

Progressive Voices



March 2020, PV32

Creation's splendour

Creation's splendour calls forth praise
for Nature's wealth, for vibrant life.
This planet home, a wondrous gift,
is threatened now by greed and strife.

Throughout the world a voice is heard
in varied cultures, distant climes.
We seek religious dialogue
and hope for peace in troubled times.

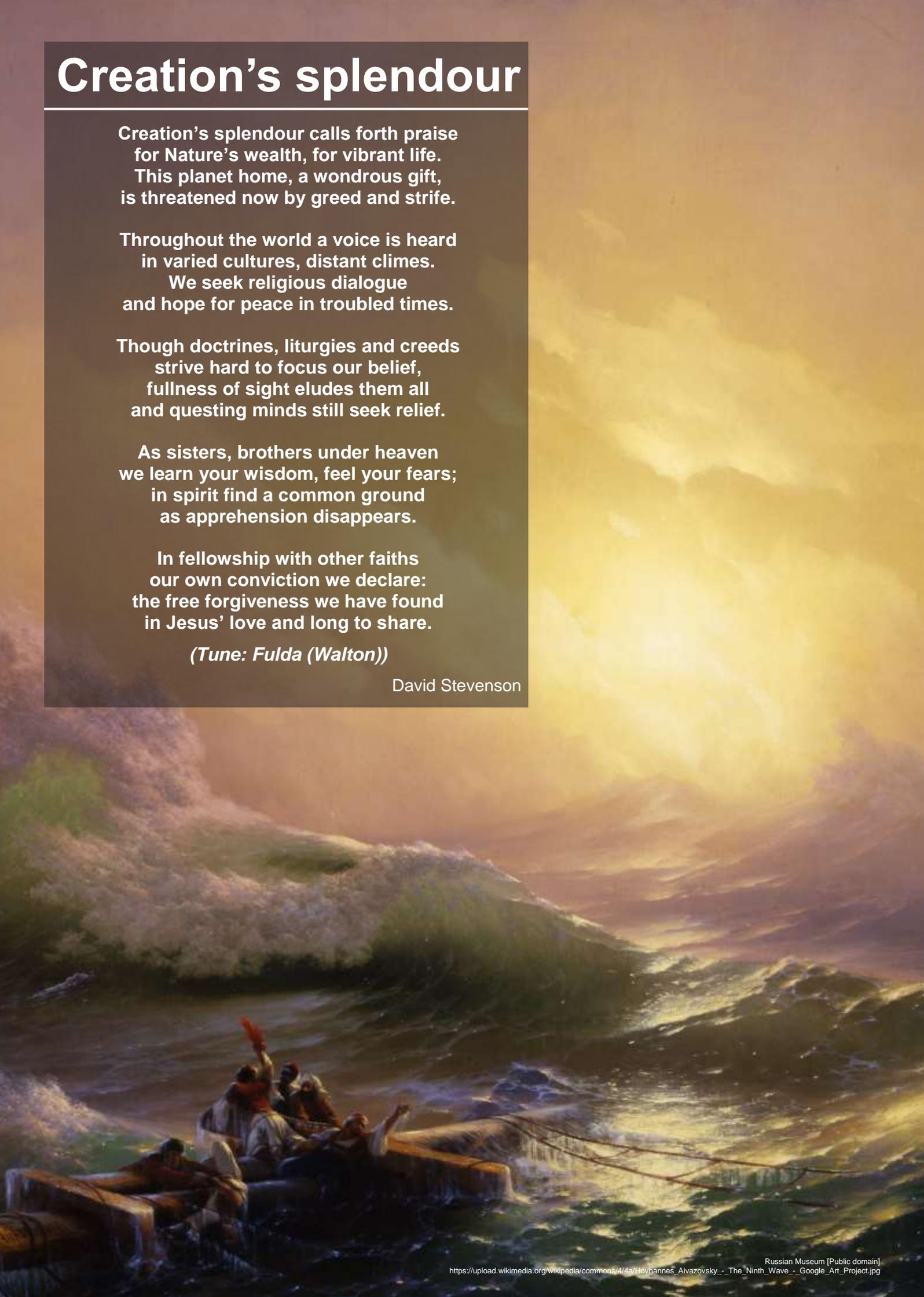
Though doctrines, liturgies and creeds
strive hard to focus our belief,
fullness of sight eludes them all
and questing minds still seek relief.

As sisters, brothers under heaven
we learn your wisdom, feel your fears;
in spirit find a common ground
as apprehension disappears.

In fellowship with other faiths
our own conviction we declare:
the free forgiveness we have found
in Jesus' love and long to share.

(Tune: Fulda (Walton))

David Stevenson



Contents

- 2 Hymn: Creation's splendour
- 3 Welcome; Staff and Trustees
- 4 Chair's Letter; Membership
- 5 To Sing or not to Sing?
- 6 The feeling may be missing
- 7 PCN Annual General Meeting (and film launch); Thinking Science, Thinking Faith Conference; Free to Believe Conference; Hymn: I cannot tell
- 8 What can we believe about Jesus? #2
- 9 Poem: Sometimes, in the dark moments; Poem: Portable Paradise
- 10 Then and Now
- 12 Making it in the end
- 14 Judas - a Psychiatric View
- 17 God: A Long-time Coming?
- 18 News from local groups; Letters
- 20 Reviews: Everyday Ubuntu, More Honest to God, Church of Snails, The Guided Life, Has Science Killed God?, Who Cares about HIV, Jesus and After, The Apostate's Creed, Outgrowing Dawkins
- 22 Living in Love and Faith Conference
- 23 Poem: Death's Welcome
- 24 Ten Commandments Remix

Welcome

We have ended up with an edition which contains a fair amount of light and shade. There are rays of hope. We have our upcoming AGM and anticipated film launch, and our engaging with the theme of science and religion. We celebrate the splendour of Creation, the joy of re-finding a singing voice, the experience of a Hindu sensing the spirit of Jesus, how the dynamics of the early church relate to us now, and a remix of ancient words to shine fresh light on the Ten Commandments. There is also a fair amount of shade. We reflect on the manner of Jesus' death, analyse Judas, wait upon God, and a personal story of a difficult road travelled. But even when light shines, shadows fall, in the gloom there can be a glimmer of light, and our poems call us to unfold our memories, carry paradise with us, and to welcome the darkness when it comes. We also have our usual roundup of news from our groups, book reviews and upcoming events. My thanks to all of our contributors, proof-members, and readers who make PV and PCN Britain what it is! Welcome to the 32nd edition of PV. Enjoy!



www.equalitytrust.org.uk

Your reflections, questions, events, poems, images, reviews, letters, comments, news, prayers and other contributions, are all welcome.

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Chair's Letter

As you read this edition of PV, our Annual General Meeting, together with the launch of our short films on March 21st, marks a significant development in this new(ish) year and new decade. The film project emerged from a long process of thought as to how we might face the world and our communities as they exist in reality. Issues around sexuality, climate chaos, poverty, the longing for good relationships, and cultural identity, all providing a challenge to Christian faith. The films have been made, and they are soon to be out there for all to see to prompt debate, discussion and action. They are short because so many people today experience news and views in short bursts via social media. In five minutes a lot can be said, both to build up and to tear down. We wish to build up and be a source of encouragement!

We have collaborated with the Student Christian Movement because we want these real life stories to be seen and heard and debated on college and university campuses, in schools and elsewhere. The subjects are not new, and in many ways the short films don't break new ground. However, they are sponsored by us, a progressive Christian organisation, which aims to promote open-minded and honest thinking about what religions might contribute and also how they are challenged as they find their place in today's context. We speak of Christianity being an incarnational faith as we consider how Jesus of Nazareth disclosed, definitively for many, the meaning of God as Love in his world, and therefore in ours.

Visual media are powerful tools of communication, are on so many different platforms, and many of us in the older generation can find it bewildering. There are, however, encouraging signs that more and more people are looking at our website and using it in different ways. This year we are to make fresh changes to make the site even more attractive to members and visitors alike.

But other forms matter too, not least the written word and here I want to give praise to our PV editor and all who contribute to this magazine, which in its totality has so much to say about progressive faith. I hope you as a reader will think about encouraging others, individuals and churches, to subscribe to PV? However, I have noticed, as I am sure you have, that the majority of contributors are men, who like me, are, let's say, in the third age of life. The trustees wish this to change, to have more women and younger writers and we are taking steps to bring this about.

Communication of course comes in many other forms, not least when we meet in our groups and in our larger gatherings. In conferences, such as the forthcoming Science and Religion conference in

York, we communicate deeply-held convictions or our confusion or questions, and we do so together as friends. My hope for this decade is that PCN will, through all types of communication, be a force for good, an encourager of honesty, of inclusion and of challenge.

At our last trustees meeting before the AGM we had much to discuss. Our finances are healthy thanks to your membership but we do need others to join us and I would ask that we all invite friends and those in our churches to come on board - after all a large membership itself communicates a positive message that there is a strong need for a more progressive understanding of Christian faith. In this year we want to hold more than one conference on the theme of science and religion. (In particular we are keen to have such a day based in Scotland.) Later in the year we intend to fly our flag once more at the Greenbelt festival and continue to partner in different ways with other organisations.

Finally, every three years or so, the trustees consider a set of priorities, a strategy for the years ahead. What will be the focus of our work? What aims and objectives can we work with? In the next edition of PV I will share with you the considered thoughts of the trustees about our priorities and canvass your opinions.

For now, as spring emerges, I hope that PCN can continue to refresh and inspire you.

Adrian Alker serves as the
Chair of PCN Britain
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MEMBERSHIP

PCN Britain has charitable status, and we depend wholly on members for funding. Membership is for all who value an open, progressive and theologically radical voice, and want to maintain and promote that generous understanding of faith.

£30 (£15 for limited income)

Receive 4 copies of PV each year, advance notice of events, reduced event fees, along with support and encouragement.

01594 516528

www.pcnbritain.org.uk/membership

To Sing or not to Sing?

Earlier in my life I used to love to sing - anywhere. I dare say I was not bad at it, and I remain grateful on many levels to the music department at my school.

Later, I always taught my own classes songs in foreign languages. Towards the end of my teaching career I had issues with my voice - probably through overuse and often volume-related, but also because of some as yet unidentified triggers that lead to sneezes, coughing and the temporary inability to make any sort of utterance. The students at school were delighted when I thus had no option but to leave the classroom for ten minutes, and rubbed their hands with glee!

Curiously however, and more significantly for me, there was another factor influencing my love of singing, and causing me to feel it had been destroyed for ever. I am referring to a rapidly growing distaste, sometimes metamorphosing into wincing or disgust, for what I term religious jargon, or theological language which I could not in good conscience go along with. Combined with the physical difficulties, the most I could often do was sing a few lines - even then an octave lower – before my voice would just ‘stick’ or I would have a coughing fit. In some respects, the fact that I was unable to sing what I did not wish to sing anyway, was quite convenient. I more or less gave up singing anything, especially hymns. I could not, however, emulate the behaviour of one acquaintance who, on rising to sing a hymn in church and discovering content incompatible with his theology, was in the habit of snapping his hymn book firmly shut. But the pleasure of singing had gone - at least so I thought. This state of affairs continued for some years, during which I managed ‘Happy Birthday’ and little else.

Fast forward to about twelve months ago when I started to attend the Unitarian chapel in which I now feel at home. One Sunday a miracle happened. My first attempts were less than tuneful, more determined than successful, yet nevertheless genuine: I actually really wanted to sing! I found it hard to believe either that I was producing some noise or that I was so keen to do so. This signalled the start of the process of retrieving my singing voice. I’m getting there!

I think there were several factors involved: the desire to be and feel included, the delight in finding my barriers to joining in were no longer there, the uplifting and encouraging nature of the sentiments expressed in the words, and the realisation that the whole exercise was eminently doable. Perhaps it’s a pity that I can’t remember which particular hymns were responsible for my ‘miracle’ but I remain well aware of some of the features they would or would not have contained.



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<https://www.needpix.com/photo/download/1138607/sing-comic-singer-young-song-singing-sound-microphone-face>

On the positive side there would have been text which served to provide:

- a sense of belonging to one another and to the sacred presence however conceived or referred to.
- encouragement to self and others along the path of life and faith, through the ups and downs we all encounter.
- a call to challenge and fight injustice and poverty.
- an emphasis on the roles we may play to enhance life for every human being and other forms of life.
- the down-to-earth quality of hopes, dreams and endeavours.

On the other hand, there would have been a lack or absence of:

- sacrificial language
- appeasement of an angry deity
- praise of Jesus (to my mind idolatry and something Jesus’ humility would have precluded).

As a consequence of rediscovering my wish to have a ‘singing voice’ I have joined a group which sings for fun and a community choir, reminding myself in the process that there is much in the material we tackle that is not to be taken literally. I find to my great surprise that I am actually enjoying singing Christmas carols and spirituals even where they contain theology that my head wouldn’t countenance. Further, the more often I sing, the less the physical issues seem to trouble me.

Performance and fun singing - in their different ways, and occasionally despite their content - together with hymn singing at chapel make a significant contribution to my overall sense of wellbeing. The jury is still out on cause and effect here, but I am so thankful to a community and its hymns for sparking off my miracle.



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The feeling may be missing

On my bookshelf is a little book 'The message of Jesus Christ', by Mohandas Gandhi. Gandhi was inspired by Jesus' life and message, but he never took on board the doctrine regarded as pivotal by many orthodox Christians. Personally, I have always resonated with Gandhi's understanding.

This article appeared on 'The Wire', an Indian news website, just before Christmas. Whether we take some of these passages literally or metaphorically, to me it captures what is the essence of Jesus' challenge to us today. It points towards a 'Way' which is about what lies in our hearts, and the action we take. Rohit and 'The Wire' have given permission to share this article with PV.

Howard Grace (Newbury Group)

The Christmas feeling may be missing, but the spirit of Jesus is alive and well

It's one of India's wonderful oddities that more Hindus in the country celebrate Christmas than do Christians, simply because there are so many more Hindus in India than there are Christians. Like many non-Christians around India, I too decorate a Christmas tree every year, give presents to those I care about, and happily sing carols (mostly off-key) with family, friends and neighbours (mostly non-Christian). I also make it a point every year to read the story of the first Christmas.

This year, though, I am finding it difficult to celebrate. How does one sing "Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright" when a heartless and calculatedly divisive Citizenship (Amendment) Act has been passed in parliament, students have been brutalised on their own campuses, Muslims systematically attacked in Uttar Pradesh, and thousands detained across the country? All is not calm. All is not bright.

Nevertheless I pick up a Bible, gifted to me long years ago by a Christian friend, and start reading the account of the birth of Jesus in the New Testament. Matthew and Luke narrate the moving account of Mary and Joseph's long and difficult journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, in obedience, as it were, to the arbitrary whims of the tyrannical government of their day.

"And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. So, all went to be registered, everyone to his own city." — Luke 2:1, NKJV.

'Registered'? How strange to find that word in the Bible at a time like this! And how ironical that our present-day Caesars have also decreed that all the citizens of India be registered! It's remarkable how little things change over the millennia – tyrants keep trying to exert inordinate control, and the poor keep

continuing to suffer because of it. I continue reading.

"Joseph also went to the city of Bethlehem, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." — Luke 2: 4-7

What a perfect picture of the plight of the poor. A pregnant woman about to give birth to her firstborn, her desperate husband knocking on the doors of the town's inns trying to find a place to stay for the night, but being turned away by innkeeper after innkeeper, till one of them finally says, 'There's no room in the inn but there is a stable next door. Spend the night there if you want.'

This particular innkeeper has been held up in the Christian tradition as a kind and helpful man, but I have often wondered how he could, in all good conscience, let a poor, pregnant woman and her husband take shelter in a place meant for animals. But then perhaps that is the best most 'haves' can do for the 'have-nots'. Just enough to assuage their conscience without disrupting their own lives too much, and then get back to the party.

I continue to read the rest of the Christmas story about the angels who appear to the shepherds, and the wise men from the east who follow a star and who come bearing gifts for the newborn child. But then I do something I don't remember doing before. I move past the story of the birth and start reading about the life of the adult Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. And as I do, I start to realise just how much the Jesus of the gospels has to say to so many of us today....

To those like Harsh Mander who have cast their lot with India's Muslims and are working day and night to try and bring peace and understanding between communities, he says: *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."* — Matthew 5:9

To those who have been brave enough to speak the truth, but have been lied about by the 'godi media' and attacked viciously by the ruling party's infamous IT cell, he says: *"Blessed are you when men shall revile you and say all manner of evil against you falsely. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward. For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."* — Matthew 5:11, 12

(The term 'prophet' doesn't just mean 'predictor of future events'. Here, it means 'a teller of truth.')



In times like these it is easy to seek revenge for wrongdoing, but to those who are tempted to return hate with hate, he says, *“Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you”*. – Matthew 5:44

To those who wonder about the various godmen and gurus who dispense spiritual instruction to the masses while at the same time aligning themselves openly with the religious right-wing, he says: *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Therefore, by their fruits you will know them.”* – Matthew 7: 15 – 20

To those who insist that God can only be worshipped in a certain place, he says: *“God is a spirit and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”* – John 4: 24

To those who stand with the poor and the persecuted as so many are in India today, he says, *“In that day I will tell you, ‘I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me.’ And when you will ask me, ‘When did we do all these things?’ I will say to you, ‘inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.’”* – Matthew 25

And to those who are wondering how we will ever be able to build an India where everyone is included, respected and valued, he says: *“Love the other as you love yourself.”* — Matthew 22:39

If enough people just did that – treated others the way they wish to be treated – our country would indeed become a kinder and better place.

I think about all those who are standing in support of their fellow citizens across the length and breadth of India. I think about the doctors and lawyers who are offering their services free of cost to those who have been attacked, harassed and persecuted. I think about the activists and journalists who are speaking up on behalf of those who do not have a voice of their own. And I think about those countless students and young people who have come out to tell the people of India that they will not be divided by the powers that be.

As I close my Bible and put it away, I realise that while the festive feeling may be missing, the spirit of Jesus is alive and well.



Rohit Kumar is an educator, working with students on emotional intelligence and adolescent issues to help make schools bullying-free.

PCN Annual General Meeting

Sat 21 March, 10.30am – 3.15pm

FREE admission

Including the launch of our Film Project.

St Luke’s Church, Holloway, London, N7 9JE

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Thinking Science, Thinking Faith

PCN Science and Religion conference

Sat 25 April, 10.30am – 4.00pm

Tom McLeish,

Professor of Natural Philosophy York University

£14 (PCN members £12)

Friargate Quaker Meeting House,

Lower Friargate, York YO1 9RL

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I cannot tell ...

I cannot tell which words were truly spoken
Or which encounters happened as we’re told.
The truth in myth or story-tellers’ token
Just mystify through twists and turns of old.
But this I know, that love is what he went by,
That love he taught and for his life was spent
To realise God’s Kingdom here on planet earth
Was his life story and now must be our intent.

I cannot tell if our interpretations
Are right or wrong, in part or incomplete
If we have missed some vital indication
As, metaphorically, we sit at Jesus’ feet.
But this I know, God’s met in friend and stranger.
The Spirit’s nudge which moves us into love.
God’s revelation even now continues,
Seeking peace and love to soar, just like the dove.

(Tune: Londonderry Air)

Sue Harrington

March 2020 | 7

What can we believe about Jesus?

In the second of a four part series, which began with the stories of Jesus' birth, we continue with his public ministry and will then reflect on the Resurrection and the Christ of Faith.

The public ministry of Jesus

The stories of Jesus carrying out healing miracles in the Gospels are so numerous that it seems likely they were a significant part of what he did. How he did them is much more problematic. It would have been a common belief then that much illness was as a consequence of some sort of demonic possession. Jesus is certainly represented in the Gospels as practicing exorcism, but few today would accept such a view of illness. Exorcism, however, could have gone hand in hand with other forms of 'faith-healing' indicated in the Gospel stories, where change could be brought about by the faith of the person wanting change and induced by a particularly authoritative and commanding figure such as Jesus. Exactly what happened in individual cases is impossible to know. Many today also see the nature miracles, such as walking on water or stilling the storm, as exaggerations written up by convinced believers; but again the exact facts are unknown and unknowable. What these stories do show is the reverence and awe induced in those present, and in the Gospel authors, by the figure of Jesus. That may be what matters rather than any literal acceptance of the miracle stories as they stand.

But what of Jesus' teaching? The open-minded reader of the Gospels is confronted with an enigmatic figure who disturbs by his teaching. For today's reader of the gospels, perhaps the most difficult part was his apparent sense of the imminent end of the world. The parables he told about the Kingdom of God and a possible future judgement of the world can be read in the context of his belief that the world was about to end in some dramatic way. Whether that was really his meaning is much debated, with some seeing the judgement he spoke of being the immediate judgement his very presence provoked, rather than something in the future. It is a complex debate that continues to this day, with no agreed resolution, But certainly from the portraits painted by the Gospel writers he was someone who provoked those who heard him to decide whether they were for or against him. It was impossible to be neutral.

Jesus expected people to trust in the reality of God as a force in their lives, and undoubtedly believed he was an agent of that God, and of something that he described as the Kingdom of God, which was both present and yet to come. His vision of God was of a loving and forgiving father, and that emphasis on forgiveness was a critical point of his teaching, In



general he appeared more concerned with the motives by which people acted than by whether they followed every detail of the Jewish law. He used parables to provoke the questions he thought confronted many in their lives, on which they were invited to make a judgement. In the process, he also attracted a group of close followers who implicitly trusted in him, and to whom he showed both love and judgement. The fact that he chose twelve was significant, since Israel was composed of twelve tribes, and Jesus seems to have realised that if his mission was to be continued it needed a group of followers who would carry on his work whatever happened to him. Whether he knew that going to Jerusalem would result in his death we cannot be sure, but it seems possible. He would have understood the political turmoil going on in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover, and would have known enough about the history of prophets to know that he was, at the very least, putting his life in danger; yet he seemed to face that fact unflinchingly.

So why was he crucified? His land was a very divided community, and that would have been especially so in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover. There was conflict between those who colluded with the Roman rule and those who rebelled against it and were, in our terminology, terrorists. That shows why the Roman authorities would be alarmed about Jesus. Whether the

historical Jesus actually claimed to be the messiah is not clear but Jesus' words were not about forming a church, but reforming Israel. The Roman authorities would have suspected a connection with the revolutionary policies of the Zealots.

A second area of conflict within Judaism concerned the Temple; some distrusted it others, probably the majority, valued it. What was Jesus' attitude to the Temple? He is reported as talking about the Temple being destroyed and rebuilt in three days, which the Temple authorities would have considered deeply subversive. He then caused uproar by overturning the tables of the moneychangers, thus challenging the whole structure of those in charge. But his complaint against the Temple was not that it existed, but that it was being misused; he spoke warmly of those who went to the Temple to pray in humility, asking for forgiveness. At the very least, Jesus was a radical reformer of the Temple practices.

There would have been a vast number of extra people in Jerusalem and in such a situation, with the possibility of heady nationalism stirring up rebellion, any Roman Governor would have been on his guard to put down anything that could cause trouble. A man from Galilee, speaking in a strange country accent and with a significant number of followers talking about a new Kingdom would have been such a target. Jesus was probably perceived as a royal pretender, hence the sign that Pilate put on the cross, 'The King of the Jews.' His death would have been on the authority of Pilate, as only Romans had the power to order execution in that way, and other non-Christian historical sources tell us of Pilate's brutal reputation.

Although some of the Jewish leaders were perhaps complicit in Jesus' execution the desire to blame the Jews more generally for the whole thing, clearly stated by Matthew and John, is probably a reflection of later Christian controversy between church and synagogue, coupled with a desire to show the later Roman authorities who might read the gospels that the burgeoning Christian church had no basic quarrel with the all powerful Roman Empire. As the American biblical scholar Robert W Funk put it: 'That particular bit of Christian apologetic licence exercised by the earliest evangelists has deeply compromised Christian integrity for many centuries and led to atrocities beyond reckoning.' But the essential fact is that Jesus met a horrible death at the hands of the Roman authorities, probably because they were concerned at the threat he posed to public order.



Bob Reiss was a Canon of Westminster until his retirement, and author of 'Sceptical Christianity'.

Sometimes ...

Sometimes, in the dark moments,
the endless nights with their deepest sorrows,
I remember to make origami of my heart.
Reaching backward into all I've left behind,
I tip and turn my mind,
straining for the soft rustle of paper-thin memories
to pry them loose of the scars and craters
into which they've lain long-buried
and bring them into now -
this half-lit, half-life, empty place -
to fall, crumpled before me.

I smooth them out, square them up, begin my work.
Under my fingers, they fold
into the shapes of a thousand dreams:
sadness slips beneath a dawning wonder;
disappointment hides under star-filled skies,
danced upon by blood red Northern lights;
and frozen chocolate macaroons -
the cold ache of their cookie tin still buried in my
fingertips -
creased into a reclaimed memory,
each fold a precious amalgam
of laughter, love, or wonder,
each smudged corner,
grace enough
to last me through the longest night.

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Portable Paradise

And if I speak of Paradise,
then I'm speaking of my grandmother
who told me to carry it always
on my person, concealed, so
no one else would know but me.
That way they can't steal it, she'd say.
And if life puts you under pressure,
trace its ridges in your pocket,
smell its piney scent on your handkerchief,
hum its anthem under your breath.
And if your stresses are sustained and daily,
get yourself to an empty room - be it hotel,
hostel or hovel - find a lamp
and empty your paradise onto a desk:
your white sands, green hills and fresh fish.
Shine the lamp on it like the fresh hope
of morning, and keep staring at it till you sleep.

"A Portable Paradise" from A Portable Paradise
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Then and Now

Locating the dynamics of the early church in the 21st century

What do you think it would have felt like to join the “Christy” movement of the first century? (The term “Christian” would originally have been a term of derision. I use “Christy” to give an equivalent jarring distastefulness.) What would have attracted you, inspired you, held you and led you to die for it if needs be? Let’s try and get the feel of those original Christ-followers. What considerations might have inspired you? I’ve suggested a few here:

Your political background. You live in a country which is under Roman occupation and oppression. You grew up believing that God will send a specially anointed leader (Christ or Messiah) to “restore the kingdom to Israel”. Now hear that Jesus of Nazareth is this Christ-figure who is going to sweep in the Kingdom. You are being exhorted to join the movement. How do you feel?

Your social background and needs. You hear that Jesus of Nazareth was, like you, a very ordinary bloke. You see that the Christies value everyone and deny social distinction. Rich people sell land to give resources to the poor. Widows and orphans are cared for. Sick are healed and/or cared for. There is a common table and everyone is welcome.

Eternal Life. They preach that they will also share Jesus the Christ’s resurrection to everlasting life

An encounter with God. The Christy movement promises that you will “receive the Holy Spirit” – which emanates in “supernatural” manifestations. The community is called by some the “The Christ-Body”. They eat in homes and share bread and wine to symbolise the Christ among them. Here is status, significance, and some form of power.

A Living Temple. All the first Christies were Jews. Your religion centred around regular sacrifices at the Jerusalem Temple. Christies declared that Jesus is the living temple where divine and human meet. Moreover, by extension *you* are a living stone of the Temple.

A “Crucified Christ”. Confusingly, these “Christies” declare that their Christ died on a cross. But you might find it mysteriously attractive and inspiring to think that the kingdom of God does not come by violence and oppression but by death, resurrection, reconciliation and peace-making.

Life Values. The Christies have firm and compassionate moral standards which enhance a sense of self-worth. They are a community of transformation.

You might want to add more issues to the list, but I would suggest that it is such dynamics that made the church appealing to people. The Christy

movement offered dynamics of hope and need - satisfaction in political, social and religious areas of life. It offered identity and belonging at both personal and community level, and compassion, spiritual intimacy and a meaningful quality of life.

These dynamics must still be relevant today – but where do we stand in relation to understanding and practising the underlying issues?

I fear we must first acknowledge that since at least the 3rd century the Church has followed the model of power, domination and wealth rather than one of servanthood and inclusion. So we have a long history to redeem. “Jesus Christ is Lord!”, we proclaim in triumphalist joy. But perhaps we should rather say “Lord and Christ need to be completely re-interpreted through the life and example of Jesus of Nazareth”. He was a humble, compassionate, inclusive figure who empowered community. His strategy was to identify with the lowest and lost and include them, rather than to set up a militant community of world-conquerors. The least will be the greatest. The rich are sent away with nothing.

Politics. Today, as in the 1st century, when people feel disempowered, disadvantaged and oppressed they are likely to rise up in fear and fight with nationalistic fervour. Let’s discriminate against the foreigner in the midst, be protectionist in our economics, ignore international standards of justice, and shut ourselves behind barriers where (in our delusion) we can be “great”. Give us a leader! This is not the Christ-Way and he refused to fulfil that role. He redefined “Christ”, turning the concept on its head.

The Crucified Christ. Their day to day experience of Jesus convinced the apostles that Jesus of Nazareth must be “Christ”/ Son of God. Yet his manner and program were such as to require a complete turn-around of any domineering picture of God. God is the suffering servant of humankind and both his Christ and the subsequent “Christ-Body” must display the same nature. To “believe” in him is not to support theological statements about him but to continue his “reconciling” work into all the world.

I believe that progressive theology has a significant role here: in its deconstruction of theologies that oppress and belittle people and in recalling the church to the theology of the Servant God who devolves his “rule” to his “little flock” and empowers them to creatively work it out together.

Social Structures. The early egalitarian Christy communities were home-sized. They met round tables for teaching and “fellowship” – a term that means “partnership”. It was there that they met one another’s needs. There may have been some more general oversight – but by appeal! Various modern

attempts to recapture this have retained hierarchical and controlling oversight structures. Can we conceive of a model of church where the essential focus is small interdependent groups which relate on the basis of mutual need and support? Of course the institution is concerned with orthodoxy and regulation, but perhaps assessment of true authenticity should be praxis – what do they *do* that is “Christ-like”?

Religious Concepts. The discovery of the vastness of the universe and the investigative methodology of science leave little place for the concept of a “theistic” God who lives “up there” and intervenes on behalf of his favoured ones. Today the primary question of theology must be “What do we *mean* by the term ‘God’?” Do we in fact need the concept of God at all? Secular society (albeit often inspired by Christians) has succeeded in pushing through on many of the social justice ideals of “the Kingdom” – but without tying them to religious concepts. Of course Jesus lived at one point in history where he would not have dismissed the idea of “God”. Nonetheless, he radically reshaped it into that of a universal, loving parent bringing children to maturity and devolving “kingdom” to them. I wonder what Jesus might have taught nowadays about “God”?

An Encounter with God (or “the divine”). Many people today will say that they are not religious but they are spiritual seekers. Early Christianity promised – and apparently delivered - spirit to spirit encounter with God. Today, the existence of massive administrative and material structures calling themselves “church” but delivering little in terms of spiritual connectedness or empowering must surely be a major stumbling block to those hungry for “spirituality”. Modern movements like the Charismatic Renewal have been either crushed or domesticated by the institutional churches. Also, unitive thinking is rejected and ostracised. How do we respond to seekers of spiritual connectedness? If the divine is embedded in the human then what we need is to explore together the depths of human personality, psyche and interpersonal communication; probably discovering things which are truly startling, but not “supernatural”. I see this as part of the “devolution of God”.

After-life. It was part of the early proclamation that Jesus would physically return very soon. This did not happen. “Heaven and Hell Christianity” focusses on this life simply as a preparation for the next. Jesus does seem to affirm something about an afterlife, but is probably more concerned with justice and compassion in this one. Our experience of living, relating and being-in-awe might point to something beyond ourselves - something “eternal”.

Marcus Borg claimed to be “agnostic” about the afterlife, questioning what people actually mean by it in the first place, and what it might be in



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substance. “We die into God”, he said: just as we now live in God.

Moral Values. There certainly are things which are worthy of being valued and which are proven by wisdom and experience. Unfortunately, Christianity has often succeeded in reducing the dynamic life and teaching of Jesus into a set of judgemental, enforceable rules. Asked why they left church many say that they have received judgement and rejection instead of respect, compassion and help. Jesus taught forgiveness, compassion and empathy instead of judgement. Faithfulness should not be to rules but to people struggling with life. The only rule is to love.

Conclusion. The early church generated dynamics of hope, inclusion, belonging and empowerment to people of all social classes. These dynamics are still needed today, but today’s intellectual, social and religious circumstances are significantly different. The church is largely despised due to its oppressive history. Government agencies have long-since replaced the church’s social provision role. We have a vast body of factual information about our universe and about our human and spiritual selves. Reclaiming credibility must involve creating communities of both compassionate actions and intellectually relevant theology. It must involve the discovery of a revitalised and all-encompassing spirituality. Above all, everything must flow from attempts to be a true reflection of the one who “made himself of no reputation and took on himself the form of a servant” Philippians 2:7.



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Making it in the end

Guilt, Blame, Understanding, Responsibility and Forgiving

My parents, so I am told, had a furious row the night I was born. By the age of 4, and the beginning of World War 2, I'd had 3 different carers and been fostered out twice. By the end of the war, I'd had 11 different carers, attended 9 different schools and expressed suicidal thoughts. Aged 12, I was regularly defrauding London Transport to supplement my pocket money, which was no more than half that received by my peer group. If I had been caught, might I have been sent to 'borstal' and what would have been my future? I received only adverse criticism from my father and it rarely felt justified - I was the black sheep of the family. My birthday was never remembered. My stepmother fed and clothed me, but nothing else. By 15, I'd had enough and was on the point of leaving 'home' with no qualifications and was prepared to live rough. I was sexually abused (outside home), and my father physically assaulted me on 2 occasions. (One occasion on the presumption that I'd had sex, when I was too shy even to hold the girl's hand.)

Such tribulations are not that exceptional - 10% of British people have had similar ACEs - Adverse Childhood Experiences - (<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy/about.html>) but statistically we comprise about 50% of the prison population and a large proportion of drug addicts, alcoholics and people who attempt suicide (to name but a few of the documented consequences).

I felt unwanted and denigrated at every step. I recall visits to a fostering agency where I always felt I was the last to be chosen by new carers, (and I guess I was hardly a happy, smiling little boy!). I was with one foster family for nearly 2 years but, about halfway through that period, I was made to get up and dress in the middle of the night to be returned to the Agency when I had soiled my pyjamas after eating too many plums. I did not feel safe or loveable in that place and waited for the next occasion to be rejected. My changes of school were so frequent that I never had any friends nor did I know how to play. I was always 'the outsider'.

I will now review very briefly some relevant scientific studies, in particular relating to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). An ACE score is derived from yes/no answers to 10 questions relating to childhood experiences. People with an ACE score of 4 or above (like me) are very much more likely to have a variety of social, mental and physical health problems. The key observation from my viewpoint is a 15-fold increase in the number of suicide attempts. If they have a score of 6 or more, this

increases yet further to a 30-fold increase in suicide attempts. This, to me, reflects their struggle to find a way of surviving, which itself leads to finding short-term relief from the pain of living. Such relief includes drug and alcohol use and a whole variety of other ways of finding an endorphin or adrenaline release such as self-harm, sex or violence. To look at this in a 'simple' way: 'recreational' drugs give temporary relief but cost money. Increasing doses are often needed to give the required relief, costing yet more money, which often leads to a life of crime (with or without violence) to fund their dependence. Imprisonment often follows. The high incidence of suicide in prison almost always follows a suicidal pattern outside of prison.

Other studies show that living in a family with violence results in violent children:

https://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/publications/Parents_Perspectives_on_parenting_styles.pdf

And brain scanning techniques show that the brains of children brought up in 'chaotic' families develop differently anatomically:

http://www.urbanchildinstitute.org/sites/all/files/databooks/TUCI_Data_Book_VII_2012.05_family.pdf

It is beyond scientific doubt that Adverse Childhood Experiences have a major impact on subsequent lives.

I was fortunate enough to have two major advantages in my adolescent life. Firstly, I had an aunt who loved me and with whom I stayed on a farm for many school holidays from ages 10 to 13. She appreciated my cleaning of the midden board – and even today the smell of cow dung brings back good feelings! Secondly, I had a good education with much support from school during a time of crisis when I was 15. After an episode of life-threatening illness aged 17, I decided to become a doctor and eventually became a consultant physician with a strong interest in emotional factors influencing our general health. I then moved on to work in hospices for some 10 years. I had almost continuous counselling support for 25 years, but the most life-changing experience for me was a 2-year training course in humanistic psychology which focused on feelings rather than logic. I learnt that my feelings mattered and how they influenced my behaviour. Through my own experience I had learnt to listen to others' feelings and stories, respect them as the person's reality, and work from that starting point.

But it was far from being all good. I desperately wanted to be part of a loving family, and was absolutely determined to avoid putting my children through experiences of a broken one. I failed miserably. I had never witnessed a mutually loving

adult relationship nor had I ever really trusted anyone with my feelings. I can see in retrospect that I looked for unhappy women. I could bond with them because I knew about unhappiness. But I lost my supportive (or was it controlling) role in my marriages if life became more 'normal'. So with the two marriages in which I had children, each ended with rejection of me and of the role I offered. I had learnt hugely from having children whom I trusted and loved, but on each breakup the mothers of my children seemed to do everything they could to impede my ongoing relationship with them. This was utterly devastating for me - losing those I truly loved. Some might describe me as abandoning my children, yet I still cared for them and made major sacrifices to maintain them, (at times risking homeless).

I am responsible for my actions in leaving the family home, but my difficulties and inadequacies were, at least in part, related to my ACEs. My parents may have co-created my chaotic upbringing (the sins of the father) but my mother herself had a childhood full of separation from her parents and my father had lifelong struggles to overcome the prejudice against his low social class origin. I believe both did what they believed was right for me so, whatever their actions, I do not blame them. The anger I have felt has been tempered by seeking understanding of their backgrounds. I am able to move on from my frustration and sense of failure, through exploring my life events, to reintegrate with the world.

I feel blessed to have been able to work in the last few years with high-security prisoners who have done 'very bad things' such as murder. Using my own experience of ACEs, and of recognising how I have damaged my own children, I feel able to listen to their stories with understanding of how they came to commit their crimes. I also recognise and reflect back to them the loveable parts of themselves which inevitably emerge as we talk through their lives. So far, in conversations with about a hundred prisoners, only two have persisted in projecting brash images. All the others have shown a very human, caring, and responsive side of themselves. I



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can make no comment on the two referred to above but the other ninety-eight are people who have suffered greatly and responded almost instantly to being respected and cared about. That, in my view, is what prisons should be about.

A caring approach reduces the recidivism rate from around 60% to 20% (BBC report on Norwegian prisons and Containing violent prisoners: An Analysis of the Barlinnie Special Unit, David J. Cooke *The British Journal of Criminology*, Vol. 29, 1989, 129–143).

For me, it was only in my 70s that I finally learnt to trust and to enjoy a truly sharing relationship. It took nearly a lifetime but I made it in the end! Prisoners could do likewise with care and support.



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Judas - a Psychiatric View

The story of Judas is familiar. He is the disciple who betrayed Jesus, and he has become the archetype for betrayal ever since. Psychologically his trajectory is also familiar: he joins up as an enthusiast, suffers disillusion and feels a fool for having believed, he is cast out, seeks revenge (the traitor's kiss), feels remorse and commits suicide, an ultimate outcome to decision conflict. He knew that Jesus knew - the ultimate guilt and shame. He felt gullible and rationalized it by believing that Jesus was a con man, and his message snake oil.

God's Agent or Satan's Tool?

Theologians and cultural historians have discussed Judas for centuries, asking whether he was God's agent or Satan's tool. Accepting for now that 'God' and 'Satan' are plausible semiotic instruments for our purpose, and theologians or not: we are inclined to ask whether Judas was part of a Machiavellian divine plan (God knew all along, God needed a catalyst to drive the inevitable death of Jesus along, and present a moral contrast the disciples and any Christian believers who came after them). Or else, Judas was a good and ordinary man (and we are all ordinary, we are all Everyman, l'homme moyen sensuel) who turned to the bad (as represented in biblical times and centuries afterwards as an evil power called The Devil or Satan). After all, the Gospels show how much time and effort went into healing people with demon possession.

So pervasive has been the influence of the image of Judas - in art and literature and politics - that it has become a tool for propagandists, and a convenient stereotype for preachers and moralists. No debate about anti-Semitism or Zionism is entirely free from it, and its echoes of conspiracy and evil. This has been so since the late 19th-century dissemination of the fabrication 'The Protocols of the Elders of Zion', advocating Jewish world domination. Yet many writers and interpreters across the ages have seen Judas as an ordinary man turned to evil by events, and by frustrated hopes and dreams.

The psychology of biblical times defines this as 'Satan entering into him'; we might attribute it to an independent but flawed moral choice, an inability to resolve cognitive dissonance, a character weakness, or a depressive disorder. Any reasonable diagnosis of normality today would take account of this view. And so there is much in the life and death of Judas to pick up on if we look it from a psychiatric or psycho-therapeutic perspective.

Dashed Hopes of Divine Wisdom

Judas starts off as a man of his time, of a people with a strong sense of exceptionalism and a history of messianic dreams, often dashed by false claimants and charlatans, and crushed by the

military and cultural hegemony of Rome. He is an idealist, wanting power for his people and for himself. Traditionally he is the nephew of Caiaphas the high priest, so probably no intellectual second-rater. He is attracted to Jesus, and his nomadic cult, attributing charisma to Jesus as a vehicle to special knowledge of the divine, as the next saviour.

Some commentators believe he was a spy for the Jewish establishment, proud of working to reveal fifth columnists in Jewish society. A 'Graham Greene' outsider, then, driven and haunted by religion and politics, seeking personal identity in both, easily pleased and easily bored. Occasional moments of zealous purpose, connected to the nomenclatura or political elite, as a way of coming to bear irresolvable emptiness - one of the paradoxes of believing that there is meaning and purpose in an absurdist world.

This promised - so he hoped - superior insight into the nature of things, the power of the mage or magus - not just divinity but divinity on steroids. Gnostic thinking at the time powerfully shaped this view, as Irenaeus confirms in his patristic text 'Against Heresies' and as we find in the 'alternative' gospel of Judas. Idealism turned to a sense of entrapment as time passed: he felt betrayed and felt he could and should betray back, biting the hand that feeds. Like the Prodigal Son, whose father knew all along that he would come back (and so tested his son's capacity for humility), Judas found no special wisdom, or believed he had been frustrated from finding it by discovery and exclusion. He felt exposed too soon, his work not done.

Confronting the Self

He knew he was fully known for what he was, his carefully-constructed self-exposed, blinding resentment inhibiting his ability to re-frame, rebuild or change. Determinists might argue that no space could be found in the divine or satanic plan for him to change: he is as trapped existentially as the heroes of Kafka's 'The Castle' or Camus' 'The Plague'. He might have childishly wondered why bad things happen to good people, or at least what makes God so intolerant and punitive about a legitimate set of hard questions.

Locked within his own emotions, Judas is unable to believe, like Charles Ryder in Evelyn Waugh's 'Brideshead Revisited', that 'the worse I am, the more I need God.' Christianity was later to explore how 'orientated towards sanctity' the 'purified community' of believers would be, as Roman Catholicism argues in both Dante and Graham Greene. Judas was excluded from this consolation, and knew it. Exclusion fed self-hatred, solipsism fed revenge.

Examined in the cultural context of Judaic 'Midrash', the rabbinic search for scriptural meaning, we know that an earlier believer, Moses 'hid his face and was afraid to look upon God' (Exodus 3:6). Hiding your face meant not penetrating the secrets of God, and remaining in the darkness of human finite understanding. Judas, like Faust and Paracelsus, was prepared to confront - not God this time, but Jesus. This was not prayer but interrogation - of the other and of the self. If faith is to be intelligent, arguably, then it could be no other way: as in Gestalt therapy, the self comes to confront itself.

Shame and Betrayal

Regularly in psychotherapy, definitions of 'factuality' and 'reliably understood truths' are indexical and negotiable. Inability to differentiate real from false, Judas knew he knew, and this turned to crisis. The tipping point was (as in John 13) was when Jesus told him that he knew: his treachery was made plain for all to see (the act of giving Judas the bread): public humiliation at a point in his life when decision conflict had reached bipolar levels.

So, for him he believed, a way out must be found - an escape route from a moral maze of his own making, as he thought, a way to back off from a spiritual reality check he was unable to rationalize and cope with. His self-esteem shattered, he could not turn back ('God's agent' thinking would not have let him, nor ironically would 'Satan's tool'). He took explicit and public revenge, as he saw it, with the kiss in the garden.

Studies of suicide often speak of delusions, poor self-management, hallucinations, narcissism, and self-disgust. It was his confrontation with Camus' 'myth of Sisyphus', that classical image of absurdist illogic. Judas felt them all, revealing how readily 'ordinary and normal' human beings adopt a fatal determination for self-elimination as the ultimate form of problem-solving - again, Camus' existentialist statement that suicide is the ultimately serious question. Studies of the mental health of younger men take historiography in this direction.

Suffering Soul and Suffering Psyche

Understandably, above all if we interpret the Christian Gospels as forms of advocacy, or even propaganda, Judas's death is brutal and degrading, as hubris dictates. As much is made of how contaminated was the place of his death (his body 'burst open' in a field he or the Temple authorities had purchased, a field afterwards called 'the Field of Blood', an allegorical obverse of the Blood of Christ) as is made today of the consequences of family pain and anger when a family member needs, and then fails to respond to, psychiatric care. The geography is relocated in the mind today, except perhaps in detective thrillers - where moral balance is broken and restored, and where retributive and reciprocal violence is either endorsed or explained away.



For the theologian the story of Judas is an example of the suffering soul - a person set apart from God, who sets themselves apart from God. We have, after all, free will to believe or not. Judas had committed, albeit opportunistically, to the Christian cause and experiences shame and betrayal. He feels that his purpose, and even his identity, is being taken apart: a kind of disintegration.

Long before the emergence of 'mental health' and formal psychiatry (recognised in early forms by the Greeks and then only later in 18th century medical rationalism), we find these narrative descriptions of Judas's feelings expressed in terms of the 'suffering soul'. In psychiatry and mental health, there has been a shift to concepts like 'the suffering psyche'.

Psychiatric Diagnosis

Today, we would re-frame this narrative using the psychiatric terminology, or symptomatology, of resources such as DSM. This is the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychiatric Disorders. The most recent version of it - of the comprehensive 1980 third edition - was published in 2013 and is called DSM-5. (American Psychiatric Association.)

Accepting the caveats that literalists believe that the Bible is the 'Word of God' (and so should not be reinterpreted by modern commentators with non-theological/religious aims), and that any modern re-interpretation of ancient Israeli cultural and religious belief and practice could be accused of anachronism, it is possible - and appropriate - to employ the DSM diagnostic criteria to examine and better understand biblical characters and storylines.

Typically, Job is tested by God and travels through a long and deep period of depression, while Ezekiel, with visions or hallucinations, could be regarded not just as an inspired prophet (the theological view) but also as a schizophrenic.

As for Judas, we can draw out the remorse of the traitor, and the shame and betrayal he feels for having committed himself so fully to Jesus. It had become the main focus of his hopes, and now, facing and fearing self-disintegration, he lost control. Psychiatrists speak of 'suicidal ideation' (it would be better for me not to have lived at all, given what has happened). Instead of finding the secret and divine wisdom he hoped for (and as Gnosticism seemed to have offered him), his dreams had been shattered, Jesus was a fake Messiah, and his disciples merely gullible fools. He felt a fool being among them.

Characteristic, too, of his response is that it is a highly self-dramatising one: not only was he faced with feelings of overwhelming shame, but he was also confronted by the other disciples, and publicly exposed by Jesus Christ. And, furthermore, Jesus's exposure is not harsh and punitive - it is gentle and all-knowing. 'I knew you would do that,' Jesus tells him. 'I had known all along.' Judas - as he sees it - is stripped of all self-respect.

If we see Judas as part of God's plan, he dwindles to a mere device, a villain in a thriller. If we see his dilemma in realistic psychiatric terms, it turns into a *perpeteia* or tragic turning-point of uncontrollable complexity for him. Following a symptomatology of extreme depression and melancholia, he has no choice but to destroy himself.

Cultural Insights

Whether readers of the Bible interpret it in a literal and 'believing' sense, or as an invaluable store of psychiatric, anthropological and cultural material so deeply embedded in Western history as to be unavoidable as an intellectual resource; there is value in revisiting many of the figures in the Old and New Testaments in this way. Evidence is plentifully there in the numerous reinterpretations of biblical narratives by creative writers of modern time.

Nikos Kazantzakis in 'The Last Temptation of Christ', and Amos Oz in 'Judas' (where on Jesus's death Judas, as he thinks, rationally concludes that he has proof of how the disciples were deceived). Yet thinking he is right is not enough to stop his fatal course, where the strength of feeling is ineluctable. Borges's 'Three Versions of Judas' suggest that he did God's work, was a free-will zetetic Gnostic, or an everyman figure useful for explicating evil: any one, and probably all three by turns. An agnostic take is that of playwright Stephen Guirgis' 'The Last Days of Judas', where like Milton's Lucifer he wants to get out of Hell since he has discovered that there is no God, and so he should be forgiven.

Eric Linklater's 'Judas' explored concepts of loyalty

and treachery as part of an indictment of Britain and France for their desertion, in the name of appeasement, of Czechoslovakia. Italian novelist Andrea Camilleri, in 'The Potter's Field' (2008), sets one of Montalbano's police cases about the Sicilian mafia in a field marked red because of its clay.

Such polemic and populist versions of 'sin' and 'evil', and the way the past haunts the present, as theological propositions or as metaphors, confirms the importance of looking at biblical material - and at traditional belief systems - on a regular basis. The questions raised by Bertrand Russell in his essay 'Why I am Not a Christian', and by 'The Brothers Karamazov' when it asks whether one can be said to 'sin' where there is no concept of sin, are perennial issues for everyone, believers and agnostics alike.

Cross-Disciplinary Opportunities

Theological queries like God's agent or Satan's tool, then, become clear as valid but restricted queries.

These are not the queries asked by psychiatrists. Yet they could be, just as much as theological interpretations lend themselves to the scrutiny and methodology of psychiatry. Both disciplines deal with human nature and suffering, and more broadly with wider issues in society like suicide and alcoholism. The professional lexicon and register of each - theology and psychiatry - benefits from re-contextualizing knowledge in terms of the other.

This is of particular relevance where 'religious' patients are concerned, and where they want or need to discuss their beliefs with a disinterested, non-judgemental, and confidential professional. Under the general umbrella of 'purpose and meaning', many issues arise in consultations and counselling in which 'religious' terms colonise everyday demotic discourse. Examples include statements such as 'I think that what she did was evil', 'I knew then that God didn't love me', and 'How can God be good if he allows such things?'. By Googling, patients draw on technical terms like 'depression' and 'anxiety' more than ever - indeed, more now than terms like 'God' and 'sin'.

Judas is a revealing case-study for any theologian engaged in pastoral counselling and for any community psychiatrist. There is an interest in common, and a common challenge to accommodate the religious space of theology and the scientific space of psychiatry. We don't necessarily 'betray' our patients by not equipping ourselves to manage this well: but we could be said to under-sell them if we don't.



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God: A Long-time Coming?

Perhaps we need to stand away from the subject of God and get a holistic view of the issue? Perhaps it is helpful to think of 'God' in the broader context of the emergence and development of human beings?

What is clear is that our own human species, *Homo Sapiens* (*Wise human*) has been around for some 200,000 years. (A history of Ancient Britain, Neil Oliver (W&N Paperbacks 2012) 50,000 years or so ago, a few members of *Homo Sapiens* left Africa, and 30,000 years later they had reached Northern Europe, Australia and South America.

About 11,500 BC, an early *Homo Sapien* in Britain scratched a sketch of a horse's head on bone, and left it in a cave at Creswell Crags, Nottinghamshire. The quality of the artwork leaves no doubt this artist had great skill and intelligence. They would have been hunters. Did they occasionally look at their surroundings, and up at the sky, and ask, 'Why does this exist? Why do I exist?' I think they must have. Which makes them religious and separates *Homo Sapiens* from other living creatures on earth.

Sadly, it took over 8,000 more years before religious thinking matured to a level that we can measure aspects of it. About 5000 years ago, hunter gatherers in Britain were under threat, because more people were starting, literally, to put down roots. They were growing crops, taming wild animals, and importing animals already domesticated elsewhere. Had humans now started to think of God in a mature way?

We cannot be certain, but the probability is that 'God' was still far from the minds of the people who put up the standing stones at Carnac in southern France, or who built Skara Brae in Orkney, or constructed Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain. Yes, they identified the sun, moon and the stars, as having an influence on their lives, and even thought-out how to orientate tunnels so that they were lit, only, at the winter solstice and summer solstice.

It seems that they were most concerned about how to organise a community – a community of people who normally lived and worked in isolation on farms. The leaders seem to have wished to develop strong social bonds: bonds that would permit the community to come together for purposes of defence - as easily as to come together to work on communal building projects (projects that no individual person might ever see completed!).

We cannot know what beliefs these ancient people developed, that persuaded them to work for the collective good, year-in, year-out. But the evidence is that they did exactly this - whether when building large circular ditches called 'hengese', stone monuments, or the extensive earthworks found in Yorkshire. These were works that required the



organisation and management of hundreds of willing workers, toiling for long periods on a 'community' project.

Later, various communities, worldwide, started to think in terms of more sophisticated ancestor worship, and of spirits controlling animate and inanimate objects and natural forces. But this thinking was still a long way from modern thoughts about a monotheistic 'God', or the ideas of Ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Classical World and beyond. One must conclude that 'God', as a modern concept was a long-time coming.

Consider *Genesis*. Even when 'God the Creator' was eventually conceived, the principal concerns of religious leaders appear to have been practical and social: how to define human nature, how to establish a sustainable community, how to identify rules for living with one another, how to ensure effective defence against aggressors. As with the Ancient Britons, the main aim was to forge rules that a community could happily believe-in.

Ironically, this is also what happened when Jesus of Nazareth came on the scene. He preached a philosophy of love, compassion, forgiveness, duty, and responsible living: a philosophy, which if practised generally, would ensure the development of sustainable communities. It would even favour the implementation of a 'green' agenda that, conceivably, could prevent an over-populated world from rapidly descending into a state of anarchy and self-destruction. That scenario feels all the more likely. And sadly, God may continue to be a long-time coming. We are still likely to be waiting for God, even when *Homo Sapiens* is in the final stages of destroying itself.



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Local groups

Please contact group convenors or see the relevant PCN Britain web page for further details. Newcomers are always welcome.

Abingdon Cliff Marshall
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We really enjoyed our visit from Adrian Alker in Nov. Amongst other issues it enabled us to consider the Film Project. Adrian showed us an early version of the first of the films and noted our feedback. This was Gemma's Story and we found it raised many pertinent and interesting questions. We now are looking forward to reviewing another of the new films at our Feb meeting and giving feedback ahead of their launch at the AGM on 21 Mar. We are also gearing up to host a public lecture entitled 'How Jews and Christians Read the Bible', on 27 Feb, when our speaker will be Prof. John Barton, author of 'A History of the Bible: The Book and its Faiths'. Our Mar meeting will look at some of the issues raised by John's talk while in Apr we shall be taking a look at all of the films launched at the AGM. Our normal group meetings will be at 7.30pm at St Michael's Church Room, Abingdon OX14 1DU on 2 Mar, 6 Apr and 4 May. All details will be on our webpage. Typically between 14 and 20 people attend.

Bolton Jim Hollyman
01204 456050 jim.hollyman@pcnbritain.org.uk

At our next meeting in Feb we will be considering future plans. Our meetings are normally on the first Wed of each month at 1.30pm until approximately 3 pm, at 121 Junction Road, Bolton, BL3 4NF.

Edinburgh Mary McMahon
0131 441 3337 mary.mcmahon@pcnbritain.org.uk

This term we are continuing to look at themes suggested by members at the June '19 'looking forward' meeting. In Jan, Jim Mein, former Dean of Edinburgh and a long-term group member will explore with us the relevance for the 21st Century of the stories in the New Testament, mostly those focussed on the life of Jesus. In Feb, psychiatrist Douglas Blackwood will share with us insights from his research in response to the question 'Is faith good for our well-

being?' And in Mar Anthea Griggs will invite us to reflect on some articles from recent editions of PV. Underlying all our meetings we have a fundamental aim - to continue, as a group, to work at respecting different perspectives on the journey.

Gloucestershire Andy Vivian
andy.vivian@pcnbritain.org.uk

We have been discussing Richard Holloway's classic, Godless Morality - Keeping Religion out of Ethics. Maureen Partington brought us 'ethical jazz', Holloway's suggestion that morals are best seen as improvisations on a theme rather than set in stone like an orchestral score. Andy Vivian highlighted Holloway's analysis of how traditions break down and we discussed the notion of competing 'goods' as applied to sex and drugs. Peter Lewis was interested in how Holloway dealt with the competing arguments over abortion and euthanasia. We agreed with most of what we read, especially Holloway's view that the Church has too often has a vested interest in tradition at the expense of justice and freedom. We greeted the New Year with our annual feast - where we bring and share both food and spiritual inspirations. In Feb we welcomed Unitarian minister, Mark Hutchinson, who spoke about Unitarianism and how it has developed. We meet on the 1st Sat of the month at 2.30pm in Gloucester.

Manchester John Ramsbottom
0161 456 5119 john.ramsbottom@pcnbritain.org.uk

For one of our autumn meetings we were able to welcome a speaker from Extinction Rebellion to give a challenging talk about action to draw attention to this major issue. Coincidentally we were asked to preview and give feedback on one of the new PCN films for our Jan meeting and this turned out to be about Christian responses to Climate change and in particular the work of Christian Climate Action, which I understand, does pre-date XR. Other topics planned for this year are Challenging Hate forum, with illustrations from a visit to Auschwitz, a discussion on religious pluralism, and a further session on our

perceptions of St Paul, following on from an interesting evening last year when we considered a contrast between Paul and Jesus.

Our final meeting of this session in Jun will be devoted to making plans for the autumn when the group resumes after the summer break. Meetings are generally on the 4 Wed of the month at Heaton Moor United church in Stockport.

Oakham Peter Stribblehill
07918 916466 peter.stribblehill@pcnbritain.org.uk

At our Dec meeting we followed our usual pattern of having a Christmas theme. This year we varied it by showing a series of short cartoon films on the births, or childhood, of figures from other faiths; Krishna, The Buddha, Mohammad and Guru Nanak. It was interesting to see the parallels between the Christian story and these with wicked kings, parting of waters, heavenly messengers and so on. At the end of the meeting, about 20 of us reverted to our normal tradition and had mince pies, stollen and (non-alcoholic) mulled wine. Our programme resumed on 21 Jan, again with just over 20 of us present. We have decided by popular demand to re-visit the original Living the Questions DVD, taking selected parts from the 21 on offer. This follows a consultation last year when newer members said that they would like to look at our origins. It was fascinating to see a younger version of Jack Spong, Lloyd Geering and other well known faces, and there is always something new to be taken from their words.

By the time this is published, we'll be well on our way into our project, and may even have decided to change tack entirely. Our fortnightly meetings will continue at 2.30pm in Oakham Methodist Church on 17 and 31 Mar before we take our summer break.

Tavistock Mike Dennis
01822 618142 mikedennis_uk@yahoo.co.uk

We have continued to meet during the autumn though numbers are usually small. The theme for Sept was #SheToo. A further exploration of the Bible Society podcasts regarding the oppression of and violence against women in the Bible (the rape of Tamar, the Levite's concubine and the punishment of Jezebel.) In Oct we used a DVD featuring

Martin Camroux on "Radical God". This was his talk at the 2018 Free to Believe Conference. About 5 years ago, he led a study day at Tavistock URC on "Religion is Dangerous". In Nov we hosted a talk in conjunction with Tavistock Peace Action Group on the theme of the war in Yemen. This was well attended by a wide cross section of local residents.

Also in Nov we used a DVD featuring Trevor Dennis on "The Bible can be funny". (2018 Free to Believe) Our plans for Spring 2020 are prepared but future meetings will depend upon the availability of key personnel to attend. Even when numbers have been very small, it has always been encouraging to share with those who have more questions than answers.

Tunbridge Wells Sandy Elsworth
radpilgrims@gmail.com

Rupert Sheldrake has been our inspiration for our last few meetings. He addressed an open meeting which we organised in the autumn of 2018, and at successive monthly meetings we looked at some of the chapters of his book "Science and Spiritual Practices". Meditation, Gratitude, Relating to Plants, and Rituals. Eating now seems to be our flavour. We celebrated Christmas with a shared meal together at our regular central venue, Christ Church, High Street, Tunbridge Wells and in Jan digested the topic of Food. As we seem to be the only radical group in Kent, we welcome members from a wide radius. If you'd like to pay us a visit, we normally meet on the last Tuesday of the month at 7.30 for 7.45 to 9.30pm.

West Yorks Michael Burn
07712620303 michael.burn@pcnbritain.org.uk

Our final meeting of 2019 took the form of a discussion on Richard Holloway's lecture to the PCN conference "Religion and Atheism - Beyond the Divide". Philip Carlin also spoke about Holloway's book, "A Little History of Religion". At our first meeting of 2020 we watched one of the films commissioned by PCN. We gave our reactions and comments which we hope will be useful in the preparation of supporting material. 24 Feb is to be led by Philip Carlin. As it is the day after Church Action on Poverty Sunday Philip will use

their material "Untold Stories: Scripture from the Margins", particularly the rejection of Jesus at Nazareth. The reflection will include information about the statue which stands outside Huddersfield station! 24 Mar we will watch another of the films commissioned by the PCN.

Woking Fred Pink
07889 200078 fred.pink@pcnbritain.org.uk

Members have moved away; others have retired from the group. The good news is that more have joined and attendance has risen to between 8 and 12. We are settling in to new ideas and ways of exploring them whilst being aware of the debt owed to those, mainly Methodists, who kept the group alive and active in the past. Members now attend Catholic, Anglican, and URC churches as well as the Methodists and the local Quaker Meeting. At present we are working our way through Dominic Crossan's DVD course Violence Divine. New insights occur in each session, sometimes from one sentence, at other times from a description developed over several minutes. It is proving to be a valuable resource. We meet from 9.30 to 11.00 on the third Sat of the month at Trinity Methodist Church, Brewery Road, Woking, GU21 4LH.

N Worcester David Tubb
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At our Jan meeting we each brought "good" and "bad" examples of worship material, according to our individual progressive viewpoint – seemingly a somewhat similar quest to Adrian Alker's recent visit to one of the local groups. There was a fair degree of unanimity on the choices we shared together – perhaps unsurprisingly. The orthodox creeds failed to meet with our approval, along with the words of "Land of Hope and Glory"! A number of familiar – and popular – hymns fell down in at least one or other line, notwithstanding the enthusiasm with which we usually sing these. The words of hymns by Fred Kaan and John Bell were frequent favoured choices, as well as the servant song "Brother, sister, let me serve you". We were somewhat wary of several modern songs. We hesitated over some aspects of the communion liturgy, though acknowledging the significance of this act of worship.

We decided to continue with our quest at our next meeting in Mar, because we found it both worthwhile and thought-provoking in terms of clarifying our progressive inclinations. It seems likely that a pattern emerges from all this choosing between "good" and "bad" (which is of course in itself something of an over-simplification). One major theme seems to be a preference for material which emphasises how we demonstrate our common humanity as followers of Christ over assertions of belief, surely a good thing in these pluralistic and secular times. The article in a recent PV entitled "What do we tell the children?" is a particular case in point.

Letters

Two questions?

Many thanks for another interesting magazine. One might quibble with one or another writer, but I would confine myself to two questions. Book Reviews: would it be helpful if the number of pages in the book were cited, giving some idea of what is involved in looking closer? Truth: following Imelda Marcos' pronouncement "Perception is real, Truth is not", should we forbid use of Truth with a capital T. Truth is a convenient word for talking about what is currently true, but there is nothing absolute or ultimate about it. The expression "ultimate truth and reality" means no more than the treasure at the end of the rainbow.

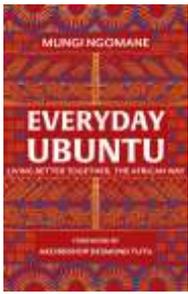
Michael Hell

Want to reply? Have your own burning question? A comment on a recent event? Want to check whether a thought is unique to you? If so, please get in touch dave.coaker@pcnbritain.org.uk



Reviews

Everyday Ubuntu by Mungi Ngomane, Bantam Press



This is a difficult book to review: it will either be valued for its clear account of the African philosophy of ubuntu or, as one reviewer stated, dismissed for its simplistic approach.

Desmond Tutu, the author's grandfather, commends the book as one which will 'open your eyes, mind and heart to a way of being in the world that will make our world a better and more caring one.' The southern African word 'ubuntu' encompasses a sense of caring, sharing and being in harmony with creation. It includes ideas of kindness and forgiveness, tolerance and the power of listening. The 14 chapters include expositions of this philosophy and examples from the author's world, from pre and post-apartheid South Africa. The stories told recognise our connectedness and interdependence; they do not argue a case for any one religious understanding but for recognition of our common humanity. Desmond Tutu is well known for his ability to use humour to defuse situations; Mungi attempts to build that inheritance, but at times it feels awkward and strained: 'laughing in the face of a difficult situation is the best attitude.' 'Humour is an attitude to make life more fun, more inviting and more attractive to ourselves and other people.' Each chapter ends with practical suggestions and exercises to aid self-understanding. In an attempt to 'highlight' these sections the print is on different coloured backgrounds, which makes it difficult to read. Mungi tries, perhaps too hard, to show how we can all benefit from embracing others, and repeats her main ideas in the Epilogue: 'Forgiving is about relieving the burden on ourselves and other people. An unforgiving nature doesn't give our anger anywhere to go.' 'Almost nothing in life is black or white. Accepting the complexities makes us more compassionate people'.

Peter Varney

More Honest to God by Grenville C Gilbert, GCG Books adrian.lea@btinternet.com

£6.99- +£3 p&p.

Grenville Gilbert is a PCN member, a thinker, an asker of questions, a poet and much more. In this self-published collection he explores, through his poetry and personal reflections, what he describes as his 'odyssey through Christianity today'. His journey, signposted by poems written over some 50 years, started when he was a teenager, with a reading of John Robinson's 'Honest to God'. He tells us that his faith has grown and faltered and has now 'grown up' so that finally it makes sense to him and that in reading John Shelby Spong he finds a new articulation of John Robinson's once thought highly radical ideas. The poems and prose essays are interesting to read - accessible and light of touch. Many of them reference writers, events and ideas that form part of the backdrop to many of our concerns and discussions in PCN and our world today. (There is even a poem on Brexit). Most of all, this is a record of one man's odyssey. I offer a brief extract from just one of the many poems - 'Jesus loved to live'.
*God is love, the Bible tells us so
We see it in Jesus, we should know...*

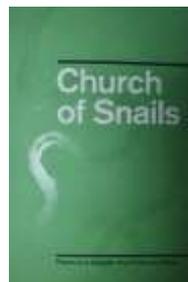
We should know that life stems from love

*From God's love within us
Not above.....*

This book is not and does not claim to be a book of definitive theology or professional writing. It is what the author claims for it, a road map of a personal journey through different stages of belief, doubt and hope.

Chris King

Church of Snails by Lucy Berry, United Reformed Church



This small book packs a big prophetic punch. For those who dare look, it holds up a mirror to how some churches are on the inside and how they appear to those outside. Its 23

poems journey through the where, what and why of church existence with a challenge to how it could be. The writer continually draws the reader back to Jesus. She encourages reflection on what the

purpose of church really should be. Comfort zones are challenged; status quo is shaken; responses are provoked.

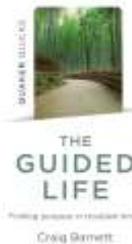
The book concludes with a section of 'references, notes and questions'. Providing a scriptural basis for some of the poems it could also be used for further personal reflection or group study.

Lucy Berry is a minister in the United Reformed Church, a performance poet and Poet in Resident for the Joint Public Issues Team. She previously worked as resident poet on Jeremy Vine's Radio 2 show. She loves the church enough to challenge it, her passion for justice, equality and acceptance are evident throughout the book.

I loved the book: small enough to read in one sitting, big enough to keep coming back to again and again. Chuckles of recognition, mingle with sighs of confession. In her introduction Lucy says, 'I hope you like some of the poems and that you take time to work out why you don't like the others'. I would say, whether you like the poems or not, there will be some working out to do. This book is for those who, like the author, love the church enough to challenge it. If you are happy with the way church is, don't like poetry, or don't want to be disturbed, then may be it is not for you.

Meryl White

The Guided Life by Craig Barnett, Quaker Quicks



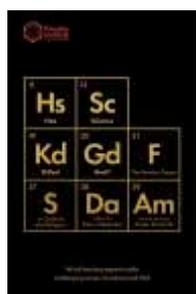
Craig Barnett has written a thoroughly insightful guide to the central conviction that attentiveness to the 'promptings of love and truth' is at the heart of any Quaker meeting.

He reminds us that the Friends are guided not by the question of 'what shall I believe?' but rather 'how shall I live?' Many different descriptions are employed to describe the Light which guides each person – Inward Guide, Inward Light, Spirit, Spirit of Christ, God – and Barnett is also quick to agree that such guidance and enlightenment can be found in a variety of religious traditions. Through stillness and simplicity and learning to trust our Guide we are led to discern what we might do in life in the service of others, and the author gives his own personal testimony to

his work in Manchester, Liverpool, Zimbabwe and Sheffield. He outlines the way in which Quaker Meetings both for Worship and for Clearness offer mutual support and guidance and can help in collective discernment when it comes to organisational decisions. In a chapter entitled 'The Broken Life' I was heartened to read of how, in all honesty, the guided life is not always straightforward and he writes well of 'struggling with God'. Throughout the book there are quotations from 17th and 18th-century Quaker 'luminaries' and some helpful spiritual practices given in an appendix. It enthusiastically commends the Quaker way of personal and communal discernment of the Spirit. It does not explore in any depth what this means in theological terms. It is above all a very sincere piece of writing, if somewhat passionless. He reveals this saying 'Quakers are usually cautious about allowing themselves to be swept into hasty decisions by passionate enthusiasm or emotional appeals. Their alternative is not reliance on calculating reason or abstract principle, but waiting for a subtler sense of 'rightness'; a quiet inner conviction that may have little to do with emotional excitement or calculation'. That lack prevented me from continuing to attend my local meeting but others might find it a blessing!

Adrian Alker

Has Science Killed God? edited by Denis Alexander SPCK



Many rightly ask whether there really is a conflict between Science and Religion, and whether some form of consensus might be helpful or even possible. The Faraday Institute for

Science and Religion was set up at St Edmund's College Cambridge in 2006, and it has been exploring areas of commonality ever since. A growing number of thoughtful papers are available online (www.faraday-institute.org/Papers.php).

The twenty papers here capture this direction of travel. They have been helpfully arranged (under six themes such as 'faith and philosophy' and 'faith and humanity') in order to appeal to both specialists and the informed general reader, and as

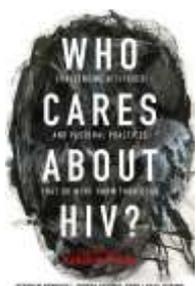
such the collection will be useful for group discussion. The essays subtly address many of the issues and, given its bridge-building intentions, provides context for each issue (e.g. what Hume says about miracles or why Genesis can be colonised by Creationists) as well as challenging the reader to re-assess their own understandings of the Bible.

Denis Alexander has done a fine job in identifying unavoidably central issues in the field - contrasting ideas about cause and design, determinism and free will, evolution and genomics, environment, and realism and relativism. Roger Trigg asks 'does science need religion?', Michael Poole argues that reductionism has promoted confusion, Stuart Judge wonders whether neuroscience can answer the question whether we have souls as well as brains, and John Polkinghorne explores the anthropic principle (why here and why now on the 'Goldilocks' planet Earth?). Each critically assesses the scientific and theological 'evidence', at times contentiously (e.g. McGrath on the 'New Atheists', or Graeme Finlay on the welfare consequences of misapplying genomics), or opening up how each approach (scientific and religious) interprets its ideas (e.g. Berry on stewardship or Holder on natural theology).

Denis' essay on models for thinking about this whole area helpfully guides us away from 'conflict' and 'overlapping magisterial' towards complementarity which 'takes both scientific and religious explanations very seriously, doing justice to both'. Yet this is not easy - and the papers demonstrate just how difficult it is, intellectually, economically, socially, and ontologically. No facile 'both / and' (and let's all be reasonable). The issues in this book will continue to resonate in the thoughts of any intelligent Christian believer long after they put the book down.

Stuart Hannabuss

Who Cares about HIV by Penrose, Kyusho-Ford and Kybird, SPCK



Caring for the sick and support for the marginalised has always been central to the outworking of Christianity. Thus inevitably the care and support of those suffering from HIV has been a

focus for many churches since the 1980s. Their reaction to HIV has been held up as a key testament to the strength, relevance and inclusivity of their faith. This book seriously challenges this view, and is likely to make us uncomfortable with the assumptions we make about the 'good' we think we are doing. The authors, two London HIV Chaplains and a Methodist Training and Development officer, construct this text as a witness to their experiences of clients. Their conclusions make stark reading. Churches have not only failed in supporting the individuals who approached them, but almost always inflicted further harm. At the root of this is an approach which fails to allow clients to own their own experiences, and to challenge and question simplistic responses. In employing strategies and metaphors which cast clients as victims, even if 'still being loved', the church undermines rather than supports. The significance of this analysis goes well beyond HIV (if that were not enough). It exposes the dilemma of teaching morality and love, perhaps even misconstruing the concept of love itself. As Guggenbuhl-Craig back in 1971 clearly established, the power relationship between client and carer is immediately unequal, and faith approaches offering 'universal acceptance' actually enhance client's feelings of powerlessness and despair. Their anger and fear remain unacknowledged. The challenge the authors pose is finding an approach which enhances clients' worth and agency, which would enable churches to gain from the challenge and dialogue which clients offer.

Andrew Lancaster

Jesus and After by E Bruce Brooks, Warring States Project



My wife and I often finish an excellent book and say that we must read it a second time. This time we turned intention into reality. It is that compelling, thought-provoking and inspiring.

Brooks' excavation of the Gospels, Epistles, Early Fathers' writings, Josephus and other material first reveals the Christianity of Jesus' earliest followers, what he calls

Alpha Christianity; next Beta, the version crafted by Paul and his followers; and, very briefly, Gamma which is the gnostic variety: all with brevity and clarity.

Though a thoroughly academic book it is structured and written to make it accessible, and exciting, for individuals or groups. The structure of each mini-chapter is a brief contextualisation, the Biblical text and reflections.

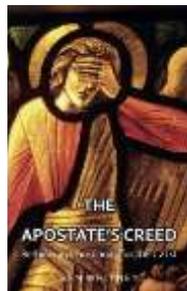
The first section explores Mark. By identifying philologically and stripping out later insertions, Brooks reveals the earliest understanding of Jesus and his message. He moves in the next section to demonstrate how amendments to Mark, and material in the other Synoptics, Pauline letters and Early Fathers' writings gave Jesus divine status. In the following sections Brooks reveals the ongoing process of how the writers changed and sought to eradicate the early Alpha material to create a textual justification of Beta Christianity; how the destruction of the Temple created a crisis in Judaism; how the Jesus sect was expelled from the synagogues; and how the Church in Rome exerted control.

If you want to purge Christianity of its Beta stumbling blocks and revisit Jesus, this is a must read.

Fred Pink

The Apostate's Creed by Ben Whitney, self-published

Ben was brought up in a strongly religious family. Following the death of his father, a Baptist minister, he gained a postgraduate theology degree and became one too.



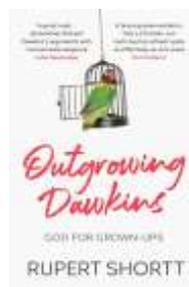
However, after several years of ministry he found it difficult to reconcile the questions raised by his training with the genuine and sincere faith of his congregation. He left the Baptist

church to begin working for the CofE and served as a lay reader. After a few years he gave up lay ministry, stopped attending any church altogether and pursued a successful career in education and social work. In recent years he has begun to think again about religion and has set up a website, www.ben-whitney.org.uk, in which he openly proclaims "I would no longer call myself a Christian; just a caring human being".

In this book, which he describes as "his last hurrah", he sets out to explain how he arrived at this conclusion. It is divided into two parts. In the first, the focus is on the provisions of Apostles' creed and the difficult questions they raise. For those of us who describe ourselves as progressive Christians or "believers in exile" there is little with which we would disagree except, perhaps, that many of us retain our belief in God as being "more than a name which we give to whatever we conceive of as the basis of our humanity". The second, entitled "Not your usual sermon" is made up of reflections "on the Way of Jesus" based on the lectionary passages for the eleven Sundays after Pentecost 2019 [except Trinity Sunday] with particular emphasis on Luke. His hope is that these will demonstrate that "there is still something in the Jesus story that can be believed and, more importantly, acted upon, with integrity". Rather than focussing on his suffering and death, we should look at Jesus' life and see what it tells us about ours and about how we should live. Our emphasis should be on doing good for others and acknowledging the good others do for us. This is true discipleship and it is not measured by how long we spend reciting creeds which are "strings of unbelievable clauses". This is an interesting and thought-provoking book and although we may not be quite as pessimistic as about the future of Christianity, we can all agree with him on the importance of ensuring that the memory of Jesus and his teaching will survive and flourish in the future.

Nigel Bastin

Outgrowing Dawkins by Rupert Short, SPCK



fundamentalists; it aims to make some considered responses to them and to put together a coherent pro-faith position which is modern and intellectually respectable.

The first chapter doesn't just deal with the belligerent tone and ignorance typical of the New

Atheists; it's concerned with a tendency amongst many to believe the claims that science and religion are incompatible, even if they find the style of people like Dawkins off-putting. He describes the incredulity of someone discovering that a woman he met at a party could be motivated in her work by her faith. She responds by asking whether he knew that the Big Bang theory was first proposed by a Roman Catholic priest.

The second chapter deals with the science versus religion controversy, and the third with the crude assertion that the moral impact of religion is always negative. This is where the author's attempt to construct a coherent position really gets going. He carefully puts together thoughts and observations from a very wide range of philosophers, theologians and scientists. His approach on the science / religion controversy is to expand Einstein's comment that religion without science is lame and science without religion is blind. His approach on ethics is to argue that religion contains considerable resources to motivate people to campaign for social justice and that it also encourages people to be sceptical of the mind-set current in some secular circles, namely a tendency to think that their side have all the answers.

This book has received plaudits from both secular and religious commentators. Sadly, it probably won't have any effect on the die-hard, but it certainly has the potential to speak to honest enquirers in both camps.

Guy Whitehouse

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Death's Welcome

Death

Ceasing to be

Becoming what?

Breathless

Containing all life

Life-less

Moving from

Moving toward

Leaving

Arriving

Shutting down

It is finished

Dust on the mantle

Ash on the hearth

Carried on zephyr puffs

Lifted

Unknowing

Fear not

Trust

Peace

At last

Ana Gobledeale



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1. Practice loyalty to the Sacred.
2. Do not forget that any given image of God is only a glimpse.
3. Do not use God's name to do harm.
4. Do not let life be defined by productivity.
5. Care for those who have cared for you.
6. Do not be destructive.
7. Be faithful to the commitments you make.
8. Do not take what does not belong to you.
9. Do not hinder justice from coming to fruition.
10. Do not let your internal desires lead you to harm another.