman in her sixties with numerous caring responsibilities and a man living with long-term severe depression who enjoyed having much to contribute to the discussion.

The conversation ranged from how the mentally ill used to be viewed within the close-knit working-class community, not always feared as one might expect so much as accepted and cared for as being a bit different or 'away with the fairies', to the perceived horrors of the old-style mental asylums. We talked of the asylum seekers now moving into our community and of the atrocities many of them had witnessed and how that must affect their mental health. And we recalled the biblical stories of Jesus' encounters with people possessed by demons who we would now understand as having mental-health problems and of situations where Jesus himself appears to be struggling with voices and visions.

Now if this had been a traditional sermon on mental health using the dementors as an illustration and expounding a biblical text you may have expected a neat, concise conclusion to go away and think over. But I honestly cannot really remember where our discussion left us, except to say that we did not come up with a precise definition of mental health or illness but rather deliberately left the boundaries muddy and unclear. We did not come up with a neatly packaged new project to set up or find a charity to support but reflected on our existing coffee morning with its credit-union collection and complementary therapies as enabling people to maintain a healthy mental state or helping in a small way to lift depression. But what was so radical about our discussion was not that we recounted stories of where Jesus had helped people with mental illness but that we were able to ask questions of whether Jesus himself had struggled with mental illness. We cited examples of Jesus suffering delusions and hearing voices in a deserted place telling him to throw himself off the pinnacle or turn stones into bread, or of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane wrestling with himself over the choices he must make. Maybe Jesus was able to care compassionately for the people society excluded precisely because he shared their feeling of isolation and identified with their inner world in all its chaos. Maybe this was the gem of insight distilled from this morning's discussion.

Where we did not go in our discussion was perhaps to the next stage of theological reflection which is to ask whether God shares our human disposition to varying states of mental health and illness. We also did not go into any great detail as to the models and understanding of mental health, from superstitious, to medical and social, that we were adopting. Nor did we go into any great analysis or ask the question as to why there is such a high prevalence of mental illness in our community and city. What we did do was to start by sharing something of our

stories and experiences, our fears and uncertainties, our prejudices and concerns around mental health and illness. We concluded our discussions where we always conclude our worship, with the whole community gathered together around the table to break bread together. The children returned with their 'rubbish' picture made of all the things we usually throw away, the point of course being that even rubbish can be made to look beautiful and that however low or sad we are feeling we are still beautiful. So gathered around the table and around the recycled picture we joined in the following eucharistic liturgy.

> Jesus is here
> The Spirit is with us!
> So, it is Jesus who invites you, not me
> To gather around this table
> As you have gathered so many times before
> As you have never gathered before.
> Come
> Not because I invite you
> Come
> Not because you want to
> Come
> For this is your home
> This is the comforting place
> Where Jesus meets
> not saints
> but sinners
> not heroes
> but ordinary people
> made extraordinary
> by the creative love of God.
> Come
> Gather
> Bring your doubts and your fears
> Bring your nightmares
> Bring your failures
> And lay them all
> at the foot of the cross.
> When the darkness threatens
> to overwhelm
> when tiredness beckons you
> temptingly
> to sink into despair
> when the voices of hopelessness
> challenge your faith.
> Come

Gather
Be with your friends
Be with your family
Be with those who love you.
Be
With Christ.
Who,
on the night when chaos reigned
when powerful voices were raised against him
when friends deserted and betrayed him
when dark forces swirled all around him
took the time to be with friends.
He took a piece of bread
and lovingly shared it with them.
Take
eat
This is my body, shared with you.
When the meal was ended
he took the cup
and blessed it to them
This cup is my promise
wherever you go
my love will go with you.
For neither death
nor life
nor powers
nor principalities
nor things living
nor things dead
nor fears real
nor threats imagined
can separate you from the love of God.
So take the bread
and drink the wine
Remember Christ's presence
and celebrate God's love.
Peace-maker
Calm-bringer
God-with-us
You have emptied us
of all that frightens us
and holds us back.
You have filled us
with your love

and you peace.
So send us out into the world
To spread peace
To bring calm
and to share your creative love
with all and with each.[2]

Can a community or a city, be said to suffer from mental illness? Perhaps not, but the language of mental health and illness provides a metaphor that may help explain the complexity and psychology of a northern, post-industrial city seeking to rise from the ashes of its past. Since the 1997 'things can only get better' era, with its second wave of social realism films, such as *The Full Monty*, *Brassed Off*, *Billy Elliot* and *East is East*, our local streets have often been used as a film set to explore post-industrial urban life with its kitchen-sink dramas. But while eloquently lamenting the demise of traditional working-class communities, such films and the community itself have struggled to find and articulate signs of hope. In local-authority speak, we are looking for regeneration, although we might put this into the more theological language of looking for signs of resurrection in the midst of the experience of crucifixion. To encapsulate the ministry of our small, inner-city church it is precisely this, to find and articulate signs of hope in the midst of a kind of collective malaise, that could be likened to a kind of collective depression.

Of course, there are many statistics, of both social deprivation and health, that could back this up. But as a local minister, I just need to open my door and meet my community. For every statistic there is a person who is not able to live their life to the full and it is their stories that the church shares and encounters on a daily basis not so much because we run lots of social programmes, but because the congregation of the church is made up from this same local community with all its stresses and strains. And if this is true of the community's physical health it is also true of its mental health. The church, standing alongside the local community is also waiting for the compulsory purchase order on its building just as many people wait for the compulsory purchase of their homes. I guess what I am trying to say is that we as a church are every bit as stressed and depressed as the community we seek to serve. There is no boundary where the healthy seeks to minister to the unhealthy, in fact sometimes it feels very much the other way around where the community minister to us.

It is a Thursday morning and the doors of the church are opened once again for our coffee morning, only the main entrance to the building has dry rot so everyone has to come around the side of the building and enter through the kitchen door. Our therapist has set up the massage couch, essential oils and relaxing music in the sanctuary of the church. Some of the folk who come to the coffee morning

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[2]   **McBeath and Presswood**, *Crumbs of Hope*, pp. 44–5. © Inspire. Used by permission of Methodist Publishing House.

now volunteer as credit union collectors and sit at a table at one end of the hall. One of the congregation makes the tea, coffee and toast. Over the course of the morning all sorts of people drop in, sharing snippets of their life stories with us: people they care for, problems with landlords, uncertainties over decisions to be made about housing, hospital appointments, long-term health problems, urgent requests for loans, people feeling down or wanting to share some good news. And we listen and share, sympathise and maybe point someone in the direction of an agency who may be able to help. The next thing I know, it is me who is being urged to go through for a massage. I am obviously looking run down and need to enjoy a few minutes relaxing and letting go of stress. Meanwhile another regular has offered to help with sorting out the church garden and someone else is in the kitchen washing-up. And somehow it is these experiences of living as part of this community that we reflect on in our worship on a Sunday.

Thomas's Story

> A garden,
> tangled, unkempt,
> weeds growing unchecked
> out of control
> nature reclaiming the space
> wild,
> its beauty hidden behind honeysuckle tendrils
> and knee high grasses
> A garden that seems beyond reclaiming
> beyond restoring
> is touched
> by two gardeners
> sharing tea and toil
> laughter and friendship
> sharing a labour of love
> and enjoying the sun
> and little by little
> as the hot days of summer go by
> what was once a lawn
> is mown and strimmed,
> overgrown hedgerows
> are cut back and lopped,
> and slowly,
> a garden is restored to beauty
> a garden is reborn
> a place to sit
> a place to watch the birds

a place to feel the gentle breeze of a balmy evening
a place to listen to the neighbours' children playing in the street
a place to simply be
a place to worship
a place to give thanks
a place to reflect
that God too touches our lives
gently, lovingly
sometimes painfully
as excess growth is pruned back
and hard edges are honed
as we weary and grow tired
as together we face the vastness and emptiness of life
God too touches our lives
gently, lovingly
sometimes joyfully
as we step hesitatingly into uncharted territory
and find the hidden beauty inside ourselves
as we reach out towards one another
and become the community of God's Shalom.[3]

The poem above is one I simply called 'Thomas's Garden'. Maybe the garden is about one individual's life. Maybe the garden is a metaphor for this community or a city, or the church. But it leads me on to tell what is perhaps the hardest and most personal of the stories I want to share.

Thomas has agreed that I can share some of his story here, has chosen to be called by the name Thomas and we have agreed that anything I write will be read by him and amended before going to a wider audience. But still there is something that feels a bit intrusive about telling another's story – here we tread on holy ground.

Serious mental illness has been called the last taboo, with people using services commonly described in ways that would be considered offensive if applied to other minority or discriminated groups.[4]

Why do I want to tell this particular story? Maybe it is because there is still much stigma associated with mental health problems. Maybe it is about breaking a taboo that keeps mental health problems, that will affect one in every four of us during our lifetimes, at arm's length.

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[3]   © Clare McBeath, 2006.

[4]   Lisa Rodrigues from the Foreword of *Time and Trouble: Towards Proper and Compassionate Mental Healthcare* (London, 2007), p. 2.

> There are some things we do not talk about.
> There are some things of which we dare not speak.
> Taboos, we say, exist for a reason,
> taboos keep order in society,
> taboos keep us from facing our violence and our vulnerability,
> taboos keep us from facing our ignorance and our fears
> but taboos silence those who most need to speak,
> taboos isolate those who most need people around them,
> taboos allow us to hide, rather than face the truth.[5]

Maybe it is because so often the church sees itself ministering to the 'other' but never truly encountering the 'other' as one of ourselves. What does it mean to be Christian and have a mental health problem? But the main reason I want to tell Thomas's story is because it deserves a wider audience precisely because he is a very gifted, deeply theological man who is central to our little church community not in spite of his mental health problems but because they are part of who he is. His journey has been a central part of our journey together as a congregation and has shaped both our theology and our identity as a church.

Thomas is the church secretary of our tiny congregation that has all of 12 members who worship with us regularly on a Sunday (though there are many others we would include as part of our membership who join us for other activities through the week). For as long as anyone can remember, Thomas has kept our little church building open and welcoming, so much so that its not possible to think of our church without seeing him pottering in the kitchen or worrying about repairs. We also knew (although it was never acknowledged) that occasionally Thomas slept at the church when his illness was bad and he needed to feel the safety of being in church. But more than this, Thomas had been the church secretary, a regular lay preacher in his younger days and still the person who would stop us mid sermon and make us think in new ways. I will never forget the sermon where I was struggling to explain what the role of a tax collector was and in first-century Palestine and Thomas piped up from the back, 'He was the loan shark.' Suddenly the sermon made instant sense to all present as everyone knew the loan shark is someone that profits from extortion and feeds on the hardship of others.

One Thursday morning my colleague and I went down to church for our usual coffee morning and credit-union collection and Thomas was not there. Not only that, but Thomas did not reappear all morning. We knew Thomas had been very low since one of our older members had died a few months before and we knew how central she had been in his life and how to some extent she took care of him and he took care of her. We also knew, because Thomas had always told us, that he had on-going mental health problems but was on regular medication, and had

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[5]   This poem was written by myself in 2003 for a sermon that placed the story of the haemorrhaging woman in Luke's Gospel (Lk. 8:43–8) alongside the story of a friend's experience of cancer.

many health and social services supporting him. So we hit the panic button. My colleague searched the local neighbourhood, fearing the worst and starting with the canal and then going to find the address he had always told us he lived at but never allowed us to visit. Meanwhile I got on the phone and called every agency I could think of that Thomas had told us he had a connection with. I tried GPs, hospitals, mental-health services, housing associations and social services.

We both met back at Mersey Street with no sign of Thomas and knowing that none of the agencies we had contacted knew anything about him and the address he called home had been pulled down and rebuilt as a petrol station 15 years before. Eventually Thomas reappeared and I sat down with him to try and piece together what was going on. I have often asked myself how I could have been so naive and not seen a crisis coming sooner or realised that much of the world Thomas believed in was not quite what it seemed. I admit, I was pretty scared and journeying with Thomas into the confused world of his mind, where voices spoke of terrible things, life was so miserable that it did not seem worth going on and the idea of doctors, professionals and hospitals was utterly terrifying, was the hardest journey I have ever undertaken.

Fortunately our local GP remembered Thomas from 30 years before and agreed to take him on again despite their list being full. He was wonderfully gentle and agreed to treat Thomas in the community rather than through an emergency hospital admission. Thomas now has a consultant and a community psychiatric nurse who sees him on a regular basis. Unusually, the church is named as his carer and church activities form the basis of his care plan. My colleague helped Thomas to apply for a birth certificate, pension, bus pass and bank account and after many months and support from the homelessness team Thomas has now moved out of his permanent home in the church to his own sheltered flat. All of these, while seeming trivial, have helped Thomas to build a sense of identity firmly rooted in reality. A birth certificate gives a sense of validation, a recognition of who you are. A pension gives a sense of taking control of one's own life however daunting this may be. A flat gives some independence and a place of safety and warmth. A bus pass opens up the possibility of new places to go. All of these provide important markers, a reference point by which to navigate the chaos.

It would be great to say that from here on it was all plain sailing and that now Thomas has fully recovered but life just is not like that. There are good days and not so good days. There are days when I as a minister struggle to cope with Thomas's need for everything to be in its correct place or done in a certain way. There are days when I do not feel like asking Thomas how he is, because I am not sure I can stay with the pain. There are days when I think I know better than Thomas what would be in his best interests and I can be pushy and bossy. And there are also good times when I wonder why with all my theological education Thomas can still make theological connections that I have never dreamed of. When we did a series of services on the exodus story, we spent a while thinking about leaving the security of the familiar for the wandering in the wilderness. While we tried to make connections with modern-day Israel, Palestine or First

Nations communities, it was Thomas who said simply, 'look outside the door, this community has been wandering in the wilderness for 40 years!'

Being church is about journeying with each other and sharing our faith story with all its struggles and uncertainties and that includes the full spectrum of mental health and ill health, from when everything is going well and life seems great to the times when we wonder whether the struggle is worth it. Often, I think as churches we like to deny pain or difficult issues, put theologically, to deny the reality of crucifixion and skip quickly on to the celebration of the resurrection. I wonder if this is healthy.

There are one or two churches that are thriving in our community and attracting newcomers, often Christian asylum seekers and refugees, into their congregations. It all looks pretty bright and happy as if somehow being a Christian is about singing and clapping loudly and telling everyone how wonderful life is once you have found Christ. Others began walking this path and then started getting involved with the local community on a practical level and found themselves walking a harder, more painful and less confident path.

Through Thomas's story I have learned that denial can be an important part of mental illness and there can be many coping mechanisms that can prevent us from seeking help. Thomas himself can now reflect that the elderly lady that looked after him for 15 years while supporting him and accepting him as he was, did nothing to get him the help he needed to address the voices that were making his life hell. If we had been more aware and less accepting as a church, Thomas could have had the help he needed years earlier. Are we as churches sometimes too accepting of the situations people find themselves in? Are we as churches sometimes in denial about our own health and the health of the community around us? Are we trying to cover up a deeper dis-ease and some searching questions about our faith and our local communities with confident and triumphal theology that seems to proclaim that we have all the answers?

Through Thomas's story I have also leaned a little of what it is like to live in that liminal space where reality is not so fixed as we might think it to be, to be on the journey rather than always focusing on the destination. In the liminal space there is the possibility of change, of openness, of transition and of ambiguity. It is the now and not yet, the living with both crucifixion and resurrection. It is the meaning behind the ritual of bread broken and wine poured that is so central to our worship together. In the liminal space is both the reality of pain and violence and the celebration and hope of restored community.

Through Thomas's story I have also learned of the importance of sanctuary, a place of safety, a sacred place not so much in terms of the building and its 'icons', central though they may be, but sanctuary in terms of an accepting community, accepting of its slightly chaotic ministers as well as whoever is already there or whoever may walk through the door. To be a place or community of sanctuary, necessarily means living with liminality, feeling the pain of crucifixion *and* partying at the dawn of resurrection. For us it has meant rewriting many of the churches' traditional hymns and liturgies to better reflect the experience of our community.

And did those feet in ancient times
walk on this urban tarmac street
and was the living breath of God
in terraced homes with us to meet
and did the face of the divine
shine out upon our shops and tills
and was community builded here
among these old refurbished mills.
Among the steel of skyscrapers
playgrounds in which our children play
in hospitals and offices
by railway-link and canal grey,
where people meet to eat, drink, dance
we'll celebrate God's loving hand
'till we have built Jerusalem
In Britain's densely peopled land.[6]

I may speak about our church as in some sense chaotic, to be politically incorrect, 'mad', but can we use the metaphor of mental illness to describe the church? I often think that as a congregation we go through periods of fairly deep depression when just getting from week to week seems to take all our efforts and the future just seems to stretch into eternity as all our visions and hopes seem to end in despair. But then, every so often we have one of our good days and we are flying, we are creative, we are going to places I know many churches would never dare to go. And to the outsider, I know we look utterly 'mad', and people struggle to make any sense of us at all. But in the chaos, in the madness, there is a faithfulness and a love that will dare to follow Christ into the wilderness, into the garden of Gethsemane and ultimately to the foot of the cross. But maybe we are so used to living with the cross that every so often we have to remind ourselves of the mystery and confusion of the resurrection and celebrate and live for the moment – we feast on hope.[7]

Maybe this poem is about our city, maybe it is a reflection of the chaotic nature of our church or community, maybe it just reflects one of our own inspired moments, or maybe, just maybe, it reflects something of our understanding of God. It is called 'Rhythmic Chaos'.

Lord of the dance
dancing on the
    graveyard
of sin and death

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[6] © Clare McBeath and Tim Presswood, 2007.

[7] This is a reference to Geoffrey Duncan's kind description for the blurb of McBeath and Presswood, *Crumbs of Hope*.

of suspicion and
   division
       of shame
   and dis-
       ease
   Yours is not
       the
           genteel
       dance
   of royal court
   or ballet stage
Your moves are
       not
       choreographed
Your arms wave
       wildly
Your legs fly with
rhythmic abandon
as your body whirls to the
   music
Your dance
   is passion
   Your dance
       is commitment
           Your dance
           is love
           Your dance is life
       unending
       unquenchable
life
indefinable
life
unquenchable
life
Your dance
goes on
wild
           strange
       mad
foolish
dancing
foolish dancing
fool
laughing

fool
loving
fool
dancing in the
    face of death
dancing on the
    face of
death
dancing
prancing
whirling
spinning
see the dance
feel the dance
feel the rhythm
    feel the joy
    join the dance
        dance
        dance wherever you
            may be
        join the dance
            follow me
            join the dance
                of folly
                    join the dance
                      of love.[8]

Producing the Patronus Charm

Understandings of mental health have changed drastically over time from superstitious beliefs, to a medical or biological understanding, to a more social understanding that sees the many environmental and relational aspects of mental health and looks to social inclusion to provide a model for recovery. We look to stories of Jesus' encountering those society excluded and can interpret what is understood in first-century Palestine as demon possession as epilepsy or mental illness, and yet when Jesus starts hearing voices and seeing visions we still interpret these as supernatural revelations of God. Could it be that Jesus himself struggled with mental illness? Was he at times delusional about himself and what he felt his mission to be? Did he get depressed or was he at times slightly manic?

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[8]   Tim Presswood, 'Poemprayer', in McBeath and Presswood, *Crumbs of Hope*, p. 120. © Inspire. Used by permission of Methodist Publishing House.

How much of our humanity did Jesus share? All of it, including our predisposition to mental health problems? And if this could possibly be so, does this not also reflect something of the being of God? We speak of great art or literature or music as reflecting the creativity of God. Yet we know that many of humanity's greatest artistic and scientific moments were created by the hands and minds of those we now know to have suffered mental illness. How can we therefore say that genius is of God without also accepting that the flip side of mental illness, that seems so often to accompany genius, also reflects something of the being of God? If God shares fully in our humanity in the person of Christ then God too shares in the experience of mental illness.

To come full circle, and return to the dementor's kiss, it is only when faced with a dementor that Harry Potter produces his finest magic – a patronus charm that drives the dementors back and keeps them at bay. For many people mental illness is response to the harsh realities of life and an everyday part of human experience. It is an experience that needs wider acknowledgement in our worship and in our pastoral work not just in terms of people to minister to but in terms of people with valuable experiences that can minister to us. Harry Potter produces a patronus charm that not only saves him but saves those around him too. Where are the patronus charms, the creative responses to difficult life experiences, in our congregations, that drive out apathy and despair and allow life to flourish? Maybe one place they can be found is in the liminal spaces between mental health and illness. The challenge for us is to provide the sanctuary, the safe place in which people's experience can be spoken of and valued. Maybe then we will be able to summon up the patronus charm and offer God the full diversity of human creativity and expression.

References

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Chapter 11

'Betwixt and Between':
Anthropological Approaches to
Blurred Encounters

Jonathan Miles-Watson

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce some key anthropological theories for the analysis and interpretation of 'blurred encounters'. All of the theories that this chapter presents have been chosen because of the impact they have had on diverse disciplines. Indeed the influence of one of the theorists I will discuss, Victor Turner, is clearly detectable in the understandings of blurred encounters that can be found elsewhere in this volume. This reason alone may justify the focus on Turner's thought throughout the first half of the chapter; however, it is not the only reason for devoting such a high proportion of space to his ideas. For all its problems,[1] Turner's thought has the kind of clarity that so much of contemporary anthropology seems to lack. It presents a clear, usable, tool for the analysis of blurred encounters that the student can rapidly start applying, albeit nuancing and improving the tool as they go.[2]

The chapter begins with an outline of theories for the interpretation of rites of passage, which are a classical blurred phenomenon that exist to guide people through the joints of categorisational systems. I then turn to explore how these ideas play out in repeating ritual and pilgrimage before concluding with a more general discussion of the relationship between religion, spirituality and secular world views. There is a sense of progression to this chapter as each subsection builds, to some extent, upon the previous; however, it is possible for those with specific needs (and relevant background knowledge) to go straight to the subsection that is of concern to them. It will increasingly become clear that my approach to these theories is (after the tradition of Sir Edmund Leach) to view them as powerful tools for comparative analysis rather than complex abstract philosophies. To this extent the chapter can be seen as a practical manual whose understanding is enriched through the application of the techniques presented. That said in such a short space it is impossible to do full justice to the range of rich techniques that

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[1] These are discussed in sections 2 and 3.

[2] Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (London, 2003), p. 74.

this chapter presents; therefore, this chapter is not intended to be a substitute for the original texts but rather an introduction to them.

1. Anthropology and Theology

British social anthropology has a long history of interpreting the social aspects of religion.[3] It is perhaps surprising then that historically there has been comparatively little anthropological study of Christian communities. The reasons for this are undoubtedly many and complex;[4] however the tendency for anthropologists to focus on seemingly distant communities and for theologians to distrust the findings of the discipline are no doubt key factors. Yet, great strides have been made, on both sides, in the past 50 years towards allowing the disciplines to share from each other's insights. Decades ago two giants of anthropology (Mary Douglas and Edmund Leach) explicitly argued for the value of applying anthropological theory to Christian material and with the increasing popularity of 'home anthropology' familiarity was no longer an automatic excuse for focusing on the distant.[5] There are, however, good reasons for conducting anthropological research on a group that the researcher is not already embedded in that need not detain us here.[6]

Today anthropologists are said to always be in the field, for anthropology is not so much a study about others as a study with them, and in particular it is about having what Ingold terms a sideways glance: an awareness that the way things are being done here is not necessarily the way that they are done in all places and at all times.[7] It does not focus on a form of social reductionism and yet offers a subtle way to understand the social value of religious practice. Furthermore, it offers a less ethnocentric understanding of the issues facing contemporary society than that of many social commentaries.[8] A good example of this is the way that many social commentators equate increasing secularism with the postindustrial West and then go on to suggest that contemporary European society is a sort

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[3]   Michael Lambek, *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion* (Oxford, 2002), p. 3.

[4]   Fenella Cannel, 'The Anthropology of Christianity', in Fenella Cannel (ed.), *The Anthropology of Christianity* (Durham, NC, 2006), pp. 1–50 (4).

[5]   Judith Oakley, *Own or Other Culture* (London, 1996).

[6]   Those who are interested in this issue will find Delmont's introductory textbook provides an accessible overview of the problems of going or being native (Sara Delamont, *Appetites and Identities: An Introduction to the Social Anthropology of Western Europe* [London, 1995], pp. 13–15).

[7]   Tim Ingold, 'Anthropology is not Ethnography' (unpublished paper delivered at the British Academy, 2007).

[8]   Benson Saler, *Conceptualizing Religion: Immanent Anthropologists, Transcendent Natives, and Unbounded Categories* (Leiden, 1993), pp. 8–10.

of stage that is reached through the of process of social evolution.[9] However, in *Natural Symbols*, Douglas excellently explodes this presumption by highlighting the fact that many so called 'primitive' societies are by our terms deeply religious, whereas others are extremely secular.[10] It is only natural then that the methods and techniques developed should be of interest to contemporary theologians. Perhaps more importantly, anthropology is both perfectly suited to the study of blurred encounters and is itself a discipline that can be described as somewhat blurred.[11]

Since Malinowski the primary tool for gathering the ethnographic information that anthropological theory is built upon has been participant observation.[12] Put simply this technique involves immersion in the community under consideration through not only observing what they do but, as closely as possible, living as they live. It is not the intent of this essay to go into detail about techniques for participant observation, field journal recording or writing ethnographies.[13] Instead I will focus on the stage at which data are abstracted, compared and analysed; the stage that makes anthropology more than just ethnography.[14] Focusing on the analysis stage will be helpful to both those who already have organically developed an ethnographic understanding of a community and those who wish to draw upon ethnographic data that has already been gathered by others. However, it is important to note that one of the most influential anthropologists of the last century, Claude Lévi-Strauss, has been widely criticised in Britain precisely because he is seen to have overly theorised from an inadequate fieldwork base.[15]

The approaches outlined below may be broadly seen as falling within the school of symbolic anthropology.[16] They do not focus entirely on the way that blurred religious encounter function, nor do they focus on the internal psychological aspects of them, rather they are part of an interlocking system of symbols, by

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[9]   William Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology of Religion: Themes and Theories* (London, 1984), p. 445.

[10]   Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, p. 18.

[11]   Edmund Leach, *Rethinking Anthropology* (London, 1966), pp. 1–27.

[12]   Malinowski famously outlined his method in his second publication on the Trobridand Islands (Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* [London, 1922]).

[13]   Those who are interested in these areas should consult one or more of the several recent publications on the topic: Amanda Coffey, *The Ethnographic Self: Fieldwork and the Representation of Identity* (London, 1999); Kathleen De Walt and Billie De Walt, *Participant Observation: A Guide for. Fieldworkers* (Walnut Creek, 2002); Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz and Linda Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (Chicago, 1995).

[14]   Ingold, 'Anthropology is not Ethnography'.

[15]   John Lechte, *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers: From Structuralism to Postmodernity* (New York, 1994), p. 72.

[16]   James Peacock, 'Geertz's Concept of Culture in Historical Context: How He Saved the Day and Maybe the Century', in Richard Shweder and Byron Good (eds), *Clifford Geertz by His Colleagues* (Chicago, 2005), pp. 57–8.

which both outward life is guided and inward life is ordered.[17] The systems are not isolated but form part of a continuum wherein two seemingly opposed systems automatically join into a whole, even if it is by opposition to each other.[18] Furthermore, a symbolic understanding also accounts for agency and individual difference: a symbol, such as a cross, is polysemous and allows for a range of understandings far more satisfactorily than the concept of a sign.[19]
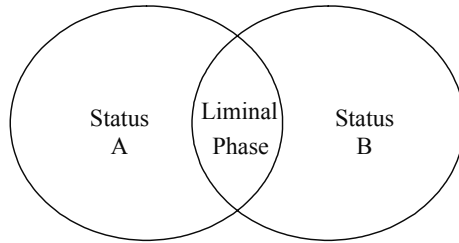
Figure 11.1   Categorisation, transitions and liminal space (© Jonathan Miles-Watson)

2. Rites of Passage

The start of university can be a very blurred encounter. Different young people, from various social and religious backgrounds, are suddenly thrust together in a space that is often distant from their home. Yet this diverse mix of people often quickly becomes strongly bonded in this special environment. where the ordinary rules of society do not always seem to apply. At first glance it may appear (as the UK tabloids often suggest) that student life is chaotic, dangerous and counter-cultural. Yet this secular, blurred encounter is actually recognisable as a variant of a worldwide, stable, social phenomenon. Furthermore, although these phenomena are often believed to be dangerous to the social order, anthropologists have demonstrated that they are actually essential for its continuance. For, in a world where increasing numbers of young people are encouraged to undergo the university experience, it increasingly operates as a recognisable rite of passage, which has secular and religious parallels worldwide.

This way of understanding rites of passage is indebted to Victor Turner who drew on his knowledge of (and experience of working with) various African communities and Van Gennap's general theory of rites of passage to develop a powerful tool for analysis. The essence of Van Gennap's model (as presented by

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[17]   Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (Chicago, 1968), p. 95.

[18]   Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, p. 43.

[19]   Susanne Langer, 'The Logic of Signs and Symbols', in Michael Lambek (ed.), *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 137–43.

Turner) is that life is divisible into several stages and that the transition from one stage to the next is generally marked by some sort of ritual.[20] He terms this 'betwixt and between' period the liminal stage (drawing from the Latin for 'threshold') and the people within the liminal stage are known as the liminars.[21] It is this blurred period, where people are neither at one stage or the other, that is of the most interest, and it is this stage that I earlier proposed we should locate the university experience within. It therefore follows that if a certain kind of undergraduate education is liminal then the some students are liminars.

By drawing upon various ethnographies Turner develops a model of how an idealised, extended, rite of passage unfolds and suggests that the liminal phase can itself be divided into three further stages:

1. rites of separation;
2. the liminal phase proper;
3. rites of reincorporation.[22]

It is possible to build upon ethnographic data to draw up an ingredients list of aspects that each stage of the idealised rite of passage will have. However, it is important to note that it is not essential for something to have all these elements to be classed as a rite of passage.[23] These lists can get tediously long yet having some idea of the content of each phase helps to flesh out the basic concept.

The first stage is that of *separation*; it involves moving away from ordinary life and becoming aware that things are going to be done differently.[24] Often this involves physical relocation: moving away from the rest of the society and being placed together with others who are at a similar state of life, yet may come from different strata of the society.[25] Part of the reason for this separation is that the liminars are often seen as polluting and a dangerous threat to the stability of the society; however, it is also an obvious way of creating a sense that the space being entered is distinct from that of the normal world.[26] It is at this stage that the liminars will often alter their dress, adopting distinct varieties from the usual social custom, they may paint or wash the body, or don a mask.[27] The result of all these features is a sense of separation from normality and as such they pave the way for the liminal phase proper.

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[20] Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (New York, 1967), p. 94.

[21] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti Structure* (New York, 1969), p. 143

[22] Ibid. p. 94.

[23] Seth Kunin, *Religion: The Modern Theories* (Edinburgh, 2003), pp. 163–4.

[24] Tuner, *The Forest of Symbols*, p. 98.

[25] Colin Turnbull, *The Forest People* (London, 1993), pp. 24–6.

[26] Tuner, *The Forest of Symbols*, p. 98.

[27] Fiona Bowie, *The Anthropology of Religion* (Oxford, 2000), p. 77.

In the liminal phase the usual rules of society are often suspended, or sometimes inverted.[28] The liminal phase can be joyful in nature (ludic) or solemn (ergic);[29] however, irrespective of this division, the central features of the liminal phase are the same. Social hierarchy often becomes flattened and sex distinctions are minimized.[30] There is a disregard for personal appearance and yet a general uniformity of appearance.[31] All, irrespective of societal rank, may have to engage in humiliating ordeals that erode their previous status.[32] There is a giving over of the self, surrendering to a higher power and mystical powers are often referred to.[33] Most of all there is a flattening of social structure and a deep bonding of people who otherwise might have been strangers. Turner terms the bonding that occurs in the liminal zone 'communitas'.[34] Communitas is not simply the kind of comradeship or bond that people of similar status may feel in their daily life; it is a profound transformative bonding with people who the liminars may not otherwise socialise with.[35] It is an experience that goes to the root of the liminar's being and generates something profoundly communal.[36]

The final stage is that of reincorporation and this involves moving back into society and taking up the new status or role that comes as a result of having completed the rite of passage.[37] This may be formally conferred through the giving of a new title, or a new name and the allotting of new rights, privileges and responsibilities. However, Turner suggests that while the liminars all separate out again after the ritual, something of the experience of communitas, which lies at the heart of the blurred encounter, remains and serves to bond the community together.[38] Therefore the seeming anti-structure of the blurred encounter actually forms part of the overall structural system.[39] It serves to cement society rather than change it and safely moves people through the potentially dangerous and volatile liminal period that lies between life cycle stages. Thus the blurred needs clarity: structure needs communitas just as communitas needs structure.[40]

Turner takes this suggestion further by claiming that certain repeating rituals also operate in a similar way to rites of passage by generating a temporary status

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[28]   Turner, *The Ritual Process*, pp. 167–8.

[29]   Edith Turner and Victor Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York, 1978), p. 35.

[30]   Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 102.

[31]   Ibid., p. 106.

[32]   Ibid., p. 102.

[33]   Ibid., p. 103.

[34]   Ibid., p. 96.

[35]   Tuner, *The Forest of Symbols*, p. 100.

[36]   Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 138.

[37]   Bowie, *The Anthropology of Religion*, p. 163.

[38]   Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 97.

[39]   Ibid., pp. 177–8.

[40]   Ibid., p. 139.

of communitas that arises through a flattening or reversal of the predominant structure.[41] An excellent example of this is Marriott's description of the Holi festival in Kishan Garhi (Uttar Pradesh, India).[42] For the duration of this festival those who do the most beating are the most disadvantaged women and those who receive the most beating are the most powerful men; village officials are mocked and cowherds exalted.[43] However, once the festival ends the society (with its strict rules and hierarchical divisions) returns to normal as though nothing had occurred.[44] Turner suggests that such rituals operate as a pressure valve, by elevating the powerless for a temporary period and lowering the powerful, they allow for the continuance of the hierarchical system; furthermore, the more strictly ordered the system the more powerful the liminal experience will be.[45] Therefore the liminal (and by extension the blurred encounter) does not directly transform structure so much as help maintain structure; however, the *awen* (inspiration) generated during blurred encounters can result in ideas and ideals that may work themselves out over time into new structures.[46]

I have deliberately avoided giving examples of relevant Christian rituals as they can be found elsewhere in this volume and no doubt the reader will already be forming connections between this theory and other theological material. However, it is important to note that while much of Turner's work draws upon diverse non-Western ethnographic data he does also apply his technique to some Christian material. Does Turner then develop a truly universal theory that works for both Western and non-Western communities? He certainly demonstrates how anthropology can move from the specific to the general and make the strange familiar and the familiar strange; however some have suggested that despite his extensive fieldwork his analysis is ultimately strongly influenced by the values of 1960s and 1970s Western society. In particular it has been suggested that this has impacted on his theory of communitas making it too idealistic and overly influenced by the hippie movement.[47] It may also be that, while Turner's model works well for some ethnographic data, it may require nuancing or complicating in order to work with other kinds of data. A good example of this process is the way that Douglas applies Turner's theory to Turnbull's ethnographic account of the *nkumbi* ceremony and demonstrates that while his model works for one half of the participants (who take it seriously) it does not work for the other half who live a far more unstructured life anyway.[48]

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[41]   Ibid., pp. 166–203.

[42]   McKim Marriott, 'The Feast of Love', in Milton Singer (ed.), *Krishna: Myths, Rites and Attitudes* (Honolulu, 1966), pp. 210–12.

[43]   Ibid.

[44]   Ibid.

[45]   Turner, *The Ritual Process*, pp. 188–203.

[46]   Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, p. 3.

[47]   Bowie, *The Anthropology of Religion*, p. 171.

[48]   Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, pp. 10–11.

The *nkumbi* ceremony is a traditional rite of passage for the Bantu villagers of the Ituri region of central Africa.[49] It is not the traditional rite of passage for the neighbouring BaMabuti hunter-gatherers; however, they are forced to participate in the rite of passage by the villagers.[50] When in the company of the villagers the BaMabuti appear to follow the rules of the ceremony, but as soon as they are left alone they break many of the social restrictions of the ritual, going as far as to use the suspended sacred banana (which it is forbidden to touch) as a punching bag,[51] The sacred symbols at the centre of the ritual were actually symbols of a hostile and oppressive Other to the BaMabuti boys. The important thing to note here with regard to Turner's theory is that not everyone who takes part in a ritual automatically experiences it in the same way. For, as Geertz has suggested, the expectations of the participants are key to the way that they experience the blurred encounter.[52]

Despite the above warnings there is much in Turner's thought that readily lends itself to Christian practice and he and Edith Turner have already demonstrated its applicability to certain aspects.[53] It is my belief that his approach remains an important tool for the analysis of liminal, or blurred, encounters; however, when we move from the liminal to the liminoid the theory becomes increasingly stretched.

3. Pilgrimage

As Turner developed his own model he increasingly turned to interpreting not only liminal rituals, such as rites of passage, but also what he termed liminoid phenomena, such as pilgrimage.[54] Pilgrimage is a blurred encounter that shares a lot of the key features of a rite of passage: it involves moving away from familiar space, being less interested in physical appearance and (according to Turner) social distinctions become minimised.[55] However, unlike traditional rites of passage, most pilgrimage (and certainly most Christian pilgrimage) is a voluntary rather than compulsory activity.[56] Furthermore, while pilgrims experience something approaching the communitas of rites of passage, they do not experience powerful initiatory communitas, nor does the completion of the pilgrimage result in the conferral of a new status that is recognised by all the society.[57] Rather he suggests

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[49] Turnbull, *The Forest People*, p. 25.

[50] Ibid., p. 196.

[51] Ibid., p. 201.

[52] Clifford Geertz, 'Religion as a Cultural System', in Jonathan Miles-Watson and Seth Kunin (eds), *Theories of Religion: A Reader* (Edinburgh, 2006), pp. 211–14.

[53] Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*.

[54] Ibid., pp. 253–4.

[55] Ibid., pp. 7–8.

[56] Ibid., p. 9.

[57] Ibid., p. 15.

that the pilgrims gain a deeper spiritual knowledge that they take back with them into the secular world, which they enliven with their enriched artistic power.[58]

To explain this different type of communitas we need to complicate our understanding of the term by drawing upon Turner's division of the basic concept of communitas into three different types:

1. spontaneous or existential communitas;
2. ideological communitas;
3. normative communitas.[59]

Existential or spontaneous communitas is broadly speaking the kind of communitas we have been exploring in our discussion of rites of passage. Ideological communitas is the formulation of the remembered aspect of communitas in a utopian blue print, designed to act as a reform for society.[60] Turner gives Gonzalo's Commonwealth speech (in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*) as an example of ideological communitas.[61] This speech can be viewed as the vocalisation of Gonzalo's process of using the experience of being stranded on a desert island to formulate a blueprint for government that is based upon the principles of communitas.[62] The key is the formulation of an ideal community in which something of the communitas, experienced in the liminal stage can be sustained. Normative communitas is then the kind of communitas that arises when the extension of communitas is actually extended, rather than its extension simply being imagined as in the case of ideological communitas. It involves the attempt to sustain the blurred encounter for a prolonged period of time and therefore necessitates organisation into a preduring system.[63] Normative communitas often results in the ethics that arise during the blurred experience being enshrined in a codified set of rules, or a system of ethical precepts.[64] This kind of communitas is most closely associated with pilgrimage.

Pilgrimage may seek to blur time but it unfolds within time (and through space). It has four clear stages: the preparation for departure, the collective experiences on the journey, the arrival at the centre and then the return journey.[65] This movement to a pilgrimage centre, which is normally at a periphery, involves exposure to an interlocking set of symbols that gradually alter the pilgrims' understanding of

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[58] Ibid.
[59] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 132.
[60] Victor Turner 'The Center out There: Pilgrim's Goal', *History of Religions* 12/3 (1973): 191–230.
[61] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, pp. 134–5.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 132.
[64] Turner 'The Center out There'.
[65] Ibid.

the places they are encountering.[66] Thus the pilgrim may experience a blurring of the distinctions between the individual and the group, space and time, action and reflection. Some pilgrims will not be as sensitive to some symbols as others; however as the journey nears the centre the profusion of related symbols becomes so great that all pilgrims will have their world view altered to some extent by the process.[67] By the time the pilgrim reaches the pilgrimage centre they approach it with a communalised set of expectations that they would not have held were it not for the pilgrimage.[68] The effect of the pilgrimage is so powerful that what was once a periphery now becomes (at least temporally) central to their identity and understanding of the world.[69]

In order to complicate this basic model Turner suggests a fourfold typology of pilgrimage:

1. prototypical pilgrimage
2. mediaeval pilgrimage
3. archaic pilgrimage
4. modern pilgrimage.[70]

A prototypical pilgrimage involves journeying to a place that was of importance for the founder of a religion or his close disciples.[71] A classical example of a prototypical pilgrimage would be the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca. Turner suggests that this type of pilgrimage takes the pilgrim on a journey that blurs the boundaries between the present and the past, the founder and the pilgrim.[72] For the pilgrim is encouraged to create personal connections between the experience the founder had at the space and their own experience.

A mediaeval pilgrimage involves journeying to sites that are associated with figures of secondary importance in the religion, such as saints. The pilgrimages often involve blurring the line between the ideology of today and the epoch in which the pilgrimage originated.[73] The Turners give the example of the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela as being typical of this kind of pilgrimage.[74] Archaic pilgrimage for Turner is one of the most personal forms of pilgrimage involving complex syncretic symbols that generate non-orthodox understandings.[75] They are perhaps the most blurred of all pilgrimages and look back to ancient sacred

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[66]   Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, p. 11.
[67]   Ibid.
[68]   Ibid.
[69]   Turner 'The Center out There'.
[70]   Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, p. 17.
[71]   Ibid., p. 18.
[72]   Ibid.
[73]   Ibid.
[74]   Ibid.
[75]   Ibid.

sights as reinterpreted through later tradition and the lived experience of the contemporary pilgrim.

A good example of this kind of pilgrimage is the pilgrimage to the cave of Our Lord of Chalma, in Mexico. This was once an important sacred site in the Oculitec and Otamí religious system within which it was a ritual site for the veneration of the divine Old Father and Old Mother.[76] After the Aztec conquest the cave retained its sacred significance but seems to have become associated with the Aztec god of war (Huitzilopochtli) and goddess of love (Cihuacoatl-Tlazolteotl).[77] It was also an important site for pilgrimage during this period with different ethnic groups visiting it at different times to conduct different rituals.[78] During the Spanish period this practice of pilgrimage was allowed to continue and the shrine was transformed: the statue of the Aztec male god was replaced by a sacred image of Jesus and the female goddess's image was replaced by a statue of Mary of Egypt.[79] Thus the key associations of the cave as a sacred space where both male and female elements were present persists (despite constantly evolving) throughout three cultural epochs. Therefore, the pilgrim, through contemporary religious experience, connects with a site of ancient sacred significance that has undergone later (yet now historical) reinterpretation

The final category is that of modern pilgrimage which Turner suggests applies to most pilgrimages that originate in the post-mediaeval period.[80] However, Turner's modern pilgrimages are not necessarily modern in tone and may be seen as a reaction against modernity.[81] They are far more individual in orientation than even archaic pilgrimages and are characterised by a personal piety.[82] In many ways modern pilgrimages, for Turner, are the least blurred of the pilgrimage types for they are the least successful at taking the pilgrim outside of their own experience and joining it with the experience of another.

Any typology is open to challenge and controversy, indeed (as Douglas has noted) the problem is particularly widespread with anthropologists, who have a tendency to rush to point out examples of practices that do not neatly fit into one category or another.[83] Turner's division has been no different and it is easy to think of examples that struggle to fit, yet this does not necessarily make his typology worthless.[84] More challenging (and more relevant here) are the various examples people have presented of pilgrimages that do not fit Turner's overall conception of pilgrimage as a liminoid phenomenon. In particular these focus on attacking

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[76] Ibid., p. 54.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid., p. 56.

[79] Ibid., pp. 54–6.

[80] Ibid., p. 19.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, p. xxxvii.

[84] Ibid.

the communitas aspect of pilgrimage, for being overly idealistic. Sax[85] and Van de Veer[86] have both found examples of Indian pilgrimages where conventional social structure and differentiation are maintained throughout and explorations of pilgrimage in places as diverse as Morocco,[87] Sri Lanka[88] and Peru[89] have shown this to be a widespread feature of pilgrimage. Furthermore, Bowman[90] and Sallnow and Eade[91] have suggested that in stressing the unity of the pilgrims Turner's analysis does not do justice to the fact that people come to pilgrimage from different backgrounds and with different expectations, which means that they are bound to experience things differently.

It is worth remembering however that Turner suggests that the normative communitas of pilgrimage inevitably involves a degree of hierarchical organisation.[92] Furthermore, the concept of a symbol rather than a sign implicitly suggests that of course different people will experience things slightly differently depending upon the set of expectations that they bring to the experience.[93] A rather different criticism of Turner's approach to pilgrimage implicitly underlies Ingold's 'dwelling perspective'.[94] This suggests that sacred place is not something that we clothe in meaning so much as something that we discover the meaning of through becoming 'enskilled' in how to be attentive to certain aspects of the environment.[95] Whereas Turner clearly draws a distinction between the organism and the environment,[96] Ingold suggests that people (both human and non-human)

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[85]   **William Sax**, *Mountain Goddess: Gender and Politics in a Himalayan Pilgrimage* (Oxford, 1991).

[86]   **Peter Van De Veer**, *Gods on Earth: The Management of Religious Experience and Identity in a North Indian Pilgrimage Centre* (Oxford, 1988).

[87]   **Dale Eickelman**, *Moroccan Islam: Tradition and Society in a Pilgrimage Center* (Austin, 1976).

[88]   **Bryan Pfaffenberger**, 'The Kataragama Pilgrimage: Hindu-Buddhist Interaction and its Significance in Sri Lanka's Polyethnic Social System', *Journal of Asian Studies* 38/2. (1979): 253–70.

[89]   **Michael Sallnow**, 'Communitas Reconsidered: The Sociology of Andean Pilgrimage', *Man* 16/2 (1981): 163–82.

[90]   **Glenn Bowman**, 'Christian Ideology and the Image of a Holy Land: The Place of Jerusalem-Pilgrimage in the Various Christianities', in Michael Sallnow and John Eade (eds), *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage* (Urbana, 2000), pp. 98–121.

[91]   **Michael Sallnow and John Eade**, 'Introduction' to Michael Sallnow and John Eade (eds), *Contesting the Sacred: the Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage* (Urbana, 2000), pp. 1–29 (5).

[92]   Turner 'The Center out There'.

[93]   See section 1.

[94]   **Tim Ingold**, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London, 2000), pp. 185–7.

[95]   Ibid., pp. 54–5.

[96]   Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, p. 22.

become woven into their environments, generating the identity of the environment at the same time as the environment generates their own identity.[97]

4. Spirituality, Religion and Secularisation

So far we have explored certain blurred aspects of religious events and introduced the idea that these may have secular parallels.[98] It is now commonly assumed that in contemporary Western society the boundaries between the secular and the sacred are becoming increasingly blurred.[99] In search of answers to the question of why this appears to be occurring some theologians have turned to classical sociological theory and ideas of secularisation and desacralisation.[100] Such theories are once more falling out of fashion,[101] yet it is still common to read about the increase in alternative forms of spiritual expression[102] and the increased complexity of postmodernity.[103] Although these ideas may seem less indebted to classical sociology they are often built upon the same ethnocentric model of cultural evolution.[104] This is not surprising for in the Western academy there is a tradition of implicitly using a model of cultural evolution, which sees history as an ever marching progression, each generation's cultural systems building upon the last and becoming increasingly complex.[105] The symptoms of an evolved culture are often said to be secularisation, advanced technology and urban living.[106] However, from an anthropological perspective it becomes clear that the distinction between simple and complex cultures is unsustainable. Many supposedly primitive people exist as part of extremely complex and dynamic systems of trade and social networks.[107] Furthermore, some nomadic communities with very limited technological capabilities have little time for institutional religion, whereas others take institutional religion very seriously.[108]

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[97] Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, pp. 189–208.

[98] See section 2.

[99] Conrad Ostwalt, *Secular Steeples: Popular Culture and the Religious Imagination* (Harrisburg, 2003), p. 29.

[100] Victor Anderson, 'Secularization and the Worldliness of Theology', in Delwin Brown, Sheila Davany and Kathryn Tanner (eds), *Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 71–85.

[101] Rodney Stark, 'Secularization, RIP', *Sociology of Religion* 60 (1999): 249–73.

[102] Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, vol. 1 (London, 2004), pp. 46–9.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, pp. 362–91.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Edmund Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma* (London, 1954).

[108] Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, pp. 18–21.

Once the inevitability of secularisation is removed (and the causal link between technological advancement and spirituality severed) the question becomes: 'What if anything, is the common factor that ties societies that favour spirituality over institutional religion together?' One of the most well-known attempts to answer this question is Clifford Geertz's *Islam Observed*, a book that seems as pertinent today as when it was first written; however, it is curiously (for an anthropological work) dependent upon sociological thought.[109] For, in this work, Geertz takes it for granted that there is an opposition between scientific explanations of the world and religious explanations. This leads him to suggest that in a typical tribal society the religious field is all pervasive, yet in modern industrial society the scientific field has arisen as an alternative, which has challenged the dominance of the religious field.[110] He suggests that religious reaction to this problem falls into two major types, which we will label syncretism and pragmatism.[111]

Syncretists are those who thrive on blurred encounters; they are mosaic builders who from a range of diverse materials build an overall picture.[112] They often do not blend the elements equally and set a hierarchy of understandings, with the religious concept subsuming, or encompassing, the scientific.[113] To explain this Geertz presents the example of a brilliant mathematics and physics student from Indonesia, who explains to him for hours 'an extremely complicated, almost cabalistic scheme in which the truths of physics, mathematics, politics, art, and religion are indissolubly fused'.[114]

Pragmatists, for Geertz, are those who deal with the event of the scientific field by relinquishing part of the religious field to science.[115] They attempt to draw a sharp division between the sacred and the secular. In many ways they are the opposite of a blurred encounter in that they attempt to keep everything neatly categorised and in its place; yet, when viewed as a whole, they are also undeniably the result of a blurred encounter between the sacred and secular fields.[116] Once more Geertz provides us with an example of the type of person he is thinking of in this category. This time he chooses a highly educated, yet traditionally raised, Moroccan who has 'the Koran gripped in one hand and glass of scotch in the other'.[117]

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[109] Daniel Varisco, *Islam Obscured: The Rhetoric of Anthropological Representations* (New York, 2005), p. 25.

[110] Geertz, *Islam Observed*, pp. 103–7.

[111] Ibid., pp. 113–16.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Ibid., p. 117.

[115] Ibid., pp. 113–16.

[116] Ibid.

[117] Ibid., p. 117.

While Geertz usefully begins to raise issues of how people negotiate complex identities his division has received some serious criticism.[118] The model he presents appears too rigid and does not explain how people respond differently in different situations.[119] A more fundamental problem with Geertz's analysis is his assumption that science and religion are the key factors for world-view formation. It is necessary here to be aware that the terms 'science' and 'religion' can be defined in varying ways and that the definition of the terms is bound to affect the nature of the relationship between them.[120] However, if religion is defined broadly (as any totalising system) then science falls within religion, rather than without it, and if religion is defined narrowly (as institutionalised religion) then its lack of dominance is not a unique and new problem.

This understanding lies at the heart of Mary Douglas's attempt to model the relationship between personal spirituality and institutional religion. Douglas suggests that the apparent trend towards spiritual confusion and individualism is not restricted to modern Europe but has parallels with various societies around the world.[121] Therefore, secularisation is 'an age old cosmological type, a product of a definable experience, which need have nothing to do with urban life or modern science'.[122] She rejects Geertz's juxtaposition of modern scientific knowledge and traditional religious knowledge and instead proposes that the key categories are those of grid and group.[123] As Spickard has noted,[124] Douglas has subtly changed her notions of grid and group over the years; however it can be broadly said that 'grid' is the group's symbolic classification system,[125] while 'group' is the degree of control the group hold over the individual.[126]

The concept of 'group' is perhaps straightforward enough and is not central to the exploration of blurred encounters; however, the concept of 'grid' requires slightly more explanation and will prove to be a key way of interpreting many of the phenomena discussed in this volume. Douglas draws inspiration for her concept of grid from Bernstein who suggests that people operate on a continuum

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[118]   Varisco, *Islam Obscured*, pp. 21–52.

[119]   Such an understanding is more usefully approached by Kunin who, building upon his analysis of the crypto-Jews of New Mexico, has usefully suggested that one way people negotiate complex identities is through a process of *jonglere*, or juggling (Seth Kunin, 'Juggling Identities among the Crypto-Jews of the American Southwest', *Religion* 31/1 (2001): 41–61.

[120]   Jonathan Miles-Watson and Seth Kunin, 'Introduction' to Jonathan Miles-Watson and Seth Kunin (eds), *Theories of Religion: A Reader* (Edinburgh, 2006), pp. 1–21.

[121]   Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, p. 18.

[122]   Ibid.

[123]   Ibid., pp. 57–71.

[124]   James Spickard, 'A Guide to Mary Douglas' Three Versions of Grid/Group Theory', *Social Analysis* 50/2 (1989): 151–70.

[125]   Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, pp. 62–3.

[126]   Ibid., p. 63.

of communication from restricted code to elaborated code.[127] He associates restricted code with large communal living, where the important thing is group coherence and appreciation of highly condensed symbolic action.[128] This, he suggests, is typical of members of the lower working class in our society who work in unskilled or semi-skilled occupations.[129] At the other end of the continuum he places elaborated code, which he associates with more individual living and the need to be able to operate without a script, which is more typical of skilled workers and the upper classes.[130] Douglas expands this basic concept by applying it to religion and suggesting that appreciation of religious symbols exists on a continuum, which stretches from those who appreciate highly concentrated communal ritual and symbolic action to those who appreciate highly individual, personal and ethical reasoning.[131] The confirmed anti-ritualist is positioned at the latter end of the continuum, as someone who mistrusts formal public action and values inner convictions.[132] They stress the need to speak directly from the heart and may even place a high value on incoherent noise.[133]

This concept is excellently developed by her analysis of a group of Roman Catholic labourers of Irish origin living in London.[134] She suggests that their attachment to the established ritual practices of Catholicism arises from their deep appreciation of communal symbolic action (high-grid position), whereas the tendency of the London Roman Catholic clergy to dismiss this as outmoded practice arises from their attachment to elaborated code (low-grid position).[135] This results in an internal conflict that revolves around the value of easting fish on a Friday. The Irish labourers saw a great significance in the ritual of eating fish, whereas their clergy could not see the sense of the practice and thought it better to show devotion through an individual act of charity.[136] Douglas suggests that it is precisely this dislocation of certain elements in the church hierarchy from the value of public ritual that has alienated certain members from the church.[137] Furthermore, she warns that once people have lost the ability to appreciate symbolic acts then the very fabric of the religious institution becomes threatened.[138]

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[127] Basil Bernstein, 'Social Class, Speech Systems and Psycho-Therapy', *British Journal of Sociology* 15/1 (1964): 54–64.

[128] Ibid., p. 58.

[129] Ibid., p. 59.

[130] Ibid., pp. 60–61.

[131] Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, pp. 57–71.

[132] Ibid., p. 54.

[133] Ibid.

[134] Ibid., pp. 39–56.

[135] Ibid.

[136] Ibid., pp. 34–52.

[137] Ibid., pp. 52–3.

[138] Ibid.

There are striking parallels between what Mary Douglas is here proposing and Turner's notion of how communitas relates to structure.[139] Douglas suggests that in order for religion to be more than a personal spirituality it can not operate for extended periods at a low level of grid; furthermore, just as Turner suggested that an attempt to extend the experience of communitas results in a sort of normative communitas, so Douglas suggests that a common reaction to attempting to abolish restricted code in symbolic ritual is that it reasserts itself in a strict adherence to a restricted interpretation of scripture.[140] Both Douglas and Turner therefore agree that anti-structure needs structure and structure needs anti-structure. This statement suggests that we can never truly deconstruct our societies no matter how much such a sentiment may appeal to our romantic ideals. Douglas does concede that it may be possible to abandon the realm of symbolic organisation by organising the religious institution around alternative models (for example economic models). However, she warns that if this occurs, the ethically minded will not ultimately find themselves in a world where they are freed from 'superstition' to pursue meritorious deeds, rather they will find 'that they must give their good causes over to the bureaucratic energies of industrial organization, or they will have no effect'.[141]

Crucial to Douglas' interpretation is the understanding that this situation is not unique to post-modern society but is also something that can be found in so called 'primitive' societies. She therefore, draws a parallel between the understanding that certain clergy have of religion and that of the forest dwelling pygmies of Zaire.[142] At first glance this society may seem strikingly different to the seminary, for these pygmies live in a very loosely organised society that revolves around hunting; however Douglas suggests that both would be plotted as having low grid.[143] For the pygmies also pride themselves on having reached a high level of intellectual development and 'cannot conceive of the deity as located in any one thing or place'.[144] Indeed Turnbull records that when the forest-dwelling pygmies were invited to the initiation ritual of the nearby villagers they could not understand the value of the complex ritual and symbols and deliberately flouted the ritual rules and conventions.[145]

Douglas takes us beyond Geertz's somewhat problematic understanding of the way that reactions to the blurring of contemporary society can be mapped and demonstrates how a mapping of responses to communalised ritual can help account for contemporary issues surrounding the organisation of institutional religion. Her model is not without its critics,[146] and in particular these have focused

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[139]   See section 2.

[140]   Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, p. 21.

[141]   Ibid., p. 53.

[142]   Ibid., p. 52.

[143]   Ibid.

[144]   Ibid.

[145]   Turnbull, *The Forest People*, p. 25.

[146]   Spickard, 'A Guide to Mary Douglas' Three Versions of Grid/Group Theory'.

on the relationship between grid and group, an area that I have avoided discussing here partly because of those problems and partly because it is not central to the concerns of this volume. Despite these criticisms Douglas's analysis presents an excellent example of how an anthropological approach to blurred encounters can make the strange familiar and the familiar strange.

5. An Anthropological Approach to Blurred Encounters

In this chapter we have explored various anthropological understandings of blurred encounters. These are all connected by the way that they move from the specific to the general and attempt to develop approaches that allow us to engage in a comparative analysis that is grounded in the understanding that things have not been done in all times and all places as they are done here and now. They do this whilst challenging assumptions of cultural evolution and the simple opposition of traditional and contemporary societies. Turner's concept of communitas, which is generated during a blurred encounter, for all its problems, valuably highlights several important factors: the potential positivity of blurred encounters, their relationship to structure and their wide geographical and temporal spread. Geertz moves us towards an exploration of how to engage in a cross-cultural comparison of the role that blurred encounters play in various societies and Douglas shows how such a comparison can be attentive to subtle and personal factors as well as grand social movements. By exploring blurred encounters in these ways we can move towards a true understanding of how they inspire the individual, shape social structure, link the past with the present and the near with the far.

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Chapter 12

Baptism as Cultural Conversation: Explorations in Implicit Theology

Martyn Percy

Introduction

Looking at photographs, the literary critic Roland Barthes made a distinction between what he called the 'studium' and the 'punctum'. The studium is the photograph's overt agenda, which might include a view, a person, an event or a drama. This will be the reason why the photograph was taken: to catch an event and preserve it for others to see. But photography cannot control all the images it captures; the eye of the camera is indiscriminate, and may include things in the detail that the photographer never intended to capture in the final image. Quite often, something strange or unfamiliar will slip in, disturbing the studium. Whatever it may be, it is often something that the photographer was not looking to include, but then becomes part of the focus of the viewer; it can become a transfixing point. Often the punctum of a photograph can convey a message, which, if read and interpreted, gives a completely different slant to the studium.[1]

One of my slightly stranger pastimes is reading old parish magazines. By old, I mean those dating from more than 50 years ago, since they often have revealing things to tell us about the ordinariness of parish life and the praxis of ministry, offering some kind of window into how Christianity, theology and contemporary culture were woven together in a bygone era. In the last parish in which I served as honorary curate, I would regularly read and reread the parish letters sent out by previous incumbents, together with their notices of events and services in the parish. One could, for example, read the letters of Oliver Tomkins, who served as vicar of Millhouses in Sheffield during the Blitz. Tomkins would write cheery letters to his parishioners, extolling the virtues of thrift and charity against a background of food rationing. The letters would often provide morale-boosting calls to the parish as a whole, urging them to be resilient and faithful in the midst of their hardships. These hardships would include the bombing of Sheffield, and the need to share their beloved building with the Methodists, who had lost the use of their building during the Blitz.

But in these magazines it was often the punctum that caught my eye more than the studium, and most especially when it came to notices about baptism.

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[1] See Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text* (New York, 1977).

For here, Tomkins urged his parishioners to turn up promptly for baptism at two o'clock on Sunday afternoons, adding that a number of people were in the habit of turning up at half past, thereby missing the service entirely, and causing him to repeat it. In other words, the standard practice for the offering of baptism in the early 1940s made the rite available outside of a normal church service, with the baptism service itself probably not lasting much more than 20 minutes. One can only presume that some parishioners were turning up a little later, possibly slightly the worse for wear after a good lunch, and were still hoping to have their child christened, even though they were half an hour late. Tomkins' notices to his parish clearly suggest that his parishioners were very much used to baptism on demand. Indeed, the rite is regularly referred to as a christening, and as such, enjoyed considerable popularity just over half a century ago.

If one compares the practice of Tomkins to that of today's parish priests, one sees some considerable differences. First, the term 'christening' is almost never used by the clergy, who uniformly prefer the term 'baptism'. Second, baptisms generally take place in the context of a normal act of worship on a Sunday morning. Third, there is little sense in which today's clergy would simply allow baptism parties to turn up with relatively little preparation and allow the child to be baptised virtually on demand. Fourth, there can be no question that Tomkins baptised many more children with his 'open' policy, than have any of his successors with their more restricted policies.

There are doubtless many reasons why the numbers of children being baptised in England over the last 50 years have dwindled. The figures are in some ways startling. Even in the mid-twentieth century, more than half the population of England had been baptised by the established church. In 1994 the figure is 249 per 1,000 live births. By 1997 the figure has dropped to 223 per 1,000. The latest figures for 2002 show 181 per 1,000. In less than a century, the Church of England has slipped from baptising more than 50 per cent of live births to less than one in five.[2] Some sociologists, such as David Martin, have pointed to too much liturgical renewal as being a factor, such that the rite of passage has become too distant from ordinary non-churchgoing culture. Others have suggested that secularisation itself has removed the need for individuals to register the significance of birth (and the transformation or renewal of generational patterns) with institutional religion. Others have argued that a stricter baptism policy, insisting that applicants jump through more 'theological hoops', has alienated the public at large.

There is some merit in all these theories, but I would suggest that the factor that is most worthy of attention is the relationship between socio-cultural expectations around birth and the self understanding of the church in relation to baptism. Put another way, we might say that churches need to pay much greater attention to 'the sacred canopy' (a phrase coined by Peter Berger), the totality of human awareness of the transcendent, especially in the experiences of birth, change and decay, and death. In such an understanding, folk religion or common spirituality becomes as

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[2]   *Church of England Year Book* (London, 1994, 1997 and 2005).

important as official, formal or denominational religion. Berger's thinking closely follows Thomas Luckmann's notion of 'invisible religion', a term that was used positively to describe whatever falls outside the scope of organised religion.[3]

It is not my place here to argue with Berger's or Luckmann's social theories. However, their work provides part of the foundation which underpins this paper, namely an understanding that ideas about the significance and practice of baptism need to be studied not only from the perspective of theology and the formal position of the churches, but also from the vantage point provided by theorists of contemporary culture, who have a broader understanding of the purposes of ritual within society. To that end, I want to proceed by outlining a basic hypothesis that is concerned with what I have termed 'implicit theology'; this will take up the first part of the paper. A second part outlines why attention to this area (focused on baptism) is important for the field of theology and the practice of the churches.

Implicit Theology

Strictly speaking, the vast majority of theology is *implicit*. That is to say, it is entangled, entwined and involved in the life of local congregations; it is engaged in areas of overlap and hinterlands between the life of the church and the world. Implicit theology, as the term suggests, understands that most of what is expressed theologically is implied rather than plainly expressed. One need only read any advertisement at the back of a church newspaper to grasp this essential point. A congregation that invites applications from clergy to become their vicar may simply state that their church is liturgical, has vestments and that their main Sunday service is a Eucharist. This instantly marks out a congregation as 'mainstream' (basically broad), but with some slight Catholic influence. Similarly, a congregation that advertises in a different way, that is drawing attention to its lively Family Service, or to its experimental patterning of home groups, is likely to suggest a different kind of theological and ecclesial outlook. In neither of these two examples is it necessary for the congregation to plainly state what kind of theological outlook they hope that their clergy will have: the desired outlook is implied through the preferred mode of praxis that is stated in the advertisement. Theology is *implied*.

Implicit theology, not unlike 'implicit religion',[4] understands that much of what is said and expressed in the name of God and the name of the church is a mixture of official and formal religion, together with operant and folk religion. Moreover, it is only in paying attention to local customs and linguistic accents that we can even begin to understand how God is *particularly* incarnate for this community

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[3]   See Peter Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion* (London, 1973); and Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion*, (New York, 1967).

[4]   A phrase coined and developed in the work of Edward Bailey. See Edward Bailey, *Implicit Religion in Contemporary Society*, (Kampen, 1997). See also R. Towler, *Homo Religiosus* (London, 1974).

or that congregation. Typically, one might say that implicit theology and implicit religion come together in the world of ritual, and most especially those rites of passage offered by the church. Following Mary Douglas, we might say that rituals operate a little like 'restricted codes', in which there is a more rigid ordering of the linguistic patterns, a higher degree of particularity and contextuality, and a higher volume of non-verbal elements. However, rituals are not merely restricted codes; they are also 'elaborate codes' in which the rational, explicitly verbal and personal relationship with God becomes more highly developed than normal. Viewed from an Anglican perspective, this is something that Robert Runcie appears to understand all too well:

> Confronted by the wistful, the half-believing and the seeking, we know what it is to minister to those who relate to the faith of Christ in unexpected ways. We do not write off hesitant and inadequate responses to the gospel. Ours is a church of the smoking flax, of the mixture of wheat and tares. Critics may say that we blunt the edge of the gospel and become Laodicean. We reply that we do not despise the hesitant and half-believing, because the deeper we look into human lives the more often we discern the glowing embers of faith.[5]

The role of ritual, then, is to inspire and then formulate responses to the sacred. For our purposes here, the rite of baptism marks a new beginning, and also enables an encounter with the mystery of creation. The birth of the child can generate a tsunami of emotions within a family, which may include a number of religious feelings centred on gratitude and wonder. Typically, such feelings often seek a focus in the ceremonial, and for many parish clergy this will result in a request for baptism. At the level of common or folk spirituality, clergy may well be faced with the expression of such sentiments as 'the baby will not go to heaven unless he is properly done' or 'I want her to have a good start in life'. It is easy to be dismissive of such sentiments, particularly when the church wants to speak in more formal theological language about baptism as incorporation into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and membership of the Christian community. The challenge for clergy (together with theologians), is in comprehending how implicit theology is expressed, and to discern how the spirituality being expressed is to be interpreted in such a way that it can be brought into the presence of Christ, where it can be both challenged and affirmed.

With one or two rare exceptions, the place and significance of implicit theology or implicit religion in the life of communities and congregations has been better understood by sociologists than by theologians.[6] In David Clark's prescient study of a north-eastern English fishing community (Staithes), he shows how the liminal

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5   Robert Runcie, 'Presidential Address to the General Synod of the Church of England', *General Synod Reports on Proceedings* 21/3 (1963): 1042.

6   Amongst the exceptions within the English Anglican tradition, recent writers to single out are Wesley Carr, Paul Avis and Christopher Moody.

qualities of the unbaptised infant are a matter of concern for all. He notes how baptism has been traditionally seen as a bridging point: it is a ritual that mediates between original sin and welcoming the child into the family of the church. It contains the idea of movement: from one social realm to another; from sin to forgiveness; and from being an outsider to being a member. Baptism brings to an end the liminal state of the child, who hovers between two worlds. The ritual brings resolution and aggregation, not only in theological terms, but also at the level of community and generational understandings, together with those ideas and sentiments that may proceed from folk religion.[7]

Clark, drawing on the work of earlier sociologists, notes how people are often usually muddled and unclear about their reasons for having their children baptised. Invariably, individuals and communities have very strong feelings about the death and burial of unbaptised children, which largely rests on the ambivalence about the child entering a social world and yet never becoming part of it. In other words, without their liminal state being resolved, they remain in an in-between state; a kind of social and theological limbo. This, Clark points out, accounts for why children in the earlier part of the twentieth century were often baptised at a very young age, often before they were two months old, in case illness lead to premature death. From the perspective of the parents and the community, it was desirable to make the infant belong to the world as soon as possible. Making them a member of the church, in a public and yet ambivalent way, could partially or mostly achieve this.

In Clark's fieldwork-based study, he suggests that baptism was often seen in a pragmatic and instrumental light. Baptisms were frequently carried out in the home – especially amongst those of chapel-going families that felt removed from the stiffness and class-based austerity of the Anglican church. (Or at least this is how it was perceived.[8]) The baptism, by being conducted in the home, became an intimate ritual that had little ritual elaboration, but was nonetheless seen as a rite that protected the child in the afterlife in the event of dying in infancy. Correspondingly, the churching, or purification of women, took place when the new mother first went to church after the birth: this was the resolution of her liminality after a period of confinement; her re-emergence as a new social being, which also had social and cultural resonances as much as they might have been theological.[9]

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[7]   David Clark, *Between Pulpit and Pew: Folk Religion in a North Yorkshire Fishing Village* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 116ff.

[8]   One should note that baptising at home has not always been an unusual practice amongst Anglicans, as the *Diaries of Parson Woodforde* confirm. Woodforde not only baptised on home visits, but also did so in his own rectory parlour (using a punch bowl), arguing that it was warmer and more intimate than his church.

[9]   For an interesting study of women's perspectives on churching, see E. Clark King, *Theology By Heart* (London, 2005).

For many in contemporary Western culture, underwritten as it is by all kinds of assumptions about the power and competence of medicine, churching women can either look quaint, or perhaps plain superstitious. But its function in ancient times (e.g., as 'purification' – see Lk. 2:22ff) was both ritualistic and medical. The 40-day period between birth and 'purification' is a biological and religious time-span; biological, since this is approximately the time it takes for the new mother's body to readjust after birth; religious, because of the connotations of passing through times of trial, also linked to the number forty. But in modern liturgies, churching or 'purification' has been misunderstood, and reconstituted as 'thanksgiving for the birth of the child'. Actually, the original rite celebrates the safe-keeping of the mother and her social re-aggregation. The rite carries and conveys more implicit theology than immediately meets the eye.

In both churching and baptism, the liminality of the mother and child is ended by a rite of passage. However, as Clark points out,[10] the close of the twentieth century saw the virtual end of churching, and the movement of baptism from the home to the chapel, with a consequential increase in ritual activity. That said, aspects of folk religion persisted even in the twentieth century: gifts of salt (symbolising preservation), an egg (symbolising fertility) and a coin (symbolising wealth) were still often brought to the new mother and baby, once they had returned from maternity hospital. The continuing practice of offering these gifts, almost certainly pre-Christian in origin, but now endowed with a meaning that has a Christian gloss, demonstrate a remarkable spiritual resilience.

Other informal practices can also be observed in relation to birth. Clark again points out how folk customs persist, often stubbornly, in the face of the medicalisation of birth. Crossing a child's palm with silver (a coin, for wealth), touching the forehead (for luck, but also an act of blessing) and 'wetting the baby's head' (toasting the child, but also a nod towards baptism) remain commonplace. The wrapping of the baby in a family shawl, often a valuable heirloom passed down from mother to daughter, establishes a pattern of generational continuity and a sign of God's continual bestowal of favour and fertility. The exchange of gifts also establishes social hierarchies; the giver has seniority and status, and the receiver is dependent. The giving of silver plates, knives, forks, spoons and napkin rings also has a resonance that is suggestive of longevity, and eventually taking one's place in the community. The practice of not welcoming an unbaptised baby into one's house also suggests a complex mixture of superstition and theologically resourced ideas (i.e., original sin, etc.); and churching, that whatever is 'unclean' in childbirth or conception, is resolved through ritual.

The baptism ritual then, taken as a whole, is more than the sum of the parts provided by the church or minister. The selection of godparents and sponsors can represent a realignment of families, their status and levels of responsibility. The gifts and their donors establish how the child is to be supported, or how this is to be symbolised. Who carries and formally names the child in a baptism ceremony also

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[10]   **Clark**, *Between Pulpit and Pew*, p. 123.

carries intimate social weight which is often invisible to the minister. The cutting of a christening cake and the making of a wish (i.e., hope or luck for the future) point to a network of extended and informal rituals that last for a few or several months, which in turn have spiritual or 'folk religious' resonance. Granted, one may say that these informal practices have little to do with the church. But another way of regarding them is to see them as being related closely to the baptism, with the Christian ritual itself as the focal point in which the informal spiritual (or superstitious) practices actually find their proper place.

An understanding of implicit theology allows us to see that each of the gestures surrounding a birth has some kind of intention that points towards some higher spiritual, theological or social meaning. The actual gesture may not carry that meaning in any perfected manner, or in a way that has an obvious explicit theological purpose or indication. But that is not the point. The informal rituals and gestures are subtle, nuanced and insinuating modes of behaviour that complement the practice of baptism. Or, put another way and to return to the analogy deployed at the beginning of this essay, we can now see that what appear to be the distracting aspects surrounding baptism are in fact part and parcel of the extended nature of the ritual. The punctum, which for many ministers, apparently takes the focus away from the main studium of baptism can be reread as vital and welcome elements within the ritual. In turn, this allows the ritual of baptism to be renarrated as a complex set of rituals with overlapping intentions and meanings, in which the provision of the church is, granted, the focal point – but by no means the only element.

Baptismal Performance: Congregational and Ministerial Practice

Studying congregations can appear to be, at one level, a pointless task. Is it not obvious how they are constituted, and what they believe? On the one hand, the adherence to creeds and religious articles can be taken for granted. But then again, many will relate to these, without necessarily fully understanding them or even being in agreement with them. Superficially, it can appear that some congregations talk about God all the time, whilst others never. An outspoken Australian, Caroline Miley,[11] gives a damming description of what constitutes Anglican polity at congregational levels:

> A considerable source of surprise for newcomers to the Church is that Christians do not like talking about Christianity. Not only do they not talk about it willingly and enthusiastically but they have a tendency to become alarmed or resentful if the topic is openly addressed or pursued. This applies to both clergy and laity. This is very odd as in every other interest-based organisation, discussion of the interest is universal, even mandatory. Hang-gliding clubs are full of people who

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[11]   Caroline Miley, *The Suicidal Church: Can Anglicanism Be Saved?* (Annandale, 2002).

discuss hang-gliding. Rotarians discuss rotary; football fans bore others to death with discussion of their fancy. Christians, however, do not discuss Christianity. To do so after church on Sunday morning is to be made aware that one has committed a frightful faux pas.[12]

But this 'analysis' ignores three vital things. First, the deeply coded ways in which people talk and act about God (e.g., 'I'll be thinking of you this week' = prayer; or 'I'll drop by with some scones' = a bereavement visit) are not forms of spiritual evasion, but of subtle and intimate religious communication. Second, that religious language is carried in the emotion, timbre and cadence of worship, which for Anglicans is often cool, reflective and apparently detached (when compared to the 'warmer' and more intimate language of, say, charismatics). Third, that deeply coded language is not a strategy for avoiding explicit theological language; rather, it carries and conveys a range of rich *implicit* theological concepts that engage people at a variety of missiological and ecclesiological levels, including intellectually and relationally.

As Barbara Wheeler notes, 'the enormous variety in the literature notwithstanding, many of the subtleties and nuances of the lives of local churches remain unaccounted for'.[13] For James Hopewell, a congregation is a rich and varied arena for research:

> As slight and predictable as the language of a congregation might seem on casual inspection, it actually reflects a complex process of human imagination. Each is a negotiation of metaphors, a field of tales and histories and meanings that identify its life, its world, and God. Word, gesture, and artifact form local language – a system of construable signs that Clifford Geertz, following Weber, calls a 'web of significance'. Even a plain church on a pale day catches one in a deep current of narrative interpretation and representation by which people give sense and order to their lives. Most of this creative stream is unconscious and involuntary, drawing in part upon images lodged long ago in the human struggle for meaning. Thus a congregation is held together by much more than creeds, governing structures and programs. At a deeper level, it is implicated in the symbols and signals of the world, gathering and surrounding them in the congregation's own idiom.[14]

Commenting on this dynamic, Wade Clark Roof notes in *Community and Commitment*, that beliefs of churches cannot be construed entirely in terms of their credal statements:

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[12]   'Cultural Diversity and Anglican Polity', May 2005; and Kate Fox, *Watching the English* (London, 2004).

[13]   James Hopewell, *Congregation: Stories and Structure* (London, 1987), p. xi.

[14]   Hopewell, *Congregation*, p. 12.

> Theological doctrines are always filtered through people's social and cultural experiences. What emerges in a given situation as 'operant religion' will differ considerably from the 'formal religion' of the historic creeds, and more concern with the former is essential to understanding how belief systems function in people's daily lives.[15]

In this case, 'operant religion' is a term that approximates to the use of the expression 'vernacular religion', 'common spirituality' or even 'implicit religion'. Studying congregations, of course, is something that is not taught at theological college. The roots of this absence lie in a profound deficiency in the notion of theological education, and in an impoverished understanding of theology, of how God acts in the world. Disciplines such as practical theology can help the churches here, by rescuing the questions, definitions and shape of theology from the world of the idealized and returning it to the concrete. Hopewell once again draws our attention to the agenda, noting how the theological enterprise is something richer and more empathetic than many presume:

> To ponder seriously the finite culture of one's own church, given the promise of God's redemptive presence within it, opens up a vast hermeneutical undertaking. The congregation recedes as primarily a structure to be altered and emerges as a structure of social communication within which God's work in some ways already occurs. The hermeneutical task is not merely the mining of biblical revelation in ways meaningful to individuals. It is more basically the tuning of the complex discourse of a congregation so that the gospel sounds within the message of its many voices.[16]

Congregational studies can be especially important when considering baptismal practice. For here one can see that such practices are rarely driven by explicit theology or by commonly owned (let alone understood) creedal formulae. For example, in one church there may be considerable suspicion about 'open' baptism policies. The practice of the church will be restrictive, making sure that all who apply for baptism are subjected to appropriate interviews and courses that establish a level of understanding about what the nature of the rite is, and what it confers. Others will be more 'open', but their policy will simply speak (implicitly) of a deeper form of theological praxis. Three brief caricatures can help us gain some further purchase on this.

The first of these posits that a 'low' ecclesial view of baptism sees the rite in somewhat functional terms: this is a movement to God initiated by the person; a confession with a ritual. Typically, congregations and ministers practising like this will reserve baptism for adults: 'God ain't gonna bless 'til you does confess.' The rite is, in other words, for believers: faith must be articulated and sins confessed.

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[15]   Wade Clark Roof, *Community and Commitment* (New York, 1985), pp. 178–9.
[16]   Hopewell, *Congregation*, p. 197.

Baptism is the person's decision and initiation into faith. Behind this praxis, one can see that there is a degree of implicit theology that is normally hidden from the casual observer: God is in people, not in places or 'things' – so a plain building will do for church. Salvation is known in the heart and mind, and invariably individualistic. There may be no need for creeds, as they are not in the Bible. There may be no liturgy or obvious historic 'tradition': the church will normally be led by a pastor.

The second would suggest that a 'medium' view of baptism identifies the rite as conferring membership of the church; correspondingly, others can confess on behalf of the child. Baptism, in this sense, is not unlike a form of enrollment. In turn, this places a greater stress on the words and water used in the rite, since these materials become pivotal points of instrumentality through which God meets the child and his or her sponsors, and they meet God. The rite therefore acquires a sacramental and confessional dimension, whereby baptism is seen as a 'sign' of salvation within the church. In terms of implicit theology, the 'medium' view is common to established Protestant churches and Anglicans. The *via media* between symbol and action, words and water, it is intended to connote the covenantal dimension of sacraments. God meets us, speaks to us and welcomes us long before we can address God. Baptism is therefore both a response to God's invitation as well as a form of initiation. In such churches, God may be deemed to be 'present' there, where buildings are held to reflect divine glory in spatial structure. The church is therefore a place where you find God in the totality of worship, which will invariably be led by a minister.

The third position we term 'high', whereby baptism is joining the communion of saints. Here, words are important; but it is the water that is holy, taking on a sacramental–salvific character. Baptism makes the child a child of God, redeeming it from the stain of original sin. The high view identifies God's availability in sacramental material. Just as words are vehicles of grace (the Bible), so can water be an instrument of salvation. Correspondingly, the implicit theological emphasis will rest on what God is doing through material to a person: perhaps through bread, wine or water. Although stress is placed on the condition of the recipient, the high view allows the inarticulate and dumb to receive. God's presence is seen as being available distinctively in sacramental material, holy writ and places (including shrines). God's power comes through divinely instituted Holy Orders, which are imbued in both people and material. Typically, such churches pay attention to aesthetics, with beauty, art and liturgy resonating with the mystical body of Christ, which itself mirrors the worship of the saints in heaven, all of which is normally orchestrated through and by a priest.

Granted, these baptismal perspectives are caricatures. But each of them corresponds, broadly, to commonly perceived practices which are themselves detectable in a range of implicit and explicit theological expressions. One can also see how each position represents a nascent theory about the identity of the church, and how membership or inclusion is conferred. Noting this dynamic, Stark and Bainbridge use sociological exchange theory to construct their models of church.

They balance the *tension* a group desires or tolerates with the *rewards* (sometimes called *compensators*, if rewards cannot be actualised) its members seek. Tension signifies the relationship with the world and the internal structure of the group. Rewards are the spiritual benefits of belonging. The degree of 'exchange' or the 'success' of the congregation is determined, to an extent, by the amount of power that the congregation appears to have, or can call upon, and can exercise. The more powerful a congregation is, the greater the (apparent) rewards on offer.[17]

For example, a 'successful' church may offer a ministry principally concerned with individual salvation. In a 'high-tension' relationship with the world, it assumes sectarian and communitarian properties, and is likely to eschew 'open' baptismal policies. However, a neighbouring congregation with fewer members may well offer a more 'open' baptismal policy, not only for theological reasons, but also because it neither gains nor loses by offering lower thresholds of entry for membership. Put another way, whereas one church can offer a tightly defined type of membership, another may seek a looser form of connectedness that is expressed both in its polity and its baptismal praxis. Both models are valid attempts to construct a theological conversation with the world, which in turn will lead to the conferring of membership. Both models also tend to imply their theological position through praxis, rather than through explicitly stated formulae. Given this, we now turn to considering baptismal practice and theology as a form of modelling cultural conversation.

Theology as Cultural Conversation

One of the most pressing challenges faced by theology and the churches is how to engage with contemporary culture. For many, engagement, it seems, is a contested and risky affair. Some theological and ecclesiological traditions feel so threatened by the prospect of being overwhelmed or consumed by the task of engagement that they retreat before they have advanced; standing apart from key issues and debates in culture is seen to be the only way of protecting the integrity and identity of the Christian tradition. Others prefer a different strategy, namely one of deep engagement; but in so doing, can find themselves so transformed that they become alienated from their roots.

There is no dispute that churchgoing has been in decline in most Western countries since the 1960s. Although it is currently the fashion to talk about European exceptionalism here, in truth, it is the USA that is unusual, since declines in churchgoing can be tracked in Australia, New Zealand and many other places. But as we know, and as sociologists remind us, the statistics we have cannot be read 'simply'; the complex data demand an equally complex interpretation, and if we are to hold our nerve as a church within contemporary culture, it is vital that we

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[17] See R. Stark and W. Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion* (New York, 1987), ch. 1.

have robust cultural understandings of our current situation. Robin Gill suggests that there are four possible theories of churchgoing.[18]

First, there are *secularisation* theories, perhaps especially the kinds espoused by Steve Bruce, Callum Brown, the early work of Peter Berger and the offerings of the late Bryan Wilson. However, many sociologists have demonstrated, both from a theoretical and empirical perspective, that crude or blunt secularisation theories are inadequate in their interpretation of churchgoing habits.

Second, there are *persistence* theories, those offered by Rodney Stark, David Martin and myself. Here, the argument runs that although there is detachment from the duties and formal obligations of religion, it nonetheless persists as part of public life. Correspondingly, scholars such as Jose Casanova show that religion can both decline and persist at the same time; where religion loses influence in the intensive and specific spheres of public life, it often makes up the loss in extensive attraction: and this movement can flow the other way too.

Third, and perhaps developing theories 1 and 2, there are *separation* theories, perhaps best represented by Grace Davie, Peter Berger's more recent work, but with Anthony Giddens and Reginald Bibby also contributing. Here the key point to acknowledge is the gap that has opened up between believing and belonging, the latter having declined whilst the former mutates and, at the very least, holds its own.

Fourth, and finally, Gill suggests that there is a *cultural* theory to be explored. Here Gill suggests that churches, as moral communities, do hold and foster distinctive beliefs and values that in turn sustain individual and community identity. Correspondingly, a decline in belonging will, inevitably, lead to a decline in beliefs. If belonging collapses, the community and authority that sustains the beliefs cannot continue in the same way. The implications for the future of baptismal practice, and for theology as a mode of practice, are indeed profound.

During the last 50 years, and since Niebuhr's ground-breaking *Christ and Culture*,[19] a significant number of theologians have attempted theological engagements with 'culture'. Broadly speaking, there have been two major modes of engagement in relation to contemporary culture, which have to some extent bifurcated. The first tradition broadly conceives of the engagement as a form of interlocking combative encounter with contemporary culture. The second broadly sees it as a form of intra-related binding, covenant or commitment. Both lead to the formation of their own distinctive cultures (e.g., characteristic missiological and ecclesiological outlooks), which increasingly do not know how to talk to one other. Whilst the adoption of both strategies delivers a certain degree of poise and reflexivity, their inability to relate to one another leads to an impoverished form of public theology. In effect, both traditions could be said to somewhat culturally dyslexic (the etymology of the word lies in a conflation, from the Greek *lexis*, 'to speak', and the Latin, *legere* 'to read'). Thus, and of culture, it could be said that

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[18]   Robin Gill, *Churchgoing and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge, 1999).
[19]   Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York, 1951).

modern theologians and the churches tend neither to speak properly nor read well. Niebuhr suggests that there are five theological responses to the complexity of a Christian faith immersed in culture. The first type stresses the opposition between Christ and culture; this is the Christ *against* culture. The second type is diametrically opposed to the first: 'there is a fundamental *agreement* between Christ and culture'. This is the Christ who is *of* or *for* culture. These two basic types represent the two primary faces of engagement that can be identified in the life of the church, and the remaining three types all flow from these two primary typologies. However, there are also four distinct types of religion–culture relationships that can be identified: religion is part of culture; culture is part of religion; culture may be 'religious'; and religion and culture can undertake a variety of serious academic dialogues.

Given the issue of baptism, its social, cultural and religious ambiguity, and following Stark and Bainbridge, we can see why and how the practice of baptism as a form of negotiated ritual between church and world becomes an acute and focal issue for churches. Rather as Troeltsch thought, the bearers of the Christian tradition long to give something to the world, but invariably do not know how. On the one hand, Christians can provide symbolic legitimation for the prevailing society and culture, thereby generating the 'church type' of interaction that theologians such as Barth were so critical of. On the other hand, there can be protest against the prevailing powers and an attempt to set up a counter-society, thereby generating the 'sect type' response that Tillich was so critical of.

So to return to Troeltsch for a moment, baptism is not administered adequately by either the 'church type' or 'sect type' orientation, since the controlling ideology normally restricts the mode and tenor of cultural engagement. Yet if the ministry of the church is to reflect God's self-gift in Jesus Christ, then there will be an element of praxis in the pastoral which will empathetically shape the gift that is defined and delimited by the ideological. Baptism (or in more vernacular language, 'christening') will at once be an ambiguous sacrament of welcome at the very borders of the church even as it proceeds from its centre and speaks of a specific intensity of faith. Thus, rightly conceived, the sacrament invites a church–world 'negotiation' (i.e., between 'culture' and 'religion', or 'orthodoxy' and 'vernacular religion') as a sign of God's grace and inclusivity, but without penalizing the borders of its' necessary exclusivity. As one cultural commentator notes: 'Religion is not effective because it is otherworldly, but because it incarnates this otherworldliness in a practical form of life … a link between absolute values and daily life.'[20] Such a view might lead us to explore the identity of baptismal culture as a hybrid or relational affair, and to develop a theology and transforming praxis that closely corresponds to that reality, yet without actually mirroring it. Because Christian identity itself is relational, it hinges both on cultural engagement and being open to direction from the free grace of God. This allows us to relate the 'core' values of religious belief to society/culture in a more reflexive manner, which in turn creates new possibilities for theology as a public discourse. Drawing inspiration

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[20]   Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford, 2000), p. 21

from writers such as David Tracy, conversation can therefore be commended as a major mode of theological engagement. Equally, collage can be considered as an analogical and methodological description for how theology is to be constructed in relation to culture; particularly contested cultural practices such as christening. In so doing, theology is able to attend to whole areas of human experience and understanding that are normally neglected by faith communities. But such a move requires a risk, namely of theology and the churches ceasing to operate as an autonomous discipline ('private grammar of faith') and to take its place as a distinctive mode of discourse that seeks to operate within a wider nexus of cultural and spiritual contexts.

Given these remarks, I am bound to say that one should also give due recognition to the fact that practices shape beliefs, and religious beliefs also shape practice. In any theology of culture (perhaps especially when focused on rituals such as christening or baptism), the infusion of religion within culture (and vice versa) must be given its proper due. As Kathryn Tanner notes:

> Religious beliefs are a form of culture, inextricably implicated in the material practices of daily social living on the part of those who hold them … in the concrete circumstances in which beliefs are lived … actions, attitudes, and interests are likely to be as much infiltrated and informed by the beliefs one holds as beliefs are to be influenced by actions, attitudes and interests.[21]

In other words, doctrines practise us; practices are not just things that Christians do in the light of doctrine: 'practices are what we become as we are set in motion in the space of doctrine'.[22] In this sense, we are once again close to Lindbeck's theory of theology; its performative dimension as something that is 'cultural–linguistic': it (i.e., doctrine, belief, etc.) 'gains power and meaning insofar as it is embodied in the total gestalt of community life and action'.[23] But there is an irony here for the theologian, and for the church. For in gaining an understanding of how the world beliefs and practice begin to cohere, one immediately sees that they, in fact, do not. As Tanner says:

> Christian practices do not in fact require (1) much explicit understanding of beliefs that inform and explain their performance, (2) agreement upon such matters among the participants, (3) strict delimitation of codes for action, (4) systematic consistency among beliefs or actions, or (5) attention to their significance that isolates them from a whole host of non-Christian commitments. More often than not, Christian practices are instead quite open-ended in the sense

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21   Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture* (Minneapolis, 1992), p. 9.
22   M. Volf and D. Bass (eds), *Practicing Theology* (Grand Rapids, 2002), p. 75.
23   George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia, 1984), p. 36.

of being undefined in their exact ideational dimensions and in the sense of being always in the process of re-formation in response to new circumstances.[24]

So, in the light of this brief cultural and theological study of baptismal practice, we might now ask, what are Christian practices and beliefs? I take them to be 'resonances of God's engagement with the world'.[25] And in this respect, we might then argue that theology should always be in deep dialogue with practice and belief – 'real life', the 'concrete church' and the context of 'operant' or 'vernacular' religion. It is here that the practical theologian will encounter individuals and communities 'working out their own (version of) salvation'.[26] Browning calls the church and theology to account when he writes that:

> The theologian does not stand before God, Scripture and the historic witness of the church like an empty slate or Lockean tabula rasa ready to be determined, filled up, and then plugged into a concrete practical situation. A more accurate description goes like this. We come to the theological task with questions shaped by the secular and religious practices in which we are implicated – sometimes uncomfortably. These practices are meaningful or theory-laden.[27]

Thus, theologians and ministers have to learn that they cannot rely on theological blueprints to determine how congregations could or should be in contemporary culture. In this respect, theology needs to work with fields such as congregational studies in helping the church to become exegetes of the text of the congregation, and local culture of a given context.[28] And, as Karen Yust reminds us, this requires engagement with 'several social science disciplines … [so that they can] describe congregational life in its thickness'.[29] This epiphany leads us to agree with Roberts, who argues that theology itself, and most especially practical theology, is 'a practical process of discerning God's will … a community activity requiring conversation and interaction'.[30]

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[24] K. Tanner, 'Theological Reflection and Christian Practices', in Miroslav Volf and Dorothy Bass (eds), *Practicing Theology* (Grand Rapids, 2002), pp. 228–44 (229).

[25] Tanner, 'Theological Reflection and Christian Practices', p. 240.

[26] Phil. 2:12.

[27] Don Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology* (Minneapolis, 1991), p. 2.

[28] For further discussion, see Martyn Percy, *Engaging Contemporary Culture* (Aldershot, 2005).

[29] K. Yust, 'Teaching Seminarians to be Practical Theologians', *Encounter* 63 (2002): 237–52 (241).

[30] R. Roberts, *Religion, Theology and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 184.

Conclusion

Interestingly, there are still plenty of signs of such conversation and interaction in the praxis of the churches. The Alpha Courses, for example, which have become a global brand of Christian initiation through the energy and creativity of Nicky Gumbel, have taken a decided therapeutic and relational turn considering its evangelical roots. Gone is the 'get up out of your seat and come to the front' style of crusading popularised by Billy Graham in large stadiums throughout the world for almost a century. Gumbel has replaced the 'big ritual' of the old-fashioned revivalist rally with something more intimate, homely and personal. Here, the process of initiation has become modular, progressive and consumerist; a chance to sample Christianity, then buy.

These remarks, I should add, should not be read as a criticism of Alpha. They are, rather, an attempt to show how the practice of initiation, not unlike the baptising and churching practices uncovered by Clark in Staithes, remain stubbornly intra-related to social and cultural values. Moreover, those cultural values, whether expressed in social realms or in the informal and operant practices of the church, tend to speak of an implicit theology that requires a deeper kind of attention and interpretation from theologians if one is to understand how the church is engaging with the world. As I have suggested, such an understanding needs to conceive of theology as a mode of cultural conversation; speaking, listening, interpreting and belonging within the world, even as it seeks to be an agent of its transformation by virtue of being 'other-worldly'. Sacraments are not, in other words, the mere practice of the doctrine or teaching of the church. They are, rather, part of a more complex cultural nexus in which theology is a significant conversation partner within the realm of operant religion.

These observations take us back to some of the points made at the beginning of this essay. Churches in Western Europe have, generally speaking, experienced or begun to experience a sharp decline in the numbers of families requesting baptism over the last 50 years. Undoubtedly, part of the reason for this can be located in the responses of the churches to secularisation and cultural pluralism. This has led the churches to define the concept and practice of baptism more sharply, over and against those understandings which have persisted within contemporary culture. In some respects this is understandable, given the need for churches, like any other organisation, to stand out as being distinctive within a more competitive and consumerist culture. However, in exercising more control over the rite of baptism, and therefore distancing it from established local customs, implicit theology and 'folk religion', the rite has progressively shifted from being a public ritual offered by the church to being a more privatised ecclesial rite.

Paul Avis, commenting on the rite of baptism in relation to the phenomenon of 'common religion', notes how the rubrics of the *Book of Common Prayer* service for the public baptism of infants urges the clergy and the parents of children not to

defer baptism beyond the fifth Sunday after the birth.[31] Similarly, Richard Hooker warns the clergy against impeding the baptism of infants.[32] But the contemporary church, anxious as it is about membership and its meaning, has tended to be seduced by more restrictive baptismal practices. This is a pity, since when new, stricter rubrics are developed by congregations, they frequently fail to read the resonant cultural traditions surrounding birth and ritual that have already been present for many centuries. Carl Jung, writing to a Protestant pastor on infant baptism, states that:

> Every event of our biological life has a numinous character: birth, puberty, marriage, illness … this is a natural fact demanding recognition, a question waiting for an answer. It is a need that should be satisfied with a solemn act, characterising the numinous moment with a combination of words and gestures of an archetypal, symbolic nature. Rites give satisfaction to the collective and numinous aspects of the moment, beyond their purely personal significance … to unite the present with the historical and mythological past.[33]

Such a recognition calls for churches and theologians to recognise the negotiated aspect of sacramental rites; as public rituals with cultural aspects as well as religious meanings.[34] It also suggests that imaginative and reflexive pastoral practice, that deeply reads cultural forms and also understands Christian tradition, is an important key in the 'performance of doctrine'. This is not a state of being that is wholly concerned with establishing the criteria for membership of congregations, but instead understands that rituals function in an ambivalent hinterland, which brings focus to the collation of perceptions of the numinous that surround the mystery of creation and birth. In turn, this stance perceives that infant baptism is not about 'making' members; it is about drawing near, engaging, affirming and blessing, thereby initiating a process of incorporation, which is itself Christian initiation. The ritual, offered openly, is simply a reification of God's complete love and grace.[35]

In this kind of understanding of the practice of baptism, theology itself then begins to emerge as a form of empathetic conversation with contemporary culture, rather than a mode of expression that merely resists it, or perhaps seeks to impose its own different definition upon the world. It is from this kind of position that

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[31] Paul Avis, *Church Drawing Near* (London, 2003), p. 121.

[32] Richard Hooker, *Of The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, vol. 2 (3rd edn, Oxford, 1845), p. 373 [Book V. ix. 7].

[33] Carl Jung, *Letters* (ed. G. Adler; 2 vols, London, 1960), vol. 1, p. 208.

[34] Avis, *Church Drawing Near*, p. 193.

[35] On a purely personal note, this is why I favour an 'open' baptism policy, even to the extent of conducting the majority of rites 'privately' (i.e., not within the context of a normal church service). On this, see R. Allen, '3 O'clock Please, Vicar', *Parson and Parish* 163 (Epiphany 2005): 12–13.

one can begin to see how much of the nascent cultural practice surrounding birth can be read more generously and creatively. Indeed, such local cultural practices suggest that the timbre, cadences and resonances that are prompted by birth, and stirred in the world by the rumour of God and the sense of the numinous, can be appropriately interpreted as a valid form of implicit theology. If such spiritual sentience can be met empathetically and creatively, churches might once again encounter the prospect of the world drawing near at the time of birth. As Jesus said: 'Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them. For to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.'[36]

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[36] Mt. 19:13.

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Chapter 13

Truth in Science and Theology: Latour, Žižek and the Theory of Circulating Reference

John Reader

Introduction

The 'blurred encounters' adventure began with a crossing of boundaries between the practical and the theoretical. The theoretical dimension emerged as I studied the relationship between faith and reason as it had developed since the Enlightenment, and what became evident was a cultural and intellectual schizophrenia with matters of the mind being split from matters of the heart. This is a crude description, but is not too far from the truth, as the counter-Enlightenment presented itself as a reaction against this and attempted to re-establish the importance of feeling and emotion through what became known as Romanticism. Faith of course was readily identified with the level of feeling and subjectivity and thus banished from the more objective areas of human endeavour.

The practical dimension surfaced through a series of local involvements where it seemed to me that decisions and judgements made in public life, and claiming to be objective, were in fact riddled with other motives and drivers that were not being acknowledged. A prime example of this was the way in which the UK government, working through its scientific advisors, handled the foot-and-mouth outbreak of 2001. I do not intend to repeat the details of this as there is a chapter devoted to it in *Blurred Encounters*.[1] Issues of public policy and concern are supposedly dealt with rationally and objectively and any other levels of human functioning, the subjective, unconscious or faith-based responses, are excluded from the process but then disrupt its smooth running somewhat in the manner of a naughty child demanding attention. Is there a better way? Can one at least show that there are locations for encounter between these different levels and perhaps ways of bringing them back into relationship?

This is far from being solely an intellectual problem given the resurgent role of religion in both national and global political life. For instance; how are Western liberal democracies to understand the claims of some forms of Islam to construct

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[1]   John Reader, *Blurred Encounters: A Reasoned Practice of Faith* (St Bride's Major, 2005), ch. 6.

political life on religious foundations when the liberal tradition believes this is both illegitimate and reflects an earlier stage of human development? How is one to evaluate the influence of the religious right in the USA and that nation's own internal differences over the relationship between politics and faith? Even in the UK, current government policy flirts with the notion of drawing faith groups into public life, both because of its concerns with internal security and because it sees such groups as significant providers of social capital. So the tension between faith and reason is played out in myriad ways, as documented by other chapters in this book.

The focus of this chapter though is on the relationship between faith and science. One could argue that this is the main battleground between religion and reason and yet it is the one that has so far received least attention in the 'blurred encounters' approach. One of the reasons for this is that the field is so complex and that one is immediately faced with the question of which interpretation of religion one is relating to which version or self understanding of science. I will mention a number of possibilities simply to suggest that many other discussions are both possible and necessary and to make it clear that this chapter can only briefly propose one fruitful line of enquiry. If they do all have something in common it is a search for the nature of truth, and whether that can even mean the same thing in the different and differing fields of faith and science.

So, for instance, in an earlier investigation into this territory, I drew upon the work of the philosopher Richard Rorty and what he described as his postmodern or relativist approach to science.[2] Rorty challenges the meaning of terms such as objectivity and rationality by replacing a correspondence theory of truth with a consensus theory. It is not that the words we use to describe external reality correspond in some way to that outer world, but rather that humans agree amongst themselves at a particular time that this is what those words will mean and that this is how they will be used in a specific discourse. Consensus is achieved when enough people agree that 'x is true'. Being rational means being civilized and agreeing to operate with tolerance, a respect for the opinions of others, a willingness to listen and to rely on persuasion rather than force. Dogmatism and defensiveness are to be abandoned as people engage with each other reasonably and respectfully. So it is not that science has access to some guaranteed method by which it establishes truth or that it achieves an objectivity which then 'trumps' all other processes of discovery or debate.

Theologians such as Don Cupitt have found this approach attractive and adopted their own non-realist interpretation of Rorty's ideas.[3] This has lead to a vigorous counter-attack from the realist camp amongst theologians and philosophers of science and one might now argue that the consensus amongst these is that the relativist and non-realist views of Rorty and Cupitt are too extreme and to be rejected. The question of truth however remains. Do scientists claim that they

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[2]   John Reader, *Beyond All Reason: The Limits of Post-Modern Theology* (Cardiff, 1997), pp. 38–9.

[3]   Don Cupitt, *The Time Being* (London, 1992).

have accurately described and analysed an external reality to which we have direct and incontrovertible access (realism) or are we actually arguing about words and the way we use them because there is no direct access to that external world (non-realism)? If neither of these is the case then the proposal is that there is a middle road in which humans acknowledge the limits of their knowledge and accept that our access to the outer world is indirect, always mediated by concepts and language which are human constructs, and thus the conclusions we reach are contingent and fallible (critical realism). If this latter is the accepted approach then our claims to truth have to be more guarded and our conclusions provisional and always subject to revision and challenge.

What one encounters in the spaces between faith and science occupied by the majority today is one version or another of this critical realism. Perhaps the most interesting thinkers in this area are J. Wentzel van Huyssteen from Princeton and Roy Bhaskar.[4] Van Huyssteen develops what he calls a non-foundational understanding of science based upon a theory of rationality which draws parallels between the ways in which scientists and theologians operate. Bhaskar is the originator of what is known as dialectical critical realism which has become an established school within the philosophy of science, although Bhaskar himself has now moved beyond this and into the fields of mysticism and spirituality. At some point the work of both these thinkers demands a more detailed investigation.

It remains the case however that some of the most high-profile scientists and theologians who appear regularly in print and on TV appear not to have entered this debate at all and still espouse a form of realism thus setting science and faith on a collision course. Richard Dawkins is the obvious example. Apparently he holds the view that religion is a matter of superstition and is a hangover from an earlier stage of human development that has now been superseded by the findings and methods of scientific debate. Not only that of course, but religion is viewed as a source of human conflict and division and has been responsible for massive amounts of suffering down the ages. At the other extreme are Christians who hold onto their biblical version of reality as being the definitive truth and deny that science is anything other than a human search for an unwarranted dominance over God's creation. Between such extremes no debate is possible.

Having laid out the territory I want to examine the ideas of another possible candidate for a continuing encounter between faith and science, the work of Bruno Latour and what is called 'science studies', which I will describe more fully in a moment. It is not that Latour himself argues for these links or has suggested a connection, but that I believe they can be identified and are worth pursuing. I offer them to others in the hope that they will evaluate that claim for themselves.

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4   Jan Wentzel van Huyssteen, *Essays in Postfoundationalist Theology* (Cambridge, 1997); Jan Wentzel van Huyssteen, *The Shaping of Rationality: Towards Interdisciplinarity in Theology and Science* (Cambridge, 1999); Roy Bhaskar, *Philosophy and the Idea of Freedom* (Oxford, 1991); and Roy Bhaskar, *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom* (London, 1993).

The strength and interest in Latour's work is that he shows how supposedly 'pure' science is constantly reacting with and encountering other spheres of human activity. Context is thus vital, and he argues that truth is a matter of circulating reference rather than either correspondence or consensus. I will then pursue this further by using the work of the Slovenian philosopher Žižek in order to show how faith and science share a world within which one is already 'in the truth' before critical thought or research can begin. We need to examine a real example of how Latour's ideas can illuminate how science operates in practice and to see how this might be informative for a developing relationship between faith and science.

Biosecurity

A good example of the way in which science interacts with other disciplines and indeed with the wider practical, working environment was the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) in Surrey in the summer of 2007, and the ways in which those within government and the general public responded to this. One particular term emerged as a focus for this debate and that was 'biosecurity'. How is one to unearth the different levels of meaning behind such an apparently innocent term? A very straightforward interpretation is that it referred to the measures which were put in place which then guaranteed that no harmful substances, notably the FMD virus, could leak out into the wider environment. The suggestion that the virus responsible for that outbreak had in fact come from the government's own laboratory at Pirbright, was used as an argument that biosecurity at that particular establishment had been deficient in some way. Subsequent attempts to either contain the spread of the virus or to eradicate it completely were also described as putting in place appropriate biosecurity measures.

My concern is that the way the term was being used, and the connotations which were attached to it, was misleading and misrepresents the nature of the reality it purports to describe. It seems to rest upon a determinate and linear view of how science can be applied to the natural order in a way that will yield guaranteed and reliable results – a form of realism in the terminology mentioned earlier. This in itself rests upon a particular understanding of human beings as capable of controlling and influencing their external environment through direct and immediate access. Can there be such a thing as biosecurity that guarantees results in that manner, and what does the use of this term tell us about ourselves? I suggest that the insights of science studies which open up the relationship between science and other aspects of human activity, for instance, economics, politics, the values and practices of faith groups, have something important to reveal.

Let us first see how science is interacting with politics in this discussion. Security is one of the great objectives or obsessions of the age, one might suggest. It is of particular importance to national governments as, in the light of the impact of global forces upon local worlds, it is not obvious that the state apparatus has that much power to influence the course of its citizens' lives any longer. One area, and

perhaps the main one left, where governments can still claim to exercise control of its people's lives is that of security. Of course, this has always been deemed to be a major function of government – to protect its people from external threats and aggressors. What are the main threats as perceived by governments today? They are climate change; potential shortages of or restricted access to energy sources such as oil, gas and water; the economic growth of the new superpowers of Asia; international terrorism; and the spread of harmful disease across the globe. It could be argued that FMD is a minor version of this general range of security issues, hence the capacity of a government to protect its people against this threat is a test of its real power and control. One might say then that biosecurity is a subset of these general concerns and high on the UK government's agendas for largely political reasons.

Science studies which claims to examine and reveal how other areas of life interweave with the study and practice of science, would help us to see how political issues influence how apparently pure scientific concerns are presented and understood. Attaching 'bio' to 'security' as in this current example looks like a classic example. At another level this rests upon a particular (realist) view of science which assumes the human capacity to control and shape external events through direct and secure access to the outer world, and that itself needs to be brought into question.

Is it accurate or realistic to suggest that biosecurity measures, however thorough and stringent, can actually guarantee that the FMD virus, in whatever form, can successfully be eradicated or kept at bay? The idea that scientists or government officials can draw a line on a map and then call this an exclusion zone within which the spread of the virus can be constrained and controlled, which is the way in which this is presented to the public by the media, is open to question. Given that the virus can spread by being airborne and that it is highly infectious, the assumption that it will not cross this imaginary and arbitrarily constructed line appears dubious. However, once one recognises that the agenda here is to inspire confidence in the government response and to reassure the public at large that everything is under control, one can understand the motivation for presenting the story in this manner. There is a gap between what was being claimed and what would really happen should FMD have taken a hold.

So one could argue once again that this is an example of political and economic factors determining how scientific accounts are presented and interpreted. Science 'delivers the goods' for which politicians like to claim the credit. It is a means by which governments control the lives of their people. The potential irony in this case was that the virus itself emanated from a government establishment and that the firm which might have been responsible was the very one that the government would employ to produce the vaccine to counter the spread of the virus. A prime example perhaps of what the philosopher Derrida called autoimmunity; the capacity of every system to inadvertently destroy its own immune system thus making it vulnerable to the external forces it sees as a major threat. Internally based terrorist activity might be a further example of this. What are human beings

really like that they behave in this perverse manner and undermine their own best efforts to achieve security? What must science really be like as developed and exercised by human beings who possess this capacity for self-destruction?

So my interest in science studies as a blurred encounter between faith and reason stems from this type of encounter and the ways in which science itself gets inextricably mixed up with other areas of human life. As we might now expect, one issue that emerges from this is that of our understanding of truth. It is Latour's suggestion that truth emerges when different areas are more connected rather than when they are kept 'pure' and unsullied from the impact of other disciplines or practices. This is where there are possible parallels with practical theology with its obvious blurring of boundaries and where the relationship between content and context is now reconfigured with truth emerging when those two are more, not less, connected.

Latour's Theory of Circulating Reference

Latour suggests that his theory of circulating reference is a way round the split between 'fact' and 'language'.[5] This refers to other theories of truth and the problem with the correspondence theory which is that facts expressed in language are deemed to correspond to states of affairs in the external world, but that the two are in fact different things. Words do not 'correspond' in any direct way with what is out there in the world.

Scientists, however, blur the boundary between 'pure' esoteric science and the 'impure' exoteric realm of society and also between the domain of discourse (language) and what the world is like (states of affairs) – so the boundary between epistemology (our representation of the world) and ontology (what the world is really like) gets blurred. This is essential to the actual process of scientific research. Latour argues that science is concerned with the question: 'How can the world be progressively packed into discourse through successive transformations so that a stable flow of reference in both directions may ensue?' No one person alone can transform a statement he is proposing into a scientific fact that others accept: only others can bring this about. However, they can introduce into the equation other (non-human) resources. This involves disciplining men and mobilizing things, and mobilizing things by disciplining people; this is a new way of convincing, sometimes called scientific research.

Science studies is not an analysis of rhetoric or the discursive dimension of science, but the study of how language slowly becomes capable of transporting things themselves without deformation through transformations, so getting rid of the non-existent gap between words and the world. Non-humans can be loaded into discourse as easily as ministers can be made to understand the complexities of scientific research. The truth of what scientists say no longer comes from their

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5   Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (London, 2000).

breaking away from society or its conventions, mediations and connections, but from the safety provided by the circulating references that cascade through a great number of transformations and translations, modifying and constraining the speech acts of many humans, and over which nobody has any durable control. Instead of abandoning the base world of rhetoric, argumentation and calculation, scientists begin to speak in truth because they plunge even more deeply into the secular world of words, signs, passions, materials and mediations and extend themselves even further in intimate connections with the non-humans they have learned to bring to bear on their discussions.

If Latour is right, then the more connected a science, the more accurate it may become. There do not exist true statements that correspond to a state of affairs and false statements that do not, but only continuous or interrupted reference. Instead of defining an a priori distance between the nucleus of scientific content and its context, an assumption that would render incomprehensible the numerous short-circuits between ministers and research, science studies follows leads, nodes and pathways, no matter how crooked and unpredictable they may look to a traditional philosophy of science. This process includes, according to Latour, five types of activity: instruments, colleagues, allies, the public, links and knots. Each of these is equally important and essential to the process. Latour identifies key elements of this as follows:

- Mobilization of the world: all the ways in which non-humans are loaded into discourse, for instance through instruments, equipment, expeditions, surveys and questionnaires – ways of making the objects of research move around us, presented in a usable form and format; in this way the world is transformed into arguments.
- Autonomization: the way in which a discipline, profession, clique or 'invisible college' becomes independent and forms its own criteria of evaluation and relevance –through colleagues, a 'community of interpreters', the history of the formation of the subject, peer groups and then the formation of institutions and traditions. This requires different skills from 'mobilization of the world', such as writing papers, talking to colleagues, organising symposia rather than digging trenches or taking measurements – in this way the references are kept circulating.
- Alliances: these might be with the military, industry, teachers, politicians and the media, getting the wider world on board in ways that progress the research. This again requires a different set of skills such as the capacity to influence and inspire and communicate in other terms, financial, political and social.
- Public representation which means circulating ideas into the wider collective. This will involve the public perceptions of and levels of trust in science itself and require other skills such as appearing on TV. This is often what is needed in order to gain wider public support and therefore funding for projects.

- Links and knots: this is where science studies seeks to understand the centrality of the conceptual content of science. It tries to see for what periphery this content plays the role of the centre, of what veins and arteries it is the intersection; where is the conceptual core or the heart beating at the centre of the circulation. The content of science is not something contained, it is itself the container.

All of this is based upon a specific example; that of Frederic Joliot and the development and widespread acceptance of nuclear power in France from 1939 onwards. Science studies seeks to show this process as a seamless web, where the contemporary politics and the atomic physics are seen as intimately related rather than as two separate and incommensurable worlds. Tracing the actual events as they developed is an illustration of the various stages and processes identified above, the circulating references between people and things. So there is not pure science and impure or applied science, the latter somehow compromised by getting involved in the murky world of politics, only science as it happens in practice with all its twists, turns and human dimensions. One has to read the account to see the point, but I am sure that many other examples could be given.

Why should this be of interest to a blurred encounters theology? Because it blurs the boundaries between pure and applied scientific disciplines and thus also possibly between pure and applied theology: the first being some sort of esoteric and theoretical discussion that has long since lost its reference to the 'real world' of Christian practice, and the second the type of practical or contextual theology which builds directly from engagement with experience and practice. If the whole distinction is brought into question in this way it could mean a different relationship between the academic and the practical.

Then it also blurs the boundary between science and theology, between faith and reason, and shows ways in which values, ethics and other such supposedly non-scientific considerations can be 'loaded into' the process of circulating reference. It could perhaps change the self-perception of scientists and their reactions to other disciplines. The question is whether science studies opens up a possible location for encounter between science and faith and reveals a threshold between the two approaches.

But 'What is Truth?'

The question that remains unanswered though is exactly what concept of truth Latour is proposing. There are a number of possibilities. It could be that the suggestion is that if references keep circulating for long enough and through the filter of enough connections, then a point will be reached where it becomes clear that the truth has been established. This sounds very much like the consensus theory of truth and thus too close to Rorty's relativism or version of non-realism. So when enough people agree that something is true then that is indeed 'the truth'.

Or, it could be that there is a point at which the references cease circulating and the various interpretations come to a standstill because it is clear that one of them does indeed correspond to the way things are in the world. So we have got it right at last and the truth has been established or revealed – this would sound like a realist view of truth. All the connections combine to achieve that point of agreement.

A further possibility, and one that is worth pursuing, is that truth is itself the continued process of circulating reference and that there is no point at which the process settles and an agreed interpretation is claimed as definitive truth. In which case what must be guarded against is the firm resting place that claims to be that final truth, so truth is fallible and provisional as in the critical realist view. In which case, the task must be to keep the references circulating and the connections ever fresh and challenging in order to prevent any such stabilization. 'Truth' might be described as a black hole at the centre of the process that discourages any final agreement and instead serves to keep a continual process of search and discovery in operation. Engaging in the constant process of keeping references circulating and feeding ideas and insights into this from outside science itself might be described as being 'in the truth'

Returning to the original example, that of identifying how the term 'biosecurity' is being used and what it really means, given that there is no one meaning of the word, only different ways in which it is used in different discourses, how is truth to be established?

Does one always question and doubt any application of the term especially given the political and economic agendas that might lie behind that? Is it possible to 'load' into the process of circulating reference an ethical or value-based interpretation that might counter-balance the political uses? Then even that would not be neutral or objective in any recognised sense of those words. Perhaps this needs to be the aim of those of us who wish to bring faith values into the debate and to argue that these matters are far too important to be left to either the scientists or the politicians. Keep making further connections and 'loading' other sets of ideas and perspectives into the debate and thus the references circulating for as long and as far as possible. This would seem to be the real implication of applying science studies and Latour's ideas to this discussion. In which case what further concepts need to be fed or loaded into the debate about biosecurity?

Žižek and the Question of Ideology Critique

Is there is a correct meaning of a term like 'biosecurity' and if so can one then identify by means of a process of ideology critique, for instance, when the term is being distorted through its employment by other interests or power groups? What ideology is at work that leads to a particular usage or interpretation of the word? How is truth to be established? To help with this debate I turn to ideas about the Master Signifier as encountered in the field of psychoanalysis and the writings of Žižek.

The argument would be as follows. Žižek argues that there is no necessary relation between reality and its symbolization. It is in retrospect however that things begin to resemble their description. If this is the case then ideology analysis or critique is *not* a matter of seeing which account best matches the facts or is the least biased, because as soon as the facts are determined one is already within one system or another. So there can be no external point of reference which is claimed to be objective or detached and from which one can make this sort of judgement. There is a structuralist dimension to the argument which proposes that the meaning of particular terms is not fixed, but is only to be identified through their relationship with other terms in the same field of discourse. For instance 'biosecurity' has to be viewed through all its possible uses across a range of settings, and the relationships between those different uses understood and clarified. What may then take place is a struggle over which particular interpretation of the term determines all the others. Can such a conflict ever be resolved?

Pursuing this argument to a deeper level, one needs to ask why it will not be possible to settle upon one meaning or use of a term that can determine the rest. Žižek talks about this in terms of 'quilting' society and asks why all such attempts to quilt society by using such terms (Master Signifiers) inevitably fail.[6] He says that this is not because there is a fullness or excess of meaning which cannot be captured but because any attempt to stand in for the empty Master Signifier requires the perspective of another signifier in order for it to be seen. It is not possible to provide a term or signifier which will unite the whole field, hence all attempts to agree or decide definitive meanings of terms remain open to further description or negotiation. There can be no definitive or once-and-for-all definition of 'biosecurity' which will then determine how all the others fit. Similarly with the concept of truth itself, either the space occupied by such a supposedly definitive definition is so empty as to have no real meaning left (it is too general to be of any real use) or it is always too particular and narrowly defined and leaves out too many other possibilities.

Using democracy as an example, Žižek argues that the only way to define it is to include all political movements that legitimize themselves by reference to this term itself, and which are ultimately defined only by their differential relationship to non-democracy. We note in passing that this has significant implications for research into the meanings of terms such as spirituality and religion. It sounds as though no one group could present their definition of spirituality and then judge the rest according to that definition. To be 'the real thing' it must possess components 'x', 'y' and 'z' so one can tell whether or not this is an authentic spirituality.

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6   In the construction of any argument there will always be a location for a determining or controlling concept the definition of which will then be that by which all other interpretations are judged or evaluated. Žižek argues that such Master Signifiers cannot claim immunity from critique and always represent a particular interpretation rather than being able to justifiably claim a universal perspective. Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), p. 37.

Žižek presents this idea of an Empty Signifier (the empty space precedes the term and then the definition) which is not an attempt to create an underlying unity but is really only the difference between all the various possible elements and interpretations.

How much further can one push this argument and what is it going to tell us about all our attempts to establish truth in either the scientific or religious fields? Hegemony, which is the attempt to exercise power over others through language in this case, is an attempt to create a Master Signifier, one that determines the location of all the rest, hence a sort of metalanguage. If however this unifying location indeed must remain empty, then the problem is that there can never be any real change and all struggles for freedom or attempts to establish truth become redundant. One can only ever review the variety of meanings that already exist, and attempt to understand how they relate to one another, but one cannot launch an ideology critique and argue that those existing meanings need to be challenged because they do not match up to or conform to a unifying or master concept.

He then turns to theology to present another example of this process at work and the way in which what is true becomes established. This process he terms 'doubling' or 're-marking', a change of perspective which shifts the whole view of what is happening. His example is the way in which St Paul turns the apparent defeat of Jesus' mission into its opposite. This is not some sort of eventual reconciliation of different perspectives but the immediate doubling or reversal of a thing into its opposite. The one is already the other and the reconciliation is already a reality; the very sign of defeat is itself evidence of the victory! This is not a process that operates through reason, persuasion or argument and it can never be grasped as such, according to Žižek, and we are always too late upon the scene as the unifying concept has already erased itself and we cannot even be fully aware of it. The Word, the Other, already believes for us and we can only follow. We are already 'in the truth' before it can become evident to us. This is a belief before belief: self-knowledge and self-reflection can only follow afterwards. In *Blurred Encounters*, I used the ideas of Levinas and Derrida on pre-autonomy to point towards this level of human functioning.[7] So what St Paul has provided is a new organizing principle or interpretative framework which enables people to view the same events from a different angle and only once one is already inside that perspective can this new interpretation of reality be grasped. No amount of argument could ever persuade anybody to adopt this new perspective.

There are perhaps more familiar ways of describing this from within theology such as 'the penny dropping'. It is a sort of conversion experience. Another term that is now used from within both the political and scientific field is 'threshold'. One passes through a threshold and, from that point onwards, can see and experience the world differently. So, for instance, instead of the disasters and crises one encounters counting against belief and commitment, it is because of them that

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7   Reader, *Blurred Encounters*, p. 101.

belief becomes the only possible response. What had been the evidence against the existence of God becomes instead the very evidence for it.

I would argue that this is a crucial location or ground where science and religion need to pursue the debate about their relationship. Does scientific exploration and research operate in this fashion, and are breakthroughs and thresholds into other ways of seeing and organizing the evidence similar to religious experiences or even conversions? What about the claims now made by some scientists to inhabit that neutral and objective territory (to be a Master Signifier) from which it can judge that religion and belief are matters of irrationality or superstition or to be identified with an earlier and more primitive stage of human development? What might science put in the place holder of the void if not some search for truth; a search which those of faith might also want to share? Why should moral values and religious viewpoints automatically be excluded from the debates about how science is to be used in contemporary society and, if they are to be allowed in, how might they assist science in its own self-understanding and reflexivity? What might those of belief now propose as their Master Signifier? I suggest that the encounter between faith and science is already a blurred one and that the type of deeper blurring enabled by encounters with philosophy, politics and psychoanalysis would be beneficial for both parties. Only by keeping the insights and theories of both faith and science in circulation can we be certain of remaining 'in the truth', and only by loading into the process that contact with the wider world can we avoid an unhealthy closure of questioning and debate.

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Chapter 14

An Experience of Rural Ministry

Philip Wagstaff

This chapter reflects a professional odyssey through a series of contrasting rural communities, an odyssey which has witnessed a series of major shifts in culture, community and landscape over the course of the past three decades.

When I was at theological college in the 1980s there was not a great emphasis placed on rural ministry. There were and continue to be many factors contributing to this, including the fact that the majority of the residential colleges were located in cities and that the priority for the church was the city, especially following the *Faith in the City* report.[1] There were links with rural communities, mainly through the preaching plan, but the practical theological emphasis was on a generic ministry formation with an emphasis on the particular context of the location of the college itself. Theological education for ordained ministry is a mix of theoretical and practical activities and is not there to give student ministers a particular direction towards a style of ministry but to give an overview of what ministry may become. However, if a proper reflection on rural spirituality and missiology is missing in theological education then rural ministry will not be seen as a priority for the church and student ministers may not explore this area of the life of the church as part of their calling.

When I went to theological college at Queen's College in Birmingham, I already had some experience of rural ministry through being a pastoral assistant in Bamber Bridge near Preston and Ramsey in Cambridgeshire. In Bamber Bridge I was working in a new village community, in which the church was seeking to work with the community to provide places to meet as well as to share faith. That new village has consolidated over the years and the community has grown, changed and developed. A village, even a new one, is not just a collection of houses but a growing living, changing, developing community.

It was in Ramsey though where I continued the experience of rural spirituality and began to recognise the importance of place. Ramsey is a remote fen community that was once an island before the Cambridgeshire fens were drained. At the centre of this island lay Ramsey Abbey, a place of prayer, work and spiritual reflection. Today, the gatehouse and the old hospital (which is now the parish church) are the only physical marks left of the abbey. Both are poignant symbols of the church

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[1] Church of England, *Faith in the City: A Call for Action by Church and Nation (The Report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas)* (London, 1985).

in the countryside; the gate through which people gather for worship, prayer and celebration, and the hospital which offered sanctuary as well as healing in people's time of need. People's encounters with the abbey have changed over time, however the core mission on which it was founded has never been lost.

Whilst living in Ramsey, I also worked closely with two Methodist churches in nearby villages. These two village chapels were part of a scattered community which stretched for over three miles. Both had a long history and shared faith in unique ways within their locality; however, due to their size, they were constantly under the threat of closure. It was to be these themes of place, size and survival that have woven their way through my ministry over the years.

Going to theological college in Birmingham after having the experiences of pastoral ministry at Bamber Bridge and Ramsey persuaded me that rural ministry was what I wanted to do. This feeling was reinforced when I was asked at an interview, 'Isn't rural ministry a soft option?', a statement I not only disagreed with, but an attitude I intended to change!

After expressing an interest in rural ministry we were eventually stationed by the Methodist Church in the small village of Wimbotsham in Norfolk. I became a probationer in a circuit of 13 churches with two other ministers, a large church of 200 members and approximately 200 members throughout the other churches. The probationer's manse was in a village (my only appointment to have been so – my further appointments in Essex and Devon both placed the manse in town), where I learnt a huge amount about village community. We shared many experiences of ministry there, through village events, working with schools and sharing pastoral care.

It can be said that a large gathered church community offers a degree of anonymity. People setting out to church on Sunday could be going to a number of places and the neighbours do not see, or ask, where they are going. In contrast, residents of a village often know much more about their neighbours and what they are up to. I found that people in villages who were interested in joining a church knew who to ask about faith, they knew those who went to chapel and church and spoke to them. This is not to say that members of a town community do not know who to ask about faith, but perhaps they feel less comfortable doing so. In towns and cities, the community is larger which means that they are less likely to know the person they are asking about faith and perhaps are more reticent to talk. It is not easy talking about faith at any time and it is important that the church creates contact points so that people can do so.

One such contact point could be a community event such a lunch club. In one of the villages, Magdalen, near Wimbotsham, the old, wooden village hall burnt down one night. Disappointed but undeterred, the community began to rebuild the hall, this time in brick. The chapel community felt that there was an opportunity to contribute something to the hall programme and came up with the idea of a lunch club. They were few in number but after positive feedback from members of the village they were determined to make this idea happen. Without enough people from the chapel to cook, the cooks at the local primary school were asked if they could provide

an additional 50 extra meals once a month for the senior members of the village, who we asked to join the lunch club, and they agreed. The chapel folk collected and served the food, washed up and got the containers back to the school and many of the community joined together to eat a meal. Many people commented on how nice it was to share a meal with other members of the community – they also really enjoyed the school custard!

When we moved to Harwich, we were pleased to see just how much space the churches freely offered to the community. One had an established lunch club, through which many people were introduced to the church and eventually faith. Another, when they realised their hall was no longer suitable for community use in a way they would like, drew up plans to have a new hall built. The plans included a fully functioning kitchen and accommodation space, as well as a meeting room and a prayer room. The hall opened in 2002 and has been a valuable community and church space ever since. My experience in the Tendring peninsula led to further recognition of the church as a provider of community space as well as spirituality.

In one of our Essex villages, the only place for the young people to meet in the evening was in a phone box. Members of the local chapel nearby noticed that in the winter this was a bit of a challenge and offered the chapel schoolroom to the young people from the village, with no supervision, should they want to meet there. This experience of ecclesiastical risk-taking came out of the awareness of the chapel folk, a generosity of spirit and the provision of a space to meet. Of course changing legislation may well curtail such activity, but the principle of using chapel buildings and halls as community space remains.

The story continues with our move to Devon and the Methodist churches in the west of the county. The circuit is made up of mainly small churches with two larger churches in the market towns. The chapels are not always near to centres of population, although all are exploring how to interact with the communities surrounding them. There has been, as with many other rural circuits, a decline in the numbers of chapel buildings in our area. This in turn has led to a decline in the Methodist witness in parts of the circuit; originally 29 chapels when it was formed in the 1970s, the circuit now contains 22 churches and chapels. They are of differing memberships and buildings, but all, from the smallest to the largest are sharing work and witness within their communities. Not everyone within that community will go to chapel but people know that the community is being prayed for and they appreciate that. One of my colleagues in the circuit was talking with a farmer, who does not regularly go to chapel himself, who said 'Mother goes for us'. Many people within communities are linked to the chapel in some way and despite not attending themselves, feel that they belong to it. This is often the starting point of people's faith journey and it is important to accept that for many people, church is a potentially daunting place; however, through a connection with the church they can develop a sense of faith and feel part of the church and its wider community.

There is a spiritual dimension to people's lives and people will talk of it, but often not to the ordained clergy, but as I found in Norfolk people will speak to those who do the washing-up at the Women's Institute, or are involved in a multitude of other community groups, for they are known to go to the church and the chapel. It is part of the role of ordained clergy to support such people so that church members can explore the theological and spiritual questions being asked by people they meet in the community.

What I have discovered through these experiences, and in the many other untold ones, is that rural churches are all different. They share different cultural contexts, different levels of rurality (ranging from suburban rural to deep rural) and different issues surrounding buildings and governance. However, in an age when national church policies seem to advocate change and rationalisation, small rural communities often feel the most threatened. The call at a recent Methodist Conference for the circuit meeting to have more authority over local congregations was greeted with applause by the conference. While this decision may well allow greater flexibility and partnership between churches, there is also a perception within some small churches that because they are small their work will be determined by the wider circuit and the resources of the circuit may be focused on larger churches. This may or may not be the case depending on the mission strategies of individual circuits. Town, city and rural ministry all have their own dynamics and opportunities, but rural chapels, because of past history, often feel that because they are small they are often perceived to be insignificant by the wider church. In an age of economic expediency it may be increasingly difficult to justify small chapels economically, but there are wider values that a small rural church or chapel represents within its community. It is up to each congregation to determine what these values and opportunities are.

Many rural chapels and churches are showing huge resilience and a willingness to 'hang on in there'. The ideas of closing small churches and taking people by bus into larger centres (part of a proposal put forward in the 1970s) was resisted, not just through fear of change, but because people do not want to lose their local chapel or the community it creates around itself. In the same way that people like to have a local school or Post Office (whether they use it or not), they like to know that a chapel is there, ready to offer them support and prayer should they need it.

Crisis of Confidence?

If you tell someone something negative often enough they begin to believe it. Not all rural churches are frightened of change or challenge or doing things differently. The rural church is not frightened of new ideas but these ideas have to be incorporated into the overall mission strategy for the church. All churches both urban and rural need to explore constructively how to change to enable them to share mission and ministry in the twenty-first century. Small churches often feel that they are seen to be irrelevant by the wider church; they perceive that

are not large or influential enough to make any real difference. The way that the main denominations explore the validity of a church is mainly numerically. If we were to look at the numbers of people who attend church in rural areas compared with the number of people in the village than the percentage would be higher than that of a large urban or suburban church, but in pure numerical terms it is low. As we have seen, people who live in a rural setting know the individuals that go to church or chapel and these are the people they will talk to, in the shop, in the pub, by the school gate. The chapel or church must not just see itself as being small and therefore irrelevant just because it is small. Small does not mean that the mission of the church is not there, it is just different from mission in urban areas. These differences have sometimes been seen as failure in the past, and this has led to a crisis of confidence for rural churches. Of course infrastructure costs are high, and chapel and church buildings sometimes have to close, but the church continues. Of course there are difficulties in filling posts, but there are many ways of making the church work appropriately within its community and there are people willing to make it so. There are issues, real, deep issues, surrounding rural ministry but perhaps a rethink of the priorities of the church enabling us to go back to the people centred, local approach may well lead local churches, circuits and benefices to work creatively and share spirituality, faith and community building for the good of all in the community.

So is there a Future in Rural Ministry?

Having been a rural minister for the last 22 years I would say that there is. However we need to continue to explore what rural ministry is in the twenty-first century, and how we may develop mission and ministry in our small rural communities. We know that there is not just one form of 'rural' but many; each church has its own history, present needs and future opportunities. There is a need to explore how to build on the deep-rooted traditions embedded in rural communities and move forwards, offering both the traditional and the contemporary. We do though need to listen to our communities and to explore the changes in community life that are taking place at the moment. One of these changes is the place of farming in rural life.

When I was in Norfolk in the 1980s I talked with a farmer who in his younger days farmed strawberries. His sons now farmed the farm. He was by then in his late 70s. We were talking about change and he said that when he was a lad, if the farm planted more strawberry plants they would get more money for the effort. That was not the case now. Most farms run up debt to provide machinery, while being part of world markets brings its own challenges. He was talking of a time when things were local, machinery was at a minimum and when, globalisation aside, the common agricultural policy, single farm payments and farm diversification were not even thought of. The church at that time reflected that way of life, but rural

communities and the church have had to adapt and change as these changes in farming have impacted on rural life in many different ways.

Patterns of rural life in the UK have changed dramatically over recent years as markets have become more global. Farming, though still of deep and vital significance to rural communities, is becoming less of the social glue that it once was. It still plays a large part in the economics of rural communities though, for example, through feed and seed merchants, agricultural contractors and agricultural engineers, all of whose fortunes vary with the fortune of farmers. Changes in agriculture and land-based industries have led to a change in the way that people live and work in the countryside and to an extent to the way that the land, food production and farming are perceived. Many still value these links and will still go the church harvest festival and celebrate together the provision given to us through the land and the work of farmers and gardeners.

In many communities farming families go back generations. To give up a farm is to give up a tradition, with its family ties and the practices which have been passed down through the generations. A farm goes further than a lifetime. This strong link between the land and human stewardship goes back as far as the Old Testament, both to the psalmist who says: 'The earth is the Lord's and everything in it' and to the covenantal relationship with Noah who was given the promise that after the flood, through the changing seasons and through God's providence, 'seedtime and harvest … will never cease'. It is this deep-rootedness with the land that is at the heart of farming and it is with the introduction of industrial sized farms that the landscape and culture of farming begins to change.

We live in changing times, and the church must reflect this. The changes in farming practice (resulting in greater intensification with an increasing emphasis on monoculture) is leading to a use of the land not seen by previous generations. Add to this the ethical, moral and scientific debates around Genetically Modified (GM) crops and we enter into a whole new world. Some people respond to this challenge by producing and buying organic food. Other farmers seek to keep pace with the increasing costs of fertiliser and feed, others look to growing crops for bio-fuels, others look to diversification. The shape of farming is changing rapidly and the church, often the centre of a rural community has to keep up with this change. As a church we should offer opportunities to develop theological and spiritual insights into these issues as well as developing practical action with our communities.

Migration patterns show that people are moving into rural areas. Many people see the country as somewhere to escape to and enjoy a 'stress-free' life, however rural areas face as many problems (deprivation being a large issue) as many of our cities. Those who are unable to afford a car can often feel incredibly isolated, with few local amenities and a severe lack of reliable public transport. Farming is no longer a reliable source of income and many farming families are working two jobs simply to stay afloat. The influx of second-home owners means that house prices are high and young people simply cannot afford to live in the place they grew up in. Rural living is not as idyllic as it may sound and more support is

needed (from local and regional government, community agencies and the church) to help within the community.

With inward migration housing costs in many rural areas have increased dramatically over the past few years. This can be seen in the south-west where house prices have spiraled and the average working wage is around 20 per cent lower than in the rest of the country. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, for young people to buy a house in the village where they grew up. Young people often have to move to the larger towns and cities where the housing costs are less, but it takes them out of the communities where they were raised. This has great social impact and has implications for the church as well. Incomers are generally welcomed but the traditions (and often the subtle nuances of those traditions) are often not understood by incomers who often want either to preserve everything, change everything or to go to a point somewhere in between. Some church ministers new to rural ministry live with the same dilemma.

Rural life is changing fast, especially in suburban rural areas next to major conurbations where it is common to see a large number of people leaving the village to go to work in the city. In the opposite direction, it is not uncommon to see former members of the community returning from the city where they can afford to live. This can create an unsettled community feel and this is where getting the balance right becomes difficult – new blood in a community brings opportunity and change, however, circumstances meaning that members of the community cannot live where they were born brings many challenges to community development.

But in the midst of all this change is the church. A place of stability in the midst of a changing world. Stability does not mean inaction and there are the stirrings of change in local parish churches and chapels. Fresh expressions of being church are gradually emerging and include community gatherings as well as spiritual experiences. However, the tradition of church gives a deep sense of stability in the community. There are places where the 1662 *Prayer Book* is used effectively, but new forms of worship are developing within the compass of the church. Forms of worship are emerging which look back to older traditions and which reflect the changing seasons such as Plough Sunday and Lammas services as well as reinventions of the (Victorian) traditional harvest festival. The church is there all the time and is not just there in times of crisis. In the 2001 outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease the church was one agency which came out of the crisis with a high degree of credibility. Local church leaders and members, many of whom knew those farmers and their families whose animals were affected by the disease, used the phone to keep in contact and delivered supplies as far as the farm gate. During this time many chapels, schools and shops were closed. The countryside closed down for weeks and ordinary life was suspended. As a response to this, in Devon, a group of local Methodist and Anglican clergy phoned Radio Devon independently of each other and asked that, as many of the churches and chapels were closed, a broadcast service might be arranged. It was, and that service has continued until now. Rural ministry has been there for generations and continues

to be there for the future, supporting people through crisis and in the everyday story of people in rural areas.

There is 'no one size fits all' to rural ministry. The church has always sought to be relevant to the present age, to share ministry contextually and to discover new ways while sharing the best of traditions. In rural situations there are particular challenges, churches are small, issues in community are often hidden, confidence may be lacking. Through it all though, the church has something to contribute in developing vibrant communities, in sharing faith and in listening to the community as a whole. By developing these themes the rural church will be able to show an authentic, prophetic and priestly ministry in terms appropriate to the community in which the church is a part.

The Ecumenical Dimension

We cannot end this excursion into the encounters of the church in rural areas without speaking of the ecumenical dimension to rural ministry and mission. When I was at theological college the rather unkind view of ecumenism was of two weak churches getting together to form a weak church. This is not the case today. In Devon there has been developed a 'light touch' ecumenical partnership. Such covenants allow churches to work together, and more importantly guarantee that the partnership is consulted when there is a change of ordained clergy. This light touch may form later into a formalised sharing agreement, but it allows congregations to have a formal covenant on which to base their sharing. An example of this is in Bridestowe in West Devon where the parish church and the Methodist chapel have for many years shared worship on an occasional basis. As time went on, more people attended the joint services than the individual ones held in the two buildings. It was felt that a covenant would be helpful and the one worked out by Devon church leaders was used. This has strengthened the churches in that village and formalised (although not fossilised) something that was already happening. Both fellowships can move forwards secure that when local ordained leadership changes the agreement will be upheld.

Some churches find that it is better to share social activities first before sharing worship. This happens in many ways in rural communities anyway, but not necessarily sponsored by the church. Groups for study during Lent providing a place for discussion are developing. Groups (often ecumenical) are forming, often involving farmers, meet to discuss and share time together in a local pub. The church is often a catalyst for such groups both for those who want to explore faith and those who want to take faith deeper. Because of its community links a prayer box is sometimes placed in the local shop and both church and chapel pray for the people mentioned there.

Different opportunities are there to gather people together, for example, groups getting farmers together, developing post offices in churches, offering church tourism, sharing refreshment, supporting farmers markets, offering a time to stop,

offering times to pray and worship. All these and many other possibilities add to the potential for local churches to work together both in worship and in offering space to local communities as part of rural life.

So what of the Future?

Rural ministry is not homogeneous but has great variety. For the first time for a long time rural mission and ministry is increasingly getting higher up onto the agendas of the regional and national church. It has been a long time coming. My positive experience of rural ministry may resonate with some people, but not with others. Some people struggle with lack of resources, big buildings, issues around tradition, and the differences shown by different churches in a circuit or benefice. For me working with many small churches is a joy, for others it is seen as a logistical nightmare and a waste of resources. Yes we do have to travel a lot, we need to think in many different contexts, we need to walk with different communities and develop ways of being church appropriate to each place where the church is set. Of course rural ministry will always be small scale, often uneventful, but always there, reflecting the communities of which it is a part. It will be different in different contexts, for example, deep rural being different to suburban rural. Wherever we are the church needs to look at an authentic and prophetic Christian presence in the place it is located and that is the criteria by which we are judged in terms of our mission and ministry. Of course there are times when we have the opportunity to change, a time to move on as Ecclesiastes tells us, but there is also a time to consolidate and offer a space for people. There will always be issues around buildings, styles of worship, lack of resources, history and tradition. But these are also potential catalysts for change.

The church talks of life, death and resurrection. No more so that during a village funeral. In one of our chapels in Norfolk the line of cars stretched for a quarter of a mile down the road. The church was there, at the centre, for people. They may not always come, they may not always respond to our sense of mission and of fresh expressions, but we are all spiritual beings and the local village community church and chapel can express and explore this with the community.

It will only do so though if the church community recognises its calling to mission and ministry in the place in which it is set, and develops opportunity for people to meet together. The church can provide places for people to meet, perhaps through sharing a meal, over coffee, holding a farmers' market in the nave, hosting the Post Office in the vestry, though worship, or through many other local possibilities. What can be done will differ from place to place. Whatever our context, we need to build confidence in the place and locality where we are, seeking to share faith and build community there.

In short the rural church is in many ways, redefining those traditional watchwords of authenticity and faithfulness in areas undergoing rapid change. It is expressing authenticity in its commitment to fluidity as well as stability.

It retains that understanding of what it means to be a significant presence in a time of change, yet is willing to invest in the relational as well as the physical by working in partnerships that cross traditional denominational boundaries but also transcend traditional religious and secular divides. This is often tangibly expressed in the rural churches' willingness to allow their buildings to become new spaces of exchange between the sacred and the secular, as well as being comfortable in engaging with that other space that is growing increasingly blurred yet significant; namely the space between explicit and institutional religion and implicit spirituality that is often embedded in people's conversations and aspirations.

The local church, with all its difficulties, its tensions and opportunities is well placed to offer to its community pastoral, practical and spiritual support. The church in rural life brings a deep tradition of faith in a world of deep uncertainty. Together, we work with people seeking to build community and deepen spirituality for all, where we are, in small but in appropriate and creative ways.

Reference

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Chapter 15

Mapping the New Theological Space: From Blurred Encounters to Thresholds of Transformation

Christopher Baker and John Reader

The aim of this chapter is to begin to construct a methodological and thematic map of the new theological space that has emerged over the course of these many contributions. We have decided that the best way to do this is to offer a visual representation of this new map (or model), and then to describe and explain some of the marker posts that appear on it. In doing this we are aware of the dangers inherent in any stylised diagram that attempts to compress the complexity of context into a simplicity of procedural action. We thus offer this diagram with the large proviso that it cannot do justice to the often intuitive, provisional nature of blurred encounters that has emerged during the course of this volume. However, we are also aware that the value of presenting such diagrams can help ensure that the principles and methods we are describing can be discussed reasonably easily within other arenas and disciplines, so that overlapping but also distinctive discourses can be uncovered.
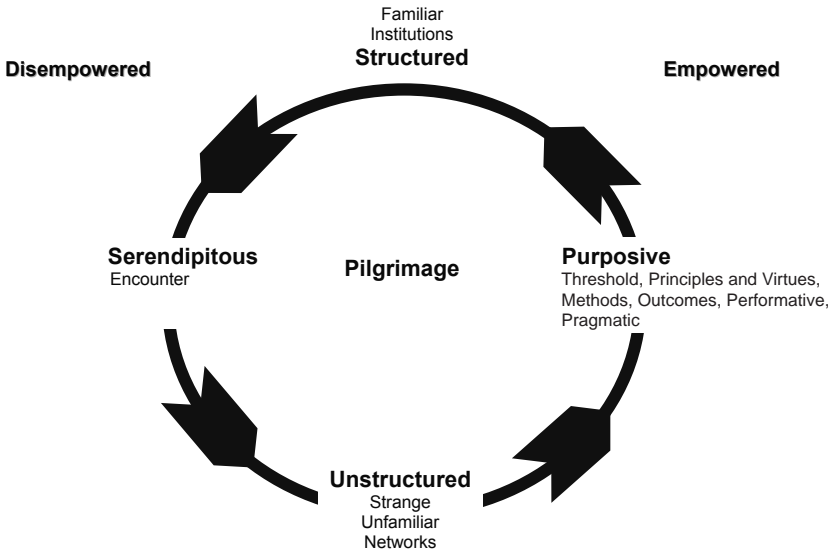
Figure 15.1   Mapping the new theological space (© Christopher Baker and John
                Reader)

A General Orientation to the Map: Four Phases or Aspects

The major trajectory that we have discerned over the course of these chapters and
the residential conference that we shared is the shift from encounter to threshold.

The threshold represents the space of new insight and opportunity from which
to engage in transforming and purposive action; it occurs at the end of a liminal
phase in which (as we saw in Jonathan Miles-Watson's chapter on rites of passage
and pilgrimage) the identity and status of an individual or local community is
changed and altered. However, the threshold is never the end of journey, never
a final resting place. Rather it is the start of another journey into a new set of
encounters which of themselves will lead to arrival at another threshold; that is,
another point of departure in terms of performative praxis and theological insight.
Hence the centrality of the concept of pilgrimage (identified in the middle of this
diagram), which attempts to convey this sense of passing through liminal spaces
of experience, and of having one's understanding and experience challenged and
refined, so that one is in a different 'space' at the end of the pilgrimage than at the
beginning.

This model can be interpreted in two ways: one is to see it as a journey from
encounter to threshold, with the notion of pilgrimage at its heart; the other is to see
each element of the model not only as a stage in a journey, but also an experience
or dimension of engaging with the new theological space. These experiences or

dimensions may not feature in a developmental or sequential way as implied by the above model: rather one or more elements may be experienced simultaneously.

It is with this proviso that we now identify some of the signposts along the way and briefly describe some of those contributions to this volume which illustrate aspects of each phase

1. The Serendipitous Encounter

Any first step on the journey from encounter to threshold clearly needs to begin with the encounter itself. All our contributors begin with a case study or a context that sets up an encounter between the Christian proclamation of good news (or the gospel) and an experience in and of the contemporary world. However, as all the contributors testify, the world in which the good news of God's reign interacts is an increasingly fluid, hypermobile and diverse one. There was a recognition that emerged during our conference of the importance of thinking on one's feet, being nimble and open to new methodologies and opportunities for pragmatic action. The rather rare noun 'serendipity' materialised from our discussion to describe the sudden, unpredictable, but potentially creative encounters that this new world throws up. There is not always time for the church to marshal the appropriate checks and balances, to try and find previous case histories and precedents. What is required rather is a potentially risky and open encounter, but one which (as we shall see later) is rooted in virtues of authenticity and faithfulness, and depends on the judicious use of both unstructured (and unfamiliar) and structured (and familiar) spaces. We therefore offer the concept of the serendipitous encounter as a new contribution to practical and public theology.

The definition of the word serendipity, that is, 'the faculty of making fortunate discoveries by accident', describes just the right amount of human agency in respect to making new connections. In other words, it is not simply a case of pure chance that we find ourselves in new spaces or situations. Rather the word serendipity reflects suggestively an innate human ability (or faculty) to be in the right place at the right time; or perhaps even a gift for seeing the potential of a new situation without having a complete idea of how the situation will eventually resolve itself. The adjective 'serendipitous' therefore has further connotations of entering into a new and 'chancey' encounter with an openness suggestive of a faithful journey or encounter; a openness to risk but also ultimately a confidence that in the words of Julian of Norwich: 'All shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.'[1]

The idea of the serendipitous encounter has clearly emerged for example from Ian Ball's chapter of pilgrimage and its reference to the paradox of the 'planned uncertainty that needs to lie at the heart of any such enterprise'. And it also emerges

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[1]   Julian of Norwich, *Showing of Love* (ed. Julia Holloway; London, 2003), pp. 42–3.

from Martyn Percy's analysis of the relationship between 'formal' and 'operant' religion when it comes to negotiating the rite of baptism.

2. An Unstructured, Networked Space

According to our proposed schema, the next signpost within the journey through encounter to threshold is what we are calling the 'unstructured space' or experience. The serendipitous encounter, produced by unforeseen events or a more deliberately intuitive placing of oneself, can lead to a space or experience that is initially strange, unfamiliar and disorientating.

Nevertheless, many of our contributors make a strong case for arguing that these feelings of discomfort and disorientation, bordering in some cases on feelings of powerlessness, are a necessary stage of the blurred encounter if it really is to lead to transformed praxis and theological insight.

Thus Clare McBeath, in the case study of a small church community at the heart of a regeneration zone in east Manchester, observes that the weekly Sunday communion service becomes a transitional space in which counter-cultural values are affirmed; regeneration is in fact the triumph of surviving day to day on limited resources, offering unconditional hospitality to friend and stranger alike, finding the hidden beauty in people and locations that are often overlooked in the brash rhetoric of new east Manchester. She concludes that it is precisely this sort of unstructured space, often strange and painful to inhabit, that is also, paradoxically, a sanctuary, a liminal space from which the true nature of gospel emerges, and creative and transformative thresholds are reached; what she describes as simultaneously 'feeling the pain of crucifixion *and* partying at the dawn of resurrection'.

Margaret Goodall's chapter on dementia chaplaincy echoes many of the insights McBeath unearths. Her use of the Holy Saturday motif symbolically represents the paradox of an empty, disorientating but potentially creative space. As Goodall reminds us, 'God does not simply encounter, but also transforms the emptiness. Easter Day follows Holy Saturday and only resurrection, while not cancelling out death and burial, can reveal their true meaning.'

The space of the network is also located in the 'unstructured space' because of its fluid and flexible nature. Many commentators have stressed the significance of the general shift towards the network, as society mimics the decentralised and fluid morphing of the 24/7 global market. Manuel Castells, a prime exponent of network theory, refers to the emergence in recent decades of 'the convergence of social evolution and information technologies [which] has created a new material basis for the performance of activities throughout the social structure. This material process, built in networks, earmarks dominant social processes, thus shaping social structure itself.'[2]

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[2]   Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (2nd edn, Oxford, 2000), p. 502.

Phillip Jones, like Castells feels uneasy at the emerging networked social space whereby solid identities and values are giving way to more fluid and unpredictable forms of identity and belonging. He asks whether the current credit crunch might finally dislodge some passive and uncritical thinking about the assumptions of a market-driven social order and urges practical theology and the church to engage more critically with social and political deficits of the current situation by returning to clear principles and values. For him, the blurred encounter is not only uncomfortable, but potentially irredeemable.

In similar fashion, David Grimwood and Jane Winter reflect on the impact of the simulacra of the new postindustrial landscape of Kent, with their faux references to oast houses in its shopping malls and 'touristification' of industrial heritage sites. 'Where does one find genuine icons of authenticity and continuity?' they ask. Their succinct summary of the tension they feel the church is caught in, 'We are urged not to sell out to secularism and at the same time need clarity and confidence about what we defend', reflects the deeply contested and ambiguous task that can lie ahead during this phase of unstructured encounter.

Meanwhile, Helen Cameron refers to Sennett and Bauman on the rise of the network as a voguish pragmatic functionalism in which large parts of society deliberately opt to live in more provisional and fluid ways as a response to economic uncertainty and a perceived decline in levels of trust. However, she also stresses that the network can sometimes be an effective tool by which to capitalise on the power of the synergetic, flexible and pragmatic interventions which then lead to our next stage in our pilgrimage through the new theological space: the purposive threshold.

3. The Purposive Threshold

A third element of the new theological terrain is the idea of the threshold as a launching space for new insight, practice and identity. The concept of a purposive threshold can be applied at a number of levels which we have outlined on our diagram, namely principles and virtues, methods and outcomes.

The Importance of Principles and Virtues

The first indicator of a purposive threshold is the identification of principles; in other words, after a period of reflection on the experience of a blurred encounter, certain principles of engagement emerge as being of prime significance that were not as important before the encounter took place.

The importance of openness, expressed as the crossing of thresholds and liminalities into greater understandings, is one such principle. This includes for many of our contributors, crossing over denominational thresholds into ecumenical ones, but also crossing over to the level of interfaith engagements and beyond (i.e., engagement with the secular field as well). Negotiating long-term

friendships within the local context is another key principle (i.e., not colluding with the perceived need within a 24/7 culture for an instant response). Taking the risk of negotiating identity is another, be it at the personal, social and political level. That is to say, core identities remain important, but flexible.

These principles are in turn linked to key virtues that have emerged as highly significant in relation to mapping the new theological space. The first virtue is that of authenticity. Part of the risk of engaging in blurred encounters is the risk of engagement with the inauthentic, risking, what Baudrillard in his work on simulacra warns us of,[3] the possibility of mistaking the surface sign for the deeper symbol. The notion of authenticity thus derives from a confidence in core identities. Authenticity also arises from the importance of knowing the values it is essential to bring into any strange and new situation. Across a range of different pastoral encounters within our contributors' experiences, the following values emerged as significant: the significance of the face-to-face encounter; the significance of memory and narrative; the importance of gathered community and the local place/space for belonging; a valuing of complexity and diversity and hybridity; the recognition of power and all its manifestations; the appropriate place of pain, suffering, a sense of powerlessness and the recognition of previous mistakes as a condition of resurrection and insight.

The second virtue in relation to traversing the new theological space is that of faithfulness. Faithfulness, like authenticity has a number of elements. One is related to a proper acknowledgment of the traditions and institutions from which we have come and been nurtured; not in a way that speaks of slavish and uncritical following, but in a way that recognises the continuity, insight and physical resources (such as buildings, funding and dedicated personnel) that are often tied up in institutional and traditional forms, even if the ways these resources are offered are not always relevant or engaged with the challenges of the present context. Then there is the idea of faithfulness as related to the resources of faith. The wisdom and challenge of the gospel and other religious traditions have much to offer our contemporary and largely secularised cultural, political and economic systems in ways that can be profoundly prophetic and countercultural.

Finally there is the faithfulness to the Christian task and identity, reflected in what for many of our contributors was a stickability; a journeying alongside, a going the extra mile in these encounters, even if those encounters are deemed to be risky or damaging. It is no coincidence that the concept of faithful pilgrimage lies explicitly at the heart of three of our chapters (e.g., Ball, Miles-Watson, Atherton).

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[3]   Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York, 1983).

The Importance of Methodologies

The second dimension of purposive thresholds can be understood in relation to the methodologies one brings to bear on blurred encounters. In this section, we observe two dimensions of methodology; analysis and observation.

Analysis   Clearly one of the key components of any purposive threshold praxis is that of analysis. Some of the analysis from our contributors has been at the epistemological level (see Reader's discussion of Latour's theory of circulating reference and Žižek's ideas of Master and Empty Signifiers and their relationship to ideology critique). Other forms of analysis focus at the level of the cultural (see Percy on the renewed sociological significance of the sacred and other ideas of implicit religion, Miles-Watson on the continuing appeal of pilgrimages which blur boundaries between the secular and the spiritual, and Lord on the thorny issue of negotiation of identity between faith-based individuals and secular institutions).

Further analysis of the new theological space occurs at the spatial level (see Brown and his mapping of suburban space via a variety of different methods including his own childhood recollections, empirical data, types of literature including poetry, novels and historical biography; and Wagstaff on different typologies of rural location and the implications of these typologies for emerging forms of community and new models of church engagement).

Another important dimension of analysis is that of the economic (see Atherton and the emergence of 'faithful economics', and Jones and the dangers of 'weightless identities'). Meanwhile organisational analysis is the final level of ordering at work in this volume (see Cameron and her warning that faith-based identity and strategic/prophetic engagements in wider civil society are not sacrificed to the culturally-induced informality of networks).

Observation   Next, under this heading of methodology, we move from analysis to observation. Several of our chapters reflect the importance of simply walking and exploring the new theological spaces of blurred encounter, as part of a method that urban and cultural geographers call the art of the flâneur. The art of the flâneur involves a conscious reflexivity while walking and observing; allowing the journey to open up all kinds of hidden texts and meanings that have contributed to or lie behind the built or rural landscape as currently constituted. Urban geographers, Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift define it as the art of the 'gifted, meditative walker, purposefully lost in the city's daily rhythms and material juxtapositions'.[4]

Several contributors seek to adopt this kind of approach (see Ball and his pilgrimages between Buxton and Lincoln and to Gloucester, Brown and his use of novelist Michael Frayn's evocative description of a post-war London cul-de-sac, and Atherton and his leisurely and reflective journey down Edinburgh's Royal Mile).

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[4]   **Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift**, *Cities: Reimagining the Urban* (Cambridge, 2002).

Outcomes: Micro, Meso and Macro Levels

Meanwhile the final evidence or proof that the purposive threshold has been reached is to look for evidence of outcomes. This third element need not detain us unduly, since most of our contributors are able to identify moments of threshold experience when transformation of insight and/or praxis does occur. It would also go against the spirit of the blurred encounter to try to systematise too much what sort of outcomes there are and what their impacts might be.

Perhaps all it is appropriate to offer is a simple typology of evidence of outcomes at what we might call the micro, meso and macro levels of community and civil society. By micro, we mean some kind of transformation at the level of the individual; by meso one could refer to evidence at the level of the community or neighbourhood; and macro we refer to transformation at the level of the national or even international. And, as we shall see, many of these blurred encounters entail some sort of change at these different levels simultaneously.

A case study of micro (or individual) outcomes is contained within McBeath's account of how one church member's struggle with depression in a small congregation within an inner-city community becomes a redemptive process, not only for that single individual but for the church community as a whole.

A case study at meso (or neighbourhood) outcome emerges from Owain Bell's example of the impact of the research project designed to discover the needs of the Bangladeshi community in Kidderminster. Bell's chapter is an honest account of how research can go awry when it unwittingly represents a community as dysfunctional victim, rather than active and dynamic contributor to the local area. The journey through this experience, and the honest reflection on it, has helped a more sensitive and accurate understanding to emerge of the role and identity of a key community group within Kidderminster as a whole.

A case study of macro-outcome change is reflected in John Atherton's account of how faith-based impacts on political economy from religious traditions are continuing to shape the aims and objectives of mainstream economic thinking and global markets. In recent times, it is the powerful blurred encounter created by the discourse on different types of capital (economic, human, religious, spiritual and faithful), coupled with the increasingly influential practice of faith-based ethical economics (e.g., global activities, such as the Fair Trade and Drop the Debt campaigns) which creates the momentum within mainstream economics towards happiness, well-being and pro-poor, pro-environmental outcomes.

4. The Structured Institutional Space

The final phase or stage within the journey from encounter and threshold is the role of the structured space. Three of our contributors perhaps express the significance of the structured space most clearly. Helen Cameron suggests that certain features of the institutional church which also contain the organisational principles of

the association could make it well-placed to engage with some aspects of civil society. In similar vein, Malcolm Brown proposes a return to familiar principles and methodologies of church engagement with previous suburban communities in contrast 'to the enthusiasm for novel modes of "being church" '. These would include examples such as the Men's Society, the Mothers Union, the Young Wives group, the Youth fellowship and uniformed organisations and Sunday schools. He concludes: 'to do a familiar thing in an unfamiliar context may be to do something new'.

Meanwhile, Philip Wagstaff in his chapter outlining a series of different rural encounters over a period of more than 20 years is clear that much of the strength of the rural church to mutate and adapt derives from the power of the resources of the institution (what we might call institutional capital). These resources are reflected in paid ministers, buildings and the social events that spring from them, the rites of passage that are conducted for families and individuals, annual symbolic events such as Harvest Festival that express the identity of the whole community, and what Wagstaff calls a 'rootedness' in the landscape and customs of the community that continues even as the landscape and customs change through the impacts of creeping exurbanisation and globalisation.

This last section thus concludes this commentary on the diagrammatic journey through serendipitous encounter to purposive threshold. We need to recall Jonathan Miles-Watson's analysis of anthropological ideas of rites of passage, and in particular the notion of the community or communitas that is formed during the journey from the rite of separation to the rite of reincorporation. It is in this experience of communitas, in the shared journey from encounter to threshold that can 'result in ideas and ideals that may work themselves out over time into new structures'.

Our theological mapping of the new space develops these anthropological concepts further by adding to them the idea that the journey to new thresholds of understanding and praxis will almost inevitably take you into a new encounter that is strange and unfamiliar. In other words, although it may be appropriate to describe this journey from encounter to threshold as a linear one, it is also a dialogical one, in which a crossing over a threshold is to return back, albeit from a changed and transformed perspective, to the blurred dynamics of a new encounter which nevertheless contains strong continuities with our previous experiences and identities.

T.S. Eliot, at the end of the epic spiritual and cultural journey described in 'The Four Quartets', spoke of the importance of exploration, the end of which is 'to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time'.[5] It is as if these words speak directly to the pastoral dynamic at the heart of this new form of pastoral engagement.

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[5]   T.S. Eliot, The Four Quarters', in *Collected Poems: 1909–1962* (London, 1974), p. 222.

Public ⟷ Private

(Flows; Rapid) Global ⟷ Local (Space; Slow)

Secular ⟷ Sacred

(Risky) Creative ⟷ Painful (Contested)

Resurrection ⟷ Crucifixion

Figure 15.2   The blurred encounter as dynamic and creative Third Space
              (© Christopher Baker and John Reader)

5. Theological Coda: The Blurred Encounter as Dynamic and Creative Third Space

The other aspect of the above diagram (Figure 15.2) needs only brief elaboration, since many of the themes and ideas it expresses have already been extrapolated. Its purpose is simply to reinforce in visual terms the powerful idea that the new theological space is both interdisciplinary and multilayered, working simultaneously at the interstices of a number of key political, cultural and theological realities. We have identified five such realities or spectra (from the material generated by this volume) in order express the full dynamism and complexity of what we believe is now required of the discipline of practical and public theology. There may be more that can be added to this list. Nevertheless, we have aimed in Figure 15.2, to show that the discipline of theology and the praxis of Christian mission and ministry now occupies the dynamic but often contested space between the public and the private, the global and the local, the secular and the sacred, the creative and the painful, between the resurrection and the crucifixion. In doing so it resists the simplistic and partial analysis of contemporary life, in all its complexity and diversity, by opting for engagement with only one or other side of the binary pole. Rather, it seeks to create new syntheses of insight and partnerships for action by reflecting on the significance and impact of both sides of the binary equation and holding both within the creative tension of a Third Space that encapsulates existing insights, but creates new understandings that reinvigorate and develop that which has gone on before.

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