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## Community of Foreigners: Bonhoeffer's Theses for a Time of Resurgent Nationalism

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) knew the grief of love for an embattled nation. He lost family members in the war and then watched punitive measures from the Versailles treaty contribute to a decade of economic hardship for the German people. Bonhoeffer sought to bring these homeland struggles to the attention of an ex-patriate community that he pastored in Spain at the end of the 1920s. His lectures from that period show how deeply love for his people ran, even to the point of disregarding the lives of others in the pursuit of national interests.

Nevertheless, Bonhoeffer's love of the Christ-community ran deeper still, a commitment that caused him to turn sharply against many of his earlier views. In 1933, when the National Socialists had taken power and suspicion of foreigners had reached a critical juncture, Bonhoeffer nailed his theses to the church door. At issue was the 'Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service', which included a paragraph that entailed demotion for civil servants of Jewish descent. Bonhoeffer opposed the enforcement of this law against the church's ministers, writing and contributing to several statements of which the most succinct was his 'Theses on the Aryan Paragraph in the Church'. Today, as nationalism surges across Europe and North America, straining commitments to refugee persons, Bonhoeffer's claims deserve another hearing.

In the theses, Bonhoeffer argues that the church has its own distinct identity and should not be caught 'emulating whatever the state does.' True loyalty to the state, in his revitalisation of Luther's doctrine, involved the church remaining true to its own free character as church. As a 'racial law' threatened to cut across the pastorate, Bonhoeffer maintained that the church's borderline could be nothing other than the gospel as Word and Sacrament. In this case, scripture spoke of an irreparable breach in the dividing wall between Gentile and Jew while baptism had bound members together with 'indissoluble ties'.

Bonhoeffer had been arguing for such a Reformation understanding of the church's unity since his first dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio*, over and against the idea that the church was held together through 'community romanticism' or 'feelings of solidarity'. The true basis of church unity, he claimed, could therefore be most clearly perceived when conflict between groups—'Jew and Greek, pietist and liberal'—is most acute and yet they come together around pulpit, font and table. Bonhoeffer's position is reprised in the 1933 theses when he states that 'the church is

not a community of people who are all the same but precisely one of people who are foreign to one another who are called by God's Word'. Against then-contemporary Lutheran appeals to 'race' as a divine order of creation, Bonhoeffer reclaims ecclesial priority: 'The *Volk* of God is an order over and above all other orders'.

Bonhoeffer's theses mounted a timely argument for the gospel as his tradition had received it: the church, founded on the authority of Word of Sacrament, relativises all other 'laws'. As a statement fit for his day, however, these arguments require more than reprinting to answer the current pressures of nationalism on God's people. Less still would the church's position be fortified by belated censure of Nazi-era policies. Working from Bonhoeffer's arguments, two lines of adaptation suggest themselves.

First, while the church will always be embedded in national contexts, it should recognise the freedom of its unique, God-ordained polity. In other words, to conclude by lobbying an elected representative is to cut short the church's realisation of its catholicity as a political event in its own right. This challenge has been memorably put by Stanley Hauerwas, who states that the church does not merely *have* a social ethic; it *is* a social ethic. To that end, Bonhoeffer's position shows that principled inclusion, in which foreigners are kept in the role of beneficiary, is not enough; a thoroughgoing ecclesial ethic works to have foreigners holding spiritual authority over 'native' members. Such an endeavour raises critical questions surrounding which criteria make a minister 'fit' for a parish, particularly in light of what Willie James Jennings identifies as a diseased Christian imagination when it comes to racial belonging.

Second, church members are free *for* their nation, in its guilt as well as its promise. Freedom, as Bonhoeffer argues elsewhere, is not merely freedom *from*. This conviction was tested in his own life when, in the summer of 1939, he became a refugee from his homeland and an alluring cosmopolitan future opened to him. His likely fame as a thinker-in-exile was assured, given the important American theologians who were looking out for him. Never one for 'private virtue', however, Bonhoeffer returned not only to the company of the persecuted but to also bear the guilt of his nation. This meant that, as his people's government became increasingly brutal, his course of action set him under suspicion for, alternately, 'complicity' in the regime and 'treason'.

Bonhoeffer's line of argument against restrictive nationalism, from the theses to his choice to bear part of the nation's guilt, shows that the freedom of the 'community of foreigners' is different in kind from that offered by 'globalisation'. This is particularly the case if the latter leads one to enjoy a nation's privileges while evading its outstanding debts—a selectivity that remains tempting for Christian citizens who benefit from imperial histories. Genuine reckoning with national

identity, in the midst of this current period of 'nativism', requires that churches ask anew what it means to be a people created by water and the Word.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bonhoeffer's 1933 essays on the church, alongside his university lectures, sermons, and letters, may be found in Volume 12 of the *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Works in English (DBWE)*, from which citations for this article are taken. Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Berlin: 1933*. Edited by Larry Rasmussen. Translated by Isabel Best and David Higgins. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009.

# Teaching and Witness in the Life of the Church<sup>1</sup>

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## *Introduction*

I am an Anglican systematic or dogmatic theologian; I happen to prefer the term ‘doctrinal theologian’. But saying that I’m an Anglican doctrinal theologian is a bit like saying, ‘I’m a captain in the Swiss Navy’, or ‘I’m Donald Trump’s head of etiquette’ — it’s not all that clear that the job exists. I mention this because when my title says that I’ll be talking about ‘teaching and witness in the church’, what it really means is that I’m going to be talking about *doctrine*.

I should also admit at this point that I’m a doctrinal theologian specifically *in the Church of England* – and I really need to plead ignorance of the Scottish context. I genuinely don’t know how much what I’m about to say about *my* context will transfer up here; I don’t even know whether Anglican doctrinal theologians are as rare a species up here as they are south of the border. So I look forward to being better informed – or perhaps robustly put in my place – in the Q and A session later.

## *The ‘Nature of Doctrine’ Debate*

I’m going to begin by asking, What *is* doctrinal theology? What is it *for*? And, specifically: *What is the role of doctrinal theology in the church?* The answer will turn out to have something to do with teaching and witness, but it will take me a little bit of a while to get there.

These questions about doctrine have been asked a lot over the past three decades or so, in a debate sparked by Lutheran theologian George Lindbeck in 1984, in his book *The Nature of Doctrine*. He’s been followed by various others, such as Alister McGrath with *The Genesis of Doctrine*; Ellen Charry with a book on *The Pastoral Function of Doctrine*; Richard Heyduck with *The Recovery of Doctrine*; Kevin Vanhoozer with *The Drama of Doctrine*, Anthony Thiselton with *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, and Christine Helmer with a book on *The End of Doctrine*.<sup>2</sup> I am, of course,

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<sup>1</sup> Delivered as the first annual Scottish Episcopal Institute Lecture on Thursday 20 October 2016 in Martin Hall at the Divinity School (New College) of the University of Edinburgh.

<sup>2</sup> George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1984); Alister E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundation of Doctrinal Criticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990); Ellen T. Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral*

planning on writing my own book, *The Something of Doctrine*, but if you have any bright ideas on what my first noun should be, just let me know afterwards.

These are all books about *doctrines*, and about *doctrinal theology*. By ‘doctrines’, I simply mean statements of core Christian beliefs, especially those found in classic creeds and confessions, or in the doctrinal bases of Christian organisations—statements that are normally presented as having some kind of authority for Christians, or as faithfully summarising the church’s authoritative sources.

By ‘doctrinal theology’ I mean the processes by which these doctrines or their subject matter are elaborated upon, justified, critiqued, and put to use, in a wide variety of forms and contexts – especially where those processes are driven primarily by attention to the meaning, implications and connections of doctrinal ideas.

So, doctrines: authoritative statements; doctrinal theology: discussion and use of those statements or of their subject matter. Those books that I mentioned are books about the promulgation of *doctrines*, and about the pursuit of *doctrinal theology* – and about both as *activities of the church*. The authors ask: *Why* are they activities of the church? What relationship do these activities – of defining doctrine, of pursuing doctrinal theology – have to the truth? to Christian practice? to scripture? to tradition? to experience?

### *Doctrine is No One Thing*

There is a lot of good stuff in these books, but I have three worries about them, and I’m going to work my way to my own more positive statements by telling you about these three worries.

First, at least some of the authors assume that doctrine has *a* nature – that it is *one thing*. And yet it seems clear to me that there is no one thing called doctrine; that there are, in fact, *many* natures of doctrine, and a tangled history of the process by which ‘doctrine’ comes to be construed in the various different ways in which we now construe it.

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*Function of Christian Doctrine* (New York: OUP, 1997); Richard Heyduck, *The Recovery of Doctrine in the Contemporary Church: An Essay in Philosophical Ecclesiology* (Waco, TX: Baylor, 2002); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005); Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007); and Christine Helmer, *Theology and the End of Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2014).

After all, the moment you start digging in to my definition about ‘statements of core Christian belief’ with ‘some kind of authority’, ‘doctrine’ turns out to cover a whole range of kinds of pronouncement, made in a variety of contexts for a variety of purposes, with a variety of forms of authority. Paul summarises Christian faith in a letter to a distant church; Irenaeus sets out the ‘rule of faith’ in a polemic against gnostic hermeneutics; the bishops gathered at Nicaea pronounce on the shape of the faith and anathematise its upstart distorters – and so on, and on and on, until we’re comparing the forms and functions of the Westminster Confession, the Barmen Declaration, and the doctrinal basis of the Evangelical Alliance. It’s not clear that those are all the same kind of thing.

Nor is there one kind of activity called *doctrinal theology*. We sometimes proceed – at least in academic contexts – as if the nature of doctrinal theology were singular and obvious. We discuss, say, the doctrine of the incarnation, say, and we know that we’re handling a particular complex of ideas, and we know roughly how to handle that complex of ideas – the sorts of things its appropriate to do with them, the sorts of questions its appropriate to ask. And yet we also know that there’s a history to the invention of that task. Paul’s summarising of the faith has something to do with his distance from the communities to which he is writing, the inability to wield charismatic authority from that distance, and the need to persuade those communities that they already know all they need to know, to decide the questions that beset them (the deposit of the faith they have is sufficient for them); Irenaeus’ setting out of the rule of faith is part of the invention of the ideas of heresy and orthodoxy, the negotiation of patterns of intercommunion, recognition, and exclusion in the diaspora of second-century Christianity; Nicaea is in part a matter of imperial politics and the need for a different kind of public performance of unity – and so on, and on, and on. The history of the carving out of the space we can call ‘doctrinal theology’ is a rhetorical, polemical, political history – an ecclesial history, a pastoral history.

And it’s also, very much, a contested history. To pick an Anglican example of this, think of what happened with the Oxford Movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Rather obviously, as well as disagreement over particular matters of theological *substance*, there was disagreement over *method* – over the kind of activity that doctrinal theology was supposed to be, and about the kind of objects that doctrines were. Participants in these debates got trained in different intellectual habits; they used (and published!) different libraries of texts from the tradition; they wrote on the whole for different periodicals; they worked to different standards of excellence, and different moves counted as good arguments for them. *The phrase ‘doctrinal theology’ meant different things depending on where you stood in that debate.*



And that's just one episode. In the course of the longer history of doctrine and doctrinal theology, all the basic questions I mentioned at the start – the relationship of doctrinal theology to truth, practice, scripture, tradition, experience and so on – were *all* answered differently in different times and places. There are, and there have been, very different intellectual traditions that can go by the name of 'doctrinal theology', each construing the nature of doctrine differently. *Doctrine is no one thing* – and, insofar as they promote unified answers, singular answers, the proposals made by the authors I have mentioned are not so much descriptive, as selective and prescriptive ... and yet the joint between description and prescription is one that they mostly leave out of sight. They talk as if they are describing how doctrine has always worked. So that's my first worry.

### *Where Does Doctrinal Theology Happen?*

My second worry is rather similar to the first. I worry that it is not always clear who is being talked to – or rather, where you'll find the doctrinal theology being discussed, and who is doing it. George Lindbeck himself, the initiator of the recent debate, illustrates this all too well. For most of his career, Lindbeck was an ecumenist – he was involved in big, mainstream, formal ecumenical dialogues, mostly Lutheran–Catholic. He wrote his account of doctrine in order to clarify the way it was being handled in those ecumenical dialogues; he was writing for other ecumenical dialoguers. *And yet*, he dressed his account up as a *general* theory of doctrine, addressed to nobody in particular; it was an account, he claimed, that should work for multiple contexts, multiple denominations, even multiple religions. *He obfuscates the audience for his arguments.*

It may be more helpful, however, to come at my point another way. Consider my own case, and the forms of doctrinal theology (the particular practices of doctrinal theology) in which I – as a self-avowed English Anglican doctrinal theologian – am involved. I teach doctrinal theology in a secular university department, in Durham, but I also teach a session or two down the road from that department in Cranmer Hall to Anglican ordinands and other ministerial trainees. Then (as some of you now know only too well), I am part of the academic leadership for the Common Awards partnership, and have some kind of role in the oversight of academic standards for the teaching of doctrine in all the partner institutions. I sometimes preach in my local church. I'm a member of the Church of England's Faith and Order Commission, which is in part a successor body to its Doctrine Commission; I'm on a panel for the Church of England's Board of Education, including a very tangential role in the development of some new doctrinally framed teaching materials, that can be used to teach about Christianity in primary and secondary schools. And I could go on.

My point is: it is really not clear to me that any *one* account of doctrinal theology will cover all these different contexts – university department, theological college, local church, Faith and Order Commission, primary school, and so on – it is not clear to me that any *one* account will cover all the different practices of deliberation and communication that take place in these various contexts. And just as I don't think that the accounts of doctrine I mentioned at the start necessarily do descriptive justice to the variety of differing theological *traditions*, so I don't think that they necessarily do justice to the variety of *practices* of doctrinal theology, and to the different parameters, standards, and needs of those practices. So that's my second worry.

### *Doctrine and Intellectual Elitism*

My third worry is rather different. It is sparked off by the recognition that there is, in some though not all of these accounts, a tendency towards the Jeremiad. That is, there is a tendency to begin by bemoaning loudly the terrible state of doctrinal theology, and the terrible state of the church brought on by its neglect of doctrinal theology, which has been replaced by some kind of laissez-faire relativism, a lukewarm indifference to doctrine.

These complaints are normally presented as analyses of the situation in which the church is *now*: a matter of current affairs more than history. You begin your book by explaining how it is all going to hell in a hand basket, and has been doing over the last few years, but you, the doctrinal theologian, are going to solve things. And yet it is pretty clear that people have been making the same complaint for decades – indeed, for centuries. I can point you to worries about the churches 'falling away from "organized religion," and with it [their] revolt from "dogmatic theology"' – in 1929; or to worries about the churches succumbing to the idea that the whole development of doctrine is 'a gigantic monument of human folly, a momentous aberration of the human spirit' – in 1897. Or to John Henry Newman complaining that, for many in the church, 'every man's view of revealed religion [whatever it might be] is acceptable to God, if he acts up to it; ... [so that] no one view is itself better than another' – in 1838; complaining about the rise of relativism and the decline of doctrinal seriousness.

And I could go back further still – because this is a perennial pattern in the life of my church (and possibly yours too). The underlying structure is actually, I think, something like a contrast between (though I don't like this term) folk religiosity and the religiosity of an educated elite: that is, between the rather various, rather inarticulate, rather 'mythical [and] material modes of making sense ... associated commonly with "the people" at large' on the one hand, and, on the other, 'the analytic styles of a class that has [supposedly] "escaped" from myth', that prizes

the clear intellectual grasp and communication of the truths of faith. I'm part quoting here from Rowan Williams' discussion of Richard Hooker's debate with Puritanism, with Hooker siding with 'the people' – with all their stubbornly limited, patchy, and various grasp of theological truth, against the Puritans, who he sees as seeking a purification of the church by means of sound teaching: a church organised around the secure intellectual grasp of theological truths.<sup>3</sup>

There are many questions to ask about that contrast, but I suggest that something like the contrast I have just described – some kind of contrast between folk and elite, or ordinary and intellectual religion – is an abiding structure of the life of the Church of England; there's a constantly reproduced opposition and interaction between the two sides, visible from the sixteenth to the twenty-first centuries. And this perennial structure gets embodied in many an individual theologian's stance, by means of the trajectory on which that individual theologian's training takes them, as it plucks them from the midst of the folk, and places them in the very institutional factory that sustains intellectual elitism: the university or perhaps the seminary. And the typical product of that training is the young, normally male theologian, who now wears the tweed jacket or black polo neck of academe, and *who knows better than the church how the church should believe* – and who, when older and more regretful, comes to Edinburgh to deliver lectures about it all.

In brief, then, my theory (which I am giving in very broad brush terms) is that this biographical trajectory, which involves moves between institutions, and between the different kinds of formation offered by those institutions, leads to theologians embodying in a certain way a perennial sociological distinction shaping the life of the church, and then expressing that distinction by means of apparently historical claims: doctrine is declining *now*, and we are in a position to restore it. Doctrine is *always* declining; that's how it always looks when you have been on that trajectory.

And I'm uneasy, therefore, about the expressed desire to *renew the church by means of restored doctrinal seriousness* – at least in some of its forms. And why am I so uneasy about this shape? Because, unless very carefully handled – and I do think it can be very carefully handled, and it is by some – it provides an intellectualist account of church life over against the messiness of really existing faith. And yet, I am sure that if I go to my church on a Sunday, and because of my intellectual training can be pretty confident that I know, say, the doctrine of the Trinity better than anyone there – really a *lot* better – there's still *no interesting sense* in which I could claim *thereby to know God better* than them. (And that's not because I think

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<sup>3</sup> Rowan Williams, *Anglican Identities* (London: DLT, 2004), 32–33.

there's anything wrong with the doctrine of the Trinity.) But by being able to manipulate the terms of technical doctrinal theology well, better than anyone in the congregation, that doesn't in itself mean that I know God better. If an account of the nature of doctrine can't do justice to that basic hunch (and therefore to the hunch that the role of doctrinal theology can't be to tell people stuff about God that they don't know, because the doctrinal theologian knows God better) – if it can't do justice to that hunch (and I don't think all of them can) I'm going to be very suspicious of it.

### *So What Is Doctrine?*

And all that now brings me, at last, to more positive comments. I'm going to sketch an account of the origin of doctrine and doctrinal theology, and I'm going to draw on that to talk about two contexts of doctrinal thinking in my church today: storytelling, and decision-making in the context of division. I'm going to try to keep in mind *the variety of doctrinal traditions* (my first worry), and *the variety of doctrinal practices within each tradition* (my second worry), and to *avoid an intellectualist account of the life of the church* (my third worry) – and I'm going (at last!) to bring witness and teaching into the frame.

Let me start with the experience with which Christianity begins: a scripture-wrapped, God-shaped experience of the human being Jesus of Nazareth, risen as Lord. This experience gives rise to discipleship – to forms of community life, and to forms of individual life within and around those communities, that respond to this Lord. Or, perhaps better, this experience gives rise to the on-going *negotiation* of discipleship: on-going negotiation in engagement with scripture, in conversation with tradition and the contemporary church, in interaction with the world – as Christians try to make enough sense to live by, as disciples.

Obviously, because it is an on-going negotiation of *discipleship*, it involves, unavoidably and centrally, reference back to Jesus. That's why the most basic shape of the life of the church can be thought of as *witness*: as life corporate and individual that points to, that responds to and so *shows*, the Lordship of Christ – in Christ-focused worship; in endeavours in communal life gathered around him; in mission in his name, and so on.

Now *teaching* is a part of this life of witness: in various forms it *serves* this life of witness, informing it, keeping it in shape, enabling and impelling the processes of negotiation and of reference or pointing that constitute it – and in various forms teaching itself can *be* a form of witness, precisely because witness involves pointing, naming – it involves communicating, proclaiming, and confessing Christ. In fact my very rough definition of Christian teaching is something like 'communicating so as to witness and so as to shape witness to Christ'.

Various practices that we could loosely group under the heading ‘teaching’ run through this life of Christian witness right from start. We have disciples of Jesus preaching to Jewish and then to Gentile audiences, defending themselves in trials before the authorities, preaching to those already converted, sending letters full of instruction, catechising those preparing for baptism, and so on. All sorts of practices of teaching.

Within this great mess of forms of communication that witness and shape witness, there are elements that begin to look specifically like *doctrinal* practices – confessing the name of Jesus in worship, singing hymns that articulate the content of the good news, pronouncing ritual confessions at the end of catechesis and during baptism, producing flexible statements of the rule of faith in the contest between diverse groups claiming the name Christian, developing conciliar creeds to police the views of bishops, and so on.

You couldn’t draw a hard line around them and say ‘here’s doctrine’, ‘here’s wider teaching practice’, ‘here’s the rest of the life of witness’: we’re dealing with messy, overlapping, intermingling complexity here, which doesn’t admit of such dissection. But in the midst of all this, we do see the emergence of a loose set of key ideas around which much of this communication’s content swirls – loci that become touchstones for comparison, contrast, and argument, and that eventually become articles of creeds and confessions. And it is those ideas that we can begin to call *doctrines*.

Right from the start of this process of emergence, we’re talking about a diversity of doctrinal practices. From a very early date, we see at least the seeds of differing domains of discourse with their own rules. What are the connections between baptismal confessions and apologetic summaries of the faith? What’s the connection between conciliar debate and ordinary catechetical teaching? What are the *rules of play* in each of these cases? But all of these doctrinally shaped practices of teaching are there to support and extend the life of the church’s witness, the on-going negotiation of discipleship; that is the context in which they make sense, the context in which they live.

### *Practices of Story-telling*

Consider, for instance, the many ways in which the life of Christian witness involves story-telling. The creed isn’t a story; if you’ll forgive the technical term, it’s ‘sort of narrativish, in part’. Christianity isn’t *a* story; the Christian community doesn’t embody *a* story; people’s lives are not in any *straightforward* sense single stories; experience doesn’t come in exclusively story form. But the life of Christian witness does irreducibly involve, among *many* other things, some practices of story-telling.

In a variety of contexts, Christians tell stories of Jesus, stories of salvation, stories of God's ways with the world.

Think of such story-telling as a family of practices: preaching, children's talks, other less visible practices of pastoral story-telling, and so on – you could probably elaborate the list all afternoon. If you look at those practices, you will find a really complex and flexible set of skills, by which Christians, in response to the contexts in which they find themselves, improvise recognisably Christian stories – drawing on a complex repertoire of themes, motifs, plots, characters, settings, and vocabulary in ways that are beyond systematisation. Sometimes it's done well, sometimes it's done badly, sometimes it's excruciating – but there's an awful lot of it out there, and a lot of it is sophisticated and complex. *Doctrines*, in this context, can perhaps be thought of as the nodes around which these stories tend to revolve. If you could plot all the lines these stories take, you would find a vast, unwieldy tangle – but doctrines would be represented by unusually intense knots in the midst of it.

In relation to these specific practices, *doctrinal theology* doesn't so much set out the one plot of Christian story-telling, as explore these nodes around which these stories are circling, learning how the story can thread into and out of them. It draws on the history of these practices of story-telling, the ways that these knots in the tangle have emerged over time; it asks how and why Christians have told their stories around them in quite the way that they have. It also draws on the ways that these stories are being told in the present in all sorts of contexts. And such exploration is undertaken, fundamentally, for the sake of feeding back into the process; for the sake of *on-going improvisation* in such story-telling – to inspire it, to shape it, to give the Christians involved access to a richer repertoire of moves to make as they tell these stories, and of questions to ask of their performance. This is, I think, one of the things going on in a theological education institution like the Scottish Episcopal Institute, when doctrine is taught – or at least it is *one* frame with which to think about the power and success of doctrinal teaching in a context like SEI. Is it both drawing on past and present practice in such story telling, and feeding back, so as to enliven and enrich those practices?

If it works like this, the doctrinal theologians in question are contributing to a set of practices that can be and mostly are fairly healthy without them, and whose gaps and failures they probably won't do that much to resolve: doctrinal theologians are not the producers, controllers, or saviours of Christian story-telling. But, if they do their job well, they might be amongst those who help keep this practice flourishing, and who keep it in touch with and recognisable to other participants. They might be playing a useful, even if not a determinative part, in keeping these practices of teaching going – and so in feeding the life of witness of which these practices of teaching are a part. We are useful, but not strictly necessary.

*Disagreement and Division*

That is, I hope, an attractive and plausible picture. But I want to focus now on a different use of doctrinal theology in the church, which may make for gloomier discussion – and that is doctrinal theology’s role in large-scale debates, in decision-making in relation to the headline issues that threaten the unity of my church and its witness. And to get to this topic, I want to say just a little more about the *development* of doctrine.

Now there are many complex stories to tell of the process of development of doctrine, but all I want to say at this point is that the nature of witness, the role of teaching within it, and the development of anything that looks like doctrine, are all *contested* right from the start. The book of Acts may present a picture of the disciples one in heart and mind, and sharing all things – but the earliest contemporary evidence we have for the development of Christianity is a bunch of letters thrown as missiles in battles about rather basic questions of Christian self-definition. The earliest texts we have are controversial – and not from controversies between central figures and outliers, but between *Paul and Peter*; we’re not talking about a debate between centre and fringe, but arguments right at the centre of the life of Christianity in the first century.

And if we carry the story on from that point, pretty soon we’re dealing with ramifying traditions of doctrinal theology – that is, diverging strands of intellectual practice, whose proponents pursue differing patterns of argument, make sense of different kinds of evidence, stand in differing relations to scripture, offer differing accounts of their own development and of their connections back to Jesus and the apostles, and so on.

And from very early on, participants in any one of these intellectual traditions, these strands of doctrinal theology, looking backwards within their own strand, can see how it has unfolded appropriately, faithfully, even with necessity, from the initial deposit of Christian faith – and looking across at other people’s traditions they can see only too easily what those other traditions miss, and where the evolution of those other traditions looks arbitrary rather than necessary. But their opponents on the other side of the fence can do just the same in return. On the whole, not many of these strands are susceptible to straightforward argumentative defeat; they can all sustain themselves argumentatively.

And this, of course, raises some serious questions for the practice – the practices – of doctrinal theology in the church. It raises questions that are inherent in the idea of witness to Christ as Lord, as it has been explored in the life – the lives – of the Christian church. Acknowledging Christ’s lordship involves acknowledgement of something not in one’s own control. It implies a kind of objectivity, a kind of shared reference to something that stands over against all of us.

Lordship implies obedience in some form. Christians therefore can't get away from the question: in the church's various patterns of witness, are they showing, are they witnessing *to the same Lord*? And that in turn means that, in some form or other, the question of whether Christians *teach the same things* is similarly unavoidable. It is not going to go away.

So, if my earlier point, about story-telling, was about how doctrinal theology might support teaching, and thereby support the church's life of witness, this point is about how differences in teaching, disagreements in doctrine, might undermine the church's life of witness. And the problem is that the differences between traditions include *differences over the very criteria by which we might decide on the limits of acceptable diversity* – the criteria by which we might decide whether we are witnessing to the same Lord. And given that doctrinal arguments only make sense *within* particular traditions of reasoning, they are therefore only so much use in tackling disagreement *between* traditions of reasoning – traditions separated precisely by what you can appeal to, and in what ways, to settle disputed questions. And when I say that they are 'only so much use', I really mean that they are 'not much use at all'.

It's no surprise, therefore, that the history of Church of England (to say nothing of the broader Anglican Communion, or the global church) is *not* a history, on the whole, of arguments being settled by theological debate – or of *theological* solutions adopted and promoted by a central authority – at least, not often in such a way that the theological articulation offered by, say, a Synod debate or an episcopally-backed report, or whatever, actually does the heavy lifting of establishing a solution that everyone can live with. Theological argument seldom solves much, in this kind of context.

So what can we say in the face of this kind of diversity, which cuts right to the heart of our life of witness? Well, just to be perverse, let me offer you a solution that doesn't quite work, even though I'd like it to. Think of me at this point as a slightly dodgy second-hand car dealer, about to talk up a car that has no real chance of passing its next MOT.

I could say that what all of us involved in these differing traditions need to do, first of all, is acknowledge the same basic overall shape to our life together as a church: that it is a witness to Jesus Christ as Lord, as the Messiah of Israel, as God's decisive word to God's creation. It ought to be possible to set out some kind of agreed statement along these lines that will secure wide acceptance in the church, and which can therefore provide a sort of widescreen backdrop, or a *minimal plot* within which to situate our diverse practices of witness. In fact, some kind of agreed statement like that would be needed to enable us to say that, yes, we agree to treat



all our diverse practices *as* forms of witness to Christ as Lord, and to allow them to be judged as such.

Such a statement of fundamentals would not, however, be enough to settle most detailed questions of practice – it's simply too broad brush, too large-scale a form of agreement. So the second step in this solution, after the establishment of this foundational agreement, would simply be to acknowledge that we do not have consensus beyond that foundation: we have different doctrinal traditions. And we should – according to this solution that I'm currently trying to sell you – simply acknowledge this diversity. We agree on fundamentals; we disagree on *adiaphora* – on things indifferent or things accessory. That's what Anglicans do. The pursuit of agreement at the level of ideas is therefore not really on the table, and we should look instead at the question of *practical compossibility*. That is, we should ask: What different shapes of lived witness can actually, in practice, be part of a single communal form of life together? What forms of witness are practicably possible alongside one another, intermeshed with one another? What forms are practically com-possible?

Of course, when you pose it like that – we have agreed on fundamentals, and we're now just looking for practical compatibility for the rest – the question of what unity and disunity might even *mean* turns out to be a very complex and messy question, that has a messier shape than the question of *intellectual* agreement and disagreement. After all, practical unity is a very various and diverse thing. The kind of peaceful and fruitful practical coexistence you can have within a single congregation is very different from kind of peaceful and fruitful practical coexistence you can have within a family of congregations in full formal communion with one another; unity means practically different things in those two contexts. And those are, again, different from the kind of peaceful and fruitful practical coexistence you can have between ecumenical partners. The limits of practical non-interference differ from the limits of conscience, which differ from the limits of active co-operation, which differ from the limits of shared teaching. The question of what you're happy for your money to pay for differs from the question of what ministry from you're willing to accept from what bishop, which differs from the question of what effect you think the witness of others has on your witness, or of what witness you think is given by the very fact of your remaining identifiably a part of the same church as another congregation with which you disagree. These are all different questions, which demand different kinds of answers; unity doesn't mean just one thing; it's a multi-level, multi-strand reality. Finding a practical way forward as a church is a matter of negotiating together through *all that* – finding a way forward where all the participants can continue with some kind of integrity (as they

see it), even though they all have different theological maps, and there's no way that a single theological argument can settle the issues consensually.

So, my proposed solution would start with some shared fundamentals of belief, which set the broadest backdrop within which our disagreements take place. It would then move on to this question of practical compossibility – the complex negotiation of how these disagreements can be lived with in practice, peacefully and fruitfully, and *bearably* (to say no more) for all involved. And the third step – can you hear that strange knocking in the engine yet, or the wobble in the offside suspension? – the third step would simply be to advocate *patience*: to say that, unsatisfactory as this uneasy practical cohabitation might be, this agreement on fundamentals and mess of negotiated cooperation on everything else – well, that is all we have, and *holding together in this way is itself a way of acknowledging the nature of the truth to which we witness*.

Unfortunately, as you'll find out if you buy this car and try to drive it away, this solution doesn't quite work. It remains at least one step too intellectually optimistic – and that is precisely because it is a proposed theoretical 'solution'. I have just given you a lecture outlining a solution, drawing on a set of concepts in order to articulate that solution. And as such, it involves a particular, controversial, construal of *how teaching and witness work*. It involves a construal of how *adiaphora* and fundamentals work, and, where the boundary is between those two – the things that you can't change and the things that you can. It presents itself as an *overview* of the field, even though it is actually an *intervention* in it, from one particular point of view. That is, it sounds like a general description of our shared situation, but it funds itself in practice on coinage that circulates *within* specific intellectual traditions within the church, but which is inevitably less well accepted in others – or at least has a very disadvantageous exchange rate.

This form of advocacy may have *some* purchasing power, but if I'm right that our divisions do not often get solved by theological argument, they are unlikely to get solved even by a theological argument about why our divisions do not often get solved by theological argument. That's a neat attempt at an end run, but it is unlikely to work; it *still leaves solution in the hands of the theologians*. It proposes yet another solution by means of clearly grasped intellectual agreement, even if it is the clearly grasped intellectual agreement to downplay the importance of clearly grasped intellectual agreement. And we're not all going to agree on that kind of claim.

### *Don't Buy This Car.*

I don't however, want to end on that negative note, and abandon every element of the proposal I have just been exploring. I'd like to keep hold of that picture I

sketched of the negotiation of practical compossibility – the whole complex, layered nature of the forms of unity that are possible, and the messy spectacle of participants using differing – indeed, incompatible – maps of the territory as they seek to negotiate a practicable way through it together, while keeping various kinds of integrity that matter to them. And I'd like to add to that now the fact that their differing maps mark different areas of the territory as non-negotiable – and not in compatible ways. There is *no consensual map in the background*, however bare-boned, on which all the individual maps are based. To say that I am sceptical of a theological *solution* to disagreement and division in the church is simply to admit that the negotiation of ways forward in the midst of all *that* kind of mess aren't, I think, going to proceed by way of overview and consensus. Or, to put it another way, and more concretely, they're not going to be worked out *by the deployment of winning arguments in some kind of generic public space within the church* – the kind of space that has become visible in new ways online, in the tit-for-tats of twitter, Facebook, the blogosphere – but the kind of space that has also long appeared in Synod-as-spectacle, or in the exchange of letters with long lists of signatories in the *Church Times* – the spaces of megaphone diplomacy, or the darkling plain on which uncomprehending armies clash by night. Those are the kinds of spaces within which global solutions are proffered – and inevitably rejected, claims about consensus advanced – and withdrawn, theological overviews floated – and shot down. I don't think that in that kind of space, at that kind of level of generality, that our way forward as a church is going to be established by a winning argument.

*However:* the on-going process of negotiation, the exploration and testing of practical compossibility, genuinely fraught and fractious though it might be – that negotiation doesn't only happen, it doesn't *mainly* happen, at that global level. It happens in all sorts of smaller-scale contexts and processes, in numerous differing localities and conversations. It is an awkward dance, and the way it evolves is affected by all kinds of thinking being done by all sorts of participants in all sorts of ways. It may not make much sense to hope for large-scale intellectual *solutions to the whole mess* – with one intellectual bound, Jack was free – but it *does* make sense, I think, to hope that the on-going negotiation of the mess might be deepened and enriched and informed, in all sorts of smaller-scale but nevertheless serious ways.

And it is in relation to those smaller-scale possibilities of development that there is, I think, useful doctrinal theological work to be done. There's doctrinal theological work to be done on helping people become literate in their own traditions of teaching and witness – and in the traditions of others; promoting good descriptions of each one's dynamism, multiplicity, and internal questions. There's doctrinal theological work to be done learning to narrate carefully – and generously – the emergence and sustaining and interaction of the multiple traditions that we

now inherit; there's doctrinal theological work to be done promoting forms of attention to each other's doctrinal claims that sets those claims in the context of past and present practice, past and present witness. Without expecting, or promoting the idea that such work is likely to *solve* anything on a grand scale, I do think it can make a difference. It can, perhaps, by way of multiple small-scale changes, affect the texture, the flow, and – perhaps, in the long run – even the outcomes of our larger-scale negotiations, our disagreements, because it can *change the possibilities of negotiation*, for at least some of the negotiators involved. I dare to hope that it might therefore be *one* factor, among many others, in allowing us to find new habitable settlements together. Perhaps.

One final comment. It's not remotely enough to leave what I have just said in the abstract – though I have left myself no time to put that right. I'll just say that we need to think about the particular spaces, the particular practices, within which these kinds of process of mutual education can take place, and the actual practices that will constitute them – coming back to the point I made early on about the variety of practices and contexts of doctrinal theology in the church. The spaces within which this kind of work can take place and does take place are very varied, and mostly quite small-scale. But they might include, I believe and hope, spaces like the Scottish Episcopal Institute. Spaces for learning, for exploration, for mutual challenge – for teaching, for growth in witness, for negotiating ways of life together, including our disagreements. And – I dare to hope – for richly attentive and argumentatively diverse doctrinal theology as one of the things, though *only* one of the things, that might serve the unity, and so the witness, of the church.

## Why Theology Needs Imagination<sup>1</sup>

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In this essay I want to focus on Christian theology's relation to the arts, and in particular why the effective practice of theology needs aid from the imagination more than ever. The last couple of decades has seen a real blossoming of literature on theology and the arts, especially in relation to poetry, visual art and music. Yet, whether the writer be Catholic or Protestant, liberal or conservative, there has been a repeat of the phenomenon described above, what seems to me a surprising reluctance to admit that traffic might go, as it were, in both directions. Instead, discussion has been dominated by what might be labeled exemplarism, the use of criteria drawn from theology to pronounce a particular work of art as good of its kind or not. Its role is thus seen to be at most to enhance belief, not help create it. It is that position which I wish to challenge in this essay by exploring four commonly held philosophical assumptions about the world in which we now live. All four are widely believed to undermine the reasonableness of religious belief, whereas I shall contend that if theologians were to pay more attention to the arts in light of these assumptions they would soon see the arts as natural allies. Inevitably, not everything can be covered in a single essay. So, for simplicity's sake, in what follows I will without further ado assume the truth of these four widely held positions.

### *The Collapse of Dualism and Appeal to Metaphor*

One major problem that contemporary philosophical reflection poses for any attempt to bridge the gap between God and ourselves is the fact that few intellectuals now believe in the conception of human nature that dominated most of Christian history and which we inherited from Platonism, and that is the sense of us already inhabiting two worlds. Technically known as dualism, it spoke of human beings as consisting of two substances, mortal bodies and immortal souls, and thus of us inhabiting the visible earth as the home of matter and an invisible reality that

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<sup>1</sup> Delivered as a lecture to the teaching staff of the Scottish Episcopal Institute on Tuesday 21 March 2017 at the Conforti Institute (Coatbridge). Much of its substance comes from recently published material and is used with permission. The original may be found in David Brown, *Divine Generosity and Human Creativity*, ed. Christopher R. Brewer and Robert MacSwain (London: Routledge, 2017), 23-36.

is the home of minds, ours and God's. Instead we have been returned to what is also the more common biblical picture, of us as psychosomatic unities, mind and body entirely interdependent with us only surviving death, if at all, thanks to divine action and not because of anything inherent in the way we have been made.<sup>2</sup>

If such a conclusion excludes any sense of us already linked to heaven (the invisible world that is God's), the question then of course becomes acute of whether there might be any alternative way of making the connection. I would suggest that reflection on the world of the arts provides just such a possibility through appeal to the imagination, that is, an appeal no longer to the fundamental nature of our minds as such but rather to *how* those minds work.

Human beings learn the use of words in application to the sensible world. So clearly, if the jump to the divine is to be made, language will need to be stretched in analogies, images and metaphors, what are in effect the common tools of the imagination. Perhaps the relevance of the point to all the imaginative arts can be expressed most clearly by making explicit the parallel between symbol in action, metaphor in writing, and image in the visual arts, and how the theological notion of sacramentality is based on a similar structure. Consider first the traditional sacraments. Each involves an action that by doing one thing intends another: the consecration of bread and wine to become the body and blood of Christ, the exchange of rings to establish a permanent relation between two individuals, the anointing of a dying person's body to prepare for life in another world, and so on. Works of the imagination, irrespective of the medium, appear very similarly founded. The metaphors of the poet are intended to take us from one sphere of discourse to another, the images of the artist from one visual image to another (or sometimes quite outside the visual altogether), while a medium like ballet is full of symbolic acts under which gestures of the body are intended to imply acts performed quite differently in ordinary life.

Even prior to his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism in 1927, T. S. Eliot had already detected the importance of metaphor in helping to interconnect what might otherwise seem a non-integrated, un-created world. Thus in a famous essay on 'The

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<sup>2</sup> Although it was certainly the more common view, the biblical pattern is now acknowledged to be more varied than was once thought. See George W. E. Nickelsberg, *Resurrection, Immortality and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (London: SCM, 1992); Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002); and Alan F. Segal, *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 2004).

Metaphysical Poets' he observes: 'When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experiences; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter fails in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking, whereas in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes.'<sup>3</sup>

In other words, as symbol is to action, metaphor to language and image to art, so sacrament is to religion. Each is trying to move us analogically, to take us to a different place, and so establish new wholes. Of course in most uses of the imagination, that other place remains firmly in our present world. Nonetheless, the imagination has already accepted the principle of a move elsewhere, and so it may well be asked, why not then to a vastly different world? As Jesus' use of parables illustrates, or some of the extraordinary imagery and word play found in the prophets,<sup>4</sup> similes and metaphors when well used can draw us from the material world into quite a different order of existence. As already noted, this is not at all to claim that every exercise of the imagination even implicitly evokes God but it is to observe that the imagination is deploying precisely the same kind of tools that make talk of God possible. So, however hostile to faith individual artists may be, they are at least moving humanity onto the same terrain that legitimates talk of God.

The sacramental can thus be seen to build upon the symbolic and metaphorical inasmuch as, though the latter are not sacramental as such, it is not hard to see how the process which they utilize might extend to the more explicitly sacramental participation of one thing in another where too there is both similarity and difference, as in earthly light and heavenly light, running water and living water,<sup>5</sup> and so on. Indeed, that very fact of difference that is opened up in analogical language and action helps identify another key contribution that the imagination can make towards an encounter with the divine, and that is in the essentially open-ended character of all imagery and symbol. That is to say, the interpretation of such devices can be pulled in quite a number of different directions, and so the question of an alternative religious world can be raised even when such a thought was far removed from the intention of artist or speaker. This is because once we move beyond the literal the multivalent character of possible comparative allusions cannot be strictly controlled, and indeed one might argue that it is the mark of a

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<sup>3</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'Metaphysical Poets', in *T. S. Eliot, Selected Prose*, ed. F. Kermode (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), 59–67, esp. 64.

<sup>4</sup> For example, a basket of fruit (*qayis*) moves Amos to think of the end (*qes*) of Israel (8:1–3).

<sup>5</sup> John 4:1–26, esp. 10, 11. 'Living' means literally running water.

great poet or artist to welcome such allusive richness. So the transition to the immaterial can sometimes be imaginatively made even where such thoughts were far from the creator's mind and perhaps even from most of his audience or viewers.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps one might be allowed to use a poem on the relation between 'Poetry and Religion' to sum up the kind of view I have been trying to express here, one by the contemporary Australian Roman Catholic poet, Les Murray:

Full religion is the large poem in loving repetition ...  
and God is the poetry caught in any religion,  
caught, not imprisoned. Caught as in a mirror  
that is attracted, being in the world as poetry  
is in the poem, a law against closure.<sup>7</sup>

*The Collapse of Theistic Arguments and the Appeal to Religious Experience*

When precisely the need for proofs of God's existence came to dominate philosophical discussion and what were the main impulses for such a way of seeing things is a matter of some contention among intellectual historians. Three significant books in this connection are Michael Buckley's *At the Origin of Modern Atheism*, Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* and Michael Gillespie's *The Theological Origins of Modernity*.<sup>8</sup> Although they differ greatly over when precisely change set in, their common contention is that the problem begins when religious belief comes to be seen as an *inference* from something else rather than itself directly experienced as part of the air we breathe, as it were. Charles Taylor wants to blame the Reformation when there ceased to be a common culture, but one might equally well go back as far as Aquinas with his five proofs for God's existence. Although modern attempts to disengage Thomas from later Neo-Thomism of the kind that saw these arguments as absolutely central to his position, the new influence from Aristotle that Aquinas made possible did after all have considerable impact, in generating

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<sup>6</sup> For two examples – from Francis Bacon and A. E. Housman – see my 'A Sacramental World: Why it Matters', in *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, ed. Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 603–15.

<sup>7</sup> From *Poetry and Religion*: Les Murray, *Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1998), 267. Used with grateful permission.

<sup>8</sup> Michael J. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987); Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Boston: Harvard, Bellknap Press, 2007); Michael A. Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).



demands for a rational structure whereby God in effect became an inference rather than part of immediate human experience. Surprisingly, such a view even became part of the official teaching of the Catholic Church in the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Yet even many Christian philosophers would now concede that such contentions were considerably overblown. Bridging the gap between the empirical world and the divine in this way (by strict, deductive argument) was simply not the right way of going about things. Of course, some notable contemporary philosophers of religion continue to defend one or more of these proofs, among them Brian Davies, Alvin Plantinga, Richard Swinburne, and Denys Turner. But, despite the technical brilliance of some of their efforts, few have been convinced.

Inevitably, the decline in acceptance of the traditional proofs has brought with it much interest in religious experience, with appeal to such experience now itself sometimes structured as a new form of proof. Indeed, I myself have engaged in such presentations.<sup>10</sup> Here, however, I want my focus to be somewhat different. Almost all such discussion has kept well clear of potential overlaps with aesthetic experience, and it may seem that this was a wise intuition. But I would like to suggest otherwise, not only because much religious experience is thereby unnecessarily excluded but also because much of the appropriate terminology for religious experience is first learnt in aesthetic contexts. Of course the analysis of experience would be much simpler if religious experience always occurred in contexts quite separate from the aesthetic. But in actual fact quite frequently there are interconnections, with initial religious responses, for example, clarified and deepened by subsequent aesthetic encounters and the kind of language and increased perceptivity that they now make possible. So, for example, one thinks of the increased awareness that paintings such as those of John Constable or Caspar David Friedrich make available in their landscapes: Constable with his sensitivity to divine immanence in scenes such as those surrounding Dedham church or Salisbury Cathedral, or Friedrich with his so-called *Rückenfiguren* that invite us to a similar perception to those figures with their backs to us of the divine transcendence implicit in the majestic landscapes that they observe.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion symbolorum* 36<sup>th</sup> ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1976), 3026.

<sup>10</sup> See my 'Religious Experience and Realism', *Religious Studies* 51 (2015): 497–512, now reprinted in David Brown, *God in a Single Vision: Integrating Philosophy and Theology*, ed. Christopher R. Brewer and Robert MacSwain (London: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> See my *God and Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 84–152, esp. 120–22 and 113–15.

Equally, one can see the process at work in the opening lines of familiar poems such as Gerard Manley Hopkins' *God's Grandeur*.

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
 It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;  
 It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil  
 Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?  
 Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;  
 And all is seared with trade: bleared, smeared with toil.

Hopkins' suggestion is of an immediate experience, and as such this is contrasted with the effect of trade, under which trees come only to be valued for their timber and not in their own right. So nature is viewed purely instrumentally (i.e. with some further purpose in mind) and not intrinsically, just as it is in itself, as a divine creation. It is that alternative perception to which Hopkins is trying to restore us, and which, arguably, was lost when sacramentality's connection with Platonism was abandoned with its two primary metaphors of participation and imitation that suggest nature and humanity already in some sense bridging the two domains of earthly and heavenly realities. To the objection that all such connections are imposed and not discovered there is of course a long tradition of an alternative explanation, of a learnt culture blinding us to the link. It is to culture's wider deceptive power that Hopkins is here pointing, an insight that he shared with Britain's greatest art critic of the nineteenth century, John Ruskin, part of whose counter-strategy was to bring nature and art into closer relation.

In Ruskin's view human art was at its best when imitating nature, principally because nature as a divine creation itself brought us closer to the ultimate source of all creativity. Indeed, despite his Calvinist roots he insists that nature does not merely point to God but can itself provide experience of the divine nature.<sup>12</sup> So, for example, a seascape stretching to infinity is said not just to point to the possibility of a similar infinity in God, it allows us the actual possibility to experience such infinity as one of the divine's own distinctive attributes. In Ruskin's own words, 'light receding in the distance is of all visible things the least material, the least finite, the farthest withdrawn from the earth ..., the most typical of the nature of God, the most suggestive of the glory of his dwelling place.'<sup>13</sup>

It is often said that such attitudes to nature cannot survive the discoveries of Darwin. But even though the strength of Ruskin's certainty of such an intimate

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<sup>12</sup> John Ruskin, *Modern Painters* (London: George Allen, 1906), II, 3, v-x.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 3, v. 45.

connection between nature and God was severely tested by Darwin's new theories, it is by no means clear why this should have been so. Strange creatures that had anticipated human beings were already known to the biblical authors in the form of Behemoth and Leviathan and, so far from finding them repulsive, an author like Job can detect God's delight in such variety of forms (Job 40:15–41:34).

More recently, a poetic writer like Annie Dillard in her classic meditation of 1976, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, well illustrates how even direct confrontation with 'nature red in tooth and claw' need not undermine such a sense of divine presence within nature. While frankly confessing her perplexity at nature at its most brutal and wasteful, as with the giant water bug and praying mantis,<sup>14</sup> she insists on refusing such encounters decisive sway. Instead, they are held in creative tension with how nature appears elsewhere, with its author a 'spendthrift genius' displaying 'extravagance of care.'<sup>15</sup> In other words, argument remains in her view the wrong category in which to view the symbols of creation. We can experience God directly in nature, even if at times our encounters are quite the reverse. And of course it is not only nature that can be experienced sacramentally in this way. Much of human experience can similarly function, as, for example when human love acts as a cipher for divine love.

In such ideas on nature Ruskin was almost certainly influenced by Wordsworth, even his favoured term 'types' being one such borrowing. But it is important to note that it was not just aesthetic experience of nature that he saw as helping to engender religious experience, he also makes much the same point about works of art, such as poetry, painting and architecture, with expression of infinity in a painting, for example, capable of occasioning a similar experience of divine infinity. At this point objections are likely to come from both sides of the religious divide, questioning the possibility of such experience but for quite different reasons. Thus on the one hand some Catholic philosophers of religion such as Brian Davies and Denys Turner have queried what it could possibly mean to say that an individual has had an experience of God, given the kind of attributes divinity is supposed to possess.<sup>16</sup> But worries on this score seem to me exaggerated since even in our ordinary human encounters with one another most experience is aspectival and inferential; that is to say, we build up interpretative frames rather than receive them in a single, all-encompassing instance.

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<sup>14</sup> Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (London: Picador, 1976), 18–20, 60–67.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 70, 117.

<sup>16</sup> Brian Davies *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Equally misconstrued in my view is the objection from the other side that such alleged religious experiences through the arts are merely questionable inferences drawn from the more basic aesthetic experience. Not only is such an inferential way of talking not how the religious experience is characteristically described but also even non-believers exploring such experience often find themselves identifying a further layer where a religious interpretation is seen as in some way the more natural reading, even though for them it must be resisted. A good case in point is the distinguished music critic Wilfrid Mellers in his exploration of the sort of music that he saw as engendering such descriptions. Intriguingly, his view is not that religious believers have confused the aesthetic and the religious. Rather, it is that a distinctive type of experience beyond the aesthetic has indeed been correctly identified but that it is deceptive if its pull to any sense of an objective encounter with divine reality is accepted. At most, what is on offer is spiritual uplift.<sup>17</sup>

#### *Social Conditioning and Communication through Images*

The third area I want to mention involves a claim that is perhaps more prominent in those influenced by Continental rather than British analytic philosophy, namely the whole issue of cultural conditioning, of the way in which even despite ourselves we are caught up in the cultural assumptions of our time. The dominant response for claims to such cultural conditioning in any form from many of the twentieth century's most important theologians has been strongly hostile: to insist on the radical otherness of biblical revelation, as in the language of the early Barth, of the Bible being 'like a flash of lightning ... as the dissolution of all relativity.'<sup>18</sup> It was a position Barth modified in later life with his talk of 'secular parables' but even then he was cautious, as his correspondence with the writer, Carl Zuchmayer, indicates.<sup>19</sup> But the problem in any case with such an answer is twofold. First, it flies in the face of the facts. We are now all too aware of the wider cultural influences upon ourselves, and of a similar pattern holding in Scripture. But, secondly, unless God in his revelation builds on the way human beings are actually situated, it is hard to see why its message should be relevant to socially conditioned beings like ourselves.

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<sup>17</sup> Wilfrid Mellers, *Celestial Music? Some Masterpieces of European Religious Music* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 331.

<sup>19</sup> Carl Zuchmayer and Karl Barth, *Späte Freundschaft in Briefen* (Zurich: TVZ Theologischer Verlag, 1977), esp. 17; see also Karl-Josef Kuschel, *The Poet as Mirror: Human Nature, God and Jesus in Twentieth Century Literature* (London: SCM, 1999), 12-14.

From that concession it would be all too easy to draw a purely negative inference: that we are thereby bound to adopt some form of determinism, and with it the relativism of all ideas. But conditioning emphatically does not mean that human beings cannot take any steps beyond the times in which they live (otherwise how would new ideas be possible?). What it does mean is that any such overstepping must bear some relation to where the society as a whole has already reached in its reflections. Even so, the most common response from theologians remains one of anxiety, that to speak of the Bible in this way, however, qualifiedly, is to undermine its claim to contain a divine message that transcends particular times and places. Equally, philosophers have more often than not concluded on the opposite side, as with Jürgen Habermas, that such severe conditioning reduces the possibility of theology making any significant contribution to any wider attempt at Enlightenment convergence of ideas.<sup>20</sup>

It is here that the contribution of the imagination and of its accompanying images can once more come to the rescue, for it is important to note that no particular biblical text stands on its own but rather is part of a continuing tradition of interpretation. Thus, as the existence of duplicate narratives demonstrates (evident from the outset in the present canon since there are two creation narratives in Genesis 1–3), new ways of telling foundational stories arise, as do fresh treatments of particular metaphors and symbols. It is thus quite untrue that present context alone shapes meaning. Instead, what we have is a meaning that as prior to present context and subsequent to it can also be, at least to a degree, transcendent of a particular place and time. Indeed, this can also help explain why close attention to earlier strands of tradition can bring its own distinctive spiritual rewards. The interest lies not in the fact that those earlier strands somehow as already transcendent realities escaped conditioning but rather that because of being part of a tradition they can preserve insights that may have been distorted or lost through later handling of the same images or symbols.

Equally, such an appeal to a tradition of imaginative symbols can also help us deal with the more limited or kenotic understanding of Christ's consciousness that has been forced on us by conclusions in biblical scholarship. Here again it might look initially as though the new way of seeing things presents a major challenge to the transcendence of Jesus and his message. But another way of reading that same evidence is to say that he now becomes more effectively a saviour by sharing in

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<sup>20</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, 2 vols. (1981); for some responses, Helmut Peukert, *Science, Action and Fundamental Theology* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1984); Nicholas Adams, *Habermas and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

precisely the same sort of conditioning that humanity in general endures. Moreover, although Jesus was born into such a very specific culture and time, because it was part of a developing tradition a whole host of imaginative ideas were available to him as he was growing up that would not have been present or not present to the same degree in earlier generations and in other parts of the world; among them, for example, the suffering servant, the kingdom of God, the Passover lamb and so on. One theologian who made much of this fact was Austin Farrer in his pioneering 1948 work, *The Glass of Vision*.<sup>21</sup> For Farrer such imagery became the primary vehicle of revelation, with Jesus creatively shaping the imagery he had inherited to his own unique sense of mission. If that is so, then to adopt post-Vatican II's talk of Christ as sacrament is to speak of him drawing on the images and metaphors of his time to help bridge the two worlds (human and divine) in a way that allowed not only his own real creative participation in both but also a similar participation to those who came after him as the images acquire new resonances and meaning.

#### *Limits of Human Knowledge and Complementary Imagery*

The final modern change of perspective to which I wish to draw attention where the arts might be relevant to theology is on the question of limits to human knowledge. Kant provided a famous positive spin on his assertion of such limits by asserting that he was 'abolishing knowledge to make room for faith.'<sup>22</sup> Many theologians who have followed Kant have ended up with what can only be described as a very minimal version of Christianity. That is not my intention here, not least since Kant's standards for knowledge can themselves be questioned. Instead, I want to contrast the continuing theological search for a very tight conceptual system enshrined in dogmatic or systematic theology (or its most recent variant, analytic theology), and how poets and artists have treated the stories and metaphors that they have inherited from the Christian tradition.<sup>23</sup>

The aim I must emphasize is not as a way reducing ontological commitments. Christ's divinity, for example, can in my view be proclaimed no less effectively in a powerful metaphor or in the symbolism of a particular painting as in some more

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<sup>21</sup> Recently republished in an annotated edition with a selection of essay commentaries; see Robert MacSwain, *Scripture, Metaphysics and Poetry: Austin Farrer's The Glass of Vision with Critical Commentary* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

<sup>22</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Preface to 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, B xxx.

<sup>23</sup> For the manifesto of the new 'analytic theology' movement, see Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea, ed., *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); for some concerns, see my review in *The Expository Times* 121.5 (February 2010): 254–255, titled, 'Is Clarity Always a Virtue?'

straightforward assertion of the fact. Rather, my point is that not all elaboration into system is necessarily an advantage. Implausible premises may be required to keep the whole thing together, whereas left at the level of complementary metaphors mutual enrichment may be the net result. That is to say, put more bluntly, sometimes there may well be a category mistake involved in pushing the language of the imagination, the metaphors and other images of revelation, too far in the direction of more narrowly defined concepts, and that is what may well explain some of the less profitable disputes that have occurred in the history of theology.

Take, for example, the doctrine of the atonement, how we are reconciled to God through Christ. Conventional histories talk of the dominance of different theories at different periods of history but still on the assumption that one must necessarily give place to another since that is how theories operate. But why should we think of the Christus Victor approach of Luther necessarily as an alternative to Athanasius' sacrificial account, or even of Abelard's 'moral' theory as in irreconcilable tension with Calvin's penal view? Admittedly, in some cases there is a formal logical structure, most obviously so in the past in the case of Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*. But the more interesting question in my view is whether the defensible element lies in that formal structure or in the imagery appropriately applied. If the latter, then it could be the case that the apparently opposing elements of imagery could actually be used to complement one another rather than be brought into conflict. After all, the key thing about metaphor is that not every aspect of it is true and so apparent conflict need not imply actual, and that is one way also to read the New Testament where a range of images are used without any apparent sense of opposition. These include example, penalty, ransom, rescue, sacrifice, salvation, satisfaction, substitution, and victory. Indeed, that very variety is one reason why this approach was adopted the last time the Church of England's Doctrine Commission was asked to report on the atonement.<sup>24</sup> Nor, it should be noted, is this to say that necessarily we now know less about the atonement than was once thought. In terms of tight, formal argument this is no doubt true but, so far from the metaphors cancelling each other out, one has every reason to believe that an enrichment of understanding would be the net result from their mutual complementarity: thus, sacrifice and satisfaction, judgment and moral stimulation, and so on. As a matter of fact, no particular version of the atonement was ever officially sanctioned by the Church. Even so, the attempt by theologians to advance particular theories did generate major problems, as for instance with the penal

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<sup>24</sup> *Mystery of Salvation* (London: Church House Publishing, 1995), 102–119. There eight different 'stories' are told.

approach. So retreat from formal argument to complementary image could certainly lead not only to an enrichment of vision but also to a more eirenic debate.<sup>25</sup>

One further example may help. Much post-war discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity has been dominated by two rival models for understanding, one structured in terms of a society of persons, the other a matter of internal relations within a single person. Early in my career I wrote in favour of a social model but as the years have advanced I have also shown some sympathy for the other model.<sup>26</sup> However, later writing on artistic images for the Trinity led me to question whether either model could offer the complete truth.<sup>27</sup> More recently, Sarah Coakley has written also on artistic images but at somewhat greater length.<sup>28</sup> However, our two approaches are quite different. Coakley comes to the images with certain advance expectations and measures the images in their light, as for instance in her insistence on images of the Spirit being of comparable size to the other two persons, and the Father-Son relationship being less obviously gendered so as to more effectively include women.<sup>29</sup>

My interest was rather in what the artists did with the existing tradition, and so the related possibility that they might actually have something useful to teach theologians. Like Coakley, artists were often concerned to produce a more adequate image for the Spirit but their desire to remain loyal to the existing tradition of representation meant that in general they adopted an alternative solution to the problem of presenting the Spirit's equality visually. Instead, the Spirit remained as dove but was now allowed to preside either in the centre with the other two persons on either side, or else floating above them both.<sup>30</sup> As a result the order of begetting

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<sup>25</sup> For this argument pursued in more detail, see my essay 'Images of Atonement: Metaphor and the Dangers of Doctrine', in *God in a Single Vision*, ed. Brewer and MacSwain.

<sup>26</sup> For my defence of the social analogy, see *The Divine Trinity* (London: Duckworth; La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1985); for something closer to the personalist, see 'Trinity', in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Philip Quinn and Charles Taliafero (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 525–531.

<sup>27</sup> See 'The Trinity in Art', in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. Stephen Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 329–356.

<sup>28</sup> Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 190–265.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, her own summary, 260–261.

<sup>30</sup> For the former, Titian's *The Trinity in Glory* in the Prado, Madrid; for the latter, Dürer's *Adoration of the Trinity* in Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.



and processing may well have been forgotten but in defence one may observe that a single image is unlikely to be able to say everything about the Trinity within a single frame.

More pertinent here, though, is how artists have approached the two rival models mentioned above, for what one soon discovers is that any accurate matching of one model against one particular form of representation is impossible. Thus, consider first paintings in which the three trinitarian persons are represented as some kind of society. What quickly becomes apparent is that what is actually being expressed is their relations to one another rather than them simply as three. So, for example, in the famous *Gnadenstuhl* or Mercy Seat images that were hugely popular over several centuries we find the Father sitting on the Mercy Seat of the old covenant as he holds the exposed, crucified Son lovingly in his arms with the Spirit as dove hovering between them as the indispensable link between both.<sup>31</sup> While thus failing to correspond completely with the creedal version of their relations, it is nonetheless clearly on relations that the image is primarily focused; that is, not their separate roles but their interaction and interdependency.

Equally, in cases where a single identity is stressed, as in the comparable verbal repetition of the same attributes in the Athanasian Creed,<sup>32</sup> more often than not what we find is that single image actually pulling towards a more corporate or societal form. Certainly, this seems the intention where three identical, mysterious human forms are presented but it is equally true where there is only one single human form but with three heads.<sup>33</sup> Such images are frequently misunderstood, and not only in our own day. In fifteenth century Florence St Antoninus, the bishop of the time, led a campaign against them on the grounds that they were *contra naturam*.<sup>34</sup> He did not quite succeed as some have survived to this day even from his own city<sup>35</sup> but a greater irony lies in the fact that their advocates, so far from being worried by the *contra naturam* objection, would almost certainly have taken the

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<sup>31</sup> Most famous is Masaccio's version in Santa Maria Novella in Florence. Other famous examples include those by El Greco and Ribera in the Prado in Madrid, and a much more literal version by an anonymous Austrian artist in the National Gallery in London.

<sup>32</sup> As in its repeated assertions e.g. 'The Father is eternal, the Son eternal; and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternal; but one eternal.'

<sup>33</sup> There is a thirteenth-century image of three identical human figures at the pilgrimage site of Vallespietra in Italy. Three-headed are more common such as one from Cartmel Priory in Cumbria or another from Nazareth.

<sup>34</sup> For the relevant quotation, see my article, 334, fn. 17.

<sup>35</sup> One from Florence by Andrea del Sarto survives from 1511.

comment as a compliment since that was precisely their primary aim: to assert the Trinity as going beyond anything that we can learn from nature. Perhaps the point can be made clearer by looking at comparable images in the pre-Christian pagan world. There it is not just gods in human shape to which this reduplication of form is applied but also those of animal appearance, an additional horn, for example, being provided. The aim was thus, I suggest, primarily intended to indicate intensifying power: that is, more than animal, more than human. So similarly, then, in the Christian context, the attempt was meant to imply the more than purely human, the inadequacy of any analogue with a single human mind. Of course, that does not necessarily entail more than one mind but it does call into question any notion that the divine mind and human minds are in any obvious sense comparable. In short, it looks as though reflection on artistic images for the Trinity might lead one to question whether there is any absolute opposition between the two types of approach that have dominated discussion since the Second World War. Rather, neither is adequate on its own to the task. Both analogies will inevitably fail at some point because that is precisely what analogies do. But, rather than lamenting the fact, we should acknowledge some merits in each of the two alternative approaches, for the divine mind does not quite follow either pattern. Instead, whichever analogy we start with, it will still need complementing by its alleged opposite.

### *Conclusion*

What I have sought to argue in considering these four common assumptions in contemporary philosophy is that theology need not be afraid of any alleged consequences, provided, that is, it takes seriously the arts as one of its potential partners. God is mediated not just through the revelation that is inherent in Scripture, in the traditions of the Church, and in formal philosophical reflections but also in the way our minds work, that is, in the imagination and the undoubted contribution that it can bring.

## Where You Stand Is How You Lead<sup>1</sup>

ANNE TOMLINSON

Principal of the Scottish Episcopal Institute

Theologies of liberation have reminded us that all knowledge is contextual; where you stand affects what you see. So I preface this lecture with 'locating' myself for you, first geographically. I live and work in the Anglican Province of the Scottish Episcopal Church; seven dioceses covering the whole of Scotland including its many island archipelagos. Much of this landscape is rural, and 'very remote rural' at that, to use the Scottish Government's terminology.<sup>2</sup> As the leaflets I have distributed indicate, there are SEC churches across the entire country. We are not the Established Church, but nevertheless we have a good coverage of the nation.

For the past twenty-five years I have worked in this setting, specifically in the field of theological education. For a while I worked mainly with remote rural charges, equipping congregations therein to become reflective practitioners and missional agencies in and to their local communities. This was a form of Local Shared Ministry akin to that found in North Michigan and New Zealand, to name two similar contexts. Thereafter I worked in the Diocese of Glasgow and Galloway – large parts of which are rural – as its Ministry Officer, again working with congregations, clergy and vestries to encourage, equip and enable outwards-facing ministries for mission. Latterly my focus has contracted to the realm of those who will go on to lead such congregations within our church's training agency, the Scottish Episcopal Institute.

In all three jobs I have encouraged people to think about the kinds of leadership needed in rural multi-church contexts where old models of 'one-priest, one-parish' no longer suffice. I have exhorted people to read the type of literature that the Germinate course recommends. Indeed a couple of years ago I had the great privilege of mentoring a participant on the CLiRC course and was thrilled to enlarge my knowledge of the subject through the articles and books we read together and discussed from his indicative bibliography. Taking the best of modern leadership thinking into our practice as congregational leaders and members is vital and I do not want to decry that in any way.

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<sup>1</sup> Delivered as the Germinate Lecture 2017 on Tuesday 16 May 2017 in the Arthur Rank Rural Theology Centre (Warwickshire).

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government Urban/Rural Classification 2013-2014. The Scottish Government (2014) at <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0046/00464780.pdf>.

But my experience is that it is not enough. Early experiments in Local Shared Ministry in Scotland faltered not because people – clergy and laity alike – didn't have the technical expertise; they did, in spades. They could talk about collaborative leadership most fluently, and yet they failed to walk the talk. 'Culture eats strategy' as Peter Drucker put it, and the old hierarchical-leadership culture gobbled attempts to model a new way of being. When push came to shove – and even when there wasn't a crisis – people reverted to type. The former ways prevailed.

If collaborative patterns of ministry are to succeed, it is my contention – born of these hard experiences north of the Border – that we must work harder at forming the *hearts*, the *characters*, of those involved; we must work as hard on that aspect of training as we do on the technical side of things. And so to my second bit of introductory contextualising. I am a Deacon and have been for some twenty-four years. I see things from that viewpoint; my world-view is shaped by that calling. In this lecture I want to make the case that where the Anglican Deacon stands in the Liturgy symbolises three attitudes, which form the essential building blocks of all collaborative leadership. If the Church is 'to develop an enabling and equipping style of leadership that seeks to grow and facilitate the discipleship and ministry of lay people', to quote the *Released for Mission* report,<sup>3</sup> then I maintain that those leaders, lay and ordained, need to take on board three attitudes, attitudes which are embodied, enacted, in the stance, the positioning, of a Deacon in the Eucharist.

This is not a push to get more people to be Deacons, though it is certainly fascinating to read recent correspondence on this topic in the *Church Times* and elsewhere – and a good case can be made for a missional church needing Deacons.<sup>4</sup> But that is a topic for quite another lecture! It is not today's. Moreover I am aware that for many of you in this room, Anglican Deacons are not part of your everyday experience. So this is *not* a vocational lecture. Rather what I am trying to say is that deep in the heart of Anglicanism, my own tradition, there lies an understanding of collaborative leadership, and that understanding is played out – 'signed', 'signalled', if you like - before our eyes at every Eucharist at which a Deacon is present. And I believe that that understanding has something precious to offer our formational task. For 'where you stand affects how you lead'.

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<sup>3</sup> *Released for Mission: Growing the Rural Church* Archbishops' Council 2015 GS Misc. 1092, 5.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2148423/gs%20misc%201092%20%20rural%20multi%20parish%20benefices.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> See Francis Young *Inferior Office? A History of Deacons in the Church of England* (James Clarke and Co, 2015), 144-48.

Where, then, do Deacons position themselves in the Liturgy? Where literally do they *stand* Sunday by Sunday?

At two points early on in the Eucharist we meet them standing *amongst others*: for the proclaiming of the Gospel, read from the middle of the nave and facing west, and for the leading of the Prayers of the People, the intercessions. Deacons are quite literally ‘surrounded’ by the assembled congregation whom they serve. On both occasions the assembly indicates its full involvement in and ‘ownership’ of the action by engaging in dialogue: variously, the call and response at the outset of the Gospel reading – ‘The Lord be with you’: ‘And also with you’ – other Gospel acclamations at the beginning and end of the reading, and the offering of congregational responses as the Deacon ‘speaks back to God the people’s need in the light of God’s story’.<sup>5</sup>

Standing amidst others - standing on the same level as them - in an authorised role and yet being at the same time the servant of all says something profound about leadership. It signifies that leadership is not simply an individual quality but a collective resource. This understanding is in tune with observations made by several modern leadership gurus, not least Keith Grint in his *Leadership: Limits and Possibilities*.<sup>6</sup> Grint, Professor of Leadership Studies at Lancaster Management School, observes that the key to good leadership is not a list of skills and competencies or even the amount of personal charisma possessed, but whether you have the capacity to learn from those among whom you work; such learning, he maintains, ‘is inevitably embedded in a relational model of leadership’.

Dyadic models of exchange between leader and follower are hardly novel but generally the relationship is construed as focussing upon the change required of the *follower*.<sup>7</sup> Grint suggests instead that the onus is just as much upon the *leader*; he or she needs to learn how to lead just as much as the follower has to learn how to follow. Learning is an iterative process, done within a community of practice.

Leaders, he maintains, learn by continually transforming their own practice as they remain open to the needs of the communities to which they belong. They learn by listening to the other. It’s what those of us who are parents do or did. Handed a newborn for the first time we may hold her awkwardly, and immediately

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<sup>5</sup> Samuel Wells, *Crafting Prayers for Public Worship: The Art of Intercession* (Canterbury, 2013), 15.

<sup>6</sup> Keith Grint *Leadership: Limits and Possibilities* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> For literature about followership see Barbara Kellerman, *The End of Leadership* (Harper Business, 2012); *Followership: How Followers are Creating Change and Changing Leaders* (Harvard Business Press, 2008).

she lets out a wail, throwing out her arms to let us know she feels unsafe, insecure. So we adjust our hold, cradling her that little bit more securely, holding her head gently in the palm of our hand – and gradually she settles; the wail dies down; our practice has been improved. We are taught to be parents by listening and responding to our children.

So it is with leadership in the church. Imposing prefab solutions to problems gets us nowhere. We need to engage in joint learning by a process of dialogue and critique in community. No leader is - or should pretend – to be omni-competent, but must work with others to grow in their ability to address the needs of the community amongst whom they work. ‘Effective leadership is learned step by step in real situations through progressive reflection and testing of new approaches’,<sup>8</sup> writes David Gortner – to which I would add the words ‘with others’. Leadership is learned step by step in real situations through progressive reflection with others. One of the key skills we teach our students in their first year of training for leadership as clergy and Readers is that of theological reflection. But not just theological reflection as an *individual* habit of the heart, crucial though that is, but reflection in *community*. We do this in the classroom but we also lay great emphasis in their first placement experience upon this skill. Great emphasis; greater indeed than on preaching, or learning how to lead worship; the art of learning to engage with the people of God in theological reflection and transformative practice is paramount in our eyes.

The great Alan Ecclestone, who served the parish of Darnall in the East End of Sheffield from 1942 to 1970, is renowned for introducing the concept of the Parish Meeting into the life of the congregations which he served; a once-a-week gathering of the flock ‘to be the Church facing its daily work and ready to find out how it is to be tackled’.<sup>9</sup> In her reflections upon this practice, Margaret Selby comments that in this way ‘he sought to discover ways in which every single member of a congregation might achieve their full sense of personal self-worth within the setting of the whole congregation as it grew in love for each other and so for the world’.<sup>10</sup> And she goes on:

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Retraining Ourselves in Thought and Action: A Thematic Exploration of Leadership Literature’, *Anglican Theological Review* 92:1 (2010), 189-213, here 212.

<sup>9</sup> Tim Gorringe *Alan Ecclestone: Priest As Revolutionary: A Biography* (Cairns Publications, 1994), 98.

<sup>10</sup> Margaret Selby, ‘A Word from One of the Laos’ in *Priests in a People’s Church* (ed. George Guiver (SPCK, 2001), 58.

To have this as his aim redefined, almost imperceptibly, his own understanding of priesthood. For him it made sense only within the body of Christ in a given place, as together they wrestled with the week-by-week task of understanding how their life together should impact on the world, as together they grew in their understanding of the complexity of that world.<sup>11</sup>

That is relational leadership at its best: enabling the people of God in a particular place to get to grips, through collective theological reflection, with the messy reality of everyday life; learning through 'effort-filled deliberative processes what Christianity stands for in our own lives for our own time and circumstances'.<sup>12</sup> Distributing leadership through the whole body of Christ in a place so that all grow as responsible disciples and together take ownership of the missional vocation of the parish, realising their part in the overall enterprise.<sup>13</sup>

Such distributed, relational leadership is even more essential in *rural* congregations for, as Amiel Osmaston has pointed out,<sup>14</sup> such churches operate as families, not as organisations. Everything works on the basis of relationship rather than structures or systems. The character of the leader – the oh-so-very-visible character of the leader – and his or her attitudes are what really count. Leadership in rural charges is counter-individualist, and therefore requires a very particular kind of sustaining spirituality.

Relational leaders are undefended leaders,<sup>15</sup> operating out of a culture of graced generosity which believes, knows overwhelmingly, that in God's economy there is enough to go round. Instead of leading out of emptiness, such leaders know that there is a fullness that meets all needs, extravagantly, overwhelmingly, and with twelve baskets left over. Such a core belief thus impels them to share leadership, not arrogate it all to themselves. Impels them to find 'ways to encourage and cultivate the gifts of others ... trust others and take the risk of setting them free to succeed and

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Kathryn Tanner, 'Theological Reflection and Christian Practices' in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy Bass; Eerdmans, 2002), 233.

<sup>13</sup> Phil Kirk 'Leadership' in *Local Ministry: Story, Process and Meaning* (ed. Robin Greenwood and Caroline Pascoe; SPCK, 2006), 119-30.

<sup>14</sup> 'Rural Leadership: Models and Skills' CLiRC Residential Conference (14-16 January 2014), 6.

<sup>15</sup> See Simon Walker, *The Undefended Leader* (Piquant, 2010).

fail. This leadership is not possessive about achievements. It is playful and compassionate and generous with praise.”<sup>16</sup>

Such leaders engage in what David Brown beautifully calls ‘unrobed friendship’.<sup>17</sup> They are vulnerable servants ‘who need the people as much as they need him or her’.<sup>18</sup> They co-create relationships not based on power but on dialogue, trust, theological reflection and connectivity, respecting the particular character of the context and community in which they are set. They are ‘incomplete’<sup>19</sup> - or rather their offering is made complete by the contribution of others.

Deacons know this in their bones. So often we are defined by what we are not, proto-priests, ‘priests manqués who cannot ...’ and then follows the list of sacramental activities in which we do not engage. But Deacons themselves don’t see the world this way; they don’t engage in deficit accounting. We are not ministerially greedy. Rather a diaconal spirituality revels in the fact that the diaconal contribution is only part of the picture, one jigsaw piece in a much more complex and richer whole. Deacons cannot, do not, fly solo. They encourage the creation of what Joseph Raelin calls ‘*leaderful* communities’.<sup>20</sup>

That first diaconal stance – exposed out there ‘in the midst’ – reminds the church viscerally, Sunday by Sunday, that leadership is a collective practice; and that leaders operate first and foremost as part of the context in which they operate. The diaconal call and response and the positioning of the Deacon as she reads the Gospel or leads the Prayers of the People speak of that dyadic relationship of mutual exchange and co-responsibility for leadership that should occur in a community of practice. Placards the kind of leadership that rural charges need.

Moving on through the service we next meet the Deacon standing at the altar, *standing to one side*, while the priest – centrally – presides at the Eucharist. Standing to one side having prepared the table for the meal by setting out linen and elements in their various vessels so that others may draw near to eat and drink. Standing to one side in such a way that pages may be turned for the priest whose hands are otherwise occupied, standing to one side ready to invite all to say the Lord’s Prayer, ready to raise – and to assist in the administration of – the chalice at

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>17</sup> As cited in Justin Lewis-Anthony, *You are the Messiah* (Bloomsbury, 2013), 22.

<sup>18</sup> Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus* (London: DLT, 1989), 45.

<sup>19</sup> See Deborah Ancona, Thomas Malone, Wanda Orlikowski and Peter Senge, ‘In Praise of the Incomplete Leader’, *Harvard Business Review* (February 2007).

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Raelin, *Creating Leaderful Organizations* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2003), 36.



Communion. Standing to one side, poised and ready, complementary, utterly necessary, but not centre stage.

Richard Fabian, onetime Rector of St Gregory's of Nyssa (San Francisco), describes the Deacon's role in that congregation as one of 'arranging, prompting and marshalling the rest'. He continues:

The deacon marshals the laypeople's liturgical ministry ... announc(ing) each liturgical event, and where needed music will be found, so that newcomers can take part as easily as the rest. As a mark of authority the deacon uses a strip of brightly colored cloth, originally carried in one hand and later extended to hang over the shoulder, leaving the deacon's hands free for beckoning, prompting, carrying and shoving.<sup>21</sup>

As the service at St Gregory's proceeds, we see the deacon doing just that: beckoning, prompting carrying - well, maybe not shoving! If you go to St Gregory's or watch the on-line video of their worship, *Dancing With God*,<sup>22</sup> you will notice that the Deacons do not *do* everything in place of others. Rather every task they do – the setting up of books, the recruiting of lectors, the rehearsing of sung responses and the announcing of texts – is geared towards enabling the liturgical ministry of the laity. The deacon's role is clearly one of guidance and enabling. At the readings, for instance, the Deacon invites lay volunteers out of the congregation, leads them to the lectern, and then continues to stand by them as they read the message.

This stance likewise says something fundamental about leadership; that it is about enabling others to effect their tasks, carry out their proper roles. All leadership should be diaconal in the way that the Swedish Lutheran Church defines that: 'to act as *facilitators*: to discover and mobilise the latent resources that exist in the parish'.<sup>23</sup> Similarly John Willetts, a Deacon in the American Episcopal Church writes:

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<sup>21</sup> *Worship at St. Gregory's* (2001) 3-4.

[http://www.saintgregorys.org/uploads/2/4/2/6/24265184/worship\\_at\\_st\\_gregorys\\_1.pdf](http://www.saintgregorys.org/uploads/2/4/2/6/24265184/worship_at_st_gregorys_1.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> 'Dancing with God' video (2000) <http://www.saintgregorys.org/videos.html>.

<sup>23</sup> 'A Bishops' Letter about *Diakonia*' (Bishops' Conference of The Church of Sweden, 2015), 42.

(Originally) I thought I was responsible for being deacon and doing diaconal ministry and that others were off the hook. (A) change in perspective happened when I was reading the ordinal many months after ordination and thinking about my promises, especially number six: show Christ's people that in serving the helpless they are serving Christ himself. It dawned upon me that the use of the third person plural pronoun 'they' meant that all of us have the responsibility of *diakonia*. Ordained deacons and priests are animators of the ministries to which all the Holy People of God are called.<sup>24</sup>

And he sums up his identity in these words: 'I need to be a learner and teacher, I need to be a servant and equipper, and I need to clearly model servant ministry to God's people so they can recognize and assume the diaconal role in the world'.<sup>25</sup>

All leadership is about enabling others 'to do their very best and to achieve their fullest potential'.<sup>26</sup> It's about being teachers and trainers, so that others might be similarly well equipped. Ian Williams, in an article published in *Rural Theology* some years ago, reported on field research which sought to elicit which practices best encourage collaborative ministerial relationships in the Anglican Church in rural England. The most strongly attested enabling feature was supporting the personal development of others:

Clergy who relate in this way teach, share and encourage people in their daily lives, they show interest and appreciation, they encourage and affirm people, and appreciate the efforts they make. They do not throw you in at the deep end but suggest ways of dealing with things and offer training and resources. They are helpful in explaining ministry and are aware of people's feelings, strengths and weaknesses and can see the potential in people. They enable others to see possibilities, gently stretching them to their full potential, ready to pick up the pieces if it goes wrong. They wish to transform others and

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<sup>24</sup> John Willetts, *Deacon as Learner and Mentor for Today's Church* (North American Association for the Diaconate Monograph Series 17, 2005), 2.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Stephen Cottrell, *Hit the Ground Kneeling* (Church House Publishing, 2009), 15

themselves, seeing learning as a lifelong endeavour and valuable for themselves and others.<sup>27</sup>

There is so much good practice alluded to in that short paragraph, tools and techniques with which those of you have done the Germinate course will be very familiar. There in a nutshell is the Lifeshapes quadrant which Jill Hopkinson writes about in *Resourcing Rural Ministry*,<sup>28</sup> those stages of development observed in Jesus's mentoring of His disciples: the directive leadership of 'I do, you watch' – come and follow me; the coaching style of 'I do, you help' – involvement of the disciples in His healing ministry (with varied degrees of success); the consensus approach of 'You do, I help' – sending of the Twelve out with a blessing; and the empowering stage of 'You do, I watch' of the Great Commission.

There, too, is Gillian Stamp's wonderful 'Tripod of Work.'<sup>29</sup> Tasking: providing clarity about expectations and providing a safe framework. Trusting people to use their judgement in taking forward the work for which they are accountable, making sure that no-one is under/overwhelmed by the work's challenges. Tending: checking that the information/training necessary to support the task is provided. As Amiel Osmaston writes in *Setting the Church of England Free*,

when someone is given a leadership responsibility, it is vital to clarify the task that needs to be done and to show why and how it is to be done. If this does not happen, then a mismatch of expectations is likely to cause frustration or hurt later. If the leadership is to be creative and fruitful, the leader must be trusted with responsibility, and encouraged to exercise initiative, not just be given a list of set tasks. If the local leader is to be enabled to grow into maturity with the necessary attributes and qualities of character ... then it is vital that the person supervising value them for themselves, keep regular contact, thank them frequently, support them and build up their confidence, accept and use failure, helping them to see every failure as a learning opportunity.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ian Williams, 'Enabling Collaborative Ministry in Rural Anglicanism' *Rural Theology* 2.2 (2004), 89-103, here 94-95.

<sup>28</sup> Jill Hopkinson, 'Multi-church Ministry' in *Resourcing Rural Ministry: Practical Insights for Mission* (ed. Simon Martin; BRF, 2015), 41-62.

<sup>29</sup> See <http://bioass.com/gillian-stamp/the-tripod-of-work/>.

<sup>30</sup> Amiel Osmaston, 'Enabling Local Leaders' in *Setting the Church of England Free* (ed. Mark Mills-Powell and John Hunt; 2003), 176-194, here 188-190.

If this good practice is adopted, then disciples grow into leaders and leadership gets distributed more evenly through a congregation. But as with our first stance, this second stance of 'standing to one side' takes a particular kind of inner character, a particular kind of spirituality on the part of the enabling leader and on the part of the one who, by discovering a new gift, a new competency, steps into their own leadership role. It takes an inner ease with being 'a responsible behind-the-scenes person, able to be hidden, to get on with things out of the limelight',<sup>31</sup> as a Church of England paper on diaconal discernment puts it. I call this a 'John the Baptist' type of spirituality, one that is at ease with decreasing as others increase; that does oneself out of a job. The type of spirituality that rejoices when others discover a capacity in themselves that outshines, eclipses, your own; when they reach heights that you have never achieved and are never likely to.

The transformative power of such agency is well described in John 2, the first of Jesus' signs in that gospel. Many of you will know *The Gospel in Art by the Peasants of Solentiname*, a book of illustrations of gospel passages by Nicaraguan *campesinos*. The illustration of this particular sign shows bride and groom, steward and wedding guests, all brightly arrayed, sitting outside in the sunshine enjoying the marriage festivities and drinking deeply of the fine wine, intent on the good things of life. But across to the right of the painting, hidden away in the house, excluded from the gaiety, stands Christ beside the water jars. And watching him are servants and children. Absorbed, transfixed, attentive, but definitely not part of the main scene. Marginal to the party - and yet participants in the real action. For as you well know, the servants here are the 'enablers of transformation'.<sup>32</sup> 'The servants (*diakónoi*) who had drawn the water knew' (John 2:9) where the wine had come from, because they had been facilitators of the miracle and had witnessed the wonderful exchange for themselves; had beheld the glory with their own eyes. And that is reward enough.

Diaconal leadership asks of us that we be content to give power away; 'to be teachers in order that the church might be a community of learning, just as Jesus washed his disciples' feet in order that they might learn to be servants to each other.'<sup>33</sup> Not to *do* the ministry oneself or to be seen to do it, but to be eccentric to the action. To release the gifts in others, through support, encouragement equipping and inspiration. And then to get off the stage and step into the wings and watch,

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<sup>31</sup> P. Avis and S. Fearn, 'Discerning the Diaconate', 4.

<sup>32</sup> M. Maybee, *Citizens of the World – Servants of Christ* (North American Association for the Diaconate (1994), 2.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Kinnamon, 'The Leadership of Servants' in *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 28.2 (1993), 66.

watch with glee. As Jerry Marshall noted in his recent article in *Countryway*, Julia Middleton, the founder of the Common Purpose development programmes, urges leaders in secular contexts not to 'be in it for yourself; enjoy the achievements of others'.<sup>34</sup> So is it in the Church. Diaconal leadership, standing to one side of the table, reminds the Church Sunday by Sunday of that attitude of heart. That crucial attitude of heart for all leaders.

Finally we meet the Deacon *standing at the door* – or at least bidding the people to turn towards the door – as she declares in a ringing voice 'Go in peace to love and serve the Lord'. Bidding the assembly to embark on the liturgy after the Liturgy, their daily lives of *diakonia* in the world. Encouraging them to look outwards, to make connections.

This third stance likewise says something fundamental about leadership; that it is world-facing. All too often the ministry of lay people is seen as being purely ecclesiastical. Thus research undertaken for the *Released for Mission* report, the Archbishops' Council recent document about rural multi-church ministry in the twenty-first century, notes that 'the ministry of lay people was essential to the functioning of rural parish churches. Lay people were deeply involved in all aspects of church life'. So far so good.

But what does it mean by such 'functioning'? The missional life of the parishes? The daily ministries of the lay people? It would appear not. By far the greatest percentage of that 'functioning' relates to worship-leading:

Regular Sunday worship in many multi-church groups was sustained by the ministry of lay people. Lay people were involved in all aspects of leading worship. In almost all the groups of churches studied, there had been an increase in the numbers of services led by lay people over the past ten years.

The report goes on to note the existence of formal ministry teams in several of the contexts studied, responsible for pastoral care and/or provision of worship. But again, though some teams also took responsibility for mission and outreach, these were few in number as the focus for most was retaining regular Sunday worship and associated pastoral care.<sup>35</sup>

Only in the last line of that section of the report, entitled 'The ministry of lay people', does this rather forlorn sentence appear:

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<sup>34</sup> J. Marshall, 'The Collaborative Leader' in *Countryway* 74 (January 2017), 23.

<sup>35</sup> See *Released for Mission. Growing the Rural Church. Rural Multi-Church Ministry in the 21st Century* (Archbishops' Council GS Misc. 1092, 2015) paragraphs 92, 94 and 97.

It was acknowledged by some clergy that a balance needed to be struck between maintaining worship and other activities through the active participation and leadership of lay people, and in allowing those lay people time to develop their own discipleship and explore their own vocation further, particularly in relation to their involvement in wider community life.<sup>36</sup>

Bob Jackson's quip that 'post-moderns treat churches like helicopters. They keep their distance for fear of being sucked in by the rotas'<sup>37</sup> is, sadly, very close to the truth. It is all too easy to get so consumed and spent by the life of the gathered ecclesia that there is no time, energy or inclination to be the Church in the world. Anne Richards speaks of lay people being 'underestimated, underused and ignored'. She writes:

I have been talking recently about a young Christian who has become a mentor to co-workers struggling with high rents, financial worries, job stress, relationship problems and drug habits. Well paid, but broke, and with chaotic lives, they turn to him to find out how his faith helps him cope. He is a frontline evangelist but with no support from his local church who just want to know when he is next going to turn up and when he's going to bring in new people. He is a leader and a sower but working in a field which his local church really doesn't understand.<sup>38</sup>

People abandon church going, she posits, when their work situations and their gifts for ministry in the world are been dismissed as irrelevant'.

In his classic study of the theology of the laity, Yves Congar declared that 'the development of a theology of the laity would involve no mere adjustment of inherited ecclesiological views but rather a re-orientation of the whole ecclesiological vision'.<sup>39</sup> That is what Deacons do Sunday by Sunday; they *reorient* the congregation to cease gazing upon the altar and turn them around to face the

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., paragraph 99.

<sup>37</sup> Bob Jackson *What Makes Churches Grow?* (Church House Publishing, 2015), 180.

<sup>38</sup> Anne Richards, 'Developing Lay Leadership – What about the Weeds?' in *Countryway* 74 (January (2017), 9.

<sup>39</sup> Charles Miller, 'The Theology of the Laity: Description and Construction with Reference to the American Book of Common Prayer' in *Anglican Theological Review* 84:2 (2002), 220-38, here 219.

altar in the world. As one form of service ends, so does another begin; the liturgy after the liturgy; the people's (daily) work. Deacons 'call us to the world';<sup>40</sup> they boot people out of the door.

In their list of discernment assessment criteria, Paul Avis and Stephen Fearn suggest that Deacons need to be people who are 'comfortable with occupying space on the boundaries, a liminal person who is at ease alongside people on the edges of the church',<sup>41</sup> people with an outgoing, risk-taking, world-orientated perspective. And that goes for us all. We *all* need to be missional leaders, finding out what God is doing and joining in. We need to be multi-lingual interpreters, listening to God speaking in the Wittenberg market places of today, and using that same demotic to speak of our faith boldly. We need to bring those insights back into our congregations and interpret what we have heard, wisely and prophetically, amongst others. We need to be leaders who are at ease with divesting ourselves of our church garb, tying a towel around ourselves and attending to the needs of those around us. And those needs are many.

A recently published report on poverty in rural areas of Scotland draws attention to the particular nature of social exclusion in that context:<sup>42</sup> greater problems with access to many general services in remote rural areas, and in particular to services for older people; higher levels of part-time working and lower levels of qualifications; higher travel costs associated with employment; a lack of suitable public transport; lower levels of social support; higher maintenance costs relating to rural housing; and so on.

Deacons stand at the door Sunday by Sunday and urge us to pay attention to those contexts; urge us to engage in an incarnational spirituality that knows that 'matter matters', as the great George Macleod, founder of the Iona Community put it; that God is in all things and is to be found at all times and in all places.

Three stances, then, descriptive of healthy models of leadership. But our experience in the Scottish Episcopal Church – and maybe yours too? – was that when attempts were made to distribute leadership more equably throughout congregations, building capacity amongst the laity, making the context 'leaderful', people all too often reverted to type, or rather to the forms of leadership that they had experienced up till then. Leadership which privileged heroic, visible, centre-

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<sup>40</sup> *Op. cit.*, 23, 2.

<sup>41</sup> *Op. cit.*, 30, 4-5.

<sup>42</sup> Nick Bailey, Glen Bramley and Maria Gannon, *Poverty and Social Exclusion in Urban and Rural Areas of Scotland* (Working Paper University of Glasgow/Heriot Watt University, 2016).

stage and ecclesiastical manifestations of the role. But as Martyn Percy notes in his most recent book,

this is not a healthful way to lead. It robs the collective of participation in comprehending the nature of their issues and challenges. Heroic leadership can quickly lead to demoralisation, mistrust, sullen consent, and the rapid unravelling of the organisation or institution.<sup>43</sup>

Since the publication of the Hind Report, 'leadership' has become one of the key formational categories in any training programme for Readers and clergy. And for us in the Scottish Episcopal Institute, leadership in rural multi-church ministry is a particular concern. Much attention is being paid to ways in which active discipleship can be encouraged in such contexts. And as you well know, this requires a complete shift in outlook and approach from what has worked previously.

Such a shift is being made by other organisations as they try to find sustainable ways in and for a changing world. A recent joint paper from The Kings Fund and the Centre for Creative Leadership wrote of the NHS in this way:

The strategies and tactics that worked in the past are not sufficient to address the challenges and opportunities of the future. The leadership that has worked in the past is equally ill-suited to overcome the demands resulting from a changing demography and increasing complexity of health care delivery'.<sup>44</sup>

The paper urges a shift to a new collective leadership culture but this, it maintains 'requires new mind-sets, not just new skills'. In order to initiate such culture change, hidden assumptions and beliefs must be unearthed because

'unexamined beliefs control an organisation and prevent any meaningful change. Years of valuing hierarchy, status, authority and control can lead to assumptions and behaviours that undermine collective leadership and are unnecessary, unhelpful and at odds with the strategic direction of the organisation'.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Martyn Percy, *The Future Shapes of Anglicanism: Currents, Contours, Charts* (Routledge, 2017), 52.

<sup>44</sup> *Delivering a Collective Leadership Strategy for Health Care* (Centre for Creative Leadership and The Kings Fund, 2014).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.



New habits and skills *can*, however, be learned for they are in essence, as David Gortner reminds us, 'perceptual choices and modes of interaction rooted in practiced cognitive patterns and habitual motivations'.<sup>46</sup> What we see enacted in front of our eyes subliminally influences how we behave; builds habits of the heart. The stance of Deacons in the Eucharist reminds us visibly, viscerally, that leadership is a collective resource; that it is enabling of others; that it is world-facing. Or couched in another way, that it is 'relational', 'collaborative' and 'missional'. Let us then 'walk the talk', putting our feet daily where Deacons place them Sunday by Sunday.

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<sup>46</sup> D. Gortner, 'Looking at Leadership beyond our own Horizon' in *Anglican Theological Review* 91.1 (2009), 119-42, here 140.

## Book Reviews

ELIZABETH S. DODD. *Boundless Innocence in Thomas Traherne's Poetic Theology*. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015). Pages viii + 242. ISBN 978-1472453976. £62.99 (hardback).

Relatively recently discovered manuscript material of the Anglican priest and poet of the seventeenth century, Thomas Traherne, has revealed him as an important theological voice in both his poetry and his prose through the work of scholars like Julia Smith, Denise Inge, and David Ford. Elizabeth Dodd continues this rediscovery of Traherne with her particular emphasis on the complex theme in his writings of innocence, a project which she has more recently developed further in a volume of essays jointly edited with Carl E. Findley III entitled *Innocence Uncovered* (Routledge, 2017). Dodd explores the complexity of innocence with theological acumen largely through the poetics of Traherne's writing, their grammar, syntax and vocabulary, revealing a powerful strand in Anglican theology, found in different forms in other Anglican divines of the seventeenth century such as Lancelot Andrewes and Jeremy Taylor, that is poetic rather than systematic, carrying profound learning lightly, and rooted in the liturgy of Anglicanism. Theology lies within language rather than being imposed upon it.

Throughout her book Dodd repeatedly refers the reader back to contemporary theological reflections on 'learnt' innocence, in particular Paul Ricoeur in *Fallible Man* (1986) and David H. Kelsey in *Eccentric Existence* (2009). We are thus reminded of the continuing relevance of Traherne's concerns, and the particular contribution that he makes to our understanding of Christian innocence: for he is unique. With the extraordinary growth in newly discovered materials, well served by the magnificent newly completed seven volumes of his writings edited by Jan Ross (D. S. Brewer, 2005-17), we are moved on by Dodd from the older view of Traherne's notion of innocence in which he is regarded as a precursor to William Blake and the Romantic sense of childhood in works like the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Rather the 'estate' of innocence is understood by Traherne through a carefully constructed theology of the Fall wherein pre-lapsarian Eden is to be carefully distinguished from Milton's untamed garden in *Paradise Lost*, and Adam, as an archetypal human being rather than an individual, understood and perceived through a delicate Irenaean Adam-Christ typology. In our post-lapsarian condition, in Traherne, we experience at one time the 'estates' of both misery and grace and in the *trial* of innocence, through grace we approach the Throne of Glory. If Milton inherits and struggles with the medieval notion of the *felix culpa*, the fortunate fall, in Traherne we feel the continuous presence of the *felix probatio*, or

fortunate trial, and the struggle, of innocence. Theology, and its accompanying anthropology, in Traherne is endlessly dramatic, a quality discussed again today in such works as Ben Quash's *Theological Dramatic Theory* (2005), to which Dodd refers frequently.

What makes Traherne unique is the particular poetics and poetic imagery of his theology, and it is these that Dodd explores so well, especially in chapter 6 of her book, where she reveals both the careful syntax and the delicate vocabulary in Traherne's theology, drawn from emblems and metaphysical conceits of the seventeenth century. Contemporary theology knows little of the gentle mystery of the optative or the careful, intellectually challenging complexity of pre-Romantic imagery and symbols based on a Renaissance humanist theological anthropology such as we find in Traherne's poetry and prose. It would be well if we re-learned them. Having published only one work during his lifetime, the *Roman Forgeries* (1673), Traherne never completed what might have been his greatest achievement, the *Commentaries of Heaven*, its manuscript miraculously rescued from a rubbish tip in Liverpool in the late 1960s. Moving word by word alphabetically, *Commentaries of Heaven* seeks to open "the Mysteries of Felicitie" in the revelation of "All Things" as "Objects of Happiness. It is nothing short of a theological dictionary, beginning with 'Abhorrence' (which "God implanted... in the Mind of Man, that he might be more Secured in the Possession of His Happiness."), and progressing through such terms as Adoration, Angell, Ascension and Atonement. Each is theologically dissected and placed. The point is that words matter, and from words are forged poetic conceits as images of innocence that, as Dodd puts it, "subvert traditional associations and sacramentalise conventional imagery to reveal hidden truth" (p. 171). Thus theology is learnt afresh. There is nothing naïve in Traherne, who delights in paradox and apparent inconsistency, and for whom the innocence of childhood is presented in the uncertainty of the subjunctive mood which yet "provides the knowledge of and desire for the good that inspires the search for felicity" (p. 173). His Anglicanism is bathed in the sense of God "who hates nothing that he has made and doth forgive the sins of all those who are penitent," and who "desireth not the death of a sinner." Dodd carefully traces Traherne's theology of innocence found in everyday experience through his language, moving between and avoiding both nostalgia and utopianism, in works of Anglicanism that remain as fresh and as relevant today – perhaps even more so – than when they were first written.

Thomas Traherne should be read again and Elizabeth Dodd has provided us with a wise and learned introduction to his work and thought, and his theology of innocence. Hers is a book that deserves to be widely read far beyond the world of scholarship.

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