

made of stories

Short films with big challenges for
religious faith

www.madeofstories.uk



This is gentle and engaging film-making
Paul Northup, Creative Director, Greenbelt

I highly recommend the beautiful new short films from PCN
Brian McLaren

*These films invite and inspire us to engage in the holy complexity of
Christianity* **Naomi Nixon, CEO, Student Christian Movement**

A powerful and moving film (Holly's story)
Steven Croft, Bishop of Oxford

*Spiritually generous and heart-warming, Gemma's film shows that
only love can prove a faith* **Richard Holloway**



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Copy Deadlines:

Dec: Friday 1st Nov

Mar: Friday 7th Feb 2025

Jun: Friday 25th April

Sept: Friday 11th July

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

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www.facebook.com/pcnuk/

Welcome

Sometimes a theme emerges as articles accumulate, but this time variety is the spice of life.

You will have noticed another tweak to the layout - Sarah spotted that the cover didn't mention PCN!

Our cover photo is of a sunset on the sea of Galilee as we remember, and give thanks, for the life of Tim Yeager.

Welcome to the 50th edition of PV.

Enjoy!

Dave Coaker



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MEMBERSHIP

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

£30 (£15 for limited income, **£45** donor option)
Receive 4 copies of PV, advance notice of events, reduced event fees, along with support and encouragement.

01594 516528

www.pcnbritain.org.uk/membership

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Chair's Letter



Simon Cross serves as the
Chair of PCN Britain.
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Dear friends,

Change is in the air once more, as a new government finds its feet amid the challenges of the contemporary political landscape. Although our network is not, perhaps, enormously broad in terms of political outlook there are enough of us that I can be sure there will be differing views among us on the question of whether this particular change of government represents 'good news' or not. In any case, it's not my place, as PCN chair to make or declare party allegiances, or indeed lack of them. What I can do, though, is reflect just a little on the opportunities and challenges facing a new prime minister, and his colleagues.

There's no question that the scale of the challenge facing anyone in public political office is huge. The immense, global scale, chronic problems of climate change and natural resource depletion must somehow be put on the same set of decision-making scales as the immediate, acute, problems facing the UK. To name but a few these include: a housing crisis; a national health service at (or maybe beyond) the point of collapse; a crumbling and crowded prison infrastructure and methodology; and a widespread and deeply felt sense of being 'forgotten about' or 'ignored' in a substantial section of society.

These problems are not all confined to the British Isles, of course. The troubling growth of 'strong man' leaders and their consequent right-wing populist movements in various parts of the world is testament to the fact that when economic times get

tough, social divisions broaden, and folk feel generally underserved and overlooked by the politicians who are there to serve their needs. Historians are right to point out that many of these problems were present in the run up to the Second World War, of course.

Something that Sir Keir Starmer was keen to say while campaigning, and then reiterated after the election dust had settled, was that he wanted to 'restore service' to the heart of government. This is something of a reminder that senior politicians, like people in the Church, are asked to be 'ministers' – they are asked to 'minister' to people. A minister's job is to help, or care for people, to serve them. A minister is, if you like, a servant.

It doesn't require us to pledge allegiance to any particular flag to recognise that servanthood hasn't always been the benchmark of our politics, nor indeed has it characterised the politics of many of our international friends and neighbours. But there's certainly a strong case for restoring a culture of service to the heart of what it means to govern.

The same is true, of course, for the Church. There is no genuine case to be made for the rulership of society by the Church, but there's certainly a case to be made for our 'services' to 'minister' to the world around us. The truth is that much of what we do, though, ministers only really to ourselves – if politicians can learn to restore 'public service' to the heart of what they do (whether they can or not remains to be seen) then surely so can we.

Limerick Bible

When Noah the ark had created,
God's pleasure was quite unabated;
But all plans were thwarted
When termites were boarded
And soon had the ark perforated.

When Jonah left God at a trot,
Some time in a whale was his lot.
Three days in its belly
Without any telly -
A whale of a time it was not

Chris Avis

Membership?

On the previous page there is a box of text giving details about PCN membership. There it gives the reason to be a member as:

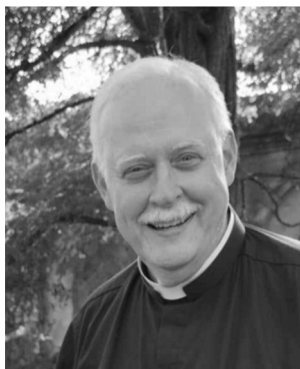
Membership is for all who value an open, progressive and theologically radical voice, and want to maintain and promote that generous understanding of faith.

Would the following suit us better?

Membership is for all who want companions and connection as they search for meaning, give expression to what they discover, wish to do so in an open and affirming way, and are in some way grounded in the story of Jesus.

David Coaker

Memoriam



Tim Yeager

Beloved father, husband, and friend the Rev'd Robert Timothy Yeager ("Tim") died aged 73 on April 2nd. Describing Tim to those who didn't know him, it seemed normal to begin, "Ah, Tim? The Communist Priest!" His passionately espoused left-wing politics, his world since 1969, became an epithet when joined to his vocational job after his ordination in 2010.

Tim spent his life generously reconciling what to others seemed strange oppositions: his broad-minded international sympathies and his particular love for his family and his Iowa background; his Communism and his Christianity; and, most immediately striking, his awe-inspiring 6-foot 8-inch frame with his great gentleness and unceasing kindness.

Tim's unshakeable principle in life was his belief in justice and love, which to him combined to resolve all possible apparent contradictions. Tim's first professional experience of helping those less fortunate came in the form of fighting for changes in the legal system. After receiving degrees from the University of Iowa, Tim was admitted to the bar in 1978. He served as the District Organizer of the Iowa/Nebraska Chapter of the Communist Party USA until 1989. He became a union representative for his Midwestern Legal Aid colleagues. And in 1991, he joined the National Organization of Legal Services Workers, UAW Local 2320 first as organiser, then as staff counsel, and as Financial Secretary in 2002. Throughout this time, he organised and joined countless marches and demonstrations, often accompanied by his daughter, Ayshe.

In 1998, on a train station platform, Tim met Caroline. Four months later, they were engaged, and a year later, married and living together with Ayshe. It was during the next few years that Tim found his second iteration of service to others: Christianity. He was ordained an Episcopal priest at Grace Church in Oak Park in 2011. In 2012 becoming the Priest-in-Charge at St. Andrew's Church on the West side of Chicago. In 2014, Tim and Caroline moved to the UK, where he took up a Church of England post of vicar at St. George's, Westcombe Park. There he pursued his lifelong passions in new ways. He took St George's to its first Pride Parade in 2020. He developed The Galilee Course; an international project so well loved that it was extended to a monthly discussion, which is still running today. In 2019, he received a Civic Award for Services to the Community of Greenwich in recognition of his selfless and compassionate work. After Tim's retirement, he and Caroline moved first to St Alban's, and then to Waltham Abbey. Tim became a volunteer priest at the Abbey Church and continued his work transforming the CofEd in progressive ways.

Tim's service to others took many and varying forms. He could listen, he could offer expert legal counsel, and he could brighten every occasion with music. He played piano, organ, accordion, trumpet and valved brass instruments, and the Highland bagpipes. He travelled all over the world, including to Japan, Germany, and Orkney, where he enjoyed visiting the Ring of Brodgar and other ancient sites of worship. Tim was unwaveringly dedicated to the single mission of his adult life. He argued with passion that Communism and Christianity were both predicated on the search for justice and on the idea of loving each other regardless of background. He sought to draw out the best and kindest tenets from both beliefs to develop his own socially motivated approach to life. For Tim the gospel of Jesus was radical – the last shall be first and the first shall be last. The Kingdom of God was not in heaven, but here on earth. He often said that Jesus didn't say join my church, he said follow me. Feed the hungry, heal the sick, clothe the poor. Love one another as I love you. For Tim, love was action, a doing word.

Helena McBurney

Faith, Peace and Justice Forum: A Call to Action

Sat 14 September 2024

St Catherine's Church, Mile Cross, Norwich, NR3 2RJ

Free ticket:

<https://www.tickettailor.com/events/stcatherineschurchmilecross/1300697>

Inspiring talks and discussion on the key social justice issues of our time.

Rev Chris Howson (A Just Church/University of Sunderland)

Kate Doran-Smith (Head of Network, Hope into Action)

Rev Vanessa Elston (Pioneer Priest for Climate Spirituality and Action)

Dr Lee Marsden (Pioneer Lay Minister/Professor Emeritus Faith & Global Politics, UEA)

Educating, motivating and activating people of faith in challenging injustice.

Dave Tomlinson on Tour

During October Dave Tomlinson, author of:

The Post-Evangelical, I Shall Not Want and Re-enchanting Christianity, How to Be a Bad Christian and The Bad Christian's Manifesto, will be visiting some PCN groups, we will give you further details as soon as they are available.



PCN Britain's 2025 Annual General Meeting

Sat 17 MAY 2025

Venue to be confirmed.

Dave Tomlinson will be our speaker.

Letters

Online Resources?

When I first became a member I was so pleased to be able to go to meetings with people like Dominic Crossan, Jack Spong and Marcus Borg. I also enjoyed other meetings which have challenged my thinking and introduced so many new ideas. During lockdown the meetings obviously stopped - and so did our local group for a while. And YouTube has become a phenomenon - so much of it free and easy to access. I have become acquainted with a number of channels discussing a range of theological and historical topics - and learnt so much. I haven't been following any traditionally apologetic channels, but there are a number of more liberal and deconverted Christians who are very interested in modern scholarship: in the Bible and in early Christianities. There are also a number of current and recently retired scholars who are very pleased to share their knowledge. I wonder whether anyone else is following theology and Christianity on YouTube? If so, can we share our thoughts on this? And maybe add digital resources to our Reviews?

Carole Wynn

Historical Jesus

I'm relatively new to PCN but have been a fellow-traveller for a while. I thought you might be interested in a collection of essays that I've published on the historical Jesus. I've taught courses in the historical Jesus for the last 25 years for the University of Cambridge, and am currently Senior Lecturer in the Study of Religion in the Faculty of Divinity. I've spent a lot of my academic life working in continuing education and so most of these essays emerged from questions asked by groups and classes of adult learners, some associated with churches, most not, who valued thinking about the historical Jesus in a critically open manner.

Meggitt, Justin James. *Studies in the Historical Jesus: Anarchy, Miracles, and Madness*. Critical Studies in Religion and History 1. Cambridge: Mutual Academic, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.17613/mpjp-3c10>.

doi.org/10.17613/mpjp-3c10.

All the chapters originally appeared in refereed journals and books, and are freely available as pdf/epub:

<https://leanpub.com/jesus> pdf:

<https://doi.org/10.17613/mpjp-3c10>

Justin Meggitt

Development of Christianity

I prefer a sequence that focusses on the genesis of Christian thought, and on the success and failure of the Church's preaching and teaching. What do you think?

1. The origins of the teaching of Jesus and John the Baptist, in the ideas that came into Jewish religious thought, from Persia, following the Babylonian Captivity.

2. Their core teaching and how it was received at the time.

3. How Jesus' death was interpreted by his supporters, and the history of the early Christian movement in the first three centuries afterwards.

4. The spectacular achievement of the Emperor Constantine, who enabled the new, state-backed Christian Church to take over Europe. How Constantine's insistence on a single credal approach to the faith, and the promotion of hierarchy, legal power, spectacle, and wealth for church leaders, matched the requirements for success in promoting Christianity in a later uneducated, superstitious and hierarchical world.

5. The Protestant Reformation: printing and the promotion of biblical fundamentalism, a deep fear of God and Satan, and of a fanatical hatred of alternative ideas and faiths.

6. How and why the Enlightenment and the promotion of science, technology and knowledge, has undermined the influence of western Churches but permitted the impressive expansion of Christianity in the global south.

7. Church today: by treating people with love and respect; by asking what they believe before inviting (regardless of their faith or lack of it) to learn how the core teaching of Jesus can be relevant today.

Harry Houldsworth

Dawkins

I must put in a good word for Richard Dawkins. Just one.

His teachers at Oundle included loan Thomas, his Biology teacher. loan, like all good teachers, not only

taught, but asked questions. And, like all good Quakers, he did not always find the answers.

The boys were given some soggy pond water containing Hydra. They could observe that these elementary creatures ate just about everything in sight. "Now tell me what it is that eats Hydra?" he asked the class. One by one came no good answer. So the boys took him on. "What do Hydra eat, then?" His reply: "I don't know either!"

I had worked with loan on various youth expeditions assisting him on the first Brathay Field exploration in Uganda in 1962. He was a man of many parts and did much good community work. Now here I was at his funeral. Like all Quaker funerals anyone could speak up, and I did. Dawkins was there too, and he spoke, relating the above story as a tribute to his mentor. Yes, Dawkins in church and saying that neither does he know all the answers! So, all is not lost!

Maurice Dybeck

Which Bible?

I am a Methodist Local Preacher and use a variety of Bible translations depending on the passage and how clearly I think the 'version' explains, or illustrates the intended message. Our circuit has always been quite 'liberal' regarding which translation is to be used (thankfully!)

My question is which translation(s) would you recommend and why?

Paul Wilks

Forgiveness

I would like to thank those people who took the time to respond to me following my article on forgiveness in issue 49. Among the responses were some with suggested reading; Michael suggested Marshall Rosenberg's book *Nonviolent Communication* which, as he describes it, provides a different paradigm, and Jim from the Bolton group, suggested Desmond and Mpho Tutu's *The Book of Forgiving*. Both of these suggestions came with the caveat that they are challenging and maybe that is as it should be. Nicola asked whether anyone could recommend Stephen Cherry's *Unforgiveable*.

I am deeply grateful both for the responses and for the support expressed for the people caught up in the Post Office scandal.

Sarah Guilfoyle

Christian CND

The following is based on the talk Libby shared at our AGM in April.

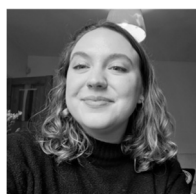
I write this the same week that Israel has launched another military assault on Rafah, and Russia has launched another attack on the Ukraine border. When I started working at the Christian CND three years ago, I did not imagine we would see global conflict involving multiple nuclear-armed states.

While only nine countries possess nuclear weapons today, both Russia and Israel are among them, as well as the UK. There are over 12,000 nuclear weapons in the world, and it has been estimated that the use of only two has the potential to end life on earth as we know it.

Nuclear weapons have only been used twice in conflict, in Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II. More than 140,000 people were killed in the initial bombing, and hundreds of thousands more have died from the after-effects. Hundreds of nuclear tests were carried out around the world in the 1950s and 60s, often on indigenous-owned land. Both the victims and veterans of these tests continue to seek justice to this day.

There are many reasons to oppose nuclear weapons: the sheer power they have to kill millions, the imbalance of power they create, and the cost (the planned upgrade to Trident is estimated to cost £200 billion). While they are often cited as necessary to deter attacks, they did not stop Hamas's attacks on Israel, nor did they stop Ukraine from fighting back against Russia. Rather, they prevent states from being sanctioned and aid from being provided.

At Christian CND, we oppose nuclear weapons because we believe the Bible's fundamental message is about peace and loving one's enemies. During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." We are all called to be



Liddy Buswell is Outreach Manager at Christian CND.
christiancnd.org.uk

peacemakers, making peace with God through Jesus and with our fellow humans. This isn't always easy, but as Galatians tells us, peace is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit living within us (5:22). The idea of deterrence includes an implicit threat that we are willing to use nuclear weapons – they are the opposite of peacemakers.



Every major Christian denomination in the UK has spoken out about nuclear weapons, but it's the people in the pews who have the power to create real change. Ultimately, getting rid of nuclear weapons will require high-level policy change, but thanks to the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, that goal isn't as far away as one might think. Even on a local level, there are actions we can take to make a difference. You can write to your MP or local council asking them to support the TPNW, and research what different candidates think about nuclear weapons when you're voting. If you're a member of a political party, you can advocate for nuclear disarmament to be on their agenda.

The majority of high street banks in the UK invest in nuclear weapons, so moving your money away from the arms industry is an important step. Switching to an ethical bank is easier than you think, and if you can't switch, you can write to your bank to start a conversation about divestment.

There are many ways you can get involved in the work of Christian CND. You can become a member of our organisation or book a free workshop for your church or PCN group. We are also running a campaign this year asking churches to mark Hiroshima and Nagasaki days (August 6th and 9th). The Archbishop of York has written a prayer for churches to use, and we have a resource pack on our website.

Most of all, nuclear weapons don't exist in a vacuum—they are a symptom of a society that prioritises violence and power over peace and equality. So, acting with kindness and empathy in your everyday life can help change that culture around you.

Why do we believe what we believe?

At the beginning of the Genesis story we have the line 'God created Man in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female'. A friend wrote recently, "I have often thought of how much the reversal is true - man created God in man's own image. We project onto God an awful lot that is really our stuff. But, as the Tao Te Ching says, '*The Tao that can be named is not the real Tao.*' The question that I find most interesting is how much do I know / can I know the God that is not a human projection, but is genuinely 'other'."

Some years ago, my wife and I journeyed to the Holy Land, which included a visit to the Garden of Gethsemane. We lived into Jesus' inner struggle. I was struck by a plaque which said 'My Father, I do not understand you, but I trust you.' It was not clear where that quote came from. But it made me think.

"I do not understand you." Was this true of Jesus too, or did he have uniquely Divine insight? One of our daughters, when aged seven asked me,

"Daddy, did Jesus think the earth was flat?" We were chatting about the bravery of some earlier explorers who, despite thinking the earth was flat and they might fall off the edge, sailed off into the unknown. A very good question. Did Jesus understand Quantum



Mechanics and other such scientific complexities? And if so when did this understanding come to him?

"Real knowledge is to know the extent of one's ignorance." This perspective of Confucius resonates with me. Yet, it is striking how intelligent human beings can become totally convinced about often conflicting beliefs, particularly religious ones. Millions of Christians see Jesus as the unique son of God. For many Muslims, the Quran was verbally revealed by God to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel. Countless others, particularly in the East, are assured about reincarnation. Intelligent people have many other diverse worldviews.

How do we come to believe what we believe? Our twenty-first century frame of reference is enhanced by the fact that we live in an increasingly interconnected world. As many people travel to, and live in lands which are way beyond their places of birth, our cultures intermix. The internet also enables us to reach into and absorb the life experiences of people in distant lands, often instantly. This gives us a much-enhanced perspective on the diversity of ways in which our worldviews and spiritual beliefs have taken root.



Howard Grace is a member of the Newbury group, he is a teacher, and executive producer of the film 'Beyond Forgiving'.

It also becomes clearer that what we often think of as "our" values and beliefs are in reality those of the groups where we feel a sense of identity and belonging. So, to what extent, for all of us, have our upbringings and choices affected our impact on wider society? Along the way, we've accumulated all sorts of biases, some conscious, but mostly unconscious. Have these led to believing that our group and lifestyle are normal, and the world would be a better if others believed, lived and behaved as we do? Or has this realization led to our living more into each other's narratives, and to valuing humanity's diversity as well as commonality?

What people believe also has a huge impact when projected onto social and international events. When people or groups believe that they are on God-inspired tracks, at times, there have been really fruitful outcomes of standing for justice, and for caring. Some years ago I visited Martin Luther King's home in Montgomery, Alabama, USA. On the wall above the desk in his office was a large picture of Gandhi. I was struck by King, a Christian, being inspired by Gandhi, a Hindu. Yet Gandhi himself had been inspired by Jesus' life, particularly the Sermon on the Mount. The lives and beliefs of both have, subsequently, influenced many others.

However, religiously related beliefs have also led to disastrous consequences, especially when intermingled with political purposes. In present times, American policy regarding Israel / Palestine is partly impacted by a theological belief within certain segments of evangelicalism about 'God's chosen people' and that the establishment of the modern state of Israel was the fulfilment of biblical



<https://easy-peasy.ai/ai-image-generator/images/global-citizenship-illustration-diverse-individuals-cultural-symbols>

prophecy. Other recent examples include the actions of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the echoing of the Kremlin's rhetoric by the Russian Orthodox Church in justifying the war in Ukraine, or the Dutch Reformed Church giving biblical advocacy for the South African apartheid policy.



Philip Kanellopoulos, <https://www.peristanom.org/>, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons

It takes a lot of conviction and courage to challenge the values of the groups where we belong. But this is what Jesus did. For instance, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!" (Mathew 23:23-24). There are numerous examples, which Christians are familiar with, of his taking issue with people governed by contemporary religious or societal norms.

To foster the spirit of our shared humanity we too will need to question and challenge mores in our society, but also those which have taken root in ourselves. For instance, in past decades, I had taken on board the homophobic attitudes of some friends and groups I associated with. My perspective has radically changed since then, largely through living into the reality of valued gay and trans friends.

What of other issues much in the news? I was recently on an international Zoom which was led by a courageous Russian university lecturer in Moscow. The theme was, 'From where do I find hope, faith and trust?' For some, she said, the source is grounded in religious conviction. For most though, their faith was not so much about religious beliefs, it was something deeper and more universal. She said that her main inspiration was seeing the courage of other people.

Although directions in which people's beliefs take them vary greatly, it seems clear that the intrinsic human process that nevertheless ends in this diversity is universal. However, even if we acknowledge this, it can be hard to honestly question certitudes that have become imbedded in our own minds.

Beliefs clearly have far reaching consequences. For the sake of the future let us open our hearts and minds to valuing diversity more greatly. A book by former Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks is titled, 'The Dignity of Difference'. Let us deeply foster a narrative that our shared humanity overrides all our human projections.

The parable of the four subjects

Imagined teachings of Jesus

One morning, whilst his disciples ate breakfast on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus told this parable...

'There was a good king who ruled over a great land. One day a traveller, passing through, asked the king how many people lived under his rule.

'Surely it must be as countless as the stars in the sky', the traveller said.

'You are mistaken', replied the king, 'for there are but four who live in my kingdom.'

The king continued. 'There is the one who resents my power and rule, even though I am good and true. This one is my enemy, working against me night and day, plotting to overturn me through many deceitful ways.'

'Next is the one who has no regard for me, who concerns himself only with his daily work and immediate concerns. He does not plot against me, but he refuses to join me in battle when the kingdom is attacked. This one, I do not know.'

'Then there is the one who, unlike the first two, shows respect for my name. He attends all the stately events, pays his taxes quickly and supports me in battle when required, and so with him I am acquainted.'

'But the last', the king said, 'is the one who has achieved something greater even than this kingdom. He has all the respect that the last had but refuses to make a barrier of it between us. With him I speak freely, just as we have spoken freely, and so he is the one I call friend.'

Looking at his disciples, Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, be bold and courageous so that you are not merely acquaintances but friends of God.'

Robin Drummond



Returning Home

My wife Gill and I are celebrating a different sort of anniversary. It's five years since we walked into St Catherine's Church in the Mile Cross area of Norwich. "Big Deal", I hear you say. And yet, for us it was, and is, a big deal. Gill has her own story to tell but for me, intentionally attending a church service marked the surprising resumption of a journey I had abandoned two decades previously.

After responding to Jesus' invitation to follow him in my early twenties, I spent the next fifteen years actively involved in charismatic evangelical churches and was, to all intents and purposes, a card carrying literalist, believing the 'literal truth' of the Bible. As a church leader, I determinedly taught this literal truth and the certainties of the faith espoused. The busyness of work and church left little room for reflection. A church environment which dealt in black and white certainties rather than nuance and shades of grey stifled imagination and creativity in favour of 'sound doctrine'.

'Sound doctrine' would reflect what the pastor and church elders believed and taught, and deviation from this was unwelcome. Women were not allowed to preach in church because Paul said so in his letters to the Corinthians and Timothy.

Homosexuality was an abomination because the Old Testament, and Paul in letters to the Corinthian and Roman church, and to Timothy, said as much. Of course, we were to "love the sinner, but hate the sin" but the truth was the church hated the sinner and they knew it. Divorce was out of the question and divorcees certainly had no place in ministry.

The love of Jesus was replaced by an Old Testament judgementalism of others and, while paying lip service to a loving God and aspiring to become more like Jesus, the reality was very different. My increasing doubts about the practice of the church and in particular its attitude towards women and gay people led me also to begin questioning the Biblical literalism I believed to be an essential component of Christianity.

I used to say, rather arrogantly and stupidly, that the Bible is full of contradictions, and I believe them all. Belatedly, I have come to appreciate that my belief system was based on the first of what Brian McLaren helpfully describes as four stages of faith in *Faith After Doubt* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2021). The four stages are Simplicity, Complexity, Perplexity and Harmony.

The Simplicity stage is characterised by dualistic thinking where the focus is on right and wrong. Motivation comes from pleasing authority figures and being considered right. The key values are being right/good and obeying authorities, staying



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faithful to tradition and remaining loyal to the in-group. This Simplicity stage characterises many conservative evangelical churches and certainly reflects where I was at that time. McLaren charts a course showing how our beliefs stop working and how we can continue our faith journey beyond that.

For me, those doubts and criticisms of the church expanded to critically examining my literalist approach to understanding the Bible. Did believing in Jesus mean suspending rational thinking? What if there was no Adam and Eve, Garden of Eden, worldwide flood, ark, whale's belly for Jonah to lie in, and chariot of fire to transport Elijah to heaven? What if the Old Testament was written by men seeking to justify patriarchy, maintain hierarchy, excuse genocide and legitimate monarchy?

The 'what ifs' led me to abandon faith. Jesus seemed a long way away and, if his body was represented by the church, then I wanted no part of it. Far from missing church, I found more time for other things and other people. I didn't miss the frantic dash to get out in time for the Sunday service or the midweek house group. I appreciated the extra money in my pocket no longer having to tithe my income and appreciated the new freedom in being able to think for myself rather than being constrained by the orthodoxy I previously took for granted. I didn't have to worry too much about maintaining friendships with the church members left behind because once you leave the club they don't want to keep in touch anyway.

My life became fuller, richer and more successful than when I had been a churchgoer. Having been made redundant and in a failing marriage as a believer I went to university as a mature student. I married the woman of my dreams, became a university lecturer and in a few years a professor, writing books and speaking in conferences around the world. Life was good and yet something was missing – or someone.

In dismissing church my relationship with Jesus had also suffered through my neglect. I had researched and written a book about the Christian Right in the United States (*For God's Sake: The Christian Right and US Foreign Policy*, Zed Books, 2008) which confirmed my concerns about the pernicious nature of conservative evangelicalism. As an antidote to writing that book I then spent some time in Northern Ireland examining the contribution of churches to the peace process and was struck by the Christ-like witness and compassion of so many working across the religious and cultural divide. The social action of so many churches following the 2008 financial crash also began to speak of an authentic faith.

When family illness struck with heart surgery required for our granddaughter we prayed and would find ourselves in church buildings asking God to intervene and heal her. What became clearer was that although I had turned my back on Jesus, he never did the same to me. He remained faithful even though I had been faithless. I became increasingly aware that relationship with Jesus was real and life was poorer without it.

I had been a prodigal, going away from God, enjoying life for a time but, faced with the reality of life and trying to face problems without him, I realised that I had traveled a long way from home and wanted to restore that relationship I first knew when becoming a Christian.

My wife had been patient in waiting for me to play catch up and we agreed to visit six churches within walking distance to see if there was one where we could make our spiritual home.

The first church we visited was a ten-minute walk away to St Catherine's Church, the parish church in an area of social deprivation. The small congregation of mainly older people was in stark contrast to the churches we had become familiar with two decades before. And yet there was something about the place that suggested that God was indeed in this place. I felt unsure about whether we would be welcomed by the members or, more importantly, by God. But then a diminutive female vicar peered over the top of the lectern and preached from Luke 15:11-23 - the prodigal son!

That was five years ago, and we have remained at the same inclusive church seeing numbers rise, the demographic change, and having a real sense of coming back home - to Jesus and his people.

We have increasingly come to value progressive approaches to faith and recognise that there may be many others in Norwich and the surrounding districts who would value time and space to wrestle with uncertainty, belief and unbelief, unconstrained by McLaren's first stage notions of 'sound doctrine', and beyond the constraints of the church service.



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Deeper Thinking?



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Last night's online Bible study -
not a substitute for face to face reflection
but nonetheless stirring deeper thinking to surface.
The familiar Palm Sunday story –
but why did Jesus choose such a provocative entry
into Jerusalem,
even with undertones of a humble king?

Maybe much later reflection
reveals more in John's gospel
with such a clear statement.
Jesus rejected the opportunity to follow a safer way,
to go elsewhere and 'teach the Greeks'.
'Unless a grain of wheat falls
into the earth and dies,
it remains a single grain.
If it dies it bears much fruit'.
Was Jesus warning his fearful followers
that he was the single grain of wheat, ready to die?

Did humanity need to learn –
that even death cannot exterminate God?
A totally unimaginable 'fruit' of Christian
commitments
grew and still grows,
as harvest from that bodily death,
or was it a spiritual planting,
inspiring countless people, then and now
to commit their very lives to this 'planted' life
of compassion, integrity, fairness and hope
as the Spirit which was active in Jesus,
goes where it will,
unimpeded by human injustice and wickedness.

What a harvest from that one seed
inspiring a forest of tiny plantings!
Thanks be to God.

Ros Murphy

Martin Camroux

In the latest of our series of interviews with 'progressive voices' PCN chair Simon Cross caught up with Martin Camroux, one of the founders of 'Free to Believe' to ask him about his thinking, career, and latest book.

I am a United Reformed minister, a dissenter by nature and conviction. My roots are in East Anglia with its wide skies, cold east wind, saltmarsh, and long indented river estuaries like the Blackwater,

'where the coastline doubles up on itself
as if punched in the gut by the god Meander,
who likes to dabble in landscapes
but with this one, lost his grip.'

(Greenlaw, L. 2004, *Minsk*, Faber & Faber p.11)

This was the Nonconformist heartland, the local radicalism reinforced by contacts with Dutch Reformed and French Huguenot refugees, of whom my family was one. Norfolk Congregationalism gave me a critical cast of mind, a dissenter's willingness to be in a minority, and a belief that the local church is what really matters. For nearly forty years it was in such congregations that I invested my life. Today my sympathies are more ecumenical, but church goes deep into who I am. Though I value my particular church, it has no special relationship with the truth. Indeed, it was never my wish to be ordained a United Reformed Church minister. I wanted to minister within a united church.

Of my 40 years of active ministry 30 were in the Local Ecumenical partnerships. Beyond that I was co-founder of Free to Believe, on the national committee of the World Development Movement, the *Times* Preacher of the Year, and Convenor for Church and Society for the URC.

I have written *Ecumenism in Retreat: How the URC Failed to Break the Mould* (2016), *Keeping Alive the Rumor of God: When Most People are Looking the Other Way* (2020), and now *A Serious House, Why If Churches Should Fall Completely Out of Use, We May Miss them*.

Back in 1995 Donald Hilton, the URC Yorkshire Moderator and an old friend, and I decided to organize a one-off conference on the future of liberal theology. However, those there asked if we could have another such conference the next year, so I agreed to organize it with Donald's help. It didn't seem too much of a commitment. After that Free to Believe just sort of happened under its own momentum. We never took a conscious decision as to what Free to Believe was going to be and its rather peculiar nature confused some people and still does. Our fundamental characteristic is that we



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stand for absolutely nothing at all - we have no statements of belief, no creed, no programme, and no formal membership list. We are simply a network which is committed to thinking critically about theological questions, without supposing that only one point of view is possible. Looking back at 29 years of conferences, reading parties, and surprisingly jolly committee meetings, what is clear to me is that the speakers were never the key factor. It was the interaction with others, the sense that you were free to express your belief and doubts in a totally safe and accepting atmosphere.

Progressive is a term I tend to use as little as possible. What exactly is a progressive? Is it someone who believes in progress – surely that belief died in the mud of Flanders, if not in the 19th century? Is it someone who stands for change? This, perhaps, is the sense that George Osborne had in mind when he said: “*The torch of progressive politics has been passed to a new generation of politicians - and those politicians are Conservatives*”. The fact that this statement is probably content free only illustrates that progressive is a very free-floating term. Does it mean someone who has history on their side, i.e. is right whereas others are wrong? If so, isn't that virtue-signalling? Another problem with the adequacy of this description is that, in my experience, quite a few churches that call themselves progressive are actually extremely conservative and traditionalist in their worship. Personally, I am a Reformed Christian, with an evangelical liberal heritage and a commitment to the catholicity of the Church! All of these are pretty slippery terms too! I am committed to an intellectually critical faith and inspired by the expansive love of Jesus. But I think faith is strongest when different traditions interact. It is much easier for our overloaded brains to hold simple binary truths, like everything is black and white, right and wrong, good and bad, conservative or liberal, progressive or evangelical, this way or that. We don't think we have the time for gray areas, nuance, context, depth, complexity, or multiplicity, in our lives, our church, our society, in our world, and we are all the worse off for it.

In Philip Larkin's wonderful poem, *Church Going*, a cyclist who knows only a little about the church, enters a deserted building, looks around, and asks: 'When churches will fall completely out of use / What we shall turn them into.' (lines 22-23) The visitor feels strange in the church, not at home, not fully understanding. He takes off his cycle clips in 'awkward reverence.' But then, despite himself, he

falls silent. He knows despite himself that this is a place where people have come in search of something, great moments in their lives have taken place here, 'which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in'.

This experience is the starting point for my new book. A huge gulf has opened up between the world of the Church and that of the general community. As A.N. Wilson shrewdly observes, 'Those millions who polish the car on Sunday mornings and never go to church, have bred up two generations of children who probably have only the haziest sense of what the church is.' (Wilson, A.N. 1992, *Faber Book of Church and Clergy*, Faber & Faber p. X.) Churches are still prominent in our towns, and even more in our villages. Architecturally they may be appreciated, possibly new uses can be found for them as community space, but their essential meaning slips out of view, as Philip Larkin wrote,

'A shape less recognisable each week,
A purpose more obscure.'

(Larkin P. 2003, *Collected Poems*, Faber & Faber p.98)

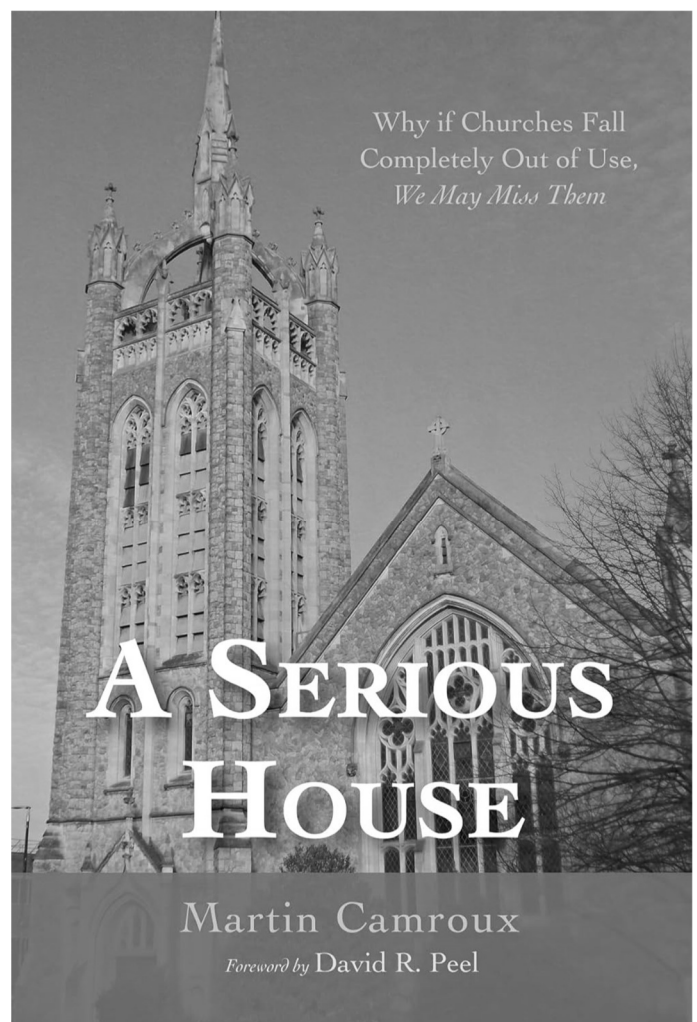
Losing touch with the Church has meant a break with the Western cultural past, its history, its music, its art, its literature, much of which cannot fully be understood without its religious heritage. But something more important than any of that is in danger of being lost. The Church is a deeply imperfect and frustrating organization, but within it, community is experienced, values are nurtured, and God's presence in the world is embodied in a people. The Church carries the story of Jesus; it tells the story of who we are, it calls us to give away our lives to others and to find love as life's central meaning. I remain deeply committed to the Church, critical of it, but still to be found within it. My objective as the Church slips out of sight is to explain my belief in it as honestly as I can.

One thing that may surprise people is the stress I put on churches as sacred space. In the UK there are something like 40,000 buildings used for religious worship. Some are functional, some are ugly, some evoke wonder, The motives of those who built them were mixed. Sometimes it may have had more to do with civic, personal, or ecclesiastical pride than any concern for the transcendent. Today some are largely given over to tourists. But they also can be sacred space. At the heart of religion is the experience of the sacred, the looking beyond ourselves, to what Rudolf Otto called the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, (Otto R. 1958, *Idea of the Holy*, Oxford University Press p.26–27) the numinous, transcendent, the holy. This can be experienced anywhere, in any place at any time but to an extent that no other building does, church buildings can be sacred spaces, places which mediate the experiences to which they witness, mysticism in stone and glass. Sometimes they make God real. It's a mistake to look at the problems the Church faces as if they are simply a UK phenomenon. The

sociological term for it is secularization. In a poetic phrase Max Weber, one of the founders of social science, called it the 'disenchantment of the world' and it finds classic expression in Britain in Bryan Wilson's *Religion in a Secular Society*. It is not uncontested and is open to definition and qualification, but it is fundamental to our religious experience at least in Europe and North America.

Historically Christian belief provided the code of conscience and belief of European culture. Now those old certainties had come apart and to many Christianity seems curious and alien. Churches are sinking beneath the horizon. Drawing on the European Social Survey, the British academic Stephen Bullivant published a concise report, *Europe's Young Adults and Religion*, to assist the deliberations of the Synod of Catholic Bishops and concluded: 'Christianity as a default, as a norm, is gone, and probably gone for good—or at least for the next hundred years. ... The new default setting is 'no religion,' and the few who are religious see themselves as swimming against the tide.' (Guardian, 21 March 2018) Exactly when this decline began is hard to date with any precision. What we can say with some certainty is that church decline began about 1880 and in the twentieth century faith became ever more marginal to society.

The process by which British culture is leaving its Christian past is not going to be reversed any time soon. There is very little reason to be optimistic



about the future of the Church in this country. But hope is not the conviction that all can be expected to go well. Hope is what you can still have when everything falls apart and logically you can't see the way forward. Hope is a wild possibility - a frail ark riding on the flood; a dove with an olive leaf; a possibility that a crucified carpenter might ever be heard of again. We maintain this hope in community with others, indeed there really is no other way. Together we listen to the story, gather to hear the word, marvel at the beauty and the music and are equipped to serve. It can still catch our imagination even in our own inhospitable cultural environment.

Someone who might help us here is Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whose dramatic life story often obscures his real theological significance. From a socially privileged background he was only 14 when he first announced his intention to become a minister. Specializing in academic theology he became a lecturer in the University of Berlin. However his life was changed utterly with the rise of Nazism, which led him to become a dissident within the Church and to work with the anti-Hitler underground. After arrest he was sent to Tegel military prison and to Buchenwald concentration camp. This immersed him in the world outside the Church. Bonhoeffer saw that Christianity was no longer the dominant force in contemporary society and asked searching questions about what this new reality meant, not only for academic theology but for Christian existence in a post-Christian world. In April 1944 in Tegel prison he wrote, 'What do a church, a community, a sermon, a liturgy, a Christian life, mean in a religionless world?' (Bonhoeffer D. 2017, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, SCM Press p.91-92) His particular circumstances meant he was early to face a question the Church still is not clear how to answer. But he gave some practical advice. While in prison he wrote: *'but the day will come - when people will once more be called to speak the word of God in such a way that the world is changed and renewed. It will be in a new language, perhaps quite nonreligious language, but liberating and redeeming like Jesús's language, ...Until then the Christian cause will be a quiet and hidden one, but there will be people who pray and do justice and wait for God's own time.'* (Bonhoeffer p.160)

Like Bonhoeffer I can go further than simply saying that the Church enriches human life, though this is certainly true. Frankly we don't know what the future of the Church will be, and some will never see it. But the Church is a serious house on serious earth, it carries the story of Jesus, it tells the story of who we are, it calls us to give away our lives to others, and to find love as life's central meaning,

'And that much never can be obsolete,
Since someone will forever be surprising
A hunger in himself to be more serious,
And gravitating with it to this ground.'

(Larkin P. p.98)

Ecstatic Erratic!

I want to be an erratic!
Carried along by the flow of the Spirit,
Taken out of the familiar,
Transported through faith's landscapes,
Until I find my home,
My place to rest,
And be,
Me.
May be,
My place to move on from,
To start another journey,
To venture into other territories,
Back to the unfamiliar,
Carried along by the flow of the Spirit,
Ecstatic!

Meryl White

Life Stone Pavement

Limestone Pavement – not for walking?
Alien moonscape atop a hill,
Rock scoured clean, laid bare,
Baldened by glacial strip and flow.
Rivers and rains creek and carve
solid mass into –
Block shaped walls and hidden caves.
Clints crack and split -
Splintering stepping stones.
Grikes descend – no end –
From here to who knows where.
Barren, stark, but
Splits give arrow slits to views beyond,
Mosses linger, spiders weave a home,
A cupped rock garden encapsulates thyme,
Creviced ferns, rooted in darkness, reach for light.
My mind searches for metaphor –
creaking and groaning like the shattering rock.
Is this what church looks like?
An alien landscape for exploring?
A scenic demonstration of events long past?
Product of the forces that shaped it?
Development and evolution in the making?
A unique habitat for specialist species?
A place for wondering worship?
A life stone pavement – fit for walking?

Meryl White

Can we trust our disgust?

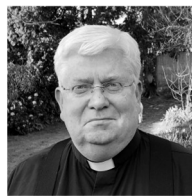
In recent years significant ethical debate has concerned the role that the emotion of disgust, sometimes termed the 'wisdom of repugnance' (Nussbaum M. *Reason* July 15, 2004), or the 'Yuck Factor' might play as a moral guide. (Kelly, D.R. 2009, *The Ethics of Disgust* University of Colorado, p.1) A visit to an abattoir or, less euphemistically, a slaughterhouse, might evince feelings of distress and disgust in most of us, whether meat-eater or vegetarian. But it begs the question whether such a reaction should influence our moral behaviour?



Daniel Kelly criticises such people as Kass and Nussbaum, proponents of 'Deep Wisdom', arguing that, whilst disgust initially evolved as a helpful autonomic response to stimuli and substances that may cause us physical harm, as we developed the faculty of apperception, it morphed into an untrustworthy guide to justifiable moral judgement. Jessa Wood adds that disgust may both precede moral condemnation or follow the belief that something is morally wrong, but that the subjectivity of neither combination is reliable, having contributed in the past to homophobia and the exclusion of social behaviours and groups considered 'other'.

Notwithstanding their laudable caution, it may be that the hermeneutical circle of liberation theology, can still provide a framework within which repugnance serves as an initial 'red flag' of potential moral transgression. In the cycle of experience, analysis, theological reasoning and practical action, (Boff, L & C. 2000, *Introducing Liberation Theology* Orbis Books) Peter Phan argues that there is nothing that may not serve as the raw material of theology in order to arrive at an understanding of what 'liberation' truly means. (Phan, P.C. 2000, *Method in Liberation Theologies* Theological Studies 61 p.53)

Liberation theology has developed the ability to incorporate suffering, anguish, anger, indignation,



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the cries of torment and moral repugnance within a rational, deliberative cycle of new orthopraxis, arising from hermeneutical and exegetical analysis, replacing old orthodoxies.

Several liberative movements have since emerged from those early Latin American origins and various arenas of oppression have been targeted: gender, sexual orientation, race, culture and religion.

Phan comments that any genuine liberation theology must fight against all forms of oppression (Phan, P.C. 2000, p.41) with Boff arguing that the viewpoint of the victims must form its foundations, and yet as Boff and Hauerwas (Hauerwas, S. & Berkman, J. *The Chief End of All Flesh* Theology Today (Princeton, N.J.) July 1992 p.197) agree, a dominant and hitherto relatively unaddressed hegemony remains, that of an arrogant anthropocentrism, (Boff, L. 1995 *Liberation Theology and Ecology* Orbis Books, p.2) subjugating all its surveys.

Yet Hauerwas identifies one great obstacle to be overcome were one seeking to give a voice to animals, the most voiceless creatures of all. That our current practices, more than our arguments, truly reveal and shape our beliefs and in that regard we continue to treat animals as the undoubted 'other' with the euphemistic lexicon of 'pork', 'beef' and 'veal' thereby justifying their continued use.

Linzey observes that continued resistance to a more positive theology persists, because we might otherwise have to make uncomfortable choices about our food, clothing, products and lifestyles, (Linzey, A. *Christian Theology and Animal Rights* Dec 2015, Vol. 67 Issue 4, p.235-244) and moreover we should have to face the cognitive dissonance of regarding ourselves as moral people alongside our demonstrable brokenness (McFarlane, K. *Living Relationally with Creation* Perspectives On Science and Christian Faith, 6th August 2014) in the untold cruelty routinely meted out to animals in our 'care'.

McFarlane notes that we may be experiencing a pivotal moment in history, as scientific, philosophical and debates about the moral status of animals gather pace. Ultimately, however, it may well require some moral repugnance and disgust to project those debates beyond the academy into the public sphere.

Is Jesus the King?

I have always had doubts about referring to Jesus as King. I was brought up in a non-conformist, anti-monarchy, family and I graciously accepted we were different from the majority of people, including those in the church, I continued to dislike the idea of a King. It portrays one person having the power to rule over your life whether you want it or not.

When I studied the Bible in my teens I warmed to passages like Matthew 20, 25-26 where Jesus says "You know that among the Gentiles rulers lord it over their subjects and the great make their authority felt. It shall not be so with you." It was the same period when I made a commitment to follow Christ Jesus, but to me that was not a submission to allow Christ to absolutely rule over me. I continued to question what the message and life of Christ Jesus means. Then, and on occasion since, I have heard preachers give a narrow conservative message and follow it with the hymn, "Trust and obey, there is no other way", a hymn that I dislike.

King implies the authority of someone with political power according to the system of human society. It is a largely out of date concept, though we are now seeing some who rise through a democratic process aspiring to something similar. Did we see that in a Boris Johnson in the prorogation of parliament? Are we seeing it in Donald Trump, supported by many Christians, who aspires to absolute power?

For many of us today, however, kingship implies great social status, the right connections and wealth, whose influence results from that and that alone. Yet with either of these meanings, is it appropriate to give this title to Christ Jesus?

In 1 Samuel 8, the Israelites want a king like other nations and the prophet makes it clear that God does not approve. After listing why a king would not be good, Samuel proclaims that God allows them to have a king, but who is subordinate to God and not like other kings. Then King Saul disobeys God. King David acts contrary to God but repents and seeks forgiveness. That repentance, together with other things, enables David to be regarded as the greatest King of Israel. Hence the first Jewish Christians were happy to call Jesus, Son of David.

Yet the stories of the Kings of Israel shows the Old Testament as ambivalent to the idea of kingship, especially among humans. So is it appropriate to describe Jesus, when he walked this earth as a human being, as a King? His self-giving, healing life was not like that of any other known king, and I therefore feel that the overuse of the word 'king' for Jesus misleads people, distorting what Jesus was all about. If we are to believe what is written in the Bible, he did not lord it over his chosen disciples,



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and did not try to remove Judas from the group. His authority did not lie in the normal authority of a king. The Old Testament is full of the need for kings to behave according to God's laws. In Psalm 72 we read "God, endow the king with your own justice, his royal person with your righteousness." Even the military might is played down in Psalm 33, "No king is saved by a great army, no warrior delivered by great strength" going on to ask for reliance on God's unfailing love. The great prophets condemn the behaviour of rulers because they do not act according to God's covenant and love. Then after so many bad kings they, and the people, look forward to a Messiah who will act not according to power but will bring peace and justice, though that is seen by many as being by forceful means.

Jesus picks up on the prophetic voices in his Jewish inheritance, but transforms it further into the power of God's love, not like anyone called 'King'.

In addition to that passage from Matthew's gospel against anyone 'lording it over others' Jesus washes the feet of the disciples, an act of huge symbolism. He repeatedly speaks of self-sacrifice, to give of himself for his friends, to die for the sheep and so on. The only phrases that I find fully acceptable with the word 'king' to describe Jesus are: "The King of Love, my Shepherd is" and "The Servant King".

In an understanding of the Trinity, I am happy with 'King of kings', that being appropriate to God. There is another unsatisfactory phrase however, used in connection with God and that is "Almighty King". The character portrayed in the New Testament of both God and Christ, cannot accurately be described as almighty, as if they have arbitrary magical power and force.

Finally, there is one practical danger in the use of the term king. King or kingship can now be translated as government, and we continue to face the threat of religious people wanting power in order to put in place who they believe to be the true king and ruler. This can be based on the Bible concept of a king who rules according to God's ways, but that makes it even more dangerous as it means God's ways as understood by one particular group of people. As Jonathan Sacks wrote in his book 'The home we build together', "Religion claims to represent the truth. Therefore surely it must seek to enforce the truth. To do so it must aspire to power. How could it be otherwise? *Yet it is otherwise.*"

There are so many ways in which the word 'king' can contradict the word 'love' that I am convinced that too many Christians wrongly use the word king when referring to Jesus.

The Wider Debate

I wish to thank Paul Harrington for his review in *Progressive Voices* of my book, *Gospel Notes and More*, published through Amazon UK. Paul concluded that *Gospel Notes and More* could offer “a good introduction for someone setting out on the progressive Christian path, before they go on to tackle the big trail blazers such as Borg, Spong, Crossan, and the like.” This is the main aim of *Gospel Notes and More*. It is useful as a reference text or easy to read in a few sessions. It aims to promote a wider debate about modern Christianity than is currently attempted by most churches.

This “wider debate” is aimed at thinking people in our UK community: they include many who may currently be agnostic, atheistic, or be associated with any of the world’s religions.

For churches to achieve this wider debate, there are, as I see it, two imperatives. The first is to recognise that all the major religions in the world, including Christianity, use a mix of facts, ancient wisdom, inspired teaching, myths, legends, and poetic language, to identify “higher truths” about “an ideal way of life”. Christians often understand these truths and way of life as giving a sense of identity and being more about dealing with the realities and problems of “here and now”, rather than about worship and doctrine. It is interesting that this idea is not emphasised more by many commentators. (For example, Jack Spong’s last work focussed largely on Christian doctrine and its weaknesses.) It is also an idea ignored by most churches: they commonly describe themselves solely as “a place of worship.” Readjusting the focus from doctrine/ worship to life issues, will require a shift for churches. It is a relative move that will require careful handling and this may not be popular, as it will inevitably reduce the focus on topics such as: the meaning of God, who Jesus is, what we mean by the Holy Spirit, the Virgin Birth, Miracles, Resurrection, Final Judgment, and Eternal Life – to give greater emphasis on Christian “living”: that is, teaching Christian values, promoting inspirational living, unselfish love, peace, building better communities, saving the planet (and even stressing that socialism and communism have their roots in some of the teaching of Jesus). Secondly, there is, I believe, a real need for churches to reduce



Harry Houldsworth is a retired lecturer, a lay member of the CofE and lives in Nottingham and Wetwang, Yorkshire.

preaching and promote more *teaching, personal testimony, and discussion*, with more *listening and feedback* from members of the congregation. And for many, I suspect, this will not be either welcome or easy.

Note that you don’t need to know and understand the ideas of commentators such as H.M. Kuitert, Gretta Vosper, Don Mc Gregor, Jack Spong, Marcus Borg, Dominic Crossan, and others, to articulate many modern objections to Christian doctrines. They are absorbed by all, while talking to friends and neighbours, and through TV and the social media.

If Churches are willing to engage in a wider debate with ordinary, intelligent, church members and citizens in the community, they will soon discover what people really believe, and understand better what might make them want to come to church on a regular basis.

There have been seventeen hundred years of imperial and hierarchical Christianity, during which priests and ministers have told people what to believe and been hostile to open discussion. This needs to change.

As we move towards Christmas and the New Year we need to reflect greatly on the increasing conflicts in the world and the urgent need for the evolution of newer and effective approaches to ministry focussed on unselfish love and forgiveness, with the aim of ensuring a better tomorrow for all.

Christians have a golden opportunity to make this happen, in partnership with all who are working to serve others.



Ted Eytan, CC BY-SA 2.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

Look Out for the Outliers

I was talking to someone the other day. She is a website developer and she's just changed jobs. She is not a loud person, but anyone who meets her knows she is a person of quality, depth and presence. She emanates a humble confidence. In her old job, she worked in a quiet, fairly sedate, office where she was given the space and the time to bring all her creativity to bear on whatever brief she was given. She was known and appreciated.

But her new job is a bit different. Her new colleagues are loud and outspoken. Silence is unknown. They like to work to a soundtrack. The drum and bass keep thumping, and the banter never stops flowing. She's finding it hard to fit in. And things weren't made any easier when, after a few days, her new boss took her aside for a pep talk. What was the problem? She was 'too quiet'.

It hurt to hear that. It broke my heart to think that anyone could be so blind. How short-sighted do you have to be, to view the grace and peace someone carries as a problem to be solved? In a world of distressing noise and clamour, she is the kind of person every office needs to temper the insanity.

I'm not worried about her. She's bright and innovative. She'll work it out. Either her new boss will see sense, or she'll leave. And if she does, the queue of employers looking for someone just like her stretches around the block. She'll be okay.

But it got me thinking about the kind of psychology I study. In my research, she would be called an outlier. One of those people in a team or a family who don't quite fit in. Not because they are weird or awkward, but because they possess some positive qualities the rest of the gang don't have. They are the creative exuberant in a team who prefer doing things by the book. The hilarious joker in a pack who likes to take things seriously. The conscientious worker trying to get on with the job in an office that would rather play now and work later. The kind one in a family of cutthroat competitors.

The thing is we all have a unique contribution to make to the world, a one-off fingerprint of strengths and abilities never to be repeated in anyone else. In research these have been called 'Signature Strengths', the unique combination of positive qualities that make up who you are. And the weird thing is that we don't have to try that hard to be them. If you are naturally kind, wise, grateful, or disciplined you won't be able to stop yourself being that way. They come effortlessly to us. And if someone tries to stop us from being the loving thoughtful faithful person, we know ourselves to be, it is like losing a limb. If we find ourselves in a context where the most beautiful things about us

The Belonging Course is designed to encourage and equip Christians to build a culture of belonging in safe and effective ways, both in and outside their church family: <https://belongingcourse.uk/>

are unwelcome – like the website developer – it is like being rejected, right to the core.

This is what it is like to be an outlier- the odd one out. By contrast, when we feel like we belong, we thrive in who we are. But here's the cool thing. If we can live by our 'Signature Strengths', if we can wake up each morning and ask the question, 'How can I use my unique positive qualities in a new way today?', it leads to remarkable improvements in wellbeing. Multiple studies have shown that those who live like this, thinking about how they can bring what is best in them to the opportunities and obstacles of each day, report increased happiness in living. Not only that, but they also show reduced anxiety, stress, and depression. It turns out that being good is good for us. Who knew?

That's not the whole story though. To be our best, we need other people to spot these strengths in us. If they don't, we feel confined and unable to be ourselves. When I ask people what it is like to not be able to bring their best qualities to those around them, they come up with some dark images. It is isolating, a desert, a fog, a prison, being trapped in a cage. In short - it's lonely. No wonder the World Health Organisation classes loneliness as a global public health concern. It affects 2 million in the UK alone. If the research is right, loneliness steals joy, destroys self-confidence, and limits potential.

When researchers ask why they consider leaving their current job, their answers often reflect something like this. Work-life balance and salary are undoubtedly important, but often, at the top of the list for wanting to leave work are the words: I am not appreciated. Something good we wanted to give has not been received. We feel unseen.

Look out for the outliers. Who is underappreciated in your family, workplace or neighbourhood? Who do you know who has something good to give, but needs help to give it? If we can learn to spot those invisible beautiful qualities in those around us, we not only give them the joy of being known, we also invite more light and flavour into the world. Life becomes a little less grey.

To belong is to be seen, heard, and understood. I just hope my friend's new boss can learn this while he still has the chance. It is tough for her to feel so misunderstood, but it's worse for him. She can move on, but he remains in an office deprived of the humble compassion she would have brought to it.

What gift of beauty and goodness are we excluding from the world because we failed to see past the packaging? It's a question worth asking.

Roger Bretherton

Meeting the Church



Tony Rutherford was a PCN Trustee, is a member of the Tunbridge Wells Radical Pilgrims group and a retired Anglican priest.

A Christian church is a gathering of people who are committed to following the life and teachings of Jesus. They are also inspired by his message, transformed by his example, and encouraged by his style of leadership. However difficult these ideals seem to be in practice, Christian people commit to following Jesus' example by having a go.

There are many ways in which these attempts to follow Jesus are shown in everyday life. For Christians, their life style is a 24/7 commitment, so their attempts to practice their faith is shown by the way they try live the whole of their lives. The Early Church was known as "The Way". Christians were people of "The Way". The Christian life is a way, a journey of faith, living according to the life and example of the Jewish prophet, Jesus of Nazareth.

A life-time commitment of caring, trusting in the power of unselfish love, and being faithful to the life and teachings of Jesus. Wherever two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus, there is "a church". The gatherings of the people are celebrations of faith, the learning of new insights and a determination to keep on to the end of the road.

Christians are groups of people who are devoted to seeing the development of the church as a caring body, a committed community and a faithful organisation. These groupings of Christian people in a local community are most often found in a building which is also called a "church".

Churches are composed of Christians who are dedicated to looking after others. Someone has suggested that the Christian Church is the only group that is designed for its non-members. Churches express their concern for other people and political situations by naming them during quiet times during their weekly Sunday gatherings.

Christians are called to demonstrate their caring by visiting people at home or in hospitals, telephoning, writing cards, letters and sending text messages or e-mails to support those in need. These visits or calls may be occasional and sensitive, with a mindfulness of when they are wanted or otherwise. Christians may also demonstrate a commitment to caring by learning about current political issues, writing letters to the press or their MPs, and attending or even organising demonstrations - often with others - religious and secular.

At the heart of a caring society is the call to compassion. Compassion being seen in practical demonstrations of an unselfish love for one's fellow humans and the whole evolving world. Karen Armstrong, the British Roman Catholic author,

speaker and former nun, and others, have shown how compassion is at the heart of every major world religion. It is also a central belief in secular society.

Somebody once said "Christians are not called to be hermits, though possibly to be hermits in pairs". Christians meet to express their faith, to learn how to develop it and to celebrate their joy in being alive. Some now meet in secular buildings such as schools or community halls. But wherever they gather, the purpose is similar - to express a faithfulness to a shared commitment to a cause that can be developed to make the world a better place.

If we want to make the world a better place by our own efforts, and those of those we work with, we need to be in a frame of mind and body that is willing to make changes in our lifestyle. This can only be achieved by conscious effort, by using existing experience and by persevering. We don't change the world simply by wanting change. Change is a continuous process – the achievement of a goal is an encouragement to tackle the next.

Deep inside the "being" of a Christian is a "faith" – meaning a trusting and committed following of Jesus, for the greater good of all. Some would say, the basic requirement of Christians is to accept a belief system, where belief means accepting as "true" agreed statements by the institutional church about God, Jesus and the Bible. Yet belief may not lead to changing anyone or anything. It doesn't imply trusting in the greater good, or being committed to the values of Jesus' teaching about what he called "The Kingdom (or realm) of God"

John Dominic Crossan, the Roman Catholic former monk, theologian, writer and speaker, describes the Kingdom of God as a world where God is in charge and the leaders of the world are not. It's a world of fairness, social justice, peace-making, bridge-building, and inter-faith co-operation. A world where the challenges of climate change, refugees and poverty become political priorities. The Kingdom of God is a system without hierarchy, power-seeking and unfair competition. It's a world of compassion, cooperation, partnerships and selfless ambition.

All these features, factors and aims are what inspires and directs the Church. But they tend to get lost in an over-emphasis on procedures in worship, debates on theological niceties and selfish ambition.

In his book, 'Meeting Christianity Again: for the First Time', published by Red Balloon Publishing, Tony Rutherford attempts to facilitate a new way of being Christian in the 21st Century.

Local groups

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

Abingdon

Cliff Marshall

01235 530480 cliff.marshall@pcnbritain.org.uk

We continue to meet via Zoom and have recently been very pleased to welcome people from other PCN groups to our meetings. It is always good to meet with them and we value having new ideas shared with us. Some of us have been listening to each other for nearly 20 years now and know each other very well. It's great to find that people are spotting the information we put on the website and getting in touch to join meetings which interest them. We take a break from online meetings in Aug and those who can come together for tea and cake in a garden. In Sept, Oct and Nov our online meetings will resume on the first Tue of the month.

Bolton

Jim Hollyman

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We continue to be challenged as we study Desmond and Mpho Tutu's "The Book of Forgiving". Which of us has ever thought of forgiveness as a process? The Tutu's write vividly and persuasively about the Fourfold Path towards renewing or releasing relationships where there has been violence or hurt of some kind, needing forgiveness. Describing it as a Fourfold Path makes it clear that true forgiveness can involve a long time of working towards the renewing or releasing.

In discussion our group decided that transforming would be a stronger word than renewing, for true forgiveness can result in a completely changed relationship. The Tutu's give remarkable illustrations of this. We looked at examples of the Japanese craft of Kintsugi as illustrations of the way in which disasters may be turned into transforming beauty and new life. One member gave us a literal example of such transformation from her childhood which had started when she and her family returned home from holiday to find their house had been burgled. Her father, a minister, met those responsible and, sometime later, he was asked if he would baptise children in that family. True transformation.

Our group continues to meet face to face at the URC of St Andrew and St George, St George's Road, Bolton.

In addition we send out a Zoom link each month.

Newcastle

Liz Temple

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In the summer months we usually have an evening out or an away day. This May some of our group gathered at a local Chinese restaurant instead of having a regular meeting – a convivial atmosphere with wide ranging chat around a circular table.

In Jun we were privileged to have Dr Caleb Gordon, Postgraduate Director of Studies, Lindisfarne College of Theology to speak. His theme was, 'The Edge of the World: Theological reflections on wilderness, civilisation, and our relationship to God'. He read his chapter from 'Words for a Dying World', edited by Hannah Malcolm. All appreciated the poetic language of the piece and a fascinating discussion followed. Caleb's family were among the first waves of American homesteaders to settle in what would become the state of Alaska; Caleb was able to draw upon his family history and personal experience to reflect upon the ways that our relationship to the world affects our relationship to God.

Northallerton

Peter Brophy

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We meet as a book club under the heading 'Journeying Together'. Currently we're reading "Tarry awhile: wisdom from black spirituality for people of faith" by Selina Stone. This isn't written from a particularly progressive viewpoint but we feel it gives us a perspective that is too often lacking from progressive discussions. We meet at 2.00 for 2.30pm on the first Tue of the month at Romanby Methodist Church.

Norwich

Lee Marsden

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This month a local PCN group in Norwich, initially meeting once a month, where progressives and questioners are welcome is starting. If you live in the area why not come and be part of it. Details available on the PCN website.

Oakham

Peter Stribblehill

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Our summer meeting was to follow

what is now a firmly established tradition during the long summer break from meetings. Our second annual summer meeting was at Lyveden, a National Trust property near Corby organised by two of our members. We met on a very hot afternoon for an introductory talk followed by walking through the grounds to The Lodge, originally designed in Elizabethan times as a summer retreat in the grounds of the manor house.

We were delighted to hear that our volunteer guide had wondered about our group name and taken the trouble to look us up on the website, realised what a 'special' group we were and adapt his talk for us. He gave us a story of religious dissent about a staunchly Roman Catholic family who paid a heavy price for keeping their faith with heavy fines and a narrow escape from retribution following family involvement in the gunpowder plot. The family were cousins of Robert Catesby, one of the ringleaders.

The Lodge was of a fascinating symmetrical design having four similar wings – Thomas Tresham studied Theology, Law and Architecture and put much of his theology into the design of both the house and its grounds. Sadly he ran out of money and died in 1605 leaving huge debts and the building unfinished. Workers walked off the site the day he died as they would clearly not be paid again.

We now look forward to restarting our meetings in the autumn when we will once more meet at Oakham Methodist Church.

Teesside

Peter Brophy

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We're about to start reading Richard Rohr's recent "The Divine Dance", a book on the Trinity which Rohr feels has been neglected for centuries. Rohr is a very popular author though his chatty style isn't to everyone's taste! We are a long established book club and would very much welcome new members to explore with us the questions of contemporary faith and life. Meetings are on the second Tue each month, starting at 2.00 for 2.30pm, usually at the Friends Meeting House in Great Ayton but please check.

After some time without a venue, we are now holding monthly weekday evening meetings in a room at a church in central Tunbridge Wells. Subjects for discussion are chosen in advance. Recent topics have included spiritual practices with some practical exercises!. A follow-up meeting centred on the relationship between faith and environment.

In addition we have a weekly meeting on a weekday afternoon held using Zoom. This is appreciated by members who find it difficult to attend the physical meetings. Sometimes the subject for discussion is decided in advance, at other times it flows from previous discussions or from participants' current concerns. Prayer, environment and climate change have featured regularly.

Reviews

Soul Scratchings of a Spiritual Stray by Robin Drummond

Available via roboshu78@gmail.com
This is a more substantial follow-up to Robin's previous self-published book, *True to God, True to Now*. It contains more imagined stories from the life of Jesus but also poems, psalms, prayers and pithy proverbs. In his Introduction he writes: 'I'm still seeking, and I don't think Christianity will ever feel like home in the way it appears to for others, but fortunately it is a place that attracts and welcomes spiritual strays, with a bowl of milk every now and then'. As someone, like many others in PCN and beyond, who feels equally liminal, more like a spectator than a participant, Robin has again provided some very useful and imaginative tit-bits to keep us fed. Those who want to seek a contemporary 'Christian' spirituality, freed from theological jargon and assumptions, would find what Robin has written a real encouragement. Like all good sermons, the book is in three parts, finishing, as I was always taught that we should, with a renewed vision of Jesus. Robin has been writing poems all his life but has more recently begun to reflect on a more specifically 'Christian' approach, though, as you would expect, this is not always obvious or

necessary. I am very much reminded of a key book from my own teenage years, Michel Quoist's *Prayers of Life* (1966). There is no superficial piety here either, just honest soul-searching and questioning in the face of what it means to be human. The Sayings are brief proverbs intended to stimulate a response such as 'Only a fool is angry at a hill for being steep' and 'Do not try to be a different person. Instead, try to be the person you are, differently'. And, with the imagined stories and words of Jesus, it doesn't matter that it didn't really happen, (can we say that with any certainty about the events recorded in the gospels anyway?), but that here is an invitation to go beyond the familiar into a deeper sense of what it means to hear a human prophetic voice challenging our comforts and showing the way.

Ben Whitney

Tarry a While by Selina Stone, SPCK

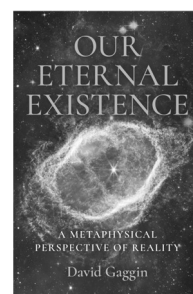


This is the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent Book for 2024 and comes with his endorsement. It applies the Black Christian Spiritual practice of 'tarrying', a time of surrendering to and waiting on God. The author explains, 'It allows us time to ponder the ways of God'. Dr Selina Stone is a Postdoctoral Research Associate in Theological Education at Durham University. Her research interests include ethics, power, social justice and race. She speaks at Christian events, has written several books, and contributes to various faith publications. She also sits on several CofE advisory boards. She describes herself as 'a proud Brummie' and draws on her African Caribbean and Pentecostal heritage throughout. Divided in to 7 sections with 2-4 subsections, it invites a Lenten journey through issues such as darkness, movement, spirit, healing. Taking a womanist approach, the author explores issues of racism, classism and sexism across all subjects and ends each section with penetrating questions for personal and group reflection. In the introduction she warns that some may find the book a challenge but invites the reader to stay curious and open to the treasures to be found.

The book is ideal for group study and there are accompanying materials available on 'The Big Church Read' website; a reading plan, discussion questions and videos. It is also suitable for individual devotions. I found this book to be an adventurous read, it made me look at difficult issues and see them from a different viewpoint. I particularly valued the call to a holistic perspective and the spiritual practice of contemplation. For me, it was a treasure trove of thought-provoking insights. I would recommend it.

Meryl White

Our Eternal Existence by David Gaggin, John Hunt

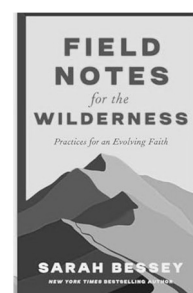


It was good to read the author's piece in the recent PV. This is an interesting exploration of some basic human questions about identity and meaning. Alongside

Science and Religion, he argues, and their often-separate premises and languages, rests the often under studied and misunderstood field of Metaphysics. For the author, the 'inner self', seen through the perspective of the spiritual / metaphysical can move us beyond the languages of both Science and Religion to help us understand and live our 'best life'. Finding the language, as ever in matters of life and death, can be tricky. Here we ascribe new meanings to the word 'spiritual' but the questions remain the same. Who are we? Why are we here? I did not find this easy reading and I did not follow all of the author's lines of argument, but I learnt a lot. I also am left with a series of questions. David Gaggin is an interesting author, and his ideas are challenging and, in parts, compelling. His YouTube broadcasts are worth listening to.

Christine King

Field Notes for the Wilderness by Sarah Bessey, SPCK

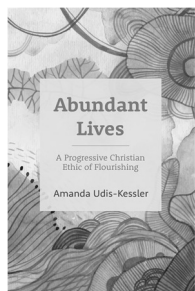


'Repentance is actually a beautiful, life-giving reorientation towards God's good path of flourishing with ourselves, our neighbours, and our world.' With rich

understanding, deep insights and the wisdom of lived experience Sarah provides, not only Field Notes, but refreshment for the wilderness. Sarah Bessey is Canadian Christian author; she has written 5 books including New York Times best seller, 'A Rhythm of Prayer'. She is leader of Evolving Faith, a conference and on-line community for people who are exploring and reimagining their faith. She is a blogger, writing Field notes weekly, and co-host to the Evolving Faith Podcast. She displays a deep love for Jesus, and has a progressive approach to Christian faith. Using the imagery of 'wilderness', Sarah writes for people who find themselves exploring their faith outside of their usual environment of church and faith communities. The wilderness is a place for 'our questions and our truth'. The book is written as a series of pastoral letters to people such as Dear Grower, Wonderer, Seeker, Regretful, Heartbroken and so on. Each letter offers advice and guidance on dealing with different aspects of coping with the difficulties of rethinking faith. This ranges from taking time to stay with the pain and lamenting the loss of past certainties to exploring ancient ways of praying and establishing faith practices. It gives permission to explore faith and gives survival tips on the way. I loved the book. Especially helpful was the suggestion to be clear about what I do believe rather than focussing on what I don't believe. Faith explorers may find this a helpful guide; fundamental thinkers may find it a challenging read. Sarah advises, 'Don't be afraid, you can't wander away from God's love'.

Meryl White

Abundant Lives by Amanda-Udis Kessler, The Pilgrim Press



Amanda-Udis Kessler is a former sociology professor based in Colorado Springs, USA. She is also an accomplished author, progressive liturgist and hymn writer. One of her great strengths is her ability to write about complex issues in a manner that is both challenging and encouraging, but also very accessible to non-theologians and professional clergy alike. "Abundant Lives" offers an overview of

contemporary Progressive Biblical scholarship and a penetrating insight into what she terms "flourishing – getting to have a good life", along with a comprehensive discussion of suffering in terms of avoidable and unnecessary suffering. The whole is accompanied by practical suggestions on how to expand human flourishing for the benefit of everyone and of society itself. Her exploration of this theme emerges from her own personal experiences and identity as a politically leftist feminist and "queer (bisexual) androgynous white woman who strives to work against white supremacy." The book was being written when, in Nov 2022, 5 people were killed and 25 injured in a Colorado Springs' LGBTQ+ nightclub by an anti-gay gunman. Unlike the usual sociological approach to ethics, being based upon abstract principles or values, she starts from the premise of what is needed practically to ensure well-being through flourishing. Part 1 is titled, "Human Flourishing". Unsurprisingly, chapter 1 is titled "From Principles to People." As she states, "Flourishing humanity is humanity at its best, and we can take the fullest advantage of our human capabilities when we flourish." She adds that limiting or ending avoidable suffering is a moral priority. Chapter 2, "Our Common Humanity" explores 10 attributes and preconditions of what it means to be human. Chapter 3, "Flourishing, Suffering and Inequality" is a rather hard-hitting analysis not only of personal and societal responsibilities that will enable all to flourish, but also of those systemic influences that aggravate suffering and therefore diminish the ability of all to flourish. She highlights four preconditions that are necessary to enable all to flourish: 1. access to resources; 2. safety and freedom from harm; 3. autonomy and self-determination; 4. respect and positive treatment of others by individuals, communities and organisations. Part 2 is titled, "The Kin-dom of God as a Community of Flourishing" and begins with chapter 4, "Jesus, the Prophets, and Beyond." There are echoes of Borg and Crossan in seeing Jesus and the Kin-dom in terms of a different kind of reign of God, as demonstrated in the early Christian communities. Chapter 5, "Love, Flourishing and God" explores

aspects of love in which loving one's enemies does not mean prioritising their well-being above those of the oppressed self. Chapter 6, "Co-creating the Kin-dom of God: Our Individual Work" deals with ways in which we can cultivate the virtues required to encourage the flourishing of all people; psychological healing; spiritual formation practices and political preparation and actions to promote flourishing and to stand against avoidable suffering. Chapter 7, "Co-creating the Kin-dom of God: Our Collective Work" considers the importance of justice, and the Church as a Spiritual "Fitness Centre". The Conclusion is a series of "Imagine if..." followed by Kurt Struckmeyer's "A Creed of Love". The book finishes with a series of questions associated with each chapter to encourage individual exploration or group discussion. This is one of those occasional books that comes with that "wow" factor, opening up a whole new area for consideration and practical application. Brian D, McLaren says, "It offers one of the best introductions to progressive Christian living that I have ever seen." And the Foreword is by Rev. David M. Felten, Pastor, The Fountains United Methodist Church and co-author of "Living the Questions." Recommendations enough as to why this book should become a standard work in Progressive Christianity.

PCN Britain's Members' Residential

Fri 18 - Sun 20 Oct

The Hayes Conference Centre
Derbyshire, DE55 1AU

01594 516528

sarah.guilfoyle@pcnbritain.org.uk

£295

The focus of this year's Members' Residential is Brian McLaren's Life After Doom.

Each of the sessions will be introduced by a 15-minute video by Brian McLaren.

<https://www.pcnbritain.org.uk/events/detail/2024-members-residential>



Disciples

Jesus' followers



Go on, try to name them?
All 12 of them.

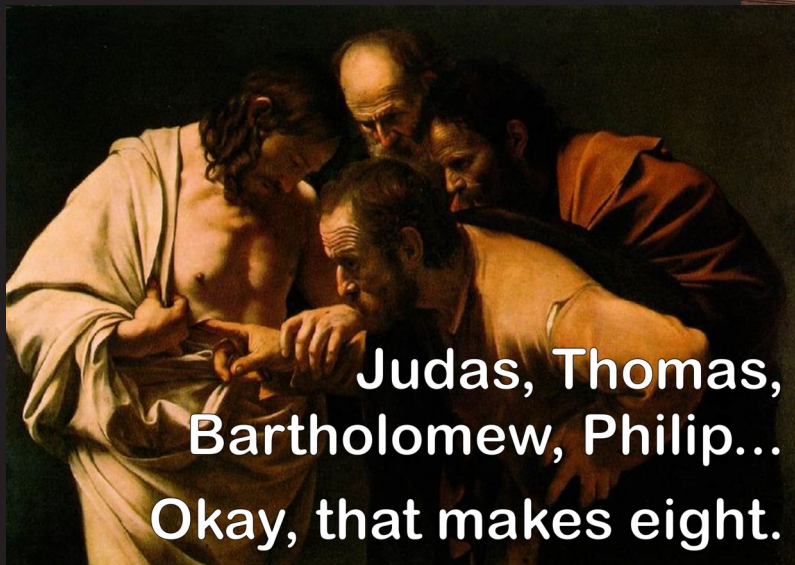


Matthew, Mark, Luke,
John...

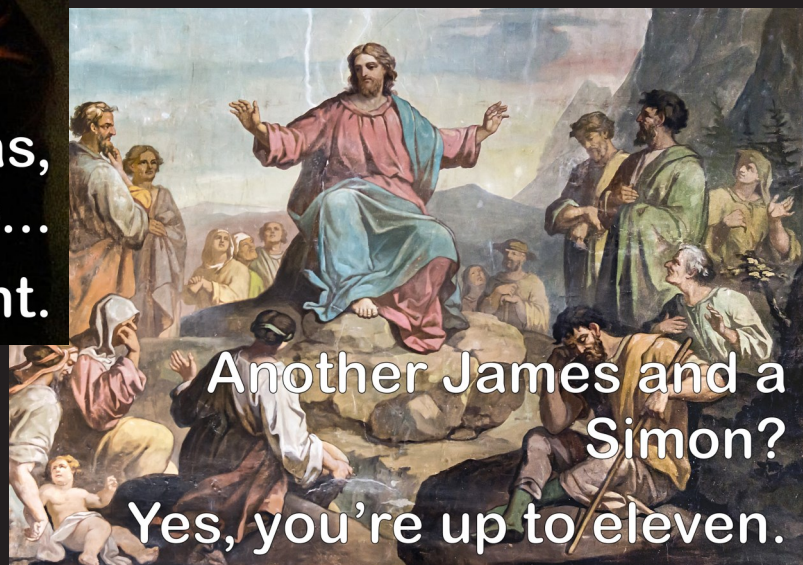
No, they're the gospel
writers - Mark and Luke
aren't on this list.



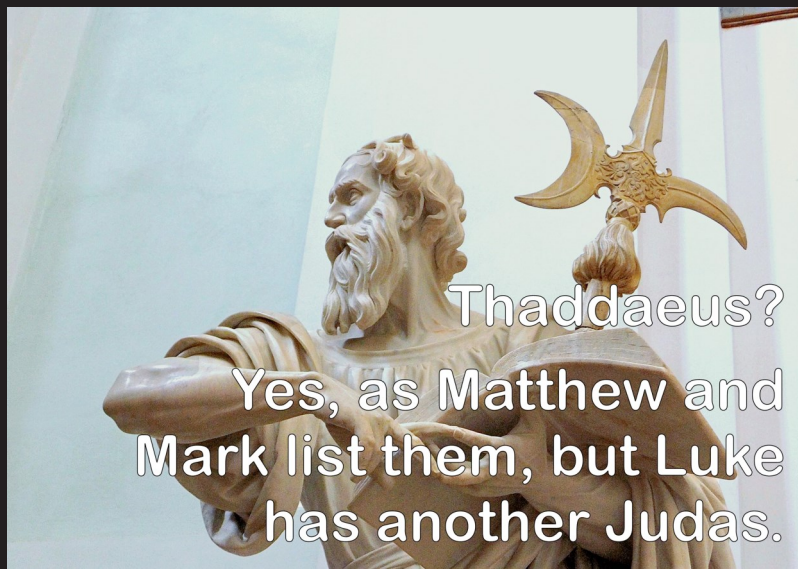
Peter, James, Andrew...
Yes, that makes five.



Judas, Thomas,
Bartholomew, Philip...
Okay, that makes eight.



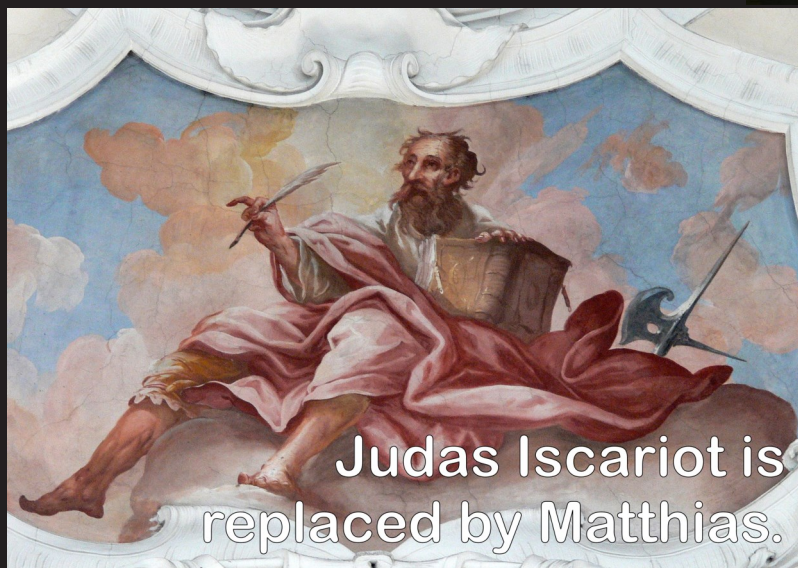
Another James and a
Simon?
Yes, you're up to eleven.



Thaddaeus?
Yes, as Matthew and
Mark list them, but Luke
has another Judas.



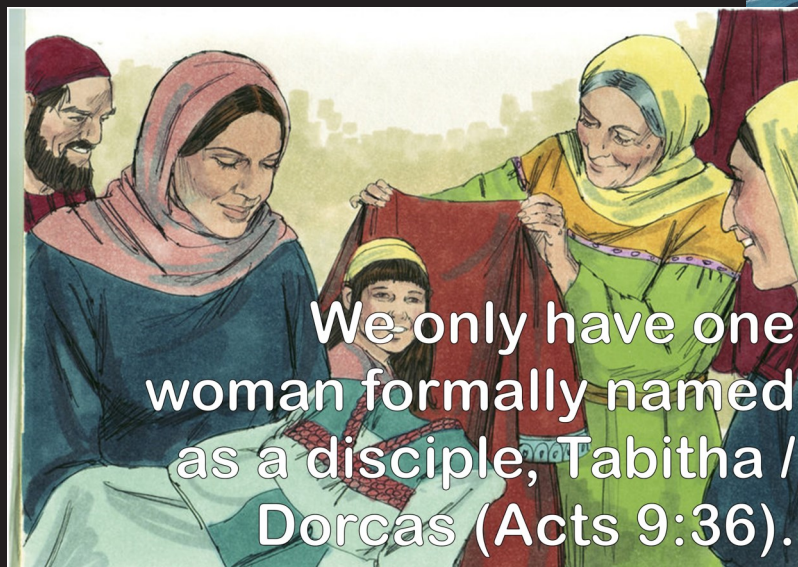
John's gospel keeps it
simple, and just calls
them 'the Twelve'.
Twelve tribes of Israel,
so twelve disciples.



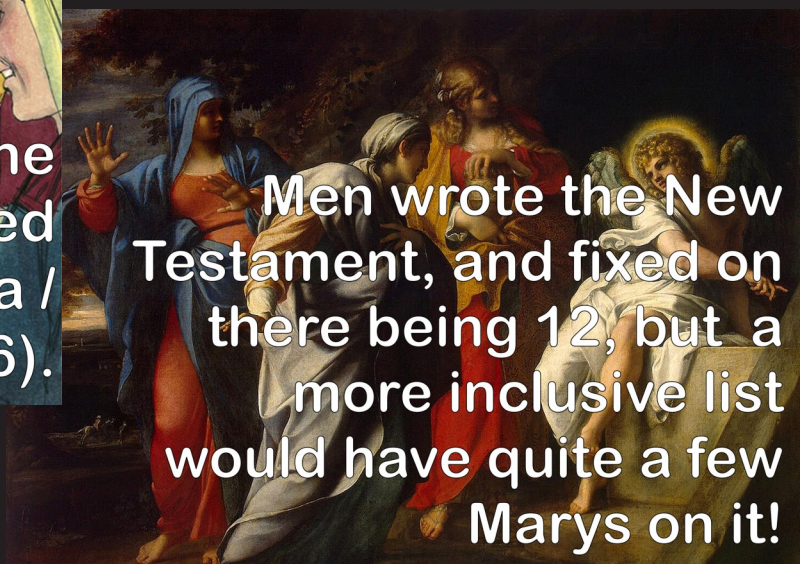
Judas Iscariot is
replaced by Matthias.



Post-Easter they become
apostles and Paul,
Barnabas, Andronicus,
Junia, Silas, Timothy and
Apollas are added.



We only have one
woman formally named
as a disciple, Tabitha /
Dorcas (Acts 9:36).



Men wrote the New
Testament, and fixed on
there being 12, but a
more inclusive list
would have quite a few
Marys on it!