

# Progressive Voices



Mar 2022, PV40

# Desmond Mpilo Tutu

**“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.”**

“It isn't that it's questionable when you speak up for the right of people with different sexual orientation. People took some part of us and used it to discriminate against us. In our case, it was our ethnicity; it's precisely the same thing for sexual orientation. People are killed because they're gay.”

**“If you want peace, you don't talk to your friends. You talk to your enemies.”**

“When you go to the Holy Land and see what's being done to the Palestinians at checkpoints, for us, it's the kind of thing we experienced in South Africa. Whether you want to say Israel practices apartheid is immaterial. They are doing things, given their history, you think, "Do you remember what happened to you?" Then they clobber you and say, "You are anti-Semitic.””

**“Forgiveness says you are given another chance to make a new beginning.”**

“I can't for the life of me imagine that God would say, 'I will punish you because you are black; you should have been white. I will punish you because you are a woman; you should have been a man. I punish you because you are homosexual; you ought to have been heterosexual. I can't, I can't for the life of me believe that that is how God sees things.”

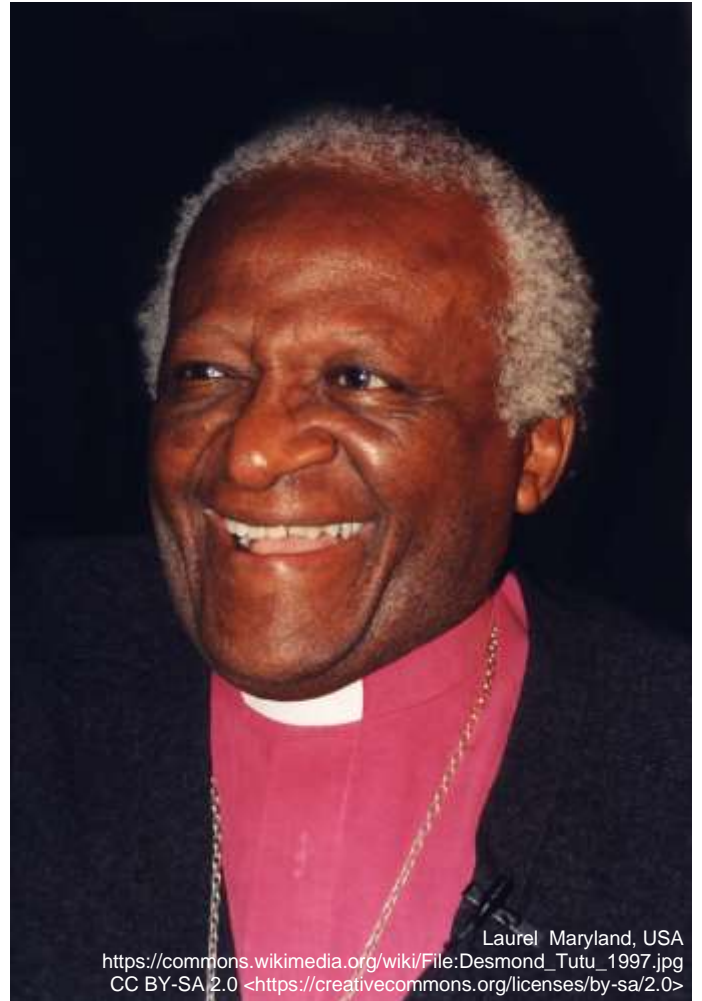
**“We can be human only together. A person is a person to other persons. We so desperately long for all of us to learn that we are meant for one another. We are meant for complementarity.”**

“We are each made for goodness, love and compassion. Our lives are transformed as much as the world is when we live with these truths.”

**“We are all connected. What unites us is our common humanity. I don't want to oversimplify things - but the suffering of a mother who has lost her child is not dependent on her nationality, ethnicity or religion. White, black, rich, poor, Christian, Muslim or Jew - pain is pain - joy is joy.”**

“We need other human beings in order to be human.”

**“Love is universal. You don't have to tell somebody that loving is better than hating. You don't have to believe in God to know that stealing is bad. All of God's children and their different faiths help to realize the immensity of God. No faith contains the whole truth about God. And certainly Christians don't have a corner on God. All of us belong to God.”**



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“My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together.”

**“There is no religion in fact that I know that encourages or propagates violence that its adherents should carry out.”**

“You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you, as you are to them.”

**“Without forgiveness, there is no future. Forgiveness is not nebulous, impractical and idealistic. It's thoroughly realistic. It's real political in the long run.”**

“When the missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible and we had the land. They said 'Let us pray.' We closed our eyes. When we opened them we had the Bible and they had the land.”

**“I'm absolutely, utterly, and completely certain that God wouldn't be homophobic. I'd much rather go to hell - I really would much rather go to hell - than go to a homophobic heaven.”**

“There are very good Christians who are compassionate and caring. And there are very bad Christians. You can say that about Islam, about Hinduism, about any faith. That is why I was saying that it was not the faith per se but the adherent. People will use their religion to justify virtually anything.”

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# Welcome

PV is 40! And with 4 editions per year, it's been around for 10 years. A browsing past editions also highlights that as PV6 (Sept 2013) was a celebration of PCN's 10th anniversary so next year will be our 20th. Anniversaries are a time to celebrate and also to reflect. Much has changed over the last couple of decades and some things have remained the same. PCN's ethos has evolved, whilst remaining true to our founding principles, but if you also browse through past PVs you will recognise familiar names throughout. That is both a recognition of the commitment and generosity of our members, but is also a reminder that we need to attract new folk. Pre-Covid our main way of attracting fresh faces was through events. As we were unable to meet we have made ourselves known through our Zoom conferences but also through boosting our posts and advertising on Facebook. This has had mixed results, and my thanks to those who have patiently responded to comments from fervent believers and non-believers. We are a membership organisation, and thanks to those that are receiving this PV after renewing and joining. Who else can we invite? How else can we reach people? Welcome to the 40<sup>th</sup> edition of PV. Enjoy!

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Dec: Friday 4th Nov 2022  
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# Chair's Letter

My wife Christine and I recently spent a couple of days in Liverpool, a city we know and love well. On the evening before going to an art exhibition in the Walker Art Gallery, we ate in a small French restaurant on Hanover Street. I suddenly realised that we were enjoying a meal in what used to be the Liverpool Diocesan Office, Church House, a place I would go to as a young clergyman if my house or my stipend needed some attention! The elegant Victorian buildings are now occupied by restaurants and commercial offices and the diocesan office has retreated to, no doubt less expensive and smaller, offices by the cathedral. The experience of returning to the city where I was ordained by Bishop David Sheppard, over forty years ago in the second largest Anglican cathedral in the world, was a sober reminder of how the church has changed over those forty years. We walked around the city and saw plenty of evidence of closed churches and those large Victorian churches still open now home to much smaller congregations.

When I was a curate in a large Liverpool church in the late 1970's the staff team conducted over 50 weddings each year, about three funerals a week, had a Sunday School full of children, and was in a religious city where wearing a dog collar earned you respect and usually privileged treatment at M&S! Bishop David and his Roman Catholic colleague Archbishop Derek Worlock led the way in overcoming Protestant / Catholic strife and worked tirelessly for the people of the city impoverished by the Thatcher government and its policies. The Faith in the City report put the church firmly in the forefront of politics and bishops regularly appeared on Question Time.

In many ways the churches in cities and towns like Liverpool continue to serve their communities but from a much more marginal and shrinking base. We know well the statistics of decline in religion in modern Britain and I have just read the latest book by the eminent sociologist Steve Bruce, entitled 'British Gods'. The conclusion he arrives at – irreversible decline - means that if I were to return to Liverpool in 40 years' time (highly unlikely!!) it might be difficult to find many churches surviving and perhaps even that great cathedral looking down like a mother hen on her city might be owned for the nation by the National Trust!

That might please Sir Simon Jenkins, past Chairman of the National Trust, who recently in a Guardian article expressed his remorse that the 16,000 parish churches were in danger of being lost to the nation as congregations fall away and buildings deteriorate. (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/dec/31/churches-banks-serve-beer-community-legacy>) Jenkins reminded us of the

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splendid role as community hubs which churches have always played in the life of villages and towns across the nation. Presently the Church of England is overwhelmingly concerned to stem the decline of churchgoing through various mission strategies. Concerned to convert and evangelise from a particularly narrow viewpoint does little to encourage those 'fuzzy faithful' and honest seekers to step inside our church buildings on a Sunday. But into this debate have progressive Christians something to offer?

I sometimes tire at the number of books constantly being written about the historical Jesus, the development of Christianity, and the need for radical and honest reassessment. We know that for most people the Church and its doctrines have become totally irrelevant and yet the search for an authentic spirituality does not cease. So why cannot we challenge our denominational leaders, a little like Jenkins does, but from a more open-minded and sympathetic view of faith? Why not open up our churches, yes to many activities – foodbank, post office, community activities BUT also a place where people of different faiths, and none, can come and share their experiences, their hopes and dreams? The Church could become an oasis of peace, a place of beauty, in part a legacy in glass and stone of a particular religious outlook, but an opportunity to re-present its core message of love, justice and peace. Perhaps trusts could be formed to own and manage the grade one and two listed church buildings, whose trustees are drawn from different faiths and interests. Denominations could still employ staff to align with the 'church' and to conduct such rituals as are needed and desired. Is such out-of-the-box thinking a pipe dream?

I believe that we need to keep the rumour of God alive, not in a dry converting sense, but in a way that offers to every community bridges of understanding between people, opportunities to share deeply in life's experiences and seek the Common Good – a common 'God'?

The alternative it would seem is that the Church heads for oblivion and progressive Christians continue to read the right books, attend the right conferences and remember with nostalgia, and some bitterness, a Church which had long ago lost any appeal to them.

# Local groups

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

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

Sadly, two of our members died recently – Ron Lewis and Gill Atkinson. Both were lively and creative group members and we will miss their valuable contributions. Because of Covid restrictions/advice we are back to Zooming our meetings. A link is sent out a day or so before each monthly meeting. We continue on the first Wed each month at 1.30pm until approx. 3pm. We are currently reading through and discussing Robin Meyers “Saving Jesus from the Church”.

**Bristol** Kaitlyn Steele  
07713 475673 kaitlyn.steele@pcnbritain.org.uk

Being able to meet again presented us with a problem – how do we keep in touch with the online community we gathered during lockdown? Rather than meeting fortnightly in person our compromise has been to have a monthly face-to-face and a monthly midweek online meeting. We endeavour to make each space a time of spiritual encounter and reflection as well as time for lively debate. We started off this year looking at ‘Christianity - the way of love’ with some interfaith thoughts from Mirabai Starr and her book ‘God of Love’ and Valarie Kaur’s book ‘See no stranger’ along with her projects of ‘Revolutionary Love’ and ‘The People’s Inauguration’. We look forward to being able to host some workshops and perhaps a conference this coming year!

**Newcastle** Liz Temple  
01207 505564 liz.temple@pcnbritain.org.uk

We continue to meet in the spacious hall at Brunswick Methodist Church in the city centre, and feel fortunate to be able to do so. In Nov, James introduced us to the writings of Richard Rohr including ‘Immortal Diamond: The Search for our True Self’ and we grappled with “Is there such a thing as a True Self?” Joyce used Inderjit Bhogal’s book ‘Hospitality and Sanctuary for All’ for our Dec meeting, presenting us with the challenging question about recognising racism within ourselves.

We were treated for our first gathering of 2022, welcoming a group from Newcastle Unitarian Church. It was fascinating to learn something of their history and background as well as how today it ‘seeks to explore truths from all sources, whilst respecting and learning from its Christian heritage’ to quote our speaker. We look forward to further opportunities for getting to know our near-neighbours and sharing thoughts and insights.

**Tunbridge Wells** Sandy Elsworth  
radpilgrims@gmail.com

Since the pandemic our meetings, usually at Christ Church Tunbridge Wells, have been on Zoom, with the exception of a well-attended summer picnic. In addition, we continued with a weekly morning Zoom meeting. Sometimes the discussion subject is decided in advance, at other times it flows from previous discussions or from participants’ current concerns. Prayer, environment, climate change and spiritual economics have featured regularly. We had a most interesting discussion on the issues raised by Ben Whitney’s book ‘The Apostate’s Creed’, which benefitted greatly from the copies generously provided by the author. There have also been discussions on PCN online events, such as John Dominic Crossan, or online events by the Marcus Borg Foundation. Our plans to return to our meeting place with a Christmas celebration was thwarted by a severe storm. We now intend to resume there in Feb.

**Teesside** Peter Brophy  
01609 761182 peter@brophy.org.uk

We managed one face-to-face meeting in Nov before omicron forced us back on Zoom. We hope to resume at the Friends Meeting House in Great Ayton in Feb or Mar. We expect to finish our discussion of Jonathan Sacks’ “Morality: restoring the common good in divided times” at the Feb meeting and will start a new book, title not yet decided, in Mar. We meet on the second Tues each month at 2.30pm.

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

Our last meeting of 2021 was led by Maureen Bownas and as a tribute to Jack Spong we considered his book,

“Why Christianity Must Change or Die”, referring also to our discussion on Ben Whitney’s, “The Apostate’s Creed”. Our first of 2022 was a discussion of Martyn Percy’s, “The Humble Church”, introduced by Sue Hobley. The meeting on 14 Mar will be led by Roy Squires who will speak on the third part of Bart Ehrman’s book, “Peter, Paul and Mary Magdalene”, looking at references to Mary Magdalene in the NT and extra-canonical literature. At present our meetings are on Zoom.

## Letters ....

### Earlier Ordinations

The moving tributes to Jack Spong, and the extracts showing his wide ranging wisdom, in the PV39 came at a time when I was again puzzling out a way to offer an authentic Christmas message. Thank you. I would like to correct one reference, in the obituary reprinted in PV. The first English Anglican woman to be ordained was the late Joyce Bennett, by the courageous bishop Gilbert Baker of Hong Kong, on 13 Dec 1971. Joyce was a school headmistress there and I had the privilege of attending her celebrations of holy communion with the pupils in the boisterously tonal Cantonese language.

Peter Varney

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

## The Widening Circle of Us

Brunswick Methodist Church, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7BJ

6:45pm, Thurs 24 March, £5

Peter Francis, Warden of Gladstone’s Library

Peter will address his own widening from a privileged beginning with an unquestioning naive faith, to a liberal understanding of faith and society.

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# Helping Children Ask Holy Questions

Kids are always asking questions. “Why do I have to brush my teeth?” “How old are you?” “Are we there yet?” These are seemingly simple, everyday questions, with pretty straightforward answers: “to keep your mouth healthy,” “30 years old,” “not yet, we have 20 more minutes in the car.”

Any adult who has spent time with children, or remembers what it’s like to be a child, knows that from these simple questions can proceed more complex ones. And it is a gift to be an adult who receives these questions because it is only when a child feels safe and comfortable that they can ask why there is violence in the world or what it means to grow up. For children engaged in Christian fellowship, questions can arise as children make connections between their daily experiences and the words, rituals, and relationships they witness in church. Then suddenly the precocious questions can be theological in nature, from “who is Jesus?” to “what is communion?” to “why did Jesus die?” to “how do we care for each other?”

When asked these questions, adults must choose how to respond. Many adults feel they ought to know all the answers, and so they feel uncertain when they are confronted by kiddos’ big wonderings. “I don’t know, let’s find out together” can be hard to express when you want to give a child support and security. In progressive theological communities, we might particularly struggle to find the balance of wonder and structure, tradition and social commitments in ways that are age and stage appropriate for children. Our beliefs and values may have shifted from our own childhood churches, or we may find ourselves facing a gap in how to communicate our beliefs to the younger Christians in our lives. But adopting a posture of wondering and accompanying children in their theological explorations can go a long way towards their long-term spiritual and religious wellbeing. Christian education resources like Godly Play and Celebrate Wonder provide support in Sunday school settings, but what about theological support for big questions outside of church?

New Directions for Holy Questions: Progressive Christian Theology for Families hopes to support children and the grownups who love them in asking questions about theology, ethics and sacraments. Each of the 19 chapters includes stories from scripture, no-preparation spiritual practices, theological explorations and reflection questions, and justice stories that share how individuals and collectives make change in their own corners of the world. Written for primary-aged children to read on their own or with an adult, this book can also be a resource for teenagers exploring confirmation, new Christians seeking membership, or any Christians

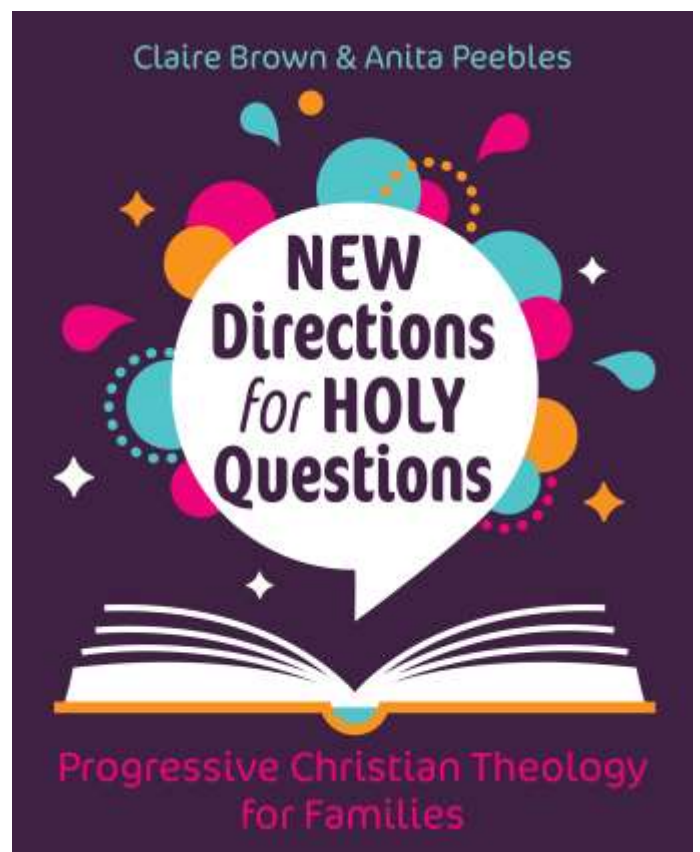


**Anita Peebles** is Baptist minister living in Seattle, Washington with her partner and their cat. With Claire Brown she authored *New Directions for Holy Questions*.

who are oriented towards antiracism, LGBTQIA+ affirmation and celebration, and creation care.

As we were writing, my co-author the Rev. Claire Brown and I found it important to claim space for this resource as part of the progressive Christian conversation. As a Baptist minister working with an Episcopal priest, we are aware that often progressive wings of denominations have more in common with each other than folks within the same denomination. We are proud of the ecumenicity of this project as we made conscious choices to share multiple ways churches observe communion, baptism and honouring the saints.

For the last decade or so, Christian educators and ministers have been shifting their emphasis from faith formation in formal church spaces, like Sunday school or children’s chapel, to faith formation at home. The primary shapers of children’s faith formation are the grownups in the home, who see their children far more than one or two hours a week. This new book is a resource for use at home, for facilitating those tough conversations, and for learning and growing together.



# ... not just for Christmas

## Jesus the Christ is for life, not just for Christmas

On the rare occasions when I lead worship near Christmas, and there are children in the congregation, I refer them to the posters sometimes seen on car windows saying "A dog is for life, not just for Christmas". I then change it to the words of the title of this article. We can also simply change the word 'DoG' into 'GoD'. This leads me on to consider the celebration of Christmas as relevant to the whole of life and not just a lovely break or, even worse, an attempt to avoid the realities and truths of life. We all need regular brief breaks, but we also need to use these to take stock of our lives.

My parents were regular church goers, but did not attend on the 25th; so when I left home I sometimes went to a Christmas day service. All too often I was disappointed to find it simply a jolly lightweight event, singing carols with some words I did not like and talking mainly about the exchange of presents. Where was the message about the meaning of Christmas? This helped me understand why my parents never felt obliged to attend.

In the year 2000, the Reverend Christopher Hill, Bishop of Stafford, wrote an article in the local Sentinel newspaper just before Christmas day. He wrote "that the world and the church still has a long way to go in really understanding the message of Jesus, the message of Christmas, which is God's love and life in humanity ... and in the Victim on the cross. God in every child, God in every victim. God in us." So Christmas is about something that can happen to anyone any day, especially in the birth of a baby or in the care for a victim.

The idea about the birth of a baby is seen in a hymn by Marjorie Dobson, it begins "Birth brings a promise of new life awaking" and the second verse expresses the incarnation of the love and spirit of God in "every new life".

A few years ago, the Ceramic City Choir sang a new choral work written by Howard Goodall (Commissioned by Mercy Ships UK, 2012). Since my wife was in that choir, I saw the words and liked them so much I decided to write them in poetic form. It is entitled "I am Christmas Day".

With the composer's permission I present it with this article for you to ponder. Our local PCN group liked it (when it was deliberately read in early summer time) and so did a few ministers of the churches to whom I have sent it; one has put it on the church website and another asked me to present it to our local preachers' meeting.

**Nigel Jones**

## I am Christmas Day

One small infant poor and frail  
two thousand years ago  
could be a million miles away.  
One rough stable  
meagre shelter from the night.  
What's so special, what's the story here?

Centuries pass, yet still it seems to say:  
Every child born, every new dawn  
is another Christmas Day.  
Somewhere hope springs,  
one more heart sings,  
it's someone's Christmas day

I am the moment when a baby first lets out a cry  
or when a stranger does not pass you by.  
I am Christmas Day.  
One scared mother far from home,  
around her, people fussed.  
Even a band of passing kings.

All these details have probably  
been built up.  
Nonetheless there is a message here.  
Born in hardship, one child changed the world.  
Every child born, every new dawn  
is another Christmas Day.

Somewhere hope springs,  
one more heart sings,  
it's someone's Christmas Day.  
When I am there to relieve  
an unknown person's grief,  
to share the load whatever their belief,  
I am Christmas day.

Every storm braved,  
every life saved  
is another Christmas Day.  
Somewhere peace wins  
one more child begins  
their first real Christmas Day.

When I'm not prepared  
to let the sun go down on you.  
To feel your pain  
and ask what I can do,  
I am Christmas Day  
I am Christmas Day.

# Mary, Founder of Christianity

In 1984, I began my degree in Theology & Religious Studies at Leeds University. As a mature student who had wasted a previous degree opportunity, I was super keen and explored things outside the main curriculum. As my degree included biblical study with knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, in my spare time I enjoyed comparing the textual variations in the Greek New Testament. I was fortunate to have studied ancient Greek at school which gave me a head start.

I became interested in the names of the Marys at the cross and empty tomb. Biblical commentaries seemed to dismiss these women as an incidental list of people who were remembered in passing as being witnesses; the job that they did in the text was to assure the reader that the man who died on the cross really was buried, and that it was his tomb that was empty. But that seemed to me to be such an essential role that surely their names must have been extremely important to the early Christian tradition? The earliest gospel, Mark, names them as 'Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome' (Mark 15.40, NRSV). Meanwhile, Mary the mother of Jesus seemed not to be present in the synoptic gospels (Mark, Matthew, and Luke), although being placed at the cross, but not the tomb, in John's Gospel.

Thirty-six years later, after a busy career at York St John University in which I was only able to write on this topic briefly in short articles, the lockdown provided an opportunity to do some more research and articulate my ideas more fully. The result will be published as *Mary, Founder of Christianity* by Oneworld Publications in April 2022. It is an unashamedly feminist book which argues that the mystery concerning the identities of these women arises from a patriarchal context in which women's contributions were minimised and overlooked.

Despite this, some powerful images of women are in evidence in the gospels, notably in the story of the birth of Jesus – Mary at the annunciation and the visitation – and the anointing narratives. These, and the list of women at the cross, provide clues to the highly influential role of women in the earliest Church, hence the title of the book. Mary the mother of Jesus, after all, preceded Jesus and taught him; she can hardly be called a 'follower' or 'disciple' as modern Catholicism seems to want to describe her.

The book also investigates the texts in which Mary is described as a virgin. The idea that this served originally as a theological metaphor for God's new creation in Christ is not particularly novel. But the Catholic Church, which accepts the presence of allegory and metaphor elsewhere in the Bible, regards the virgin birth as a line in the sand because it is a doctrine. Of course, it is a story that



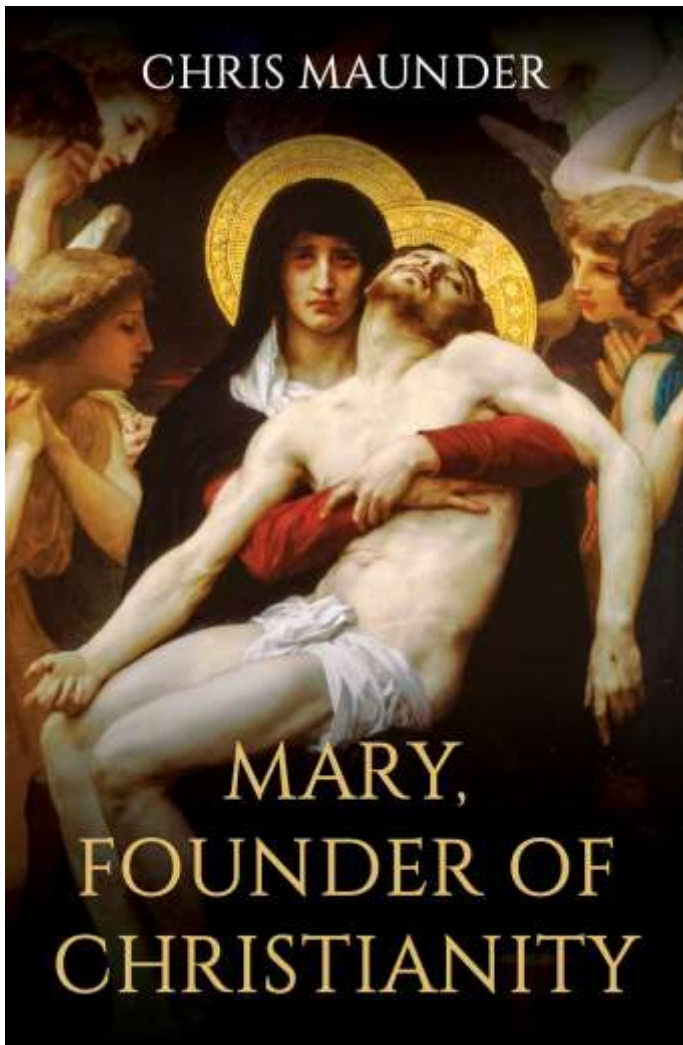
**Chris Maunder** is the author, or editor, of several books and articles on Mary.

has inspired generations over the centuries, and can be read in ways that are liberating, as well as suppressive, for women. Nevertheless, I think that there are major benefits from viewing it as a metaphor and sizeable problems in regarding it as literal fact. Recent events in the churches lead to the conclusion that suppressing sexuality can have tragic consequences. The fact is that Mary was married and Jesus is the likelier of the two to have been a lifelong virgin.

*Mary, Founder of Christianity* is not an attempt to debunk devotion to Mary; this is the opposite of the truth. I have facilitated Marian pilgrimage for many years as the trustee of a local shrine, Our Lady of the Crag in Knaresborough. My wife and I enjoy travelling to Marian shrines and taking part in devotions and processions when we get the chance. What I have attempted to do in the book is to use research and analysis to help to reconfigure devotion to Mary in a way that makes sense in the twenty-first century. I want to look at Mary in the light of honest and considered reflection. That has been my long-term goal since 1984, and this book is the summation of my efforts so far. I am not the first to view Mary in a progressive light, I know; I draw on the work of many other writers. Yet, in my case, I do not want critical analysis to result in a diminution of Marian devotion, an unintended consequence of the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s.

Along with Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene is also discussed in the book. As a Christian, I know that the resurrection is the best news there could possibly be. Mary Magdalene is credited with being the first to believe the resurrection gospel, another testimony to the role of women in the early Church. The relationship between the Marys stood within a community of women in the ministry of Jesus, whom we glimpse only a couple of times in the gospel texts. That is one reason why we can conclude that the New Testament is androcentric; these short mentions leave us with the task of reconstructing what these women might have done in a way that is not as difficult for the twelve male disciples. This fellowship (*koinonia*) of women is indispensable for the foundation of the Christian gospel. And, by the way, there is no evidence to suggest that Mary Magdalene was Jesus' wife; she might have been, but we will never know. She could just as well have





been his aunt. What is true, however, is that she has an equal claim to be called 'the new Eve', a traditional title of Mary the mother of Jesus.

A third Mary, Mary of Bethany as she is known, is associated with the anointing of Jesus. Given that the word 'Messiah' (Hebrew) or 'Christ' (Greek) means 'anointed', and Jesus is nowhere else anointed, this must have been a momentous event in his ministry. It comes in slightly different places in the gospels, which suit the evangelists own particular ways of presenting the gospel story. In Mark, the earliest, it comes just before the events of the Last Supper and Passion, a crucial position in the text as the revelation of the Messiah unfolds.

In the synoptic gospels, the anointer is anonymous, but it is no surprise that John tells us that her name is Mary. She echoes the vocation of both Mary the mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene in recognising the meaning of the dying Messiah, the Messiah as Suffering Servant. Again, this Mary relates to other women, in her case, her sister Martha. For John's Gospel, as I explain in the book, sisters are very significant.

So perhaps the book should have been titled *Mary, Mary, and Mary, Founders of Christianity!* For while it begins as a study of the mother of Jesus, its inevitable path leads to the community of women at the cross and tomb.

## Guided by ...

### Guided by humility and science

A more accurate, but I feel, superficial description of God is provided by data from the Hubble Telescope, presented recently on television by Professor Brian Cox, (BBC, The Universe Series 5, Oct 2021; The Big Bang Before the Dawn). An ocean of energy subjected to inflation and the 'Big Bang', set up different densities of hydrogen and helium that eventually collapsed to form the first stars and galaxies creating nuclear fusion and elements of the Periodic Table. Notwithstanding our advancement in knowledge, we still expect God to turn up every Sunday and have ears (probably two) to hear our intercessions. School children familiar with Cox's program may conclude that they have a better understanding of the creation of the universe than any account given in church, and that church has nothing to teach them.

There are signs of renewed marketing exercises within the CofE. Ben Whitney (PV39) finds many faults with this approach, including the suggestion that traditional claims of Christianity are unbelievable to modern minds. In his recent book, *The Humble Church*, Martyn Percy, an eminent priest and theologian with strong orthodox beliefs, is also critical of evangelical strategies for growth and advocates a return to a focus on God, as expressed in the life of Jesus, rather than on the church; a church obsessed with self-image, productivity and growth. He recognizes deficits in the competencies of bishops and questions why God could not bring the gospel to the church. Church ministry shares the aforementioned traits with the better-recognized professions that are also characterized by self-preservation, services best suited to the professional than the client, resistance to change and restricted communication with clients. Percy reminds us that church is also meant to hold and cherish the world before God. Encouragingly, this is an aspect of Christianity that younger generations appreciate and pursue enthusiastically, as depicted by Holly in the 'Made of Stories'. The Preface to *Guidelines on the Professional Conduct of Ordained Ministry (2015)* includes the message that guidance will come from tradition and the best insights and knowledge available to us in the present age. The church will, therefore, need to wake-up and smell the science, as past guidance appears to be completely based on tradition. Christian aspects of human life interwoven with those of our suffering planet are too great and complex an issue to be left solely to priests and theologians. Expert opinion is needed in several diverse areas that can impact positively on church liturgy, teaching and attendance.

# Science and Christianity

It was with sadness that we had to cancel our 'in-person' conference on science and faith. In light of that, I would like to share some personal thoughts on Science and Christianity.

When the Nicene creed was adopted in 325 AD it was partly a work of politics organised by Constantine. This initial creed was adapted soon after, and is still said today in the vernacular of the countries of the world. Even after Luther's Reformation, many of Christian beliefs are really bound by older Greek or Roman ideas. (Many denominations may not recite the Nicene creed but largely believe its tenets!) I am pleased that science has moved on since Nicaea and Wittenberg. We now have had Faraday, Maxwell, Dalton and Darwin, not forgetting Newton and Einstein.

So, what can Christianity learn from science? In one sense nothing, as they have very different ways of gaining knowledge, but, significantly, science does allow for drastic change. Whereas faith struggles to do so. Let me offer three examples: cosmology, reproduction and Climate Change.

We no longer believe in the Ptolemaic view of the solar system; indeed, we have seen the famous photograph of our blue planet taken in 1972. The 'cosmology' around the time of the gospel writers was of a 3-tiered universe; heaven above the static Earth and Sheol below the Earth. We know that the



Tom-L Early\_Hebrew\_Conception\_of\_the\_Universe.svg  
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Wikimedia Commons

Earth (which is more or less spherical) orbits the Sun and the Sun orbits around the Milky Way. Jesus did not ascend into heaven and there is no hell beneath us as we have

Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo and Newton (and many others) to thank for changing the paradigm from the 3-tiered Earth-centred universe to the present one.

The discovery of the human ovum started in the 17th century, but it was not really completed until 19th. So the ideas that the gospel writers, Luke and Matthew, worked with was that women nurtured new life and acted like an incubator. The idea that each gender contributes 23 chromosomes to the new child was unknown, and women were marginalised in those societies. Mary was not an empty vessel waiting to incubate a son!



**Martin Bassant** is PCN trustee and retired deputy head teacher who taught, and was also a chief examiner, for A level Physics.

One bone of contention about Climate Change was whether changes in our climate were due to natural cycles or were made by humans. Climate Change deniers generally had an agenda: backed by the fossil fuel industry and/or countries that rely on fossil fuel exports. (This argument is similar to that of tobacco companies denying that cigarettes were a health hazard.) We now know that Climate Change is driven primarily by increasing amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere leading to our 'age' being called the Anthropocene by many scientists. (The current geological age, viewed as the period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment.)

So the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was set up and the vast majority of countries began reporting progress toward their climate reduction goals. IPCC reports have given scenarios for Climate Change over a range of temperatures: 1.5C being the safest; 4C the most catastrophic.

Science works by international co-operation and the testing of ideas, something which faiths struggle to do, even if they attempt it. Worldwide agreement on matters of faith is probably impossible, and potentially undesirable, given its personal nature.

In 'Structures of Scientific Revolutions' (University of Chicago Press, 2012) Thomas Kuhn argues that big changes in scientific thinking occur despite the present prevailing paradigm, the predominant view, at the time. The change from Ptolemy to a Copernican point of view is an example of a paradigm shift. I think that Don Cupitt, Marcus Borg, Dominic Crossan and Jack Spong can be seen as paradigm changers of today's Christian thought.

If the thinking around the meaning of the gospels is found to be predicated on an outdated paradigm, we need to change the narrative and explain it with respect to 2022! The New Testament writers could only write about things within their understanding and the paradigm of the times; I am not criticising them, but it is time to move on. How many of you would like the world of Luther: no electricity, painful dentistry, little understanding of the circulation of blood, no vaccines, no mass transport, no phones, no internet, no clean water, etc.? So let's celebrate the open vision PCN encourages and work to change the established paradigm for the new one. Perhaps we should work towards 'The Structure of Christian Revolutions'?

# The God of My Childhood #1

Richard Rohr recently had a piece about Buddhism in his daily email and a reader replied, as someone once Christian and now Buddhist, that he found the teaching of Buddha and of Jesus helped him equally to understand, and to live, his life. But he still yearned for 'the God of my childhood'.

So do I. I read and value Richard Rohr and the writings and conversations of liberal and of progressive Christians, amongst whom I count myself. I read and value the words from other faiths, whilst feeling that Christianity happens to be 'my language'. Yet for years I struggled and silently fumed at the words of Victorian hymns and the sermons directing our attention, if not upwards, at least by implication, outwards. I had to remind myself that poetry can be true without being literal.

As a teenager I revelled in the radicalism of John Robinson in 'Honest to God' and smiled at the headline in the Daily Mirror: 'Breaking news: God is not a Daddy in the Sky'. As a student I listened to Werner Pelz talk about his book 'God is No More' and it all felt liberating and exciting. As a theology student my study of Biblical texts and developing appreciation of context, of history and of the complexities of authorship, helped the process of 'demythologising' make sense.

My church membership happened to be 'high' and the sacraments, the eucharist in particular, always grounded me and allowed me a belief in what in another context I would describe as 'magical'. No longer do I restrict the sacramental to what happens in church. However, as I read and listen and follow the logic of my intellect, I find myself without, and yet deeply yearning for, 'the God of my childhood'.

I am not sure why. Maybe it is because I am growing older (as teenagers we used, shockingly, to talk of the elders in the congregation as 'cramming for finals!'). Maybe it is Covid - it seems to have had an impact on most things in our lives. Maybe it is losing much loved parents to dementia, and maybe it is a long family journey through illness. Maybe it is the beauty of the coastline where I live, or the love of family and friends, or the kindness of strangers. Maybe it is a feeling that there are mysteries and miracles, and that these are not simply waiting for science to explain them.

I do not want a God to blame, or whose existence offers a clear explanation of the vagaries of life. I want to believe in a God in whom love is dominant, in whom all the best of who we are comes alive. Most of all I yearn for a God who offers permanence in a transient world - a God who offers a 'home' for those I love who have died. I yearn, above all, to believe in 'eternal life' whatever that might mean.

I remember the God of my childhood. I don't believe I was ever taught that he lived in the sky, or that he

**Chris King** is an academic in the fields of Theology and History, a former Vice Chancellor, and she now lives in Devon.



had a long white beard, a throne, or that he judged people. Although, to be fair, many of the hymns I sang certainly did point not too subtly in that direction. I suspect the early love of poetry I gained from my father helped me through this maze.

I remember being very young and sitting on the bottom step of the stairs with my lovely dad, and asking him if Father Christmas was real. So patiently and lovingly he explained that although Father Christmas wasn't 'real', the 'Spirit of Christmas' most definitely was and, taking my hand, he told me not to worry, he and my mum would make sure that the presents arrived safely.

I know so many people who have left behind their churches, in their various traditions, and teachings; not just 'Father Christmas' but the 'Spirit of Christmas' also. In dismissing the myths, they come empty handed to a new understanding of life - or so it seems to me. They are in practice splendid humanists, caring about our beleaguered planet and for our fellow human beings. There is no hope for a future beyond death, or for the power of mystery, working in beautiful and unexplained ways.

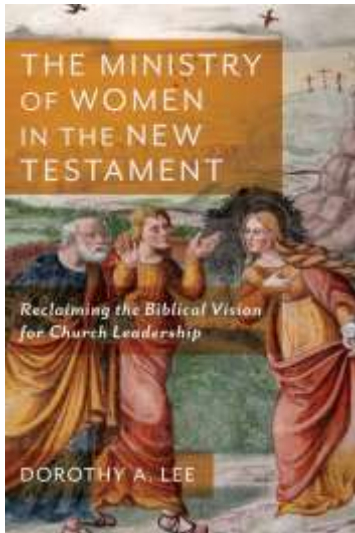
However out of step with my intellect's processing of history and texts, I continue to hope that I can talk to this God and be heard. I do not expect privilege. I do not expect all my wishes to be granted. I don't think I ever did. I yearn to be able to believe in - and maybe even 'worship' - a God who cares.

I care about the planet, like my atheist / humanist friends, and I care about humanity and social justice and world poverty. In so many ways it would be good to give up the search and rest in the uncertain certainties of this life. But that 'Hound of Heaven' pursues me and my search for the God of my childhood continues. What am I missing? Am I alone in this quest?



# Book Reviews: Women's Ministry

## The Ministry of Women in the New Testament: Reclaiming the Biblical Vision for Church Leadership by Dorothy A. Lee, Baker Academic



The role of women in the ministry of the church has been the subject of debate and dispute from earliest times, and it continues to be a divisive issue. While in most of the Protestant churches there are no barriers preventing women from filling any

leadership position, there are restrictions in the Roman and Orthodox Churches, particularly in respect of access to the priesthood. In this book, Dorothy A Lee, an ordained Anglican priest and research professor in the University of Divinity, Melbourne, Australia, argues from a NT perspective that women should have full access to the church's ministry whether in lay or ordained ministries, and that this access needs to depend not on gender but on a sense of vocation and calling.

In the first part she considers the role of women as portrayed in the Gospels and Epistles. She seeks to identify the particular features taken by each of the four evangelists. In respect of Mark and Matthew she notes the presence of Galilean women who follow Jesus, and their loyalty to him even to being there at the Cross. She considers Luke and Acts as one, and notes that the Gospel features more women than Acts, which creates an interesting conundrum for debate. John's gospel contains fewer women than Luke's, but it is, for example, John who recounts Mary Magdalene's post-Resurrection encounter. After the Gospels, the author moves on to consider the Pauline Epistles which she acknowledges are always a "bumpy ride". Although the ground has been well covered over the years, she is still able to provide new insights and, on many of the more difficult issues, sets out clearly the views of other scholars. This makes the study thought-provoking. Thus, for example, one wonders to what extent the location of the Christian community was an influencing factor. If a meeting took place in a home, it is likely to have been much less formal while, if it were in a synagogue or assembly, traditional practices would have been followed. As she suggests "Paul is addressing himself to those who might disturb the decorum and dignity of worship." (p.121).



**Nigel Bastin** is a retired legal academic and served as a churchwarden during a twelve-year vacancy.

After her consideration of the New Testament she includes a much shorter second part looking at tradition and theology. In relation to tradition, it is noted that some Christians argued that the Church had never had women in ordained ministry, and that ordaining women, or giving them leadership responsibilities as laity, would break decisively with an otherwise unbroken historical tradition. (For more see Mark Thompson 'Clear and Present Word' Apollos, 2006 p.143-170). She demonstrates there has never been a unanimous voice on women's ministry, that from early days women have engaged in leadership and ministry, and this was not universally forbidden for over a millennium.

The chapter on theology is, as one would expect, interesting and challenging. There is one point that is raised that is particularly thought-provoking, and that relates to the martyrdom stories where strict gender roles become irrelevant. As she points out the female martyrs alongside the male martyrs were, and are, effective icons of Christ and his cosmic redemptive suffering. If women can represent Christ in their martyrdom, "they can represent him at the altar and in the pulpit, at the font and by the graveside" (p.184)

## Look back to the Future: Consecrated Women in Britain 597AD to date by Debra Maria Flint, DWM Press



This also considers women's ministry but looks at one specific issue, namely the struggle for women to find full-time vocation and ministry in the Roman Catholic church today. It is written with a strong Catholic slant, and is particularly aimed at the British Catholic community, because it is here in particular that women are

struggling to find an official full-time ministry.

As the title suggests she is looking back to the past to make her case, although not to the earliest times of the Church's history. Starting with the Anglo-Saxon period in Britain she highlights the significant contributions made by women over the centuries

starting with the Abbesses of large “double” monasteries of men and women [located in separate buildings!]. Examples from the medieval period include Richeldis, founder of the Shrine at Walsingham; the anchoress, Julian of Norwich; and after the Reformation, Mary Ward, founder of the Congregation of Jesus dedicated to the education of women. These women were either nuns or members of one of the two Consecrated Orders, either that of widows or virgins who had only taken a vow of celibacy and lived in the community. The Reformation brought to an end female consecrated life in Britain until C18th when it returned, but initially only in the form of living in groups, either enclosed or working in the community.

Having looked back, she turns her attention to the future and argues for a new or restored form of consecrated life for women, which enables them to live independent lives in the secular community where they can evangelise and promote faith.

She does not favour ordination to the priesthood for women as she sees it as a “schismatic issue” but seeks an equal voice for women in the Church by permitting them to vote at synods and even secure appointment as “lay cardinals.”

However, I would have liked to have seen more about the current debate on the possibility of women deacons in the Catholic Church and the position of Pope Francis on the issue. There was much which I found interesting, even though I am one who has come to believe that all roles within the church should be open to both men and women.

### Comment

In many ways these two books are different, but underlying both is the issue of leadership within the Church. However, we must avoid focussing too much on ordination or attendance at synods, important though they might seem.

In her book, Debra Maria Flint made one comment which I found particularly pertinent (and indeed relevant to the current debates within CofE on the future of rural parishes). Discussing the early church, she wrote *“It was a community-based church made up of people exercising many ministries and did not revolve around the ministry of one priest.”* (p.12)

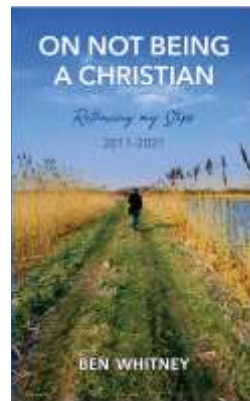
It is important that we always remember that “ministry” is not something limited to priests or consecrated women but embraces all who strive to serve Christ and his Church in whatever way they can. As Paul reminds us: *“...there is a variety of gifts but the same Spirit and there are varieties of service but the same Lord... To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good”* (1 Corinthians 12: 4-5,7) and *“the body does not consist of one member but of many”* (12:14) *...and parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable”* .(12:22)

# Not being ...

## On not being a Christian

Available this Spring via [www.ben-whitney.org.uk](http://www.ben-whitney.org.uk)

Free to PCN groups and supporters.



After the interest shown in ‘The Apostate’s Creed’ I have updated and republished my writings about reading the Bible as entirely human literature: *Walking Without God: Reflections on selected psalms* (2011); *Finding the Way: Reflections on selected parables* (2011); *Updating the Map: A humanist journey through the Bible* (2012/2021)

This is not a book of serious-minded theology or academic Bible study; it is a book about human life and what it means to live it well, which recognises and explores my Christian inheritance but aims to keep both feet on the ground. Think of it as a series of conversation starters; more like chatty podcasts than the Reith lectures! It is anecdotal, opinionated, in places irreverent and partial but also, I hope, friendly and stimulating. It is about a journey that didn’t start from here but which won’t last for ever.

I have not found a ‘faith’ again during this process - perhaps I never had one to lose in the first place! I did find that I still had a fascination with the Jesus story and that, like it or not, it continues to be an integral part of my cultural and personal identity. But I am an observer of Christianity, not a believer. We create our beliefs, our values and our truths. We decide what they contain and the rules required for living by them. So we can change them.

I am convinced that Jeshua of Nazareth had no intention of founding a new religion focused on himself. But what seems to have been his prophetic desire to reveal the ‘God-ness’ in this world, and in ourselves, still has value. His story is a ‘myth’, not in the sense that he did not exist, but in the sense that there are truths to be found here, perhaps deeper and more lasting truths than those formulated by those who turned him into a Divine Saviour. Paul and Augustine have a lot to answer for!

So what lies beyond Christianity? There are, I believe, many good people who have abandoned it because they cannot share its doctrinal basis. Others are hanging on but often don’t feel able to say what they really think. Maybe a ‘religion’ is no longer the best place to start. So let’s start with us. Is this another way to engage with the Bible and our Christian heritage before it virtually disappears? I genuinely hope so.

Ben Whitney

# Church Action for Tax Justice

[www.eccr.org.uk/church-action-for-tax-justice](http://www.eccr.org.uk/church-action-for-tax-justice)

Have you come across Church Action for Tax Justice before? If not – it's good to 'meet' you, albeit in a one-sided way. We're a programme of the Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility, and our focus is on campaigning for a fairer tax system to prevent the relentless and damaging rise in inequality both here in the UK and internationally.

A key focus for us right now is our call for the introduction of new wealth taxes. We're far from alone in this, with many civil society bodies, research think-tanks - and even significant numbers of wealthy people - joining the call. It makes no sense at all, either economically or morally, for the less fortunate to be bearing the brunt of tax increases in an already difficult time.

Christians have a particular reason for backing these calls: we know we're called to have a care for the needy, (as Paul says in 2 Corinthians, "...as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need."). And we also know that in paying taxes responsibly and honestly, we're not only showing love for our neighbour, but also for Christ himself: "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, **you did for me**" (Matthew 25:40, 45, NIV).

But these things won't happen unless our elected leaders, and other decision-makers, pay attention. If you're so minded, we'd love it if you would be willing to join us in this one, simple, but powerful action: a **pledge to demand tax justice**, [www.eccr.org.uk/tax-justice-pledge](http://www.eccr.org.uk/tax-justice-pledge) and to keep asking for it until the day we see new laws ensuring that those with the most riches make their fair contribution to our society. In February, we'll be launching a detailed Wealth Taxes Campaign, and if you sign up to our pledge, you'll also be kept 'in the loop' on how this develops, and what our various 'asks' are.

It's heartening to see who our allies include. Last year, delegates arriving at the Conservative Party Conference in Manchester were met with some prominent and arresting billboards. One said, bluntly, "**It's not rocket science, Rishi – tax the rich**". The billboards were organised by Partners in Progress, <https://progresspartners.org> a network of UK millionaires calling for – and this may come as a surprise to some – a tax on their own wealth, rather than increasingly, disproportionately and often crippling high contributions from workers; especially less well-paid workers.

Calls for a fairer tax system aren't new. But they make



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particular sense to those of us in the Christian faith. In his letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor Ch8:13-14), Paul reminds those who are well-off to give generously to those who aren't. In case his readers should balk at parting with their wealth, he makes clear the reason: "*For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness*". As they say, 'we all do better when we **all do better...**'.

Partners in Progress is a secular organization, and as far as I know doesn't have an especially high proportion of Christians in its membership ... but then, Christians don't have a monopoly on decency or compassion. I was struck by a comment made by Gary Stevenson, the founding member of the organization: "*As a millionaire in the UK I am exhausted by politicians, irrespective of political colour, who fail to close tax loopholes that only benefit wealthy people like me; just as I'm flummoxed by decisions to tax the work of ordinary people instead of taxing the vast wealth of a small few. It's bad for our economy and it undermines trust in democracy. If I am exhausted, the abuse of the current system - and the total lack of economic ambition to do anything to change it - must be stomach churning for the British public. If politicians want to be taken seriously it begs the question - when will they close these loopholes and when will they tax wealth to create a fairer country, even if it means more taxes for themselves?*" This is beautifully put. We're grateful for voices such as these calling for justice. As Mr Stevenson himself adds: "*Wealthy people can afford to pay more. Many of us want to. **Why won't he tax us?***".

Why indeed? Here at CATJ, we hold in our prayers the hope that policymakers and elected leaders are listening. Please join us in doing so.

**church action for**  
**Tax justice**   
*for the common good*



# Come together

As we come together,  
Some may come to pray;  
Seeking for direction -  
How to live each day.

As we come together,  
Some to meet with friends;  
Talking, lis'ning, sharing;  
On these love depends.

As we come together,  
Some to be surprised;  
To confront new insights,  
And be energized.

As we come together  
Some may come to weep  
Over ugly failures  
And the guilt they reap.

As we come together  
Some may come to pause;  
Stressed and in depression;  
Looking for the cause

As we come together  
Some may come with grief;  
Seeking for some comfort,  
Seeking some relief.

As we come together  
Some come for release  
From the fear that conquers  
All their inner peace.

As we come together  
Some may come in fear;  
Hoping for compassion  
And a lis'ning ear.

As we come together  
Some with gratefulness;  
Thankful for compassion  
Shown with gentleness.

As we come together  
Some in happiness;  
Seeking to be conscious  
Of those in distress.

As we come together  
Some may come alone;  
May our warmth and friendship  
Be quite clearly shown.

As we seek together  
At this time and place,  
May we know God's presence,  
And God's wondrous grace.

**George Stuart**

Tune: Caswell, 65 65

Copyright free hymns for each week of the  
Revised Common Lectionary.

<https://sites.google.com/view/george-stuart/home>

**Keeping Hope Alive**

Free to Believe conference **14th - 16th July**, £185  
**High Leigh Conference Centre, Hoddesdon**  
Speakers: Fiona Bennett, Karen Campbell,  
Alex Clare-Young, Helen Garton and Iain McDonald.  
[www.freetobelieve.org.uk/conferences.html](http://www.freetobelieve.org.uk/conferences.html)

**Greenbelt Festival**

Christian Arts Festival - 26 - 29 August  
**Boughton House, nr Kettering**  
After the uncertainty and anxiety of the last two years,  
we wanted a theme for our 2022 festival that was  
simple, direct and full of energy – it's time to **Wake Up**.  
[www.greenbelt.org.uk](http://www.greenbelt.org.uk)

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# The God of My Childhood #2

The God of my childhood was said to deal impartial justice from a glorious throne in that distant heavenly realm above the clouds, to which, if I was good, I could aspire. The ideas presented to me pandered to my condition with simplistic concepts: black and white, hero and villain, God and Satan, good and evil, a heavenly Father Christmas.

In my childhood, church attendance on Sunday was inescapable, but it was a penance; for the church was cold and damp; even the seats were uncomfortable. We sang interminable boring hymns, without reality or rousing rhythm. The words were antique, often meaningless, and the tunes were seldom attuned to my youthful ears. Neither did they say anything that I wanted to express.

As I grew older I met other situations, came to see a wider spectrum, for all is not black or white. There are innumerable brilliant colours, and even the journey from black to white is graced by innumerable shades. In the same way, good intentions do not always work for good, and goodness can mask another false agenda, in religion as in life. So, as I reached maturity, I discarded the stories of angelic beings with those of fairies and hobgoblins, discarded the tales of miracles with those of witch's spells, discarded religious fantasies, stories woven about divinity, and the reality of divine existence. Although occasionally led by others to attend a church, it was for very human rather than any spiritual considerations.

Yet a meeting with the reality of divinity gave me a freshened view. I was persuaded, warily, to attend an Alpha Course, and there met, somehow, the reality of spirituality. I was transported, changed. Thus "Born Again" through undeniable experience, I was bound, knowing no other way, to accept the concepts of the Alpha Course. I embraced these concepts eagerly. Herein lay truth, salvation, the meaning of life!

As I grew older I met other ideas, read more deeply, saw a wider spirituality: one less structured, bounded, defined, less certain of its rectitude. For institutional piety often hides another less worthy agenda. Bounded, strident, Christian doctrine can often create division and hurt when it acts as a power base for religious domination. So, once again, though with, perhaps, a more reasoned approach, I discarded the legends that prop up religious sacrament and dogma, discarded the sanitised tales of early Christianity, discarded the fantasies woven around Christ and the associated doctrine that promotes his parenthood and divine nature. I sought another, truer, way. I was left with questions and challenged by unlikely answers to ask again. The doctrine and precepts of orthodox tradition seemed no longer tenable, seemed tainted



**Edward Conder** was born in 1939, then 20 years each of: growing/schooling, Army officer, computer analyst, evangelical evangelist leading to liberal seeker.

by an unholy agenda. Even the halls of ecclesiastical establishments seemed lined with hypocrisy. Divinity seemed to lie well beyond the boundaries of institutional religion.

So, driven to seek anew for truth, I took to the internet; found the Progressive Christian Network, fed off its ideas and others, and travelled beyond the boundaries of religious doctrine seeking to find a fresh vision of truth, of God, of right religion. Such research and reading increasingly exposed the poverty of many concepts embodied in our religious institutions, presenting their own bounded version of truth. Thus, I discarded concepts of reward or punishment in an unproven afterlife, exchanged Jesus as a God to worship for Jesus as a model to follow, and discarded the idea of God as a personal superhuman, replacing it with thinking of God as something real but beyond my conception.

I came to see right religion as a gathering of people to serve others and each other, following the principles that Jesus defined. Jesus challenged the religious people of his day to find a radically different solution to the problems of their world. He challenged his followers to look again at the precepts that defined their faith and relate them to the problems of his day. If we are to follow faithfully the path that Jesus showed us, surely we should be addressing the problems that we face today? Perhaps the realisation that many secular groups follow Christ's concepts more closely than the Church does, should prompt a call for the Church to repent and change its ways? When we find that the message of the Church has little practical relevance to the present problems of the world, it is time for a new reformation. When we find that the actions of our Church have no immediate impact, can it be following the path of its radical founder?

But must I then, having realised its deficiencies, leave the Christian fellowship? Can I honestly serve within the church, though doubting much of what it deems sacred? Can I hope to bend the Church, even slightly, to a new realisation of a truer mission, whilst sitting at the bottom of the religious pile?

Maybe, through some root-and-branch revision of its doctrine, the Church may be saved for future generations? However, the courage to make such a change seems unlikely and the call to do so might, once again, be the route to crucifixion. Would I dare to take that route if I could find a platform?



# How small



How small thou art!  
For we have cut thee down,  
a pint-sized deity  
to fit the human mind,  
and thought thee God!  
We speak thy name  
with easy condescension,  
forgetful that so small a word  
transcends infinity.

How small thou art!  
We meet thee in the temples  
we have built,  
likewise in meditation's hour,  
yet have not sought thee  
vibrant in thy world;  
for still we have not learned  
that love is life's default,  
accessible to all who dare engage.

How small thou art!  
We limit thee within the covers  
of our sacred book,  
too often read with scant regard;  
name it The Word of God,  
as if thou hadst not spoken since  
by many worthy prophets  
whom the faithful scorned.  
Woe waits upon the bearer of new truth!

How small thou art!  
Could we but ease our grip  
on long-entrenched belief,  
that joy might flood our hearts anew!  
"I bid you follow," Jesus ever calls  
by daunting paths and strange,  
till knowing love supreme  
at length we breathless whisper,  
"How great thou art indeed!"

David Stevenson

# Cerebrations

To save you looking in a dictionary it means: reflection, speculation or thought. If you come across a quote or a brief thought worth sharing, please send it in: [dave.coaker@pcnbritain.org.uk](mailto:dave.coaker@pcnbritain.org.uk)

*Ubuntu – I am because we are.* Desmond Tutu

*God comes to you disguised as your life.*  
Paula D'Arcy

*I don't like that man, I must get to know him better.*  
Abraham Lincoln

*It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.*  
Frederick Douglass

*I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use and by some other means to give us knowledge which we can attain by them.*  
Galileo Galilei

*Until the lion learns how to write, every story glorifies the hunter.*  
African proverb

*There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.*  
Margaret J. Wheatley

# Disturbance

Lord, make me a channel of disturbance.  
Where there is apathy, let me provoke;  
Where there is compliance, let me bring questioning;  
Where there is silence, may I be a voice.  
Where there is too much comfort and too little action, grant disruption;  
Where there are doors closed and hearts locked,  
Grant the willingness to listen.  
When laws dictate and pain is overlooked ...  
When tradition speaks louder than need ...  
Grant that I may seek rather to do justice than to talk about it;  
Disturb us, O Lord.  
To be with, as well as for, the alienated;  
To love the unlovable as well as the lovely;  
Lord, make me a channel of disturbance.

Author unknown

# Compromise?

Making compromises; none of us like doing it but, to a greater or lesser extent, we all do. Ideally we would all do what we wanted, whenever we wanted, and there would be no repercussions. I could do the thing that gave me the most enjoyment, satisfaction, or fulfilment and there would be no constraints, consequences or troubled conscience to worry about. The illusion of this ideal might exist if we were human batteries powering the Matrix, but in reality our interactions with other people open us up to a whole host of constraints, consequences or troubles to our conscience. Conversely, it also opens us up to a whole host of opportunities, coincidences and affirmations. Our personalities and pasts will affect whether we, to misapply Sartre, find other people to be heaven or hell, but we can't really exist without them.

We all have to live with a certain amount of compromise. Whether that is the job we have rather than the one we dream of, maintaining family bonds despite unfortunate opinions/incidents, or remaining part of a congregation despite its imperfections.

The Church has never been very good at compromise. Questions have too often been seen as challenges to the status quo and discussions have rapidly led to division and rancour. You only need to glance at the history of the Church depicted as a tree, with all the branches and grafts, to see how disposed we are to falling out with each other.

Compromise is a necessary part of life, but how do we apply it to church life so that we are able to compromise without being compromised?

First we need to accept that perfection is an impossibility. To quote an unusual source for PV, 'Stop looking for the perfect church. It does not exist. Even if it did exist, the moment we joined it, it would no longer be perfect!' (Nicky Gumbel elaborating on Billy Graham / Charles Spurgeon.)

For some of us there will be lines we will not cross. Every church tradition has its own particular history, organisation and values, and elements from any of those could make us rule them out as a possibility.



**David Coaker** is a minister within the United Reformed Church, editor of PV and a PCN trustee.

There is also a comfort in the tradition you know. It may well be flawed, but it's yours, and it takes a major event for those bonds to be weakened.

The Church is an incredibly diverse and varied entity. For every aspect of teaching, expression, tradition, culture, or a whole host of other categories, you could narrow down a denomination or a specific congregation that reflected your preferences. While such an exercise may be informative, your actual choices will more often be determined by your location and past experience.

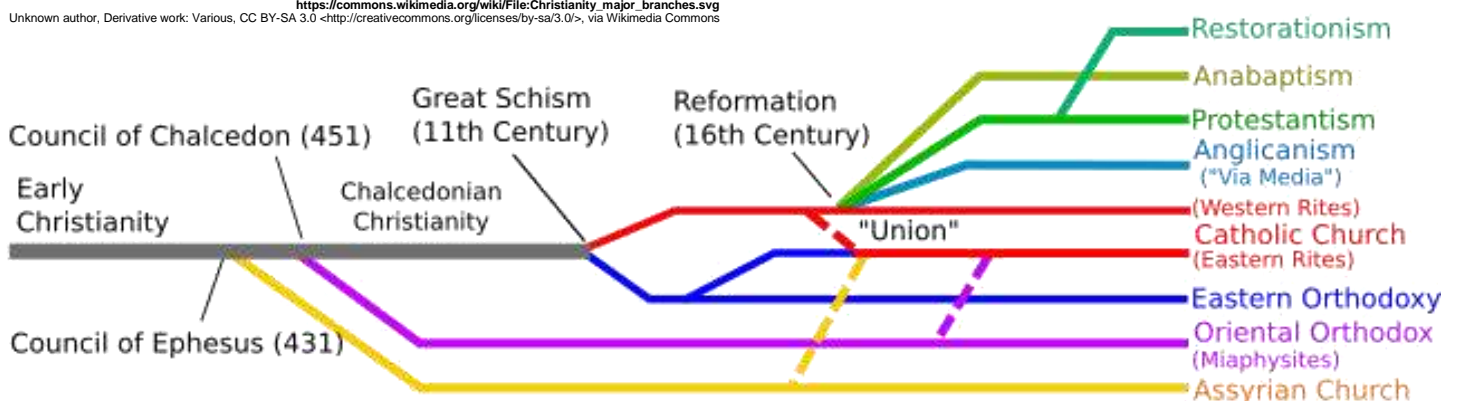
We could become spiritual hermits. Choosing to completely detach ourselves from any communal aspect of faith life, cherry-picking experiences and personal devotions, and living out our faith isolated from any human contact. Making our spiritual life a completely private hobby determined by our own whims, preferences and attitudes. The consumerism and self-centredness inherent in our society has encouraged this behaviour and is exemplified by the New Age movement. Personal circumstances may well narrow this down to being the only viable option, but doesn't there still need to be some sort of connection?

For many of us congregational life has a transactional nature. We attend, pay our dues, fill the rotas, and in exchange expect to have a good sing, feel uplifted, and be reassured that we're doing alright – too often with an added pinch of self-righteousness about those that have clearly got it all wrong. This is coupled with the friendships and socialising that go along with being part of any group. The dilemma is that the cultural expectation of church attendance we inherited in the early 20th century has now vanished, and we are left with church-goers bewildered by why everyone else has other things to do on a Sunday morning.

## Major branches within Christianity

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Christianity\\_major\\_branches.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Christianity_major_branches.svg)

Unknown author, Derivative work: Various, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons



***I have only chosen a congregation once. I went to the Methodist chapel in the village where I grew up, then the United Reformed Church (URC) where I went to Boys' Brigade, and then chose the church where I later candidated for ministry and then became part of others through placement and then mutual call. I chose that church as it was the nearest URC to where I had just moved, and felt welcome and at home from my first visit. So I have never really been church shopping, after a falling out or moving into a new area, which seems to account for many new attendees in congregations. Being a minister also adds another layer to the mix, balancing the call to lead and to serve, to affirm and to challenge, to nurture and to prune.***

Isn't community an essential part of faith? If the criteria we apply to our faith are wholly determined by ourselves, how are we to truly know whether we are being faithful? Throughout Church history there are examples of divinely inspired individuals with profound and prophetic lives in the face of mass opposition from others, but undoubtedly there are numerous others who felt equally inspired but had little or no effect on the world around them.

Living out our faith in community is a challenge. Other people offering, sharing and being present in worship affects us. Coming together to make decisions, discuss issues, and playing our part in the routines of congregational life, can create tension. Opening up to others about our feelings, understandings and experiences can lead to questions, judgements and assumptions. Doing all of this together enables us to learn from each other. Living our faith out together opens us up to a whole host of insights, inspirations and experiences beyond our own. It also requires a certain amount of humility, openness and inclusivity that can clash with our individual preferences.

Accepting the transactional nature of congregational life is an easy compromise. We can work out what the minimum expectation is, and then try to get the maximum return. A harder, and more faithful compromise, is to try to embrace a more communal understanding. Images of tiny pebbles becoming walls, dripping water wearing away a boulder, and tiny flames surrounded in darkness are all too obvious platitudes, and should not obscure the fundamental leap of faith required. Seeking to live your faith communally requires you to compromise more than anyone else. You may well be the only person in the congregation that has chosen to do so. It is a leap of faith and you have to trust that your example will encourage others to follow suit.

So, where to start? If you are already part of a congregation, start there. You already know the people, routines and its baggage, so you've got a head start or at least an idea of where the pitfalls may be. Having said that you do need to approach this with a clean slate. All the times you've tried before, the arguments you've had previously, the person you know will be against it, all this and more needs to be put to one side. For your congregation to change, you need to change first.

If you've left a congregation, consider why for a moment? Were you unwilling to compromise? Are you unable to attend relying just on yourself? Do you need to apologise? Ask for help? Is your pride getting in the way? But if you truly feel there is no way back, start to look elsewhere.

If you've moved to a new area, can see no way to return, or just made the decision to become part of a congregation, do your research. Narrow it down to traditions you are likely to be in-tune with and start with the ones that are physically nearest. If you're looking for a community, it's good to start with one you are already part of. Church websites and noticeboards can give you an impression, and online sermons, pictures, magazines, and the organisations / charities they support, also provide insights. Sound out friends and neighbours about their impressions. Then start to explore. You are effectively church shopping, testing them out to see if they fit. Remember none of them will be ideal, and that you are looking for the best compromise or, failing that, the least bad fit.

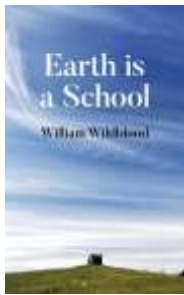
In all of this compromise what should you prioritise? There is a balance to be struck. You may prefer certain styles of worship, music, prayer, teaching, or structure, but you'll never find a congregation that fits your ideal. You'll always have to compromise one of those against another. What I think you need to give priority to is the people. Can you be yourself amongst them? Do you feel welcome and at home? To some extent we always make decisions about groups based on how the members make us feel, and we just need to be more intentional about it.

This also has implications for congregations encountering new people. Content is a factor, but more important is the atmosphere. Congregations need to be comfortable enough to expect new people to arrive, make them welcome when they do, strive to act and speak in ways that are obvious to everyone – whether they are new or a regular (ditch jargon and assumptions), and be flexible enough to integrate newcomers in their midst without treating them as strangers.

Nobody likes to compromise, but it is a necessary part of life. We need to accept that fact and apply it to church life with humility, openness and inclusivity to foster communities which learn together, support each other, and explore what living faithfully, as individuals and as community, means for them.

# Reviews

**Earth is a School by William Wildblood, Axis Mundi Books**

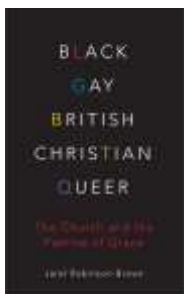


What is our purpose? Why are we here? This book argues that the challenges and sufferings we endure are part of a deliberate divine plan which allows us experiences, and to

make choices, which develop our spiritual identity and bring us closer to recognising our divine source. The present time, he argues, is where the divide between those who 'open up to the light' and those who 'remain closed' has become critical. In the 'school' in which we all live it is time to 'hand in the exam paper'. Progress in society, whilst it has obvious benefits, can also corrupt us and take us away from our real spiritual journey and purpose. We are taken through a series of chapters dealing with those issues that concern seekers on a range of spiritual paths, although for the writer clearly Jesus is the prime teacher and guide. These include 'the soul', 'evil', 'reincarnation', and 'Jesus'. His inspiration is an experience with the 'Masters' - spirit beings, messengers from God, who have spoken to him over a period of 20 years. As a progressive with a church background, I struggle with these questions: Do I have a soul? Is there life after death? Whilst I found the idea and messages of the 'Masters' a theologically challenging concept, I did enjoy this book and it made me think. The questions raised are good and the answers offer serious food for thought.

**Christine King**

**Black, Gay, British, Christian, Queer by Jarel Robinson-Brown, SCM**



This is a passionate exposition of the centrality of grace in the gospel, and the ways in which the Church limits it.

The author, a black gay Anglican priest, challenges the black churches as much

as the white. Black people, he says, find in black Pentecostal churches the space to be themselves, to worship freely in a way that

expresses their culture, to be free of white-dominated society, and to walk proudly as children of God – but only if they are heterosexual. The theological underpinning of these churches remains wedded to white Euro-American fundamentalism. They have been unable to break away from the fear of the body that has been imposed on them by white missionaries.

This is a product of a 'famine of grace' in the Church, which is a deficiency in its understanding. True grace is not, as Western Christians tend to understand it, pardon for sin. It is the inexhaustible and unconditional love of God. In the words of the Methodist liturgy for the baptism of children, God says to every one of us, 'I love you. I am yours. You are mine. All this for you, before you could know anything of it.' This grace of God is embodied in Jesus. To see sex in its full reality as somehow unholy, is a denial of incarnation. Ironically, it is this very denial of the holiness of the body, coupled with a societal sense of worthlessness, that leads gay people to seek intimacy in ways that feed their skin hunger but not necessarily their heartfelt longing for love. My one reservation about this book is that, while people who regard homosexuality as wrong will probably not bother to read it, those who agree with the author may feel they are wasting their time. However, even though you may at first feel you are reading familiar ideas, it well rewards perseverance. There are some real gems of insight and challenge, not least in the final chapter, which asserts that a church without grace does not need to be abolished because it is already dead. Its only hope is to be brought to its knees before God and be resurrected into new life.

**Ray Vincent**

**Bringing God up to date by John Hunt, Christian Alternative**

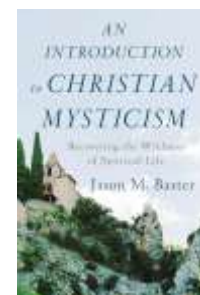
This uncompromising and hard-hitting book strikes at the heart of past and present Christianity. He is unequivocal about the fact that religion matters, but contends that Christianity is all too often bad religion. He reserves his harshest criticisms for



fundamentalism, particularly the US Bible belt: for him, "taking the Bible literally just makes it difficult for rational people ... to take Christianity seriously." Not that more traditional churches get let off the hook: to him they are "morally bankrupt" and have caused untold damage by clinging to myths such as the infallibility of the scriptures, the papacy, ungrounded doctrines, original sin, great buildings, wealth, and western Christianity's record as "probably the bloodiest of any religion." He also roundly condemns the kind of laissez faire market capitalism that dominates the lives of so many people in the West and creates both extreme wealth and extreme poverty. He is not convinced that the churches can be part of the solution to finding God in the modern world, although following the teachings of Jesus about the Kingdom of God - recovering Christianity in its purest form unfettered by power, wealth and doctrine - certainly can, as can the essence of the other religions if, as he reminds us, we survive. There is little that is new about Hunt's reservations and criticisms. Prophetic voices have been saying similar things for decades now; the churches have largely closed their ears to them and, in consequence, he says, have by and large driven out their congregations. Albeit rather long, it pulls no punches and is supported with scholarly evidence. It is an important read that should open many eyes.

**Alastair Smurthwaite**

**An Introduction to Christian Mysticism by Jason M. Baxter, Baker Academy**



'The premodern vision of God in all its fierce joy and heartening wildness' is what Baxter aims to restore to postmodernity in this book on Christian

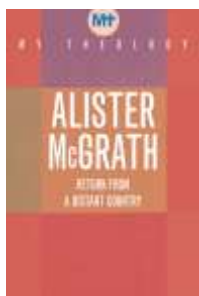
mysticism. A professor of Humanities and Fine Arts at Wyoming Catholic College, he observes a discomfort and suspicion of mysticism in students and his wider audiences. However, he also notes a hunger among spiritual seekers for something beyond organised religion. He explores why this may be, and sets out an argument for the value of Christians embracing the

wisdom and practices of mysticism in our current age.

He describes the history and themes of mysticism, introducing the saints and writers along the way. Starting with antiquity he looks at what he terms the 'Pagan grope towards God'. Mystics' themes and spiritual practices are explored including: the inward turn – searching for God within; the darkness of God – find God in the darkness and absences; praying with the whole world – meeting God in creation and learning from God in Scripture. The introductions to the mystics are brief but inspire follow up reading. The descriptions of spiritual practices, such as Guigo 2's 'Monks Ladder' are a little confusing, but do provide a spring board to further exploration. Although an academic book it is written with a passion for the subject. He shows how people, passionate for God, have encountered and engaged with God in daring, sometimes dangerous, and often surprising, ways. They offer a way of knowing God intuitively, with the senses which may be seen as countercultural to 'enlightened' thinking. Seekers after a 'searing, wild vision of God' may find this book a step along that journey.

**Meryl White**

### **Return from a Distant Country by Alister McGrath, DLT**



An easily readable reflection on his personal, rather than academic, journey to reach and develop his different theological approaches, with fascinating mini-explorations of

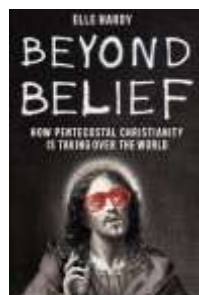
other contemporary theologians, the new atheists and more.

First we are given an account of his journey from natural science to theology, from Oxford to Cambridge, and back to Wycliffe Hall. His early specialism was in quantum theory, and his enthusiasm was for Marxism which he says 'expanded my mind, creating an intellectual appetite for "Big Pictures" of reality.' He clearly sets out his varied theological interests. These include the origins of Luther's theology of justification, in the wider context of historical theology. C S Lewis was seminal in his conclusion that theology discerns and explores the 'Big Picture' of the Christian faith as disclosed in the

Bible and Christian tradition. He takes from Lewis the idea that 'humanity does not pass through phases as a train passes through stations: being alive, it has the privilege of always moving yet never leaving anything behind. Whatever we have been, in some sort we are still.' He also embraces 'mystery' to speak about God and Christ 'because my limited capacities as a human being mean that I cannot hope to grasp these realities fully.' He provides a basic framework for engagement in the interdisciplinary field of science and religion, suggesting that science and theology represent different perspectives and engage at different levels of our complex world. He summarises his three volume survey, 'A Scientific Theology', as an exploration of nature, reality and theory. He writes: 'science helps us understand how things work; theology helps us grasp what things mean. We need to hold these together, seeing them as integral elements of reality.' Public engagement has been a major part of his life, and what he describes as his 'short, clear, and convincing response' to Dawkins and the new atheists will be of interest to many PV readers. He suggests he is seen 'not as an original thinker but as a gateway to a rich tradition'. He does not identify with any one Christian tradition and says he hopes to be remembered as a 'theologian who is particularly good at introducing other theologians, enabling them to be better understood and appreciated.' This modesty reflects his gentle but thorough engagement with academic theology. The well-ordered contents and clarity of writing will enlarge the understanding of readers open to new ways of theological thinking.

**Peter Varney**

### **Beyond Belief by Elle Hardy, Hurst Publishing**



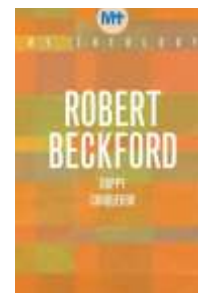
This account of the rise and rise of Pentecostalism across the globe, by journalist Elle Hardy, goes a long way towards explaining the growth of Pentecostal streams of church in the UK and beyond. She casts a keen and insightful eye over a range of such movements, focusing on stories and

scouting between countries and continents to draw parallels and bring out illuminating insights from places as far apart (physically and metaphorically) as Nigeria, North Korea and Guatemala.

Discussing the state of the Church in the UK with other PCN folk I often find conversation turns to the growth of some charismatic evangelical churches, which contrasts so clearly with the situation facing many 'liberal' or 'progressive' churches. Here she gives some clues as to why this may be, looking at the roots of Pentecostalism, how it ties to cultural and political movements, and how it reflects aspirations for the future. If current trends and predictions are right, then Pentecostalism may become the dominant form of Christianity across the world. Given this, and the close ties some of its leaders have to some of the troubling 'hard man' right-wing political leaders of our time, many will find this readable account helpful in navigating an increasingly uncertain future.

**Simon Cross**

### **Duppy Conqueror by Robert Beckford, DLT**



Duppy is an Afro-Caribbean term meaning a ghost or spirit who defeats evil spirits and confronts lies and untruth. The falsehood being confronted here is the form of

Christianity inflicted on black people during the colonial era. Black theology is the quest for a liberationist version of the gospel. He draws on personal experience and aspects of African and Jamaican culture to describe how he has constructed a theology which rejects passivity and abstraction and focuses on changing the society we live in. There are three chapters, the first on God, the second on Jesus and the third on the Holy Spirit. Each chapter has several themes but to give a flavour of what to expect, the first entitled God Rahtid (Rahtid is a Jamaican word meaning something like wrath) dismisses the view of God as impassive. Rather God has emotions and promotes redemptive vengeance (the proactive defeat of oppression). The chapter on Jesus is less interested in Trinitarian puzzles and emphasizes

stories of healing and the driving of the money lenders from the temple, while the chapter on the Holy Spirit rejects the idea of reacting to evil by being long-suffering and cultivating the fruit of the Spirit and argues for action to challenge social injustice. It's a remarkably quick read (94 pages) and whatever I thought of one or two of the statements he makes, for example on the black conservative voice, I'm glad I read it.

**Guy Whitehouse**

**Hope and Witness in Dangerous Times by J Brent Bill, Christian Alternative**



Bill is a US Quaker firmly rooted in the 'Christocentric' tradition. In this short book he shows how action in the world can be a response to spiritual life. Some of the language,

with its use of American idioms, may be difficult for UK readers. The account of Quaker origins describes George Fox's voice telling him: 'only Christ Jesus can speak to thy condition'; Fox preached that the light is found within and that silent worship connects to that which is eternal. In Bill's Quaker meeting a series of spiritual conversations, or 'clearness committees' identified what they were called to do rather than what they should do.

He writes: 'doing work that is rooted in our spiritual life also nurtures our souls... we do this work not to convert individuals but to convert the structures and systems.' He gives a powerful example: American Quakers visited the Nazi leaders after Kristallnacht and held their hosts in silent worship while the officers met and then granted the request to engage in relief work. Bill gives examples of personal spirituality. One: to discern 'what is mine to do and say, and knowing what I am for', another: 'belief in the good that is in everyone holds others in the light and asks God to direct them in new ways'.

The acronym SPICES embraces six principles and 'testimonies' which Quakers see as fundamental: Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality and Stewardship of the earth. By declaring these are testimonies for any faith organisation to use he sets up an unnecessary exclusion of all

who don't act from such a base. He makes it clear that his faith base is not only 'that of God' in all but being a 'friend of Christ'. 'As children of God, friends of Jesus, we are invited to work with God in the redemption of the world in ways that free our souls while caring for others'.

**Peter Varney**

**The Backwater Sermons by Jay Hulme, Canterbury Press**



Jay was a poet before becoming a Christian. He was brought up an atheist and claims not even to have known the date of Christmas Day before his conversion in

November 2019. On the other hand, he had a serious habit of hanging round churches and cathedrals. Something there kept calling him, but for a long time he seems to have lived in denial: "...I was too poor, too queer, too dodgy, to even enter them, let alone belong in them." These poems reflect his new-found faith, his questions, search for meaning, and his place as a young transgender Christian in a world that was almost immediately plunged into a pandemic. This outpouring of poems bears witness to the flowering of his faith in what must have seemed at times like a wilderness. Jay brings a flair for language and a delight in words to his poems. Some are very traditional, some less so, but I would say that all are accessible and share a freshness and immediacy which makes them very appealing. Jay is a more orthodox Christian than I am but his words still speak to me. I can see much here that would resonate with anyone who has lost someone dear to them during the pandemic. There are also lovely moments for anyone who doesn't fit into our binary gender categories; he imagines Jesus in a gay bar, talking to a boy who has dared to reach out and touch his garment, begging to be healed:

*My beautiful child*

*There is nothing in this heart of yours  
That ever needs to be healed*

But the poems addressing gender issues are just a small selection. More examine our losses in the pandemic, the Church, faith, and the cathedrals that were Jay's first love. There are flashes of humour here, along with faith, grief, hope and

longing. And this is a generous collection; ninety pages of poetry. I recommend it most heartily. You won't be disappointed.

**Jenny Jacobs**

**Personal Idealism by Keith Ward, DLT**

Keith Ward is 83, and has held some of the most prestigious academic posts to be had. 1991-2004 he was Regius Professor of Divinity, Oxford,



having previously lectured in both philosophy and theology, and is a fellow of the British Academy. He is a prolific author and has written on the nature of religion, philosophy of

religion, comparative theology and, particularly, on science and religion. In the introduction he describes how his views have varied throughout his life: "Sometimes I was an atheist ... sometimes I was attracted to some faith [mainly Vedantic Hinduism]". Then he had "a strong personal experience of the presence of Jesus Christ" and was baptised and confirmed in the Church of Wales, later offering himself for ordination as priest. He explains that it was his interest in mathematical physics (following Polkinghorne and Peacock) which led him to 'personal idealism'. Contrasting personal explanations with scientific ones, he insists they must not be seen as alternatives, but as complementary: "Believing in God is not accepting some sort of optional addition to a universe we all agree about, but expresses a rational reflection on the nature of ultimate reality". He explains that, for many, materialism (the notion that everything that exists is made of matter located in space time) is the primary philosophy. Here both thoughts and feelings have a material basis. Idealism contradicts this view of the world. For the Idealist everything exists in consciousness/ mind; even materials have a "mental basis". He argues that all who believe in God are, virtually by definition, Idealists. In all, Ward has a theology which will be "denied by some Christians but which, taken as a whole, will suggest a spirituality which is both centred on Christ and is consonant with the best contemporary knowledge of the world". Indeed, it does.

**Peter Shepherd**

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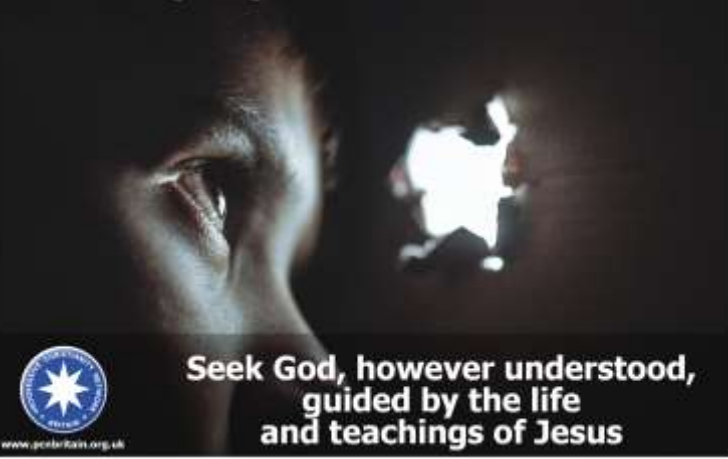
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