Journal of European Baptist Studies

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Publication – Twice a year

Editorial Office
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ISSN 1213-1520 (print) | ISSN 1804-6444 (online)

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This journal is published in open access in cooperation with Index Theologicus.
https://www.jebs.eu | https://www.ixtheo.de

Print Subscriptions
International Baptist Theological Study Centre
The Baptist House, Postjesweg 150, 1061 AX Amsterdam, The Netherlands
https://www.ibts.eu | jebs@ibts.eu | +31-20-2103025
Subscriptions to this journal are also available through EBSCO and Harrassowitz.

Cover design by Thought Collective, Belfast, Northern Ireland
https://www.thoughtcollective.com | hello@thoughtcollective.com

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Editorial

Lina Toth

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It is my joy and privilege to offer to the readers this 'Scottish' issue of the *Journal of European Baptist Studies*. Characterised not by a common theme, but a common context, this collection of articles provides an insight into some of the questions currently occupying the minds of Baptists living and working in Scotland.

Once the land of the Reformed kirk and Calvinist discipline, today Scotland is characterised by a highly secular and multicultural population, only one third of whom would identify as Christian in some way.[1] As in many other parts of Europe, Baptists here represent a small and gradually declining minority. Whilst new opportunities for Baptist ministry and mission are opening, such as chaplaincy or youth and community work, these are taking place in the context of rapid and pervasive social, cultural, and religious changes. Making sense of ourselves — as people of faith, and as Baptists — involves making use of a number of interpretive tools: turning to scriptural resources; paying attention to various episodes of Christian history; taking another look at doctrinal matters; reflecting on practice; and engaging with resources outside theology. In one way or another, all the articles in this issue are attempts at 'reading': the reading of Scripture, yes, but also history and tradition, our systematic theologies, and, of course, the reading of practice in its particular expressions, at times in conversation with other disciplines.

[1] Martin Williams, 'Just one in three Scots now identify as a Christian', *The Herald*, 9 March 2022 <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/homenews/19978556.just-one-three-scots-now-identify-christian/> (based on a YouGov survey sponsored by the Humanist Society Scotland). The information from the latest Scottish census, which usually takes place every ten years, would provide more precise information and figures. It was last carried out in 2022 and the results are still forthcoming.

We start, as many Baptists would, with the Bible and its interpretation. Paulus de Jong offers arguments against the common replacement theology associated with the Christian reading of the Gospel of John, particularly in relation to the Mosaic *torah*. Making the case for the retainment, reinterpretation, relativisation, or diversification of the ritual practices and institutions of the *torah*, de Jong sees fruitful implications in this approach both for the Jewish-Christian dialogue and for any Christian endeavours to draw closer to the world of the New Testament by taking part in some Jewish practices.

However, in the course of Christian history, these Jewish practices often have been not only suspect, but vehemently despised and demonised. Ian Birch draws attention to John Chrysostom's *Homilies Against the Jews* as one of the starkest and most troubling examples of antisemitism among Christian theologians. This makes for an extremely disturbing read, and serves as a very serious warning of how easily Scripture and rhetorical brilliance can be used for the most dangerous distortions of the witness of Scripture and the Christian Way.

The wrongness of the antisemitic lens should be a clear-cut case today[2] — or so one would want to hope — but what about a larger discussion of the role of Scripture in moral discernment? Marion Carson reads the narrative of Abraham and Sarah with just this question in mind. Carson underlines the role that cultural assumptions play in ethics — in Abraham and Sarah's as much as in ours. She also challenges an unquestioning embrace of what is perceived to be divine guidance, and a dangerously narrow, foundationalist, reading of Scripture which disregards uncomfortable contradictions and complexities.

Amanda Quick takes us into a more personal area of discernment, in the context of one's midlife. Looking for resources which would resonate with her own Baptist tradition, she starts with the Bible itself, but finds it necessary to then look for other sources, such as an imaginative contemplation of Ignatian exercises and discernment practised in a small group setting. Nothing in such a discernment

[2] The publication process of this issue of *JEBS* was too advanced to engage in any reflection on the conflict which broke out in Israel and Gaza in October 2023.

process can be guaranteed, but as Quick's own story so far testifies, it can lead to deepened bonds with others as well as a new appreciation for the journey of faith and all it entails.

Moving on to the level of the communal and theological, what kind of discernment is needed when churches are forced to (rapidly) reconfigure their common life, such as in the face of Covid-19 lockdowns? In Scotland, as in much of the rest of the world, this experience revealed some interesting layers of implicit theology operating within various Christian communities. Steve Holmes, however, argues that for Baptists at least, it is their ecclesiology that shapes, or should shape, their approach to the Eucharist (or Communion, or the Lord's Supper — the terms themselves say something about our theological leanings as well as our contexts!). Being together physically may be the most desirable expression of being present to and for each other, but Holmes makes the case for the theological validity of an online Eucharist as a practice for sub-optimal circumstances.

Whilst the experience of the pandemic has been described as traumatic in a variety of ways, Roz Lawson looks at the deeply profound experience of trauma, which she explores in relationship to the practice of friendship. Taking the real-life story of Brian Keenan and John McCarthy, who were taken as hostages during the Lebanese Civil War, Lawson provides a study of Keenan's autobiographical book *An Evil Cradling* and the friendship between these two very different men, which blossomed in the midst of their captivity. Drawing on a variety of literature and disciplines, she then broadens the conversation to consider the healing power of friendship for trauma sufferers in the context of Christian communities.

The theme of suffering is also taken up by Alistair Cuthbert, as he considers divine omnipotence in kenotic terms. Engaging with the work of one of the most prominent contemporary Baptist theologians, Paul S. Fiddes, Cuthbert discusses Fiddes' notion of kenosis as God's suffering love, and then turns to a nineteenth-century Danish Lutheran theologian Hans Lassen Martensen, in whom he finds a corrective contribution to Fiddes' kenotic theology. Martensen provides Cuthbert with a Christology which emphasises God's kenotic self-limitation as

well as the elevation of humanity into sharing in the divine life. In the now-but-not-yet world, kenotic love would then be understood as one of the expressions, rather than the only mode, of divine omnipotence.

How do our theologies of kenotic love play out in our practice? Laura Gilmour explores just this question in her auto-ethnographical reflection. She looks at palliative care chaplaincy and specifically, caring for a patient in the process of assisted dying — which is far from being a theoretical issue, as the Assisted Dying Bill may well soon be brought into law by the Scottish Parliament. What kind of love, she asks, can a chaplain provide in accompanying the patient at the end of their life's journey? It moves Gilmour to conclude that, kenotically speaking, it involves putting the need for *being there* for the patient above one's personal convictions or principles, whilst also being able to lament all that is not life-giving and life-affirming.

Steve Younger opens a window into another area of chaplaincy available in Scotland: namely, chaplaincy in the context of Scottish non-denominational schools. Having emerged as an activity of a local parish minister, deeply rooted in Reformed Christian tradition, school chaplaincy finds itself today in a pluralistic context, navigating highly contested areas, whether these be questions around gender and sexuality, or freedom of speech. Recognising the weak theological foundations of Scottish School chaplaincy — 'a ministry role in search of a theology', as he puts it — Younger offers the biblical and theological motif, or image, of an ambassador.

While chaplaincy work can easily be embraced as a type of ministry, what about people's ordinary jobs and projects? In the final article of this *JEBS* issue, Stuart Weir comes back to the Bible in order to consider an eschatology of work in conversation with two Matthean parables. The goodness (or otherwise) of any working project, Weir argues, can be determined in light of Christ's *parousia*, and his suggested criteria provide a lens to reconsider the contribution of our work to the kingdom and its relationships.

I trust that readers of this journal will be stimulated by these contributions and the various connections between the themes they explore. Some of the topics, particularly those relating to practice, may

not be as prominent in other contexts and countries. However, there will be plenty of parallels to and contrasts with familiar issues and situations. Hopefully this brief visit to Scotland will have stimulated some further questions about our use of Scripture, practices of discernment, thinking about and living through suffering, and engaging in the work of the kingdom.

Unity and Diversity in Torah Practices: A Johannine Vision for Contemporary Christian Communities

Paulus de Jong

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Abstract
Against the grain of much Johannine scholarship, this article offers a sustained argument *against* the notion that John's Jesus replaces sacred Jewish institutions and practices such as ritual purification, the temple, the Sabbath, and the Jewish festivals. Instead, I argue that John promotes a deeply appreciative and contextually sensitive vision of the Mosaic *torah* in which significant *torah* practices and institutions are retained, whilst also being reinterpreted, diversified, and sometimes relativised. This vision, in turn, has beneficial implications for Jewish-Christian dialogues and can provide wisdom in contemporary debates about the role of Jewish institutions and practices in Christian communities.

Keywords
Gospel of John; *torah*; ritual purity; temple; Sabbath; Jewish festivals

Introduction

The assessment of the Jewish law, or *torah*, in John's Gospel is a matter of vigorous debate.[1] Many scholars argue that John promotes a strong *replacement theology* regarding some of the most sacred Jewish practices

* This article puts forth a similar argument to the one presented in the third chapter of my hitherto unpublished PhD thesis: Paulus de Jong, 'From Divine Teaching to the Divine Teacher: *Torah* and the Gospel of John' (doctoral dissertation, University of St Andrews, 2022), pp. 61–121.

1 The article will use the more comprehensive term *torah* ('teaching') rather than the English noun 'law' with its stronger legal connotation. When the qualifier 'Mosaic' is used, this is simply to indicate that, in traditional understanding, the gift of the *torah* is associated with Moses. However, in John, as well as in other ancient Jewish and early Christian literature, the term *torah* (תורה), or its Greek translation *nomos* (νόμος), encompasses much more than the law given to Moses on Mount Sinai or those books of Scripture traditionally attributed to Moses (e.g. John 10:34; 12:34; 15:25; Rom 3:10–19; 1 Cor 14:21; cf. Ps 119).

and institutions. Jesus changes water, meant for ritual purification, into wine (John 2:1–11); Jesus speaks of his own body as the Temple (John 2:21), arguably eliminating the necessity for a human-made divine abode; on the Sabbath, Jesus tells the paralysed man to pick up his mat and walk (John 5:9) in clear violation of scriptural Sabbath law;[2] at the festival of Tabernacles, with its well-known water ritual, Jesus claims to be the source of living water (John 7:37–39), and, at the Passover festival, Jesus is presented as the true Passover Lamb (John 19:36). All these textual data are readily interpreted as corroborating John's replacement theology. William Loader offers a clear articulation of this view:

> Now that the Son has come, the logic of John's theology demands that the validity of the Law, the scriptures, the institutions and practices of Israel cease. For those for whom they once had authority and significance, the validity of the Law and the scriptures should exist now only as a pointer to Christ.[3]

The foundation for this seemingly programmatic replacement trope is found in John's prologue: 'From his fullness we have received "grace *instead* of grace"' (χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος; John 1:16).[4] This verse is often understood as indicating a strong opposition between the Mosaic *torah* and the grace revealed in Christ.[5] On this view, John sees the *torah* as mostly redundant and obsolete. The implications of this outlook would have been clear for John's earliest audience: followers of Jesus no longer need to observe the Sabbath, engage in ritual purification, worship at the Jerusalem Temple, or keep the Jewish festivals.[6]

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[2] Cf. Jer 17:22.

[3] William Loader, *Jesus' Attitude towards the Law: A Study of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 489.

[4] For a strong linguistic case for translating ἀντί with 'instead', see Ruth B. Edwards, 'ΧΑΡΙΝ ΑΝΤΙ ΧΑΡΙΤΟΣ (John 1.16), Grace and the Law in the Johannine Prologue', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 32 (1988), 3–15. For contextual reasons, however, I prefer a different, widely followed, translation of ἀντί, namely 'after' or 'followed by'; cf. John F. McHugh, *John 1–4,* International Critical Commentary (London: T&T Clark, 2009), p. 66.

[5] This view goes at least back to Augustine, see *Homilies on the Gospel of John: The Works of Saint Augustine,* trans. by Edmund Hill (New York: New City, 2009), p. 69. This view is also followed by many contemporary Johannine scholars such as John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 80.

[6] For example, Martin Hengel, 'The Old Testament in the Fourth Gospel', in *The Gospels and the Scriptures of Israel*, ed. by W. Richard Stegner and Craig A. Evans, Journal for the Study of the

There are, however, other ways of assessing the relevant textual data in John's Gospel. Against the grain of much Johannine scholarship, this article will argue for a much more sympathetic view of the *torah* in the fourth gospel. By examining the relevant texts, I will argue that John promotes a deeply appreciative and contextually sensitive vision of the Mosaic *torah* which, as I will draw out towards the end of this article, has beneficial implications for Jewish-Christian dialogues and can provide wisdom in contemporary debates about the role of Jewish institutions and practices in Christian communities.

The Prologue

Any serious assessment of the *torah* in John's Gospel must be grounded in the gospel's prologue (John 1:1–18). The prologue introduces the reader to the divine Logos, the means of all things created, the source of all things revealed (John 1:1–3). The two images John uses to describe these realities of *creation* and *revelation* are *life* and *light* (John 1:4–5).[7] John is emphatic about the scope of the creative and revelatory work of the Logos: '*All things* came into being through it, and apart from it, not one thing came into being that has come into being.'[8] Any assessment of the Mosaic *torah* then, will have to begin with this positive affirmation: the *torah* came into existence through the Logos.[9]

As the prologue continues, the evangelist describes how the divine Logos came to its own, faced rejection and acceptance, and then became flesh, revealing divine glory in human form (John 1:10–14).[10] In

New Testament: Supplement Series, 104 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), pp. 380–395 (p. 389).

[7] On this understanding of 'life' and 'light' see Karl Barth, *Witness to the Word: A Commentary on John 1*, ed. by Walther Fürst, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 36–44.

[8] John 1:3; the reason for translating 'it' rather than 'him' is that the human identity of the Logos is not revealed until verse 14. (All translations are my own unless indicated otherwise.)

[9] As Martin Vahrenhorst puts it, 'Der Logos, dessen Name hier genannt wird, ist der Ursprung der Tora. Das wundert nach 1,3 nicht weiter, den schließlich ist ja "alles" durch ihn geworden—also auch die Tora.' Vahrenhorst, 'Johannes und die Tora: Überlegungen zur Bedeutung der Tora im Johannesevangelium', *Kerygma und Dogma,* 54, no. 1 (2014), 14–36 (p. 29).

[10] For a strong example of a revelation-historical reading of the prologue, see Martin Hengel, 'The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth', in *The Gospel of*

the final movement of the prologue, John testifies that, from the fullness of this Logos, we have all received χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος (John 1:16). Leaving aside the best translation of this phrase for the moment, the next verse specifies that these two occurrences of χάρις respectively refer to the Mosaic *torah* and Jesus the Messiah: 'Indeed, the *torah* was given through Moses, grace and truth came into being through Jesus the Messiah' (John 1:17). However one translates the phrase χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος, then, it is clear that both expressions of χάρις have a common source: they are both gifts flowing from the fullness of the divine Logos.[11] The divine Logos once gave the *torah* through Moses to the people of Israel. This Logos has now become flesh in Jesus the Messiah. Considering this, one might translate χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος simply as 'one gift after another', or, with the LEB, 'grace after grace'.[12]

Another way to see what the evangelist is trying to communicate in this final movement of the prologue is by looking at the passage's literary allusions to the Jewish Scriptures. Scholars have long noted the reuse of the book of Exodus in John 1:14–18.[13] The Logos 'pitched his tent' (ἐσκήνωσεν) among us revealing his divine 'glory' (δόξα) which is 'full of grace and truth' (πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας). The keyword ἐσκήνωσεν, which is cognate to the noun σκηνή ('tent'), recalls the tent of meeting where YHWH met with Moses (Exod 33:7–11) and the tabernacle were YHWH dwelt among his people (Exod 25:1–8; 40:33–38). The keyword δόξα recalls the glory that filled the tabernacle (Exod 40:34) and the glory revealed by YHWH to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod 33:18). Finally, the phrase πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας is arguably John's personal rendering of the Hebrew phrase ורב חסד ואמת (Exod 34:6),[14] which is part of the magnificent self-revelation of YHWH on mount Sinai before he gives the *torah* to Moses. By reusing these specific

John and Christian Theology, ed. by Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 265–294.

11 For this conclusion, see also Jörg Augenstein, 'Jesus und das Gesetz im Johannesevangelium', *Kirche und Israel*, 14 (1999), 161–179 (p. 171).

12 Cf. footnote 4.

13 For example, M. E. Boismard, *Moïse ou Jèsus: Essai sur Christologie Johannique*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, 134 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988), pp. 101–105.

14 For more detailed case, see Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary,* 2 vols (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 1, pp. 416–419 and McHugh, *John 1–4*, pp. 59–61.

scriptural traditions, then, John connects the dwelling of YHWH among the Israelites with the dwelling of the divine Logos among 'us' (John 1:14), and the revelation of YHWH on mount Sinai to Moses with the revelation of the Logos in the flesh. In other words, the same God who revealed himself to Israel now reveals himself through Jesus. However, for John, the connection between YHWH and the Logos not only works forwards but also backwards.[15] *The Logos was always there with God* (John 1:1–2). That is, when Israel's God chose to dwell among his people, the Logos was there. When God gave the *torah* to Moses on Mount Sinai, the Logos was there. The relation between the Mosaic *torah* and the Logos, then, is not to be defined by opposition but by progression: the divine Logos, who was present on Mount Sinai, indeed, the source of the *torah* (John 1:3, 16), has now become flesh.[16]

By beginning with the prologue, it has been my aim to show that from the outset of the gospel it is problematic to describe the relation between the former and present revelation of the divine Logos as one of 'replacement' and to present Jesus as standing in strong opposition to the Mosaic *torah*. Both gifts described in John 1:17 derive from the same source, the Logos, and both gifts are described as gracious (χάρις) and thus fundamentally good. This, however, still leaves open the question of how the revelation of the Logos in the flesh affects the practices and institutions revealed in the Mosaic *torah*. It is to this question we now turn.

Ritual Purification

One of the Jewish practices John's Gospel records is that of ritual purification (John 2:6; 3:25; 11:55; 13:10; 18:28).[17] Acts of purification

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[15] For this insight, see also Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), pp. 308–311.

[16] Christopher M. Blumhofer, *The Gospel of John and the Future of Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 73.

[17] John typically uses the verb καθαρίζω or the noun καθαρός in these passages. John 11:55, however, uses the verb ἁγνίζω. The difference between καθαρίζω and ἁγνίζω is subtle. Whereas forms of καθαρίζω or καθαρός usually focus upon the elimination or ritual impurities, ἁγνίζω and related lexemes usually focus upon a positive state of ritual acceptability or dedication to God — which obviously can include the elimination of ritual impurities as well; Louw-Nida Greek Lexicon, s.v. 'Purify, Cleanse'.

form an integral part of the written *torah*, with the Pentateuch recording many everyday scenarios that require ritual cleansing for both priests, Levites, and laity.[18] In Second Temple Judaism these practices were developed in various ways, and several of these practices are reflected in John's Gospel.[19]

The first such practice is mentioned in the story of Jesus changing water into wine at a wedding feast in Cana (John 2:1–11). The narrator comments, 'Now six stone water jars were set there for the purification of the *Ioudaioi'* (John 2:6).[20] For many scholars, this narrative is programmatic for the allegedly prevalent replacement theme in John.[21] In this reading, the water represents the Jewish law or 'Judaism' and the wine the new revelation through Christ.[22] There are two main reasons for understanding the Cana story in this way. First, there are *six* jars with water meant for purification. Given the highly symbolic use of numbers throughout John's Gospel, many commentators take the number six to represent what Andrew Lincoln calls, 'the imperfection or insufficiency of the old order of Judaism'.[23] Secondly, the idea that Jesus changes water *meant for purification* into the choicest of wine is easily interpreted as an act indicating the abolishment of the requirement for ritual purification.[24]

However, neither of these interpretations necessarily follows from the narrative itself. Even if, at a symbolic level, the narrator wishes to juxtapose God's revelation through the *torah* with the newness of Jesus's revelation, the number six does not amount to a negative judgement on Judaism. It could simply indicate the *progression* from grace

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18 For example, Lev 12–16.

19 For a thematic treatment, see Ulrich Busse, 'Reinigung und Heiligung im Johannesevangelium', in *The Scriptures of Israel in Jewish and Christian Tradition: Essays in Honour of Maarten J. J. Menken*, ed. by Bart J. Koet, Steve Moyise, and Joseph Verheyden, Novum Testamentum Supplements, 148 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 141–158.

20 By using the transliteration *Ioudaioi*, I seek to avoid both the danger of stigmatisation (a potential risk of the translation 'Jews') and de-Judaising the Gospel of John (a potential risk of the translation 'Judeans').

21 For example, Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John,* 2 vols, Anchor Bible Commentary Series (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 1, p. 104; Loader, *Law*, p. 453.

22 See, e.g., Andrew Lincoln, *Gospel According to St John* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), p. 129.

23 Lincoln, *John*, p. 129.

24 Loader, *Law*, p. 453.

to grace, from anticipation to fullness — with Christ symbolising this fullness of God's revelation. The same holds true for the sign itself: the provision of wine in these water jars does not necessarily imply the abolishment of the requirement for ritual purification. To the contrary, the narrative itself seems to resist rather than confirm this interpretation. Indeed, one of the key details of the story is that the jars *had to be filled* (John 2:7). That is, they were empty because, presumably, they had been used for ritual purification. In the most literal sense, therefore, Jesus does not *replace* water meant for purification with wine, he uses new water.[25] Rather than a narrative about *replacement* of that which is obsolete, the Cana narrative, then, is better understood as a story about *provision*: Jesus aids the *torah* observant wedding hosts by abundantly providing in that which is lacking, wine.

The second reference to ritual purification (καθαρισμός) is in a dispute between the disciples of John the baptiser and a certain Jew (John 3:25).[26] Although this verse is somewhat enigmatic,[27] the immediate setting makes it clear that this dispute occurs in the context of a discussion on *water baptism* (John 3:22–26). In other words, it appears that the act of water baptism was perceived as a form of *ritual purification*.[28] Far from any notion of replacement, then, the evangelist presents Jesus and John the baptiser as endorsing an act of ritual purification in their respective ministries, although they may have shaped or interpreted this practice in a particular way that could have sparked debate.

That practices of ritual purification were widespread in first-century Judaism is further evidenced by John 11:55 where the narrator comments, 'Now the Passover of the *Ioudaioi* was near, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify

[25] Vahrenhorst, 'Tora', pp. 16–17.
[26] P^{66} and the first hand of Sinaiticus read the plural Ιουδαιων which would establish a clearer link with verse 26.
[27] Who the Jew is, what the dispute is about, and how it is resolved all remain unclear. Ernst Haenchen thus rightly labels this verse as 'an unsolved riddle'. Haenchen, *John 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 1–6,* Hermeneia Commentary Series (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 210.
[28] Lincoln, *John*, p. 160.

(ἁγνίσωσιν) themselves.'[29] No evaluative comment is provided, but the reference to this widespread practice of purification does inform the narrative setting of the story of the foot washing (John 13). In fact, it helps to explain why Jesus implies that Peter and the other disciples had purified themselves through ritual washing, as evidenced in John 13:10. 'The one who has bathed (λελουμένος) does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean.'[30] Jesus does not condemn this ritual washing but insists that, in addition, his disciples need to receive the purification only he provides: 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me' (John 13:8). Jesus, then, does not abolish the need for ritual washing but introduces an additional ritual practice, the foot washing. Rather than replacement, then, there is evidence of *diversification* of *torah* practices in John.

A final reference to ritual purification is found in John 18:28.[31] Here, the Jewish leaders do not want to enter Pilate's headquarters, 'so as to avoid ritual defilement (μιανθῶσιν) and to be able to eat the Passover'.[32] The irony is obvious in the context of John's Gospel. The Jewish leaders desire to preserve their state of purity so they can enter the temple and eat from the flesh of the Passover lamb whilst they contribute to the death of Jesus, the true Passover lamb.[33] In all likelihood, the irony of this juxtaposition intends to evoke reflection on behalf of the gospel's audience. Apparently, as in the case of these Jewish leaders, one can engage in the right practice (i.e. seeking ritual purity) but miss the point (i.e. recognising the true Passover lamb). What is more, one can engage in the *right* ritual practice whilst participating in the *unrightful* act of seeking the death of a *righteous* man. In such a case,

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[29] For the difference between καθαρίζω and ἁγνίζω see footnote 16.

[30] The verb λούω typically refers to the washing of the entire body whereas the verb νίπτω usually refers to the washing of only part of the body. See *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG), s.v. 'λούω' and 'νίπτω'.

[31] I have skipped over John 15:1–2 where the verb καθαίρω, to purify, has been used as a metaphor of the continuing process of purification that is necessary for the branches of the vine. In addition, in John 15:3, the noun καθαρός is used as a metaphor for the cleansing the disciples have received through Jesus's word. In this passage, however, no ritual practices are in view.

[32] The Greek Pentateuch uses the verb μιαίνω repeatedly to denote various forms of defilement that require ritual purification. In the New Testament the verb only occurs here and in Titus 1:14; Heb 12:14; and Jude 7.

[33] Cf. John 6:53 and Exod 12:8 [MT] and John 19:36 in which Jesus is identified as the Passover lamb (cf. Exod 12:46; Ps 34:20).

the prophetic critique of ritual practices without corresponding acts of justice readily comes to mind.[34]

In summary, we have seen that the theme of purification plays a significant role in John's Gospel. The various acts of purification practised by Jesus's contemporaries are never condemned as such. In contrast, Jesus endorses acts of water purification (e.g. baptism) and even introduces a new ritual act to his followers — foot washing. Rather than replacement, then, John fosters a *diversification* of practices of ritual purification. Indeed, to have a share with Jesus, one also needs to be washed by him (John 13:8). At the same time, there is an element of *relativisation* regarding ritual practices: engaging in the right ritual practices without practising justice leaves these practices meaningless. Right practices must go hand-in-hand with right behaviour.

The Temple

In offering an alternative to the ubiquitous replacement readings of John's Gospel, the biggest challenge is certainly found in John's temple theology. The evangelist presents Jesus as the locus of God's presence and even identifies Jesus's body as a temple (John 2:21). For many scholars this is a clear indication that, according to John, Jesus replaces the Jerusalem temple. A few quotations readily illustrate this point: 'For believers in Jesus, the Jerusalem temple now gives way to the temple constituted by the body of Jesus.'[35] 'Those who recognize Jesus' unique relationship with the Father, recognize in him the true house of God and the Temple has lost its religious significance.'[36] 'Jesus is now the dwelling place of God among his people, and so replaces the Tabernacle and the Temple.'[37] The basic logic underlying these widespread statements can be summarised as follows:

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[34] For example, Isa 58:6–12; Amos 5:21–24.

[35] Hays, *Echoes*, p. 312.

[36] Mary L. Coloe, *God Dwells with Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), p. 74.

[37] John Behr, *John the Theologian & His Paschal Gospel: A Prologue to Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 140.

- John presents Jesus's body as a temple — the earthly locus of the divine presence.
- Therefore, Jesus now replaces the Jerusalem temple — which used to be the special locus of the divine presence.

The argument begins with a premise from which a conclusion is drawn. However, if we lay out the argument in this way, it becomes clear that there is a hidden premise that often remains unspecified but needs to be articulated for the argument to make sense. This premise can be formulated as follows: *There can only be one special earthly locus of God's presence*. The reason why this premise is typically not stated, I suspect, is because the very premise is challenged by John's temple theology.

Before examining this challenge, however, I want to affirm the first premise (John presents Jesus's body as a temple) by briefly setting out the various ways John's Gospel presents Jesus as the locus of God's presence. In John 1:14, the incarnate Logos is presented as revealing God's glory by dwelling (ἐσκήνωσεν, 'pitching a tent') among us, recalling the divine glory which filled the tabernacle (Exod 40:34). In John 1:51, Jesus claims that his disciples will 'see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man'. This instantly recalls Jacob's dream at Bethel, the house of God, where he sees angels ascending and descending to heaven on a ladder.[38] Jesus now assumes the role of this ladder as the nexus between heaven and earth.[39] In John 2, Jesus's body is identified as the temple which will be destroyed and raised after three days (John 2:21). Both in John 4:14 and 7:37–39 Jesus is presented as the source of 'living water' which evokes various prophetic images of the ideal or future temple from which streams of 'living water' will flow.[40] Finally, Jesus's crucifixion forms the ironic climax of this temple motif as Jesus's temple body is crucified and (living) water literally flows from his side.[41] More could be said on each

[38] Gen 28:10–17.
[39] Richard Bauckham, *The Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2015), pp. 171–180.
[40] Cf. Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), pp. 99–101, 175–176.
[41] Behr, *John the Theologian*, p. 190.

of these texts, but it is clear that John consistently portrays Jesus as the incarnate locus of God's presence.

John, however, not only speaks of Jesus as the locus of God's presence but also describes the Spirit in these terms. Jesus will eventually go back to his Father but will give the Spirit to his followers to secure the ongoing presence of God in and among them (John 14:17). John also speaks of this divine indwelling as the Father and Jesus making their *home* within the disciples (John 14:23) — in a sense then, the disciples become houses of the Father (and the Son). Elsewhere John uses the image of 'living water' to indicate the indwelling of the Spirit within Jesus's followers (John 4:14; 7:37–39). This living water will become 'a spring of water welling up to eternal life' (John 4:14). Or as John puts it elsewhere, 'from his belly will flow rivers of living water' (John 7:38).[42] Other texts could be discussed but the point is clear: through the Spirit, God's presence will dwell in Jesus's followers wherever they are. Far from God's presence being confined to one human-made structure or person, there is a clear move towards the *democratisation* of the divine presence in John. Wherever Jesus's followers are, God is present through his Spirit. The hidden premise that there can only be one special earthly locus of God's presence must, therefore, be contested.

Now that we have challenged the hidden premise underlying a fully fledged replacement account of John's temple theology, we are in a good position to consider the significance of the Jerusalem temple in John's Gospel. An important first observation is that Jesus calls the temple 'my Father's house' (John 2:16) and is clearly concerned for its purity. The disciples link Jesus's passion for his Father's house to the words of Psalm 69, 'The zeal for your house will consume me' (John 2:17). It is only when Jesus is questioned about the authority by which he acts that he makes the enigmatic comment about his temple-body which will be destroyed and raised (John 2:19). Within John's narrative world, however, there is no indication that the Son's temple-body somehow *replaces* the Father's house. They simply coexist. In fact, the

[42] There is a longstanding debate whether the personal pronoun αὐτοῦ ('his' belly) in verse 38 refers to Jesus or the believers. Both readings are grammatically possible and fit within the wider outlook of John's Gospel. I therefore suspect this ambiguity is intentional and that αὐτοῦ can refer to both Jesus and those who believe in him.

Jerusalem temple continues to play a significant role in John's narrative, forming the location of some of Jesus's most significant teaching discourses. John seems to have no problem with affirming the Jerusalem temple as 'the Father's house' whilst also presenting Jesus's body as a temple.

The only other time the phrase 'the Father's house' occurs is in John 14:2, 'my Father's house has many rooms'. Following the line of typical replacement readings, this text is frequently understood as mysteriously referring to Jesus himself.[43] However, this reading faces some serious problems. To name one, if Jesus is the Father's house, why would Jesus have to go there to prepare rooms (John 14:2)? In my opinion, the much more likely option is that John, in line with many Second Temple Jews, considered the earthly temple to be a representation of the heavenly temple.[44] This heavenly temple, then, is the 'heavenly' house of the Father which has abundant dwelling places for Jesus's followers.[45] This alternative reading of John 14:1–4 removes the need to fit this text within John's alleged replacement theology and retains the common contemporary understanding of the Jerusalem temple as the earthly representation of the heavenly abode of God.

To complete our discussion on the significance of the Jerusalem temple we must face one final text in which the importance of the Jerusalem temple is explicitly discussed.

> 'Sir', the woman said, 'I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.' 'Woman', Jesus replied, 'believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem' […] 'Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.' (John 4:19–21, 23–24, NIV)

It is important to note to whom Jesus addresses these words: a Samaritan woman and the wider Samaritan community who worshipped

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43 For example, Coloe, *God Dwells with Us*, p. 163.

44 Cf. 1 Enoch 39:4 and 4 Ezra 7:101.

45 Steven M. Bryan, 'The Eschatological Temple in John 14', *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, 15, no. 2 (2005), 187–198.

God on Mount Gerizim rather than on Mount Zion.[46] After acknowledging Jesus as a prophet, the woman shares the dilemma about the appropriate location for worship. Jesus, in response, does not insist on one location over the other but anticipates a time when worship will neither occur on Mount Zion nor on Mount Gerizim — likely referring to the time after the fall of the Jerusalem temple.[47] Jesus furthermore refers to the coming 'hour' when true worshippers will worship the Father *in the Spirit and in truth*. In John, this hour is bound up with the mission of Jesus: it refers to his glorification, his return to the Father, and the subsequent gift of the Spirit, who, in turn, will enable true worship.[48] In this passage, then, Jesus offers no criticism of the Jerusalem temple but *relativises* its significance as the one location for true worship. True worship is not bound to a specific location but to the gift of the Spirit.

It is significant that Jesus offers these insights in conversation with a woman and her community for whom an insistence to worship in Jerusalem likely would have formed an obstacle to believing in Jesus. That is, Jesus shows *missional flexibility* in his approach to Jewish *torah* practices. For this non-Jewish audience, he does not impose the requirement to worship at the Jerusalem temple — his Father's house. Rather than insisting upon this location, he offers the Samaritans a vision of true worship which transcends location. Meanwhile, in the remainder of John's Gospel, Jesus and his Jewish disciples faithfully continue to worship at the Jerusalem temple.

In summary, rather than interpreting John's temple motif as a model illustration of John's replacement theology, our brief discussion offers an alternative way to understand this topic. First, the idea that Jesus simply *replaces* the Jerusalem temple rests on a misunderstanding of the locality of God's presence. John's Gospel does not limit God's presence to one structure or even one person. Rather, God's presence can both dwell in 'the Father's house', as well as being uniquely exhibited in the incarnate Son, whilst eventually being democratised to all Jesus's

[46] 'You' in verse 20 is plural, that is, the wider Samaritan community is in view.
[47] Thompson, *John*, p. 104.
[48] John 12:23; 13:1; 17:1.

followers through the Spirit. In other words, to speak of Jesus's temple-body as necessarily replacing the Jerusalem temple as the location where God dwells is simply a non-sequitur.[49] Rather, John *retains* the significance of the Jerusalem temple as 'the Father's house' and the obvious place for Jesus and his Jewish followers to worship, whilst *reconfiguring* the locality of God's presence in terms of Jesus and the Spirit and *relativising* the significance of the proper location of worship for non-Jewish people within the gospel's narrative world.

The Sabbath

In John, the most explicit debates about Jesus's attitude towards the *torah* revolve around his alleged breaching of the Sabbath (John 5; 7:14–24; 9). To understand these debates from a Johannine perspective, however, we must consider them in the wider context of Jesus's mission in John.

One of Jesus's mission statements occurs shortly before the first Sabbath controversy: 'My food is that I might do the will of the one who sent me and that I might "finish his work" (τελειώσω αὐτοῦ τὸ ἔργον)' (John 4:34). This expression appears with slight variation in John 5:36 and 17:4, 16, culminating in Jesus's final cry 'it is finished' (τετέλεσται; John 19:30). This repeated formula is readily understood as an allusion to the conclusion of the first creation story in Genesis, 'and on the sixth day, God "finished his works" (συνετέλεσεν τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ)' (Gen 2:2). John thus sets Jesus's works in analogy to God's creative works in Genesis. Jesus's mission, in other words, is to bring rest89oration to God's creation tainted by darkness (cf. John 1:5), thereby finishing the Father's work.[50] This understanding of Jesus's mission forms the appropriate context for the subsequent Sabbath controversies.

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[49] Indeed, this more comprehensive vision of God's presence is widely attested in the Jewish Scriptures. Even the scriptural narration of the dedication of the Jerusalem temple contains the following caveat in Solomon's prayer: 'But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built!' (1 Kgs 8:27; cf. Isa 66:1 and Ps 137:9).

[50] Martin Hengel, 'Prologue', pp. 268, 276.

The healing of the paralysed man is the basis for two controversies between Jesus and the *Ioudaioi* (John 5:1–18; 7:14–24). In the initial controversy, there are two reasons why Jesus's healing work aggravates the *Ioudaioi*: first, he 'works' on the Sabbath; second, he commands the healed man to pick up his mat and walk, thereby encouraging him to break the Sabbath command as well.[51] Jesus's response to the *Ioudaioi* is simple yet profound, 'my Father is working until now, so I am working' (John 5:17). Jesus does not deny that he works on the Sabbath but claims that he shares in the divine prerogative to do so.[52] Obviously, this would not have been a very convincing argument for Jesus's opponents — if it can be considered an argument at all. For the gospel's audience, however, it does not come as a surprise. Jesus, the divine Son, is sent on a mission to restore a broken creation (John 4:34). He simply follows the Father's lead in restoring a paralysed man to fullness of life. Of course, one could object, Jesus could have done this on a different day of the week, so why on the Sabbath? John does not provide a specific answer to this question other than that Jesus simply does what he sees the Father doing (John 5:19). A possible answer, however, might be implicit in Jesus's mission statement: if Jesus is sent to bring healing to a broken creation, thereby finishing the Father's works, what better day is there to perform his life-giving works than on the Sabbath, the day which marks the perfection of God's original creation?

The second Sabbath controversy in John still revolves around Jesus's healing of the paralysed man on the Sabbath. This time Jesus offers a different rationale for his Sabbath 'work':[53]

> 'Moses has given you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses would not be broken, are you angry with me because I made a whole man well on the Sabbath?'. (John 7:22–24, LEB)

[51] Cf. Exod 25:3; Num 15:32–36; Jer 17:21–22.

[52] Severino Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel: The Torah and the Gospel, Moses and Jesus, Judaism and Christianity According to John*, Novum Testamentum Supplements, 42 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), p. 16.

[53] John 7:21 explicitly uses the word ἔργον in reference to the healing of the paralysed man.

At first sight, Jesus appears to make an argument from the lesser to the greater (*qal wahomer*). If even an act that affects only one part of the body (circumcision) overrides the Sabbath law,[54] how much more is it permitted to heal a whole man? As a *qal wahomer* illustration, however, the argument does not work. Circumcision *must* happen on the eighth day, so if that day happens to be a Sabbath it must happen then. But Jesus could have healed the paralysed man on any other day of the week. So why on the Sabbath? If we remember, however, that Jesus is sent by his Father to complete his work and that *he always does the Father's will* (John 4:34), a hidden premise in the argument comes to light:

> If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses would not be broken. Are you angry with me because I made a whole man well on the Sabbath, (*so that 'the will of my Father' would not be broken*)?

The reason the comparison with circumcision works, then, is because just as circumcision *must* happen on a certain day, so Jesus's work *must* happen on the day his Father chooses.[55] In addition to the argument about Jesus's *divine prerogative* (John 5:17), John 7 offers us an argument of *divine necessity*. Jesus must heal the man on the Sabbath because this is his Father's will.

The third Sabbath controversy originates in a different work of Jesus: the healing of the man born blind (John 9:1–12). This is arguably a *creative* sign as Jesus not simply restores someone's sight but creates the ability to see.[56] Jesus quite literally acts as 'the light of the world' (John 9:5) bringing sight to someone in darkness. In addition to this sign being marked as a 'work of God'[57] — in reference to Jesus's creative mission — Jesus again points to the divine necessity of this work: 'We *must* (δεῖ) work the works of the one who sent me while it is still day' (John 9:4). Notably, however, by speaking in the first-person plural, Jesus also includes the disciples in his mission.[58] Like Jesus, they are called to

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[54] Lev 12:3.

[55] For a similar insight, see Augenstein, 'Gesetz', p. 168.

[56] For a more extensive interpretation of the healing of the man born blind as a creative act, see Daniel Frayer-Griggs, 'Spittle, Clay, and Creation in John 9:6 and Some Dead Sea Scrolls', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 132, no. 3 (2013), 659–670.

[57] John 9:3: 'This happened so that *the works of God* (τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ) might be revealed in him.'

[58] For other instances where the disciples are included in Jesus's work, see John 3:11; 4:2, 38; 6:5; 14:12; 20:21; cf. Thompson, *John*, p. 207.

perform God's works while it is still day. And since the necessity of this work (healing the man born blind) clearly trumps the command to rest on the Sabbath, the reader may infer that Jesus's disciples likewise are called to work 'the works of God', even on the Sabbath. *From a Johannine perspective, however, this does not constitute a breach of the Sabbath command rather it constitutes obedience to God's command to perform restorative, life- and light-giving works in accordance with his will, also when this occurs on the Sabbath.* The Father is at work on the Sabbath, so is Jesus, and so should be the disciples.

This adaptation of the Sabbath command is not as shocking as it may appear. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus could appeal to common exceptions to the Sabbath command: saving a sheep or a child is permitted on the Sabbath (Matt 12:10–12; Luke 14:3–4); it is better to do good than to do evil on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1–16; Luke 6:6–11). From these exceptions it is only a small step to John's claim that it is good, even necessary, to perform works of God on the Sabbath when one is presented with the opportunity to do so.

So far, we have discovered that Jesus performs life- and light-giving works on the Sabbath. These works bring restoration and renewal to God's tainted creation. There is, however, one more 'work' Jesus needs to complete: dying a life-giving death. We already noted that Jesus's final cry, 'it is finished' (τετέλεσται; John 19:30) echoes the conclusion of the first creation story. This cry, moreover, is followed by John's enigmatic reference to the 'great Sabbath' following Jesus's death (John 19:31).[59] As Martin Hengel puts it so beautifully, 'On the cross the creator of the world completes his work of "new creation".'[60] Jesus's work, bringing life and light to a broken creation, is now finished. The light has overcome the darkness. A great day of rest has arrived. And this great Sabbath is followed by a new day where, perhaps unsurprisingly, Mary meets Jesus in a garden and mistakes him for 'the gardener' (John 20:15).[61] Clearly, John seeks to communicate that Jesus's resurrection marks the dawn of a new creation — which is inaugurated

[59] John 19:31: ἦν γὰρ μεγάλη ἡ ἡμέρα ἐκείνου τοῦ σαββάτου, 'because that Sabbath day was great'.
[60] Hengel, 'Prologue', p. 270.
[61] There are many other allusions to Genesis 1–3 in John's passion narrative. For an excellent overview, see Nicholas J. Schaser, 'Inverting Eden: The Reversal of Genesis 1–3 in John's Passion', *Word & World*, 40 (2020), pp. 263–270.

by Jesus's finished work. And in this new creation, just as Adam once received the breath of life, Jesus now breathes (ἐνεφύσησεν) on his disciples and calls them to continue his life-giving mission (John 20:21–22).[62] Now they must perform the works of God and spread the life and light of God's new creation.

In discussing the Sabbath controversies in John's Gospel, we have placed these disputes in the larger context of Jesus's mission to complete the Father's work and act in obedience to the Father's will (John 4:34). From this perspective, Jesus never breaks the Sabbath but simply obeys his Father's command by performing life- and light-giving works on the Sabbath. This priority to follow the Father's lead over strict Sabbath observance is also extended to Jesus's disciples (John 9:4). Far from a dramatic alteration of the Sabbath command, however, this prioritisation of 'doing the works of God' over 'rest' is not much different from similar forms of prioritisation that Jesus's contemporaries engaged in. The Gospel of John offers no obvious reason, then, for Jewish disciples of Jesus to stop observing the Sabbath as a day of rest (although this rest could be supplemented or 'broken' by engaging in 'works of God'). What is more, the Sabbath would arguably attain an even deeper significance for Johannine believers as this day now can be celebrated in light of the finished work of Jesus and the new creation his work has brought about.

Other Potential Indications of Replacement

Besides the debates regarding ritual purification, temple, and Sabbath, there are yet other motifs in John's Gospel that could easily be interpreted through a replacement lens.

The Jewish festivals play a prominent role in John's Gospel and Jesus's ministry. Jesus attends the Passover (John 2:23), an unnamed Jewish festival (John 5:1), the feast of Tabernacles (John 7:2), the festival

[62] The Greek verb ἐμφυσάω is a hapax legomenon in the New Testament and rare in the ancient Greek versions of the Jewish Scriptures. It does, however, occur in Greek Gen 2:7 to describe the breath of life God breathed into Adam.

of Dedication (John 10:22), and, again, the Passover festival.[63] Jesus thus observes the festivals together with his disciples. However, on three occasions, John's Gospel refers to these festivals as 'the festival *of the Ioudaioi*' (ἑορτὴ τῶν Ἰουδαίων; John 5:1; 6:4; 7:2). For many scholars this phrase is, yet again, an example of John's replacement theology. Andrew Lincoln comments that it 'is probably not simply a neutral description but reflects the present distancing of the Evangelist and his community from Jewish institutions'.[64] In similar vein, Raymond Brown suggests that this expression 'may indicate a hostility to these feasts which are to be replaced by Jesus'.[65] If one believes that John's Gospel is actively promoting a replacement theology, such comments are understandable as they fit the adopted paradigm, but this is certainly not the only possible interpretation. As Alan Culpepper and Edward Klink have observed, these phrases may simply function as explanatory notes for the implied non-Jewish audiences of the Gospel.[66] They clarify that these are Jewish festivals. Be that as it may, on its own the phrase 'the festival of the *Ioudaioi*' certainly does not indicate either distancing or replacement. Jesus carefully observes the festivals. What is more, the festivals are a significant stage against which Jesus can reveal his identity through his teaching and actions. At the festival of Tabernacles, where, historically, a water and light ceremony at the temple formed a highlight of the celebrations, Jesus reveals himself as the source of living water and the light of the world.[67] At the festival of Dedication, marking the 'sanctification' of the temple after the defilement by Antiochus Epiphanes IV, Jesus reveals himself to be the Father's sanctified agent.[68] At the Passover festival, Jesus acts like a new Moses, performing signs, and, ultimately, gives up his own life and dies as the true Passover Lamb.[69] In other words, each of these festivals fulfils a positive function in facilitating the revelation of Jesus's identity. Nowhere in the gospel is

[63] The Passover is also 'near' when Jesus miraculously provides bread for the hungry crowd (John 6:4). However, Jesus is not in Jerusalem at that time.
[64] Lincoln, *John*, p. 192.
[65] Brown, *John*, 1, p. 114.
[66] R. Alan Culpepper, *The Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), pp. 218–222; Edward W. Klink III, *The Sheep of the Fold: The Audience and Origin of the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 173–174.
[67] John 7:37–39; 8:12; cf. M. Sukk. 4:9; 5:1–5; T. Sukk. 3:6; 4:1–9.
[68] John 10:36; cf. 1 Macc 4:48; Greek 2 Chron 7:20.
[69] John 19:33–36; cf. Exod 12:10.

there any indication that Jesus's Jewish followers should give up celebrating these festivals. At the same time, however, considering their understanding of Jesus's identity, Jesus's followers would certainly celebrate these festivals in a *reconfigured* way. They would remember Jesus as the one in whom the various elements of their festivals find a new significance.

Another possible indication that the evangelist may be distancing himself and his community from the *torah* is the use of second- and third-person possessive pronouns in combination with the noun νόμος.[70] There are three examples of this in John's Gospel: 'in *your torah* it is written' (John 8:17), 'is it not written in *your torah*' (John 10:34), 'it was to fulfil the word that is written in *their torah*' (John 15:25). According to William Loader, this distinctive use of possessive pronouns is appropriate 'since it has ceased to be the Law of Jesus and the community, except in its Christological function'.[71] Again, this understanding of these three phrases is conceivable if one takes John's purpose is to promote the replacement of the Jewish law by Jesus. There are, however, good contextual reasons to doubt this interpretation. In John 8:17 and 10:34, we find Jesus arguing with a group of Jewish leaders. Rather than distancing himself from the *torah* he uses evidence from the *torah* to corroborate claims about his identity. The possessive pronoun simply adds rhetorical force to the argument. In John 15:25, Jesus explains that the *Ioudaioi* are fulfilling their very own *torah* by persecuting Jesus. The use of the possessive pronoun simply highlights the irony of this event. Moreover, the use of possessive pronouns to add rhetorical force to one's argument is not unprecedented in the Jewish Scriptures. As Jörg Augenstein has demonstrated, the books of Deuteronomy and Joshua contain ample examples of second- and third-person demonstrative pronouns used for rhetorical purposes rather than creating distance between the speaker and object referred to.[72] Rather than understanding these three examples from John's Gospel as

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[70] For this understanding of John 8:17, 10:34, and 15:25 see Hengel, 'The Old Testament', p. 28; Loader, *Law*, p. 489; Pancaro, *The Law*, pp. 520–522.

[71] Loader, *Law*, p. 489.

[72] Jörg Augenstein, 'Miszellen: "Euer Gesetz"—Ein Pronomen und die Johanneische Haltung zum Gesetz', *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*, 88 (1997), 311–313 (pp. 312–313). E.g., Deut 4:10, 21, 23.

indications of a growing distance between the evangelist and their community and the *torah*, these phrases are best understood as adding rhetorical force to the contextual arguments of Jesus.

A final issue is John's prevalent use of *torah* imagery to describe Jesus. Jesus is presented as the source of life, light, and living water, the truth, and the bread of life. Each of these images is used to describe the *torah* in the Jewish Scriptures, other Second Temple Literature, and later rabbinic sources.[73] For some scholars this is yet more evidence that Jesus replaces the *torah* whereas others conclude that, for John, Jesus is the continuation or embodiment of the *torah*. As Jochen Flebbe puts it in a recent monograph, 'Jesus ist die Tora'.[74] Or as Craig S. Keener claims, 'The Fourth Gospel presents the Logos of its prologue as Torah.'[75] In my opinion, however, both understandings are unhelpful and, ultimately, un-Johannine. For John, the Logos does not replace the *torah* nor is it to be identified with the *torah*. Rather, the Logos (i.e. Jesus) is the *source* of the *torah*. This is the clear implication of my proposed reading of John's prologue. For John, then, the *torah* can be called a light, the source of life, and the truth, *because it derives from Jesus* — not the other way around.

It is easy to see how the three motifs discussed above can be utilised to corroborate a replacement understanding of John's view of the *torah*. However, none of these motifs provides compelling evidence that John wished to present Jesus as replacing the *torah*.

Summary and Implications

This article has argued that there are no persuasive reasons to suppose that John's Gospel promotes the view that Jesus replaces the institutions and practices of the Mosaic *torah*. There are no indications that, within John's narrative world, Jesus or his followers stopped observing the Sabbath, refrained from temple worship, or stopped performing

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[73] For example, Jochen Flebbe, *Jesus Tora: Christologie und Gesetz im Johannesevangelium vor dem Hintergrund Antik-Jüdischer Torametaphorik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020).

[74] Flebbe, *Jesus Tora,* p. 404. To Flebbe's credit, he does try to avoid replacement language in his wider argument.

[75] Keener, *John*, 1, p. 360.

practices related to ritual purity, neither does the evangelist present Jesus as replacing these practices and institutions or suggest they no longer matter. There is no evidence, furthermore, that the evangelist intentionally distances himself or his community from the *torah*. This article, then, has largely provided arguments for what is not happening, the negative case so to speak, with regards to the *torah* in John's Gospel.[76] Along the way, however, we have seen the signposts of what a more constructive vision of the ethical and ritual practices of a 'Johannine community' might look like.[77]

First among these is the element of *retainment*. John does not envision a community that jettisons its sacred practices and institutions. There is no replacement of ritual washing by baptism, the temple by Jesus, Sabbath by Sunday, or Jewish festivals by a 'Christian' calendar. Rather, each of these practices and institutions are subject to *reinterpretation* now that the Messiah has come: true purity is given through the washing which Jesus offers his followers; true worship is not dependent on location but on the Spirit; God's tainted creation is restored and renewed through the finished work of Jesus; and the festivals find new meaning through the mission of Christ — the bread of life, the source of living water, the light of the world, and the true Lamb of God. In addition to *retainment* and *reinterpretation* John also advocates a degree of *relativisation* about the significance, or appropriate application, of certain Jewish institutions and practices: to worship in Spirit and truth is far more important than the location of worship (John 4:21); to do the works of God is weightier than Sabbath rest (John 9:4); to attain to ritual purity is worth little if, at the same time, one contributes to the death of the Lamb of God (John 18:28). To put this last point differently, in John we find clear evidence that the appropriate observance of the *torah* is dependent on *context*. The Samaritan woman and her community are not summoned to go to Jerusalem to worship and Jesus does not tell the paralysed man, 'You have waited for thirty-eight years, so please wait for one more day because it is the Sabbath today.' For John, observing the *torah* is more than adhering to a set of

[76] There is also a positive argument to be made about the ethical practices John's Gospel envisions, but this would require a different essay.

[77] By 'Johannine community', I mean the community John's Gospel envisions, or seeks to create, rather than the community or communities from which the gospel emerged.

written or oral teachings, it is being attentive to God's guidance and instructions in specific situations. Finally, there is an element of *diversification* in *torah* practices in John: Jesus introduces the practice of foot washing, encourages fresh ways of Sabbath observance, and opens up new modes of worshipping God.

Taken together, the possible implications of John's vision of the *torah* as set out above are many, but I want to draw out just two. First, a Johannine vision of the *torah* that avoids the language of replacement and emphasises the positive value of the Jewish institutions and practices has serious potential to aid Jewish-Christian dialogue. John, an early and highly influential Christian text, *does not* promote the abolishment of Judaism's sacred practices and institutions nor of the Mosaic *torah* as a whole, despite much evidence to the contrary in the history of its interpretation. Of course, the gospel's central claim about the messiahship of Jesus will remain a watershed issue for Jewish and Christian audiences encountering the text. Still, in an interreligious dialogue, a Christian could affirm the value John's Gospel attributes to Jewish practices and institutions. Moreover, one could explain, that, in this assessment of John's Gospel, Jewish people who acknowledge Jesus as Messiah would not be expected to abandon their traditional Jewish institutions and practices — although they would be subject to reinterpretation in light of the person and work of Jesus.

Second, I have argued that a Johannine vision of the *torah* leaves space for a *diversity* of *torah* practices and encourages *contextual sensitivity*. Currently, both in the country I reside, Scotland, and my home country, the Netherlands, many baptistic churches face renewed internal discussions about the appropriateness of observing certain Jewish practices or institutions such as the Sabbath or Jewish festivals. Rather than providing clear-cut answers, I believe that a Johannine vision of the *torah* as set out in this article can offer wisdom for healthy, contextually sensitive discussions on such issues.

The Performative Preaching of John Chrysostom: A Warning from History

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Abstract
This article offers a critical review on John Chrysostom's *Homilies Against the Jews*,[1] first preached in Antioch in 386 CE. They are the supreme example of anti-Judaic writing among the patristic Fathers, and arise out of this author's work on the history of interpretation of anti-Jewish texts in Matthew's Gospel. Other scholars have undertaken to provide an account of John Chrysostom's preaching,[2] but here I offer my own analysis of his homilies for those who may be only vaguely aware of his antisemitic convictions. The importance of keeping this material in the public eye is to sensitise ourselves to antisemitic currents in Christian history, to be cognisant of the contribution Christians have made to the terrible atrocities perpetrated against the Jews throughout history. Reviewing the sermons of John Chrysostom against the Jews is also to be reminded of the power of the pulpit, and the responsibility of all who preach to perform words that contribute to the peace of God's kingdom, to be ambassadors of reconciliation.

Keywords
John Chrysostom; Jews; antisemitism

Introduction

John Chrysostom, known as 'golden-mouth' for the eloquence of his preaching,[3] was accustomed to receiving the adulation of his

[1] I am using the translation, St John Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos Orationes*, based on Migne, *Patriolia Graeca*, vol. 48, Section 20, Opensource <https://archive.org/details/adversus-judaeos-orationes-st-john-chrysostom> pp. 844–942. I have also cross-referenced with the translation produced by Mervyn Maxwell, 'Chrysostom's Homilies against the Jews: An English Translation' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 1967).

[2] Wendy Mayer notes that the homilies receive significant attention in more than sixty books, articles, and dissertations across a broad range of languages. See Wendy Mayer, 'Preaching Hatred? John Chrysostom, Neuroscience, and the Jews', in *Revisioning John Chrysostom*, ed. by Chris de Wet and Wendy Mayer (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 58–136 (p. 58).

[3] Consider, for example, the eulogy of Hughes Oliphant Old: 'Without doubt the most universally respected of all preachers, the golden mouthed John remains the crowning example

congregation as they clapped and cheered his orations.[4] Chrysostom, could today, however, also be described as 'potty mouthed' for the foul and abusive language he was want to employ when speaking about the Jews. If we ever wonder if preaching has any impact or legacy, the lessons to be learned from Chrysostom's oratory are sobering. The negative repercussions of the sermons under consideration here have been documented by Stephen Katz, who has noted their inspiration for pagan Nazi antisemitism.[5] James Parkes denounced these sermons in striking fashion as 'the most horrible and violent denunciations of Judaism to be found in the writings of a Christian theologian',[6] and again, 'In these discourses there is no sneer too mean, no jibe too bitter for him to fling and the Jewish people.'[7] Marcel Simon's estimate of the 'golden-mouth' is equally excoriating: 'Chrysostom's passion in the cause of anti-Semitism, and the violence of his invective, are without parallel in the literature of the first few centuries.'[8] He is accused of being the 'master of anti-Jewish invective'.[9] It is not an overstatement to say that Chrysostom, in Christian tradition, has divided opinion, sharply.

A number of elements that characterise early Christian polemic against the Jews coalesce in unique fashion in Chrysostom's

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of how the faithful preaching of the word of God ever purifies and enlightens the church so that the Lord of the Church is glorified. Surely there is no one from whom we can learn more about preaching as worship.' (Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: Volume 2: The Patristic Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 171–172.)

[4] Homily I, I, (1); Homily VII, VI, (2). The homilies are numbered I–VIII (Roman numerals), have sections I–various (Roman numerals), and paragraphs with Arabic numerals (1), (2), etc., in parentheses. I shall follow this pattern for ease of reference.

[5] Stephen T. Katz, 'Ideology, State Power, and Mass Murder/Genocide', in *Lessons and Legacies: The Meaning of the Holocaust in a Changing World*, ed. by Peter Hayes (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), pp. 47–89 (pp. 52–54). Many other have also written about the progress of Christian anti-Jewish activity. See, for example, Wayne Meeks and Robert Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era*, SBL Sources for Biblical Study 13 (Missoula, MT: Scholar's Press, 1978), pp. 34–36; Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel: Study of the Relations Between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire, AD 135–425* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), pp. 135–236; James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: a Study of the Origins of Antisemitism* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1961) <https://hdl-handle-net.dtl.idm.oclc.org/2027/ heb01238.0001.001. EPUB>.

[6] James Parkes, *Prelude to Dialogue* (Elstree: Vallentine Mitchell, 1969), p. 153.

[7] Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue*, p. 163.

[8] Simon, *Verus Israel*, p. 222.

[9] Simon, *Verus Israel*, p. 217.

documented sermons. He employs the ancient rhetorical form of *psogos*[10] to propagate tropes of popular antisemitism, air his theological grievances, and mine biblical texts to speak ill of the Jews. While his anti-Jewish polemic is evident throughout his work, his bitterness comes to its zenith in his eight *Homilies Against the Jews*, in Latin *Adversus Judaeus*, which are an extraordinary, personal rant against the people who were, lest we forget, of the same nationality as Jesus.

Chrysostom delivered his sermons in Antioch, in the autumn of 386 CE,[11] the immediate purpose being to deter Christians in Antioch who were attracted to Jewish religious culture and customs which compromised, in Chrysostom's mind, loyalty and participation in Christian life and worship in the city. Chrysostom accused these citizens of being 'Judaizers', a moniker which has generated much literature around the question whether the homilies were directed at the Jews, and are anti-Judaic, or at the Judaizers in his own congregation.[12] Robert Wilken has even proposed the title of the sermons be read not as *Against the Jews*, but *Against the Judaizing Christians*.[13] The content of the sermons, however, suggests that while Chrysostom is attacking some in his own flock, his method is to persuade them of the Jews' perfidy, and for this reason they should have no engagement with them. To paraphrase Tertullian, what, for the Christian, has Bethlehem to do with Jerusalem?[14]

A significant development for understanding the background to Chrysostom's homilies against the Jews was the coming to imperial power of Julian the Apostate,[15] whose eighteen-month reign from 361

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10 Meaning, invective, vitriol, blame, etc. See Wendy Mayer and Pauline Allen, *John Chrysostom* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 148; Robert. L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late Fourth Century* (Berkely: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 112–116; Alberto J. Quiroga Puertas, '*Psogos*: The Rhetoric of Invective in 4th Century CE Imperial Speeches', in *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Ancient Rhetoric*, ed. by Sophia Papaioannou, Andreas Serafim, and Michael Edwards (Leiden: Brill, 2021), pp. 170–191 <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004470057>.

11 See Mayer and Allen, *John Chrysostom*, p. 148.

12 Meeks and Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch*, p. 31.

13 See Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews*, p. 68.

14 See Tertullian, *Prescription Against Heretics*.

15 See Peter van Nuffelen, 'The Christian Reception of Julian', in *A Companion to Julian the Apostate* ed. by Hans-Ulrich Wiemar and Stefan Rebenich (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 360–397 <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004416314_013>; Wilken, *Chrysostom and the Jews*, pp. 158–160.

to 363 CE had an egregious impact on relations between Jews and Christians in Antioch. To deal with an uprising on the eastern border of the empire, Julian moved his living from Constantinople to Antioch in 362, arriving in the city on 18 July. Before launching a military campaign against the Sassanids, however, he devoted time to instituting a series of religious reforms which pitted Jews against Christians. Having converted from Christianity to paganism around the age of twenty, Julian believed the fortunes of the empire depended on a revival of the ancient religions and suppression of the newly dominant faith, Christianity. To defeat the church, therefore, he appointed the pagan priest Theodorus to organise a programme of rebuilding pagan temples in Asia as a means of reinstating pagan rites, and it also served his purpose to restore the fortunes of the Jews, including a plan to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.[16] In the event, the rebuilding was not successful, possibly the result of an earthquake, and the predictable reaction of the Christians proved to be a double blow, since they interpreted this as a sign of God's siding with their religion and divine opposition to both Julian and the Jews.[17] Julian, keen to provide support for ancestral rituals, also instructed the Jews to resume the traditional sacrifices of Judaism, but again this was not realised on account of the reply from the Jews that sacrifice was only permissible in the sanctuary in Jerusalem. The anti-Christian policies of Julian made unusual allies of pagans and Jews, the link between them being Julian's preferment of ancient religions against the new.[18]

To the relief of Christians in Antioch, Julian's reign was destined to be brief as he was mortally wounded in battle with the Sassanids at Samarra, near Maranga, on 26 June 363, to be replaced by Emperor Jovian, who re-established Christianity's privileged position throughout the empire. Shortly after Julian's death, Christians in Antioch began to display increasing hostility towards the Jews, a backlash to Julian's attempts to use the Jews as a weapon against the church. Twenty-three years after Julian's death, John Chrysostom, newly ordained into the

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16 This event is discussed in *Homily* V, see below.

17 See Sebastian P. Brock 'The Rebuilding of the Temple Under Julian: A New Source', *Palestine Exploration Quarterly,* 108, no. 2 (1976), 103–107 <https://doi.org/10.1179/peq.1976.108.2.103>.

18 Meeks and Wilken, *Jews and Christians*, p. 29.

priesthood, opened his 'golden mouth' to begin his series of eight homilies against the Jews.[19]

Homilies Against the Jews/Judaizers

The intensity of bitterness towards the Jews common in Chrysostom's preaching means it is not only the Jewish religion, but also the people that are commonly denounced in his sermons.[20] Furthermore, his anti-Jewish rhetoric is found not only in his sermons, but elsewhere in his writings; for example, where he says, 'The Christian must follow the example of the martyrs who, because they loved Christ, hated the Jews, for it is not possible to love the victim without hating his murderers.'[21] Elsewhere he writes, 'How can anyone have anything to do with these miserable, demon-possessed creatures, brought up on crime and murder? […] Shun them like filth and a universal plague.'[22] I would suggest it is only someone with a personal, extreme antipathy towards a people, not merely their religion, who could speak such words as these.[23]

The homilies against the Jews were occasional sermons, prepared in a hurry as a series of Jewish festivals was about to begin in Antioch and John was troubled at the thought of Christians participating in the Jewish rites and rituals. The purpose of the sermons was to inspire the people to a hatred of all things Jewish, to persuade his congregation to stay away from Jews, Jewish festivals, Scriptures, and fasts, and motivate them to prevent any, who were so inclined, from attending. John's rhetoric was neither unprecedented, nor short-lived in its impact. It had a context, which can be traced back to the New Testament,[24] and

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19 See Meeks and Wilken, *Jews and Christians*, p. 30.

20 I share the view, defended by Wendy Mayer, that Chrysostom's sermons cannot be exonerated from an *ad hominem* intention. See Wendy Mayer, 'Preaching Hatred? John Chrysostom, Neuroscience, and the Jews', p. 59.

21 Cited by Simon, *Verus Israel*, p. 223.

22 Cited by Simon, *Verus Israel*, p. 218.

23 The words of Steven T. Katz come to mind, as he writes, with Chrysostom in view, 'Hate is a sacramental activity. To hate Jews is for the Church Fathers a Christian *mitzvah.* Make no mistake — every major Church Father is a great hater of Judaism and the Jewish people.' See Katz, 'Ideology, State Power, and Mass Murder/Genocide', p. 51.

24 The literature on this theme is vast, but see for example, *Anti-Judaism and the Gospels,* ed. by W. R. Farmer (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1999); D. R. A. Hare, 'The Rejection of the Jews in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts', in *Anti-Semitism and the Foundations of Christianity*, ed. by A. Davies

created a context for others to attack Jews in word and person, and this is one of the reasons his words should not be forgotten or too easily excused.

Homily I

The feasts of Trumpets, Tabernacles, and associated fasts[25] are drawing near, and an upsurge in Jewish religious fervour is endangering Christian loyalty. First, as a faithful shepherd, Chrysostom warns his sheep not to mix with the Jews, then, as a doctor, who recognises the onset of plague, Chrysostom warns his people to keep away from danger, for 'this is what physicians do'.[26]

His first point of attack concerns the scandalous manner in which the Jewish feasts and festivals are kept, which are not with humility and sobriety, but 'dancing with bare feet in the marketplace, […] with kettledrums, with lyres, with harps, and with other instruments'.[27] The risk to one's reputation, however, is the least of a Christian's concern, because, more importantly, God has declared that he hates the festivals of the Jews (Amos 5:21),[28] and has demonstrated his rejection of festivals and sacrifices, along with his forsaking of the Jews as a people, by allowing the destruction of the Jerusalem temple by barbarians.[29]

The scandalous behaviour of the Jews, he warns, is of a piece with what they do in the synagogue, which they have turned into a theatre where 'the effeminate and prostitutes perform'.[30] It is 'a den of robbers and lodging for wild beasts […] a dwelling of demons',[31] so why would Christians want to go there?

(New York: Paulist Press, 1979), pp. 27–47; R. R. Reuther, *Faith and Fratricide* (Minnesota: Seabury Press, 1974).

25 Homily I, I, (5).

26 Homily I, I, (6); I, IV, (3).

27 Homily I, II, (7); I, VII, (2). Dancing with bare feet indicates that the fast of Yom Kippur was imminent. See Wilken, *Chrysostom and the Jews*, p. 75.

28 Homily I, VII, (1–2).

29 Homily I, VII, (4).

30 Homily I, II, (7); II, III, (4).

31 See also Homily VIII, VIII, (7–8).

The attraction of the synagogue may seem puzzling to us today, but the appeal to Judaizers was the antiquity of the Jewish religion, exemplified by the scrolls of the Law and Prophets they preserved.[32] But what good do the scrolls serve the Jews, Chrysostom asks, since they do not read them, and worse, they fail to see Christ foretold in them, thus missing their very purpose.[33] Sacred books do not make a place holy. So, turning to the Judaizers directly, he asks, 'Why do you reverence that place, must you not despise it, hold it in abomination, run away from it?'[34]

We understand something of Chrysostom's pleading with the Judaizers when we realise that for him, the denunciation of the Jews is the obverse side of the coin to their rejection of Jesus. For example, he laments, 'Here the slayers of Christ gather together, here the cross is driven out, here God is blasphemed, here the Father is ignored, here the Son is outraged, here the grace of the Spirit rejected.'[35] It follows, therefore, that it is impossible that those who have tasted the grace of Christ could find any delight in the rituals of his killers.

Lastly, Chrysostom turns his attention to the Jews themselves. Vilifying the Jewish people in the most outrageous and deprecatory terms he can conjure, he attacks the Jews with preaching that is unashamedly *ad hominem*. Jews are 'pitiful and miserable',[36] and no one should be offended at calling them 'pitiable and miserable', for they are ungrateful, and have spurned the many blessings and gifts God has bestowed upon them. Supreme in their ingratitude was their failure to recognise and embrace 'the morning Sun of Justice, but they thrust aside its rays and still sit in darkness'.[37] Having rejected Christ, the *prodigal* sons 'fell to kinship with dogs', and furthermore, 'they became dogs, and we became the Children'.[38] Here the preacher's tactics are transparent, *dehumanisation*[39] of his enemies, with a side-order of replacement

32 See Homily VI, VI, (8).
33 Homily I, V, (2–4).
34 Homily I, III, (1); I, III, (3); I, IV, (2); I, V, (2); I, VI, (2).
35 Homily I, VI, (3); see also VI, VI, (7).
36 Homily I, I, (5); I, II, (1)
37 Homily I, II, (1).
38 Homily I, II, (2).
39 See Katz, 'Ideology, State Power and Mass Murder/Genocide', pp. 50–52.

theology,[40] both constructs that would pay forward into medieval antisemitism with deadly effects.

As if to justify his own intemperate rhetoric, he reminds the congregation that the Jews were the target of their own prophet, Jeremiah, when he complained 'you broke your yoke and burst your bonds', which, in Chrysostom's estimation, 'is the crime of untamed beasts, who are uncontrolled and reject rule'.[41] On he goes, with bitter invective, saying that 'the Jews themselves are demons […] they sacrificed their own sons and daughters to demons'. [42] The Jews 'live for their bellies, they gape for the things of this world, their condition is not better than that of pigs or goats because of their wanton ways and excessive gluttony'.[43]

The worst crime of the Jews, is of course, their response to their Messiah, Jesus. It is early into the sermon, but Chrysostom wheels out the 'big gun' trope of the Jews as Christ-killers: they had the prophets, and all the benefits of Scripture, nevertheless they 'crucified him whom the prophets foretold. […] [B]ut we did worship him of whom they prophesied.'[44] They shouted, "'Crucify him, Crucify him," "His blood be upon us and our children.'"[45] Since, therefore, they rebelled against the ruler of creation, committed an outrage against God himself, it is folly and madness to have fellowship with these insurrectionists. Finally, what follows from this is even more chilling, as Chrysostom, led on by the logic of his own rhetoric asserts, 'Although such beasts are unfit for work, *they are fit for killing*. And this is what happened to the Jews […] they grew fit for slaughter.'[46] It is impossible to hear these words in a post-holocaust world without a sense of sadness and shame that they were uttered from the pulpit of a Christian church.

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[40] I am drawing here and throughout on Philip Esler's principles of intergroup conflict theory. See Philip F. Esler, 'Intergroup Conflict and Matthew 23: Towards Responsible Historical Interpretation of a Challenging Text', *Biblical Theology Bulletin: Journal of Bible and Culture*, 45, no. 1 (2015), 38–59 <https://doi. org/10.1177/0146107914564824>.
[41] Homily I, II (4).
[42] Homily I, VI, (3), see I, VI, (6–7).
[43] Homily I, IV, (1).
[44] Homily I, II, (1); I, III, (3)
[45] Homily I, V, (1); I, VII, (5).
[46] Homily, I, II, (6).

This opening homily is powerful and persuasive in its rhetoric, the 'coarsest of the sermons', in the judgement of Mervin Maxwell,[47] intended to prevent Judaizers from joining Jewish feasts and festivals. He warns those who then do go to the 'spectacle of the Trumpets, or rush off to the synagogue, or go up to the shrine of Matrona, or take part in fasting, or share in the Sabbath, or observe any other Jewish ritual great or small, I call heaven and earth as my witness that I am guiltless of the blood of all of you'. For those who insist on friendship with Jews, then their pastor has washed his hands of them.

Homily II

Five days before the Jewish fast of Yom Kippur, the second sermon is addressed not directly to Judaizers, and has less to say about the Jews directly than the first homily, but appeals to the faithful believers whom Chrysostom hopes will reach out to their families and neighbours and plead *his cause* with them. He asks them to be 'fishermen', and 'bird hunters', tracking down with all fearlessness those who are suffering from the disease of a love of Judaism.[48]

The sermon is based on Galatians 5:2–5,[49] 'If you be circumcised, Christ will be of no advantage to you,' taken to mean that a Christian can have no part, whatsoever, with Judaism. In other words, Chrysostom argues, you cannot be a Christian and a Judaizer, it is one or the other, or as Maxwell entitles the sermon, 'All or Nothing'.[50]

The dangers of Judaizing, therefore, are manifold. First, to embrace one element of the law is to put oneself under the yoke of the whole law. Second, to cling to the law demonstrates a lack of faith and trust in the strength of Christ to free us from our sins, we are hedging our bets. Third, Jewish rites are null and void, because the only place on earth where God ordained Jewish fasts, sacrifices, festivals, and the reading of the law to take place was Jerusalem, but due to idolatry, God

[47] Maxwell, 'Chrysostom's Homilies', p. lvi.
[48] Homily II, I, (2–3).
[49] The text on which the sermon is based is not given but is obvious from the content. See Maxwell, 'Chrysostom's Homilies', p. lvii.
[50] Maxwell, 'Chrysostom's Homilies', p. lvii.

used the Romans to raze the temple to the ground, and exclude the Jews from the city of Jerusalem. This tragedy means for contemporary Jews that, far from being virtuous, all fasts, festivals, and laws are contrary to God's commands, and are, rather, 'impure' and 'defiled'.[51]

This is the nature of the argument Chrysostom makes to persuade the Judaizers, especially women, to keep away from Yom Kippur. It is an argument most scholars regard as utter nonsense and must have appeared 'fantastic' to Jews.[52] They did not need Palestine, Jerusalem, or the temple to legitimate their rituals, but in this sermon John was not addressing Jews, but Christians, and he knew what arguments would work best for his own flock.

Homily III

'Passover' is the subject of the third sermon, and the target is a small group of Judaizers in the congregation called '*Protopaschites*',[53] who were insistent on joining with the Jews to celebrate the festival. Since the date of Passover did not coincide with Easter, the actions of the Judaizers were viewed as disloyal, even treacherous, for this was a purely Jewish occasion.[54]

The sermon is based on 1 Corinthians, and illuminates Paul's plea for unity in the Christian fellowship. Though there were many errors and sins in the Corinthian church, Chrysostom shows that the main concern in the epistle was to confront 'dissention and contentiousness' among the believers.[55] What Chrysostom has against the Judaizers, therefore, is their unwillingness to submit to their leaders

[51] Homily II. At this point numbering is not possible because this material is contained in a lost segment of the second sermon only recently recovered and translated at the request of Roger Pearse of the Tertullian Project. The text can be found at The Tertullian Project <https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/chrysostom_adversus_judaeos_02_lost_portion.htm.>.
[52] See Wilken, *Chrysostom and the Jews*, p. 151.
[53] In the heading to the homily. On the complicated meaning of this term, which defies complete clarity, see Maxwell, 'Chrysostom's Homilies', pp. lxvii–lxxxii. His meticulous research of their identity is not for the faint-hearted!
[54] Homily III, I, (2).
[55] Homily III, II, (3).

and conform to their teaching, by which he means himself in the first place, and heed their warnings of spiritual danger.

Serious though it was, there was more at stake than merely the unity of the local church, since by aligning themselves with the Jews in observing Passover, the Judaizers were rejecting the authority of the Council of Nicaea (325 CE), which had set the authorised date for Easter, and was endorsed in the first canon of the Synod of Antioch in 341 as the accepted practice for the region. The intention of Nicaea, John reminds them, was to unify the church in celebrating the death and resurrection of Christ without any reference to the date of Passover as calculated by the killers of Christ. By ignoring the Nicene decree about Easter, the Judaizers clearly regarded the Jews as wiser than the Fathers of the church who gathered from all parts of the world,[56] and for this reason, Chrysostom does not accuse them of heresy, but indicts them on the charge of schism.[57]

Returning to a theme developed in Homily II, Chrysostom mocks the *Protopaschites* for their foolishness, for failing to realise that Passover celebrated outside Jerusalem has no legitimacy or efficacy. He repeats that God destroyed Jerusalem to wean the Jews off the rituals and observances of Judaism, and therefore it is folly to join the very rites God has terminated.[58]

Since he is addressing the Judaizers in this sermon, there is less attack on the Jews, though some words of insult about the nation are still to be found here, accusing them of slaughtering their children, sacrificing them to demons, being hard of heart, senseless and despisers.[59] It is almost as if Chrysostom cannot help himself, as if it is a reflex action to spontaneously disparage the Jewish people.

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[56] Homily III, III, (4–6).

[57] Nicaea, influenced by the practice of the Alexandrian church, decreed that the church would make its own calculation of the vernal equinox, independent of Jewish calculations, and that Easter would be celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the vernal equinox. See Maxwell, 'Chrysostom's Homilies', p. lxix.

[58] Homily III, III, (7).

[59] Homily III, III, (8); III, V, (7).

Homily IV

The Jewish fast of Yom Kippur is ten days away, and inspires the fourth sermon in which, 'with all the vulgar cunning that could be mustered',[60] Chrysostom attacks the Jews as 'the most miserable and wretched of all men, […] more dangerous than any wolves'.[61] The purpose of the sermon is, once again, to discourage Christian participation in Jewish rituals and John has in view 'those who seem to belong to our ranks although they observe the Jewish rites'.[62] These people are more to be condemned than Jews themselves, and speaking directly to them says, 'I am exhorting you to flee from that accursed and unlawful fast.'[63]

Two arguments are used to support the central thesis that the fasts are 'unlawful', and therefore to be avoided by Christians. First, God's will and word about any matter is decisive in determining whether an action is virtuous or sinful:

> When God commands, you must not question too much the nature of the action, you must only obey. […] Therefore, always look into the decrees of God before you consider the nature of your own actions. Whenever you find something which accords with His decree, approve that — and only that.[64]

This principle is now applied to the fasts of the Jews, and each must make their own judgement on the matter, whether God approves of what they do, or not.[65] Chrysostom is in no doubt that the Jews act contrary to the laws and commands of God, and fast in violation of his decrees.[66] In particular, John restates his familiar argument that God instructed the Jews to celebrate fasts and festivals in Jerusalem, and there only.[67]

The second argument was from precedent, and Chrysostom recounts the experience of the Jews in Babylonian exile, cut off from Jerusalem, who, in obedience to the law refrained from offering

[60] Katz, 'Ideology, State Power and Mass Murder/Genocide', p. 50.
[61] Homily IV, I, (1–2).
[62] Homily IV, III, (4, 8).
[63] Homily IV, I, (5).
[64] Homily IV, II, (2, 7).
[65] Homily IV, III, (3).
[66] Homily IV, IV, (2).
[67] Homily IV, IV, (3–7).

sacrifices, worship, and observing festivals.[68] Knowledge of their history should cause the Jews of his own day to cease from ritual, since they too are without a temple or access to Jerusalem, but since they continue to fast, how do they imagine they can avoid being cursed and defiled?[69] Furthermore, how can Christians think there is virtue in joining with them in their disobedience?

In this sermon, the undercurrent of John's anti-Jewish prejudice is strongly evident. The Jews are a wayward people who, from the outset, God tried to pacify with sacrifices that he did not desire, and have no essential meaning or purpose. The Jews are steeped in disobedience, never listening to God's decrees, or obeying his commands, but making their own judgements about what is virtuous. They do not heed God's word, or discern his actions in history such as the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, thus they habitually do the opposite of what God wills to be done.

For this reason, the sermon ends with a customary plea to the congregation not to be indifferent about those who meet with Jews, but to rouse themselves to rescue their Judaizing friends. He asks, 'If you look the other way when so many souls are perishing, how will you find confidence to stand before the judgement seat of Christ?'[70]

Homily V

The fifth sermon[71] is an argument from prophecy that the Jerusalem temple will never be rebuilt, and the Jews will never return to their former way of life.[72] In some respects, the sermon is an elaboration of points made in the first sermon about the destruction of the temple, and sermon four about the indispensable nature of the temple to Jewish worship, which taken together delegitimised the feasts and festivals of contemporary Jews, and made the connivance of Judaizers in Jewish rituals absurd.

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[68] Homily IV, IV, (9).
[69] Homily IV, V, (5).
[70] Homily IV, VII, (2, 7–8).
[71] The longest sermon in the series, by some distance, almost twice as long as the others.
[72] Homily V, I, (6).

The 'proof' that the temple will never be rebuilt consists of citing the incontestable testimony of Jesus in Luke 21:24 that Jerusalem will be trodden down until the time of the Gentiles is fulfilled, by which is meant the consummation of the world. John considered this a prediction the temple would be devastated and completely disappear,[73] but the Jews, on account of Christ being their enemy and regarding him as merely human,[74] do not believe his words to be prophecy, and maintain a hope of return and restoration.

Chrysostom's response is to show from history how prophecies made by Jesus were fulfilled, just as predicted. For example, the woman who anointed the feet of Jesus was told that her deed would be recounted wherever the gospel was preached, in memory of her, and it was so. This is proof that Jesus is divine, and his word true.[75] Jesus predicted the building of the church upon the rock and the gates of hell would not prevail against it. Despite unprecedented persecution against the church, history has confirmed the truth of these words.[76]

Lastly, John comes to his point, that Jesus 'also predicted that the temple would be destroyed, that Jerusalem would be captured, and that the city would no longer be the city of the Jews as it had been in the past'.[77] Furthermore, three centuries have passed since the capture of Jerusalem, and there is not the remotest chance of any change in the fortune of the city, or the Jews.[78] This contrasts with previous captivities, which were predicted to begin and their duration specified, but the current exclusion from Jerusalem, though predicted to begin has no promised end, neither has a promise been given that the city or temple will ever be restored.[79]

To emphasise the futility of the Jewish hope of a restored city and rebuilt temple, three thwarted attempts to retake the city and reconstruct the temple are rehearsed.[80] The first (132–136 CE), was

[73] Homily V, I, (6).
[74] Homily V, III, (2).
[75] Homily V, II, (2).
[76] Homily V, II, (8); V, III, (7).
[77] Homily V, III, (13).
[78] Homily V, IV, (1).
[79] Homily V, X, (7).
[80] Homily V, X, (7).

during the time of Hadrian and resulted in a catastrophic annihilation of the Jews and obliteration of Jerusalem. The second was during the time of Constantine, but again was unsuccessful.[81] Julian's recent attempt to rebuild the temple likewise proved an impossible venture[82] because God had destroyed the city and decreed it would not be rebuilt. Did the Jews not know that 'what [God] has destroyed and wishes to stay destroyed, no man can rebuild'.[83] The irony of this last effort to resurrect the temple was that the Jews supported the emperor in his ambitions, and justified their cooperation with a pagan ruler on the basis that sacrifices were not permitted outside of Jerusalem.[84] This was precisely the point Chrysostom had been arguing in previous sermons, and now the Jews themselves confirm his contention against the Judaizers. The Jews had given the game away, that their ritual observances away from the temple were invalid and worthless.

Three efforts to rebuild a God-destroyed temple is evidence that the Jews 'resist the holy Spirit' and work against God's declared purposes. But, says John, 'that is the kind of people you are. From the beginning you have been shameless and obstinate, ready to fight at all times against obvious facts.'[85] Because history works according to the providence of God, it should be obvious to all who can read the signs that Judaism is destined to fail and Christianity to flourish.[86]

This extraordinarily long sermon has less than usual to say directly about the Jews, but insults are not entirely absent. The Jews are 'arrogant and obstinate', and Jeremiah exposed Jewish use of cannibalism, referring to 'women [who] boiled their own children', and as a people, they fight against God.[87] This last point means that those who have sided with the Jews have pitted themselves against God, hence again he ends with a plea to loyal hearers to 'rescue your brothers', 'set

[81] Homily V, XI, (3). There is no historical record of an attempt to rebuild the temple at this time, though Chrysostom says it is remembered by the old among them. See Wilken, *Chrysostom and the Jews*, p. 157.
[82] By all accounts this was due to an earthquake. Homily V, XI, (9).
[83] Homily V, XI, (6).
[84] Homily V, XI, (5).
[85] Homily V, XII, (1).
[86] Homily V, XII, (2).
[87] Homily V, IV, (4); V, VI, (2); V, IX, (3); V, XII, (1).

them free from their error', because all that he has said was not for the benefit of the faithful, but for those who are sick.[88]

Homily VI

The theme of the sixth sermon was the feast of the martyrs, and revisiting accounts of past persecutions of the church has aroused Chrysostom, who is 'stripped and ready' to enter the arena against the Jews.[89] Changing the metaphor, he likens himself to a wild beast who has acquired a taste for human blood and, being insatiable, his appetite for homiletical battle against the Jews has intensified.[90] In this extraordinary imagery, projecting the conflict between church and synagogue into the realm of mythology,[91] Chrysostom flips the metaphor again, and likens the Jews to wild beasts who tormented and killed the martyrs in the arena. The martyrs, he assures us, will now be listening in as a great cloud of witnesses, enjoying his sermon, for they too 'have a special hatred for the Jews', since they killed Christ whom the martyrs loved even unto death.[92]

With rhetorical bravura, the sermon moves next to address the Jews directly, and asks why they are suffering more in this moment than at any other time in history. 'Tell me this,' John questions, 'Why did you have great honour from God when your sins were greater? Now that your sins are less serious, he has turned himself altogether away from you and has given you over to unending disgrace.'[93] What is the reason for this present calamitous situation?

The simple answer is that the Jews have sinned. The Jews have always sinned, and 'it is not only now that your people are living sin filled lives', it has been their habit from the beginning.[94] Even after the many miracles God performed in rescuing them from Egypt they worshipped a calf idol, tried repeatedly to kill Moses, blasphemed God,

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88 Homily V, XII, (12–13).
89 Homily VI, I, (5).
90 Homily VI, I, (1–2).
91 See Katz, 'Ideology, State Power and Mass Murder/Genocide', p. 49.
92 Homily VI, I, (7).
93 Homily VI, II, (8).
94 Homily VI, II, (5).

learned the rites of Baal Peor, sacrificed their children to demons, and engaged in every kind of ungodliness and sin.[95] Yet, in spite of all their wickedness and waywardness, God continued to favour, protect, and bless them, why? And if God restored them after past failings, why, despite their strict observances in the present age, are they currently without rescue and devoid of hope?

The answer again is simple, but no less devasting: it is because the Jews had a 'mad rage against Christ', and they had slain Christ.[96] Appealing first to his own people he asserts, 'They did lift their hands against the Master,' and speaking over their heads to the Jews he accuses, 'You did spill his precious blood.' Now in full oratorical flow he decrees that for this crime there is no atonement, no excuse, no defence.[97] This recurring theme in Chrysostom is the unsurpassable sin, the unpardonable sin, and is the reason why the Jews will be punished without end. Unrelenting, Chrysostom repeats, 'You committed outrage on him who saves and rules the world; now you are enduring this great punishment. Is this not the reason?'[98] Again he says,

> You are in the grip of your present sufferings not because of the sins committed in the rest of your lives but because of that one reckless act. […] Now, after the cross, although you seem to be living a more moderate life, you endure a greater vengeance and have none of your former blessings.[99]

God has turned his back on the Jews, which is a terrible fate, not least because history cannot be reversed, there never can be a 'before the cross', and therefore the Jews are under an inescapable judgement.

If the Jews want proof that God has abandoned them, if they want evidence that what Chrysostom is saying is true, then history is a true and faithful witness; the current circumstances in which the Jews find themselves tell their own story. History is revelation.[100] The destruction of the city of Jerusalem, the desolation of the temple, exile of the people, and all the other misfortunes, which God, not men, has

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[95] Homily VI, II, (6).
[96] Homily VI, IV, (5).
[97] Homily VI, II, (10).
[98] Homily VI, III, (2).
[99] Homily VI, III, (3); VI, IV, (7).
[100] Homily VI, V, (5). My phrase, not Chrysostom's.

unleashed upon the Jews, time without end, are irrefutable. God has deserted them,[101] and the reason has God left them is clear: 'Is it not obvious that he hated you [the Jews] and turned his back on you once and for all?'[102]

The application of this sermon takes the form of a warning to Antiochene Christians that the contemporary patriarchs in the city are 'hucksters and merchants and filled with all iniquity'.[103] The rituals of the Jews are a sham, the scrolls of the Law and Prophets do not make the synagogue holy, the ark in which their scrolls are kept is no more sacred than a box bought in the market,[104] and their rituals and observances serve only to provoke God's wrath.[105] Jewish worship is like shadow boxing, it is pretence, it has no reality, ritual without authenticity, ceremonies without divine sanction, so why would anyone who understands Scripture, as Chrysostom does, associate with these people.

This sermon is as bitter as any in the series, and the summons to action predictable. Let those who would be a temple of the Lord, if they see someone tempted to Judaizing, or running to the synagogue, do all in their power to rescue them and persuade them of the error of their ways. If necessary, bring them in your home and force them as means of breaking their Jewish fast.[106]

Homily VII

Chrysostom was in combative mood when he launched into the seventh sermon, and expresses his delight in the verbal battle with the Jews which the sermon series has become. He cannot get enough of this theme, and for those who might be tiring of his spiteful vitriol he warns, 'The man who does not have enough of loving Christ will never have enough of fighting against those who hate Christ.'[107] The fight must go

101 Homily VI, III, (7); VI, IV, (4).
102 Homily VI, IV, (4).
103 Homily VI, V, (6).
104 Homily VI, VII, (2).
105 Homily VI, VI, (9).
106 Homily VI, VII, (10).
107 Homily VII, I, (1).

on for these reasons: the Jews are still holding their feasts and tents are even now pitched in the city ready for the festivities; and the tents are no better than whore houses; and the Jews still fight against God and resist the Holy Spirit. They carry on as if they lived in the old dispensation, so the seventh sermon has one aim: 'Let me prove that both the sacrifices of the Jews and their priesthood have completely ended and that day will never again return to their former status (or usage).'[108]

Proof that observance of the Mosaic Law was temporary takes the form of a reprise of the obscure ritual of the 'water of conviction' set out in Numbers 5:12–28, an ordeal for women suspected of adultery but impossible to perform since the time of the exile. Add to this David's words confirming the end of the sacrificial system when he announced 'sacrifice and offerings you did not desire',[109] and the *coup de grâce* is inevitable as Chrysostom declares that Christ has offered a once for all sacrifice for sin, a perfect atonement which has abolished the old system of the Jews.[110] There is no sense, in Chrysostom's thinking, that Christianity fulfils or builds on God's covenant with the Jews, it is simply a case of the imperfect former being ended by the perfection of the latter, it is replacement theology, pure and simple.[111]

The sermon finishes with a familiar exhortation to go out and rescue those not present, who are negligent, sick, and cut off from the truth, who 'side with the Jews'.[112]

Homily VIII

The eighth homily coincides with the end of the Jewish fast, what Chrysostom calls 'a drunken orgy!'[113] The Jews do not use wine to get drunk because they are deranged, out of their minds, unable to see aright, their speech is disgraceful, and to cap it all, as with all who are

[108] Homily VII, II, (3). See translation in Maxwell, 'Chrysostom's Homilies', p. 205.
[109] Homily VII, II, (4). Taken from Ps 40:6.
[110] Homily VII, III, (1).
[111] See Homily VII, V, (10).
[112] Homily VII, VI, (10).
[113] Homily VIII, I, (1) Maxwell's translation, 'Chrysostom's Homilies', p. 230.

inebriated, they are 'drunk but do not know they are drunk'.[114] Chrysostom's attention in this homily, however, is not the Jews *per se*, but the 'many' Christians who joined their fast, regarded now as comrades fallen on the battlefield, soldiers wounded in battle, brothers and sisters needing rescue and recovery, who by God's grace will be attended by physicians of the soul and restored to health.[115]

The good news of this sermon is that no one is beyond the reach of salvation. Adam and Cain are set forth as examples of grace, who must inspire the faithful to care for the wounded, and cure them of their illnesses. They must play the role of the Good Samaritan for their brothers (*sic*) who have fallen among the Jews:

> Those who have just observed the fast have fallen among robbers, the Jews. And the Jews are more savage than any highwaymen; they do greater harm to those who have fallen among them. […] The Jews have mortally hurt their victim's soul, inflicted on it ten thousand wounds, and left it in the pit of ungodliness.[116]

Of course, the parable has been inverted, so a Jew is no longer the victim of unmerited violence but the assailant of Christians; a predictable twisting of Scripture for John to perform.

Another reason Christians have been associating with Jews is to seek healing for illnesses and ailments from Jewish healers. This is condemned by Chrysostom, who asks, 'What excuse will we have if for our fevers and hurts we run to the synagogues, if we summon into our own house these sorcerers, these dealers in witchcraft?'[117]

Recognising, however, the desperation of sickness as a motivation to join with Jews, John outlines a strategy for winning back those who have done so which consists of placing the Christians in an impossible position: the person should be asked, 'Tell me, do you approve of the Jews for crucifying Christ, for blaspheming him as they do, and for calling him a lawbreaker.'[118]

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[114] Homily VIII, I, (4).
[115] The mention of 'many', which is an interesting detail, is at Homily VIII, IV, (5).
[116] Homily VIII, III, (10).
[117] Homily VIII, VI, (6).
[118] Homily VIII, V, (4).

The implication of the logic is obvious; no illness is so great that a believer would consort with the Christicides, even if it cost one's life. To seek help from a Jew is to put in danger one's very soul, it is to contaminate oneself with sin, it is to seek temporary respite at the risk of eternal condemnation. Get rid of those 'foul sorcerers', is Chrysostom's advice to his flock, for their healing is poison. The synagogues to which people go for healing are 'wicked places', the dwelling of demons and evil forces.[119]

The homily concludes with another appeal to those who have remained faithful to go out and rescue the fallen, cure those who are sick with Judaizing, put right those feeble in their faith, just as Christ the Good Shepherd went out to rescue and save the lost and perishing.[120]

Conclusion

John Chrysostom is widely regarded as one of the greatest preachers of Christian history, but in this article I have sought to highlight a dark theme that occupied his attention, namely his campaign of homiletic vitriol against the Jews. His prejudices and pernicious words about the Jews in contemporary Antioch and as a historic people, fall roughly into three main categories. First, accusations *ad hominem* which teach that Jews are demon possessed, sorcerers, God-forsaken, are dogs, naturally immoral, drunkards, gluttons, covetous, robbers, dishonest, compulsive idolaters, cannibals, infanticides, cursed and defiled, kin to Sodomites, obstinate, shameless, hated by God and hated by John.[121] The second group of complaints is targeted at the religious institutions and traditions of the Jews: synagogues are a 'den of robbers', full of wild beasts, the synagogue is a brothel, a theatre, full of wild beasts and a haunt of demons, the temple is destroyed and their worship is dishonouring to God, the law and sacrificial cult is finished in the economy of salvation, priests are hucksters, and the priesthood is ended, Judaism is finished and has been replaced by Christianity. Thirdly, John attacks the current religious practices of the Jews, declaiming that sacrifices and offerings

[119] Homily VIII, VIII, (7).
[120] Homily VIII, IX, (3).
[121] The hatred is stated in Homily VI, VI, (11).

are worthless since the temple and its altar are gone, rituals such as Passover are meaningless noise, pilgrimage to Jewish sites is pointless, and festivals are simply occasions for impurity and defilement.

The three-pronged attack Chrysostom launched on the Jews means that on the one hand the Jews become meta-human, assuming the role of enemies of God, Christ-killers, and therefore guilty of deicide, and as God's opponents they are essentially satanic. On the other hand, they are sub-human, regarded as dogs. On both counts Chrysostom has justified his call to kill the Jews.[122]

By wrapping his words in a series of sermons, John marshals Scripture, God's words, against the Jews, and the preacher assumes the mantle of divine authority for his deadly prejudice. His manipulation of the Bible against the Jews gives *his* words the weight of 'God says', and Scripture is confirmed by history, so his declamations must be true.

In preaching these words John Chrysostom was sowing seeds of a deadly poison which would yield a harvest one hundred-fold, reaped repeatedly throughout history, even to our own day. It is for this reason that we must not lose sight of this record of Christian homilies which we might wish had never flowed from the 'golden mouth'.

[122] See Katz, 'Ideology, State Power and Mass Murder/Genocide', p. 51.

Moral Discernment in the Abraham and Sarah Narrative: Observations for Contemporary Pilgrims

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Abstract
For many Christians, Abraham and Sarah are exemplary characters, whose lives provide spiritual and moral guidance for us on our own journeys of faith. Adopting a literary approach, this paper explores the narrative, draws insights from reception history, and asks what it can teach us with regard to moral discernment in the contemporary church. It suggests that while Abraham and Sarah live lives of faith and hope, they are flawed characters, hampered by personal weakness and cultural influences. Reception history of the story challenges us to be discerning readers — aware of our own flaws and constraints, unafraid to examine our traditional understandings, and open to learning from voices from traditions other than our own.

Keywords
Abraham; Sarah; moral discernment; reception history; narrative

Introduction

In Christian tradition, the Bible is a source of moral guidance as well as of doctrine and spiritual comfort. For many 'ordinary' readers of the text, the Bible is the place in which to look for guidance for everyday life.[1] The text is to be taken at face value and its instructions obeyed without discussion. This approach to Scripture is rooted in a hermeneutical standpoint which has been called 'foundationalism', the belief that human beings can reach a knowledge and understanding of 'objective truth'.[2] It dominated much of biblical scholarship in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and led to an understanding of the text as the source of facts and data, and as far as ethics is concerned, principles and rules.

[1] By 'ordinary' I mean Christians who have little or no theological education. See Jeff Astley *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Learning and Listening in Theology* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 56.
[2] Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p. 23.

In recent years, however, this approach has come under fire. Not only has it been recognised that our understanding of the text is constrained by cultural context and human weakness, there has also been a growing realisation that our moral lives are impoverished if we live only by rules. Under the influence of character ethics, ethicists and theologians have come to appreciate the value and importance of narrative in the moral lives of communities and individuals.[3]

Within biblical studies, this, along with a growing interest in literary criticism, has led to a greater appreciation of the narratives in Scripture as a source of moral guidance.[4] In his book *Understanding Old Testament Ethics*, John Barton notes that the Hebrew Scriptures are rich in examples of narrative texts which can be used as vehicles for the exploration of moral issues. We can look to the behaviour, attitudes, and values of the characters within these narratives to provide us with rich material for discussion. They are, as he says, 'stories with a serious purpose', each intended as 'a vehicle for presenting insights into the moral life of human subjects in such a way that the reader would be challenged and stimulated to thought and action'.[5]

With this in mind, in this article, I intend to focus on one of these narratives, the story of Abraham and Sarah. The patriarch and his wife have, in both Christian and Jewish tradition, often been revered as examples for us to follow. Abraham is considered to be the father of faith, the biological ancestor of the people of Israel, and the obedient, faithful recipient of the covenantal promises. As such, he is venerated as the patriarch of Israel, 'a model for emulation, the progenitor of the Jewish people, and a friend of God'.[6] Sarah, too, has been commended

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[3] Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

[4] See, for example, Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading the Old Testament Ethically* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000); *Character and Scripture: Moral Formation, Community, and Biblical Interpretation,* ed. by William P. Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002); Stephen E. Fowl and L. Gregory Jones, *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life* (London: SPCK, 1991).

[5] John Barton, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics: Approaches and Explorations* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), p. 10.

[6] Sean A. Adams and Zanne Domoney-Lyttle, 'Introduction: Abraham in Jewish and Christian Authors', in *Abraham in Jewish and Early Christian Literature*, ed. by Sean A. Adams and Zanne Domoney-Lyttle (London: T&T Clarke 2019), pp. 1–8 (p. 2).

for her obedience to her husband, and understood as a model for motherhood. But how far, if at all, should they be revered and emulated? Are they really to be trusted as good moral guides? The aim here is to explore the narrative, looking at how Abraham and Sarah are depicted and how they conduct themselves in relation to God and to other people.[7] Along the way, we will dip into the narrative's reception history, both Christian and Jewish, listening to and learning from the insights of readers over the centuries.[8] In what ways can these voices help us be discerning readers of the text today?

Abraham: Piety, Religiosity, and Obedience

The narrator tells the story simply, seldom offering comment. Abraham, after the death of his father Terah, is commanded by God to leave Harran, and go to an as-yet unnamed land. Having heard from God that he will become a 'great nation' (Gen 12:2–3), the patriarch sets off on his journey, taking Sarah and his nephew Lot with him, along with his household and possessions, not knowing where he is going. As readers follow the story of Abraham and Sarah's journey, they are left to make up their own minds as to the morality of the protagonists' behaviour on the basis of incidents and dialogue. Nevertheless, it is made clear from the first few verses of the narrative that Abraham is to be seen as a man of obedient faith (Gen 12:4), and this emphasis is maintained throughout. Prior to Abraham's arrival on the scene, the Genesis story of human activity has featured rebellion, death, and finally, scattering, when the attempt to build a tower at Babel is thwarted (Gen 11:1–9). Abraham's dutiful response to God's call to leave his home in Harran

[7] Note that I am not looking for 'implied law' in the story as, for example, James K. Bruckner does in *Implied Law in the Abraham Narrative: A Literary and Theological Analysis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

[8] I use the words 'dip into' advisedly, for the primary and secondary sources are vast. See, for example, John D. Levenson, *Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy of the Patriarch in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Abraham: The Story of a Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015); Kris Sonek, 'The Abraham Narratives in Genesis 12–25', *Currents in Biblical Research*, 17 (2019), 158–183.

(Gen 12:4–5) brings us back to a new beginning of faith and obedience.[9] From the outset, the reader knows that this is a man to watch.

In the course of his journey, Abraham builds several altars (4:7, 8; 12:6; 13:4, 18; 22:9) and religious ritual is an important aspect of his ability to discern what God is saying. However, this is not mere religiosity — Abraham is a man of prayer, who 'calls upon the name of the Lord' (13:4), and he regularly hears from God in dreams and visions (e.g. 12:7; 13:14; 15:1–16; 17:1–22). He leaves Ur of the Chaldees without demur, and obeys the command to have himself and all the males in his household, including slaves, circumcised (17:23–27). Famously, too, he does not object when God tells him to sacrifice his son, Isaac (Genesis 22). He is obedient and loyal even in the face of overwhelming evidence that the promises of land and progeny he has received are unlikely to be fulfilled. He believes, trusts, and is faithful to his understanding of what God is saying to him.

On this evidence, then, his reputation as a man of faith seems unassailable. This was certainly the opinion of the earliest Christian theologians. Paul notes in his letters to the Roman and Galatian churches that Abraham is to be considered righteous because he believed God's promise, despite the odds, that he would be the 'father of many nations' (Romans 4; Galatians 3). For the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, Abraham's faith is exemplary because of his trust in God's goodness and the fact that he holds on to what he has been promised and leaves his home without knowing where he is going (Heb 6:15; 11:8, 17).[10] In the Epistle of James, Abraham is commended for his obedience when he offered his son for sacrifice (James 2:21–23). The Early Fathers saw Abraham as a moral paragon. For Saint Anthony, Abraham's journey is an allegory of the spiritual life — the patriarch was searching for the 'discernment of the good' and his journey provides us with a pattern to follow. According to Ambrose, Adam had allowed himself to

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[9] Thomas L. Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical and Theological Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 233.

[10] On the use of the Abraham story in the New Testament, see further Chris Tilling, 'Abraham in New Testament Letters', in *Abraham in Jewish and Early Christian Literature*, ed. by Adams and Domoney-Lyttle, pp. 127–148.

be distracted by pleasures, but Abraham turns toward virtue.[11] His obedience is unquestioning, as the fourth-century Egyptian theologian Didymus the Blind notes with favour; he does exactly as God tells him.[12]

However, not all commentators have shared this view. Some suggest, for example, that Abraham's trip to Egypt during the famine betrays a lack of trust in Yahweh's ability or willingness to provide for his household's needs. His offering of Sarah as his sister (Gen 12:10–20; 20:1–18) has been seen as a failure to trust God to protect him from danger.[13] Calvin considered that in Egypt, Abraham should have turned to God in a dangerous situation and that the repeat incident in Gerar shows that he did not learn from his mistake. Nevertheless, Calvin is keen to emphasise that these are only minor stumbles in the life of a man who did not waver in his faithfulness to God's greater purpose.[14] Similarly, for Claus Westermann, the fact that Abraham yields to Pharoah's might in this situation is a sign of weak faith — he should have trusted God for a way out.[15] His laughter when angels tell him that Sarai will soon have a child (17:17) and his impregnation of Hagar have been interpreted as expressions of doubt with regard to the promise (17:18). In the overall story, however, these incidents are mere aberrations — all too human slips in an otherwise exemplary life. The comment of the narrator captures the theme of his life: when God promises that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars, Abram believes and it is 'credited to him as righteousness' (15:6).

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11 Anthony the Great, 'Letter 1', in *Epistolae sanctissimorum*, Patrologiae Cursus Completus Series Graeca, vol 40, ed. by J.-P Migne (Paris: Migne 1857–1886), cols 977–1000; Ambrose of Milan, 'On Abraham', in *Sancti Ambrosii Opera,* ed. by Karl Schenkl, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, vol 32 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1896), 2:1–2. See the *IVP Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture Old Testament II: Genesis 12–50*, ed. by Mark Sheridan and Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), pp. 1–2.

12 Didymus the Blind, *Commentary on Genesis: Fathers of the Church Patristic Series*, trans. by Robert C. Hill (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), p. 185.

13 Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 95.

14 See John Calvin, *Sermons on Genesis Chapters 11–20*, trans. by Rob Roy McGregor (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), Sermon 56 (p. 111) and Sermon 96 (p. 854).

15 Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–16*, trans. by John J. Scullion SJ, A Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 167.

Abraham: Social, Business, and Political Interests

Abraham's faithful obedience and religious observance have been, to a large extent, admired. However, religiosity and obedience tell us little or nothing about the true nature of a person. It is possible to be (or even want to be) religiously and theologically correct, but be a very flawed character indeed. It is possible for a person to believe that he or she is obeying God, but at the same time to have ulterior motives and selfish aims. The best way to determine a person's moral character is by looking at his or her dealings with other people. We will therefore consider Abraham's social, business, and political activities as they are recorded in the narrative. Two things stand out here. First, he is largely peaceable. He is able, on the whole, to maintain peace with his neighbours and as he journeys through others' land. Abraham has no designs on the territory of others. When trouble erupts in Egypt, he leaves quietly, and in Gerar he enters into a treaty of mutual respect with Abimelech. He is generous in allowing his nephew to take the fertile Jordan lands for himself, and when this leads to trouble, Abraham sends his militia to rescue him (14:13–16). Kinship is important.

He is also depicted as a man of integrity, with a sense of justice in an age before the law was given.[16] He also seems to have a sense of God as God of justice.[17] He argues with God, insisting on justice when it seems that entire cities are going to be destroyed because of the behaviour of some of their citizens. According to Nahum Sarna, Abraham's dialogue with God here

> involves a concern for the welfare of others, total strangers. Abraham displays an awareness of suffering and an ability to respond beyond his immediate personal interests. He shows himself to be a moral man, a compassionate person. His behaviour at this moment makes him the paradigm of 'the just and the right', qualities that are to characterize his descendants.[18]

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[16] See Barton, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics*, pp. 32–44. Cf. Cyril S. Rodd, *Glimpses of a Strange Land: Studies in Old Testament Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 2001).

[17] Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis,* Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), p. 171.

[18] Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2001), p. 132.

At a post-battle meeting with the king of Sodom, Abram refuses to take any goods from the king (except the food the men have eaten), declaring that he has made an oath to God that he would give him no cause to say 'I have made Abram rich' (14:23). He makes sure, however, that his men have their share.

Wealth does not seem to lead him into moral difficulty.[19] When Lot chooses the fertile Jordan area, Abraham is not greedy or self-seeking and he does not impose his seniority on family members.[20] Grasping Lot loses everything while Abraham's wealth increases. Melchizedek, the King of Salem, who is described as a priest of God Most High, recognises Abraham as a man of God, and blesses him. Abraham pays tithes to Melchizedek — an act which Ambrose interprets as humility. When God appears to Abraham near the trees of Mamre in the form of three men, he offers lavish hospitality (18:3–8).

Abraham: Domestic Matters

In general, then, Abraham's activities suggest a man who is virtuous in matters of business, hospitality, and diplomacy. He is not perfect, but there is integrity in his dealings with others. The relative orderliness of Abraham's life is sharply contrasted with the chaos and greed of Lot and the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah. He is loyal and gracious in his dealings with Lot. However, his treatment of his wife and female slave, and even of his children, raise many questions. The two occasions on which he says that Sarah is his sister, rather than his wife, have troubled scholars. Is Abraham a coward to let Pharaoh take Sarah into his harem, failing to protect her honour? Should we be concerned about his deceitfulness? Many, including Augustine, absolve Abraham of deceit on the basis that Sarah actually is his half-sister. Cowardice and dishonour are discounted by Hermann Gunkel on the grounds that the practice of using one's sister in this way was not unethical in that culture.

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[19] For Brodie, there are two primary tests for Abraham involving wealth and beauty. The patriarch passes the first — but fails the second. Thomas L. Brodie *Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical and Theological Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[20] Sarna (*Genesis*, p. 98) speaks of Abraham displaying 'great nobility of character' and as being 'peace loving and magnanimous'.

'The story', he says, 'glorifies the intelligence of the patriarch, the beauty and the self-sacrifice of the mother, and especially the faithful help of Yahweh.'[21]

Others are less sympathetic. Walter Brueggemann discounts arguments that Abraham was not at fault because Sarah was really Abraham's sister by noting that the story 'clearly depends on the admission that Abraham was lying'.[22] Mark Biddle, while exonerating Abraham of dishonesty, considers his actions 'inept and clumsy' and suggests that the tales underscore the divine plan for Abraham to be a blessing to the nations *despite* his behaviour.[23] He notes Abraham's lack of trust but argues that the issue in these stories is 'not one of fairness or justice, but rather an expression of God's grace which surpasses human error and mistrust'.[24]

Jewish writers have long been perturbed by Abraham's behaviour in these stories. Some have tried to see it in a positive light. The book of Jubilees, for example, absolves Abraham (and Sarah) by saying that Pharaoh took Sarah by force for himself (Jubilees 13:12–13; 17:17–18).[25] The *Genesis Apocryphon* 20:14–22 similarly emphasises that Sarah was taken from Abraham by force. For the medieval Sephardic commentator Ramban, Abraham inadvertently committed a great sin in risking Sarah's virtue — he should have trusted God to save him. Radak, the eleventh-century commentator, considers that Abraham had to make a choice between two evils. Both are at risk of being killed and his

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[21] Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, trans. by Mark E. Biddle (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), p. 172. The issue of whether these narratives provide two accounts of one incident or of two separate events, does not concern us here. For a discussion of the arguments, see Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50,* Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1994), pp. 68–69.

[22] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, p. 127.

[23] Mark E. Biddle, 'The "Endangered Ancestress" and Blessing for the Nations', *Journal of Biblical Literature,* 109, no. 4 (1990), 599–611. According to Biddle, a potential curse is averted by God in the Pharaoh episode and the potential depriving of the blessing is recognised by Abimelech.

[24] Hemchand Gossai, *Power and Marginality in the Abraham Narrative* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995), p. 124.

[25] See J. L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 254–255.

wife at risk of abuse. It is better for Sarah to be violated so that both may survive.[26]

Contemporary feminist scholarship offers a quite different approach to the story. From this perspective, in Genesis 12, Abraham traffics his beautiful wife in order to save his own skin.[27] Sarah, who has no choice in the matter, stays in Pharaoh's harem while Abraham makes a profit, showing no concern for her wellbeing whatsoever. Thanks to the work of feminist writers, we are also now far more able to appreciate the nature of Hagar's powerlessness and lack of voice, and the compassion that God shows her when Abraham and Sarah have shown none. Whereas Ambrose took the opportunity to urge women to put aside jealousy on the grounds that Sarah 'desired only that her husband forgive her sterility', and Augustine claimed that Abraham did not lust after Hagar, it is today pointed out that Hagar, as a female slave, had no rights at all, and so her impregnation by Abraham could be seen as rape. Abraham's distress for his son when he and his mother are sent away is encouraging to twenty-first century readers, but he does not, apparently, have any concern for Hagar. Weak in the face of pressure from Sarah, he sends his slave and son into the desert — most likely to die.[28] With Bruce Chilton we might say that after the birth of Isaac, Abraham's character has 'all the staying power of a weathervane'.[29]

Above all, it is the story of the Akedah in Genesis 22 which has been the stimulus for discussion of Abraham's integrity. According to the narrator, Abraham is tested by God (Gen 22:1). When he is told to take Isaac to Mount Moriah and sacrifice him, he obeys without

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[26] Sarna *Genesis,* p. 95. Moses ben Nachman (Ramban 1194–1270 CE) was a Catalonian Jewish philosopher and biblical scholar. David Kimchi (Radak, 1160–1235 CE) was a Provencal rabbi, biblical commentator, grammarian, and philosopher. Sarna thinks Radak's interpretation is faulty, but recognises that Abraham had to face a 'conflict between human life and human dignity within a hierarchy of values'.

[27] Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes, 'Sarah's Exile: A Gender-Motivated Reading of Genesis 12.10–13.2', in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, ed. by Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 221–234.

[28] See Donna Nolan Fewell, 'Changing the Subject: Retelling the Story of Hagar the Egyptian', in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, ed. by Brenner, pp. 182–194; John L. Thompson *Writing the Wrongs: Women of the Old Testament Among Biblical Commentators from Philo through the Reformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 17–99.

[29] Bruce Chilton, *Abraham's Curse: Child Sacrifice in the Legacies of the West* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), p. 202.

question. At the last minute, God provides a ram, and Isaac's life is saved. Early Christian and Jewish voices applaud Abraham.[30] In his *Treatise on Abraham* (167–207 CE) Philo approves of Abraham's 'free and loving tribute to God'.[31] The Epistle of James sees the offer of Isaac as an example of faith active in works (James 2:21–24). For the writer to the Hebrews, Abraham's faith is exemplary because the patriarch knew that God could raise people from the dead; on this basis he was prepared to sacrifice his son (11:17–19). Augustine thought Abraham praiseworthy for the same reason, and Irenaeus saw the patriarch's action as a foreshadowing of Jesus's death.[32]

The question of the ethics of the story begins to come to the fore in the modern age.[33] The approval of Abraham's actions amongst Christian readers is most famously expressed by Søren Kierkegaard, who admires Abraham (describing him as 'the knight of faith') for laying aside his sense of right and wrong in order to obey God. God's command is higher than any ethical principle.[34] Abraham is commended for his trust in God's goodness, for being prepared to relinquish that which is most precious to him, and for foreshadowing the kind of faithfulness exemplified by Christ himself.[35] The French Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas responds to Kierkegaard's approval of Abraham's willingness to abandon ethics in obedience to God with a commendation of the patriarch's ability to listen to the voice of the angel

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30 For Jewish and Christian views that Abraham was found to be faithful when tested, see J. L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, pp. 295–326. Cf. John D. Levenson *Inheriting Abraham*, pp. 66–112, who cites both positive and negative views.

31 Blenkinsopp, *Abraham*, p. 141.

32 Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. by Henry Bettenson, Penguin Classics, rev. edn (London: Penguin, 2003), 16:32; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies,* in vol 1 of *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Ireneaus*, ed. by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 4:5.4.

33 See Aaron Koller, *Unbinding Isaac: The Significance of the Akedah for Modern Jewish Thought* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2020); *Interpreting Abraham: Journeys to Moriah*, ed. by Bradely Beach and Matthew T. Powell (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014).

34 Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling and the Sickness unto Death*, trans. by Walter Lowrie (New York: Doubleday, 1954).

35 For positive Christian views of Abraham, see for example, R. W. L. Moberly, *The Bible, Theology, and Faith: A Study of Abraham and Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 225–242; Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in the Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 258–307.

and refrain from killing Isaac. Both writers, for quite different reasons, see Abraham's actions as morally worthy.[36]

But not all are agreed. For Immanuel Kant it is objectionable, and questionable, that God should be understood as making such a demand at all. God would not ask Abraham to do something contrary to the moral law. Kant says,

> Abraham should have replied to this supposedly divine voice: 'That I ought not to kill my good son is quite certain. But that you, this apparition, are God — of that I am not certain, and never can be, not even if this voice rings down to me from (visible) heaven.'[37]

Kant is an early, lone voice, however. Most Christians have been reluctant to challenge Scripture in this way, until recently. Increasingly, God's command and Abraham's unquestioning response have been considered cruel and unfeeling. What sort of a God would ask a father to do this? And what sort of a father would be prepared to do it? In her book *Abraham on Trial*, Carole Delaney recounts the story of Cristos Valenti who, in 1990, killed his daughter in a Californian park believing that God had commanded him to do so. Delaney challenges the notion that the willingness to sacrifice one's child, rather than the protection of the child, should be seen as the 'quintessential model of faith'.[38] Other questions have arisen. Why, for example, does Abraham argue with God about the fate of Sodom (and Lot) and not about the fate of his son? For his failure to argue with God in this instance, Abraham is either branded as a 'brute' or pronounced mentally deranged.[39]

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[36] See Laurence Bove, 'Unbinding the Other: Levinas, the Akedah and Going Beyond the Subject', in *Interpreting Abraham: Journeys to Moriah*, ed. by Beach and Powell, pp. 169–86.

[37] Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. by Mary J. Gregor (New York: Abaris, 1979), p. 115. The German original was first published in 1798.

[38] Carole Delaney, *Abraham on Trial: The Social Legacy of Biblical Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 5. See further, Chilton in *Abraham's Curse* who examines the story's influence on religious violence and martyrdom thinking in the three major faiths.

[39] Chilton, *Abraham's Curse*, p. 203. On religious delusion and the Akedah see George Graham, *The Abraham Dilemma: A Divine Delusion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Sarah

But what of Sarah in all this? We are not told much about her. Like all the women in the patriarchal narratives, she is a secondary figure, despite her crucial role in the proceedings.[40] In comparison with Abraham's, her story is incomplete and she is very often absent at crucial moments in the narrative.[41] In everyday life, she seems to be given little or no choice in the matters that concern her. She plays no part in Abraham's religious practices, and is apparently complicit in the ill-judged dealings with Pharaoh and Abimelech. Did she enter Pharaoh's harem out of 'noble generosity to save her husband's life and to serve his great calling', as Leon Kass suggests?[42] We do not know.

We are informed, at the outset, that she is unable to have children (Gen 11:30). Her suffering, therefore, is great. Culturally, this is a matter of great shame, and implicitly, Abraham is seen as virtuous for having kept her as his wife.[43] Throughout the story she is a compliant if sometimes tetchy wife, going along with his wishes, obedient to his requests, often at considerable personal cost. The text gives little sense of her own relationship with God. Her laughter at the promise that she would conceive has been interpreted, like Abraham's, as a lack of faith (Gen 18:12–15). She does hear from God, however, when he contradicts her denial that she laughed. She is appropriately grateful when she does have a son (21:6). Importantly, she has her own sphere of influence in the domestic circle. She gives her slave Hagar to Abraham so that he may have a child with her (Gen 16:1–4). However, when Ishmael is born, she resents the fact that he has no respect for her family, and insists that Hagar is sent away (21:14).

In Hebrews 11:11, Sarah is included in the list of those whose faith is remarkable, along with that of Abraham. For Augustine, she denotes grace and divine mercy. For Origen her obedience to her

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[40] Sarah's key role in the narrative is highlighted by Tammi J. Schneider in *Sarah: Mother of Nations* (London: Continuum, 2004).

[41] Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (London: T&T Clark, 2016), pp. 69–114.

[42] Leon R. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 275.

[43] See Candida R. Moss and Joel S. Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility: Biblical Perspectives on Procreation and Childlessness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), pp. 21–69.

husband is exemplary.[44] Jewish commentators (Philo, for instance) see Sarah as representing virtue, and are keen, for example, to preserve her chastity in Pharoah's harem.[45] In the *Genesis Apocryphon*, Sarah is depicted as wise, but ultimately it is her usefulness as a sexual, reproductive being which is emphasised.[46] If the biblical narrative keeps Sarah in her place by giving her very little voice, midrashic tradition gives her opportunities to speak. In *Midrash Tanhuma, Lekh Lekha* 5, for example, she is allowed to protest at being left in Pharaoh's house at risk of abuse and tells God to act in keeping with his great name and the faith she placed in him. Some Jewish writers have been disturbed by her treatment of Hagar. Radak considers her treatment of Hagar to be lacking in morality, piety, and compassion, and Ramban is also critical.[47]

The reformers had differing views. Luther considered Sarah to be a wise and saintly women, while Calvin was strongly disapproving of her treatment of Hagar.[48] In the nineteenth century, some female writers followed the view taken in 1 Peter 3:6 that Sarah's every action should be seen in a good light, and that she should be commended as a paragon of wifely obedience and motherhood, as well as of faith.[49] This idealised picture is still a feature of some strands of Christian thinking today.[50] However opinions as to Sarah's character have begun to change. While

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[44] Augustine, *The City of God* 15.2; Origen 'Homilies on Genesis', *in Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, trans. by Ronald E. Heine (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 7:5–6. See Elaine James, 'Sarah, Hagar, and Their Interpreters', in *Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. by Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, 3rd edn (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), pp. 51–55.

[45] Philo, *Legum Allegoria,* trans. by F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, Loeb Classical Library, 226 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), 2.82.

[46] See Joseph McDonald, *Searching for Sarah in the Second Temple Era*: *Images in the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, the Genesis Apocryphon, and the Antiquities* (London: T&T Clark, 2020).

[47] See Adele Rheinhartz and Mirian Sinna-Walfish, 'Conflict and Coexistence in Jewish Interpretation', in *Hagar, Sarah and their Children: Jewish Christian and Muslim Perspectives*, ed. by Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), pp. 101–126 (p. 113).

[48] Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell, 'Unto the Thousandth Generation', in *Hagar, Sarah and their Children*, ed. by Trible and Russell, pp. 1–33 (pp. 15–21).

[49] See for example, the writings of Frances Elizabeth King and Grace Aguilar in *Let Her Speak for Herself: Nineteenth Century Women Writing on Women in Genesis*, ed. by Marion Ann Taylor and Heather E. Weir (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), pp. 107–184.

[50] See for example, Matthew B. Schwartz and Kalman J. Kaplan, *The Fruit of Her Hands: A Psychology of Biblical Woman* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), pp. 133–135.

it is recognised that as a woman who cannot have children she is an object of pity and even an outcast in society, her treatment of Hagar has been strongly criticised.[51] She is seen as petulant, jealous, and even cruel.[52] Athalya Brenner notes that she fails to treat Hagar's son as her own, despite having undertaken to do so (16:2).[53] Womanist writers point out that Sarah's treatment of Hagar is reminiscent of the abuse of black slaves by white women in antebellum America.[54]

As we have seen, Sarah is given no voice at all in the Akedah story. That her son is to be sacrificed is apparently no concern of hers. Josephus is concerned by this, and says that Abraham did not tell her what God had said to him.[55] Later Jewish Midrash, however, gives her a voice which the Masoretic text does not. *Leviticus Rabbah* tells of Sarah crying out and dying when Isaac tells her what has happened. 'Had it not been for the angel you would have been slain?' she asks her son. When Isaac confirms this, 'She uttered six cries corresponding to the six blasts of the shofar. It is said, she had barely finished speaking when she died.'[56] Contemporary feminist scholars also consider her part in the incident. In Phyllis Trible's view, it is Sarah rather than Isaac who is sacrificed on Moriah. After this, the matriarch and Abraham seem to separate. Trible suggests that the Akedah incident was the death knell for Abraham and Sarah's relationship — he goes to Beersheba and she dies in Hebron. The conflict with Hagar is unresolved and her character is unredeemed. It should have been Sarah who was healed of her attachment to Isaac, not Abraham.[57]

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51 On Sarah's cruel and callous treatment of Hagar see Gossai, *Power and Marginality*, pp. 1–34.

52 Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots and Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd edn (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), pp. 60–62.

53 Athalya Brenner, 'Female Social Behaviour: Two Descriptive Patterns within the "Birth of the Hero" Paradigm', in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, ed. by Brenner, pp. 204–221 (p. 208).

54 See, for example, Renita Weems, *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible* (San Diego: Lura Media, 1988), pp. 1–19; John W. Waters 'Who was Hagar?' in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by Cain Hope Felder (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1991), pp. 199–200.

55 Josephus, *Antiquities,* Books 1–3, trans. by H. St J. Thackeray, Loeb Classical Library, 242 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1998), 1.225.

56 Leviticus Rabbah 20:2; see Chilton, *Abraham's Curse*, p. 204.

57 Phyllis Trible, 'Genesis 22: The Sacrifice of Sarah', in *'Not in Heaven': Coherence and Complexity in Biblical Narrative*, ed. by J. P. Rosenblatt and J. C. Sitterson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 170–191.

Moral Discernment and the Story of Abraham and Sarah

What can we learn from this story of father Abraham and mother Sarah and their journey of faith? First, the traditional view of the patriarchs as moral exemplars and the Protestant emphasis on Abraham's faith and righteousness have tended to encourage a far less nuanced view of the patriarch and his wife than the story itself provides. These assumptions can tempt the reader to lose sight of the struggles of the journey and may even diminish our appreciation of God's grace in working through Abraham and Sarah despite their many failings. Far from being the paragons of virtue that the early Fathers wanted them to be, we see that they are as capable of good and evil as any other human beings. Despite this, and indeed because of it, we can learn from them. For instance, Abraham may be seen as an example for us to follow regarding belief and obedience. Brueggemann suggests that Abraham's willingness to leave all that he knows should pose a moral challenge to the modern western church in its settled, comfortable state, and to individual Christians in complacency and career building.[58] We can also admire Abraham's generosity and peaceableness in his dealings with outsiders and his loyalty to his kin. As for Sarah, whose voice is so muffled, we can say that she suffered much but remained faithful and loyal in her own way. We can detect both virtue and vice in these characters. There are signs of virtue — generosity, a sense of justice, diligence, patience (if tested at times), but there is also cruelty and exploitation. We might hope that they grow in wisdom as they go on their pilgrimage, but I am not convinced that we can see moral or spiritual development in the account.[59] What we have is a story of struggle and conflict.

Second, the story teaches us to be cognisant of how our cultural assumptions can inform and inhibit our moral discernment. The narrator and characters operate within the constraints of their culture, and Abraham and Sarah can treat others in ways that are shocking to twenty-first century readers. In the narrative, this is especially evident with respect to the treatment of women, children, and slaves. We do

[58] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, p. 112.

[59] Barton, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics*, p. 68: 'What the Bible thinks about is not moral progress but conversion.' This does not, of course, preclude us from seeking moral progress in our own lives.

well to remember, however, that we are no different. Cultural assumptions can also blind us to the personhood of others and the moral dimensions of our own actions. Moreover, we must always be alert to the fact that what is legal (for example, using one's slave as a surrogate mother), may not be moral.[60] Of course, Abraham and Sarah's times are different to our own, but rather than ignore or excuse this, or discard the story altogether, we must recognise that we, no less than any preceding generation, need to examine ourselves to see where our moral discernment is influenced by and perhaps clouded by adherence to cultural norms.[61]

Third, we see too that if the story of Abraham and Sarah is to help us in our own moral discernment, we must be discerning readers. Christian interpreters have been uneasy with questioning the viewpoint of the narrator. We have been prone to idealising Abraham and Sarah. We have tended to adopt a foundationalist approach which looks to the text to provide us with certainty as to what to believe and how to behave.[62] We would do well, I think, to become more comfortable with an approach to Scripture which relishes the nuances of the narratives and the opportunities for rich moral discussion and discernment which they offer.

This is highlighted in the story of the Akedah and its reception history. Approval of Abraham's unquestioning obedience is far less popular than it was, and I am glad that this is so. Nevertheless, the Christian instinct to look to the text to tell us how we should live our lives runs deep, and can have problematic results. Clemens Thoma speaks of an Akedah-inspired spirituality in late antiquity. He writes,

> Many people, finding themselves in difficult situations, were able to sustain themselves on the strength of this account about Abraham who, confidently obeying the God who was 'testing' him (Gen 22:1), was prepared to slaughter his only and beloved son, and about Isaac who was willing to be offered as a

[60] The practice is attested in the *Code of Hammurabi*, 146. A copy of the Code of Hammurabi can be found at the Avalon Project, part of Yale University Law Library <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/ancient/hamframe.asp> [accessed 3November 2023].

[61] See further Paul Borgman, 'Abraham and Sarah: Literary Text and the Rhetorics of Reflection', in *The Function of Scripture in Early Jewish and Christian Tradition,* ed. by Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders (London; Bloomsbury, 1998), pp. 45–77.

[62] Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism,* p. 23.

> sacrifice. This expression of obedience by Abraham and submission by Isaac constitute an example worthy of imitation. The story motivated people to accept obediently and submissively in their lives what seemed incomprehensible, unendurable and contradictory and to reflect on it.[63]

Such an understanding may provide reassurance and emotional comfort in the face of difficulty, but it can also lead to passive acceptance of injustice. A foundationalist perspective prompts a desire to find proposition and instruction, asking only 'what is the story telling me to do?'. As we have seen, such an approach, when taken to extremes, can have tragic consequences. Here, we can learn much from the Rabbinic tradition of midrash with its willingness to dig deep and ask awkward questions of the text.[64] According to *Genesis Rabbah*, a wicked angel asks why Abraham should think sacrificing his son is an acceptable thing to do: 'Hast thou lost thy wits?' he asks.[65] We may not wish to be visited by a wicked angel, but, as the Apostle Paul well knew, all spiritual discernment needs to be tested, and it should be done in community (1 Cor 14:26–33, cf. 1 John 4:1). Had Abraham consulted Sarah, for example, had she been given a voice, he might have re-thought, re-discerned what he thought God was telling him to do, and averted much suffering in the process. Did God really say that?

Conclusion

The main aim of this article has been to explore how the story of Abraham and Sarah can be a guide for moral discernment amongst contemporary Christian readers. Noting the limitations of a foundationalist hermeneutic which looks to the text for rules and instructions and suggesting that it is a narrow if not impoverished way to go about moral discernment, the choice was made for a narrative approach which looks to the story for challenging moral insight.

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[63] Clemens Thoma, 'Observations on the Concept and the Early Forms of Akedah-Spirituality', in *Standing Before God: Studies on Prayer in Scriptures and in Tradition with Essays in Honor of John M. Oesterreicher*, ed. by Asher Finkel and Lawrence Frizzell (New York: Ktav, 1981), pp. 213–222 (p. 213).

[64] On midrash see Karin Hedner Zetterholm, *Jewish Interpretation of the Bible: Ancient and Contemporary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fortress, 2012), pp. 69–110.

[65] *Genesis Rabbah* 56.4.

This narrative based approach revealed a far more nuanced story than the commonly held view of Abraham and Sarah as moral exemplars might suggest. These are complex, flawed characters who are constrained by the culture in which they live, and do good as well as make serious mistakes. Each episode in the narrative provides the reader with rich material for reflection on their actions, and the cultural constraints which influenced them. Modern readers can gain much from reflecting on how the story might speak into the way we conduct our business and domestic matters today. What can we learn from the mistakes of these characters, as well as their 'right' actions? What cultural influences help us, blind us, or constrain us? What difference does being followers of Christ make to the way we conduct ourselves?

In addition, we have seen that reception history can help us to avoid simplistic readings of the story. Jewish midrash and feminist hermeneutics, amongst others, have opened up ways of looking at the story of Abraham and Sarah's journey which encourage us to look beneath the surface of the text and ask difficult questions. The richness of biblical narrative demands that we dig deep and reflect in order to learn and grow. There is thus a responsibility on the part of theological educators and church leaders to encourage and facilitate a move away from simplistic foundationalist thinking and to enable readers to ask honest and probing questions of the text, and indeed, of each other. We need to be challenged if we are to avoid interpretative hubris with all its attendant dangers. As Stanley Hauerwas says,

> To claim the Bible as authority is the testimony of the church that this book provides the resources necessary for the church to be a community sufficiently truthful so that our conversation with one another and God can continue across generations.[66]

If the church is the truthful community of which Hauerwas speaks, we must not be afraid of examining our traditional understandings and engaging in new conversations. We have looked for moral discernment in Abraham and Sarah, now let us cultivate it in ourselves, for there is still much to learn.

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[66] Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, p. 64.

Midlife Decisions: In Search of Resources for Personal Discernment

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Abstract
This article explores the issue of discernment through tracing the author's experience wrestling with personal midlife decisions. The article begins by describing my sense of turmoil and enquires whether Baptist resources are available to support the decision-making process. 'Communal discernment' in its traditional form is examined but dismissed as ill-suited to my task, while the Baptist principle of 'soul competency' seems to offer a viable starting point. Similarly, searching the Scriptures offers insights but fails to resolve my dilemmas, although engagement with Catholic spirituality through the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius proves fruitful. I go on to consider whether small group discernment within Baptist settings might provide an effective blend of intimacy and community, discussing both a home-grown experiment and a published case study. In reporting the outcomes of the process, namely attaining a sense of peace despite continuing uncertainty, I conclude that discernment is deep spiritual work that cannot be rushed.

Keywords
Decision-making; discernment; guidance; spirituality

Introduction

This is a personal story; yet I am increasingly persuaded that all I can offer the church, ultimately, is my own personhood, created, redeemed, shepherded, and sustained by God. In Christ 'all things hold together', including the fragments of my unfolding narrative and the community of Christ-followers whose interwoven narratives form a longer epic.[1]

In the summer of 2020, I was granted a three-month sabbatical, which took place during lockdown. Travel was impossible, but there was ample time for reading and reflection at home. My focus was 'the

[1] Col 1:17. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the NRSV.

spiritual journey of midlife'. This life season may be characterised by 'concerns about getting older, self-questioning, a period of maladjustment, and a reappraisal of life'.[2] Successfully navigated, this stage can lead to 'ego integrity' and a 'satisfactory life review'.[3]

The midlife journey is inevitable but deeply personal; it requires humans to throw off external expectations and travel inward in search of authenticity. Richard Rohr expresses the invitation to midlife thus:

> So get ready for some new freedom, some dangerous permission, some hope from nowhere, some unexpected happiness, some stumbling stones, some radical grace, and some new and pressing responsibility for yourself and our suffering world.[4]

I have continued to ponder these themes, hoping to pursue a more integrated approach to life in my fifties and beyond.

Personal Decisions

Two important questions formed during my midlife reflections: one vocational, the other personal; each requiring a response. The first question concerned the future of my ministry. After ten years in the same post, I had become conscious of dwindling energy levels but also a sense of restlessness. James Hollis identifies a correlation between energy deficit and vocational misdirection:

> When the path we are on is right for our souls, the energy is there. When what we are doing is wrong for us, we can temporarily mobilize energy in service to goals, and often we must, but in time such forced mobilization leads to irritability, anger, burnout, and symptoms of all kinds.[5]

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[2] Margie E. Lachman and Rosanna M. Bertrand, 'Personality and the Self in Midlife', in *Handbook of Midlife Development,* ed. by Margie E. Lachman (Chichester: John Wiley, 2001), pp. 279–309 (p. 303).

[3] Jutta Heckhausen, 'Adaptation and Resilience in Midlife', in *Handbook of Midlife Development,* ed. by Lachman, pp. 345–394 (p. 350).

[4] Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (London: SPCK, 2012), p. xii.

[5] James Hollis, *Living an Examined Life: Wisdom for the Second Half of the Journey* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2018), p. 23.

It seemed natural to explore whether God might be calling me to a new chapter, or whether I should remain and embed myself further into my existing community.

The second, more personal question was this: should I take a DNA test? Upon the death of my father nine years ago, I had learned of the existence of at least one and probably multiple half-siblings. Some children were the product of short-term relationships, but he had also volunteered as a sperm donor in the days before such processes were fully regulated. For someone raised as an only child, this was a huge revelation. DNA testing offered the possibility of connecting to my father's other children, but would this be wise? There was a risk of emotional fallout for all concerned.

These questions began to occupy a good deal of my attention. There was a sense of urgency, a felt need for resolution. Unexpected bereavements confronted me with my own mortality: there was limited time remaining in which to forge or renew family connections, achieve new goals, or leave a meaningful legacy. It seemed essential to pray about these matters — but how? I needed to discern God's voice. Brittany Krebs, reflecting on the church's role in validating an individual sense of call to ordained ministry, writes,

> It calls for spiritual discernment that can be uncertain and risky. Our lives are flooded with voices competing for our attention, making it difficult to identify the voice of the Spirit if we are not perceptive.[6]

I lacked confidence in my own perceptiveness but was wary of involving others. Did my Baptist tradition have any resources to offer? Or was I required to make such momentous decisions in complete isolation? Any conclusions I came to would have implications not just for me personally but also for my ministry to church members navigating their own life journeys.

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[6] Brittany Stillwell Krebs, 'A Word from a Seminarian', *Review and Expositor,* 110 (Fall 2013), 551–553, (p.552).

Communal Discernment

The Baptist practice of communal discernment has been widely discussed. It is held up as the gold standard for decision-making within the Christ-centred community. For Paul Fiddes, this is fundamentally a question of authority:

> […] authority finally lies with the rule of the risen Jesus Christ, who is present in the local congregation […] There is no chain of command, no pyramid of power. Christ alone rules, and the task of the local church gathered in covenant community together is to find the mind of Christ. It must find his purpose for it as it comes together in church meeting.[7]

James McClendon elucidates how the congregation submits to Christ's authority through this process of communal discernment, which is,

> a communal undertaking in which God's people in a certain place meet and consider their next steps in the common life, bringing their shared journey under mutual study in the light of all the Scripture and all experience, committing it to ultimate authority in earnest prayer, and shaping the common judgement of all concerned.[8]

Stuart Blythe defines communal discernment succinctly as 'the practice of local congregations, intentionally gathering, to try and work out together what they believe the living Jesus Christ is saying to them concerning their life, ministry, and mission'.[9] This practice is underpinned by the Baptist Union of Scotland's 'Declaration of Principle':

> That the Lord Jesus Christ our God and Saviour is the sole and absolute Authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the

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[7] Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), pp. 85–86.

[8] James Wm. McClendon, Jr, *Doctrine: Systematic Theology, Volume 2* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), p. 479, cited in Doug Heidebrecht, 'James Wm. McClendon Jr.'s Practice of Communal Discernment and Conflicting Convictions among Mennonite Brethren', *Baptistic Theologies,* 7, no. 1 (2015), 45–68, (p. 57).

[9] Stuart Blythe, 'Communal Discernment: A Scottish Baptist Perspective' <https://www.academia.edu/29883889/Communal_Discernment_from_a_Scottish_Baptist_Perspective_Article_docx> [accessed 29 October 2023] (p.74). English original of an article translated into Dutch by T. Visser and D. Visser and published as, 'Als gemeente samen Gods wil onderscheiden: een Schots-Baptistisch perspectief', in *Samen ontdekken! De uitdaging van de vergarder(en)de gemeente: Samen de wil van Christus onderscheiden*, ed. by Ingeborg Janssen-te Loo (Amsterdam: Unie van Baptistengemeenten in Nederland, 2016).

> Holy Scriptures, and that each Church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His laws.[10]

Church meetings and vision days are typical examples of gathering for discernment and decision-making, perhaps within the context of worship or a shared meal. Such gatherings may be more or less formal, lively, tense, or inspiring; they may be eagerly anticipated as high points of church life, or secretly dreaded as flashpoints; but they are central to the Baptist way of being church.

Communal discernment rests upon or complements the Baptist concept of 'soul competency', whereby every believer relates directly to Christ, without the need for intermediaries. Soul competency was articulated as a Baptist principle by Edgar Young Mullins more than a century ago.[11] David Buschart further elucidates the principle:

> People experience redemption as a result of God applying his truth directly to the heart and mind of individual persons. Thus redeemed and under the lordship of Christ, the believer is to be free to interpret the Bible apart from binding prescriptions of a creed, and apart from the demands of church or state.[12]

He characterises this position as 'freedom for immediacy'.[13]

I was familiar with the theory of communal discernment and had experienced fruitful as well as fretful church meetings. Yet my own questions and decisions felt very personal and individual. I did not consider them appropriate or relevant material to bring to a church meeting. My genetic heritage, frankly, did not seem to be anyone else's business! In the case of a potential change of vocational direction, the custom has been for ministers to do their soul-searching in private, lest they unsettle the congregation, perhaps unnecessarily, if in fact no change transpires. I was content at this stage to proceed alone, a

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10 'Who We Are', Baptist Union of Scotland, 2022 <https://scottishbaptist.com/about-us/who-we-are/> [accessed 5 May 2023].
11 E. Y. Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion: A New Interpretation of the Baptist Faith* (Philadelphia, PA: Griffith & Rowland Press, 1908).
12 W. David Buschart, *Exploring Protestant Traditions: An Invitation to Theological Hospitality* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), p. 169.
13 Buschart, *Exploring Protestant Traditions*, p. 169.

'competent soul' embracing the gift of immediacy by seeking personal direction from God.

Searching the Scriptures

Could Scripture assist in my private decision-making? The Bible seemed to be my major resource, alongside prayer, which felt more nebulous, although I hoped these two spiritual resources would complement each other. I opened the written word to hear the voice of God, confident that this word is 'living and active'.[14]

Concerning guidance and vocation, Scripture abounds in examples of individuals hearing and responding (or failing to respond) to the call of God on their lives. I resonated with Jeremiah's sense of inadequacy and Moses's preference that the Lord 'send someone else' in his place.[15] I had previously spent considerable time reflecting on Jonah's disobedience and the temptation to abandon the call of God and run away in the opposite direction.[16] I was familiar with the traditional selection of texts offering comfort while advocating trust, usually in the form of greetings cards or online memes.[17] None of these Scriptures told me what I should do next.

Scripture repeatedly stresses that God's people should consult with God, individually and severally, when there are decisions to be made. Saul is judged for turning to mediums instead of consulting God.[18] Idols cannot speak or give guidance.[19] Yet God communicates in a bewildering variety of ways. There are instances of people hearing God's audible voice, being visited by angels, experiencing dreams and visions that require interpretation, hearing God speak through human messengers, or receiving compelling impressions that seem to come

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[14] Heb 4:12.
[15] Jer 1:6; Exod 4:13.
[16] I had been challenged by Peterson's reflections on pastoral ministry and the book of Jonah. Eugene H. Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992).
[17] Popular examples include Prov 3:5–6; Ps 32:8; Ps 37:4; Jer 29:11.
[18] 1 Chr 10:13–14. Saul has violated the instruction in Lev 19:31.
[19] Hab 2:19.

from God.[20] Sometimes people disagree sharply over a decision, as with the dispute between Paul and Barnabas regarding John Mark.[21] Sometimes they pray over their options and cast lots, as in the appointment of Matthias to replace Judas.[22] Simply reading the biblical accounts of others' quests for guidance, however fascinating and inspiring, would not be likely to deliver a definitive answer to my vocational questions.

Regarding DNA testing, I did not consider there to be any fundamental conflict between Scripture and the study of genetics. As Francis Collins states, 'The God of the Bible is also the God of the genome. He can be worshipped in the cathedral or the laboratory.'[23] I was clear both that I was the biological product of my parents, grandparents, and other ancestors, but that I could still recognise and worship God as Creator, the One who spoke all life into being. I experienced joy and wonder as I meditated on Psalm 139:

> *For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit metogether in my mother's womb.*
>
> *I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*
>
> *Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.*
>
> *My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth*.[24]

Genetics formed part of that 'weaving' process. I reflected that God had woven or knit the strands of my DNA together in a complex and beautiful process. God had also made it possible for humans to develop sufficient understanding, skill, and technology to be able to extract and analyse these strands. I was satisfied that I had sufficient

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[20] A helpful analysis of guidance in Scripture is provided in Kenneth Berding, 'A Biblical Spectrum of Guidance from God (From Clearest to Least Clear)' <https://www.biola.edu/blogs/good-book-blog/2022/a-biblical-spectrum-of-guidance-from-god-from-clearest-to-least-clear> [accessed 28 May 2023].

[21] Acts 15:37–39.

[22] Acts 1:26.

[23] Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2007), cited in Kelli Swan, 'Genetic Testing and the Christian Faith: Navigating the Tension Responsibly', BioLogos <https://biologos.org/articles/genetic-testing-and-the-christian-faith-navigating-the-tension-responsibly> [accessed 26 May 2023].

[24] Ps 139:13–15.

control over the permissions on the testing site: my data would be as protected as I could reasonably hope.

My hesitation related more to the psychological aspects of the process and its potential outcomes. My ultimate sense of identity was secure: I had been chosen, adopted, and redeemed by God.[25] I had been 'included in Christ' since the day I first responded to the 'message of truth' in 1986.[26] Nothing could separate me from the love of God in Christ, neither scientists at their benches nor skeletons in the family closet.[27]

While connection to Christ takes precedence over family relationships,[28] those relationships are not discarded as altogether irrelevant. The many genealogies included in the Bible suggest that family history was as important to God's people then as now. Jesus's own family line tells more than one important story, affirming his Jewishness through his maternal line; his kingship through his adoptive paternal line; and God's trajectory of hope through the inclusion of those who were outsiders, like Rahab and Ruth.

Scripture emphasises the importance of truth while maintaining a healthy awareness of mystery. The gospel brings revelation and illumination:

> For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open.[29]

It had been a surprise to discover I had half-siblings, and their discovery of my existence could likewise be a complete shock. I had a duty of care towards them and should proceed with caution and compassion. Only those seeking their biological matches would be able to discover my existence. I felt strongly that people had a right to know who their parents were, should they wish to find out. It lay within my power to disclose what I knew of my father with any of his other biological

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[25] Eph 1:4–8.
[26] Eph 1:13.
[27] Rom 8:39.
[28] For example, Luke 14:26.
[29] Mark 4:22, NIV.

children, if they were seeking such information. I could potentially offer them a measure of resolution, connection, or closure.

Scripture records several instances of emotional reunions with long-lost family, notably that of Joseph with his brothers.[30] If Christ-followers have been given 'the ministry of reconciliation', then reaching out to relatives seems a legitimate action, an appropriate overflow of the love God lavishes upon humans. [31]

The Bible offered clues, hints, relatable narratives, challenge, and encouragement; yet it was clear that Bible study alone would not help me to resolve my specific issues. I would need to draw on multiple resources. God's promise through Isaiah suggests that divine guidance unfolds dynamically while the guidance seeker is already in motion:

> Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it'.[32]

I hoped to hear God's voice with similar clarity and specificity.

Ignatian Inspiration

Eugene Peterson, reflecting on Jonah's prayer from inside the belly of the fish, advocates 'learning a form of prayer that is adequate to the complexity of our lives'.[33] While wrestling with my dilemmas, I was approached by a spiritual director, a member of my church, who offered to lead me through the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius. She sensed that I might find them relevant and helpful. The exercises plus supplementary material unfolded over a period of eighteen months.

Ignatius has been called 'the champion of the discernment of spirits'.[34] The act of discernment is performed by an individual, allowing God to communicate directly to their heart and mind. This seemed to resonate with the Baptist principles of 'soul competency' and

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[30] Gen 45:1–11.
[31] 2 Cor 5:18.
[32] Isa 30:21.
[33] Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, p. 101.
[34] Kees Waaijman, 'Discernment and Biblical Spirituality: An Overview and Evaluation of Recent Research', *Acta Theologica*, Supplement, 17 (2013), 1–12, (p. 2).

'immediacy'. Mark Thibodeaux clarifies how discernment of spirits relates to personal decision-making:

> The Ignatian method of discernment teaches you how to fine-tune your spiritual senses so that you can more readily detect and move toward the voice of the Good Shepherd, distinguishing that voice from all others.[35]

In Ignatian thought, the 'false spirit' is 'anything that draws me away from God and from God's loving plan for the world'.[36] Conversely, the 'true spirit' incorporates the Holy Spirit plus anything else that draws me closer to God. When a person is in 'desolation', they are under the influence of the false spirit: they feel empty of faith, hope, and love; restless, apathetic, fearful, and secretive. In 'consolation', they are under the true spirit's influence: they experience a sense of God's closeness; faith, hope, and love; peace, noble desires, and transparency.[37]

Ignatius begins from the premise that humans are created to 'praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord'.[38] The whole of life, including choices and decisions, should be directed towards this end. He advocates the cultivation of a holy 'indifference':

> […] it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created things in all that is allowed to the choice of our free will and is not prohibited to it; so that, on our part, we want not health rather than sickness, riches rather than poverty, honour rather than dishonour, long rather than short life, and so in all the rest; desiring and choosing only what is most conducive for us to the end for which we are created.[39]

I had not yet attained this state of indifference, particularly regarding my vocational question. I was in emotional turmoil, veering now towards one option, now another, confused and paralysed. I recognised that I was having trouble getting in touch with my deepest desires. I felt uncertain, perhaps wary of a tussle between God's will and my own inclinations. I was in a state of desolation, when Ignatius counsels 'never

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[35] Mark E. Thibodeaux, *God's Voice Within: The Ignatian Way to Discover God's Will* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2010), p. 7.
[36] Thibodeaux, *God's Voice Within*, p. 12.
[37] Thibodeaux, *God's Voice Within*, pp. 16, 44.
[38] *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. by Father Elder Mullan (New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons, 1914) <https://www.catholicspiritualdirection.org/spiritualexercises.pdf> [accessed 31 May 2023], p. 23.
[39] *The Spiritual Exercises*, p. 23.

to make a change', because we 'cannot take a course to decide rightly' when under the influence of the false spirit.[40]

A preliminary exercise was to read Psalm 91 and reflect on my own fears — particularly an underlying fear of dying with regrets, which intensified the pressure I was putting on my life decisions. I was to picture Jesus coming towards me and let the encounter unfold in its own way.

> I picture myself walking through marshland. The ground feels increasingly boggy, but I can't go back the way I've come. The water rises higher and higher up my wellies until it threatens to pour into them. Concern escalates to anxiety as I feel more stuck and perceive the reality of the threat. I sense that it is important to move slowly and not to panic. I want to be free — to come out on the other side intact.
>
> […]
>
> Jesus comes towards me. He comes by a peculiar route. He knows where the dry, firm, secure footholds are. He sees my predicament and nods gently, acknowledging what's happening. I want him to rescue me, hoist me out of my boots and carry me away, but he doesn't do that. Instead, he gestures for me to watch closely and follow in his footsteps as we pick our way across.[41]

I was moved by this prayer experience and had new confidence in Jesus as the Way Maker, who saw my 'stuck-ness' and offered patient, committed guidance rather than an instant solution.

Many exercises involved the use of imaginative contemplation: meditating on gospel passages, imagining myself into the scene and then allowing that scene to develop as the Holy Spirit gave inspiration. Sometimes I was encouraged to imagine the gospel scene taking place in a different time and place altogether. I found this difficult at first, but as I became more accustomed to the practice, I relaxed, and found it both fascinating and fruitful. There was a liberty in not being constrained by the accuracy of historical or linguistic details. This was dynamic prayer: I felt I was encountering the living Christ and hearing God speak directly into my life. I was surprised by themes and motifs that emerged, such as a playfulness in Jesus, constantly disarming me

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[40] *The Spiritual Exercises*, p. 74.
[41] Author's personal journal, 16 January 2022.

and inviting me to live and work with greater freedom, courage, and lightness.

Gradually, my emotional turmoil settled. Life, ministry, and decision-making still felt hard at times, like straining at the oars of a rowing boat and not getting very far; but I began to appreciate that Jesus was rowing alongside me, and I was grateful for his companionship. I began to experience longer periods of consolation as I treasured my prayer encounters and drew spiritual strength from them. I was now in a healthier place to consider decision-making.

David Runcorn recounts the story of Macarius, a founding father of the Egyptian Coptic church. Macarius believed that God was telling him to build a monastery but was uncertain of the precise location God had in mind. He wandered through the wilderness, praying for a sign from God, but receiving nothing. Then the revelation comes:

> At last, after another day filled with fervent prayers for guidance, an angel appeared with a message from God: 'The Lord is not going to show you where to build the monastery. He wants you to choose the place. If he tells you where to build and things go wrong, you will only blame him. So you must choose'.[42]

Even for the saints of old, guidance was hard-won: divine revelation working in partnership with internal, often painful, revolution. Runcorn asserts that 'responsible and creative choice-making has become a lost vocation of our times'.[43] Ignatian practice offers a spiritual pathway towards choosing well, in God's time and under God's guidance. I have more to learn about Ignatian spirituality, and, significantly, have experienced it only at an individual level, not in a community context.

Adventures in Small Group Discernment

As I sought to make sense of these disparate influences, I wondered whether there might be a way to reconcile the Baptist emphasis on

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[42] David Runcorn, *Choice, Desire and the Will of God – What More Do You Want?* (London: SPCK, 2003), p. 55.
[43] Runcorn, *Choice, Desire and the Will of God*, p. 69.

communal discernment with the deep inner work of Ignatius. Perhaps the answer lies in small-scale communal discernment. A group of trusted friends might offer to walk through a decision-making journey together. This close circle could ensure confidentiality and allow sufficient intimacy but would still be able to offer a variety of perspectives and lift the burden of isolation. Such a group would not serve as intermediaries, or counsellors, but as listening companions and conversation partners.

Case Study 1: Jim

I recalled a previous experience of participation in another's discernment journey. In 2018, a member of our weekly house group approached the rest of the group with a personal request. Jim[44] was entering a season of change, with the potential for new opportunities. He was of retirement age, conscious of his limitations, but eager for fresh challenges. He did not want to spend all his time on the golf course, but desired to be fruitful. He had been involved in various roles, deploying his professional skills and spiritual gifts, but was questioning whether to lay these roles down. He was seeking direction and a fresh sense of God's specific call on his life. In his own words,

> Exploring the options for retirement and seeking God's design in this had become an issue as I wanted to be realistic about my faculties and energies as I aged. Counselling and counselling training require cognitive acuity and emotional/empathy resources that can decline and exhaust (often slowly) to the point of ineffectiveness/incompetence. I had seen this happen and wanted to navigate these waters wisely.
>
> Seeking wisdom — particularly in regard to major life choices — normally has been a rather private affair for me, with imposed events often featuring significantly (for example, being made redundant). My personality and spirituality are such that I have rarely had lone personal revelations as the prime impetus towards life/discipleship choices. Rather I find that the melding of my will to that of God's takes time and the idea of 'process' fits well.[45]

Jim asked whether we would be willing to accompany him in a shared discernment process. I agreed to serve as facilitator and suggested using the ten-step framework outlined by Danny Morris and

[44] Name changed.
[45] Email to the author, 22 May 2023. Shared with permission.

Charles Olsen.[46] These experienced pastors, Presbyterian and Methodist respectively, draw on a breadth of sources including Roman Catholic and Quaker practices. They introduce their discernment process by invoking the image of stones in a 'reflection pool'.

> Ten stepping stones are arranged from one side of the pool to the other. The water in which God's yearning and will are sought provides a safe place. Each stone represents a movement in the process of discernment. Participants may step on each stone in sequence, skip over one, and even come back and revisit one or more stepping stones if they come to impasse.[47]

The image of the pool sets the tone of openness, curiosity, flexibility, and freedom. The steps are not to be slavishly followed: this is not a machine for producing 'decision sausages'. The process unfolds organically within a supportive environment. The ten steps (or stepping stones) are delineated as framing, grounding, rooting, and shedding; listening, exploring, improving; weighing, closing, and resting. Morris and Olsen sound a note of caution about the significant time commitment required:

> Discernment is rightfully a patient process, and a group that rushes to judgement is apt to meet with pitfalls and obstacles. Time for discernment should be free of the threat of calendar or clock.[48]

Our group was in no hurry and the process — a purposeful meander back and forth among the stepping stones — unfolded over a period of about six weeks. All participants were prayerful, engaged, and supportive throughout. Jim noted,

> The 10-step process encouraged and developed an openness on my part. I greatly valued having others frame questions/clarifications and challenge assumptions and motivations. Otherwise, my deliberations would have been essentially private — and probably littered with blind spots. I felt supported throughout — no doubt, in my mind, a reflection of our being a well-formed group (essential for openness and vulnerability).[49]

The 'shedding' phase required humility and vulnerability, not just from Jim but from the whole group: the process was redundant if

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[46] Danny E. Morris and Charles M. Olsen, *Discerning God's Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church,* rev. edn (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).
[47] Morris and Olsen, *Discerning God's Will Together,* p. 61.
[48] Morris and Olsen, *Discerning God's Will Together*, p. 93.
[49] Email to the author, 22 May 2023.

we were just going to project our own ambitions, hopes, and plans onto our friend. Shedding 'lays aside ego, preconceived notions, false assumptions, biases, and predetermined conclusions so that people involved in discernment can openly consider the matter'.[50] We each had to lay aside our personal assumptions and expectations around retirement.

Jim was attentive during the process, valuing others' insights and prayers, but taking personal responsibility for any decisions reached and acted upon. As Scriptures, ideas, and observations were shared, Jim captured these on paper, revisiting them through the week, and responding through artwork or additional prayer exercises.

> The 'work' of the group in developing and exploring options led eventually to a more solitary step of choosing/garnering conviction. At my choosing this took the form of a silent retreat. I dwelt on each of several ways forward for half a day, painting different flowers while saying to God 'Is this your way?' From this — somewhat mysteriously — emerged a preference and commitment. I took this back to the group seeking their reflections.[51]

The group did arrive at a shared sense of a fruitful way forward for Jim, who began to take logical next steps.

> On reflection, I think the group functioned as an agent of provenance not unlike the external/imposed events that featured in our other life decisions. There was an element of serendipity in play, such that I did not consider other options (such as the management group of the organisation I was serving).[52]

Events initially unfolded in a different direction. There were unexpected reactions beyond the group and significant changes in external circumstances. At first, we were tempted to question the fruits of our discernment process — perhaps our adventure had become a misadventure? Consolation turned to desolation for a time, but in due course, new options emerged, and the pathway became clear. Although our group experiment did not 'deliver' an outcome as we might have imagined, it enriched Jim's ongoing discernment process, sharpened our

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[50] Morris and Olsen, *Discerning God's Will Together,* p. 60.
[51] Email to the author, 22 May 2023.
[52] Email to the author, 22 May 2023.

attentiveness to God and led to a deeper cherishing of one another. Jim concluded,

> Participation in this way was novel for me. The support was profound and doubly so when my chosen path became very rocky — another story (with elements of the demonic). In addition to seeking a way forward in my career, the process developed useful self-awareness, which prepared me for the new things God has enabled. I liked the process very much and advocate it as a good expression of Romans 12:5–8.[53]

Jim continues to be faithful and fruitful, using his gifts in a variety of settings, and finding renewed joy and purpose.

It is curious that when I faced my own discernment crisis, I overlooked this important experience. Serendipity may have been a factor, as it was for Jim. Sitting at my desk, I can make logical and theological connections. In the heat of a psychological moment, when I was grasping for handholds, Ignatian spirituality presented itself as a lifeline. I was carried along by the intense momentum of the exercises. This probably caused a degree of tunnel vision, whereby I failed to identify alternative resources, even those I had previously encountered in theory and practice. I may have subconsciously resisted becoming vulnerable before others, the ministry role setting me uncomfortably apart. I recognise my desire to retain control; Jim's story demonstrates how even the most orderly and careful process is no guarantee of outcomes.

Case Study 2: Norman

Sometimes, decisions require to be made, but an individual is unable to make them alone. All humans pass through times of vulnerability and powerlessness, particularly at the beginning and end of life. Jesus's words to Peter linger long in the imagination:

> Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.[54]

Those who have the power to 'dress and lead' others, whether in a personal or professional capacity, shoulder a weighty responsibility. A

[53] Email to the author, 22 May 2023.
[54] John 21:18.

person's soul remains intact, for nothing can separate them from the love of God that is in Christ[55] — but physical or mental frailty may affect their 'competency' to make or communicate decisions.

Curtis Freeman movingly describes the experience of a close-knit church seeking to support seventy-nine-year-old Norman, who was terminally ill and had slipped into a persistent vegetative state. Norman had no family, but a long-time attorney friend had been appointed as Norman's guardian. This man 'possessed the legal authority but felt that he lacked the moral authority to make a substituted judgment'.[56] He sought support from his (and Norman's) church family. Freeman reflects on the uniqueness of their position:

> Our relationship to one another and to Norman made a difference in the perspective from which we considered the issues of withdrawing and/or withholding treatment. We were not a group of physicians trying to determine what was the best treatment for this patient; nor were we a hospital ethics committee seeking an impartial viewpoint; nor were we a group of policy-wonks attempting to construct a fair set of guidelines to govern other cases like Norman's. We were a group of Christian friends searching for affirmations that lay at the heart of our faith and reached to the limits of our existence.[57]

The church began by reflecting on the sanctity of life, 'to see the issues at stake and to discern what course to follow'.[58] They pondered the early chapters of Genesis, recognising life as both 'donation' and 'vocation'. As they reflected on Scripture, they began to reframe their discernment process:

> To some it might appear that the overriding moral question was 'Should we let Norman die?' or 'Can we help Norman die well?', but for us the troublesome question became 'How can we enable Norman to live well while dying?' We could not immediately discern how (or if) we could assist Norman to answer the Creator's call to live well.[59]

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[55] Rom 8:38–39.
[56] Curtis W. Freeman, 'What shall we do with Norman? An Experiment in Communal Discernment', *Christian Bioethics,* 2, no. 1 (1996), p. 17.
[57] Freeman, 'What shall we do with Norman?', p. 17.
[58] Freeman, 'What shall we do with Norman?', p. 18.
[59] Freeman, 'What shall we do with Norman?', p. 23.

After much reflection, discussion, and prayer, they sensed that their responsibility towards their baptised brother was 'to be a community of care in his dying', pledging their presence to Norman and to one another until the time of his death.[60]

Further Reflections

Freeman observes a 'proclivity toward *individualism* in decision-making' that in his view 'has created a society of moral strangers'.[61] I have noted my own tendency towards privacy and control, a troubling dissonance between my defensive personal stance and my more open pastoral approach. Freeman challenges an individualistic understanding of 'soul competency' and concludes that

> discernment is formed and found in the church as a confessional community. Discernment is not a matter of individual intuition; it is a process of social reflection […] Those who stand together under the Lordship of Christ are authorized to discern through a social process *that from which they are liberated* and *that to which they are obligated*.[62]

Kyle Childress warns of the perils of individualism:

> If a congregation is going to live the Christ-like life, then they had better do it as a body or else they will never make it. Lone individuals trying to live faithfully cannot stand against sin, death, the powers, and the overwhelming pressure of society. Both we and our people, as individuals, are easy targets for the powers of death; they will separate us, isolate us, dis-member us, pick us off one at a time, and grind us down into the dust.[63]

Ministers may be particularly susceptible to such isolation. Neville Callam, former general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, offers this clarification of Baptist theology:

> Discerning the mind of Christ is not simply about a Christian taking the counsel that is given in the Bible and applying it directly to a particular issue of concern. One reason for this is that, in this individualistic world, discernment of the voice of Christ is best done in community with other

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[60] Freeman, 'What shall we do with Norman?', pp. 36–37.
[61] Freeman, 'What shall we do with Norman?', p. 24.
[62] Freeman, 'What shall we do with Norman?', p. 27.
[63] Kyle Childress, 'Knowing what the Stakes are: Hauerwas Questions and Baptist Answers', *Review and Expositor*, 112, no. 1 (2015), 37–46, (p. 39).

> Christians. God can speak to each of us in the privacy of our place of prayer. But we must test what we believe we are hearing against the wider sense of the believing community.[64]

Callam is writing with reference to 'moral discernment'; yet perhaps his point holds for matters of guidance generally. Sarah Boberg, writing about vocation, observes a creative tension between the personal and communal aspects of discernment:

> While God's call is often an individual experience, it has impact beyond the individual called. God's call is a special, unique, and sacred experience between God and an individual, and while personal, it is manifested and lived out in the larger context of Christian community.[65]

The individual may and must invest time and effort in private prayer and reflection, embracing the immediacy and freedom they possess to approach Christ; yet it is essential to have companionship on the journey, to consider the impact of decisions beyond the self, and to listen to the wisdom of the church.

Christ-followers need to draw on the authority of Christ through both 'theological' sources — Scripture, but also creeds and Baptist confessions of faith — and 'ecclesiological' sources, including the local church and the wider communion of saints.[66] Disciples look to a 'robustly present God' who interacts with them in and through everyday life with other persons, rather than operating from a 'closed, individualistic, buffered selfhood'.[67]

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[64] Neville Callam, 'When the Churches Present Inconsistent Moral Teachings', Baptist World Alliance General Secretary's blog, 1 March 2016, cited by Steven R. Harmon, 'Baptist Moral Discernment: Congregational Hearing and Weighing', in *Churches and Moral Discernment, Volume 1: Learning from Traditions,* ed. by Myriam Wijlens and Vladimir Shmaliy (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2021), pp. 99–114 (p. 100).

[65] Sarah Boberg, 'The Call Experiences of Baptist Women', *American Baptist Quarterly,* 38, no. 4 (2021), 417–432, (p. 420).

[66] Harmon, 'Baptist Moral Discernment', p. 101.

[67] Glen Harold Stassen, *A Thicker Jesus: Incarnational Discipleship in a Secular Age* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), p.110. Interestingly, Stassen recommends Ignatian practice to listen for God's voice at times when the mind is relaxed and open rather than 'buffered' (ibid., p. 122).

The Journey So Far

So, how did I resolve my personal questions? Concerning DNA testing, I reflected on the possibility for some time. I was satisfied that testing was not incompatible with my Christian faith, and felt it held more potential for good than for harm. Perhaps I had a moral obligation to share what I could about my father with any half-siblings who might be seeking such information. I considered that I was mature enough to deal with any psychological consequences and concluded that this was fundamentally a private matter for me to decide. After consulting briefly with my stepmother and aunts to ensure they had no objections, I went ahead with the test. To date, no half-siblings have come to light, but I have connected positively with some cousins and filled in some gaps in my family tree. I am at peace both with my decision and its outcomes so far.

My vocational question proved more complex. Anglican David Runcorn provides helpful insight into the process of choosing between options:

> When we talk about being 'in two minds' over a choice or course of action we are often struggling with our own relationship between order and wildness, between safety and risk.[68]

I recognised this tension or contrary motion within myself. I was torn between the desire for change and an attachment to my church; I was weary after ten years in the same post, but reluctant to let go and unclear as to any alternative. The *Spiritual Exercises* were a valuable resource, inviting me into greater awareness of Christ's presence. They enabled me to hear words of assurance and to receive the encouragement to keep rowing forward.

Peterson asserts that 'to live vocationally is not a once-for-all achievement'.[69] Fiddes takes a high view of ordination, describing it as 'a moment of special encounter with the triune God in which, like baptism, there is grace to help shape heart, mind and character'.[70] Yet

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[68] Runcorn, *Choice, Desire and the Will of God*, p. 33.
[69] Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, p. 156.
[70] Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, p. 101.

he too sees ordained ministry as dynamic rather than static, open to change and further steps of discernment.

> Christ may cease at some stage in the minister's life to issue a call to this particular kind of ministry: the person's way of being may be about to take a radically new direction. What has been is not reversed but taken up into a new way of being. That a call is coming to an end may well be felt by the individual himself or herself, but it is also discerned by the community of the church (local and trans-local) which has tested and recognized the call in the first place. […] [T]hose who are called to this task of discernment should be imaginative in looking for new forms that *episkope* itself may take. Given the open-endedness of a way of being, it may be that a person is being called to a new direction *within* the office.[71]

One option I had long considered was higher study. During my period of uncertainty, I had a chance encounter with an academic, who mentioned in passing a master's programme that combined my previous fields of study. This held immediate appeal, but I sat with the possibility for a year before taking any further action. During this period, I discussed the prospect of further study with my husband, close friends, spiritual director, my senior colleague, and with a group of ministry colleagues who had been meeting weekly on Zoom for prayer and mutual support. These people served as my community of discernment, listening deeply to me, praying with and for me, and sharing helpful counsel.

Over the summer and autumn, I undertook an Ignatian discernment process suggested by Thibodeaux.[72] This exercise involved pondering all the options available to me and 'dreaming' myself positively into each one, to tap into my deepest God-given desires. While contemplating the scenario of combining my present pastoral post with part-time study, I wrote the following:

> I dream of weaving the two together, seamlessly though not effortlessly. I remain rooted in the church and the fruits of my learning enrich my ministry. I continue to build on my foundation but also embrace new direction. I work hard, but God gives strength. I remain reasonably secure financially, and church members are supportive of my goals. My role and voice at Leven Baptist Church evolve in line with God's gifts and my renewed sense of

[71] Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, p. 102.
[72] Thibodeaux, *God's Voice Within,* pp. 151–187.

> vocation. I am happier and have a greater sense of my unique contribution to the team. When the time is right, I retire, but remain active in the most fruitful areas.[73]

Following a period of reflection and retreat, and after investigating alternative programmes, I applied to the course I had long been considering.

This autumn, I will commence my studies while continuing in my present pastoral post. I remain open to other developments, as God's will and my own desires align. Perhaps, like Jim, I will need to recruit a new community of discernment for the next chapter; or perhaps, like Norman, matters will be taken out of my hands. The future remains unknown and unknowable. Discernment is difficult and cannot be rushed; there are no quick fixes. This is deep spiritual work. God is growing the fruit of patience in my life — fruit that I hope to share as I support others through the changing seasons of their own lives.

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[73] Author's personal journal, August 2022.

* With grateful thanks to David Finch, Jayne Foster, and the Barnacles.

Can the Eucharist be Celebrated in an Online Gathering? A Theological Analysis

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Abstract
Can an online celebration of the Eucharist through means of video-conferencing software be permitted? The Covid-19 lockdowns of 2020 and 2021 made the question urgent for many churches; for persecuted or geographically scattered churches it is perennial. This article offers definitions to clarify the question asked, and then two arguments, one based on an extension of currently accepted practices, and one based on the ecumenical doctrine outlined in the Lima text, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, to propose an affirmative answer to the question.

Keywords
Online church; Eucharist; virtual church

Introduction and Previous Studies

Discussions of dispersed church worship are not new,[1] arguably going back to the early days of radio broadcasting,[2] but they are inevitably evolving as technology evolves,[3] and they attained a particular urgency in the early months of 2020 with worldwide lockdowns preventing

[1] Inevitably, the field has moved since 2012, but Heidi Campbell's 'Introduction: The Rise of the Study of Digital Religion', in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, ed. by Heidi A. Campbell (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 1–23, remains a very helpful introduction.

[2] Indeed, we might trace them back to reports of St Clare's miraculous remote observation of the Christmas mass during her last illness in 1252, which led Pope Pius XII to declare her the patron of television.

[3] A radio broadcast is unidirectional and aural only; St Clare's vision was both aural and visual, but remained unidirectional; contemporary video-conferencing solutions allow for real-time interaction and are visual and aural; they do not (as many churches rapidly discovered in moving online during lockdowns in the 2020 pandemic crisis) allow for multi-voiced participation in liturgical response or congregational singing, because of differing and discernible time-lags for each participant — but it is not hard to imagine that such functionality might come in the next few years. A few years after that — some possibility of tactile engagement, perhaps?

churches from meeting.[4] One question that came to rapid prominence at that time, driven perhaps by the fact that in many western nations lockdowns began just before Easter (in the western calendar), concerned the possibility of online eucharistic celebration.[5] This article is a theological analysis of this possibility, arguing that ecclesiology, rather than sacramental theology, should be the determining factor in the answer given, but also suggesting that Calvin's theology of eucharistic presence is particularly accepting of the possibility of an online Eucharist.

I write, of course, from a specific perspective. I am a Baptist — ordained, indeed, although my paid employment almost throughout my working life has been in secular universities. I am British, and so I know well the UK responses to Covid,[6] and the limitations placed by the British lockdowns; I cannot pretend to have studied the details of restrictions on worship in every other context. That said, theological principles are not subject to local legal variations; and in what follows I am seeking to be expansive, indicating the limits of various arguments, and constructing a broad space bounded by certain identified lines (which of course may exclude certain readers, or indeed traditions).

The question of celebrating the Eucharist online is also not a new one. I believe that the earliest published academic treatment of it was by Debbie Herring in 2008,[7] but even then she had many earlier experiments to reflect on (she suggests that the first attempt to celebrate a digitally-mediated eucharist was led by Stephen C. Rose over Ecunet

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[4] This essay has its deep roots in two blog posts I wrote about that time: 'Can We Celebrate an Online Eucharist? A Baptist Response 1: a Positive Argument' <http://steverholmes.org.uk/blog/?p=7716> [Accessed 11 October 2023] and 'Can We Celebrate an Online Eucharist? A Baptist Response 2: Some Possible Objections' <http://steverholmes.org.uk/blog/?p=7721> [accessed 11 October 2023].

[5] The debate as I followed it happened in Facebook feeds and Twitter interactions, but Pete Phillips captured the more interesting and lengthy contributions in his 'Bread and Wine Online? Resources and Liturgies for Online Communion' <https://medium.com/@pmphillips/bread-and-wine-online-resources-and-liturgies-for-online-communion-34b80972a068> [accessed 12 December 2022]. A useful ethnography of Canadian practices of online Eucharists during the period has also been published: Sarah Kathleen Johnson, 'Online Communion, Christian Community, and Receptive Ecumenism: A Holy Week Ethnography During COVID-19', *Studia Liturgica* 50, no. 2 (2020), 188–210.

[6] Public health is a devolved matter in the UK, so each of the four nations had its own response.

[7] Debbie Herring, 'Towards Sacrament in Cyberspace', *Epworth Review*, 35 (2008), 35–47.

in the summer of 1997, although she concedes that it was problematic in a number of ways[8]). In 2009 Paul Fiddes wrote a short paper about the possibility of virtual sacraments within the constructed world of Second Life, which has since been published in various places online.[9] There have been various other contributions since, although not very many, as, so far, most academic study of digital religion has been social-scientific rather than theological, and so devoted to analysing what is going on, rather than discussing what should be going on.[10]

Two ecclesial Canadian contributions are something of an exception, and deserve notice.[11] The Presbyterian Church in Canada received an overture in 2010, asking whether eucharistic elements could be 'blessed via webcam or other video media'.[12] A committee duly reported to the 2012 Assembly, recommending that online consecration should be accepted, with the following provisions: that (i) all those participating should have 'pre-established face to face relationships'; (ii)

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[8] Herring, 'Towards Sacrament', p. 36.

[9] Paul Fiddes, 'Sacraments in a Virtual World' <https://www.frsimon.uk/paul-fiddes-sacraments-in-a-virtual-world/> [accessed 7 May 2020]. Fiddes has recently revisited the question, with responses to some of the criticisms of his earlier piece: Paul S. Fiddes, 'Sacraments in a Virtual World: A Baptist Approach', in *Baptist Sacramentalism 3*, ed. by Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2020), pp. 81–100.

[10] There is one significant post-pandemic contribution: Richard A. Burridge, *Holy Communion in Contagious Times: Celebrating the Eucharist in the Everyday and Online Worlds* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2022). Burridge is particularly concerned with debates within the Church of England; he is, for example, unaware of the Canadian discussions I reference in the next paragraphs, although he devotes a number of pages to tracing the positions of other churches in England and the USA (pp. 13–46). Burridge offers a series of 'proposals', most of which are accounts of what to do on the assumption that an online celebration is impossible. His positive position is not dissimilar to what I develop below, but perhaps less attentive to ecumenical eucharistic theology. He assumes a disjunction between a 'Zwinglian' memorialist position and a more 'Catholic' position, which may adequately describe the debate as it stands in the Church of England, but is simply inadequate ecumenically.

[11] This is perhaps not a surprise as Canada contains vast, sparsely populated areas, which pose a huge challenge to practices of gathering. Anecdotally, I recall a conversation some years ago in Halifax, Nova Scotia: I was talking to a regional Baptist leader, who was reflecting that in much of his area (the Atlantic provinces) there might be a hundred people (not congregants) in a given fifty-mile radius, and was seeking help in imagining what practices of church might be sustainable in such a context.

[12] Committee on Church Doctrine Recommendation No. 2, 'Providing Communion Using Technology', Presbyterian Church in Canada, 2012 <https://presbyterian.ca/resources/resource-finder/download-info/providing-communion-using-technology/> [accessed 16 November 2020) (p. 1).

that an ordained elder[13] and some other members of the congregation are locally present together wherever the elements are to be received; and (iii) that the media being used are adequate in various ways to make the shared service meaningful.[14] This recommendation was adopted at the 2012 Assembly.

This is a significant decision, and its bases are worthy of reflection. It is justified, essentially, on two grounds: that receiving the Eucharist is a central element of Christian life, and should be facilitated wherever possible;[15] and that the essentially communal aspect of the Eucharist could indeed be mediated via electronic media, within certain, fairly stringent, conditions and safeguards. In terms of the British debate around Easter 2020, the first point was uncontroversial; the second essentially irrelevant, in that there was no possibility for the gathering of an elder and several members of the congregation that the report required. That said, this is the first ecclesial document of which I am aware that accepts the possibility of the consecration of eucharistic elements via video link, and so it is significant; the limitations placed are about establishing right relations within the fellowship who receive communion; the possibility of consecration is simply asserted.[16]

The United Church of Canada decided in 2015 that 'online communion was permissible', and repeated this statement in the face of lockdowns in 2020.[17] The earlier statement followed an extensive

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[13] In common with other Presbyterian churches, an elder in the PCC is elected by the congregation to a role involving shared leadership responsibilities on the Presbytery and pastoral care of the congregation. They will also typically share in the administration of the Eucharist, but are not permitted to celebrate the sacrament.

[14] Committee on Church Doctrine, 'Providing Communion', pp. 5–6.

[15] This (surely correct) instinct is central to Burridge's disquiet with the formal decisions of the Church of England during the pandemic lockdowns.

[16] The theological rationale offered is disappointingly thin. On the one hand, there is an insistence that the strictures of the Westminster Confession about private masses do not obtain, which is hard to argue with, but not nearly enough to establish the point; on the other, there is an assertion that through technology 'human presence can be extended', which is certainly true, but surely demands theological reflection on different modes of human presence ('Providing Communion', p. 4). I will argue below that there are several good reasons (within certain important limitations) to argue that eucharistic consecration can be effective over, for example, a video link, but this point does need to be established, not merely assumed.

[17] The 2020 statement can be found on the Church of Canada website <https://www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/online_communion_in_united_church.pdf>; the 2015 rationale does not appear to be available online.

consultation in 2013, with many contributions arguing various perspectives.[18] Contributors reflected on Wesleyan ecclesiology, ecumenical implications, practical considerations, and more. It would be impossible to do justice to the richness and variety of what was then offered in less than a full paper, but two points are worth noticing. The first is the clear implication that changing technological possibilities do change the right judgement here. Consider the following argument:

> We should see this reality by facing one another. In both the Old and New Testaments, facing is crucial (cf. Gen. 32; 2 Cor. 3:18–4:6). *This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion* (*THM*) emphasizes the importance of the people facing the presider and the presider facing the people (*THM* 29), so that we see one another. In on-line Communion, that seeing would seem to be uni-directional: the presider would be seen by the other celebrants, but she would not see them, nor would they see one another. Since on-line Communion does not allow communal co-seeing, a common facing, it masks rather than reveals how 'we all with unveiled faces are being transformed from glory to glory' (2 Cor. 3). On-line Communion is not a manifestation of 'the visible unity of the church' (*THM* p. 37).[19]

The authors of this paragraph have other reasons for rejecting online Communion, to do with 'bodily' presence, but in this argument the key point is seeing faces (something I shall argue below does resonate with significant Biblical themes): technologically, it was not possible in 2013; it is generally possible now. Theological necessities do not change, clearly, but the ability of technology to supply those necessities can change, and our theological reflections must reflect that reality.

Second, there is an evident tension in the various contributions between (what is perceived as) effective mission and (what is perceived as) good order. There are those insisting that online sacraments are working, in that they bring people into a living relationship with Christ and the church, and so they can only be good, and others insisting that they are improper and so can only be bad. This tension is hardly a new one, particularly within the Wesleyan heritage these papers appeal to —

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[18] The 2013 papers can be found in the following directory: <http://www.umcmedia.org/umcorg/2013/communion/> [accessed 11 October 2023]. I am very grateful to the Revd Daniel Hayward for providing me with this link.

[19] Brent Latham, Gil Hanke, and Larry Hollon, 'Online Communion: Community and Culture' <http://www.umcmedia.org/umcorg/2013/communion/response-papers-composite.pdf> [accessed 11 October 2023] (pp.1–2).

John Wesley himself felt it over field preaching, after all — but it raises a genuine issue: taking both claims at face value, if missional effectiveness and ecclesiological impropriety clash, which should take precedent?

Theologically, of course, we will want to refuse the question: that which is ecclesially improper cannot be truly missionally effective, and *vice-versa*. This only raises further questions, however: if there is an apparent clash, is it because the seeming missional success is in fact an illusion, or because the claimed ecclesial impropriety is not in fact a problem? In the context of a pandemic, one distinction that seems relevant here is that between the *esse* and the *bene esse* of the church. To put the point bluntly, in my ecclesial tradition it is possible to celebrate the Eucharist using chipped china on an upturned hay bale — we have considered the *esse* of the sacrament to be fairly broadly extensible. Were the sanctuary and the communion plate — the *bene esse* — available, of course, we would not think of using the barn, but our history across the world is often a history of persecution, and the *bene esse* has often been unavailable to us. I assume that all will agree that online Communion is sub-optimal; the *bene esse* would be to celebrate together in the sanctuary; the question of whether online Communion violates the *esse* of the sacrament, and so of the church, is the decisive one.

Definitions and Distinctions

Clarity about terminology is important here. Much online discussion when the question became urgent in 2020 used the language of 'physical gathering' versus 'virtual gathering', but this is actively misleading for at least two reasons: first, in the field of digital religion (and social-scientific studies of online activity generally), 'virtual' has a particular meaning, referring to avatar-based interactions in a digitally-constructed world (Second Life, Minecraft, Roblox, etc.), which is just not what was being talked about when online Eucharists were being discussed; second, the flow of photons through fibre-optic cables, electrons through wires, and electromagnetic waves through Wi-Fi networks, is all irreducibly physical, and so online engagement is physical engagement also, just mediated in some significant ways. We need to work harder to

adequately describe the difference between a local and an online celebration of the Eucharist.

John Dyer has proposed a helpful typology of ways of doing church over the internet.[20] 'Broadcast' church is a unidirectional delivery of a church service (live or recorded). Radio services are broadcast, as are YouTube services. 'Virtual' church is, as suggested above, a church service conducted by avatars in a virtual environment. 'Online' church is characterised by two-way, real-time interaction by people using video-conferencing software. These are not exclusive: in particular, online services might well use broadcast elements — a pre-recorded sermon, for example — or a particular community might have some elements of its internet meeting online and other elements broadcast.[21] Accepting Dyer's distinctions, I will immediately bracket virtual church; what was being discussed in April 2020 was local churches moving to a broadcast or online or blended broadcast-and-online model, not moving into virtual worlds. (For those interested in communion in a virtual church, Fiddes' papers cited above make the right distinctions and arguments.)

We should also distinguish between different modes of separation. Broadcast church raises the possibility of temporal separation: I may watch the YouTube video of the service at a different time to another worshipper. Temporal separation raises obvious questions for eucharistic celebration: it further strains the notion of 'gathering' at play; and, if the key act of consecration is the celebrant's reciting of certain words (whether the dominical words of institution or the epiclesis [invocation] or both), then the fact (or possibility) that the celebrant's words are not contemporaneous with the act of Communion of each worshipper might well be perceived as theologically difficult.

Spatial separation needs careful thought. It is of a course an inevitable fact of human life: my occupation of a particular spatial

[20] John Dyer, 'What is an (online, virtual, broadcast, local) Church? Some Helpful Distinctions' <https://j.hn/what-is-an-online-virtual-broadcast-local-church-some-helpful-distinctions/> [accessed 7 May 2020].

[21] During the 2020 UK lockdown I engaged with one local church who broadcast their Sunday morning services, but made their Sunday evening services online through a well-controlled Zoom meeting; and with another who broadcast all Sunday worship, but had prayer meetings and home groups online, and online social gatherings after their broadcast Sunday worship.

location renders it impossible for any other human being (indeed, material object) to occupy that same location — if an infinite number of angels may dance on the head of a pin, that simply highlights the irreducible difference between human and angelic existence. There is a sense, then, that the congregants in the sanctuary are spatially separated. I suppose that most of us will intuitively feel that the spatial separation of an online congregation is of a different kind, but we do need to specify this difference in kind in ways that both respect the facts of the situation, and are theologically robust.

I have already indicated my unhappiness with a distinction between physical and virtual; I am similarly unhappy with narrating the issue using a distinction between 'mediated' and 'immediate' interaction or gathering, for three reasons. First, some form of technological mediation has been so normal as to be routine in church services for some while now; I do not remember the last time I went to preach — or celebrate the Eucharist — in a church and was not expected to use a microphone and PA system, for example. Second, even if not using a microphone, when the celebrant speaks, they create sound waves which travel through the air to the ears of their congregants, which suggests that physical mediation is an inevitable component of all human interaction. We are thus going to need some other distinction to capture the (obvious and real) difference between congregating in the sanctuary and congregating online. Third, if we believe that the Eucharist mediates divine grace, then insisting that it must be celebrated in an unmediated way seems a rather odd thing to do, and in need of extensive defence. The celebration of an online Eucharist is physically mediated; what it is not is somatic — marked by bodily presence.[22] I propose, then, that the right distinction is that between somatic presence and somatic separation. When the heart of the rite is eating and drinking, this is a significant distinction, of course.[23]

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[22] This distinction assumes, of course, the non-extensibility of the human body. This, I suggest, is presently a plausible assumption, although it might be complicated by future technological developments; the sound of my voice and the sight of my body can presently be extended by technological means, but my bodily presence is stubbornly confined to the space within my skin.

[23] At this point, accounts of transubstantiation might seem significant, but in fact they are not. The question here is whether the bodily/somatic presence of the celebrant with the communicants (and the elements) is necessary for a valid celebration, which does not depend in

In making the necessary distinctions, we should also distinguish between different models of online eucharistic celebration. Those in non-sacerdotal traditions might, on the basis of Acts 2:46, imagine every household celebrating their own Eucharist, perhaps under the direction of the church leadership; contemporaneous household Eucharists is therefore one model. In April 2020, the Church of England (amongst other denominations) advised 'spiritual communion', where congregants watch the celebrant receive the Eucharist and recall Christ's death, thus receiving the benefits of the Eucharist without receiving the elements; this is a second model.[24] Finally, we might imagine a single eucharistic celebration in which the participants congregate online — a true 'online Eucharist'. This last is the possibility I am exploring in this article, as it would seem to be both the most interesting, and least theologically problematic, way of celebrating the Eucharist via the internet.

A Continuum of Modes of Presence

I suggested above that the meaningful distinction between a traditional Eucharist and any sort of online Eucharist was that between somatic/bodily presence and somatic/bodily separation. Somatic separation, however, is not uniform, particularly given the possibilities opened up in recent decades by technology. The separation experienced by the family of an undercover agent operating behind enemy lines in wartime is rather different from the separation experienced by my family when I am away at an academic conference, and able to be in touch through social media and video-conferencing as often as my schedule allows. We might explore this through some reflection on an exegetical ambiguity in Paul.

The canonical Pauline letter corpus is of course itself a witness to the pain and limitations of somatically separated Christian fellowship, as well as a leveraging of the then-available technology to try to

any way on accounts of the substantial presence of the body and blood on the altar. Indeed, in as much as accounts of transubstantiation (or indeed consubstantiation) demand the possibility of some sort of extended bodily presence, they perhaps offer some level of *prima facie* support to the possibility of mediated consecration.

[24] Burridge discusses this model at length in *Holy Communion in Contagious Times*, pp. 67–83.

overcome that. Paul offers us the distinction I have already proposed, between somatic presence and somatic separation, in 1 Corinthians 5:3: ἀπὼν τῷ σώματι, παρὼν δὲ τῷ πνεύματι ('absent in body [σώμα], present in spirit [πνεύμα]'). This is straightforward.

In an earlier letter, however, Paul phrases the distinction in another way, practically identical for him, but inviting further reflection from us. In something of an echo of the Corinthian text, he comments to the Thessalonians ἀπορφανισθέντες ἀφ᾽ ὑμῶν […] προσώπῳ οὐ καρδίᾳ, περισσοτέρως ἐσπουδάσαμεν τὸ πρόσωπον ὑμῶν ἰδεῖν […] (1 Thess 2:17, 'separated from you — in person, not in heart — we longed […] to see you face to face' NRSV). I have included the Greek here to highlight the point that the same Greek word — πρόσωπον — is translated in two different ways in the NRSV in this verse: 'person' and 'face'.

This is certainly not wrong; the semantic range of the word stretches at least that wide in Paul's day, and continues to be capacious through most of the patristic period.[25] For Paul, of course, and indeed anyone living prior to the most recent decades, there is little practical difference given the expressed desire: Phoebe could not have seen Paul's face unless he was personally (and somatically) present to her; for us this is no longer true.

[25] In earliest extant usage (Homer), πρόσωπον referred fairly simply to the face; from there, it came to be the term for the mask an actor in a Greek drama would wear, from which sense another meaning of 'character' (in a play), and so 'actor in a narrative' and so 'person' gradually developed. In the theological tradition the word is demonstrably fluid in meaning through the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries. Diodore of Tarsus (4th century) used it to mean something like 'an existing subject of predication and experience', and so 'person' with some weight; for Theodore of Mopsuestia (4th–5th century) and Nestorius, the word carried no ontological weight, and so the sense of 'mask' or 'outward appearance' was to the fore (famously Nestorius proposed a 'prosopal union' of divine and human in the incarnation, and meant a shared appearance with no shared ontological entanglement). John Philoponus and Leontius of Jerusalem again use the term in different senses; only in John of Damascus's *Philosophical Chapters* do we get a stable definition (ch. 43), which John achieves largely by insisting that appearance reflects reality, and so that the 'mask/face' sense and the 'person/character' sense cohere.

The desire to see 'face to face' can be satisfied in online church;[26] the desire to be personally, which theologically must imply somatically,[27] present cannot. Paul longed to be with the Thessalonians 'prosopally'; did that mean just seeing their faces, or bodily presence, or what? As I have indicated, these are not distinctions he (or any generation prior to our own, really) could have made; in the absence of video-conferencing solutions, bodily presence was necessary to seeing faces. That said, almost everything Paul talks about longing for in 1 Thessalonians is achievable in online meeting: he wants to pastor them, to observe and interrogate their growth in faith, to be able to correct error, to offer exhortation and encouragement. All of this is possible online. As the letter closes, however, we find the instruction to 'greet all the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss '(5:26) — there comes a point where bodies are indispensable.

If Paul could have met with the Thessalonians over Teams or Zoom, he would have jumped at the chance, I am sure; he could have heard of the answers to his constant prayers, and offered the encouragement and advice he longed to give — but he would still have wanted to kiss them.

No-one who engaged with church through the 2020 lockdown needs to be told that our online gatherings were sub-optimal; kissing may not be quite our culture, but hugging might be, sharing the peace in ways that involve bodily contact probably is, and communal singing almost certainly is. But these reflections on Paul's expressed desires do remind us that gathering online was not nothing: we could 'meet face to face' in online church; we could hear of each other's faith; and offer encouragement and counsel; we could bring encouragement, and offer

[26] Having been involved in making both online church and higher education work as well as each one could through the 2020 lockdown, I am very aware of those who are excluded from the possibilities of video conferencing through poverty, technological inexperience, or the geographical limitations of internet availability. We need a serious ethic of online church alongside the theology before we can imagine a worthwhile practice. That said, my focus in this paper is on the theology.

[27] The arguments are of course well-rehearsed, but, in the most concentrated form, the credal assertion of bodily resurrection necessitates that any theology of human personhood must insist that to be properly human is to be embodied.

prayer. In online church we are not simply apart, although we are scattered.

These reflections suggest that we should imagine 'presence' to be a continuum, not a binary. If somatic presence is one end of the continuum, and simple absence the other, in between there are many intermediary points: full visibility, without bodily contact; synchronous verbal conversation with no visible presence (e.g. a phone call); synchronous written conversation via text message; asynchronous conversation via voicemail or email or bulletin board; extended asynchronous conversation via the exchange of letters (what Paul knew) . . .

In considering the possibilities of a valid online eucharistic celebration, these distinctions might become important — we might find that we need to insist on synchronous presence, or on some real visual engagement ('seeing face-to-face' in Paul's terms, which was the thrust of the UCC argument I quoted in the first section above), or on some other condition, as the necessary minimum. Recognising that 'presence' is a continuum, not a binary, opens the space to make these distinctions and to have these discussions.

An Argument from Current Practice

My first argument for the possibility of an online Communion is to suggest that all the accommodations necessary for it to be valid have already been routinely made in at least some traditions of the church.[28] We have already moved along the continuum of presence described above in common and uncontroversial practices. That is, communicants

[28] I am not concerned here to explore precisely which denominations have made these accommodations, but I will indicate the theological 'red lines' that exclude my proposal as they become relevant. Where I make claims about common practice, I rely merely on personal experience; that said, I have worshipped over the years in many dozens of local churches on several different continents, and, in part through involvement in formal denominational and ecumenical structures both nationally and internationally, can claim some more general awareness of what is common and what is exceptional in at least several traditions of the church. On this basis, I would be surprised if anything I suggest here is found controversial; even if it is not acceptable in a particular reader's own tradition, that reader will have to own that in other traditions such practices are indeed common.

regularly view the celebration only on a screen, possibly whilst in a different room, and then receive elements that the celebrant has not touched in consecrating them. Given this, it is difficult to see why a true online Eucharist as defined above is impossible.

I have made two claims about current practice in this summary: let me defend them, and address a third issue.

First, the 'screening' of the celebrant: can a Communion actually be celebrated with the celebrant on a screen? That is, is the 'prosopal presence' of seeing the celebrant face to face, adequate, or is somatic presence necessary? The implicit answer in the routine practice of many local churches would appear to suggest that screened presence is enough, as they already rely on it. Routinely, during a Communion service, there might be video links to the creche, or to an overflow hall — in my own church, where we meet (appropriately, for a eucharistic celebration) in an upstairs room on a Sunday, we screen the service to a ground floor room for those unable to manage the stairs. Clearly this is not the same as us all being in our living rooms at home, but it is not immediately clear how it is qualitatively different (I will consider this argument more fully below). The Holy Spirit is at work when the Eucharist is celebrated, and the Holy Spirit is not limited by location or distance. (It is possible that an account of the sanctity of the church building could be theologically interesting here, with the creche/overflow room rendered acceptable by being in the same building as the sanctuary, a point I also address below.) Many churches are demonstrably happy, given their recent practice, that 'screened' participation in a service is adequate for receiving Communion as part of that service.

Second, untouched elements: many of us, I suppose, will have communicated in large gatherings where, for reasons of logistics, the elements are spread around the meeting space as the consecration is performed. We receive elements that were several metres distant from the celebrant when consecrated.[29] Or in another context, a celebrant might elevate and break a wafer/piece of bread, and then place it with

[29] Burridge, *Holy Communion in Contagious Times'*, p. 334, suggests that such a practice has become routine in English (Anglican) cathedrals.

many other wafers/pieces of bread on one of several plates, to be served to the communicants by someone other than the celebrant. There has been some measure of physical proximity, to be sure, but I have already suggested that proximity is not an interesting theological category: a communion wafer untouched by the celebrant that is a few centimetres from one they have touched, or that is on a different table in the same room, is not obviously more — or less — available to consecration than one on a kitchen table across town.

Third, we speak of 'being one body', because we 'share in one loaf,' and 'one cup' (echoing Paul in 1 Corinthians); if we all have our own elements to receive at home, in what sense are we being faithful to this Scripture, and to our repetition of it in our liturgy? We have to be honest here: it would be fairly hard to find a church that shares in both 'one loaf' and 'one cup' in its typical Eucharist. My own Free Church tradition moved to individual cups as the norm a century or more ago, whilst retaining a single loaf;[30] more Catholic traditions might insist on a shared cup (but it is not always single), but have, similarly since the late nineteenth-century, defaulted to individual wafers rather than sharing a common loaf. The 'one loaf/one cup' language is, then, stretched fairly seriously by almost all currently common practices of eucharistic celebration. What is different in theological terms between such a context and the idea of the celebrant consecrating elements that are scattered across the town (say)? Either there is some need for the celebrant (or an altar?) to touch each portion of the elements, or the work is the Holy Spirit's, and is therefore necessarily in no way spatially confined.

On these bases, I suggest that *if the way we have been accustomed to celebrating the Eucharist in recent years is acceptable, then an online Eucharist is also acceptable*. I have indicated the doctrinal red lines that would allow a tradition to resist this conclusion, but I am fairly confident that no significant western Protestant tradition, at least, can claim to have held

[30] More recently we have often surrendered the single loaf to accommodate people with coeliac disease, providing a second, gluten free loaf that, for obvious reasons, is kept physically separate from the loaf that is elevated and broken by the celebrant.

to these red lines. What arguments might there be against this? Three suggest themselves.

The obvious first argument is that one or another common accommodation is in fact illegitimate; this would indeed be fatal to the argument I have sketched in this section (I venture a more positive, and so less vulnerable, argument in the next section). I simply observe, however, that the practices I have just described have been common enough to be routine in many very visible contexts, and have gone unchallenged. I myself have received the sacrament under every condition described above, and have celebrated under most of them. No-one was hiding what they were doing; if one condition or another rendered a sacramental celebration invalid, the point ought to have been raised and the argument had before now. The fact that celebrations with each accommodation have routinely been held without challenge suggests fairly strongly that (on these grounds) there is no theological challenge to an online Eucharist, only an emotional disquiet at its novelty.

A second argument might turn on the combination of several accommodations: we might argue, for example, that it is acceptable for the celebrant to be only visible on the screen, and that it is acceptable for them to not touch the distributed elements, but that the combination of these two accommodations invalidates the sacrament. I am not, in principle, opposed to such an argument, but I struggle to see how it might be made with theological seriousness. Issues of sacramental validity appear to be binary (either the elements are consecrated, or they are not; it is not the case that they are 75 percent consecrated under this or that condition); the combination of binary factors will always be itself binary (if, and only if, all conditions are met, then sacramental validity is established); on this basis, the combination of accommodations is not relevant; if each accommodation is valid, regardless of how many there are, then the sacrament is validly consecrated.

A third argument might impose particular limits on some of the accommodations above. This is potentially stronger. Consider the criterion of touch, for example: there might well be a valid theological claim that the celebrant does not need to touch every individual piece of bread, but that it all needs to be served from the altar from which

they are celebrating, or needs to be present within the consecrated space in which the celebration is taking place. With an adequate doctrine of the sanctity of the altar, or of the consecrated space, this would certainly undermine the case I am making. My challenge to such an argument would be similar to that offered above concerning the potential illegitimacy of one or another accommodation: in various previous eucharistic celebrations (perhaps held in a tent at a festival, or outdoors) have such strictures in fact been insisted upon before now? If not, it is hard to see their invocation now as theologically serious.

A fourth argument would concede the points made above, but in a repentant mode. An objector might say, 'Yes, I see now that in allowing this or that accommodation we crossed a particular theological line; I did not see that at the time, and if I had, I would not have allowed it.' Such an argument might be personally significant for an individual, but my points above have relied on claims about practices that are routine in many local churches; unless and until a substantial number of those who have been willing to engage in these practices adopt this repentant attitude, then the change of heart of one, or a number of, individual(s) does not affect the arguments I have made. Were several denominations to insist formally that, for example, screening the celebration of the Eucharist to the creche should be a reason to refuse the sacrament to those in the creche, then my arguments would have failed on this ground; until such a situation obtains, they stand, regardless of the personal qualms of one or another objector.

A Positive Theological Case

I want in this section to make a positive case in the most general terms possible. That is, as far as I can, I will make no decisions between any of the currently controverted matters in eucharistic theology, but hover above them with some very general theological principles that all, or virtually all, will accept. To do this, I will draw fairly extensively on the relevant sections of *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*;[31] for reasons of space, I will not engage extensively with the reception history, but I am writing

[31] Hereafter *BEM*. As is common, citations will be by paragraph within the relevant section, so 'E2' refers to numbered paragraph 2 under in the section on the Eucharist, and so on.

with full awareness of it.[32] Where this is not possible, I will indicate what I see to be the limits of my case in footnotes.

My first principle is this: the triune God acts to make the sacrament efficacious (*BEM* E2). Different Christian communities will disagree on how this claim is to be developed (is the epiclesis necessary for the Spirit to be active? To what extent is the celebration dependent on the activity of an ordained priest, acting *in persona Christi*?…), but the basic claim will be general. The activity of the triune God in the world is not limited spatially (I assume this claim does not need defence, but it is the practical result of the standard Christian doctrine of divine omnipresence); therefore, if we wish to claim a spatial limitation on a triune work, we will have to offer defence as to why this particular action is unusual.

This already shifts the burden of proof significantly: phenomenologically, our usual experience of eucharistic celebration is spatial, and so we are inclined to assume that spatial limitation is normal; theologically considered, however, spatial limitation must be established, not assumed, as it is abnormal. Accounts considered above of the particular sanctity of the sanctuary, or of the need for somatic contact between the celebrant and the elements, are possible ways of establishing spatial limitation, and may, in certain theological traditions, succeed, but they can only be understood as positive arguments for an exception to a general principle.

Second, the Eucharist is tri-dimensional, although the balance between these three dimensions will be different in different traditions and accounts. It is first vertical, an act of thanksgiving ('eucharist'), and perhaps sacrifice,[33] offered to the Father (E3–4; see also E12 and commentary thereon). Second, it is horizontal, an act that deepens the communion of the faithful who communicate (E19–26). Third, it is internal, or perhaps individual, in the recollection (anamnesis) of the

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[32] See World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry 1982–1990,* Faith and Order Paper, 149 (Geneva: WCC, 1990), pp. 60–67 for a summary of the responses received, and *Churches Respond to BEM,* 6 vols, ed. by Max Thurien (Geneva: WCC, 1986–1988) for the texts of the responses.

[33] I have recently explored concepts of eucharistic sacrifice in Stephen R. Holmes, 'A Reformed Account of Eucharistic Sacrifice', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 24 (2022), 191–211.

death of Christ and the renewal of the truth of this in each communicant (E5–7; 12–13). Clearly, only the second of these might offer a reason for spatial limitation, in that the other two do not require any particular relationship with other communicants; that said, in Reformation traditions there has been a (proper, to my mind) insistence on the Eucharist as an act of the community.

BEM is interesting on this point: E1 already insists that the Eucharist is 'the new paschal meal of the Church […] [for] the continuing people of God', suggesting an irreducibly communal dimension; however, the section of 'The Communion of the Faithful' (E19–21) is concerned with the whole church, and so does not focus on the local gathered community in any serious sense. That is, *BEM* already assumes that, whenever the Eucharist is celebrated, there is a translocal dimension that cannot be ignored ('The sharing in one bread and in the common cup in a given place demonstrates and effects the oneness of the sharers with Christ and with their fellow sharers in all times and places.' E19). This is not, of course, an acceptance of, or permission for, online celebration, a possibility that could hardly have been in the minds of the framers of *BEM* in 1982. It is, however, further indication that, in ecumenical tradition, the Eucharist has always been perceived as a sacrament that transcends spatial limitations in significant ways.[34]

My purpose here, again, is to shift the burden of proof: in *BEM* two of the three dimensions of the Eucharist assume no spatial location, and the third focuses more on the transcending of spatial location than its maintenance. Just as when the Eucharist is considered as the work of God, when the Eucharist is considered in its sacramental effectiveness, it seems natural to assume that a dispersed/online Eucharist can be celebrated, unless and until we are given good reasons why it cannot.

For a third point, we might consider a basic orientation of sacramental theology, established most trenchantly by Augustine's

[34] In the paper referenced in n. 29, I worked with Calvin's account of the pneumatological relocation of the communicants, under which he suggests that those who receive the Eucharist are in/by the Spirit, made present with Christ where he now is in the heavenly realms. I also noted that this doctrine is asserted in at least some of the Reformed confessions (Holmes, 'Reformed Account', pp. 200–204). Such a doctrine further relativises the need for somatic presence, and so is particularly accepting of accounts of online eucharistic celebration.

discussions of baptism. Augustine is considering the question of the validity of schismatic or heretical baptism, and argues (against Cyprian, and so against the great weight of tradition in his context) that all baptisms performed in the triune name are valid. His argument is straightforward: the sacrament belongs to Christ, who intends it for good; a schismatic or heretic cannot either wrest the sacrament from Christ, or defeat Christ's purposes in the sacrament by their own intention to do something different; so, however deficient the performance of the sacrament, and whatever the erroneous intentions of the one baptising, and indeed the local community, Christ will do the good he intends through his sacrament.[35]

This success of this argument is evident in history: only in a very few sectarian contexts (many, I must admit, developing within my own Baptist tradition) has there been a willingness to discount the validity of a baptism performed in another Christian tradition, whatever deficiencies might be ascribed to that tradition. The basic argument here is as Augustine stated: God intends to do good through the sacraments, and the various, inevitable, deficiencies of any particular sacramental service will not subvert the divine intention.

With regard to the Eucharist, the long-standing principle that the validity of the sacrament does not rely on the morality or indeed orthodoxy of the celebrating priest is a species of the same instinct: God desires to do good through the sacraments, and human failure will not limit that. This argument is however more complicated when applied to the Eucharist, for reasons that are historically understandable, but not, perhaps, theologically defensible. Two requirements stand out: the demand that the celebrant be episcopally ordained, and some sort of required belief concerning the sacrament, either that the elements are transubstantiated, or that there is some intention that the sacrament be sacrificial. Whilst there are some limited exceptions allowed by ecumenical arrangements when a believer cannot attend a church of their own tradition,[36] in general the sacrament of unity divides us still.

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[35] On this see, for example, Adam D. Ployd, 'The Power of Baptism: Augustine's Pro-Nicene Response to the Donatists', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 22 (2014), 519–540.

[36] For example, see the strictures and permissions of Canon 844 in the Roman Catholic Church.

That said, the question of an online Eucharist is not particularly affected by these debates. The basic scenario is a eucharistic community who cannot gather spatially, and so are seeking to gather online (as during the pandemic lockdowns). In this context, the basic doctrine, that the triune God's intentions to do good through the sacraments regardless of imperfect performance, can be invoked with confidence. If a particular tradition's doctrine insists on one of the limiting cases I have indicated — the sanctity of the sanctuary, or the celebrant physically touching every individual element — then this argument will not, of course, be relevant, but in the absence of such limiting factors, it seems significant. (It also gives us a way of narrating the *esse/bene esse* distinction made above: there is a proper requirement to celebrate the Eucharist in the most reverent way possible, and that includes physical gathering when it is possible, but when the best is not possible, the best we can do is adequate.)

Conclusion

I have argued that both current practice and ecumenical doctrine create space for the Eucharist to be celebrated online if that should prove necessary, and I have indicated where certain doctrinal commitments exclude that. I suggest that, for the majority of Protestant churches, at least, online celebration is a valid option. It should never be the preferred mode of celebration, but if, through reasons of distance (remembering my Canadian friends), public health (the Covid-19 lockdowns), or indeed persecution, somatic gathering is not possible, then an online celebration of the Eucharist can be a true Eucharist. In the midst of a pandemic, or under persecution, or simply scattered by geography, God's people should not be denied the good of the sacrament.[37]

[37] I am very grateful to an anonymous reviewer for this journal who identified a weakness in the argument and pointed to two sources I had not been aware of. The piece is significantly better because of that reviewer's interventions.

Traumatic Experiences and the Role of Friendship in Healing: A Theological Reading of Brian Keenan's *An Evil Cradling*

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Abstract
In this study of trauma and friendship, focused around Brian Keenan's *An Evil Cradling*, I investigate the friendship between Brian Keenan and John McCarthy, who were imprisoned together as hostages in the late 1980s during the Lebanese Civil War, as described and celebrated within the text. Three recurring motifs of friendship — solidarity, prayer, and community — are used to identify the theological underpinnings of friendship. Drawing from the literature of trauma studies, particularly Shelly Rambo on 'witnessing' and 'remaining', I explore whether friendship as an embodied spiritual practice is a fitting response to trauma, itself an embodied experience. This, by extension, has important ramifications for communities of care like the church, especially when the Johannine Christ implores his disciples to 'remain' with each other, and invites Thomas to touch his bodily wounds. By acknowledging and 'touching' trauma, I find that close, interdependent friendship that avoids erasing wounds is paradoxically most able to help restore the wounded.

Keywords
Trauma; healing; friendship

Introduction

When I was ten years old, in April 1986, a thirty-five-year-old man from Northern Ireland called Brian Keenan was taken hostage by Islamic fundamentalists in Lebanon. It was a news story which my family followed with interest for the entire period of his captivity, which ended as abruptly as it had begun in August 1990. Keenan, a lecturer in English literature, along with John McCarthy, an English journalist, were two of

around a hundred foreign hostages kidnapped between 1982 and 1992 during the Lebanese Civil War.[1]

I thought no more of that news story until a few years ago when I read Keenan's story of his four and a half years in captivity, *An Evil Cradling*.[2] It is a brutal, honest, and profoundly moving autobiographical account of his ordeal in which he was kept, blindfolded, and often in total darkness, in tiny, squalid underground cells. Following an initial period of solitary confinement for several months, Keenan was imprisoned with John McCarthy, a man with whom he became close friends. For the final three years of Keenan's captivity, they were bound by chains on their ankles and wrists, which were bolted to a wall.[3] In the centre of a narrative about this traumatic experience, Keenan somehow shaped a love story: the power of friendship in the midst of trauma.

During their long captivity together, Keenan and McCarthy's friendship grew and developed such that when Keenan was eventually offered his freedom by his captors, his initial instinct was to beg to speak to McCarthy, who ultimately was not released until almost a year later. Keenan's deeply moving account of his thought process while held next door to McCarthy prior to being freed includes this question: 'For how much freedom can there be for a man when he leaves one half of himself chained to the wall?'[4] The idea of a friendship which is so close that the friend feels like part of oneself is deeply fascinating, especially within the context of trauma.

Trauma is incredibly prevalent, far-reaching, and destructive in our world today.[5] In response, it can be easy for 'community' to be brandished as the answer to all life's brokenness, especially in theological/church circles. But, like Keenan, 'I am somebody who

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[1] Magnus Ranstorp, *Hizb'allah in Lebanon: The Politics of the Western Hostage Crisis* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), pp. 1, 86–108.
[2] Brian Keenan, *An Evil Cradling* (London: Vintage, 1992).
[3] Keenan, *An Evil Cradling*, p. 217.
[4] Keenan, *An Evil Cradling*, p. 292.
[5] See, for example: Vincent Felitti, Robert F. Anda, Dale Nordenberg, Valerie Edwards, Mary P. Koss, D. Williamson, A. M. Spitz, and James S. Marks, 'Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study', *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 14, no. 4 (1998), 245–258.

enjoys questions rather than answers. I don't have a lot of time for answers.'[6] In this exploration of trauma and friendship within *An Evil Cradling*, I will ask how the friendship between Keenan and McCarthy developed and how it helped them both to survive the experience of captivity. Bessel van der Kolk, an expert in traumatic stress, acknowledges that certain therapies such as EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing) and certain anti-depressants seem more effective than others in trauma survivors although neuroscientists and psychiatrists do not know why. Intriguingly, he then says, 'We likewise don't know precisely why talking to a trusted friend gives such profound relief, and I am surprised how few people seem eager to explore that question.'[7] This article is my response to this perplexed observation.

James McClendon asserts that 'theologians may do better work […] through a certain attention to other people's lives'.[8] McClendon argues that the importance of biographical study lies not so much in its 'usefulness' but rather that the power lies in the ability of a real person's story to explain something theological which could not be imparted propositionally.[9] In selecting the biographical subject, therefore, McClendon suggests that we should like, or be struck by, our saints' stories, and that it is their embodied doctrine which is so compelling. In all these respects, Keenan seems to qualify as one of those lives worthy of such theological attention. Although, in his honest and highly self-aware text, Keenan self-consciously rejects 'sainthood' or links with religion, he consistently reflects Christian values of forgiveness, self-sacrifice, care for the other, and the self-discipline of friendship, often in explicitly biblical terms.

It would be tempting to apply this exploration of friendship and trauma in a prescriptive way. We might state, for example, 'Strong

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[6] 'Interview with Brian Keenan', Guardians of the Flame (GOTF) podcast, 12 January 2021 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u92I6K7jRo4&t=1284s> [accessed 25 May, 2023].
[7] Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Transformation of Trauma* (London: Penguin, 2014), p. 262.
[8] James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), p. 69.
[9] McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, p. 161.

friendships are the best way of healing from trauma.' However, the desire to fix, prevent, transform, or even redeem trauma will need to be suspended, avoiding what Shelly Rambo describes as the 'redemptive gloss' which is often placed over suffering.[10] This study will contextualise the specifics of the friendship between Keenan and McCarthy, before focusing on three main theological motifs for friendship within the context of trauma. Following an exploration of scientific and other readings of trauma, I then investigate whether there are theological ways of responding to trauma. Finally, I discuss the spiritual practice of friendship, both between Keenan and McCarthy as well as more broadly, and its political and sociological implications, especially as they align (or do not) with the biblical witness. The embodied experience of both trauma and friendship will be central to this brief study.

Theological Dimensions of Keenan and McCarthy's Friendship

Context of the Friendship

It was a long journey which led towards Keenan's eventual friendship with McCarthy as hostages in Beirut. Keenan's early years were spent in a tough area of Belfast, the Antrim Road. He had a difficult relationship with both his parents, particularly his father. Although Keenan admired his father (who had been in the air force during the war), he found him distant and disliked his politics as both an Orangeman[11] and a Freemason. When the Northern Irish 'Troubles' erupted when he was aged nineteen, Keenan saw friends disappearing into a mire of sectarianism which he likened to Albert Camus's *The Plague*. He was living in Derry as a student with an older Protestant couple when Bloody Sunday happened in January 1972 — a shooting of twenty-six unarmed civilians by the British Army, in which thirteen Catholics died. The

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[10] Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 8.

[11] An Orangeman is a member of the Protestant fraternity, the Orange Order, which is named after William of Orange, who defeated the Catholic King James II in 1688. Orangemen are strongly associated with sectarianism in Northern Ireland and parts of Scotland.

devastation and shock of the woman he was staying with had an impact on him and he decided he ultimately wanted to leave Northern Ireland.[12]

Keenan himself notes that arriving in Beirut in early December 1985 to teach English at the American University of Beirut, might be a case of 'frying pan to fire? Another Belfast?'[13] Armed bodyguards greeted him at the airport and many civilians in the streets were armed with AK-47s. Within weeks he was kidnapped by fundamentalist Shi'ite militiamen. Initially, Keenan was held in solitary confinement in a small underground cell. He discusses the process of 'traumatic transition' to this new and unwelcome situation as one that minimises danger. This is connected to the phenomenon of denial, which he describes as 'a normal and necessary human reaction to a crisis which is too immediately overwhelming to face head on'.[14] Keenan convinced himself he would only be held for two weeks, but after two failed escape attempts, reality sank in. During the period of being held underground in the dark, with only one visit to the toilet each morning and a small amount of food and water given daily, Keenan experienced many strange emotions. Euphoric highs were followed by crashing lows of depression, strange dreams, haunting memories, and exhaustion. He had an almost mystical experience of this solitary confinement, of being on the edge of madness. One senses that this experience shaped his response to McCarthy when they did finally meet.

Keenan and McCarthy's unwitting initial meeting came when the hostage-takers moved them to another location and put several prisoners in the back of a van. All were blindfolded, but Keenan felt another prisoner touch his foot for reassurance; he responded by putting his hand on the other man's hand, 'a strange first human touch conveying such warmth and companionship'.[15] Keenan later discovered that it was McCarthy who had touched him, having firstly reached out to touch the person on his other side, with no response.[16] Following the journey in the van, Keenan and McCarthy were put in a cell together

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[12] 'Interview with Brian Keenan', GOTF podcast.
[13] Keenan, *An Evil Cradling*, p. 23.
[14] Keenan, *An Evil Cradling*, p. 31.
[15] Keenan, *An Evil Cradling*, p. 88.
[16] Keenan, *An Evil Cradling*, p. 92.

and met after tentatively removing their blindfolds. McCarthy, an international journalist, had travelled to Beirut to make a film about Keenan, describing that as 'the worst mistake I ever made in my life'.[17] For the remainder of Keenan's captivity, he was held with McCarthy, mostly just as the two of them, but at one point towards the end of their confinement, they were both held together with three American hostages.

After four and a half years, Keenan was offered his freedom first and he recounts his indecisive wrestling with whether to take it or not. 'Great love has weakened me', he writes, and ultimately decides that it would belittle McCarthy to return to his chains: 'I know that the deep bond our captivity has given us will be shattered if I return.' Keenan sensed that because of the growth he had observed take place in McCarthy, it would be an insult to him if he (Keenan) refused to leave him — as if, by implication, he was saying that McCarthy needed him in order to survive. He writes that their mutual respect 'demands of each that we take our freedom when it comes'. Yet, when Keenan did so, he had the sense 'that my arm had been wrenched off my shoulder and was suddenly missing'.[18]

Theological Motifs of the Keenan/McCarthy Friendship

In a rich, dense text like *An Evil Cradling*, there are a number of aspects of embodied friendship which can be seen as theological. However, for the purpose of this piece, I will focus on three main motifs of friendship in the midst of trauma which are emblematic of Keenan's text, and pertinent to a theological study of friendship and trauma: solidarity, prayer, and community. I have arrived at these motifs by considering carefully three of the many striking images used within the text, which for this reader acted as snapshots, fragments, or 'still lifes' of Keenan's imprisoned self. It is notable that Keenan does not shy away from self-consciously making biblical and theological references in his work. Focusing on the three motifs of solidarity, prayer, and community should not imply that it is possible to thus encapsulate the entirety of their friendship. However, the motifs and the images within them reveal

[17] Keenan, *An Evil Cradling*, p. 91.
[18] Keenan, *An Evil Cradling*, p. 292.

aspects which cannot be expressed propositionally through a doctrinal study of friendship alone.

Solidarity. The first striking motif to focus on is a moment of resistance to the guards, who plan to shave off Keenan and McCarthy's beards. Keenan objects strongly as a point of principle, as he feels robbed of his dignity. As McCarthy panics and starts speaking quickly about whether they are going be shot, Keenan stands up and pretends to shoot an arrow from a bow. McCarthy instinctively copies him, as if they are a couple of children playing a game. Comparing themselves to David and Jonathan in the Bible, Keenan writes, 'That instinctive mimicry, with excitement, the fear, the adrenalin coursing through our bodies, was an inarticulate gesture of mutual support.'[19] Quite apart from the obvious biblical imagery, this gesture seems to capture something of the solidarity between the two. Earlier in the text, they share stories of each other's lives and listen closely to stories from childhood. Keenan describes how they have 'exchanged each other's friends and families until they became our own. […] We began to move into each other's lives.'[20] This sharing of each other's selves illustrates how interconnected friends can become. For example, when Keenan was beaten, he recognised that he had in some strange way, caused suffering to McCarthy: 'He endured every blow that I received.'[21] One person's suffering became another's, as if they were one body, with both being wounded. Therefore, alongside the biblical imagery of David and Jonathan, this image also demonstrates something of the body of Christ being united but having many interconnecting parts.

Prayer. The second motif contains imagery that is less pleasant than that of two friends united in solidarity. In a particularly gruesome passage, Keenan has a case of diarrhoea and uses a bag as a toilet multiple times very close to McCarthy's face, due to their small cell. The illness goes on for two weeks and eventually Keenan is too weak to get to the bag in time: 'Lying exhausted, with an agonized embarrassment I watched my friend clean the mess off me without complaint.'[22] Later, Keenan

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[19] Keenan, *An Evil Cradling*, p. 142.
[20] Keenan, *An Evil Cradling*, p. 105.
[21] Keenan, *An Evil Cradling*, p. 246.
[22] Keenan, *An Evil Cradling*, p. 250.

feels McCarthy gently place his hand on his stomach and realises McCarthy is praying for him: 'I was overcome. […] I wanted to join him in prayer, I wanted to thank him for this huge and tender gesture.'[23] The twin aspects here of prayer and care for the other, including touch of someone who is literally 'unclean', is reminiscent of Jesus's healing touch.

Keenan describes how, in the early days, they prayed 'unashamedly, making no outward sign. We simply knew that each of us did pray and would on occasion remind each other to say a prayer for someone in particular among our families and lovers.'[24] When McCarthy was facing interrogation and a beating after an altercation with another prisoner, Keenan prayed 'not for John's strength nor for his courage but for his safety', commenting that 'one needs to believe that someone, somewhere is thinking about you when you are in a dangerous situation'.[25] In this way, a deep connection between the friends was instinctively manifested through prayer. Even when they are separated at one point, Keenan comments that through prayer, 'we were apart but somehow we were in communication'.[26]

Community. The third theological motif from Keenan's text is connected with the small community that was formed when Keenan and McCarthy were eventually held alongside American hostages Terry Anderson, Tom Sutherland, and Frank Reed. Reed, in particular, had been brutalised by their captors such that he would remain with his head under a blanket, unable to communicate with the others. When the guards came in he would crawl into a corner, terrified. Keenan repeatedly and unsuccessfully urged Reed to get up and McCarthy firmly told the guards to stop beating him.[27] Eventually, through the strength of the friendship and humour of the others, 'Frank emerged from behind his blanket slowly, tenuously. As he did so, so did we. […] It was a restoration of meaning for all of us.'[28] This image of a de-humanised

[23] Keenan, *An Evil Cradling*, p. 251.
[24] Keenan, *An Evil Cradling*, p. 99.
[25] Keenan, *An Evil Cradling*, p. 196.
[26] Keenan, *An Evil Cradling*, p. 153.
[27] Keenan, *An Evil Cradling*, p. 286.
[28] Keenan, *An Evil Cradling*, p. 288.

man hiding under a blanket and eventually being restored by friendship is at the heart of this exploration of trauma. It is an image of what the church could be and, as with the bow and arrow image, highlights the interconnectedness between people. Keenan recognises this interdependence: 'It struck home to me then that when we participate in another person's suffering, we in part heal ourselves.'[29] The friendship between Keenan and McCarthy was therefore not inward-facing; it also became 'a prop for others'.[30]

Illustrated in the three motifs of solidarity, prayer, and community, there are clear theological connections to be made about the nature of friendship. In terms of trauma, although we cannot draw from Keenan's text how the pair managed to cope with trauma many years after their captivity, what is clear is the *embodied* nature of both the traumatic experience and the friendship. As we turn to an exploration of trauma, especially through the contributions of neuroscience and psychiatry, we will note some of the methodologies used for healing from traumatic wounds. Sometimes these hint at the possibility of socialising and friendship as a help without fully making the connection. But is the neurological aspect of trauma studies limited in its application by treating the social as useful only in an instrumental way, as a function of healing the individual?

Individual, Social, and Theological Approaches to Trauma

Keenan and McCarthy clearly went through a prolonged traumatic experience. People have always experienced trauma, but without necessarily naming it as such. It was in the late nineteenth century that Freud's early definitions of 'hysteria' and an understanding that it may emerge from the sexual abuse of children paved the way for many modern psychoanalytic techniques, such as the 'talking cure'.[31] However, the study and treatment of trauma is relatively new, with the phenomenon and symptoms of returning Vietnam war veterans leading directly to the inclusion of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in

[29] Keenan, *An Evil Cradling*, p. 176.
[30] Keenan, *An Evil Cradling*, p. xiv.
[31] Kolk, *Body Keeps the Score*, p. 181.

the third edition of the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSMIII) in 1980.[32]

Although Keenan's text cannot be mined for details of how the trauma affected him many years later, since it was published within two years of his release, the prolonged nature of his traumatic experience gives rise to questions of how he coped *within* it. When Keenan was released he eschewed counselling, preferring instead to move, alone, to a rural location in County Mayo in the Irish Republic for a period of three years.[33] However, it is notable that documented within his time in captivity, Keenan appears to instinctively turn to techniques and treatments for trauma which have been only subsequently discovered and developed by neuroscientists/psychiatrists. For example, the use of imagination and play has been found by trauma specialists to assist with healing, especially as used in communal movement/rhythm, as well as theatre.[34] Similarly, the positive touch between the friends, such as McCarthy laying a hand on Keenan in prayer, resonate with modern 'bodywork'.[35]

Understandably, much of the literature on trauma focuses on individual psychiatric and neurological treatment of the physiological/psychological consequences of traumatic experiences, but a few notable exceptions have opened the field to broader considerations. For example, Judith Herman's groundbreaking *Trauma and Recovery* situates trauma as a political and social phenomenon,[36] while Cathy Caruth uses history, narrative, and literary theory to approach the experience of trauma.[37] Herman and Caruth have enabled trauma to be

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[32] Kolk, *Body Keeps the Score*, p. 137.

[33] Siobhan Breatnach, 'Beirut Hostage Brian Keenan: 30 years on from the Irishman's Unimaginable Kidnapping', *The Irish Post,* 12 April 2016 <https://www.irishpost.com/news/beirut-hostage-brian-keenan-30-years-irishmans-unimaginable-kidnapping-85914/> [accessed 25 May, 2023].

[34] See, for example, Emma Heard, Alyson Mutch, and Liza Fitzgerald, 'Using Applied Theater in Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Prevention of Intimate Partner Violence: A Systematic Review', *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse*, 21, no. 1 (2020), 138–156.

[35] Kolk, *Body Keeps the Score*, p. 216.

[36] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 2015).

[37] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History,* 20th anniversary edn (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2016).

conceived of as an individual, neurological, psychosocial, historical, literary, institutional, and collective phenomenon; but can it be theological? According to Shelly Rambo, it can. Citing the example of a New Orleans minister coping with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Rambo asserts that trauma can be expressed as 'an encounter with death'.[38] This could be a shattering of a person's world and how they experience it, rather than a literal death. Keenan's world certainly shattered when he was kidnapped at gunpoint in April 1986. The Christian desire is often to find a redemption from death and to rush from Good Friday to the resurrected life of Easter Sunday, bypassing Holy Saturday, a place in which death has occurred but the redemptive life has not yet begun. In doing so, there is an assumption that suffering can be circumvented. Instead, Rambo argues that the appropriate response to suffering is to witness it and to faithfully remain, such that the relationship between death and life is reconfigured.[39] Rambo's thesis situates both witness and woundedness within Holy Saturday. This resonates with Keenan's discussion of feeling stuck between death and life, sometimes wishing to embrace death which seemed seductive to him.[40]

Rambo's argument lays useful groundwork for this article in terms of what a witness is and does. She firstly takes two dominant ideas of what witness is — proclamation and imitation. The 'proclamation' understanding of the witness concerns the judicial/legal idea of an observer who can relay particular events to a third party, usually in words. For example, early followers of Christ perceived themselves to be witnesses to Jesus's words and actions. It was therefore incumbent upon them to give testimony on his behalf, especially in order to convince others of Christ's message.[41] On the other hand, the 'imitation' version of witness is about following Christ's love and actions, even if it means persecution and death — an embodied witness rather than a verbal one. This development was centred in the persecution of the early church into the second century and the need for the message of Jesus

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[38] Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, p. 4.
[39] Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, p. 32.
[40] Keenan, *An Evil Cradling*, p. 68.
[41] Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, p. 38.

to be not only proclaimed but inhabited: 'A witness literally became, in body, that message.'[42] Although Rambo acknowledges that these understandings of the witness have biblical and historical/traditional roots, she considers them inadequate when it comes to witnessing trauma, since they assume that the witness can understand what they are seeing. Instead, Rambo posits the idea of witnessing 'from the middle', by which she means that the witness can 'see truths that often escape articulation' and experience the 'continual elisions that make it impossible to see, hear, or touch clearly'.[43]

Drawing from the Johannine text, Rambo notes that Mary Magdalene and the beloved disciple as witnesses to the resurrection are fairly unreliable in a judicial sense. For example, in Mary's encounter with Jesus at the tomb, she has limited vision due to her own tears plus the fact that it is dark, and she only has a partial look into the tomb.[44] Similarly, the beloved disciple, who arrives first at the tomb, does not enter it but instead peers in. Thus, these texts 'underscore a gap between seeing and believing'.[45] Jesus's own words in his farewell discourse (John 14–16) prior to his death and resurrection are seen as suggestive of this gap. For example, in John 16:12, Jesus indicates that the disciples will experience his death but they will not understand it at the time. However, critically, the paraclete or Holy Spirit, will be with them in his absence.[46] By translating the Greek word *menein* as 'to remain',[47] this allows Rambo to build on the idea of a middle spirit, the reliance on the Spirit as a witness. This pneumatological stance of Spirit as teacher/guide/witness enables the disciple to remain in a place of love, as commanded by Christ, despite the paradoxes of death and life between which trauma is situated.[48] Rambo suggests that the urge to push through trauma to arrive at redemption is an unhelpful dominant narrative, with particularly troubling implications for those who are not

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42 Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, p. 39.
43 Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, p. 40.
44 Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, pp. 83–84.
45 Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, p. 92.
46 Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, pp. 100–101.
47 Other scholars do likewise. See, for example, Edward W. Klink III, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), eBook, p. 8d.
48 Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, pp. 102–105.

able-bodied, for example.[49] Instead, Christian disciples are called to be persistent and perpetual witnesses to suffering despite the pull to derive meaning from it, and the work of the Spirit is to enable us to be attentive. The trauma survivor, therefore, acts as a witness to the experience of suffering and sits within the reality of it despite it being hard to grasp.

A critique of Rambo's text is that she is perhaps *too* keen for trauma survivors to remain in or be perpetual witnesses to suffering without the necessity for healing. This raises the question, Could this cause an 'eternalisation of suffering'?[50] Could Keenan and McCarthy have metaphorically held their 'bow and arrow' position indefinitely? How long could one bear to be with a man who is literally and figuratively hiding under a blanket? However, a later text by Rambo helps to imagine what might be involved in remaining.[51] In it, she draws from the example of the French drama series *Les Revenants (The Returned)*, in which people in a small town who had died years earlier suddenly begin returning to the community, seemingly unwounded. For Rambo, this emphasises 'bodies as the loci of trauma'[52] and connects with the resurrected body of Christ, particularly in his encounter with Thomas in John's Gospel. Jesus's return bearing the wounds of death means that life stands in the midst of death, similarly to the 'afterlife' of trauma carrying the woundedness of 'death' into the survivor's ongoing life. Later in *Les Revenants*, the people who remained experience wounds appearing on their skin, which Rambo links to the clinical need for wounds to surface in order to be addressed.[53] By utilising Thomas's insistence on witnessing Jesus's wounds, acknowledging that they are 'part of the history of this body',[54] Rambo focuses on the significance of wounds, avoiding their erasure.[55] She places special significance on Jesus's offer to Thomas that he touch the wounds. This, alongside the

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[49] Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, p. 147.
[50] Johann Baptist Metz, 'Suffering Unto God', *Critical Enquiry*, 20 (1994), 611–622 (p. 619).
[51] Shelly Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017).
[52] Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds*, p. 4.
[53] Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds*, p. 13.
[54] Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds*, p. 150.
[55] Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds*, p. 11.

community of disciples being gathered around the wounds, helps us recover the centrality of the body to the narrative, and creates in the Upper Room, 'a place where wounds are touched, and where shame, grief, and anger are released'. The Spirit's breath given to the disciples gives an awareness of the wounds, which in turn helps form a collective, which brings healing to the 'after-living'.[56]

Although Rambo's texts do not offer any practical examples of how healing might be achieved in the 'after-living', they do offer a framework for seeing bodily woundedness as something to be acknowledged rather than glossed over. It is also a helpful corrective for some who see woundedness as something to be literally erased or 'forgotten' in the eschaton.[57] The critique of attempting to circumvent suffering and instead jumping straight to redemptive language is profound, partly because such language can cause distress, guilt, and self-doubt to trauma survivors. The attempt to negate experiences which remain with survivors in the present day, despite their struggles with them, has serious pastoral implications. The subtle shift of emphasis towards remaining whilst still holding to an orthodox view of redemption is a necessary counterbalancing of an eschatology that holds that all things have already been fully restored. This has wider implications for hermeneutical frameworks and how Scriptures (and experiences) which do not 'fit' can be interpreted. Rambo ably demonstrates how the Johannine text focuses on 'remaining', or abiding, alongside woundedness as constitutive of community. Rather than suffering being eternalised, as Johann Metz argues, the trauma survivor as witness is simply being affirmed in that position of being between death and life which is akin to the position of God's kingdom being both 'now' and 'not yet'.

Christian theology ought to offer much to the field of trauma studies because of the focus on the cross and the wounded, resurrected Christ at its centre, which should correspondingly put wounded people at its centre. Although it is impossible to avoid the fact that Christian

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[56] Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds*, pp. 151–153.

[57] See, for example, Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, 3rd edn (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2019), p. 142.

theology has done some of the wounding,[58] it also has the capacity to add much to the study of trauma (and friendship) because it sees the body not solely as neurological or social, but as tangible and real. This is what makes Keenan's account so compellingly theological in relation to trauma — because it unflinchingly expresses an embodied experience. But how can trauma relate to friendship, and how can Rambo's work help us with this relationship?

The Theological Relationship of Friendship to Trauma

Thus far, I have described some theological aspects of Keenan and McCarthy's friendship, before moving on to how trauma has been analysed. But what is the relationship between friendship and trauma? Can friendship be viewed through a theological lens, as trauma can? And if so, what does this mean for us today?

It does appear that trauma can be the seedbed for friendship, and that the conditions of captivity may actually be conducive to friendship. Shared trauma may in fact form the *basis* of close friendships because of the heightened reality of living through it together. The trauma of prison or captivity in particular can act as a catalyst for close friendship. For example, quoting from Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom*, that 'prison is an incubator for friendship', Doaa Embabi suggests that this is why solitary confinement within prison is so devastating, since it 'denies the person one of the key aspects afforded by friendship, i.e., the assurance and recognition of the self that a friend provides'.[59]

Similarly, nurses made 'captive' by their role on the Western Front during the First World War, found ways of coping with the trauma of male patients harrowingly wounded in battle through strong friendships with each other. In her study of women's war diaries, Bridget

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[58] Particularly to women — see, for example, 'body theodicy' and the effect of a purity culture theology on women's bodies in Katie Cross, '"I Have the Power in My Body to Make People Sin": The Trauma of Purity Culture and the Concept of "Body Theodicy"', in *Feminist Trauma Theologies: Body, Scripture and Church in Critical Perspective*, ed. by Karen O'Donnell and Katie Cross (London: SCM, 2020), pp. 21–35.

[59] Doaa Embabi, 'Friendship and Solidarity in Prison: Mandela and Habashi', *Alif Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 36 (2016), 107–139 (p. 119).

Keown finds that the 'sisterhood' which emerged between nurses, gave 'the potential for healing and closure' which enabled nurses to endure.[60] In another 'captive' situation, John Perkins, a black civil rights activist, describes how his life was repeatedly threatened when attempting to help register black people to vote in Mississippi. When he told his neighbours, around a hundred men from his local community came to protect his home each night. Perkins writes that 'traumatic experiences have a way of creating bonds that are unique and lasting'.[61] In these situations of actual captivity (that is, imprisonment) or effective captivity (for example, the inability to leave the war front or the oppressed community), friendships can flourish.

This leads one to wonder if an appropriate response to the embodied experience of trauma is the embodied experience of friendship. Perhaps our images of both Keenan and McCarthy's traumatic experience and their friendship are two sides of the same coin. Our first image of solidarity in the mimicry of the bow and arrow posture is self-consciously compared by Keenan to that of the biblical David and Jonathan. This iconic story of friendship immediately lends itself to a theological exploration of the subject. Eugene Peterson's meditation on that biblical friendship, recounted in 1 Samuel 18–20, is a good starting point for these considerations. Although Peterson does not frame it in this way, David certainly experienced what we would now consider to be trauma: stalking, repeated murder attempts, forced into the wilderness as a fugitive from the royal courts. It is in this context that 'Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul'. The friendship between them was risky for Jonathan as the son of the king, but according to Peterson, it 'bracketed and contained the evil'.[62]

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[60] Bridget E. Keown, "'I think I was more pleased to see her than any one 'Cos she's so fine": Nurses' Friendships, Trauma, and Resiliency During the First World War', *Family & Community History*, 21, no. 3 (2018), 151–165 (p. 154).

[61] John M. Perkins, *He Calls Me Friend: The Healing Power of Friendship in a Lonely World* (Chicago: Moody, 2019), eBook, p. 23.

[62] Eugene H. Peterson, *Leap Over a Wall: Earthy Spirituality for Everyday Christians* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), p. 53.

Peterson then makes further illustration with an encounter between Martin Buber and Douglas Steere where Buber said to Steere that 'the greatest thing any person can do for another is to confirm the deepest thing in him […] to see what's most deeply there, most fully that person and then confirm it by recognizing and encouraging it'.[63] This notion of confirmation of the other is picked up by Peterson and parallels well with Rambo's idea of the witness. Friendship, then, as a witness and confirmation, is at the core of David and Jonathan's friendship. Jonathan confirms and is witness to God's anointing of David, whilst David confirms and is witness to Jonathan that his character is not dependent on that of his father.

It is at the point of describing a playful aspect of friendship, the 'inarticulate gesture' of pretending to shoot with a bow and arrow, that leads Keenan to draw the comparison with David and Jonathan. The playfulness is a consequence of the friendship rather than being constitutive of it. The mimicry of the other, the instinctive solidarity, resonates with the idea of confirming or witnessing the other. Within trauma, friendship acts as a witness to the experience of the self and of the other simultaneously. Friends continue to point to the essential goodness of each other, a goodness which cannot be subsumed by the traumatic experience; a goodness given by God.

The goodness of God in friendship can be seen during the time of Keenan's illness, when he comments that his friend, 'was a man of vast tenderness, a man of compassion'.[64] In the grim image of Keenan suffering from diarrhoea, eventually unable to clean himself, the care shown by McCarthy is a combination of both practical and spiritual. The care is manifested in the cleaning of the body alongside the prayerful touch of one by the other. Here we may recall the way the spiritual element of friendship was expounded by the English Cistercian monk, Aelred of Rievaulx, in the twelfth century. He asserted that the foundation of friendship is the love of God[65] and that this love would gladly, 'bear another's burdens […] disregard himself for the sake of

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[63] Peterson, *Leap Over a Wall*, p. 54.
[64] Keenan, *An Evil Cradling*, p. 251.
[65] Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, trans. by L. C. Braceland, SJ, ed. by M. L. Dutton (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2010), pp. 88–89.

another, […] oppose and expose oneself to adversity'. Praying for each other, he declares, is at the heart of spiritual friendship.[66] This element of the devotional life is exemplified in the image of McCarthy praying over Keenan in a moment of severe adversity. One of their maxims for life in captivity became 'exercise, the companionship of friends and above these the gift of the spirit which is divine'.[67] The spiritual dimension of trauma allows for the 'speaking' of what cannot be spoken, whether to God, or to each other, by the embodied spiritual care of the other.

Friendship and trauma in the third image, of Frank Reed set apart and needing to be befriended, seemingly too traumatised to connect with other humans, leads us to consider the wider concerns of how trauma might be recognised and borne within community. Christian theology should have plenty to say in relation to community since the church is envisaged as the body of Christ. According to Luke Johnson, the language of friendship would have been implicitly understood within the early church even where it was not explicitly stated within Scripture as *philia*,[68] due to the connotations from the Greco-Roman context of such phrases as 'having the same mind', 'being one spirit', 'having fellowship', and so on, that derived from associations with the philosophical ideas of Plato, Cicero, and Aristotle.[69] In his study of Philippians, Johnson convincingly argues that through the use of the word, 'fellowship', which would have been read as 'friendship', it would have been clear to the church that they were being instructed to be 'a community of friends'.[70] The manifestation of such friendship would be the mutuality of shared possessions. Although for Keenan and other hostages, possessions were in short supply, it seems that instead, they

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66 Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, p. 125.
67 Keenan, *An Evil Cradling*, p. 171.
68 Unlike more modern conceptions that *philia* was in some way inferior to *agape* love whilst being superior to *eros*, others reformulate these types of love as three expressions of it. See Joas Adiprasetya and Nindyo Sasongko, 'A Compassionate Space-Making: Toward a Trinitarian Theology of Friendship', *The Ecumenical Review*, 71, no. 1–2 (2019), 21–31 (p. 22).
69 Luke T. Johnson, 'Making Connections: The Material Expression of Friendship in the New Testament', *Interpretation* 58, no. 2 (2004), 158–171 (pp. 159–161).
70 Johnson, 'Making Connections', p. 163.

shared *each other*, and this was an example of the spirit at work in their small community.

However, the experience of friendship should not be limited to a single pair of friends, enjoying the pleasure of one another's company. Instead, it should branch out to others, especially others unlike themselves. If the church as a community of friends is to reach out to the wider social sphere, Keenan and McCarthy's friendship, reaching out to Reed and the other American hostages, is an apt metaphor for the church's relationship with a broken world. Friendship should not 'remain in a fenced in, enclosed area', but instead act as a space in which the attributes of friendship can be practised so that they can be used in a broader context.[71] In such a framework, the 'healing' of Frank Reed came about through the love and care of the friends, and also because the friends recognised that their own survival and flourishing was inherently connected with his. They 'remained' with Reed, and this drew him out through their humour, imagination, and the courage to face such woundedness.

This type of friendship, of course, is subversive and at odds with a culture which has taken on a managerial idea of friendship as one which can be 'invested in'; barely more than a reflection of the transient and mechanised workplaces of the contemporary world.[72] Even in the current social climate of an epidemic of trauma, 'arguably the greatest threat to our national well-being',[73] we do not see a corresponding increase in close, deep, and abiding (or 'remaining') friendships. Perhaps the cause really is something as banal as a lack of time, as Paul Wadell claims.[74]

If friendship is a way of healing from traumatic experiences, it is important to raise the question as to why it does not seem to enable

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[71] Manitza Kotze and Carike Noeth, 'Friendship as a Theological Model: Bonhoeffer, Moltmann and the Trinity', *In die Skriflig*, 53, no. 1 (2019), locators 2305–0853 <https:/doi.org/10.4102/ids.v53i1.2333> (a2333).

[72] Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1996), pp. 206–207.

[73] Kolk, *Body Keeps the Score*, p. 348.

[74] Paul J. Wadell, *Becoming Friends: Worship, Justice, and the Practice of Christian Friendship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002), p. 42.

friends to forget those experiences. In the later book which Keenan and McCarthy wrote together, *Between Extremes*, McCarthy claims that the experience of captivity no longer dominates the friendship, yet references to it are littered throughout the book.[75] Wadell also states the rather obvious truism that 'healing takes time'. More troublingly, after listing traumatic experiences such as violence, rape, and sexual abuse, he states that friendship can help and that certain negative reactions are normal/healthy, but that, 'they must gradually be overcome if they are not to be the overriding story of a person's life'.[76] This implies a certain impatience with the trauma survivor, which is consistent with Rambo's critique of redemption narratives. 'How long?' is surely a cry which echoes the Psalmist's own, but perhaps it is the case that friendship which remains continues to sit with trauma for as long as *it* remains — and beyond — and this, in itself, is a source of healing. The friendship remains alongside the traumatic memory for as long as it is an aspect, in Buber's parlance, of recognising the deepest thing in the other which needs to be confirmed.

However, it is right to note that the healing power of friendship has limitations. Although friendship has much power to enable the journey through trauma to continue, 'it is not a substitute for political action or structural change'.[77] Friendship has much to recommend it: the solidarity with another, the spiritual element of prayer and care working in tandem, the ripple effect outwards from a close pair to the broader community. Although it cannot prevent the circumstances in which trauma occurs, such as racism, misogyny, war, and other injustices,[78] it still has a role to play. Keenan's autobiographical account of friendship can be read theologically to show how it can stave off some of the effects of trauma which cannot be touched by either the micro-level of neuroscience and psychology, nor the macro-level of world politics. The three motifs of embodied friendship put flesh on the bones of how healing from trauma may be envisioned.

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[75] Brian Keenan and John McCarthy, *Between Extremes* (London: Black Swan, 1999), p. 32.
[76] Wadell, *Becoming Friends*, p. 52.
[77] Dana L. Robert, *Faithful Friendships: Embracing Diversity in Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019), p. 185.
[78] Robert, *Faithful Friendships*, p. 185.

Conclusion

In this brief study of trauma and friendship within Brian Keenan's *An Evil Cradling*, I have drawn upon three motifs of solidarity, prayer, and community to examine both topics. Trauma and friendship in the text are like two sides of the same coin. Although a traumatic situation was the catalyst for friendship, this friendship in turn lessened the effects of the traumatic situation by enabling Keenan and McCarthy to remind each other of their human dignity and worth. This then emanated out into the community of hostages thrown together by circumstances, who perhaps would not have 'chosen' each other in another setting. In a theological sense, the friendship between Keenan and McCarthy is the starting point for a chain of friendships, just as the New Testament envisages the church as a community of friends who intentionally form bonds. The two intertwined themes of friendship and trauma are intimately connected since they are both an experience of the body.

In a world in which traumatic experiences are common, and loneliness so rife, there is much to be learned from the experience of captivity (or indeed of prison or war) in which friendships, whilst not inevitable, become critical to the survival of a group. The experience of trauma, with its 'double wound' of both the trauma itself and the recurrence of it in later life, demands that the 'wound that cries out' be heard, seen, and touched. In Rambo's view, this enables healing to occur because there is no attempt to erase or eliminate the wound. Instead, Christ's call to his disciples to remain in him and in each other demands that, through the Spirit, the trauma can be witnessed, even where it cannot be understood or spoken about. Faithful 'remaining' within Holy Saturday thereby prevents a leap from the traumatic Good Friday event straight into the redemptive language of Easter Sunday, instead pausing in the Holy Saturday space where death and life sit side-by-side.

To summarise the images I have chosen from Keenan's text, the first of the bow and arrow indicates something of the solidarity of friendship; of one witnessing in the other what is truly there and confirming that to them. It shows two people mimicking one another, aiming at the same goal — in their case, of freedom. Secondly, the picture of McCarthy prayerfully cleaning up the mess of an ill man goes further and offers the idea that friendship is a spiritual discipline. In this

case friendship involved the spiritual touching of woundedness alongside the practical care and compassion for the unclean, which is reminiscent of Christ. Thirdly, the image of Frank Reed ultimately removing the blanket that he had been cowering under reflects the possibility of a community of witnesses to suffering and trauma, an 'Upper Room' group of disciples who give to each other, touch each other's wounds, and enable each other to flourish despite trauma.

Although friendship may not be able to actively prevent trauma, it seems clear that close, intentional friendships have a role to play in mitigating its effects within individuals and communities. More research is needed on how the church could operate as a community of friends and what the practicalities are of creating safe spaces in which people feel able to reveal their wounds so that healing can begin. This is particularly necessary where men and women's experiences of trauma may differ. Recovery from trauma will never be achieved by forcing the matter, of pushing for a positive redemptive conclusion to the death-in-the-midst-of-life paradox. Instead, Christian theology's focus on the body, especially through the wounded body of Christ, even post-resurrection, and Jesus's words in John 15, implies that Christian disciples are called to witness, remain with, and gently touch each other's wounds. The loving nature of the relationship between Keenan and McCarthy, which is articulated and celebrated in Keenan's work, gives a testimony to friendship's power to enable survival, and indeed flourishing, in the most harrowing of traumatic situations.

'Probably the Best Kenoticism in the World': Exploring Paul S. Fiddes' Kenosis of Suffering Love in Dialogue with the Kenotic Theology of Denmark's Hans Lassen Martensen

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Abstract
The aim of this article is to come to a definition of divine power as kenosis that theologically helps explain the wide spectrum of experience Christian believers have of divine power or lack thereof, ranging from divine hiddenness to signs and wonders. To this end, Paul Fiddes' kenosis as suffering love theology is delineated, analysed, and critiqued. Certain weaknesses in the account are identified at which point Hans Lassen Martensen is introduced as an interlocutor and his kenotic theology explained and applied as a potential enhancer of Fiddes' definition of kenosis. By situating the exploration in a kenotic definition of omnipotence within a context of spiritual conflict and evil, this nuanced account of the nature and scope of kenosis offers a very plausible articulation of divine omnipotence congruent with the current now-and-not-yet age of tension and the promised future of an eschaton free of all evil and suffering.

Keywords
Fiddes; kenosis; Martensen, omnipotence; suffering love

Introduction

The infinite *dunamis* (and *doxa*) of God is central to a number of the incommunicable attributes of God. Indeed, it has been claimed that omnipotence is the pre-eminent attribute and the key idea because all other divine characteristics flow from it.[1] However, what exactly does it mean to talk about the omnipotence of God? What conclusions, exactly,

[1] Richard Swinburne, 'Is God All-powerful?', Closer to Truth <https://closertotruth.com/video/swiri-037/?referrer=8285> [accessed 15 August 2023].

are we to draw when we consider the spectrum of claims and anecdotal evidence concerning expressions of the power of God, ranging from supernatural, sovereign demonstrations of signs and wonders, as regularly witnessed to by the church of the global south,[2] through to the current post-evangelical/charismatic milieu in the west which appears to be more comfortable with the concept of God's hiddenness (or even absence)?[3]

The intention of this article, as inferred by its title, is to explore the nature and scope of the New Testament concept of kenosis[4] in order to arrive at a theological definition and understanding of divine omnipotence; ideally, one that helps explain the spectrum of experience and also acts as a corrective to less-than-biblical notions of divine power. To effectively do this, the theology of kenosis as suffering love advanced by the contemporary Baptist theologian Paul S. Fiddes is introduced, analysed, and discussed. As a Baptist scholar who offers a well-articulated contemporary kenotic model of power as suffering love,[5] this makes him a salient choice for an article of Baptist constructive theology that seeks to identify and build upon theological connections between different denominational traditions.

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[2] Philip Jenkins contends that theological conservatism and signs and wonders experiences are the key factors for church growth in the global south. Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 1–14.

[3] Michael Rea claims that theological exploration into the question of divine hiddenness has become a significant focus of academic theology since the second half of the twentieth century. Michael C. Rea, *The Hiddenness of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 6.

[4] *Kenosis*, *kenoticism*, and *kenotic theology* is a theological concept within Christology that articulates the idea of divine self-limitation. Taken from the Greek *kenosis*, meaning 'an emptying', it is found in Philippians 2:6–7 in which Paul describes Christ as 'emptying himself' in his incarnational descent. Since the early nineteenth century, theologians in Germany and the United Kingdom have explored what divine attributes (if any) Christ divested when he became human. It is particularly pertinent when exploring divine omnipotence, the subject matter of this article. For a helpful introduction to kenotic theology, see Alistair E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 283–284, 377–378.

[5] Fiddes develops his model of kenotic power as suffering love within the context of the problem of evil and suffering (i.e. theodicy). He argues that to offer any in part satisfactory answer to theodicy questions, we need a doctrine of God built upon divine passibility, divine-self-emptying, and a vulnerability which leads God to suffer alongside those experiencing pain and evil. For a full articulation of this model, see Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 2000), pp. 152–190.

Once the analysis of Fiddes is finished, the historical Danish theologian Hans Lassen Martensen will be brought into the frame as an interlocutor in order to explore whether or not his kenotic theology can add to and possibly strengthen Fiddes' account of divine omnipotence based upon kenosis. As a nineteenth-century Danish social critic and the Lutheran Bishop of Seeland (1854–1884), Martensen has in recent centuries received greater attention for his own writings instead of simply being the object of Kierkegaard's antipathy.[6] As a churchman trained in philosophy and theology, there has been a gradual increase in English translations of his work since the first translation into English in the 1860s.[7] Intellectually, Martensen stood between Hegel and Kierkegaard and was partly responsible for introducing the former to the Danish intellectual world of the latter.[8] Martensen published work in kenotic Christology which later went on to influence British-Anglican kenotic theology.[9] As constructive theology looks to broaden discourse and develop understanding across denominational lines, the choice of Martensen aims to stimulate some fresh perspective as a conversation partner who has, as far as I am aware, not previously been engaged with Fiddes.

Since our understanding of divine omnipotence has something relevant to say to a significant number of theological subjects, it is imperative for the purposes of this short article to limit the discussion of the omnipotence of God to one specific doctrinal matter: specifically, the nature and reality of evil and associated suffering. For if God is omnipotent as traditionally articulated, why does he not simply bring the event of the *parousia* forward to the present, thus ending the age of now-and-not-yet tension, and inaugurate the new heavens and new earth? Given the fact that he has not done this, what does this suggest about

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[6] For a helpful overview of Martensen's intellectual journey, see *Between Hegel and Kierkegaard: Hans L. Martensen's Philosophy of Religion*, ed. by Terry Godlove, trans. by Curtis L. Thompson and David J. Kangas (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), pp. 5–17.

[7] H. L. Martensen, *Christian Dogmatics: Compendium of the Doctrines of Christianity*, trans. by W. Urwick (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1866).

[8] Godlove, *Between Hegel and Kierkegaard*, pp. 1–4.

[9] See below, n. 53.

God's being and character, as well as the nature and necessary make-up of his operational power?

Fiddes' Suffering Love Kenosis: An Ontology of Omnipotence

> But this kind of vulnerability can be combined with the faith that God's love can never fail or be destroyed, and that love is — finally — the strongest power in the universe, able to overcome evil with its resources of persuasion.[10]

Fiddes constructs his theology using a less-than-traditional definition of omnipotence. He maintains that God's ultimate and most effective power is the power of suffering love, which is grounded in divine vulnerability and freely-chosen self-limitation. It is all centred in the perichoretic dance of the Trinity and operates via persuasion and influence.[11] Granted there is risk involved, but this does not, as is often claimed, make God impotent, since God's 'weak power' of cruciform persuasion can be very constraining and if it aligns with the wishes and desires of creation will result in actualising God's will without the need of any strong intervention or coercion.[12]

As is well known, Fiddes is influenced by process thought when it comes to defining omnipotence in terms of divine persuasion and influence.[13] His embrace of the non-unilateral power of suffering love

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[10] Paul S. Fiddes, 'A Theological Reconsideration of "the Wild": A Response to Elizabeth O'Donnell Gandolpho', *Louvain Studies*, 41, no. 3 (2018), 317–327 (pp. 326–327).

[11] Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 144–173; Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God*, pp. 71–81. As well as the obvious Moltmannian influence, Fiddes also draws from Eberhard Jüngel and Alfred North Whitehead when constructing his doctrine of omnipotence.

[12] Fiddes rejects all worldly ideas of coercive and dominant power when defining divine power. Paul S. Fiddes, 'Is God All-Powerful?', Closer to Truth <https://closertotruth.com/video/fidpa-006/?referrer=8285> [accessed 15 August 2023].

[13] Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*, pp. 37–42. Where Fiddes diverges from process theology is in his locating God's persuasion and influence within the freedom of God. Defining God's omnipotence as persuasion and influence in the power of suffering love is a central tenet which Fiddes has consistently purported since the beginning of his academic career. See Paul S. Fiddes, *The Escape and the City,* Old Testament Study, Baptist Union Christian Training Programme (London: Baptist Union, 1974), pp. 1–36 (pp. 18–21); Paul S. Fiddes, *The Promised End: Eschatology in Theology and Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 166–175; Paul S. Fiddes, 'The Place of Christian Theology in the Modern University', *Baptist Quarterly*, 42 (April, 2007), 71– 88 (pp. 74–80); Paul S. Fiddes, 'Ancient and Modern Wisdom: The Intersection of Clinical and

simultaneously aligns him with and sets his face against different Christian scholars.[14] For Fiddes, the conflation of process theology's emphasis on persuasion with no domination and the biblical theme of God's suffering, found especially in the Prophets, goes a considerable way to help understand God in the context of a fallen creation which exercises its full access to irrevocable freedom in order to use it for good or ill.[15]

However, this conflation by Fiddes immediately raises two critical questions. First, has Fiddes accepted process theology's non-coercive persuasive position without careful consideration of whether it is logically coherent? As David Basinger asks, is it necessarily impossible for the process God to intervene or coerce, or is it rather an act of self-limitation? If the former, then this raises the challenge of talking about a necessarily powerless deity without any experiential base to draw from, especially when human experience consistently demonstrates the ability to control other human behaviour whether through ultra-soft, soft, mid or hard coercion.[16] If the latter, which is Fiddes' position as determined by his account of divine freedom, then the same charge can be brought

Theological Understanding of Health', in *Wisdom, Science and the Scriptures: Essays in Honour of Ernest Lucas*, ed. by Stephen Finamore and John Weaver (Oxford: Centre for Baptist History and Heritage and Bristol Baptist College, 2012), pp. 75–98 (pp. 90–95); Paul S. Fiddes, 'Covenant and Participation: A Personal Review of the Essays', *Perspectives in Religious Studies,* 44, no. 1 (2017), 119–137 (pp. 129–132).

[14] Fiddes rejects Nicholas Healy's unilateralist position in favour of Stanley Hauerwas's human-divine co-operation stance. See Paul S. Fiddes, 'Versions of Ecclesiology: Stanley Hauerwas and Nicholas Healy', *Ecclesiology*, 12, no. 3 (2016), 331–353 (pp. 332–342); Paul S. Fiddes, 'Ecclesiology and Ethnography: One World Revisited', *Journal Teologic*, 15, no. 1 (2016), 5–36 (pp. 29–32). Moreover, Fiddes is highly critical of Aquinas's Thomistic causation theology which views God as the primary cause, arguing instead that it is better to imagine God acting persuasively. Paul S. Fiddes, '*Ex Opere Operato*: Rethinking a Historic Baptist Rejection', in *Baptist Sacramentalism 2*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought, vol. 25, ed. by Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), pp. 219–238 (pp. 222–229).

[15] Paul S. Fiddes, '"Father, Son, and Holy Spirit": The Triune Creator in Hymn and Theology', in *Gathering Disciples: Essays in Honour of Christopher J. Ellis*, ed. by Myra Blyth and Andy Goodliff (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017), pp. 204–220 (pp. 217–219).

[16] David Basinger, 'Divine Power: Do Process Theists Have a Better Idea?', in *Process Theology*, ed. by Ronald H. Nash. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987), pp. 197–213 (pp. 203–205).

as is made against the classic freewill theist: why does God not freely choose to intervene in cases of meaningless evil such as the holocaust?[17]

The second question concerns Fiddes' use of the Prophets, especially Hosea, and whether he correctly uses these prophetic passages to develop this kenotic-based understanding of divine passibility, that is, God's capability to feel or suffer. As Frances Young points out, as well as Hosea's language of the 'man-like' God (the one who walks in the garden and woos his lover), other prophets such as Isaiah and Amos describe Yahweh as 'wholly other' in contrast to the popular gods of the nations around Israel. Therefore, this leads to the use of *synthesis* (observing the highest and most beautiful things of creation), *analysis* (using the technique of abstraction, taking away what we know and arriving at apophatic terms), and *analogy* (creating myths and similes) in order to understand God as both infinite, incomprehensible, beyond human knowledge but, via revelation, accommodating and speaking to us in human language that we understand. Fiddes, she suggests, would do well incorporating a more sophisticated form of anthropomorphism into his theology.[18]

Notwithstanding the above comments, the overarching rubric of Fiddes' position regarding the persuasive power of suffering love is kenosis. He defines God as the one who humbly reveals himself and freely desires to limit himself and be the self-emptying kenotic God.[19] Despite Fiddes' denial of being a social trinitarian,[20] a theology of divine triune society is the best setting for a doctrine of kenosis.[21] That said, however, there is still an imperative to converge our focus on the

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17 David Basinger, 'Divine Persuasion: Could the Process God Do More?', *Journal of Religion*, 64, no. 3 (1984), 332–347 (pp. 334–335).

18 Frances Young, *Face to Face: A Narrative Essay in the Theology of Suffering* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), pp. 242–247.

19 Paul S. Fiddes, 'The Making of a Christian Mind', in *Faith in the Centre: Christianity and Culture*, ed. by Paul S. Fiddes (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Press, 2001), pp. 1–24 (pp. 14–18); Paul S. Fiddes, 'The Story and the Stories: Revelation and the Challenge of Postmodern Culture', in *Faith in the Centre*, ed. by Fiddes, pp. 75–96 (pp. 89–94).

20 Paul S. Fiddes, 'Relational Trinity: Radical Perspective', in *Two Views on the Doctrine of the Trinity*, ed. by Jason Sexton (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), pp. 159–185 (pp. 159–161).

21 Thomas R. Thompson and Cornelius Plantinga Jr, 'Trinity and Kenosis', in *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*, ed. by C. Stephen Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 165–189.

specific nature of Fiddes' understanding of kenosis in terms of scope and implications.[22]

A synthesis of Fiddes' panentheistic vision and definition of power as persuasion and suffering love results in a capacious definition and scope of kenosis. There are, in the main, three theological meanings of the term 'kenosis': christological, trinitarian, and generalised.[23] Similarly, Fiddes writes about three kinds of kenosis which he calls *three kenotic moments*, namely 'the eternal kenosis of the Father in the sending out of the Son; the kenosis of creation in which God brings into being something that has reality over against God's self who is himself self-emptying; and the cross, which is the deepest kind of self-emptying.'[24] In a reversal of the temporal-chronological order of the three kenotic moments, it is the final 'moment', the cross in the heart of God, that Fiddes uses as the foundation for kenotic theological development concerned with trinitarian and generalised meanings of kenosis.[25]

In fact, grounding omnipotence as suffering love in a cruciform kenosis helps delineate a trinitarian kenosis, both of which can be situated within a generalised kenosis. This can be an appropriate way to locate omnipotence for two reasons. First, methodologically, theodicy is a theological concept that can be extrapolated from experience, which is an important source of theological method when dealing with

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22 Fiddes claims that a kenotic definition of God also affects our understanding of God's omniscience. Paul S. Fiddes, 'Charles Williams and the Problem of Evil', in *Essays and Memoirs from the Oxford C. S. Lewis Society*, ed. by Judith Wolfe and Brendan Wolfe (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 65–88 (p. 77).

23 Sarah Coakley, 'Kenosis: Theological Meanings and Gender Connotations', in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. by J. Polkinghorne (London: SPCK, 2001), pp. 192–210 (pp. 192–204).

24 Paul Fiddes, personal communication with the author, 15 and 16 March 2016. Cf. Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God*, pp. 34–46; Paul S. Fiddes, 'Participating in the Trinity', *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 33, no. 3 (2006), 375–391 (pp. 379–383). Of note is that Fiddes here departs from H. Wheeler Robinson, a significant influence on Fiddes, who held that kenosis of the Spirit is the deepest kind of kenosis (H. Wheeler Robinson, *Redemption and Revelation: In the Actuality of History* (London: Nisbet, 1942), pp. 294–295).

25 At this point, the limitations of temporal language such as 'moment' (borrowed from Sergei Bulgakov and Hans Urs von Balthasar) become significant. Coakley rightly notes that the majority of essays (including Fiddes' chapter) in *The Work of Love* address the significance of kenosis in regard to God's relation to the world and subsequently only turn to christological or trinitarian meaning for illustration (Coakley, 'Kenosis: Theological', p. 193).

theodicy and human suffering.[26] Of course, not all agree and some see great danger in rooting any aspect of the doctrine of God in experience which may lead to over-anthropomorphising.[27] However, the lack of biblical detail and historical-theological material on the spirit world can legitimately invite human experience to help form our knowledge base.[28] Second, generalised kenosis helps to explain perceived divine hiddenness amidst evil and suffering before and after the incarnation of Christ. Those who posit kenosis in the Hebrew Bible without any Christological considerations, relate God's omnipotence to humility. The kenosis of God is realised while retaining transcendence when God manifests himself in humility alongside the defeated, the poor, and the expelled via a gentle whisper (1 Kings 19:12).[29]

However, these strengths do not negate a significant weakness in Fiddes' account, in that he presumes God's self-emptying on the cross when exploring the atonement without any serious exegetical work on Philippians 2 and other examples of divine limitation in the biblical account.[30] Consequently, he does not enter into some of the kenotic

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[26] Take Emmanuel Levinas, for instance, who wrote philosophy as someone who survived incarceration in Auschwitz. See Renee D. N. Van Riessen, *Man as a Place of God: Levinas' Hermeneutics of Kenosis* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), pp. 101–130. Similarly, Nicholas Wolterstoff starts his philosophy of divine passibility not from philosophy but from experience after the premature death of his son; a tragic event Fiddes has also experienced. See Kelly J. Clark, 'Hold Not Thy Peace At My Tears: Methodological Reflections on Divine Impassibility', in *Our Knowledge of God: Essays on Natural and Philosophical Theology*, ed. by Kelly J. Clark (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1992), pp. 167–193 (pp. 167–168).

[27] David Cook believes that titles like *The Human Face of God* and *The Crucified God* use language that reflects weakness in human experience without necessarily differentiating between weakness caused by sin, weakness affected by circumstances, and weakness through an inability to cope. Such an account may well give too much power and significance to circumstances, sin, or the power of the evil one, and we need to avoid this. See David Cook, 'Weak Church, Weak God', in *The Power & Weakness of God: Impassibility and Orthodoxy,* ed. by Nigel M. De S. Cameron (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1990), pp. 69–92.

[28] Clark suggests that *sola scriptura* will not produce the full answer needed due to an 'under-determination' of Scripture. This can happen when Scripture rightly interpreted may not settle the issue as it may not address the issue at all; when Scripture rightly interpreted could settle the issue but the right rules of interpretation may not be discernible; and there may be no such thing as the 'right' interpretation of Scripture. There may be competing explanations of the text all of which are compatible with the text. Clark, 'Hold Not Thy Peace', pp. 176–177.

[29] Van Riessen, *Man as a Place*, pp. 173–187.

[30] Gordon D. Fee, 'The New Testament and Kenosis Christology', in *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*, ed. by C. Stephen Evans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 25–44; N. T. Wright, '*Arpagmos* and the Meaning of Philippians 2:5-11', *Journal of Theological*

Christology debates such as whether the kenotic state of Christ was for the duration of the incarnation or only between crucifixion and Holy Saturday;[31] the relation between kenosis and glorification;[32] the difference between ontological, functional, and kryptic kenosis;[33] or what divine attributes did Christ capitulate in the incarnation without loss of divinity?[34]

Moreover, Fiddes argues that this idea of kenosis has to be an essential concept from which to construct a doctrine of God for today's world, despite the fact that kenotic theology predicated on divine mutability and passibility is a recent development with little precedent. Unlike other kenoticists, Fiddes spills little ink analysing the development of modern-period kenoticism from nineteenth-century German theology into Anglophone theology in an attempt to make sense of Christ's incarnation as one person with two natures in light of a newly emerging understanding of personality and self-consciousness.[35] Instead, he simply presupposes God's kenotic ontology and from this starting-point differentiates his understanding of God as intrinsically

Studies, 37, no. 2 (1986), 321–352; Kenneth S. Wuest, 'When Jesus Emptied Himself', *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 115, no. 458 (1958), 153–158.

31 Without fully aligning with his Holy Saturday kenosis descent, Fiddes appreciates von Balthasar's theory of atonement based upon the formlessness of the Word and Christ's kenotic obedience to descend into hell. See Paul S. Fiddes, 'Review of *The Glory of the Lord Vol. VII: Theology: The New Covenant,* by Hans Urs von Balthasar', *The Expository Times,* 102, no. 11 (1991), 349–350.

32 For a helpful discussion on this, see C. Stephen Evans, 'Kenotic Christology and the Nature of God', in *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*, ed. by Evans, pp. 190–217 (pp. 200–202).

33 For a clear articulation of these types of kenosis, see Oliver D. Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity: The Incarnation Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 118–153.

34 Graham James, 'The Enduring Appeal of a Kenotic Christology', *Theology*, 86 (1983), 7–14.

35 For a recent thorough historical overview of the development of modern kenoticism spreading from the continent to Scotland and England, see David Brown, *Divine Humanity: Kenosis and the Construction of a Christian Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), pp. 36–171. Other historical analyses of modern kenosis development include D. G. Dawe, 'A Fresh Look at the Kenotic Christologies', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 15 (1962), 337–349; D. G. Dawe, *The Form of a Servant: A Historical Analysis of the Kenotic Motif* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), pp. 47–176; Friedrich Loofs, 'Kenosis', in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics VII*, ed. by James Hastings (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1914), pp. 680–687; Bruce McCormack, 'Kenoticism in Modern Christology', in *The Oxford Handbook of Christology*, ed. by Francesca Aran Murphy and Troy A. Stephano (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 444–457.

kenotic from that of others, and what it means for God to be kenotic in his triune being.

As suggested, this lack of analysis, together with little serious exegetical work on those scriptural passages which possibly suggest kenosis, weakens Fiddes' account. Ronald Feenstra, for instance, argues for a kenotic Christology that is faithful to Scripture and Chalcedon by adopting an 'omni-unless-freely-and-temporarily choosing to be otherwise for the purpose of incarnation and reconciliation' definition. Moreover, in order to avoid the common objections of traditional theologians, he concludes that all discussion of kenosis and divine attributes *has to* start with testimony of Jesus of Nazareth, not the doctrine of God.[36] This indeed raises a number of interesting possibilities about God's power and logical limitation: if God can bring into being a pregnant virgin then can he also create a married bachelor or make two plus two equal five? Also, there is a broad critique of kenotic Christology by Thomas Weinandy who argues that we should define personhood ontologically instead of psychologically. If that is done, then kenotic problems disappear, such as postulating the incarnation in compositional ways in which the union of Christ's humanity and divinity inevitably reduces his divinity.[37]

Notwithstanding these potential criticisms, Fiddes purports that God *is* necessarily kenotic, but not because of any necessity imposed on him by an external force.[38] Rather his kenosis is rooted in an 'internal necessity' caused by his eternal desire and divine will.[39] God chooses kenosis but not in the sense of choosing between option A and option

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[36] Ronald J. Feenstra, 'A Kenotic Christological Method for Understanding the Divine Attributes', in *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*, ed. by Evans, pp. 139–165 (pp. 150–164).

[37] Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Change? The Word's Becoming in the Incarnation* (Still River, MA: St Bede's Publications, 1985), pp. 118–123.

[38] As widely known, process theology postulates that God has always had a universe somewhere and has always known limitation because of free acts of creatures. Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), pp. 29–30; David R. Griffin, *God, Power and Evil: A Process Theodicy* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), pp. 279–280.

[39] Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of God*, vol. 2.1 of *Church Dogmatics,* ed. by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. by T. H. L. Parker, W. B. Johnston, Harold Knight, and J. L. M. Haire (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), §28, pp. 257–321.

B.[40] God's forming of covenant with creation means he becomes necessarily kenotic and this is perfectly demonstrated when there is a convergence of creation's responsiveness and the desire of God. This accounts for miracles, as well as emancipation from evil forces, which can often happen if there is a complete alignment of God's will and desire with the free acts and petitions of creation.[41]

There exist other benefits within Fiddes' account of necessary kenosis as suffering love, especially when it comes to articulating divine relations with creation in kenotic terms. Yet, despite these positives, there is still the need for greater development and clarity of Fiddes' model of kenosis in order to arrive at a definition of divine power in kenotic terms which helps explain theologically the spectrum of experience that Christians have when it comes to demonstrations of divine power, or lack thereof. For this, we shall enlist the help of Martensen's kenotic theology.

A Danish Flavoured Kenotic Theology of Suffering Love

Before developing Fiddes' kenotic model through interlocution with Martensen, some further preparatory work needs to be done by way of critical comments on Fiddes' propositions, especially on his notion of divine power. First, is the definition of power as 'suffering love' the only way God exercises power? If no, then what other facets of power sit comfortably with a non-coercive, softly-persuasive idea of the power of suffering love? Other paradigms of omnipotence are predicated upon a strong definition of sovereign and providential divine power, which seems unlikely to be consistent with power as suffering love.

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[40] Fiddes believes that words such as 'choose', 'desire', and 'will' all have their place and so this slightly sets him apart from other necessary kenoticists such as Thomas Oord, who believes that God's kenosis is involuntary because it derives from God's eternal and unchanging nature of love. Paul Fiddes, personal communication with the author, 15 and 16 March 2016. Cf. Thomas Jay Oord, *The Uncontrolling Love of God: An Open and Relational Account of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic Press, 2015), pp. 94–95.

[41] The resurrection is the unique and quintessential great miracle that comes from the perfect response of Jesus and the desire of the Father. Paul Fiddes, personal communication with the author, 15 and 16 March 2016.

If, however, power as suffering love is the only form of divine power, then a corollary, which also applies to discussions on divine omniscience, is that it is not obvious how a divine being who operates power *only* by persuasion can actualise the *parousia* in a way faithful to Scripture if God can only bring it about in co-operation with creation in a non-unilateral way. Also, given that Fiddes focuses most of his 'power of suffering love' account on soteriological matters, it is unclear whether non-coercive suffering love will overcome and finally eradicate diabolical evil, especially if evil, as Fiddes claims, has no ontological status but is rather 'the absence of good' (*privatio boni*) ambiguously expressed as 'nothing' (*nihil*).[42]

Then add into the mix some of Fiddes' early ecclesiological work which unambiguously claims that God can and does *overcome* hostile forces including powers and principalities. Conflict is represented by the symbol of chaotic water and so the exodus and baptism are understood as overcoming the hostile powers that oppress human beings.[43] However, these powers are not demonic but rather this-worldly and political, which means that divine creative power is not battling it out with Satan *per se* but rather emancipating the people of God by leading them out of exilic despair and disillusionment back to Canaan in order to rebuild Zion.[44] Therefore, does this suggest that God *can* act unilaterally when he has to, or that interventionist-causal power has evolved into the power of suffering love as part of the theological drama of God's people, especially this side of Golgotha? Fiddes unquestionably takes the latter option. The problem of evil and suffering can *only* be satisfactorily explained by divine mutability and vulnerability. Whatever the type of theodicy — consolation, story, protest, or freewill

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42 Paul S. Fiddes, 'Something Will Come of Nothing: On a Theology of the Dark Side', in *Challenging to Change: Dialogues with a Radical Baptist Theologian, Essays Presented to Dr Nigel G. Wright on His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Pieter J. Lalleman (London: Spurgeon's College, 2009), pp. 87–104 (pp. 94–95); Paul S. Fiddes, 'Tragedy as Rhetoric of Evil', in *Rhetorik des Bösen / The Rhetoric of Evil*, ed. by Paul S. Fiddes and Jochen Schmidt (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2013), pp. 165–192 (p. 170); Paul S. Fiddes, 'Christianity, Atonement and Evil', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Problem of Evil*, ed. by Paul Mosser and Chad Meister (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 210–229 (p. 213).

43 Paul S. Fiddes, 'Baptism and Creation', in *Reflections on the Water: Understanding God and the World Through the Baptism of Believers*, ed. by Paul S. Fiddes (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1996), pp. 47–67 (pp. 53-55).

44 Fiddes, *The Escape*, pp. 32–36.

— it has to be addressed by the full passibility of the divine and the reality that evil, whether moral or natural, which is totally alien to God, does actually befall him.[45]

So, there remains a consistent challenge to any delineation of kenosis, whether that be christological, trinitarian, or generalised. Moreover, since our primary concern is with kenotic *theology* it is imperative that the biblical witness on this question is given priority over more philosophical approaches to the theodicy question. It does not take long for a student of the New Testament to note the logical challenge a synoptic reading of Jesus's return to Nazareth raises in the face of the various reasonings given by commentators for the lack of miracles performed.[46] Furthermore, the sheer ambiguity of New Testament data, especially in the pertinent gospel texts that display some form of self-limitation of divine prerogatives in the life of Jesus of Nazareth,[47] suggests that there can be limitations placed on God by creation that thwart the divine plan; God is not simply deciding to accede or not to a prayer petition or cry for deliverance.

Therefore, having critically explored some of Fiddes' propositions, let us now articulate Martensen's model of kenotic power found in his Christology and then explore what happens when Fiddes' kenotic definition of omnipotence as suffering love is juxtaposed with that model. After this we will apply the Fiddes-Martensen collocation to the Christ hymn of Philippians 2:5–11, the clearest articulation of kenotic Christology in the New Testament.

Martensen embraced and promulgated a Lutheran theology of divine kenosis, a condescension of God in solidarity with humanity which revealed the capacious nature of divine love.[48] As a scholar of Christology he was, amongst other things, very aware of the historical

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[45] Fiddes, *Participating in God*, pp. 152–179.

[46] Mark 6:5–6 cf. Matthew 13:58. Commentators go to great lengths to avoid the natural conclusion that the lack of faith seemed to have limited Jesus's ability to display *dunamis* in Nazareth. See R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), p. 550; and Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 367.

[47] See Fee, 'The New Testament', pp. 37–44 for an insightful discussion into these passages.

[48] 'We follow, therefore, the apostle Paul, who represented to himself the incarnation of God as a self-emptying (ἐκένωσεν) of the divine logos, manifesting itself primarily as self-abasement […] (Phil 2:6,7)' (Martensen, *Christian Dogmatics*, §133, p. 265).

christological heresies to avoid, such as the deficient denial of the distinction of Christ's two natures found in Eutychianism.[49] Like other Lutherans, he intentionally aligned with the early Alexandrian tradition which consequentially lead him to reject any christological trajectories of the Antiochene school, especially Nestorianism and its division of the operations of the human and divine natures of Christ.[50] Instead, he developed unique christological language that spoke of Christ as the one who was 'the fullness of divinity framed in the ring of humanity'.[51]

This originality continued when he suggested, noting a major modification of the earlier work of Thomasius, that the Son has two centres of consciousness: one in heaven and one on earth. Christ grew in his divine consciousness while incarnated on earth and this climaxed during the passion. The major impact of his idea was that the two-fold actuality of the Son was 'not divine and human as on the two-natures model but rather one divine nature simultaneously in full power and kenotic'.[52] Omnipotence is dialectic, a synthesis of full and varying kenotic power:

> In the place of world-creating omnipotence enters the world-vanquishing and world-completing power, the infinite power and fullness of love and holiness in virtue of which the God-man was able to testify "all power is given to me in heaven and earth" (Matthew 28:18).[53]

Moreover, Martensen's claim that the Son has two centres of consciousness also produced the corollary that the incarnation would

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[49] Martensen, *Christian Dogmatics*, §135, pp. 267–268.

[50] Lee C. Barrett, 'Martensen as Systematic Theologian: The Architectonics of Incarnation', in *Hans Lassen Martensen: Theologian, Philosopher and Social Critic*, ed. by Jon Stewart (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2012), pp. 73–98 (p. 88).

[51] Brown, *Divine Humanity*, p. 60. Brown notes that while the language is unique, the idea expressed was similar to the kenoticism of Thomasius.

[52] Brown, *Divine Humanity*, p. 61.

[53] Martensen, *Christian Dogmatics*, §136, pp. 268–270. Brown notes that this kenotic model had significant influence on British kenoticists, most probably because Martensen wrote theology as a Bishop, and this influence led British kenoticists to search for a suitable analogy in order to best describe full and kenotic power within the divine nature. Brown's suggestion is to imagine God as the ultimate divine method actor as this explains the divine living in purely human conditions and drawing into the kenotic divine life new experiences. The life of sacrifice, exemplified by his death on the cross, explains Christ's inward struggle as the divine nature accepts social conditioning. This model best communicates, for instance, Jesus's growth in wisdom (Luke 2:52). Brown, *Divine Humanity*, pp. 246–259.

have taken place whether or not the Fall had happened.[54] The Logos has existed from all eternity as the divine God-man and so the main objective of the incarnation was the reunification of God and God's objectification of himself in the created order.[55] Within the context of the Fall of humankind, this re-frames the story of Jesus of Nazareth as a narrative about the elevation of humanity, as well as the descent of God: 'Through the necessary regimen of obedience to the divine, the human nature of Jesus was glorified and can become the font of new life for all of Jesus' brothers and sisters.'[56] This, in turn, connects the resurrected Christ to his church on a cosmological level since Jesus's process of transition from Easter Sunday to the Ascension proleptically announces the future transformation of all reality in the yet-to-be-inaugurated new heavens and new earth.[57]

This succinct description of Martensen's articulation of kenosis demonstrates that it holds much explanatory capacity for God's omnipotence within the current now-and-not-yet, evil-ridden creation. The idea of two lateral strands within the life of God, one permanently in the triune divine life and one kenotically in the incarnation and after, coheres well with the Christ hymn of Philippians 2. Not only does the story of Jesus function as a tale of God's assumption of finitude but it also narrates the ascendancy of humanity, a humanity originally formed to be the temple of the divine. Consequentially, 'Jesus' human nature is eternally receptive to divinity and in Jesus human nature is perfected and reaches its true idea.'[58] Overall, therefore, the kenotic Christ cannot remain unchanged: not only is there an internalising of new experiences for the first time but also, after Christ's exaltation, a continuation through the Spirit's ministry of drawing people to himself.[59]

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54 A view first asserted by John Duns Scotus who is not cited (or known?) by Martensen since Scotus was not well-known outside of the Franciscan order or its theological work.

55 Barrett, 'Martensen as Systematic Theologian', pp. 86–87.

56 Barrett, 'Martensen as Systematic Theologian', p. 89, cf. Martensen, *Christian Dogmatics*, §146, p. 292.

57 Martensen, *Christian Dogmatics*, §173–179, pp. 321–329.

58 Barrett, 'Martensen as Systematic Theologian', p. 89.

59 Against the possible charge that Martensen is falling into Monophysitism in which the human Jesus is being remotely driven by the divine Jesus since the divine is superior and more dominant, Martensen (*Christian Dogmatics*, §136, p. 269) clearly articulates the nuanced difference between his account and this heresy: 'Although the Church condemned the monophysite error in the

This narrative movement maps effortlessly onto the Christ hymn's self-emptying descent, death, and exaltation of the Son. The Son descends to earth through kenosis in the heart of God, gives up dominant and full creative power for persuasive influence, and is filled with the Spirit of God which manifests in love, compassion, and miraculous signs (Phil 2:6–7).[60] Upon his crucifixion and death, the ultimate *moral* kenosis of suffering love is exemplified by a fatal rupture in the body-ness of the incarnation and alienating forsakenness within the Trinity (Phil 2:8).[61] God's self-emptying is followed by the exaltation of Christ at his resurrection, a state of plerosis or full self-realisation of the Son, which establishes our redemption (Phil 2:9).[62]

Collectively, the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ allows us theologically to describe the now and not-yet milieu we currently inhabit as a continuum that moves between the poles of kenotic emptiness and the fullness of plerosis. As Scripture, tradition, and experience reiterate, this current time between Pentecost and the full *parousia* of Christ consists of moments of healings and death, forgiveness and resentment, deliverance and torment; all evidence of full

most distinct terms, the current orthodoxy still contains monophysitic elements […] it has been maintained that Christ, during His death struggle on the cross, omnipotently and omnipresently ruled heaven and earth; […] such representations destroy the unity of His person and force us to the supposition of two different series of consciousness in Christ which can never blend and unite […] what this theory lacks is the rightly understood *conception of κένωσις, of the divine self-limitation'* (emphasis mine).

[60] Brown, *Divine Humanity*, pp. 259–261; Keith Ward, 'Cosmos and Kenosis', in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. by Polkinghorne, pp. 152–166 (pp. 161–164).

[61] Fiddes, *Participating in God*, pp. 224–250; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, trans. by Aidan Nichols, O.P. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), pp. 23–36; W. H. Vanstone, *Love's Endeavour, Love's Expense: The Response of Being to the Love of God* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1977), pp. 55–74. Alan Torrance argues, following Rahner, that since the imminent Trinity is the economic Trinity then only Christ can speak into the stark meaninglessness as the one God enters into and takes into himself all aspects of earthly pain and suffering. Alan Torrance, 'Does God Suffer? Incarnation and Impassibility', in *Christ in Our Place: The Humanity of God in Christ for the Reconciliation of the World*, ed. by Trevor A. Hart and Daniel P. Thimell (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1989), pp. 364–368.

[62] The plerosis establishes both the humanward movement to God and the Godward movement to humankind. See P. T. Forsyth, *The Person & Place of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 321–357.

power, under-used power, and no available power.[63] Finally, when the full eschatological consummation happens, as described in Philippians 2:10–11, it is the sublime and supreme henotic moment, an intimate uniting of infinite and finite personhood resulting in the divine and many creaturely persons becoming one,[64] which concludes with theosis, that complete unity with the triune God and sharing in the divine life (2 Peter 1:4), which, according to Keith Ward, is the final telos of God for creation.[65]

Because the death and resurrection of the Son signifies a permanent cross in the being of God, the kenotic journey of Christ is foundational for pathways into trinitarian and generalised kenotic accounts. What is true of kenotic Christology is true of kenotic Trinitarianism and kenotic cosmology.[66] Therefore, to better understand the kenotic reality that conflicts with spiritual powers of evil, extrapolation from the life of Jesus is needed. First, Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit, often operates with full power through authoritative usage of his being and instruction (Luke 4:1; 10:21; Mark 4:39; 5:7).[67]

Second, after his death, he plunges the depths of hell in a radical descent of kenosis to have solidarity with the dead and identify with the complete godforsaken-ness and outright evil he wants to defeat and rescue humanity from (Ephesians 4:7–9; 1 Peter 3:19; 4:5–6).[68] Third, following the precedent established by Jesus empowering his disciples over the demonic (Mark 6:7, 13), after his ascension his name was authoritatively used by his apostles to command demonic powers to leave (Acts 16:18).[69] Finally, at the final consummation of the eschaton, there will be the full eradication of all evil — Satan, demons, the beast,

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63 Brown, *Divine Humanity*, pp. 264–266. Brown notes, 'The attempt to follow Christ in this world should not always take the kenotic path. Sometimes [unilateral] power is the right instrument to use' (p. 264).

64 Galatians 2:20.

65 Keith Ward, *The Christian Idea of God: A Philosophical Foundation for Faith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 191–203.

66 Ward, 'Cosmos and Kenosis', pp. 152–166.

67 Fee, 'The New Testament', pp. 37–39.

68 Edward Oakes, 'The Internal Logic of Holy Saturday in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 9, no. 2 (2007), 188–193.

69 Conversely, we can also see the fluctuation within the kenosis-plerosis continuum where Jesus's name is used without authority with powerless and disastrous results (Acts 19:13–16).

false prophet — initiated by the Son appearing in full glory and power (Revelation 19:11–21) and completed by the great judge on the almighty throne (Revelation 20:7–15).

Theologically, spiritually, and phenomenologically, our current epoch is one which fluctuates between kenosis and plerosis. The reason for the coming of the Son incarnate was to destroy the works of the demonic (1 John 3:8) yet the total eradication of evil is still to happen. In the meantime, we see and experience divine events of emancipation from the diabolical, fuelled by the plerosis of the triune God, that anticipate the exhaustive destruction of evil. Unfortunately, we also see moments of kenotic servitude when humanity and creation remain enslaved to the free-but-always-evil decisions of the demonic. So, because of the nature of enslaved freedom of Satan and his hordes, for which they will be held morally responsible,[70] the power of suffering love will never persuade or influence them to change, thereby only leaving one apocalyptic option: the exhaustive eternal destruction of all evil in the all-consuming henotic and theosic power of the triune God.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been to delineate a contemporary theology of divine omnipotence grounded in the kenotic power of God; an incommunicable attribute of the infinite God that helps explain the spiritual now-and-not-yet global reality currently inhabited by humanity. As argued, any theology of divine power has to comprise the spiritual concept of kenosis in order to have congruence with much of the witness of Scripture and experience of real life; one where all creation continues to endure between the kingdom of God and the realm of darkness, and groans in labour pains longing for the day of redemption and renewal (Romans 8:20–23).

The above-given kenotic definition of omnipotence has been contextualised within the dynamics and reality of the experience of evil and its corollaries. Even though the understanding of omnipotence

[70] For a helpful account of the philosophy and theology of Jonathan Edwards concerning the type of freedom a person (or spiritual being) needs to have to be morally culpable, see Steve Holmes, 'Edwards on the Will', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 1, no. 3 (1999), 273–285.

described could offer some explanations to power-related questions in other areas of the Christian life — whether healing, salvation, and so on — the larger theodicy questions are the central testing ground for a satisfactory definition of omnipotence, especially when attributed to an all-good, benevolent deity. As suggested, there are good reasons for using the concept of kenosis to form an instructive framework in order to define and understand divine omnipotence, a nuanced version that shows congruence with the current reality of the now and not yet and the full eradication of evil at the consummation of the eschaton.

Of course, this proffered definition does not answer all questions raised by theodicy, in that while it insists that God *could* bring about the end of suffering and eradicate evil, it does not suggest *when* he will do it, or indeed *why* he has not already done it. Notwithstanding this limitation, however, the alternative definition of kenosis as suggested by Martensen and used to supplement and develop Fiddes' definition of omnipotence as suffering love, holds much potential for further understanding of God's power in the midst of a reality of evil. First and foremost, it coheres well with the descent and glorification of Christ as described in Philippians 2 and this forms a satisfactory *Christian* theology based on the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth, which according to the gospels and letters of Paul, was rooted in human weakness (1 Corinthians 1; 2 Corinthians 12). Hence, this offers a theological account of variable demonstrations of power in the gospels but without concluding, as in process theology, necessary kenosis since this does not account for answered prayer and the consummation of the *parousia*.

Second, the use of Martensen's account helps negate a couple of the weaknesses of Fiddes' account. It allows us to articulate how kenosis can be extrapolated from Christology to a trinitarian and generalised concept. The juxtaposition of full and varying kenotic power permits the idea of suffering love to be one *mode* of divine omnipotence, not omnipotence in and of itself. Second, Martensen's dialectic of kenotic power offers a way to further advance Fiddes' kenotic theology by emphasising subjective experience, which includes genuine events of exorcism and deliverance when full kenotic power is at work; this is all a foretaste of the ultimate end of all evil. Overall, this definition of omnipotence goes a considerable way to maintain a

traditional understanding of divine power in the now-and-not-yet milieu of the contemporary reality while helping to address some of the perennial questions of theodicy.

Negotiating Questions of Spiritual and Moral Integrity: Reflections of a Hospice Chaplain on What it Might Mean to Accompany Patients in Assisted Dying

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Abstract
This article uses autoethnography and theological reflection to explore how the palliative care chaplain might pastorally and spiritually care for a person requesting death by assisted dying, when that choice is contra to the chaplain's personal beliefs as to its moral permissibility. In present day Scotland (May 2023) this is a current issue, as debates about the legality of assisted dying loom in view of a proposed parliamentary bill. Reflecting on the Parable of the Good Samaritan and the theme of kenosis, the article concludes that God's self-emptying, kenotic 'neighbour' love offers this chaplain a model of kenotic pastoral care through which they can remain present, whilst maintaining spiritual and moral integrity. The self-emptying of kenotic pastoral care, which includes the setting aside of our own egos, invites and allows room for God in the pastoral encounter and keeps the relationship open for invited dialogue with the patient.

Keywords
Accompanying; kenosis; assisted dying; pastoral care

Introduction

The Scottish Parliament accepted the 'Proposed Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill' in September 2022.[1] It was two days before I was ordained as a Baptist chaplain and my first year of working as a chaplain in palliative care. The Scottish Parliament's acceptance of

* Content advisory: Please be aware that in addressing the theme of assisted dying, this article contains a description of suicide, which some may find disturbing or distressing.

[1] Liam McArthur, *Proposed Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill,* September 2022 <https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/proposals-for-bills/proposed-assisted-dying-for-terminally-ill-adults-scotland-bill> [accessed 1 September 2023].

this proposed bill serves as a precursor to the Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) Liam McArthur submitting a proposal for legislation to make assisted dying legal for terminally ill people in Scotland. If this legislation is passed, its practical outworking will undoubtedly have an impact on chaplains and other Christian healthcare professionals working in the field of palliative care. Whether those professionals think assisted dying is morally permissible or not, reflection will be required as to how the new legislation intersects with their personal beliefs and its practical implications.

Before becoming a chaplain, I worked in the field of NHS Research Ethics[2] and studied philosophy and theology as an undergraduate at the University of Leeds. I had a good grasp of the theoretical arguments for and against assisted dying, but in the hospice, faced with patients in the final days, weeks, and months of life, those arguments held little sway.[3] Robust, theoretical, ethical arguments paled into insignificance at the bedside of a dying patient, and I experienced a dissonance between this theoretical learning and the experiential learning of being at a patient's bedside. Despite having theoretical arguments to defend my belief that assisted dying was morally impermissible, when faced with a patient in the last days of life, desperately wanting their life to be over, the immediate question was not one of permissibility but rather, 'How can I best journey with this patient in their final days?'

As such, this reflection is not concerned with the moral permissibility of assisted dying, the ethical arguments for and against, neither is it about the very real concerns about safeguarding and the practical outworking of the legislation. These questions are important and have been considered before at length by others. The focus here is on the act of accompanying the dying patient, journeying with them, spiritually caring for them when the choices they make are not choices that I as chaplain might choose for them, for myself, or my loved ones.

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[2] The NHS denotes the National Health Service of the United Kingdom, with responsibilities devolved from the UK Government to the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government, and the Northern Irish Assembly.

[3] For a summary of such arguments see Tom L. Beauchamp and James F. Childress, *Principles in Biomedical Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 144–158.

This reflection will seek to avoid 'casting out' the patient, an action which rejects them for the choices they have made. Neither is it looking to impose the chaplain's beliefs on the patient, condemning the patient for making choices contra to the beliefs the chaplain might hold themselves.[4] Instead, this reflection seeks to find a way in which this chaplain can maintain personal, moral, and spiritual integrity in the act of accompanying the dying patient who requests assisted dying. Whilst I situate this reflection within the field of palliative care, the act of accompanying those with whom we disagree is not unique to palliative care chaplaincy. Chaplains working with people involved in prostitution, substance use, seeking abortion, or refusing life-saving treatments may also face similar personal and theological dilemmas.

I adopt an autoethnographic approach because the purpose of this reflection is to discern how I might best maintain *my* moral and spiritual integrity in these circumstances. My personal integrity is as individual to me as your integrity is to you. There will be commonality between us, but as James McClendon argues, 'the line between the church and the world still passes through the heart of every believer'.[5] In the believer's moral decision making there exists a line of the heart representing those things that we can accept with integrity as a faithful believer and those which we cannot. Maintenance of our spiritual and moral integrity rests on our discerning whether an act transgresses that line. Our lines may be different, we all need to discern what we will be accountable for before God.

An auto-ethnographical approach comes from a place of personal experience, essentially an embodied experience of the emotional and physical self.[6] This methodology situates the chaplain's

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[4] We cannot assume that all chaplains agree on the moral permissibility of assisted dying. Healthcare and Palliative Care Chaplaincy is a multifaith arena with chaplains from a wide range of faiths who are called to care for patients, families, and staff of all religious faiths and none. See Elizabeth Goy, B. Carlson, N. Simopoulos, A. Jackson, and L. Ganzini, 'Determinants of Oregon Hospice Chaplain's Views on Physician Assisted Suicide', *Journal of Palliative Care*, 22, no. 2 (2006), 83–90.

[5] James Wm. McClendon Jr., 'The Practice of Community Formation', in *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics After McIntyre*, ed. by Nancey Murphy, Brad Kallenberg, and Mark Nation (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), pp. 85–110 (p. 103).

[6] Tony Adams, *Autoethnography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 5.

embodied emotional and physical presence to the fore, which resonates with the subject of accompaniment at the end of life.[7] Tony Adams describes the following features of autoethnography which suit the method of reflection here: an acknowledgment and valuing of the researcher's relationship with others; the use of deep and careful reflection; and demonstrating the process of someone working out what to do.[8] This is very much where I find myself as I approach this reflection; trying to work out what to do if assisted dying legislation is brought into Scottish law. I bring to this reflection personal spiritual beliefs, within the broader Christian tradition, including the belief that there is inherent value to every individual's life, a worth that lies in the virtue of being human and is not conferred by any social standing or level of cognitive or physical ability.[9] These theological beliefs stand alongside experiences of witnessing people who feel that there is no quality to their lives, that their lives are not worth living, and who just desperately want their lives to be over.[10] These beliefs and experiences lead to a place of genuine openness to the question 'What do I do here?'. I hope the process of reflection will illuminate new learning to inform future practice.[11]

> It [reflection] becomes the 'I notice, I wonder' of Value Based Reflective Practice, seeking to engage with the messiness, the unpredictability, the uncertainty of practice, focussing not on abstract theory but on […] real experiences of practitioners and the skills they develop as they try to make sense of these experiences.[12]

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[7] Steve Nolan, *Spiritual Care at the End of Life: The Chaplain as a 'Hopeful Presence'* (London: Kingsley, 2012), p. 37.

[8] Adams, *Autoethnography,* p. 2.

[9] Daniel Sulmasy, 'More than Sparrows, Less than Angels', in *Living Well and Dying Faithfully: Christian Practice for End of Life Care*, ed. by John Swinton and Richard Payne (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 229.

[10] For further reflection, though outside the scope of this article, are considerations surrounding whether a person's desire for a hastened death is influenced by societal worldviews of self-determination and individualism.

[11] Ewan Kelly, 'Introduction', in *Invitation to Chaplaincy Research: Entering the Process*, ed. by Gary Myers, Handbook of the Healthcare Chaplaincy Network (September 2014), pp. i–x <https://www.transformingchaplaincy.org/2017/10/04/an-invitation-to-chaplaincy-research-entering-the-process> [accessed 1 September 2023] (p. i).

[12] D. Saltiel, 'Judgement, Narrative and Discourse: A Critique of Reflective Practice,' cited in Michael Paterson and Ewan Kelly, 'Value Based Reflective Practice: A Method Developed in Scotland for Spiritual Care Practitioners', *Practical Theology*, 6, no. 1 (2015), 51–68 (p. 54).

I bring to this reflection ten years' experience as a Samaritans Listening Volunteer. Samaritans is a UK charity providing non-judgemental, confidential support for people experiencing suicidality. The organisation provides support via the telephone, in person, email, by post, or text messages and is available twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year. During my time as a listening volunteer, I would occasionally be engaged in calls where a person was attempting suicide. On these occasions I would be present at a distance over the phone, callers were anonymous, and we did not know their location. Not being physically present meant that, as listening volunteers, we were never certain whether that suicide attempt had been fully carried through. It occurred to me as I approached this reflection that I had, in fact, likely been present as someone died through their own choice. The difference in the case of assisted dying would be that I might be asked to be present physically and the dying person would not be anonymous.[13]

The aim of this reflection, then, is to better understand how (and whether) I might accompany and provide spiritual care for individuals who make the choice to end their own life by assisted dying. Whilst essentially personal in nature, I hope these reflections will prove useful to other chaplains in palliative care and other spheres.[14]

The Current Situation

After the 'Proposed Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill' was passed, Liam McArthur (MSP) invited a medical advisory group to scrutinise the proposal and make recommendations before the Bill moves to the next stage, which is a Proposed Legislation Bill. The medical advisory group consisted of eleven medical professionals, three

[13] The position of the chaplain in this scenario is that of witness and accompanier. I acknowledge that moral and ethical considerations will differ for the medical professional, who under the prescribed legislation will be asked to assess, 'approve', and prescribe the life-ending drugs for the patient.

[14] The issues raised in this reflection may prompt consideration of situations in the wider context where a person seeks voluntary death, including reflecting on the role of the 'passer-by'. In the case of assisted dying, the hospice chaplain, employed by the organisation, and with access to patients by virtue of that employment, has constraints and responsibilities placed on them which the person witnessing a suicide attempt on the street does not.

of whom were actively involved in palliative care. Among recommendations relating to safeguards, coercion, and scrutiny regarding eligibility to request assisted dying, were proposals relating to conscientious objection. The medical advisory group recommended that conscientious objection should be limited to healthcare practitioners, in this case defined as physicians, nursing staff, and pharmacists, and that this was only applicable on an individual basis, not at an organisational level. In effect, this means that should assisted dying be brought into law, hospices could not refuse to conduct assisted dying on the grounds of conscientious objection. Similarly, by restricting individual conscientious objection to physicians, nurses, and pharmacists, other healthcare professionals (such as chaplains) would be unable to object on the ground of conscience. Given that chaplains in the healthcare environment are called on to provide spiritual care for patients of all faiths and none, chaplains would be in a position of being unable to refuse spiritual care to individuals engaging in assisted dying. This highlights the relevance and context in which these reflections are situated. Notably, the report of the medical advisory group does not consider the spiritual and existential needs of the patient. This neglects the holistic model of person-centred care as espoused by NHS Scotland and the World Health Organisation, both of which hold spiritual care as one of its core values.[15]

Many people, including those who profess no faith, face spiritual and existential questions as they approach the end of their lives. It is unreasonable to think that those considering assisted dying would have no such spiritual or existential concerns, and so the option of spiritual care during this time should be an important consideration.[16] This provision should not be misconstrued as an attempt to persuade the patient one way or the other, but rather to help them think through for

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[15] NHS Education for Scotland, *Spiritual Care Matters* (Edinburgh: NHS Education for Scotland, 2009) <https://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/media/23nphas3/spiritualcarematterssfinal.pdf> [accessed 1 September 2023] (pp. 6–11).

[16] See the case of Myra in Renne S. Katz and Therese A. Johnson, *When Professionals Weep: Emotional and Countertransference Responses in Palliative and End of Life Care* (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 157–158.

themselves the spiritual, emotional, and existential questions that arise from making a decision of this magnitude.

If conscientious objection, be it organisational or individual, is curtailed, the risk of moral distress to both chaplains and other healthcare professionals is high. Moral distress is defined by the British Medical Association as

> psychological unease where professionals identify an ethically correct action to take but are constrained in their ability to take that action. Even without an understanding of the morally correct action, moral distress can arise from the sense of moral transgression. More simply, it is the feeling of unease from situations where institutionally required behaviour does not align with moral principles […] The individual suffering from moral distress need not be the one who has acted or failed to act; moral distress can be caused by witnessing moral transgressions by others.[17]

This correlates with a survey done in 2022 by the Association of Palliative Medicine in which 90 percent of doctors surveyed stated that should assisted dying be brought into Scottish Law it would have an impact on their career sustainability; 84 percent said it would negatively impact their personal and family life; and 79 percent said that it would negatively impact their mental health. Forty-three percent of palliative care doctors participating in the survey said that they would resign if their organisation chose to undertake assisted dying.[18] To date, research has focused on the impact of assisted dying legalisation on medical professionals, rather than the impact on allied health professionals and others in palliative care organisations. Given this background, it is a pressing issue to consider how chaplains might continue to practise in such an environment. Theological reflection offers us a constructive starting point for these deliberations.

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[17] British Medical Association, 'Moral Distress in the NHS and Other Organisations', Advice and Support, British Medical Association, last updated 30 Nov 2021 <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/nhs-delivery-and-workforce/creating-a-healthy-workplace/moral-distress-in-the-nhs-and-other-organisations> [accessed 1 September 2023].

[18] 'Proposed Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill – Potential Impact on Palliative Care Services', Association of Palliative Care Services, February 2023 <https://apmonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/APM-Survey-of-AD-Impact-on-PC-FINAL.pdf.> [accessed 31 May 2023].

A Kerygmatic Approach

In September 2020, the Vatican issued a Letter entitled *Samaritanus Bonus* which uses the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) to reflect on the care of the dying person.[19] In the parable, the Samaritan looks on the victim with eyes of compassion and delivers him to a place of safety. Using midrash to approach the parable we can examine its relevance to the context of accompanying a person at the end of life. Midrash is an ancient Jewish practice which involves entering the story creatively as a way of finding meaning within the story that might be transferable to different contexts. The practice involves 'exploring the gaps in the story, the missing voices, the silences, the wondering that is sparked […] In midrash we are invited into the cracks and spaces of the story to see what is revealed to us.'[20] The wondering, the missing voice, the space between the words in the context for consideration is contained in the question, 'What if the beaten man died after being delivered to the inn?'

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. (Luke 10:30)[21]

Diane Chen underlines that in the parable the beaten man is 'half-dead' or 'looks dead'.[22] A traditional reading assumes that the victim survives — using midrash we can bring the text to the context of palliative care, considering instead that the victim dies. The parable details the dire predicament of the beaten man. The Samaritan tends his wounds, before delivering him to a place of safety. These actions demonstrate that the Samaritan views the beaten man's life as valuable and he chooses to accompany him to a place of safety, rather than leaving him in the ditch as the Levite and the Priest had done. Once delivered to a place of safety the Samaritan leaves, promising to return

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[19] Offices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faithful, 'Samaritanus Bonus', Letter 14 July 2020, The Vatican <https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20200714_samaritanus-bonus_en.html.> [accessed 31 May 2023].

[20] Christine Valters Paintner, *The Soul of a Pilgrim: Eight Practices for the Journey Within* (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2015), p. 24.

[21] Unless otherwise stated, all biblical quotations are from the New International Version.

[22] Diane Chen, *Luke: A New Covenant Commentary*, New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), p. 152.

to pay the innkeeper's bill. Here the story ends; we are not told what happens when the Samaritan returns, so we cannot know what happened to this beaten man. We might imagine here that the Samaritan accompanies the beaten man to the end of his life. The robbers who beat the victim can be said to be those engaged in 'assisting' the victim to die. The Samaritan, motivated by compassion, delivers the victim to a place of safety, into the care of a person who will look after him. The Samaritan becomes an accompanier, noticing the needs of the victim, binding the most immediate of wounds, before accompanying, delivering, and going with the victim to the innkeeper's house. In a similar vein, we can imagine the palliative care chaplain accompanying the dying person. Noticing the spiritual and existential distress of the dying person, attending to those most immediate distresses through compassionate listening and careful attention, before agreeing to accompany them, to walk with them towards their death.

A Priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. (Luke 10:31–32)

Both the Priest and the Levite passed by, refusing to stop. Ruben Zimmermann suggests that the use of the word 'half-dead' suggests that considerations of ritual purity were a factor in the refusal to stop.[23] Others have noted that the burial of a body, or the saving of a life overrode all considerations of purity.[24] Chen asks the question, 'Is showing compassion more important than ritual purity, when acting on one might transgress the other?'[25]

Chen's question leads us to reflect on the complex balance of decision-making in circumstances where correct doctrine comes into conflict with compassionate practice. When a person is met with a situation in which their beliefs about correct doctrine are brought into conflict with compassionate practice, a judgement must be made as to which takes precedence in the circumstances. In this parable, the Priest

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[23] Ruben Zimmerman, *Puzzling the Parables of Jesus: Methods and Interpretations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), p. 306.
[24] Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmanns, 2018), p. 299.
[25] Chen, *Luke,* p. 153.

and the Levite chose to elevate correct doctrine (in this case ritual purity) over an act of compassion (tending to the victim). We can surmise from Jesus's later command to 'go and do likewise' (Luke 10:37) that following the Good Samaritan's example of compassion is the preferable course of action when such conflicts arise.

But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. (Luke 10:33)

In contrast to the Priest and the Levite, the Samaritan was moved by compassion.[26] The Samaritan's primary motivation is described as 'he was moved by compassion'.[27] The same Greek word is used to describe how Jesus looked upon the woman at Nain on her way to bury her son (Luke 7:13) and also with respect to the father of the prodigal son (Luke 15:20). We can deduce, then, that it was something within the Samaritan, something of his character which led him to help the beaten man. By explaining that 'he was moved by compassion' we can see that the inner motivation of compassion is what leads to action, rather than ethical deliberations over the morally correct thing to do. Greg Forbes notes that the Samaritan was 'distinguished not only by his response but by his identity',[28] in that the one who helped the victim was the very person whom others did not expect to help.

This seems relevant to my own considerations as I wonder how I might accompany and support someone at the end of their life as they choose assisted dying. The situations are not parallel, some interpretation is required to bring this parable to bear in the modern context of the hospice, as with many other modern pastoral situations. However, important themes have emerged which include compassionate approach to those in need and the nuanced decision-making required when doctrine and compassionate practice come into conflict.

In this situation, I wonder whether I should elevate my belief in the inherent value of a person's life? Perhaps I should conscientiously

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[26] Greg Forbes, *The God of Old: The Role of the Lukan Parables in the Purpose of Luke's Gospel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), p. 65.
[27] Chen, *Luke,* p. 154.
[28] Forbes, *The God of Old,* pp. 63–64.

object, refuse to care for the patient, and have nothing to do with the process, a pressure which I feel from some in the Christian community and from the strident voices of social media. I feel a pressure to noisily refuse to support the dying person in the decision to prematurely end their life by means of assisted dying. It is a pressure to make a stand and say, 'This is a line I refuse to cross.' But the parable offers me a challenge: is it really about me and what I think? Is it even about the opinion of others as they make judgements on how I choose to spiritually care for those who come across my path? Maybe there is some way in which I am 'the one whom the others did not expect to help', which makes it important that I do not walk by on the other side, refusing to be moved by compassion in the face of the suffering of others. Being moved by compassion is not to be interpreted as agreeing with the patient's choices; rather, I understand it as a choice to accompany the patient even when disagreeing with the choices that they make. Acting with compassion and disagreeing with a person's choice are not mutually exclusive.

But he [the lawyer] wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' (Luke 10:29)

Jesus tells the parable within the context of the lawyer questioning Jesus about what he must do to inherit eternal life. The lawyer wants prescriptive answers or rules, in this case about 'who is my neighbour?'. Klyne Snodgrass notes that the parable is further evidence that

> Jesus will not allow boundaries to be set so that people feel they have completed their obligation to God. Love does not have a boundary where we can say we have loved enough, nor does it permit us to choose those we will love, those who are 'our kind'.[29]

In the parable, the lawyer (and by extension ourselves as well) learns through the travellers that 'one must show compassion to those in need regardless of the religious and ethnic barriers that divide people'.[30] Once again, the importance of the compassionate character (in the parable it

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[29] Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, p. 300.

[30] Anna Wierzbicka, *What did Jesus Mean? Examining the Sermon on the Mount and the Parables in Simple and Universal Human Concepts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 377.

is the Samaritan, in the hospice it is the chaplain) is elevated over the religious beliefs that divide us. It becomes a matter of *my* identity as a neighbour rather than the definitions of who a neighbour is and the limitations that this distinction places on our obligations to others. How we love is as important as who we love. David Jeffery, quoting Paul Ricoeur, reminds us that

> Jesus is not articulating a 'sociology of the neighbour'; he is showing forcefully that 'one does not *have* a neighbour. I make myself someone's neighbour'. [31]

The presence of the chaplain at the end of life, as someone who sees the dying person's life as unique and valuable, even when they may not see that for themselves, is paramount. When the palliative care chaplain is asked to spiritually accompany, to be with a patient in the final moments of their life, the crucial factor is for the chaplain to continue to see that person's life as valuable, that the chaplain does not desert them, does not pass them by due to differences in religious beliefs about the way in which that life was ended. We may hold our own personal convictions about the moral permissibility of an action, we may not agree with that person's choices, but as with the compassionate eyes of the Good Samaritan, what is important here is that we accompany the dying with a heart and eyes full of compassion for the person we have before us. Our focus becomes the compassionate course of action, and how we show mercy, love, and compassion within the context of 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' and 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Luke 10:27).

> The Christian response to the mystery of death and suffering is not to provide an explanation but a Presence that shoulders the pain, accompanies it and opens it up to a trusting hope.[32]

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. (Luke 10:30)

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[31] David Lyle Jeffrey, *Luke* (Ada, MI: Brazos Press, 2012), p. 150.

[32] Cicely Saunders, *Watch With Me: Inspiration for a Life in Hospice Care* (Lancaster: Observatory House, 2009), p. 25, cited in 'Samaritanus Bonus', p. 14.

In closing this section of the reflection, it must be noted, as Ronald Burris does, that as we adopt a compassionate eye for the victim, we must also adopt a compassionate gaze towards the robbers themselves.[33] Burris invites us to consider what happened in the lives of the robbers to make them act in such a violent way. The challenge for those of us working in palliative care is twofold. We might ask what is happening in our medical services, or in society at large that leads people to choose to opt for assisted dying. How do we view those who are terminally ill? What are the options for palliative care, and is it adequately funded? What is happening in the inner life of the patient that they want to hasten their death? These are big questions which cannot be addressed in this short reflection, but they do need to be considered when we look at the wider debate over the ethical acceptability of assisted dying in Scotland.[34] John Swinton argues that one of the primary facets of practical theology is indeed to grapple with questions such as these.

> A major task of practical theology at this moment in time is truth telling. Truth telling enables us to prophetically deconstruct the world, in order that we can faithfully participate in its rebuilding.[35]

We must therefore not be afraid to ask questions, deep questions about the state of the world and why it is as it is. This will involve examining the structures of society itself and the injustice inherent in the power structures that we live by. It will involve examining our own past, present, and future complicity in upholding structures which perpetuate injustice. This will inevitably be uncomfortable and at times painful. As practical theologians concerned with faith worked out in practice, we must be willing to shine a light on these uncomfortable truths, approaching them with an openness of character such that we

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[33] R. Burris, 'Another Look at the Good Samaritan', *Review and Expositor*, 114, no. 3 (2017), 457–461 (p. 460).

[34] I recommend the works of Miro Griffiths for a comprehensive examination of the limitations that society places on those deemed to have a life limiting and progressive condition. See, for example, Miro Griffiths, 'Why I support Better Way', Better Way <https://www.betterwaycampaign.co.uk/assisted-suicide-law-would-heighten-inequality-dr-miro-griffiths/> [accessed 1 September 2023].

[35] John Swinton, 'What Comes Next? Practical Theology, Faithful Presence and Prophetic Witness', *Practical Theology*, 13, no. 1–2 (2020), 162–173 (p. 167).

might allow the Spirit to work in the rebuilding of both our very selves and the structures that we live by.

A Thematic Approach

Thus far we have looked at a kerygmatic approach, focusing on specific passages of Scripture to explore the issue at hand, examining a particular story of Scripture and asking what the parable of the Good Samaritan might have to say to us about the issue for reflection here. Nancey Murphy encourages us to bring the whole of Scripture to bear on a moral issue, not looking solely at specific passages of Scripture, rather considering its narrative arc and prominent themes.[36] As such, whilst we can draw some useful reflections from our midrash on the parable of the Good Samaritan, we must take care not to take these out of their wider scriptural context. A thematic approach allows us to consider overarching themes in Scripture, and following this approach, I will look at the theme of kenosis — God's humble self-emptying in entering into creation at the incarnation — to take the exploration further.

Kenotic love is expressed in Philippians 2:5–8.

> Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross!

Kenotic love, kenotic pastoral care, God's self-emptying kenosis is expressed in the passage above and is demonstrated in God's own humility as the divine compassionately enters creation in Jesus Christ. Sallie McFague calls this 'radical relationality'.[37] If we embody kenosis in our pastoral care for others, we engage in a self-emptying of our own egos, a setting aside of those certainties to which we (rightly or wrongly hold) and instead allow the Spirit of God to enter into the pastoral encounter. What we set aside in the encounter is our own desire to assert our personal beliefs, instead choosing to listen to the person we

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[36] Nancey Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg, and Mark Theissen Nation, *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), p. 32.
[37] Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Christology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021), p. 37.

accompany, only offering our opinions when we are graciously invited to do so. Weil describes this as 'a form of self-emptying in which [we] diminish as God grows [in us]'.[38]

Kenotic pastoral care as self-emptying, in the context of accompanying those who make choices with which we disagree, necessarily involves elevating the needs of the person above our own desire to express ourselves and to make our own thoughts and opinions known, and instead asks us to humbly put aside ourselves to make room for God in the encounter. If the chaplain uninvitedly makes their personal beliefs known to the patient, then the chaplain elevates their personal desire to be heard over the needs of the patient, and risks damaging the future of the relationship. Acting with compassion towards a patient allows for the maintenance of relationship between the chaplain and the patient, through which the patient may come to encounter God.

This self-emptying is sacrificial. It is sacrificial because it is difficult and hard, it means responding with 'under-standing' and humility to the needs of the person for whom you are caring. 'Under-standing' referring here to self-emptying by humbly situating our own needs and opinions under those of the person requiring care, by elevating their needs above our own. But most importantly, self-emptying means submitting all these things to God and letting God do the transforming work that God sees fit. Kenotic pastoral care means setting aside all these things and asking what our neighbour needs, to come to understand and experience the loving nature of God. Through relationship and compassionate care, we may even be afforded the opportunity to offer our counsel and opinion. We cannot take this for granted, but if we refuse to care for the patient requesting assisted dying, we can be assured that this opportunity will likely not be afforded. In short, kenotic pastoral care begins with getting us and our opinions about morality out of the way so that God can do the transformative

[38] Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. by Arthur Francis Wills (New York: Putnam, 1952), cited in McFague, *New Climate,* p. 27.

work. In this way we truly demonstrate, not loving our neighbour *despite* but loving our neighbour *full stop*.

What, then, does kenotic love look like in the context under consideration here? It looks like kenotic love in any situation where we are asked to accompany, to walk with someone when we feel that they may not be making choices that are right for them: engaging with them in their own time and on their own terms, maintaining relationship, and keeping the doors open for conversation about their choices. Swinton notes that for Jesus,

> friendships were unbounded by culture or public opinion; in particular, he offered friendship to those whom society marginalized, stigmatized and demonised […] Such a repositioning of the margins challenges [us] by raising the question: *Are we sitting where God is sitting?* [39]

When palliative care chaplains offer kenotic love to the person requesting assisted dying, rather than conscientiously objecting or withdrawing from them, we instead walk towards the patient. We practise cruciform loving by emptying ourselves of our *need* to have our opinions heard in the situation before us. In kenotic pastoral care we empty ourselves of these desires and we make space for the transformative mystery of God to work in the situation. We look on the patient with the compassionate eyes of Jesus, with a heart that sees the value in the person even when they cannot see it themselves. We continue to walk with the person, keeping the relationship and opportunity for discussion open. We are not those who judge, but importantly, are those who will lament when they are gone. Lament is essentially a hopeful practice, one which says, all is not well in the world just now, but I hope that one day it is different.[40] In this way, our presence of kenotic cruciform loving reflects something of the kenotic love that God showed for us in the incarnation.

As I reach the end of this reflection on kenotic love and its relevance to pastoral care, I am taken back twenty years to one of my first shifts as a Samaritans listening volunteer. It is the middle of the night, and I answered the phone, stepping into the booth as a newly

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[39] John Swinton, *Raging with Compassion* (London: SCM Press, 2018) p. 221.
[40] Arthur Cole Riley, *This Here Flesh* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2022), p. 101.

trained Samaritan, just twenty years old. The caller, let us call him James, was silent. Slowly he revealed, in slightly slurred speech, that he had taken an overdose. He detailed all the ways in which life events had led him to this decision, all the pain laid bare before this stranger on the phone. He wanted to end his life; this was not a cry for help he assured me. He did not want anyone to find him. But he did not want to be alone. 'I don't know what to say,' I said, silent tears falling down my cheeks. 'I don't need you to say anything,' he replied, 'I just want to know that someone is with me.' The silence echoed around us, me silently lamenting all the events in James's life that had led to this day. Him slowly slipping into unconsciousness. I remember that silence now, pregnant with the weight of the moment, and remember that I have never felt so alive to the presence of God.

Conclusions

I entered this process of reflection to establish how I might be able to accompany a person in the process of assisted dying, whilst at the same time maintaining spiritual and moral integrity in doing so. I expected that this might involve in some way making my opinions known on the matter, whilst still fulfilling my pastoral obligation to remain with the dying person. I had thought that I would make a prophetic stand, demonstrating that I valued their life. Perhaps this might involve saying to them in the face of death, 'You are valuable even when you do not see it.' I imagined that this might be courageous, that it would be bold, that it would speak politically as well as profoundly to the person for whom I was caring. But I see that those things would have met my needs, not the needs of the patient who wanted me to be by their side as they made a hard and difficult choice.

Instead, through reflection on both the story of the Good Samaritan and in particular my reflection on the theme of kenosis, I have come to see that a faithful response which maintains my personal spiritual and moral integrity, is actually less to do with what I think about the person's choices, and more about maintaining the relationship to allow space for God to do the transformative work that God deems necessary for the situation. That transformative work may or may not

involve an invitation for me to dialogue with the patient about their choices. An invitation that would surely never come if that relationship were curtailed due to my conscientious objection and refusal to provide spiritual care.

My reflections have led to a gentler position; I still view that a patient's life is valuable, I still wish that they had a quality of life and could see that their life was valuable, that they would not feel the need to make the choice of assisted dying. But despite this, if the law allowing assisted dying is passed in Scotland, I will continue to journey with those who do make that choice and who wish for me to remain by their side whilst they do so. I will not loudly impose my uninvited opinion on them, alienating them from the spiritual care they need at this time, and creating a barrier between us whereby they possibly might not feel able to ask for spiritual support and advice if needed.

Initially I worried that this accompanying might in some way affect my spiritual and moral integrity, I realise now that in looking at the person with the compassionate eyes of the Good Samaritan, in the putting aside of differences of religious beliefs, and through the adoption of kenotic, loving, pastoral care, my accompanying remains integrated with my theological and moral beliefs. I have come to understand that faithful character expressed through loving faithful practice is elevated above the imposition and loud proclamation of theological doctrine. Therefore, if the Assisted Dying Bill is brought into law in Scotland, I will continue to be present at the bedside of the dying patient, even if they request to end their life by means of assisted dying. My hope will always be that every person feels loved, valued, and supported enough (medically, spiritually, emotionally, and socially) that they do not feel drawn to end their own lives through these means. But until that time comes, I will continue accompanying, supporting, and being with people to the very end, all the while lamenting that things might be different.

Keeping Faith: Some Issues of Theology in Christian Chaplaincy in Scotland's Schools

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Abstract
Contemporary Scottish school chaplaincy has been struggling to find a theology fit for purpose in the twenty-first century context of the increasingly secular realm of education. A theology rooted in an ambassadorial motif, which can itself be connected to biblical themes, may provide a robust framework and understanding. Such a motif provides a helpful pastoral and diplomatic tone for two highly contested areas increasingly encountered by school chaplains: gender ideologies and polices, and challenges to freedom of belief and speech.

Keywords
Chaplaincy; schools; gender; ideology; freedom of speech

Introduction

Scottish education has deep roots in the vision of John Knox and the sixteenth-century Reformed tradition which placed a high premium on literacy and education. The motivation was arguably evangelistic: a literate population could read and apply the Scriptures and function effectively as church participants and members. Knox's call for 'a school in every Parish'[1] was enthusiastically acted on by the churches across Scotland. By the late nineteenth century, the pattern across both urban and rural Scottish communities physically and literally placed church and school buildings side by side at the heart of many communities. By the time the church relinquished control of schools and schooling in the 1872 Education Act (Scotland), church and school were inextricably partnered.

[1] John Knox, 'First Book of Discipline 1560', in *A Dictionary of British History*, ed. by John Cannon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Scotland still has a strong tradition and pattern of local Church of Scotland congregations linked to schools within their physical parish boundaries through 'chaplaincy'. It is hard to quantify precisely, but my own doctoral research (concluding in 2018)[2] led me to estimate that 65–70 percent of Scotland's non-denominational schools have an active link to a Christian chaplain.

Scottish school chaplaincy may still be very prevalent, but it has no standard pattern, no nationally agreed competencies, and little regulation. It is in many ways a ministry in search of a theology and of secure biblical foundations. To use a current phrase from the political realm, are its current practices and patterns 'fit for purpose'? It is a role that is also increasingly questioned and challenged, primarily by humanists, secularists, and the LGBTQIA+ community. This article proposes a motif for Scottish schools and chaplains to see the role as akin to 'ambassadors', which intersects with several strands of Scripture. I also examine the issues raised for Christian chaplains as to how to respond to curricular issues such as the teaching on Relationships, Sexual Health, and Parenthood (RSHP) and policies mandating a distinct gender ideology. This leads on to the wider issues of how Christian chaplains should handle hostility and secularism and the challenges to their freedom of religion and freedom of speech.

Scottish education is a devolved responsibility, with all aspects of the curriculum, of education policy and philosophy, of teacher training, accreditation, and management controlled by the Scottish Government rather than the United Kingdom Government. Scottish education is managed through Education Scotland[3] and has its own curriculum and inspectorate. Scotland's 'Curriculum for Excellence' is distinct and different from those of the other nations of the United Kingdom. The curriculum includes detailed experiences and outcomes for Religious and Moral Education. It also has a strong emphasis on character and values, influenced by Jacques Delor's report for UNESCO detailing the pillars of education as 'Learning to Know',

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[2] Stephen Younger, 'Religious Observance and Spiritual Development within Scotland's "Curriculum for Excellence"' (doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2018) <https://theses.gla.ac.uk/8903/>.

[3] Education Scotland <https://education.gov.scot/> [accessed 28 May 2023].

'Learning to Do', 'Learning to Live Together', and 'Learning to Be'.[4] There is a strong historical and active partnership with Scotland's school chaplains (400–500 in number, and often ordained local Church of Scotland clergy) to provide Religious Observance ('Time for Reflection'), assistance in the delivery of RME (Religious and Moral Education), in character formation, in pastoral support to the school communities, and in facilitating partnership between schools and their local communities.

For historic reasons, the majority of school chaplains are broadly Christian and Christianity has a privileged — but increasingly contested — profile in Scotland's schools, even though 90 percent of Scottish Schools are officially classed as 'non-denominational' (the remaining 10 percent are Roman Catholic, Independent, and 'Faith' schools). However, a commonly accepted 'theology of school chaplaincy' in the non-denominational sector is lacking. There are also specific theological issues raised for school chaplains around questions of gender identity and current in-school teaching on LGBTQIA$^+$, and around how to respond to those who question the place and legitimacy of Christianity within Scottish schools.

What, Theologically, Is a School Chaplain?

First and foremost here, is the task of identifying a theology of school chaplaincy. There is currently no agreed national definition or description of school chaplains. It has been left to each local Education Authority on an ad hoc basis to set out any guidelines for chaplains.[5] The 1872 Education (Scotland) Act had a clear understanding of the role of the local Church of Scotland parish minister as the de facto 'chaplain' to any school situated within his (sic; there were no ordained women in the Church of Scotland until 1969) parish boundaries. The custom has proved surprisingly long-lived and there is still an

[4] Jacques Delors, *Learning: The Treasure Within* (Report of the UNESCO International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century, 1996), Unesco Digital Library <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000102734> [accessed 29 October 2023].

[5] There were initially 32 Unitary Authorities, each able to issue their own guidelines on chaplaincy until January 2018, when these were grouped into 6 Regional Improvement Collaboratives. New guidelines may follow.

expectation that ordained local Church of Scotland parish ministers will take on the role of school chaplains. In the contemporary scene, an increasing number of school chaplains are from other denominations (and faiths), from parachurch organisations (such as Youth for Christ, The Message Trust, Scripture Union), and from lay ministries (such as church-based community workers, youth workers, and family workers).

By default, and by common understanding, the roles and duties of those first chaplains could be inferred from the scant references to them in the 1872 Act:

> Every public school, and every school which is subject to inspection, shall be open at all times to the inspection of any of Her Majesty's inspectors, but it shall be no part of the duties of such inspector to inquire into any instruction in religious subjects, or to examine any scholar in religious knowledge or in any religious subject or book.[6]

It can be assumed, then, that the chaplains were not employed school staff as such, and their role was limited to the provision of religious instruction and education. At the time they were all, of course, Christian.

Given the prevailing culture of the 1870s, it may have been widely assumed that chaplains were engaged in the enculturation of pupils for church membership. Daily prayers at the opening and closing of the school day, including reciting the Lord's Prayer, were the norm.[7] Catechisms, the Westminster Confession, and Scripture memorisation were the chosen methods of instruction. Weekly school assemblies operated as mini church services. They included 'sermons' (or 'children's addresses') with moral and scriptural lessons, prayers (often learned by rote or repeated) and hymn singing.

The ministers and Kirk Sessions had a significant level of control over the daily management of each school and the appointment of headteachers, as is evidenced in the 1872 Act:

> In each parish the heritors and minister who under the law as existing at the passing of this Act have the management of the parish school and the

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[6] 'Education (Scotland) Act 1872', Education in the UK <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/acts/1872-education-scotland-act.html> [accessed 29 October, 2023] (paragraph 66).

[7] The daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer persisted until 2017 in some primary schools on the Island of Lewis.

> appointment of the parish schoolmaster shall, as soon as conveniently may be after the publication of the rules and directions for the conduct of first elections of school boards to be issued as herein-after directed by the Board of Education, meet and fix a time and place for the election of a school board, and appoint a fit and proper person to be returning officer at the election, and shall make due publication of the time and place so fixed and of the person so appointed.[8]

Until well into the mid-twentieth century, the majority of Scottish non-denominational schools had ordained Church of Scotland clergy as their chaplains. The 'religious instruction' of schools in 1872 became 'religious education' in the 1960s and a growing number of Scottish secondary schools employed specialist Religious Education (RE) staff. It was not uncommon for ordained clergy with a particular interest in work in schools to transition into being qualified RE teachers. By the 1980s, RE had broadly become 'Religious and Moral Education' (RME) and while the curriculum majored on Christianity it had long lost any evangelistic impact or church enculturation or faith formation in the non-denominational sector. In keeping with the secular tone of education, there is no permission for proselytising in the current curriculum.

School chaplaincy in Scotland is, therefore, a ministry role in search of a theology. School chaplains are no longer instructors or indoctrinators. Informally, many school chaplains do contribute to sections of the RME curriculum, but they are no longer religious teachers or religious educators in any significant numbers. They may provide opportunities and experiences for worship as a part of the informal curriculum, they may lead voluntary groups,[9] and still frequently provide a faith-based input to school assemblies and 'Religious Observance'. They cannot, however, be evangelists or apologists within Scottish schools. The primary theological task, then, for Scottish school chaplains in the non-denominational sector is to find a new identity.

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[8] 'Education (Scotland) Act 1872', paragraph 12 'Election of First School Boards'.

[9] There are, for example, approximately 190 Scripture Union groups (as at May 2022) in Scotland's 2,500 primary and secondary schools.

Books on (Christian) chaplaincy are replete with images and titles that express the search for a meaningful theology of chaplaincy. Some begin by looking into Scripture. Chaplains are, for instance,

> Resident Aliens. If I had to find one source alone in the biblical narrative of metaphors for sector ministry, it would be in the wanderings of the patriarchs in Genesis, people who were dwelling already within the land of promise, but as strangers.[10]

The word 'chaplain' does not occur in the Bible and there is no direct equivalent. Writers on chaplaincy explore a wide range of biblical stories, incidents, and episodes but most often appear to be moulding Scripture to fit the practices of chaplains rather than deriving those practices from Scripture. The most frequently cited Scriptures across the literature on all forms of Christian chaplaincy would include Genesis 39:2–5; Jeremiah 29:7; Matthew 5:44–48; Matthew 22:37–39; Matthew 25:37–40, 44–45; Luke 6:36; and Galatians 6:10.

A more honest and descriptive approach to determining a theology of chaplaincy begins by examining the many functions chaplains are called to perform in their roles. These roles may be identified with reference to an understanding of biblical models of various interwoven ministry competencies: for example, 'as minister, pastor, intercessor, healer and teacher'.[11] But often these roles seem to be determined not by Scripture or denominational theology or personal spirituality but by employer or institutional requirements. They are driven more by job descriptions than by biblical models of ministry. As Keith Evans notes,

> The many functional roles which a chaplain might fill in an organisation may range from advocate-Liaison, counsellor, bioethicist, professional educator, comforter, priest, to even liturgist […] A chaplain is a pastoral and spiritual counsellor, advocate and a guide […] A chaplain is a liaison with local churches, synagogues and mosques. Ultimately a chaplain should be open-minded, flexible, cross-culturally sensitive and understanding.[12]

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[10] Christopher Moody, 'Spirituality and Sector Ministry', in *Chaplaincy: The Church's Sector Ministries* ed. by Giles Legood (London: Giles Chapman, 1999).

[11] Alan Baker *Foundations of Chaplaincy: A Practical Guide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021), p. 4.

[12] Keith Evans, *The Fundamentals: The Why, What, Who and How of Chaplaincy,* The Chaplain Skill Set Series, vol. 1 (n.p.: independently published, 2018), pp. 21, 24.

A more subtle approach to school chaplaincy begins with examining many of the biblical functions of ministry and applying them to chaplaincy. This is helpful in maintaining a focus on faith formation and spiritual development. John Caperon's research has been particularly helpful and clear:

> Basing my analysis on discussion with and observation of the chaplains I worked with, and drawing also on my experience of staff review as a school leader, I initially developed a five-fold functional analysis of the school chaplain's role, later revised to a six-fold analysis to incorporate the teaching dimension of chaplaincy. The different functional aspects of a school chaplain's role, I suggested, could be set out as follows: Pastoral: caring for the whole community. Liturgical: leading prayer and worship. Spiritual: leading the spiritual life of the community. Missional: commending the Christian faith and supporting other faiths. Prophetic: 'speaking truth to power'. Pedagogic: teaching about faith, and Christian catechesis.[13]

An understanding of all forms of chaplaincy as a ministry of presence is also common across the literature. A particularly useful approach is to study chaplaincy in terms of meaning-making.[14] But there is surprisingly little on a specific theological understanding of school chaplaincy at the nursery, primary, and secondary level. Caperon's work stands out as an exception.

At the tertiary level (colleges and universities), a recent study offers the useful notion of seven education chaplaincy 'motifs' rather than an extensive theology: a pastoral motif; a 'religious' motif; an incarnational motif; a prophetic motif; a missional motif; a spiritual motif; and the notion of relationship-building.[15] Each motif has its strengths and weaknesses, its merits and demerits. The central idea of a 'motif' or an 'image' for school chaplaincy rather than an elaborate 'theology' appeals.

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[13] John Caperon, 'The Nature of the Ministry of School Chaplains in Church of England Secondary Schools' (doctoral thesis, Anglia Ruskin University, 2012), pp. 46–47.

[14] *Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care in the Twenty-First Century: An Introduction,* ed. by Wendy Cadge and Shelly Rambo (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022), p. 62.

[15] K. Aune, M. Guest, and J. Law, *Chaplains on Campus: Understanding Chaplaincy in UK Universities* (Coventry: Coventry University; Durham: Durham University; and Canterbury: Canterbury Christ Church University, 2019) <www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/chaplains-on-campus-executive-summary.pdf> [accessed 3 November 2023].

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David O'Malley offers a list of 'some chaplaincy images: Jester; Parish Priest; Defragmenter; Still Point; Ship's Navigator; Weaver; Prophet'.[16] These are more stimulating and creative and truer to the lived experiences of many chaplains. They can, however, feel a little contrived and each needs clarification, explanation, and elaboration. But the idea of looking beyond Scripture for an initial understanding of chaplaincy, and then subsequently connecting it back to biblical motifs, images, and ministries seems useful and fruitful.

A Suggested Theological Motif for School Chaplaincy: The Ambassador

I therefore offer into the debate on a theology of school chaplaincy a biblical word that brings theological stability and matches well with the current state of partnership between school chaplains, faith communities, and local schools: 'ambassador'. It is ideal as a biblically grounded motif for school chaplaincy.

The New International Version of the Bible employs the word 'ambassador' once in the Old Testament (Isa 57:9) and twice in the New Testament (2 Cor 5:20 and Eph 6:20). The OT word is *tsiyr*, an 'envoy, messenger'[17] or 'ambassador, herald, errand-doer'.[18] The NT word is *presbeuomen*, 'marking the exercise of a profession […] This was the regular word in the Greek east for envoys or the emperor's legate'.[19] The word had a definite political-legal sense:

> The ambassador legally represents the political authority which sends him; his competence is according to its constitution […] In the Roman period *presbeutes* is the Greek equivalent of *legatus* […] It is commonly used for the imperial legates.[20]

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16 David O'Malley, *School Ethos and Chaplaincy* (Bolton, UK: Don Bosco, 2008).
17 '*tsiyr*', in the *Hebrew and English Lexicon,* ed. by F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. Briggs, repr. edn (Peabody, MA: Hendricksen, 1991).
18 *James Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010).
19 Cleon L. Rogers, Jr, and Cleon L. Rogers, III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), p. 403.
20 Günther Bornkamm, 'preseubo', in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament VI,* ed. by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 681.

These legates, however, were more often high-ranking military officers commanding legions than political appointees. While the biblical words translatable as 'ambassador' have a particular historical and cultural context, the concept, when paired with a twenty-first century western understanding of 'ambassador', provides a useful theological descriptor of the role of the contemporary school chaplain.

In my role as Chaplaincy Project Coordinator for Christian Values in Education (Scotland) I train both school staff and school chaplains in the delivery of Religious Observance and spiritual wellbeing and development within Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence. Staff are frequently suspicious of the perceived evangelistic motive of chaplains, and chaplains are frequently sentimental about a loss of Christian influence, coupled with ignorance and uncertainty about the policies and statutes around the expression of faith issues in schools. Chaplains frequently need a great deal of help in understanding the rapidly changing educational context. Many of them do indeed have a strong evangelistic imperative and a 'missionary' mindset. School staff, equally, are often unaware of the skills, knowledge, and contacts that a chaplain can bring to a partnership with a school. For both staff and chaplains, the associations around the word 'ambassador' seem to provide a genuinely helpful common ground. The concept of ambassador can also usefully encompass and echo many biblical strands.

Broadly speaking both school staff and chaplains share an understanding of what an ambassador is and does:

- The ambassador is a citizen of one kingdom, living and working in another kingdom.
- The ambassador is a representative of their kingdom specifically appointed to live in another kingdom.
- The ambassador is a representative of a sending kingdom, able to speak on behalf of its government or leadership.
- The ambassador is typically an example of the best and most able and competent a sending kingdom has.
- The ambassador acts as the liaison between two kingdoms (the sending and the receiving ones).

- The ambassador is therefore expected to robustly explain and defend the actions and policies of their sending kingdom.
- The ambassador may also be called by the government of their receiving kingdom to receive a rebuke for the actions of their sending kingdom with which their hosts disagree.
- The most effective ambassador is often bi-lingual.
- The ambassador has some privileges but works hard to understand and respect their host kingdom and abides by its laws and customs.
- The ambassador is expected to be skilled in diplomacy, negotiation, and creative partnership for the common good of both the sending and receiving kingdoms.
- The ambassador has a role in assisting, advocating for, protecting, and caring for citizens of their kingdom who live in or visit the host kingdom.
- The ambassador works to create multiple mutually beneficial alliances between their sending and host kingdoms.
- The ambassador is always subject to recall by their sending kingdom.
- The ambassador is in a position of accountability to their host kingdom.

While the notion of school chaplains as ambassadors diverges from the biblical etymology, it is generally well-received in joint training events for school staff and school chaplains and is regarded as a positive approach. Both school staff and chaplains appear to understand the concept of an ambassador, and both appear to appreciate the dignity and respect it confers within their respective realms.

Scottish schools use a curricular framework known as 'All Experiences and Outcomes' (the E's and O's) and a self-assessment framework named 'How Good is Our School'. The self-assessment regime is in its fourth incarnation and is usually referred to in schools by the acronym 'HGIOS4'. A theology of school chaplaincy as expressed as ambassadorial fits well with the wellbeing and responsibilities of all in the E's and O's of the Curriculum for Excellence. A school chaplain, with the perspectives of the kingdom of

God, is well described in the language of the official document as a partner to a school who shares a mutual interest in 'health and wellbeing' and in developing 'spiritual wellbeing':

> Each establishment, working with partners, should take a holistic approach to promoting health and wellbeing, one that takes account of the stage of growth, development and maturity of each individual, and the social and community context. I can expect my learning environment to support me to: […] understand and develop my physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing and social skills.[21]

Chaplains as ambassadors also sits well with the partnerships described in the self-assessment framework of HGIOS4.

> Meeting the wide-ranging needs of all children, young people and their families is the heart of what makes an excellent school. Schools cannot achieve this by themselves. As noted in the *Building the Curriculum* series, strong, effective partnerships at local and national level are the key […] You will have a range of partners such as the third sector, youth workers, community learning and development staff, colleges, universities and employers who work with you to deliver learning pathways to meet the needs of all children and young people.[22]

In the language of HGIOS4, a school chaplain functions precisely as an ambassador who brings the resources, roles, and skills of their service in God's kingdom into the realm of education as a partner, sharing the desire to 'meet the needs of all children and young people'.

Many of the indicators from the sections 'Partnerships' (2.7) and 'Ensuring Wellbeing, Equality and Inclusion' (3.1) of HGIOS4 help to illustrate the strong ambassadorial position of a school chaplain in partnership with schools in terms of bringing together local, third-sector faith groups (such as church congregations and parachurch organisations) and their local schools. We might cite, for instance, the following examples:

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[21] Education for Scotland, 'Curriculum for Excellence: All Experiences and Outcomes', Scottish Government, 2017, last updated 3 April 2023 <www.curriculumforexcellencescotland.go.uk> (p.12).

[22] Education Scotland, 'How Good is our School (4th Edition)', Scottish Government, 2015 <https://education.gov.scot/media/dtnnmvjh/frwk2_hgios4-4.pdf> (p.7).

> **The development and promotion of partnerships**
>
> Our partnerships are firmly based on a shared vision, values and aims which put the needs of all learners at the core of our partnership working. […]
>
> **Impact on learners**
>
> […] As a result of our effective partnerships all our learners have access to an extended range of learning pathways through which they are developing skills for learning, work and life and securing sustainable positive destinations.
>
> **Features of highly-effective practice**
>
> […] The school understands and plays a significant role in the life of the local community.
>
> […] The school can demonstrate the impact of partnerships through improved outcomes for learners.
>
> Our school community has a shared understanding of wellbeing and in the dignity and worth of every individual. We know and can demonstrate that all of our children and young people feel safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included. All staff and partners feel valued and supported.[23]

Theological Issues Around the LGBTQIA$^+$ Agenda and Policies on Gender Identity

Scottish education, Scottish school chaplains, Christian staff members and parents, face a number of issues which are currently in flux, that are creating tensions, and which touch on the messy interface of several fields — ethics, faith, theology, conscience, philosophy, freedom of speech and expression. These include education policies on LGBTQIA$^+$; on inclusion, respect, and equality; on gender identity; on what constitutes 'hate speech'; on conversion therapy; teaching on Relationships, Sexual Health, and Parenthood Education (RSHP); teaching in a multi-faith context. These policies are not unique to Scotland, nor are they confined to the field of education. For example, the tabloid newspapers recently made much of a story of a woman in her 70s being presented with a form at a National Health Service clinic in Darlington which invited her to indicate which of eighteen genders

[23] Education Scotland, 'How Good is Our School', p. 7.

she wished to identify as.[24] Schools are equally struggling for consistent and clear guidance on, for example, how to address and accommodate pupils who are transitioning or who self-identify as gender fluid.

Some school chaplains feel the prevalence of such policies and issues are creating an exclusion, a disrespect, and inequality for those affirming a traditional biblical stance on gender, family, marriage, and sexual relationships. They express a frustration that no neutral debate on these issues is possible as those promoting what they regard as traditional biblical understandings are accused of bigotry and intolerance. They express a fear that certain aspects of proposed Scottish legislation on gender conversion therapy effectively silence and even criminalise the expression of alternative (Christian) viewpoints and the exercise of activities such as prayer and preaching.[25] For all participants in these debates, it seems increasingly difficult to disagree without becoming disagreeable and combative. These points of tension and contention illustrate the value of the motif of school chaplains as ambassadors. How can we bring the tact, diplomacy, and creativity of an ambassador to this clash of values between two kingdoms?

Issues of Gender Identity and Ideology

A common thread through the issues centres on gender identity and ideology. It is not possible to definitively state a common approach amongst all school chaplains. Their instinctive theologies, philosophies, moral and ethical values, and biblical literacies vary enormously. There are, however, still many traditionalist chaplains who maintain what they view as a mainstream biblical point of view: that God created humankind with only two genders (male and female); that 'normal' sexual relationships are between male and female (with any other type of relationship therefore being regarded as abnormal); and that God's patterns for marriage, sex, and procreation should only occur between

[24] Stephen Moyes and Sam Blanchard, 'Woke Hospital Chiefs Under Fire', *The Sun,* 18 May 2023 <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/22407379/hospital-listing-gender-options-patient-form/> [accessed 23 May 2023].

[25] The Christian Institute, *Banning 'Conversion Therapy' in Scotland: Summary and Extracts of the Written Legal Opinion of Aidan O'Neill, KC* (Scotland: The Christian Institute, 2023). The Christian Institute is a charity that campaigns for the protection of Christian rights and the promotion of Christian values in a secular world. See <https://www.christian.org.uk>.

a man and a woman (with any other pattern being regarded as sinful). This sketch is no more than a caricature and a generalisation. But it is obvious that this sets these chaplains at odds with many of the current policies on inclusion and respect in education. A part of my task in school chaplain education is to encourage fresh thinking.

It is beyond the scope of this short article to explore, justify, dissect or to defend this caricature of the traditional interpretation. My personal observation is rather that the focus on chaplains acting to defend against the perceived threats to their deeply held theologies may be a mistaken one. They are, in essence, fighting the wrong battle on the wrong field. It is certainly pastorally unhelpful when such chaplains come face to face with, for instance, a member of staff in a homosexual relationship or a transitioned/transitioning pupil or a member of the school community insisting on being addressed with their choice of personal pronouns. The pressing theological conundrums are not actually around teaching in schools on gender and sexuality — they are around the secular challenges to freedom of speech and freedom of belief; they are around many chaplains failing to realise that the kingdom that is Scottish education does not share the values of *their* kingdom; they are around issues of coercion and control, and of rights and respect, of arrogance and humility. Just as many school chaplains may object to being instructed to use a language of inclusion, are uncomfortable with and object to constraints on the content of their preaching and praying, so those in the kingdom of education may object to those same chaplains likewise dictating *their* use of language and their practices and policies.

Where to begin on resolving the points of tension and contention? Once again, I have found the ambassadorial motif to be pastorally useful in school. I have found a more careful and nuanced reflection on my own instinctive theology to be beneficial. A key starting point for me has been to ask myself the (deceptively) simple question, What gender is a soul? This is not a new discussion and is an ancient debate within Christianity and Christendom.[26] Yet revisiting this point

[26] For example, Philip C. Almond cites Cyril of Jerusalem (4th century CE) in his piece, 'Are Christian Souls Gendered?', The Conversation, 2022 https://theconversation.com/are-christian-souls-gendered-194998 [accessed 11 September 2023].

of theology/philosophy has been a fruitful way for me to re-examine my own viewpoint and find a way to engage diplomatically, pastorally, and sensitively in that liminal space where the two kingdoms I inhabit overlap. I am at once a citizen in the kingdom of God (and do not claim to understand it or represent it definitively, or completely, or accurately) and simultaneously a citizen of the kingdom of Scottish education. Rediscovering a satisfactory answer to the question of what gender is a soul, helps me personally to navigate a course through the no-man's land where kingdoms clash.

I am certainly not alone in finding that the issue of a soul's gender provides a fruitful point of contact between contemporary kingdoms; in this case between the realms of Christian chaplaincy and Scotland's secular education. Both Plato (428–347 BCE) and Proclus (c.410–485 CE), for instance, wrote on the soul's gender, with conclusions that certainly sound strange to our ears in twenty-first century Scotland but are still being debated by contemporary philosophers.[27] Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) revisited the debate on the soul's gender, and it is fascinating to see a revival of interest in his conclusions in the overlap between Catholic approaches to education and medicine. This can be helpfully illustrated by citing the following abstract to a 2020 article:

> I will defend Aquinas's fundamental insights into the root of gender distinction without defending his biological understanding of the process itself. I will argue that there is a single generic generative power in the soul that is determined by the matter to which the soul is united, to be expressed as either male or female. This paradigm, I believe, copes better than the one offered by Finley with phenomena such as intersexed persons and sex reassignment surgery. While I do not accept the idea of a feminine or masculine soul, the paradigm offered here does lead to the notion of the soul being feminized or masculinized on account of the matter that it informs.[28]

The gist of the argument is that a soul is neither male nor female and that a person's gender identity is therefore a product of the complex

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[27] For example, Jana Schultz, 'Conceptualizing the "Female" Soul: A Study in Plato and Proclus', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy,* 27, no. 5 (2019), 883–901.

[28] William Newton, 'Why Aquinas's Metaphysics of Gender is Fundamentally Correct: A Response to John Finley, *The Linacre Quarterly, the Journal of the Catholic Medical Association*, 87, no. 2 (2020), 198–205.

interplay of their biological en-fleshment, their upbringing, their beliefs and practices, and societal and environmental conventions. Body and soul become deeply intertwined and are not easily separated or discrete from one another. It may be a simplistic conclusion, but viewing humans as souls en-fleshed and their gender as habituated through a life-long dynamic process with multiple influences helps me see and treat every person as a person rather than as a male or female. What gender someone wishes to be addressed by therefore does not matter to me or offend me if I see simply an ungendered soul. What lifestyle a person opts to live does not, then, unsettle me as much as it might if I held to a rigid tradition of theology or morality. My concern becomes more for the salvation of a person's soul than for the correction of their lifestyle.

There are several points to note around gender in the gender-related creation texts: Genesis 1:27; 2:7; 2:21–23; 5:1–2. We note firstly that Adam is clearly the personal name for a distinct male individual and Eve is equally clearly the name for a distinct female individual. Scripture names only the first three of their sons, Cain (Gen 4:1), Abel (Gen 4:2), and Seth (Gen 5:3), and adds that after Seth was born, Adam lived a further eight hundred years and had 'other sons and daughters' (Gen 5:4). Yet we note also that Adam is a generic Hebrew term meaning both 'taken from the earth' and 'mankind' or 'humankind'. Looking more closely, the formation of a male body/bodies came *before* Adam (the man/humankind) becomes a living being (Gen 2:7). Adam becomes a sentient, living being *after* God 'breathed into his nostrils *the breath of life*' (Gen.2:7). The identity of the person seems secondary to the physicality of the body.

What, exactly was this 'breath of life' that God 'breathed' into 'Adam'? Victor Hamilton comments that 'instead of using *rûah* for 'breath' […] Gen. 2:7 uses *nᵉšāmā*. Unlike *rûah*, which is applied to God, man, animals and even false gods, *nᵉšāmā* is applied only to Yahweh and to man.'[29] *nᵉšāmā* is the Hebrew word for 'soul' or 'spirit'. Adam's masculinity, his male gender, relates to his physical body rather than to his soul. Therefore, the essence of what makes Adam 'Adam', both the

[29] Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17,* New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 159.

individual and humankind, is the *nᵉšāmā*, the soul, that God breathed into him. It is not the physical body that defines 'Adam'. 'Until God breathes into him, *man* is a lifeless corpse.'[30]

Realising this background may help more traditional school chaplains, and Christian parents and teachers, react less virulently and confrontationally to, for instance, a pupil insisting on being addressed by particular personal pronouns, or a school promoting the Pride flag and Pride Week, or RSHP lessons promoting inclusion or equality or respect for the LGBTQIA$^+$ community. Creation recounts the formation of a gendered body that is not animated until a soul is breathed into it, and Scripture maintains an awareness of a fusion yet distinction between body and soul, as can been seen in the following examples: 'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell' (Matt 10:28); 'At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven' (Matt 22:30); 'If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body' (1 Cor 15:44). In the resurrection at the end of all things, such references suggest that the part of us that is resurrected is primarily spiritual rather than physical, and that we are returned to a new creation that is generic rather than gendered. This also may help school chaplains find their way to a better relationship with those who express gender fluidity or different sexualities.

Twice in the early creation accounts, we read that God created mankind 'male and female' (Gen 1:27; 5:1–2). Gerhard von Rad, commenting on Genesis 1:27, notes that 'one will do well to split the physical from the spiritual as little as possible: the whole man [i.e. the body and the soul, the individual and the collective Adam, the male and the female] is created in God's image'.[31] Yet later commentators suggest a greater nuance:

> Unlike God, man is characterised by sexual differentiation. Unlike animals, *man* is not broken down into species (i.e. 'according to their kinds' or 'all kinds of'), but rather is designated by sexuality: male and female he created

[30] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, p. 159.
[31] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (London: SCM, 1972), p. 58.

> them […] Sexuality is not an accident of nature, nor is it simply a biological phenomenon. Instead, it is a gift of God.[32]

God created mankind 'in his own image' (Gen 2:7; 5:2) and, as is often pointed out in commentaries, God contains in Godself both male and female identifiers. It seems to me that, again, the truly contentious issue for Christians and school chaplains in Scottish education — indeed, in Scottish society — is not the prevalent teaching on gender and sexuality but the attempt to silence reasoned debate and to exclude and demonise traditional Christian viewpoints as a valid alternative.

Challenges to Freedom of Belief and Speech

For Baptists especially, this can feel, somewhat ironically, familiar. Our insistence on submission to the written word and to the Living Word saw our historic ancestors, the Anabaptists, relentlessly persecuted. Their determination to engage with Scripture and to challenge the churchmanship and Christendom of their contemporaries saw them demonised. Strenuous efforts were made to silence them and to eradicate them rather than to engage with them or persuade them otherwise.

British Baptists have always insisted on freedom of belief, even that of their opponents, and have paid a heavy price for this.[33] They have not always been shown the same generosity of spirit. Nothing in the policies or from the current pressure groups within Scottish education matches the ferocity and violence meted out to the Anabaptists for seeking to hold to their understanding of biblical principles and values. Yet there are some parallels. There is an obvious inconsistency in the way policies aimed at improving equality and inclusion — meant to protect the LGBTQIA$^+$ community — seem to disallow those with particular mainstream Christian views on gender, marriage, and sexual relationships an equal hearing and a right to have their viewpoint included as a valid alternative. Christian voices, when raised, are met

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[32] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, p. 138.

[33] Ian M. Randall, *Religious Liberty in Continental Europe: Campaigning by British Baptists, 1840s to 1930s,* The Whitley Lecture 2012, Centre for Baptist History and Heritage Studies (Regent's Park College, Oxford: Whitely Publications, 2012).

with accusations of bigotry, intolerance, and hatred and are increasingly vilified.

There are, of course, so many variations among Christians as to what constitutes the definitive or supposedly correct theology on gender, marriage, and relationships. And there are also those who take a highly provocative, rigid, confrontational, and extremist stance. Notoriously, Westboro Baptist Church in the United States of America has frequently headlined international news bulletins for their high-profile demonstrations and inflammatory language at sporting events, concerts, in public arenas, and even in deliberate proximity to military funerals. They contend that the military conflicts into which the US has been drawn and the subsequent deaths are God's judgement on the nation for tolerating and promoting homosexuality. While the US Supreme Court has upheld the church's right to freedom of speech, even neutral ethicists debate if freedom of speech and public debate should allow indisputably hateful speech.[34]

Scotland's school chaplains and Christians within Scottish education (chaplains, teachers, and parents) seem, at this point, to be at the sharp end of a similar unfolding debate. Stating their personal convictions and denominational understanding of moral issues, of relationships, and of sexuality is bringing them into conflict with strongly opposed voices who are deeply offended by the understanding of biblical values expressed. Freedom of belief and freedom of speech are being questioned when Christians attempt to state their opinions.

Baptist chaplains in particular have a dilemma here. They have a long tradition, all the way back to Anabaptist roots, of arguing for and upholding freedom of belief and freedom of speech as human rights. It is a double-edged sword: to defend the right of others to express views strongly opposed to one's own is to risk unleashing strong voices that do not offer the same tolerance.

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[34] Jahel Queralt Lange, 'Oxford University Practical Ethics', blog post 11 March 2011 <blog.practicalethics.ox.ac.uk> [accessed 23 May 2023].

Articles 18 and 19 of the UN Charter of Human Rights state that

> Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.
>
> Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Tony Peck, at the time General Secretary of the European Baptist Federation (EBF), has written on 'Baptists and Human Rights' in this journal.[35] Peck recounts the EBF's creation of

> a small team of three people who can research abuses of religious freedom and human rights and who also travel regularly to Geneva to contribute the experience of Baptist communities on the ground to the Universal Periodic Reviews on human rights the UN carries out on different nations. In recent times, we have done this for Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, based on our own visits there, and we are also currently finding ways to raise the human rights situation in eastern Ukraine.[36]

The need for such a monitoring team in these areas of armed conflict is undeniable and obvious. But the challenges to freedom of belief and speech are subtle and pervasive in many other areas. While it may not be a physical challenge, it could be argued that Scottish education is a field in which an ideological challenge to religious freedom and freedom of speech is unfolding. It should be reiterated here that Christianity has indeed held a privileged place within Scottish education,[37] and the unease of many Christian chaplains, teachers, and parents might also be seen more in terms of defensiveness over the challenge to privilege rather than as a reasoned consideration of challenges to freedom of belief and speech. However, what is emerging is that this generation of believers, comfortably unchallenged for so long, seemingly does not

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35 Tony Peck, 'Baptists and Human Rights', *Journal of European Baptist Studies,* 20, no. 1 (2020), 30–46.

36 Peck, 'Baptists and Human Rights', p. 32.

37 Callum Brown, Thomas Green, and Jane Mair, *Religion and Scots Law: Report of an Audit at the University of Glasgow*, sponsored and published by the Humanist Society Scotland, Edinburgh, 2016 <https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/117621/1/117621.pdf> [accessed 23 May 2023] (p. 19).

know how to respond to efforts to silence and demonise the expression of their views.

What form, then, should this response take? There is the example of Jesus — silent before his accusers (Isa 53:7; Mark 14:60–61; 1 Peter 2:23). And then there is the encouragement to boldness offered by the apostles standing before the Sanhedrin: 'Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard' (Acts 4:19–20). There is an undeniable tension or inherent contradiction here: to maintain a dignified silence or to stubbornly insist on speaking out knowing that it may be perceived as inflammatory. Yet, not to speak up risks emboldening and condoning further restrictions. Martin Niemöller's well-known words reflecting on the Holocaust seem to have some pertinence here:

> First they came for the Communists and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist. Then they came for the Socialists and I did not speak out because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak out for me.[38]

Returning to the theological motif of the ambassador may again prove useful. The ambassador uses skills of diplomacy and tact; acts as liaison between very different and sometimes opposed kingdoms; works to respect and understand the values of their receiving kingdom while at the same time explaining and the values of their sending kingdom; works to find compromises that are mutually acceptable and beneficial to both kingdoms they find themselves in; engages in bi-lingual communication and looks for a common understanding; and ever acts as an advocate and voice for the vulnerable. School chaplaincy walks a fine line between speaking out and keeping silent. Despite all provocation, it should model reasoned, careful, respectful, and kind debate. It should be prepared to make recourse to existing laws on freedom of belief and of speech.

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[38] Holocaust Memorial Day (UK) <https://www.hmd.org.uk/resource/first-they-came-by-pastor-martin-niemoller/> [accessed 29 May 2023).

The Parousia and Work: Being Found Working According to the Kingdom

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Abstract
Eschatologies of work are almost as rare as discussion around Christ's *parousia* at the present time. This article will show that the second appearance of Jesus necessarily informs an eschatology of work. More specifically, two Matthean parables of eschatological discourse will be shown to insist upon 'watchful patience' and 'necessary expansion' as shaping contours to an eschatology of work which has Christ's *parousia* in mind.

Keywords
Work; *parousia*; eschatology; final state; Scotland

Introduction

Theologies of work, when they are attempted at all, tend to be developed with a view to origins and purpose, in other words, a protological bent. The inverse of this also holds true, that those who attempt an eschatology of work are, as has been manifest over the last three decades, few by comparison. Perhaps the latter emphasis is viewed as too theologically speculative to be worthy of development.[1] Theologians, however, are invited by Jürgen Moltmann to piece

[1] See the response by Douglas Schuurman (protologically minded) to Miroslav Volf (eschatologically minded) as an example of fair-minded, mutual critique: Miroslav Volf, 'Eschaton, Creation and Social Ethics', *Calvin Theological Journal,* 30 (1995), 130–143; Douglas J. Schuurman, 'Creation, Eschaton, and Social Ethics: A Response to Volf', *Calvin Theological Journal,* 30 (1995), 144–158. Gordon R. Preece, *The Viability of the Vocation Tradition in Trinitarian, Credal, and Reformed Perspective: The Threefold Call* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998). Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and the Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Leicester: IVP, 1996), pp.53–58.

theology together from Christ's future and thus apply the coming effects of his *parousia* to the present.

> From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present. The eschatological is not one element *of* Christianity, but it is the medium of Christian faith as such, the key in which everything in it is set, the glow that suffuses everything here in the dawn of an expected new day.[2]

Eschatological thinking in this way is therefore a vital prism to unlocking Christian ethics, argues Moltmann. If he is on track in his bold assertion, then fleshing out an eschatological view of human work is surely necessary as it is for any other theological enquiry.

Assuming Moltmann is correct in his overarching lens for the Christian faith,[3] I will sketch out key statements from church history on the *parousia*, while also highlighting twenty-first century Western theology's under-emphasis, perhaps even deliberate omission, of the eschatological expectation of Jesus's second coming, otherwise known as the *parousia*. After all, the *parousia* (literally 'the coming') is one legitimate aspect of final state eschatology. As someone who roves throughout Scotland in partnership with Scottish Baptist Churches and befriending their pastors, it seems from my collected interactions over the last decade that the *parousia* is not an ever-present theme, nor a steady undercurrent, either in pulpits or in pastoral care. So how might this 'embarrassing' component of Christian eschatology be brought to bear upon the eschatology of work?[4]

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[2] Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. by Jim W. Leitch (London: SCM Press, 1978), p. 16.

[3] For a rigorous testing of Moltmann's overarching approach to theology, see Ryan A. Neal, *Theology as Hope: On the Ground and Implications of Jürgen Moltmann's Doctrine of Hope* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2008).

[4] The *parousia* was deemed 'embarrassing' by modern theologians from the time of the Enlightenment, according to Moltmann, due to concerns that the concept needed to be demythologised in the same manner as the virgin birth and Christ's resurrection. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, trans. by Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1993), p. 313.

The *Parousia*

Throughout church history consistent effort has been made to ensure the chief place of the *parousia* of Jesus Christ in the telling of the Christian narrative and that it is yet to be fulfilled. In the New Testament, Paul teaches of another 'coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together with him' and that 'the day of the Lord is' yet to come (2 Thess 2:1, 2). Despite the sufferings of followers of Jesus, Peter comforts his intended readers by interpreting their present tortures through the Lord's torture on the cross. And yet there will be a 'shout for joy when his [Jesus's] glory is revealed' again, which will end all present strife (1 Pet 4:13). As the Apocalypse of St John concludes we read, 'The one who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come Lord Jesus!' (Rev 22:20). Jesus's future return is to be anticipated.

Moving from Scripture to the Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr declares that Jesus 'should come again out of heaven with glory', with particular reliance upon Daniel 7:13.[5] Among the second-century Apostolic Fathers there were four eschatological events which were consistently repeated: (i) the *Parousia*; (ii) the general resurrection; (iii) the judgement; (iv) and the end of the current world epoch.[6]

Irenaeus is convinced that Jesus 'shall come in glory'[7] and 'shall also come in the same flesh in which He suffered, revealing the glory of the Father'.[8] With rhetorical deployment, Tertullian declares, 'Who has yet beheld Jesus descending from heaven in like manner as the apostles saw Him ascend, according to the appointment of the *two* angels? [Acts

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[5] Justin Martyr 'The First Apology', in *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 1*, ed. by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. by Marcus Dods and George Reith (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0126.htm> [accessed 28 May 2023], p. 51.

[6] T. A. Noble, 'Eschatology in the Church Fathers', in *What are we waiting for? Christian Hope and Contemporary Culture*, ed. by Stephen Holmes and Russell Rook (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), pp. 63–74 (p. 65).

[7] Irenaeus, 'Against Heresies', in *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 1*, ed. by Roberts, Donaldson, and Coxe, revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103304.htm> [accessed 15 June 2023], III.4.2.

[8] Irenaeus, 'Against Heresies', III.16.8.

1:11] Up to the present moment they have not, tribe by tribe, smitten their breasts, looking on Him whom they pierced.'[9]

Athanasius concludes his great defence of Christ's incarnation with, 'and you will also learn about his second glorious and truly divine appearing to us, when no longer in lowliness but in his own glory, no longer in humble guise but in his own magnificence, he is to come'.[10] The Nicaean Constantinopolitan Creed (381 CE) states that Jesus 'ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father; And *He shall come again with glory* to judge the living and the dead'.[11] Nicaea's further definition at Chalcedon unsurprisingly reiterates that the 'one Lord Jesus Christ […] is coming again'.[12] Cappadocian Father Basil the Great, likewise, repeats that 'the Son of God shall come in His glory with His angels'.[13]

A millennium of church history later, the Schleitheim Confession of 1527 plainly evinces that the brother- and sisterhood were 'looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ'.[14] In 1530 the Augsburg Confession outlined that 'at the Consummation of the World Christ will appear for judgement, and will raise up all the dead; He will give to the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joys'.[15] The Scots Confession

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[9] Tertullian, 'On the Resurrection of the Flesh', in *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 3*, ed. by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. by Peter Holmes (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0316.htm> [accessed 28 May 2023], p. 22.

[10] Athanasius, 'On the Incarnation', in *Christology of the Later Fathers: Vol. III*, ed. by Edward Rochie Hardy in collaboration with Cyril C. Richardson, trans. by A. Robertson (London: SCM Press, 1954), p. 109.

[11] 'The Nicaean Constantinopolitan Creed', Orthodox Wiki <https://orthodoxwiki.org/Nicene-Constantinopolitan_Creed> [accessed 15 June 2023], emphasis mine.

[12] 'The Chalcedonian Decree', in *Christology of the Later Fathers: Vol. III*, ed. by Hardy and Richardson, p. 372.

[13] Basil the Great, 'Epistle 46', in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 8*., ed. by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans by Blomfield Jackson (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1895). Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3202046.htm> [accessed 15 June 2023], Epistle 46.5.

[14] 'The Schleitheim Confession', Baptist Studies Online <http://baptiststudiesonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/02/the-schleitheim-confession-2.pdf> [accessed 4 May 2023], p. 6.

[15] 'The Augsburg Confession', *Book of Concord* <https://bookofconcord.org/augsburg-confession/of-christs-return-to-judgment/> [accessed 15 June 2023], Article XVII.

of 1560 also reads 'we certainly believe that the same our Lord Jesus shall visibly return, as that He was seen to ascend'.[16]

Stanley Grenz's impressive *Theology for the Community of God* stands tall among twentieth-century contributions to doctrinal theology.[17] But for all its merits, it is almost silent on the eschatological moment of Jesus's second appearing in the flesh. With no sub-section allocated in a volume committed to in-depth eschatology, readers find a mere inference to this future moment subsumed among talk of the day of judgement. Not that both events are unrelated, but perhaps Grenz's omission of the *parousia* is indicative of the sheepishness that Moltmann detected among others in the early 1990s. Indeed, Moltmann further notes that in the main christological contribution of his contemporary Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus–God and Man*,[18] Pannenberg entirely glosses over the once expected return of Jesus Christ. Significantly, Pannenberg was Grenz's doctoral supervisor and prominent influence throughout his corpus.

Kirk MacGregor's important Molinst/Anabaptist contribution gives the *parousia* no place either, despite his disclaimer that he will only attempt to discuss 'direct and pressing challenges to the coherence of the biblical worldview or to the vitality of Christian discipleship in contemporary society'.[19] This absence is the case even though the focus of the final chapter is upon Jesus and the kingdom of God. This is not dissimilar to the non-feature of Christ's *parousia* in Glen Stassen and David Gushee's *Kingdom Ethics*. Their emphasis is to develop Christian ethics almost exclusively from Jesus's Sermon on the Mount.[20] James McClendon, however, does include the *parousia*. The baptising community of faith is simultaneously an eschatological community of

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16 'The Scots Confession', The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, <https://www.fpchurch.org.uk/Beliefs/ScotsConfession/index.php> [accessed 15 June 2023], chapter 11.
17 Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000).
18 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, trans. by L. C. Wilkins and D. A. Priebe (London: SCM Press, 2002).
19 Kirk R. MacGregor, *A Molinist-Anabaptist Systematic Theology*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007), p. 14.
20 Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003).

faith because it awaits the Master's reappearance.[21] This handpicked cocktail of modern Baptist thinkers highlights that Jesus's *parousia* is not given a prominent emphasis among Baptists.

Nevertheless, the *parousia* is always included in the ancient creeds and mediaeval confessions. As such it can be said with some confidence that the *parousia* is a vital aspect of final state eschatology and Christian theology in general. For my purposes here, by extension Jesus's second coming must have some bearing upon an eschatology of work by virtue of its eschatological significance, and furthermore because of the lacuna which exists in the lack of overt interplay between the two.[22]

Working in Anticipation of the *Parousia*

In what ways should an eschatology of work be shaped by the immanent return of Jesus? Even if certain apocalyptic teachings, which for generations have been interpreted as Jesus's second coming, turn out to refer to the sacking of Jerusalem in 70 CE,[23] thus reducing these texts to a past and not a coming event, I remain convinced that the message to workers now or in the past is/was always urgent and life altering. In seeking answers to my self-posed question, I will turn to Matthew's Gospel account to enquire how Christ's future *parousia* might shape human work until that day. The reason for selecting Matthew's evangel is that the Matthean Jesus repeatedly teaches that ethical acts, whether performed or left undone, have a definite, final state corollary (5:12, 21–23, 46; 6:1–6, 16–18; 7:1–2, 23; 10:15, 41–42; 11:22, 24; 12:36, 41–42; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 23; 24:51; 25:31–46).[24] In short, there is a causality of human agency toward what will eventuate in the future age known as

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[21] James Wm. McClendon, Jr, *Ethics: Systematic Theology Vol. 1* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), p. 266.

[22] See, for example, Miroslav Volf's anticipation of how reconciliation might take place at the final judgement as an aspect of human life's correlation to the eschaton. Miroslav Volf, 'The Final Reconciliation: Reflections on a Social Dimension of the Eschatological Transition', *Modern Theology*, 16, no. 1 (2000, 91–113.

[23] See N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God: Volume Two* (London: SPCK, 1996), pp. 341–343; Andrew Perriman, *The Coming of the Son of Man: New Testament Eschatology for an Emerging Church* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), pp. 77–79.

[24] Richard A. Burridge, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), p. 202.

the new creation. By using the first two parables of Matthew 25 as a stimulus, I will sketch out charcoal-like contours which show how Jesus's *parousia* might inform an eschatology of work.[25]

Watchful versus Lackadaisical

The first parable of Matthew 25 (verses 1 to 13), typically known as 'the Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids', conveys that the kingdom of heaven *de facto* will appear at an unexpected moment with the return of Jesus. It will startle even those who are his followers. Remaining on high alert by monitoring life's happenings will ensure that alarmed followers are as ready as possible for that arrival. The key message for the ten bridesmaids is *preparation.* Those who have readied themselves in advance for the overdue arrival of the bridegroom are not filled with dread when word comes 'at midnight' that he has suddenly appeared.

Required for the smooth running of weddings, bridesmaids are at the beck and call of the bride. But the anticipation of an expected bridegroom is all the more heightened in this depiction of the kingdom's fullness because there has been such a prolonged wait to endure. So, when the time finally arrives for the bridesmaids to react there must be no hesitation in falling into line with their wedding day duties. Their attentiveness must be immediate and full. Thus, when the five who did not prepare in advance ask for a bit of help to catch themselves up, they are promptly denied by those who are at the ready. Their firm decline in not sharing their oil with their ill-prepared counterparts is striking.

Whereas this parable is not the most obvious of texts for a theology of work, its suitability for an *eschatology* of work is more evident. Nevertheless, there are subtleties which help us see work's connection with this teaching on the *parousia*. The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids urges workers to avoid being in a situation where shame is the only outcome due to the bridegroom's disappointment in work's failure to launch. It is difficult to ascertain Jesus in any other role than the bridegroom. He is the coming one. There is no one else to whom this

[25] The final parable of Matthew's 'eschatological discourse' (25:31–46) has also been claimed as crucial to ascertaining *who* and *how* human agency is vital to an eschatology of work and the new creation. See Stuart C. Weir, *The Good Work of Non-Christians, Empowerment, and the New Creation: The Efficacy of the Holy Spirit's Empowering for Ordinary Work* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016).

character could be attributed but the coming Messiah. If this identification is correct, the dread of his pronouncement shown in the parable lays bare poor working efforts and becomes a very sharp motivator. The 'fear factor' of the bridegroom elicits a prominent moral incentive for an eschatology of work. Being tempted into slovenliness might swiftly be rescued by the thought that one's work be incomplete and not at the ready for his undefined time of arrival. Fearing Jesus as a retributive deity might be viewed as problematic for some because it creates real anxiety about assurance of salvation. Moltmann, for one, objects to any final state portrayal of Jesus being one who in a binary fashion separates saints and sinners to heaven and hell respectively.[26] He calls for all final state eschatological visions of Jesus to be consistent with the Jesus of the gospels. But although, on the one hand, Jesus radically includes those who had been excluded by religious Jewish society in his day (the poor, the leprous, women, the *ochlos*) — a point Moltmann makes with sufficient force[27] — on other occasions Jesus makes severe judgements about those whom he deems worthy of (at least) criticism. Examples of such are found laid at the feet of religious leaders (Matt 23:1–36); those worshipping at the Temple in loose fashion (Matt 21:12–13; Mark 11:15–17; Luke 19:45–46; John 2:13–21); Judas at the point of betrayal (John 13:16–18, 21–27); Peter in his opposition to Jesus's forthcoming passion (Matt 16:23); and occasionally toward non-Israelites (Mark 7:26–27). No one really wishes to recall these moments with great glee, but they are part of the whole Christ presented to us by the evangelists. No one is exempt from enquiring whether our comprehension of Jesus is selective towards his palatable traits. In the end, as the parable relays, being ill-prepared will subsequently see said workers excluded from the final state. The bridegroom is unequivocal at the great wedding that losing interest regarding the time of his arrival will cause great alarm and subsequent omission from the kingdom of heaven. Correspondingly, any

[26] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, trans. by Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1993), p. 336.
[27] Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, trans. by Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 2000), §III.

eschatology of work must integrate vigilance which governs the manner and content of one's endeavours.

Watchful work, then, should also be *patient* work. Patient insofar as waiting for the Son of Man's return involves real longsuffering. If time is indeed short until his next arrival, consideration of the five lackadaisical bridesmaids is advantageous. In being as conscientiously prepared as one can be, contemporaneous with antennae on high alert, patience is required to absorb the shock of misplaced expectations of his timing. Not that Jesus gave any promises of when and where (Acts 1:7). Being at constant attention for his reappearance needs no corrective, but solely a complementary rootedness in conviction that he will arrive regardless of how long it seems to be taking.

Watchful work without longsuffering stability could easily drift into careless work if it is thought that the Master's return could be at any moment. There is a type of millenarianism which becomes dismissive of the present *precisely because* of being on such high alert. So all-encompassing is the thought that he might return at any moment that bridesmaids may, for example, pour paraffin in their lamps too swiftly so that the stream of fuel pours over the sides, with much of it wasted on the ground. Sloppy workmanship can result in a millenarian and distracted feverishness.[28] Such crazed workers are so heavenly minded that they are of little earthly use. Friedrich Nietzsche's 'passive nihilism' also evokes a similar display towards earthly work by 'bleach[ing] value and beauty out of ordinary life by making it a discardable ladder for the ascent to the divine'.[29] Nietzsche's assessment of the religious life is that it ensures a person (sub)consciously opts out of serious engagement with the earth by virtue of a mindset of dejection.[30] Such indifference to life and work sails close to the five ill-prepared bridesmaids.

Contrariwise, a patient watchfulness in one's work possesses both the readiness of the five wise bridesmaids but includes the careful

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[28] Neil T. R. Dickson, *Brethren in Scotland: A Social Study of an Evangelical Movement*, Studies in Evangelical History and Thought (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002), pp. 262–263, 310–312.
[29] Miroslav Volf, *Flourishing: Why we need Religion in a Globalized World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), p. 198.
[30] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Holflingdale (New York: Viking, 1974), p. 181.

dedication of a watchmaker. It is such readiness which reveals the dogged determination to go about one's work with thoroughgoing excellence. It is because of who is coming that the quality of one's work must match one's working to attention. Indeed, in considering the five lamps which were trimmed and fully prepared, watchful patience at work might insist that the lamps were also buffed into a mirror polish and proudly wrapped in cotton muslin to avoid any tarnishing.

Work That Grows

In the second of the three Matthean 'eschatological discourse[s]' (chapter 25) the kingdom of heaven arriving in its fullness is likened to a man who delegated responsibility for his property to slaves while he travelled abroad (25:14–30). This story is often referred to as the 'Parable of the Talents'. The three slaves apparently had differing 'ability', but the property was nonetheless unevenly divided among them. Slaves 1 and 2 were ambitious and expanded their greater portion. This endeavour 'paid off' as they were able to exponentially increase what they were originally given. At the proprietor's return, slaves 1 and 2 were wholeheartedly affirmed for their initiative and hard labours. 'Good' and 'faithful' were the property owner's appraisal of their work. The third slave, however, out of fear did nothing with what he had been made responsible for. The proprietor calls him 'wicked' and 'lazy' for his unwillingness and lack of aspiration. As a consequence, he was 'throw[n] […] into the outer darkness' because of his fear of the master and his correlative inertia towards a development of work.

It is important once again that we ask who Jesus is in this parable. Is Stuart Murray accurate in identifying Jesus as the 'lazy' slave who is misunderstood and condemned by the authorities around him?[31] What works against this theory is that in Matthew 24 and 25 the Master is always the one who is coming at an unspecified time. Further, if the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats informs the first two parables of Matthew 25, where the coming one is identified as 'the Son of Man' delegated by his 'Father' to have authority over heaven and earth (Matt

[31] Albeit Murray relies more directly on the Lukan version of this parable. Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2005), p. 296.

25:31, 34), then the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats sheds some light upon the coming one's identity in the Parable of the Talents. Jesus is to be identified as the landowner and not as slave 3.

It is expected by the coming Master that workers grow and expand what the master has bestowed upon them. Not ever acting on what one has been given is condemned in the harshest terms because the Master 'reap[s] where [he] did not sow, and gather[s] where [he] did not scatter' (Matt 25:26). But what is meant by 'growth' here? Is this teaching a kind of anachronistic endorsement for capitalistic upscaling? Some church denominations in the United Kingdom are content to relate passively and uncritically towards the 'invisible hand' of liberal market forces.[32] This cosy relationship with capitalism is not the position of Timothy Gorringe who calls for a complete replacement of the current capitalist order due to the vast levels of injustice this system births.[33] There are other voices which seek to 'transfigure capitalism'[34] or believe that there is 'scope for self-correction'[35] within the system itself. This is not unlike Miroslav Volf's belief that there are always 'alignments, tensions and incompatibilities' in following Jesus with any given economic system.[36]

But what might the Jesus who wishes work to grow have to say about profitable business which puts people out of work because robots do the work more consistently? An increasing number of humans are unemployed as a result of the human creation of robots. In creating intelligent machines to serve us, humans have purposely or inadvertently worked themselves into unemployment and poverty. There is some anxiety that humans have created machines in our own image, but through our obsession with new technologies what if humans begin

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[32] Eve Poole points this out in her detailed analysis of the hierarchy of the Church of England. Eve Poole, *The Church on Capitalism: Theology and the Market* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 154.
[33] Timothy J. Gorringe, *Capital and the Kingdom: Theological Ethics and Economic Order* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994).
[34] John Atherton, *Transfiguring Capitalism: An Enquiry into Religion and Global Change* (London: SCM Press, 2008).
[35] Richard Higginson, *Questions of Business Life: Exploring Workplace Issues from a Christian Perspective* (Carlisle: Spring Harvest, 2002), p. 42.
[36] Volf, *Flourishing*, p. 240, n. 92.

thinking like machines?[37] What does that mean for being human and for the work we ought to do? We may have grown and designed new machines that have never before existed, but is this commensurate with the growth the Master expects?

Profit may indeed be made, but what if it is at the expense of the health and very lives of humans, animals, or inanimate creation? For example, what if profit is made at a music concert but the content of the performer's songs promotes violence and hatred in the world? There are links between imbibing certain lyrical content and social behaviour.[38] Can we argue that entertainment value really trumps lyrical content when we have fundamental fears about what is being actively promulgated from the microphone? This situation immediately comes into direct contact with the issue of freedom of expression.

Again, we might question the lucrative popularity of Irn Bru (the 'pop'/soft drink of choice in the Scottish market). Some of its ingredients include stimulants which produce adverse behaviour in children.[39] Is such a drink good for us? Can we say that Irn Bru is of benefit to our bodies? Yet year upon year it remains Scotland's highest selling soft drink.[40]

Again, in terms of profit and growth, we might similarly ask what of the short-term forestry practices for timber in the construction industry which robs generations' worth of growth?[41] Such forestry understands trees only as a means to human ends. They are reared until they reach their earliest maturity and then are felled, ending up in a logging production line. Not all trees should be there for the taking,

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37 Mark Boyle, *The Way Home: Tales from a Life without Technology* (London: OneWorld Publications, 2019), p. 151.

38 Craig Anderson, 'Violent Song Lyrics may lead to Violent Behavior', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84, no. 5 (2003), 960–971.

39 'Irn-Bru to Carry a Health Warning', *The Scotsman*, 24 July 2010 <https://www.scotsman.com/news/irn-bru-to-carry-a-health-warning-2442243> [accessed 6 June 2023].

40 'Irn-Bru and Tennent's Lager Top Lists of Favourite Scottish Food and Drink Brands', *Scottish Daily Express*, 17 December 2022 <https://www.scottishdailyexpress.co.uk/lifestyle/food/irn-bru-tennents-lager-top-28755145> [accessed 9 June 2023].

41 Peter Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate: Discoveries from a Secret World*, trans. by Jane Billinghurst (London: William Collins, 2016), pp. 31–36.

burning, or reshaping for industries such as construction. Trees exist for themselves too. Further, trees are instrumental in the air humans and other animate and inanimate species breathe. So ruthless has Scotland been over the last one hundred years in chopping forests down that the remaining one percent of the original Caledonian forest now has to be fiercely protected to prevent its permanent disappearance.[42] Indeed, great efforts partnered with political agreement have become mandatory to regrow what we have so recklessly utilised with short sightedness.[43] Furthermore, why is the habitat of many animate and inanimate species, who forge homes in these short-lived forests, frequently overlooked when timber is 'required' for human needs?[44] Scotland's extensive deforestation is the consequence of rolling out an unquestioned utilitarianism. With few advocates for them, would there be a situation where there were few to no trees in existence to clap their hands (Isa 55:12) at Christ's eventual *parousia*?

At this juncture, we might pause to consider the symbolic value of trees in the Bible that might illustrate the link between human work and the *parousia*, and what this might indicate about appropriate growth. Two trees mark out the Edenic period of creation, namely the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:9); the Abrahamic blessing was given by God to Abram at the oak of Moreh (Gen 12:6); Abraham was visited by YHWH under the oaks (or terebinths) of Mamre (Gen 18:1 — incidentally, one of these trees still lives near Hebron today); the prophetess Deborah judged Israel from underneath a palm tree between Ramah and Bethel (Judg 4:5); Saul and his sons were buried under an oak in Jabesh (1 Chron 10:12); and the eschatological hope to come promises to include the tree of life which will salve the wounds of life from this present age (Rev 22:2). This is nothing to say of the particular species of tree highlighted as native to the nations surrounding the Promised Land (e.g. the cedars of Lebanon,

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42 A huge proportion of trees in Scotland have been felled for three main reasons: (i) production during war efforts; (ii) as a consequence of the historical Highland Clearances from the mid-to-late 18th century into the mid-19th century; (iii) and overgrazing by deer due to lack of culling.

43 'An Ancient Wilderness: Reversing Centuries of Ecological Damage', *Mossy Earth,* <https://www.mossy.earth/projects/reforesting-scotland#an-ancient-wilderness> [accessed 9 June 2023].

44 Boyle, *The Way Home*, p. 77.

cypress, wild olive, and juniper — 2 Sam 5:11, 6:5; 1 Kings 19:4; Neh 8:5).[45] In other words, trees in and of themselves add value to human and non-human creation under God's sacred canopy. Work which cultivates, appreciates, and lives peacefully alongside local, verdant woodland is more befitting of a coming Jesus. God's people are to be propagators of the good, not agents of systematic destruction in the name of vice regency.

Therefore, work as naked profit cannot be work's *telos*. Left solely to the devices of the liberal market forces, all kinds of twisted endeavours eventuate at the hands of the human race, spoiling society and broadly denigrating creation.[46]

> Consumer capitalism has stooped to conquer, endorsing an ethos of unrestrained acquisitive materialism merely in order to transform independent citizens into supine subjects. It has served as a mechanism for the manufacture first of endless desires and then of the endless flow of commodities that alone would (however partially) gratify those desires.[47]

What is meant by working growth as per Matthew 25:14–30 can surely be work which *propagates* the kingdom of heaven. What might this kind of work look like? It might initially look like a preparedness to ask critical questions of any work project or initiative regarding their benefit and for whom at the conception or planning stages. Good practice would include adaptation, acceptance, or rejection of projects at design and concept stage rather than rushing ahead to force a project into reality without first asking how beneficial it might be. Would we have the same proportion of dissatisfying or detrimental initiatives in our society if followers of Jesus were assessing ideas at embryonic stages? This necessitates the question of whether there are (i) enough followers of Jesus in Scottish workplaces and by extension, (ii) whether there are

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[45] Thanks to Richard Bauckham who sent me this unpublished paper "'All the trees of the forest sing for joy": God and the poetry of trees', which he delivered at the *Society for the Study of Theology Conference 2010*, 12–14 April, Manchester, England, which informs this paragraph.

[46] Michael J. Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2012); Andrew Glyn, *Capital Unleashed: Finance, Globalization, and Welfare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[47] Wilfred M. McClay, 'Where Have we Come Since the 1950s? Thoughts on Material and American Social Character', in *Rethinking Materialism: Perspectives on the Spiritual Dimension of Economic Behavior*, ed. by Robert Wuthnow (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 25–71 (p. 52).

Christian workers who are senior enough across working all sectors to be at the table to influence such decisions. Moreover, do wise working agents need to be Christian to necessitate a beneficent outcome? There are many who would argue that this is not a prerequisite for the efficient ordering of projects.[48] Part of the struggle, too, is that liberal market forces demand we sell ideas swiftly to make money so that salaries can be paid at the end of each month. This 'invisible hand' squeezes out early analysis because no employer wishes to reduce their workforce due to pregnant deliberation of ideas, even if it is only because making redundancies costs so much emotional energy.[49]

Beyond the consideration of ideas, what might propagate the kingdom of heaven, displaying evidence that this reign is long since inaugurated on earth and that it might soon culminate with Christ's reappearance? A useful stratification to test working projects is offered by the identification of a fourfold nature to the kingdom of heaven.[50] The kingdom of heaven is a new order of life which evinces: (1) a harmony of relationship between God and humankind; (2) a pattern for how human-to-human relations can flourish; (3) a peace between human work and the rest of God's creation; (4) as well as a serenity and tranquillity in relating to oneself while working. I will briefly comment on each in their turn as a way of probing at types of work which might propagate the kingdom of heaven.

(1) The work of the church is vital in fostering and training its people in its ancient disciplines in order to relate to the God who has come near in Jesus Christ. 'The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers' (1 Pet 4:7). Because the structural motif of the Christian faith is *trinitarian*, the correlation as God's people to his triunity is an *ecclesial*, communitarian

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48 Weir, *Good Work*.

49 Scotland's economist Adam Smith (1723–1790) is the originator of this term. Adam Smith, *The Invisible Hand,* Penguin Great Ideas (London, Penguin Books, 2008).

50 Credit must go to Darrell Cosden who seeded this thought in his lectures at the International Christian College, Glasgow in 2001.

integration, and always with an *eschatological* bent.[51] As Grenz quite rightly emphasises, 'believers sense a special solidarity with one another. Within the context of the church, this solidarity works its way out in the practical dimensions of fellowship, support, and nurture that its members discover through their relationships as a communal people.'[52] In a time when churches across Scotland of all traditions cannot recruit and train enough leaders who will shepherd existing flocks of sheep, it appears that much is to be done to have in place adequate, let alone healthy, Christian leadership who can orchestrate spiritual verve and vitality among God's people. Done well, there are no people better suited to facilitate human relations with the triune God than the church.

(2) Not that the work of the church should be unlinked from repairing relationships, but any work which seeks to bring people together who are estranged is work befitting of this layer of his new order of life. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of the Republic of South Africa was and is a laudable attempt not only to deal with realities as they were perceived to have happened, but as a dual process which sought to encourage those involved to acknowledge culpability and seek out the possibility of restitution and reconciliation in the wake of the truth. Because the act of reconciliation is first and foremost an act of Jesus dispelling enmity to bring parties back together (Rom 5:8, 10–11; 2 Cor 5:19), any correlating act which genuinely facilitates and enables human relationships to mend themselves is work which echoes the reign of God on earth. Family mediation and marriage counselling, for example, done with the aim of restoring relationships must surely speak of God's realm at work.

We might add to this the difficult and fraught work of restorative justice and attempts to reintegrate prisoners back into society, along with, in rare cases, attempts at encouraging confession to their victims. With Scottish prisons overcrowded and with no end in sight to the continual incarcerations,[53] our society needs to attempt something

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[51] Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), pp. 169–273.
[52] Grenz and Franke, *Beyond,* p. 236.
[53] 'Overcrowding in Scottish prisons among worst in Europe', *Scottish Legal News*, 8 April 2021

completely alternative. Retributive justice with no thoroughgoing attempt at rehabilitation or restoration has not shown any benefit. Restorative justice, on the other hand, is a type of work which nudges in the direction of the kingdom of heaven. Real attempts at aiding fellow human beings to flourish in society, where people learn to give as well as receive, is surely one way of loving one's neighbour against their track record. Even if attempts are ultimately unworkable, the instinct to not assign someone to a dark fate speaks of a human-to-human spilling over of God's *'hesed*.

(3) With the post-flood reiteration of the cultural mandate to Noah and his sons, God states a change in relations between humans and animals: 'The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth […] every bird […] on everything that creeps […] on all the fish' (Gen 9:2). Sin entered God's good creation and has marred it significantly. The 'dread' which animals experience in relation to humans is one major difference between prelapsarian Eden and Mount Ararat. Yet there is a hope that these relations are reconciled at the new creation where even the vulnerable 'nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp' (Isa 11:8). Here we see momentarily the reversal of human/animal dynamics as well as predator and prey animals put on peaceable terms. There are flashes and glimpses of these surprise relations in the present day, but wherever there is work being done to better human/animal relations and the management thereof, this might be conceived of as the propagation of the kingdom of heaven *de jure*. In Scotland we could consider the reintroduction of beavers in Knapdale, which has received both plaudits and criticism. Despite disagreement, the human decision was made to reintegrate them back into our country. Beavers instinctively carve out new wetlands, benefit and help to organise woodland, and consequently (perhaps intentionally?) encourage a richer equilibrium for other living species.[54] Although some humans object to their wetland reorganisation, there may be no grounds for any moral high ground given the historically destructive stance of

<https://www.scottishlegal.com/articles/overcrowding-in-scottish-prisons-among-worst-in-europe> [accessed 23 June 2023].

[54] 'Scottish Beavers', Scottish Wildlife Trust <https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/our-work/our-projects/scottish-beavers/> [accessed 23 June 2023].

humans towards them that led to the extinction of beavers on our island by the sixteenth century.

(4) Work which aids people in the task of better knowing and understanding themselves, not only in relation to others but also in order to healthily and accurately think of themselves, can be work befitting of the kingdom of heaven. Loving others as we love ourselves only functions on the assumption that we do love ourselves. For those whose default setting is self-loathing or self-hatred, society as well as the person themselves are set up for disaster. The work of self-understanding and self-love, or 'inner work', with the goal of learning to love oneself, when done well will then precipitate the ability to genuinely love others. An example of an avenue to understanding ourselves and each other that has Christian roots is the Enneagram of personality, which 'illustrates the nine ways we get lost, but also the nine ways we can come home to our True Self'.[55] The wisdom that this system of thought offers is that 'when properly used as a lens, [it] can both increase our self-awareness and foster compassion for others'.[56]

Such working examples and motivations nudge, in broad contours and with hopeful instincts, towards the kingdom of heaven. Before Jesus's *parousia* unalterably takes place, so the Parable of the Talents warns, human work ought to somehow expand. Illustrations of what growth could and should not mean are roughly outlined above.

Conclusion

Each Matthean 'eschatological discourse' from chapter 25 provides edges of their own sort. Correspondingly, they inform any eschatology of work. *Watchful patience* holds in tension the need to be on alert in the

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[55] Christopher L. Heuertz, *The Sacred Enneagram: Finding Your Unique Path to Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), p. 25.

[56] A. J. Sherrill, *The Enneagram for Spiritual Formation: How Knowing Ourselves Can Make Us More Like Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2020), p. 25. However, Richard Rohr offers a caution that this benefit can be compromised. Deviated from its Christian roots unhinges the practice from the Source and secularises its packaging as one of a plethora in the psychological world. 'Richard Rohr', Enneagram Mapmakers with Christopher Heuertz, 29 June 2021, podcast <https://enneagrammapmakers.podbean.com/e/richard-rohr/> [accessed 23 June 2023].

endeavour of work without denouncing the tasks at hand. Indeed, by continually attending to this tautness, work can be present and at its best without distraction and fecklessness. *Expansive work* demands a critical assessment of the liberal market and unbridled capitalism, while also having an adequate replacement definition. I have offered a fourfold stratification of God's kingdom as a prism by which to determine whether certain projects are in keeping with the divine realm intended for this earth.

Jesus's *parousia* necessarily sharpens the focus of the form(s) of work his followers aim to perform (or get involved in) in concert with the intensity by which said work is delivered. Allowing for and enquiring how the coming *parousia* informs human work vitally incorporates this oft-forgotten component of final state eschatology into an eschatology of work.

Book Reviews

Brian Froese, *California Mennonites* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 334 pages. ISBN: 9781421415123.

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For centuries, California has occupied a unique place within the American culture and imagination as a land of opportunity, paradise, and adventure. Brian Froese, in *California Mennonites*, seeks to tell the story of the Mennonites in the Golden State, both forming and being formed by the California experience in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In this book, Froese argues convincingly that, by migrating to California, 'Mennonites employed several strategies to bring together religious identity, accommodation, and practice so that their Mennonitism could take root in the Golden State' (p. xii). However, this is not just a story of Mennonites within the political boundaries of the state of California, but rather how the California experience created a new breed of Mennonites, which Froese states, 'produced an ambivalent pacifism and softened sectarian impulses with urban evangelical realities' (p. 230).

A common theme throughout the book is the underlying tension of how to respond to the pressures of modernity experienced by the Mennonites in California, such as 'urbanity, cultural diversity, changing economy, and shifting mores'. Drawing on extensive research with archival records and congregational histories, Froese identifies evangelicalism, Anabaptism, and secularism as the commitments that shaped the Mennonite responses to these pressures, represented by 'a selective retaining and discarding of Mennonite religious practices, identities, and expressions'. The triangulation between these commitments, Froese suggests, made the Mennonites in California 'a dynamic people who did not simply become modern, but who actively

shaped their experience to engage modernity on their own terms' (p. 242).

While the book primarily focuses on the years 1890–1975, it does include a very brief epilogue bringing the story into the twenty-first century, which leaves the reader desiring a more thorough treatment than the epilogue is able to provide. It is perhaps unfair to critique a book for not including something outside of its set parameters but, having found Froese's writing up to the 1970s to be so engaging, I kept wanting to hear more of this story and its recent developments. Of particular interest would be the shifting and evolving nature of Mennonite identity in California with the growth of ethnic minority Mennonite churches, the influence of New Calvinism, and the practice of dropping 'Mennonite' from many church names. This, however, may have to be saved for future scholarship.

Admittedly, it may seem a little odd to review a book on California Mennonites in a journal for European Baptists, yet Froese's study of a baptistic Christian community's engagement with the pressures of modernity in a particular place is something that warrants our attention and consideration. While the names and places may be different, the story is quite familiar: how do we live lives worthy of the calling we have received in a rapidly changing world?

John Maiden, *Age of the Spirit: Charismatic Renewal, the Anglo-World, and Global Christianity, 1945-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 288 pages. ISBN: 9780198847496.

Reviewed by Ian Randall

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This is an outstanding study of charismatic renewal, a movement that changed the face of global Christianity. For years my own 'go to' book on early charismatic renewal in Britain was Peter Hocken's *Streams of Renewal* (1997). John Maiden's work expands in at least three ways what was done by Hocken. First, the starting point of 1945 — indeed the reach back goes further — enables deep tap roots to be explored. I was

especially intrigued by the link with *Cursillos de Cristiandad*, established on the Spanish island of Mallorca in 1944. Second, there is the geographical expansion, taking in the Anglo-world and showing the remarkable web of connections within the movement. Third, Maiden's expansive study interacts with wider societal trends such as secularisation and cosmopolitanism.

The themes of the chapters are themselves innovative. 'Potential' looks at antecedents and 'follows the flows' in astonishing detail. 'Pentecost' analyses how varied currents came together and produced what Maiden terms a 'Spiritscape', which he convincingly situates within the long 1960s — an era of cultural upheaval and experiments in churchmanship. 'Mediation' has as its focus the way forms of media transmitted and coloured the movement. 'Body' takes up the areas of communal life, leadership, and the roles of men and women. 'Imagination' offers important insights into how charismatics imagined not only what God was doing but what they believed he would do. 'World' looks at the global picture beyond the Anglo settings, and the final chapter, 'Legacy', takes the complex story beyond 1980.

Baptists appear throughout the narrative. Readers wishing to trace how Baptists were influenced by and had an impact on the expressions of renewal will find that they are taken on journeys that incorporate a range of Baptist communities. In the British context, an article by Douglas McBain, who appears in the text without being named ('one prominent British Baptist') is cited, but it would have been helpful to include his wide-ranging book on Baptists and renewal from the 1960s to the 1990s, *Fire over the Waters*. Alongside McBain, one of the most influential leaders in the developing renewal in the Baptist Union in England was Nigel Wright, who became principal of Spurgeon's College, and the sympathetically critical contribution by Wright, Tom Smail, and Andrew Walker, *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology*, could usefully have been discussed, perhaps under 'Legacy'.

It is, of course, inevitable that even in a book that is replete with meticulous historical investigation and theological scholarship there will be points that could have been developed further. This is, however, a truly ground-breaking study — a work described by Stuart Piggin as 'a miracle'. It is superbly written and it will repay reading and re-reading in

order to follow the dazzling array of strands of spiritual renewal that John Maiden has uncovered.

Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World*, 2nd edn (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018), 272 pages. ISBN: 9781532617973.

Reviewed by Daniel Trusiewicz

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Fourteen years after its first publication, this second edition of *Post-Christendom* describes the huge contrast between the Christianity which started as a movement and the Christendom which is today a well consolidated but also fossilised establishment. The population of today's Europe is gradually being secularised and this process may be indicated by the term 'Post-Christendom', meaning a society where Christianity has been losing influence. The author laments the state of the Christian church today and asks crucial and poignant questions about the future.

Having defined and illustrated 'Post-Christendom', Murray uses the following chapters to take us on a thought-provoking journey from the wellspring of Christianity in the first century to the present time. Emperor Constantine's 'conversion' was a political act that served the goals of the Roman Empire. He saw an advantage to favour Christianity and most Christians gladly accepted it. Similar polity was implemented by his successors, which resulted in the further advance of the Christian religion. The side effect was a growing self-esteem and even arrogance of the church.

By the fourteenth century, the shift from Christianity (movement) towards Christendom (establishment) had made a major change, which eventually weakened the church. Medieval Christendom became wealthy and totalitarian (also corrupt) and influenced all spheres of public life, so that massive church buildings were constructed. Any opposition was quenched and dissenters were not tolerated.

The Protestant Reformation introduced important changes but did not seriously challenge the Christendom mindset. The Anabaptists

had radical demands and challenges against Christendom. They rejected infant baptism and belonging to the state church, and advocated for religious liberty and nonviolence. They were persecuted by both Catholics and Protestants.

The age of Enlightenment turned attention towards reason and so post-Christendom was on its way. The numerous spiritual 'awakenings' since the seventeenth century resulted in the rise of many free churches which still bear multiple vestiges of Christendom. The Moravians in the early eighteenth century embarked on a global mission. William Carey urged similar action and started the modern missionary movement. A few centuries later, the movement has overtaken Christendom (sixty percent of Christians live now in Africa, Asia, and Latin America).

The later chapters of the book raise many questions about church in the post-Christendom era. How, for example, in the global age, can non-western missionaries avoid importing the Christendom vestiges into their own societies? How much should the emerging churches be different from the traditional ones? What is non-negotiable? What form of proclamation would be most effective? And many others…

The emerging churches seem to appreciate simplicity and humility, something that has been lost in Christendom's established institution. Therefore, says Murray, post-Christendom churches need to be modelled after the early Christian pattern. He concludes, 'The language of *pilgrimage* seems to describe well the Christians as they are the followers of Jesus.'

This is a challenging book and raises many important questions for mission in a constantly changing and increasingly secular world.

Frances Mackenney-Jeffs, *Reconceptualising Disability for the Contemporary Church* (London: SCM Press, 2021), 214 pages. ISBN: 9780334059162.

Reviewed by Oleksandr Geychenko

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Frances Mackenney-Jeffs, a Franciscan spiritual director and Christian counsellor, has offered a book on the important and sensitive issue of disability and the church (based on her doctoral thesis). The book is for clergy and lay people 'who engage in ministry with disabled people to think more deeply about the relationship between the Church and disabled people and to be mindful of the dangers that lie in that direction' (p. xv).

In a way this book fits within the recent flow of publications on disability and theology. In the first two chapters Mackenney-Jeffs describes disability from a historical perspective (chapter 1) and introduces models of disability and research methodologies used in disability studies (chapter 2). This part of the book seeks to orientate the reader in the complex and established field of disability studies and internal discussion on different models. It is informative and enlists key names and movements, which is helpful for those who want to explore the field further. Perhaps the section on research methodologies and challenges is interesting for students and those who want to immerse themselves in researching this area. It contains description of some key approaches, models, issues, and examples of scholarly approaches. It is basic and may be sufficient for novices but those who seek a more detailed introduction should turn elsewhere.

In the second part the author turns to theological issues. She first focuses on the issue of personhood (chapter 3), then continues looking for elements for the construction of a theology of disability (chapter 4), and exploring some new streams of theology and their value for the issue of disability (chapter 5). Addressing the problematic concept of disability as static and normality as exclusive (pp. 59–61), Mackenney-Jeffs opens a discussion on what it means to be human and how this includes the limits as norm. Her extensive discussion of the problem of suffering (pp. 78–100) comprises the core of chapter 4. She

rightly criticises the usual concept of redemptive suffering and offers a more nuanced approach by stating that 'God is not the *author* of suffering […] does not waste our suffering and uses it productively *provided that we cooperate with him*.' (p. 95)

In the last three chapters she addresses more practical issues: inclusion of people with disabilities in the church and some examples of this (chapter 6); experiences of those who had children with disabilities and how this transformed them (chapter 7); and the pastoral support of families with members who have disabilities (chapter 8). The book finishes with a summary of tasks that lie before the church — educational, spiritual/theological, and support (pp. 187–89).

The book does serve its purpose of introducing its intended readership into the field by stimulating thinking about disability and pointing to the existing issues and challenges of disability for the church. What is particularly valuable is that Mackenney-Jeffs invites the reader to think about traditional doctrines in the light of the disability movement and those challenges that it poses to the church and its theology. Occasional turning to her personal experience makes the narrative colourful and engaging. *Reconceptualising Disability* is a good start for those who want to explore relations between disability studies and the church.

Graham Kings, *Nourishing Mission: Theological Settings*, Theology and Mission in World Christianity series (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 250 pages. ISBN: 9789004469419.

Reviewed by Sarah Mhamdi

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This work is a collection of essays that span the working life of Graham Kings from his time as a Church Missionary Society partner in Kenya in 1985 to Bishop of Sherbourne and retirement in 2020. The chapters are grouped into the different settings of Kenya, Cambridge, Islington, Sherbourne, and Lambeth. Within these contexts we have glimpses into Kings' own ministry, introductions to significant people in his thought, historical reflections, theological contributions, poetry, and a theme of

inter-faith relations and mission. Most of the writing has been published before as articles or lectures. The chapters that have been republished now have a short introduction by Kings.

Each chapter can be read individually as, having been separately published over a period of years, they are not connected; the link within their settings is the time period in which they were worked on. However, the overall theme of mission, of learning and serving as a whole, and global church is clear. Kings begins with a case study on Archbishop Gitare of Kenya's prophetic use of Scripture; explores how African theologians approach other faiths; reflects on the continuing influence of Max Warren on inter-faith dialogue; comments on the post-Lausanne conversations between evangelicals and Roman Catholics on mission; and in a late chapter concludes that 'it takes the whole world to understand the whole gospel' (p. 242).

While the tone is theological and Kings is clearly at home in the academic world, there is also reflection on practice from his time as a parish priest in Islington and in a couple of chapters Kings has used some of his own poetry and commissioned paintings as a method for reflection.

I feel that the book would have benefitted from having had an afterword added to the chapters as well as an introduction. As it stands, many of the chapters are interesting and some of the insights relevant but will probably be picked up by those reading for historical interest or for research. An afterword written in the present day, with additional information or reflections, would have made this volume a useful and valuable contribution to recommend to those involved in mission and mission thinking today.

Fernando Enns, Nina Schroeder-van 't Schip and Andrés Pacheco-Lozano (eds), *A Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace: Global Mennonite Perspectives on Peacebuilding and Nonviolence* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2023), 450 pages. ISBN: 9781666713817.

Reviewed by David McMillan

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As a compilation of papers, poems, and reflections from the Second Global Mennonite Peacebuilding Conference and Festival, the book provides an extensive range of resources and inspiration for anyone involved or interested in issues of justice and peace. Organised into six sections, this interdisciplinary and international collection covers the ecumenical engagement, spiritualities, and theologies of Just Peace as well as ethics, history, and practices of Just Peace.

The book demonstrates something of the diversity of Mennonite engagement in and approach to peacebuilding as well as the breadth of understanding of what must be encompassed within the pursuit of justice and peace. Papers on migration, refugee care, ecology, gender, and racial justice all feature with the text, which also seeks to reflect the range of artistic expression that marked the event as both conference and festival.

Two of the editors (Enns and Pacheco-Lozano) set the tone of the book as they explore and reflect upon their experience of Mennonite engagement in ecumenical 'Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace'. Charting the development of the World Council of Churches initiative, they share the story of 'Pilgrim Team Visits' to various locations around the world, engaging with issues of truth and trauma, land and displacement, gender justice, and racism. Assured of the importance of ecumenical pilgrimage in pursuit of justice and peace, they highlight the concepts of companionship and kenosis as essential understandings of the nature of pilgrimage in order to avoid overtones of colonialism or proselytism.

Exposure of the extent of John Howard Yoder's sexual violence has raised some tough questions about the integrity of the Mennonite peace church tradition. It is to the credit of the organisers and editors that the question of how to address Yoder's violence was included in

the conference and the publication. Daniel Drost's chapter 'Sexual Violence: Working with John Howard Yoder's Ecclesiology in the Light of His Abuse of Women' addresses the question of what to do and how to engage with Yoder's work, which has been so influential in the thinking of many in the peace church tradition. Drost's conclusions may not be to everyone's satisfaction, but he does offer a coherent possible redemptive appropriation of Yoder's work.

Benjamin W. Goossen delves into another difficult element of Mennonite history as he explores the involvement of Ukrainian Mennonites in the Holocaust and expressions of support for National Socialist ideology. In a chapter that is both shocking and searingly honest, Goossen argues that 'excavating this troubled past can open paths for atonement, contributing to peacebuilding within and beyond the Anabaptist tradition' (p. 267). While neither Drost's nor Goossen's themes are typical of the content of the book, which has much that is forward-thinking, joyful, and inspirational, their inclusion speaks to a Mennonite integrity in the pursuit of justice and peace that, in my opinion, makes this book all the more important.

Karen E. Smith, *Following on the Way: The Acts of the Apostles as A Guide to Spiritual Formation* (Macon: Smith & Helwys Publishing, 2023), 277 pages. ISBN: 9781641733946.

Reviewed by Tommaso Manzon

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Karen E. Smith is an Honorary Senior Research Fellow of the School of History, Archaeology, and Religion at Cardiff University and an ordained Baptist minister, whose research interests focus on the areas of formation for ministry, church history, and Christian spirituality. Her most recent output represents a 'spiritual formation commentary' on the *Acts of the Apostles*, seeking to focus on themes connected to spiritual formation and discipleship as found in the second part of Luke's work.

Accordingly, *Following on the Way* could have been sub-titled the '"So-what?" Guide to the *Acts of the Apostles*'. This is not a derogatory statement, but rather an appreciation of the practicality of Smith's work.

In contrast with many academic commentaries that leave the reader with the question 'What should I do with this?', *Following on the Way* goes straight to the point. In section after section, Smith brings out the spiritual and therefore practical implications of the *Acts of the Apostles*, always keeping an eye to the macro-narrative of the disciples' growth on the way of Christ. In her own words, this represents her attempt to go 'beyond a mere reading of the text' and reflect on the dynamics of spiritual formation. Admirably, she balances the focus of her exegesis between the communal and personal levels of discipleship and distributes the weight equally between meditating on the posture adopted and the challenges faced by the followers of Christ.

On top of this, the practicality of *Following on the Way* is enhanced by the fact that each one of its portions (28 in total, one for each chapter of *Acts*) culminates in a 'draw your own conclusions' section provided with questions. This, together with its accessible language and clear prose, makes *Following on the Way* a useful tool for small groups that want to meditate together on the theory and practice of discipleship.

To sum up, *Following on the Way* is a great tool for preachers and theologians, but also more generally for any Christian who wishes to delve more deeply into the *Acts of the Apostles* while taking a reflective attitude towards their walk with the Lord.

Teun van der Leer, Henk Bakker, Steven R. Harmon, Elizabeth Newman (eds), *Seeds of the Church: Towards an Ecumenical Baptist Ecclesiology*, Free Church, Catholic Tradition (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2022), 166 pages. ISBN: 9781666718379.

Reviewed by Oleksandr Geychenko

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One may wonder what another book on Baptist ecclesiology can add to a rather vast body of publications. *Seeds of the Church* is worth attention because it represents a Baptist communal attempt to address one of the two convergence documents produced by the World Council of Churches, that is, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (*TCTCV*). This

project was initiated by the BWA Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Christian Unity in order 'to write a response together […] and to add a sketch of Baptist ecclesiology as a contribution to the ecumenical discourse about the church' (p. xv).

The volume contains the text of the official response of the BWA Commission (pp. 1–23), an introduction into Baptistic ecclesial vision (pp. 24–31), and twelve papers by Baptist scholars (pp. 32–166). The editors think these pieces represent 'bifocal vision (visible unity and legitimate diversity)' (p. xvi) that Baptists bring to the ecumenical table. Starting from Baptist convictions and practices (p. xvi) the authors engage *TCTCV*, providing a Baptist perspective on it and critiquing some of its aspects. This made the editors' task complex because the book represents different voices and levels of interaction with *TCTCV*.

Some authors suggest that ecumenical ecclesiology could be enriched by elements of Baptist ecclesiology. Paul Fiddes suggests that using the language of covenant alongside *TCTCV*'s language of *koinonia* can 'bring a sense of commitment and discipleship that may sometimes be missing' (p. 42); Henk Bakker opines that the practice of congregational discernment may enrich the worldwide church (p. 53); Marion Carson deepens *TCTCV*'s understanding of Christ's call to unity by explaining the context and theological meaning of John 17 and pointing to the missional dimension of unity; and Jan Martijn Abrahamse suggests bringing together the Baptist concept of gathering and *TCTCV*'s emphasis on *koinonia* (pp. 61–62). Others engage *TCTCV* critically. Thus, Uwe Swarat critiques its neglect of the priesthood of all believers as 'the biggest obstacle on the path of unity' (p. 94); late Baptist historian Anthony Cross doubts whether the proposed way to unity through mutual recognition of the whole process of initiation is viable at all (p. 104); Frank Rees notices *TCTCV*'s truncated perspective on the nature of ministry, suggests that recent developments in pastoral care could be incorporated, and provides an example of a Baptist vision of pastoral care (pp. 125-6); and Daniël Drost reflects on how the diasporic mission approach of Dutch Urban Expressions can shape ecclesiological thought to make it more relevant and down to earth (pp. 148–152). Papers on befriending (Lina Toth), preaching (Ruth Gouldbourne), theologising (Amy Chilton), and remembering

(Elizabeth Newman) start from some *TCTCV* ideas and images, but they represent fresh ways of thinking about Baptist ecclesial practices rather than dealing with the document. Regardless, this variety and the level of engagement, the use of *TCTCV*, the focus on the practices and overall perspective of 'receptive ecumenism' (p. xiii) provides a framework that holds diverse Baptist voices together.

One aspect of this work requires improvement. It is obvious that the editors attempted to gather a balanced team of authors. It is highly commendable that female theological voices are well represented, and these contributions are very significant. However, it is noticeable that the contributors represent the 'global North'. It would be interesting to see to what extent the shape of the response and its flavour would change if the project included representatives from the global South, especially from places where the Church is growing fast or facing significant challenges that test Baptist convictions and the relevance of *TCTCV* text. Apart from this, the volume is a valuable and significant contribution to ecclesiological discussions.

John Baxter-Brown (ed.), *Call to Mission and Perceptions of Proselytism: a Reader for a Global Conversation* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2022), 363 pages. ISBN: 9781532658778.

Reviewed by Timothy Kay

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Call to Mission and Perceptions of Proselytism explores the global conversation on interdenominational proselytism from a myriad of perspectives. The book is divided into three parts. The first part, 'Setting the Scene', provides historical and conceptual background to the modern notion of proselytism, while simultaneously acknowledging the quagmire of trying to define this emotionally laden term. The second section, 'Statements and Reports from Christian Bodies', provides 150 pages of carefully constructed statements from diverse sources including Catholic, Pentecostal, Orthodox, Seventh-Day Adventist,

Evangelical, and Coptic Churches, as well as numerous interdenominational consultations, which enable readers to experience many of the key moments in the global dialogue from Vatican II to today. The third part, 'Articles by Individual Commentators', allows a timely shift from official statements to individual opinions, all of which are pregnant with fruitful insights regarding both the practice of unethical proselytism and the conversation surrounding it. The stated goal of the editor was to 'allow the authors and drafters of the different documents to keep their own voice' (p. xiii). This has been immensely successful. The reader walks away with the sense of having truly tasted a smorgasbord of reflection on this vital topic.

The real problem, faced by all contributors in the volume, is that condemning proselytism proves far easier than defining it. As one moves through the various official statements on the topic, it becomes apparent that proselytism is often no more than a strawman. What Christian body would not condemn 'unethical sheep-stealing'? There are indeed several individual commentators who seem willing to develop a real, heuristic definition of unethical proselytism, but it is nonetheless hard to avoid the feeling that this corner of ecumenical dialogue is stuck in a mud of stereotypes and mistaken allegations. Maybe future interlocutors can find us a way out of it. For this to take place, the next stage of the global dialogue should involve a humble willingness to sit together, across denominational lines, with real case studies of alleged proselytism, in which church leaders ask one another, 'How exactly would you recommend we do things differently?'

A final recommendation for future dialogue is for the conversation to come full circle. This volume adequately presents Orthodox allegations of Catholic and Protestant proselytism and Catholic allegations of Protestant proselytism but the book offers no allegations of Orthodox proselytism. This seems strange, especially given the extreme forms of inter-Orthodox proselytism currently occurring in Ukraine, as well as the far more acceptable example of the surge of evangelicals turning East in North America, supported by Orthodox radio, podcasts, publishing, and social media. It is time for the conversation to come full circle, and for all of us to engage lovingly and humbly in a genuine dialogue, enriched by real case studies, real

definitions, and real conversational equality. This book will hopefully prove to be a great stepping stone in that direction.

Sally Nash, *Shame and the Church: Exploring and Transforming Practice* (London: SCM Press, 2020), 193 pages. ISBN: 9780334058847.

Reviewed by Susan Stevenson

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Shame and the Church is a work of practical theology reflecting on the experience of shame. It aims to enable ministers to avoid practices which exacerbate shame and to help them establish communities in which people can grow in healing and freedom from shame.

Sally Nash is a Church of England priest, a theological educator, and the Director of the Institute for Children, Youth and Mission. In this work she differentiates between 'guilt', which focuses on actions (*what you did was wrong*), and 'shame', which concerns who we are (*you are a bad person*).

While acknowledging societies which are shame/honour based, the primary focus of this work is on the more personal experience of shame. It draws on the author's own experience of shame, and on the experiences of people with whom she works. The book weaves together personal stories, theological reflection, and a six-fold typology of shame developed by the author.

The six dimensions she identifies are personal, communal, relational, structural, theological, and historical shame. In chapters 1 to 5 the concept of shame is examined, whilst chapters 6 to 9 consider ways of confronting and relieving the shame which people experience.

The opening two chapters present some of the theoretical and theological underpinning of the work, with the second chapter offering detailed references for anyone wanting to investigate further the biblical background drawn on here. Chapters 3 to 5 explain her typology of shame and are full of people's stories, illustrating different types and experiences of shame.

The focus turns to ministerial practice in chapters 6 to 8, and many working ministers will find this section of the book particularly helpful. On the one hand it explores liturgy and ritual and, on the other, pastoral care. Both chapters offer ideas and examples of material used by the author. These materials are offered either to be adapted for use by ministers in their own context or to act as a stimulus for those wanting to develop their own resources and practice. The final chapter offers further resources towards creating 'a less shaming church'.

Each chapter concludes with a helpful series of questions for personal or group reflection, making it useful for church leaders, for those who have experienced shame, and for anyone who wants to understand better the complex nature of shame in our personal and social life.

I came to this book hesitantly, fearing a highly technical approach to individual distress, but found something quite different. Whilst offering a sound theoretical framework for understanding shame, this work contains much more. It offers much to aid growth in personal awareness, contains fresh and practical insights about the impact of the language we use, and supremely it pushes readers to reflect deeply about how best to communicate core beliefs about the fundamental nature of God and of the gospel.

Narry F. Santos and Xenia Ling-Yee Chan (eds), *The Present and Future of Evangelical Mission: Academy, Agency, Assembly, and Agora Perspectives from Canada* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2022), 182 pages. ISBN: 9781666730968.

Reviewed by Brian Talbot

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This collection of essays originated in papers given at some Evangelical Missiological Society of Canada meetings in 2020. It is not accidental, but a deliberate policy by the editors to seek to give opportunities for a diverse range of voices to be heard in this conversation. The participants

who provided the papers include those working in academic institutions, mission agencies, churches, and others in business or a wider marketplace.

The book is divided into four parts. Part One is entitled 'Mission in Retrospect and Prospect'. There are two papers in this section. The first looks at the future prospects for missiology in North America from a contributor from an Asian Indian background, currently resident and teaching in Chicago, USA. The response was given by a second-generation Canadian-born Chinese pastor, ministering to a Hong Kong immigrant diaspora congregation in the greater Toronto area. The second main paper was an opportunity for a Canadian indigenous voice to give a prophetic challenge to western ideas about mission, with a response from a bi-vocational Bible College instructor and Chaplain of a seniors' residential community. Part Two is entitled 'Past Christian Mission and its Relevance to Present Mission'. The first paper considers Clement of Alexandria's contribution to contextual mission. The second paper engages with and extends Ralph Winter's 'Ten Epochs of Redemptive History', while the third reviews the place of women in Chinese and Korean churches. Part Three is entitled 'Present Evangelical Mission and Its Relevance to Future Mission'. Paper one, 'Diversity is Fact; Inclusion is a Choice: Is Multiculturalism bad for the Church in Canada?' is provided by the manager of Agency Collaboration at Mission Central in Vancouver. Paper two was written by the Missional Network Developer for International Teams Canada, an international development agency based in Elmira, Ontario and is entitled 'Churches Together: Mission-Engaged Differentiated Unity as a Hermeneutic of the Gospel'. The third, 'Healing of Memories: Reconciling the Church for the Reconciliation of Community', is by a member of the Peace and Reconciliation network of the World Evangelical Alliance; with 'Power and Participation in Evangelical Mission' by a practical theologian and church planter from Toronto, as the fourth paper. Part Four is entitled 'Present and Future of Workplace Mission'. It has two papers: 'The Business of Mission: An Imago Dei for Workplace as Mission' by two academic specialists in Business Studies and Social Sciences respectively; and 'Renewing the Role of the Church in Cross-Cultural Marketplace Ministry' by a mission society international director. This is followed by

a concluding paper, 'Surfacing Significant Changes in our Understanding, Attitudes, and Actions towards Evangelical Mission', by one of the book's two editors.

Increasing secularisation in wider Canadian society, together with a continuing decline in the number of people identifying as practising Christians, has been a wake-up call for Canadian Christians as they seek to raise up and equip a new generation of Christian leaders to engage in effective, fruitful mission and ministry in their country. This situation is similar in many respects to other historically Christian countries like the United Kingdom. The editors of this volume are to be commended for giving an opportunity to this diverse group of practising Christians to offer perspectives and raise pertinent questions about the past, present, and future of Christian Mission in Canada. The reader is drawn into the debate that is energised by significant biblical hope for the future; but, as these contributors make clear, there are no easy answers for the future of missions. It is warmly commended.

Robert Edmund Cotter, *John Cennick (1718–1755): Methodism, Moravianism and the Rise of Evangelicalism* (New York; Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), 177 pages. ISBN: 9781032128962.

Reviewed by Jared Stephens

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In this volume, Robert Cotter (a Church of Ireland minister who earned his doctorate in the study of John Cennick) looks with fresh eyes, and new research, at the life and work of John Cennick, a tremendously important figure in the English Revivals of the eighteenth century, who has been heretofore sorely overlooked by the sweep of history. He was counted one of the best preachers of that era and was both a prolific hymn writer and a dedicated evangelist. This book explores these themes as well as delving into the person behind the work.

Cotter examines John Cennick's background, historical context, and life. He explores previously unpublished primary sources, drawing on diaries, letters, papers, and first-hand accounts. The author assumes

that the reader has a certain knowledge of the time in which Cennick lived and, at least, an introductory knowledge of the Moravian Church. Through the book's seven chapters, Cotter takes the reader on a coherent journey through important aspects of Cennick's thought and work, beginning with a broader introduction to who Cennick was and his historical significance ('How the Preacher became the Apostle of Ireland'). Cotter moves systematically through Cennick's work in the Methodist Movement, then his formation within the Moravian Church, and his evangelistic work in Ireland. He then considers Cennick's theological approach and development (chapters on 'Christocentrism', Eschatology', and 'Ecumenism'). Finally, he reflects on Cennick's life and work, and his impact on the Moravian Church and Christianity in general within Ireland ('John Cennick the Mystical Maverick').

To fully engage with this work, the reader will benefit from having a broader knowledge of the English Revival of the eighteenth century, and some understanding of the Moravian Church, to understand terms, players, and situations, since the author does not provide an explanation of the historical setting.

Cotter brings to life the person of John Cennick in a fresh and insightful way. The book is well structured, well conceived, and well written. Cennick is a significant, yet under-explored, character in both social and religious history. He was a courageous, unorthodox thinker, preacher, and teacher. His passion for Jesus and the work of the gospel brought a revival to Ireland that drew people from all backgrounds and left a legacy of faith that still lives on today. I recommend this book to any who might wish to gain a deeper understanding of the Christian Church in Ireland today, for Cennick had a huge impact on the church extending far beyond the confines of the Moravian Church. It is especially relevant to the Baptist Church in the work of mission and evangelism, for Cennick and the Moravian Church were the catalyst for much of the early missional work of the Baptist Church: their methods, spiritual discipline, and dedication formed the inspiration for the explosion of missional work through the Baptist Missionary Society around the world.