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ARTICLES

REVIEWS

AUTISM AND LITURGY

A special request regarding a research project on autism and liturgy

Dr Léon van Ommen needs your help for a research project on autism and liturgy.

Léon is a lecturer at the University of Aberdeen, a member of St Ninian's Church (Aberdeen) and a member of the Liturgy Committee of the Faith and Order Board.

Léon is conducting a research project on autism and liturgy. He is looking for participants. If you (self-)identify as autistic/on the autism spectrum and are willing to share your experience of worship and liturgy, please get in touch with him at leon.vanommen@abdn.ac.uk. People anywhere on the autism spectrum, including non-verbal, and of all ages, are welcome to join.

The project is based at the Centre for the Study of Autism and Christian Community, at the University of Aberdeen. Ethical permission has been obtained from the University. Please email Léon for more information, he would love to hear from you.

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Theology and the Safeguarding Revolution

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Any church website you care to visit these days will prominently display a link to what that church is doing about safeguarding, an issue that has assumed a remarkably large role in the church's self-presentation and self-consciousness. It has permeated priests' understanding of their roles and challenged vestries' understanding of their responsibilities. It is likely to be a major factor shaping any strategy for outreach. The articles gathered here under the title 'Safety and Salvation' come from a number of different angles to ask why this is the case, and in what ways it should and should not be the case. Because these angles of approach are varied, and yet certainly do not cover all possible approaches, the aim of this introductory article is to locate them within a broader overview.

It should not be necessary to defend the discussion of this topic, though in some quarters a defence seems to be needed. It is an essential aspect of what 'taking safeguarding seriously' means for the church. Theology aims, *inter alia,* to give articulateness and clarity to the church's practice, to account for it in the light of the Gospel and the tradition, to give continuity and integrity to the church's understanding of itself. The precautionary practices, attitudes and reactions that belong with the project of safeguarding need to be set in this light if they are to be integrated into the church's life and mission. Then they will be an occasion of grace, not merely of law. If the theological task is neglected, on the other hand, they will be a cuckoo's egg in the nest, the bridgehead for a culture of condemnation and tactical damage limitation. Can we learn to implement the mandate of 'safety' while continuing to celebrate 'salvation'? If we are prepared to think more deeply about both, we can. The Church of England has made a good beginning with two thoughtful publications by its Faith and Order Commission, *The Gospel, Sexual Abuse and the Church* and *Forgiveness and Reconciliation in the Aftermath of Abuse;*[1] the Methodist Church of Great Britain is also currently awaiting a theological report. We are fortunate to have contributors to this issue who have been involved in work on those

[1] Church of England Faith and Order Commission, *The Gospel, Sexual Abuse and the Church: A Theological Resource for the Local Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2016); *Forgiveness and Reconciliation in the Aftermath of Abuse* (London: Church House Publishing, 2017).

documents, but a journal offers a freer context in which to explore the issues with no need to speak *ex cathedra.* So, the aim of this issue is simply to allow a second word on the topic which is neither the first nor the last. Needless to say, not everything said by one author will command the assent of the others, nor of the editors. That is the essence of a useful exchange of ideas.

Disclosures and procedures

The discoveries that made the safeguarding initiative necessary have been very painful ones, which have put sharp moral questions both to the church and the civilization. It is of importance first of all to take the measure of them, a task tackled by **Ann Loades** CBE in a personal retrospective review of some of the more distressing cases affecting (mainly) the British churches in the last thirty years. A survey of the experience of the global church over that period would make longer and more gruelling reading, as would a survey of the British experience as a whole, secular as well as ecclesiastical. On the broadest scale we may speak of a psychological paroxysm, which thrust into the public realm a set of fantasies connecting sex, power and cruelty — as though the sump of private imagination, the residue of impulses rejected by conscious judgment, had sprung a leak and bypassed the disciplines of conscious action to spill into a public world that had no way of interpreting it. The ordinary commonsense judgments that sustain public enquiry were subjected to extraordinary strain: facts were wrongly dismissed as imaginations, imaginations wrongly accepted as facts. In understanding the bewildering course that events have taken on these islands in particular, it is worth recalling how the discrediting of multiple-abuse allegations in Cleveland (1987) and Orkney (1991) imprinted on the public mind a presumption that mass hysteria and over-zealous officialdom was likely to be a major factor, a presumption that it took the delayed explosion of the Saville case in 2012 to turn on its head, substituting the opposite presumption that officialdom was all too sluggish and inattentive to the complaints of victims.

The church has certainly not been isolated in its experiences, which, indeed, constitute only a few eddies in a much larger flood. But that is no reason not to look at the church's reactions to it as a topic of special concern, and to ask precisely what they tell us about the state of the church as a whole. And here we can only be struck by the recurrence of one feature: the initial desire of church leaders to handle situations 'pastorally', through personal understandings rather than documented procedures, which too often meant handling them inadequately or not at all. Well-meaning pastors who proved to be out of their depth, as we were all out of our depth, have taken so much public criticism that we may often worry whether they are being made scapegoats for the sins of offenders. But it is right, at any rate, that what

should chiefly concern members of the church is not the question of relative innocence or guilt, but the disciplines of common life most obviously in need of strengthening. And we need to be clear that when bishops and other pastors reacted weakly to the first cases of abuse to cross their paths, it was not merely a matter of self-protectiveness, typical of all institutions. It arose from the prevailing expectations of episcopacy that had sentimentalized the idea of Christian leadership. The universal demand for a 'father in God' to comfort and support the troubled clergy, not a figure of authority to uphold the faith and order of the church, was bound to produce precisely the mistakes that were made. A well-formed ecclesiology needs at its heart the dynamic interplay of the inner and the outer form of the church. A well-conceived church leadership needs to serve both.

The experience of the church has, of course, been of more than one kind: on the one hand, power abused and oversight neglected, on the other an over-compensating eagerness to pronounce judgment. The irony with which Paul describes the Corinthians' belated discovery of a need for discipline finds many targets among us: 'What eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment!' (II Corinthians 7. 11). **David Jasper** explores one such case, which has additional complicating factors: one (by no means unique) of being 'historical' and involving allegations made against a dead pastor; the other (unique) of calling into question the formal evaluation of someone judged worthy of liturgical commemoration. Yet the problems raised by the Bishop George Bell case are essentially those presented by any conception of justice that prioritizes accusation over defence and the appearance of being active over patient enquiry. There is a logic of adversarial justice which we often wish to deny: a plaintiff cannot receive justice unless the defendant receives justice at the same time. If both are not possible, neither is possible. Until recently the peculiar problems of historic cases was held to exclude from adjudication any case that had lain too long unheard to allow of sufficient investigation. The relaxation of this restraint originated not with sexual offences but with the political pressure to pursue surviving Nazi war criminals to the grave. Having begun, however, the relaxation moved apace, and gained increasing speed from the growing interest of the law in recognizing institutional responsibilities for crimes and torts committed by their officers, even after a complete change in personnel. So, the Bell case arose on a side wind, from an enquiry into liabilities of the Diocese of Chichester. We are now well past the point where such enquiries can be avoided *in toto,* but the lesson may be learned that they need very special handling. It would be a wise administrative move, at least, to reserve to provincial church authorities enquiries into the conduct of retired or dead clergy or lay employees.

Courts and judicial enquiries were a major feature of the church's past and will apparently be a feature of its future. There is, however, another institutional point to emphasize, especially in view of the popular recourse to the accusation of a 'cover-up', which suggests a hierarchical organization in which senior management protect an institution's reputation by not responding decisively to the misconduct of employees. The structures of the Anglican churches in general and in particular of the Church of England (which figures in some of these narratives) are not of this form. Evolved to ensure the freedom of the Gospel rather than tight management, they have tended to set limits on the executive and judicial powers of bishops. As recently as 2003 the provisions of the new Clergy Discipline Measure aroused extensive protest among the clergy.[2] There is, then, a particular reason why bishops may have failed to act effectively, which is that they lacked the authority to do so. The assumption that somewhere at the top is a single decision-maker who can and should sort things out is an easy one for journalists to make; theologians must be more aware of the labyrinthine and often unmanageable character of the 'diffused authority' on which Anglican churches have, and not always wrongly, prided themselves.

Which is why the question of the adequacy of procedures is itself of such importance. How well provided is the Scottish Episcopal Church, even now, with procedures of enquiry? It is a question to be asked, and if possible, answered. We must expect these to be run and organized with the discrimination that justice requires, which is part of what is meant by the church being an institution in the public world. But it is not *merely* an institution, and caring more about being an efficient institution than about discharging its apostolic commission is a temptation against which it cannot be too much on guard. An apostolic ministry, however much institutional authority it may need and claim along its way, can never *terminate* in the act of judgment. St Paul models the church leader as one who is prepared to judge as required but is also conscious of being subject to *divine* judgment, and therefore perpetually engaged in *self*-judgment. An ecclesiology that understands the apostolicity of the church will know that the church must follow him. **Jeremy Worthen,** accordingly, reflects on the meaning we can give to an act of repentance on the part of the church, and the conditions for responsible use of that idea. Drawing on ecumenical reflection he takes us into the paradox of the church that is in its nature at once holy and sinful. Precisely because it is so, it will have to see repentance not simply as a way of dealing with failure in its calling, but as part of the calling to holiness itself. The church's failures make repentance necessary, and the church's indefectible apostolic witness makes repentance an act of witness to the

[2] *Clergy Disciple Measure 2003* [accessed 26 February 2021].

intervention of the grace of God. Balthasar once wrote memorably of the image of the institutional church as that of St Peter crucified upside down.[3] In recent years we have seen enough bishops in that lamentable position to remember that a crucifixion is the archetype of all grace and witness, and that St Peter may reveal the reality of the church in his humiliation even more, perhaps, than in his exercise of rule.

Salvation and conversion

Ecclesiology is one important aspect of the situation to get right. Together with it goes soteriology. And if ecclesiology is tilted towards cozy, family models, something will certainly be wrong with the salvation such a church sets out to proclaim. 'Salvation' and 'safety' translate the one New Testament Greek word, *soteria.* If it is the case, as is said in *The Gospel, Sexual Abuse and the Church* that 'the household of God evokes stability, warmth, safety […]', we have to ask whether that is an adequate construal of *soteria* and what alternative emphases we might find evoked by speaking of 'the city of God', which unlike the household is said to spread its 'walls sublime' both 'broad and far'. [4] The conception of the church as a city may give us a less sentimental picture and make better sense of an internal discipline that prevents members preying on members. But what relation does either of these conceptions have to the ultimate reference of *soteria,* the safety of divine grace in God's gift of his own presence? There is something rightly counter-intuitive to Christian minds in thinking of salvation in terms of personal safety or practical peace of mind. The New Testament points to the *risks* of faith, its exposure to 'affliction' of various kinds, which not even in the New Testament excludes affliction caused by some Christians to others. There is certainly an *analogy* between salvation and safety: the offering of safety may be a witness to salvation. Paul let down by a basket from the walls of Damascus is no less an apostle for having been rescued from harm! But

[3] Hans Urs von Balthasar, Seeing the Lord, vol. 1 in *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, trans. by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), pp. 566–67.

[4] Samuel Johnson's popular hymn 'City of God' hardly needs identifying. The other quotation is from *The Gospel*, p. 31. The homely bias in the ecclesiology of that document is strikingly illustrated by its referencing of the phrase 'household of God' not by either of the two New Testament texts where that phrase actually occurs, but with Ephesians 2. 22, 'a dwelling-place of God in the Spirit', where the image is clearly not that of a household but a temple. The family model has apparently taken over the imagination of the church to the point where other apostolic views are lost sight of.

the way in which that analogy is described may be all-important. The two ideas cannot simply be equated.

Nicola Price-Tebbutt takes this question further, drawing on the 'connexional' understanding of the Methodist tradition to explore the dialectic between the church as a 'safe place' and grace as free and open to all. Since grace involves the gift of righteousness to the unrighteous, it is foundational to the 'grammar' of Christian existence that righteousness and unrighteousness are not binary alternatives, but united in all self-aware moral experience. Yet once the church takes on the form of quasi-judicial inquisition, how can the conceptual unity be prevented from falling apart? In the safeguarding context we talk of 'victims' and 'offenders', and rarely pause to think of them as being *the same people*. We might ponder more deeply the well-observed fact that many who emerge as predators and aggressors were originally victims. An enquiry, however, has to deal with *this* case *now,* and that imposes a certain priority of relevance among the facts and a certain procedural discipline to restrain the effect of pre-understandings. But not only must justice be done; so (and they are always bound up together) must mercy. And Price-Tebbutt's proposal, challenging in the context of the tradition and not least her own tradition, is that there is a priority to be observed here also. As it used to be said that the church has a 'preferential option for the poor', so, she suggests, a 'welcome to those who have suffered abuse' must come first. This proposal needs careful thought. And one way of thinking about it is to contrast it with a proposal that points in the opposite direction, that of the church's long penitential tradition, the goal of which was to give first place to helping those with horrific stains on their consciences in leading them back to the clarity and beauty of holiness.

In contrasting the two proposals, ancient and modern, we need not suppose that they disagree that the offender is in a worse position, in an important moral sense, than the victim, that the stain on the conscience of great wrongdoing is deeper and more destructive than anything that can be attributed to the state of the victim. Yet moderns, with modern psychology to instruct them, are much more likely to be aware of how the experience of being abused *resembles* the experience of guilt, especially in the case of sexual abuse with its legacy of feeling 'soiled' and 'valueless', even 'accused' — of being paradoxically forced, in fact, into the moral space of the offender. We have rediscovered the potency of persistent shame without actual guilt. We could even talk, by an extended analogy, of a kind of 'conversion' of the victim from the self-hating states of mind typically produced by the abuse. This unhappy condition is often framed in the language of a broken 'identity', a terminology that aims to cover much ground, perhaps too much, but has particular usefulness in naming the effects on children or vulnerable adults of being subjected to the exercise of exploitative and domineering power. It

can help us re-envisage what used to be expressed in terms of the health of the 'soul', a self-completeness capable of happy self-differentiation from, and so of autonomous welcome to, the other. And Christian understanding has an important contribution to make: 'identity' springs from positive 'identification'. Two acts of identification, in particular, are central to the recovery of a whole identity: the identification of God with an offending, soiled mankind, and the identification of the soiled believer with the unsoiled Christ. Theology should be the guardian of an important, if paradoxical, psychological truth: it is not enough to conceive the recovery of identity as *making good* something that has gone missing or been damaged. It needs to be re-generated out of wholly positive relations that enable identification.

A second difference between the two proposals is that moderns do not believe in Natural Law, or if they do, do not believe that others believe in it. A social context seen as amoral makes it appear essential that wicked acts should be constantly declared to be wicked acts, innocent victims constantly declared to be innocent victims. Judgment seems always threatened by a pervasive amoralist nihilism, and so in need of constant reassertion; the point is never reached at which the moral relations can be taken as read and the *next question* asked, which is how the broken pieces may be picked up and put together again. Such moralism, which always accompanies amoralism, can hardly bypass the church. Even though Christians declare that judgment is, in its most important sense, already passed, achieved once and for all upon the cross of Christ, the church can hardly forget a cultural context in which even its strongest announcements of divine forgiveness and newness of life are dissolved into emptiness by the sheer indifference of nihilism. And so, the church wants to be *seen* on the side of the victim, always concerned that the distinction between innocence and guilt should not simply be wiped out of the cultural memory.

And there is a third difference, which is a loss of confidence in the analogy between moral regeneration and healing. The sometimes-ferocious disciplines that the ancients liked to impose upon offenders were all understood in quasi-medical terms. The modern church professes no such medicine. Grace is understood as a mystery of divine freedom, not a power in the possession of the church to be deployed as necessary to achieve predictable effects. On the whole this is a theological gain; Jesus's remark to the disciples who could not expel the demon is a warning to be kept in mind. But a modest hesitation to claim too much in regard to the conversion of sinners may sometimes turn into a sheer reluctance to enter that territory at all. The very language that refers to victims as 'survivors', as though talking of a virus or a flood rather than a human act, helps make the offender disappear from view together with his or her moral needs.

Here there is a special value in **Mark Elliott's** historical survey of the ways in which the church has sought to be a community of healing for the repentant sinner. Not only patristic sources, but modern, too, are rich in discussions of atonement, sanctification and their personal appropriation. That repentance can be obscure and elusive, that even sincerely meant resolve can be fragile, that fully acknowledging that it is I who have done what I have done may be a lifelong task and that conforming myself to the new humanity in Christ may require constant repetition, these are not realities that came to light only yesterday. Churches with cenobitic traditions may perhaps have an advantage in this ministry: the penitent living under the eye of the community can be sustained in his or her conversion by the continually supportive presence and routine of a disciplined life. But the church's ancient wisdom in overcoming sin cannot be handed over to one specialized form of life; it must remain alive and available to all forms of worshipping community. And to address the question of the presence of the offender within the church, should we not also re-examine the patristic institution of *public* penance, with the special visibility that it accorded penitents in the church at worship?

With the recognition that there is a Gospel both for offenders and for victims there may be a further recognition, that in dealing adequately with the one we may, for the time being, be precluded from dealing adequately with the other. There may be such a thing as a *vocational moment* to listen to those who have suffered abuse, rather than to those who have performed it, even though that moment may pass and be replaced by its opposite. For both groups may properly seek an *undivided attention.* It is often and rightly said that traumatized victims need above all a long time and a supportive context for the slow process of recovery and healing. 'Accompanying' a victim on the long journey to achieving a just view of the wrong endured, may undoubtedly require the church to be 'quick to hear, slow to speak'. But without trying to force premature closure, how can the goal still be kept in view? And how can we recognize when such accompanying demands questioning as well as listening, working *with* the sufferer to achieve a deeper truthfulness and completeness in self-narration? For if everything in the church's relation to the victim is 'listening', the very listening may become a prison in which the victim is trapped. There is much to learn from the discussion of 'gradualism' within Roman Catholic theology of the 1970s and 1980s, which was very much concerned with getting the balance of pastoral ends and pastoral means right.[5]

[5] See Alain You, *La Loi de Gradualité: une Nouveauté en Morale?* (Paris: Le Sycomore, 1991).

Church and state

In conclusion, one last area of reflection ought not to go unnoticed, though it has not been explored in these essays. Much of what the church says about safeguarding is coyly reluctant to admit that its initiatives have originated anywhere but in its own newly won self-critical knowledge. In fact, the forms in which safeguarding guidance is framed are closely dictated by law and government regulation. The fact that this is so raises the old question of the two realms, and of how the church can think of itself as self-governing in evangelical freedom while at the same time subject to appropriate exercises of authority in a political society. The Anglican tradition has been very nuanced on that point, the formative factor having been the dual role of the bishops of the Reformation era, on the one hand, as officers of the *imperium in sacris* of the monarch, and on the other, as sacramental ministers of the Gospel. In principle there is no need for Anglicans to be shy in admitting the secular origins of safeguarding, nor to doubt the benefit, in general terms, of the state's requirements. But that only leaves the more difficult question: how can these legal norms of protection become vessels of grace in their implementation? How can the perpetual 'watching one's back' that the juridical style of government imposes be converted in the life of the church to reflect a community of grace and forgiveness? A comprehensive answer to that question will have to wait, no doubt, upon the accumulation of much experience still to be won, but it is not too early to probe the question.

For instance, the New Testament would like us to cultivate an *innocence* within the church, an occupation of the mind with good projects and good reactions, an unreadiness to entertain evil: 'Think on these things,' it tells us (Philippians 4. 8); and 'Sexual immorality, impurity and covetousness must not even be named among you' (Ephesians 5. 3). In response to the crisis all advice is in the opposite direction: to be vigilant, ready to suspect evil, scanning the body of the faithful for signs of grooming, never underestimating the 'determination and duplicity' of those who pray with us, and, if scandal is brought to us, 'ready to respond' — but *not* by telling the gossiper to mind his or her own business! This is a proposal for a significant moral rebalancing, and we should not plunge into it without trying to clarify how the virtues of innocence and trust may be preserved, even indirectly, in circumstances of diffused suspicion, or 'respectful uncertainty'. Christian casuistry has in the past learned something of how to insist on the virtues of charity even in armed conflict, on truthfulness even in politics, on generosity even in complicated financial transactions. There is a wisdom to be acquired, too, about the virtue of reluctance to think evil even in a setting that requires constant alertness to danger signals. The experience of believers under regimes of terror where nobody's good

intentions could be taken for granted will help us think about the situation.[6] Or, to take a question that is both similar and different, how can the church, which for two or three generations has been celebrating the end of clericalism, satisfy the expectation that all occasions of meeting and involvement will in some way be 'managed' by a priest? The task of safeguarding presents the obvious temptation of redefining the expectations and priorities of the priesthood away from pastoral support and proclamatory activity. Diocesan headquarters will no doubt find ways of rewarding clergy who keep the paper trail up to date. There will be special wisdom to be acquired about how to resist the temptation while doing what the situation requires.

The topics discussed in this collection of essays are, it is obvious, only a small sample of those that the new safeguarding practices raise. This introduction has tried to gesture in the direction of others that surround them, and in its turn will only have succeeded in picking out a sample. There is much theological work to be done drawing on the Spirit's convictions of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16. 8). The authors will be content if they encourage others to think further and more clearly.

[6] And to start with, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's prison-essay, 'After Ten Years', in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. by E. Bethge (enlarged edition, New York: Macmillan, 1972) pp. 1–17, esp. pp. 16–17: 'We have been silent witnesses of evil deeds; we have been drenched by many storms; we have learnt the arts of equivocation and pretence; experience has made us suspicious of others and kept us from being truthful and open […] Are we still of any use? […] Will our inward power of resistance be strong enough […] for us to find our way back to simplicity and straightforwardness?'

The Revelation of Abuse: Some Personal Reflections

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Contemporary Christians cannot but be aware of the problem of sexual abuse and its devastating impact on adults and children alike, far more widely than will ever have been thought possible half a century ago. My own interest in the topic arose indirectly and so this article reflects that fact, in not being a systematic exploration of the subject, but rather a series of personal reflections, spread across three main areas.

Abuse of position

My first encounter with this topic was through being invited to address the first national conference for Christian Survivors of Sexual Abuse in York in 1993: 'A Climate of Oppression: Is that all?'. This occasion turned out to be a meeting of women who had been abused in one way or another by clergy (from any and all ecclesial groups).

On reflection, of course, one might well query whether a 'conference' was an appropriate venue to share experiences of 'abuse' in their many possible forms, but in their time, what other options did those who deemed themselves to be 'victims'/'survivors' have? How were they to consider whether they had inadvertently prompted what they experienced as accidental or as deliberate abuse? Or how to think whether 'pastoral' gifts and graces of empathy, sympathy and the capacity to listen had been misused or misdirected or misunderstood? How to raise such issues with the alleged 'abuser' who may or may not have apologized, denied any intention to 'abuse', denied what anyone in their right mind would have recognized as abuse? Would such a person have pleaded that the matter go no further, not be spoken of to anyone else? Or if such an attempt had been made, did the response compound the 'abuse' by advice not to make a fuss, the denial of what had supposedly taken place, and above all the recommendation to change one's possibly provocative or needy behaviour, and learn to avoid possible occasions of abuse (e.g., private conversation— so much for trust and confidentiality).

Much might depend on being taken seriously by friends if not by the representatives of the relevant institution, the latter gradually and painfully coming to acknowledge that 'abuse' does occur, though with not the remotest idea how to avoid its occurrence, let alone how to respond

appropriately to complaints and allegations at that time. Whilst no one is helped by the arrogance of hindsight, learning from the shreds of memory of the past can be salutary, as well as extraordinarily difficult for an institution. Institutions as well as particular individuals, however, will need to face the hazard that the retelling of apparent 'memories' may have rendered them as 'true' for the teller, whilst if they come to the realization that they are nothing of the kind, then having to find the courage to endure the 'dissonance' between memory and 'evidence' and admit the consequences. This point has also required 'therapists' to distinguish 'belief' without evidence from 'belief' with evidence, whilst in both instances seeking to 'understand' why someone is portraying their life in a particular way.[1]

In trying to come to terms with what has happened and is happening, I was particularly struck by events surrounding the conduct of the American Mennonite theologian, John Howard Yoder, not least in how his own powerful advocacy of strategies of peace in his writing stood in such sharp contrast with what was happening in his own life.[2] This example is valuable because it draws attention to the fact that the problems facing the Church of England and other Anglican churches including the Scottish Episcopal Church are to be found elsewhere in 'Anglophone' culture and that attending to an example of abuse at a distance, in a different context, alerts us to what to look for in problems close to us 'at home'. So, in particular, points to note from discussion of his behaviour include the observation by a sociologist that 'the moral weight of religious traditions often renders believers vulnerable to leaders' abuses', but also renders believers defensive of those they revere, such that they either deny that the abuse occurred or blame the victims for bringing the problem to public attention.[3] It has also been claimed that any 'elite' is likely to rally round one of their number because an attack on one of them is experienced as an attack on them all. They will

[1] See Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson, *Mistakes were made (but not by me)* (2007; New York: Mariner Books, 2015), pp. 88–163.

[2] Rachel Waltner Goossen, '"Defanging the Beast": Mennonite Responses to John Howard Yoder's Sexual Abuse', *Mennonite Quarterly Review,* 89 (2015), 7–80. The first page provides JHY's own list of the 'continuum of activities in which he and a number of women had engaged'; Isaac Samuel Villegas, 'The Ecclesial Ethics of John Howard Yoder's Abuse', *Modern Theology*, 37.1 (2021), 191–214. Another very different example is Robert Blair Kaiser, *Clerical Error: A True Story* (New York and London: Continuum, 2003).

[3] Anson Snape, quoted in Goossen, 'Defanging the Beast', p. 10.

then protect the offender either by denying the alleged offence or find the person another place in which they can continue to exercise their power.[4]

Yoder, after all, married and with six children, was a most distinguished theologian widely read outside the Mennonite Brethren, shrewd in appealing to women on the grounds that he valued their intellect and collaboration ('grooming' behaviour appropriate to women on a university level campus, not least in the study of theology). Perhaps to Yoder's advantage in his era and culture, the politician Henry Kissinger was quoted widely for saying, 'Power is the ultimate aphrodisiac', and Yoder (like others as we shall see) employed variants of power play in exercising clout.[5] It was also an era in which both ecclesial and non-ecclesial institutions were struggling with insights from a range of disciplines to address sexual abuse, and why some women were able to resist Yoder and others were not. Whether ecclesial institutions have caught up with such insights remains an open question, and it could hardly be expected of those endeavouring to negotiate with Yoder.

In Yoder's case his theological expertise enabled him to argue that he was perfecting insights from his reading of Paul and Jesus, and his own phrase, 'defanging the beast' was intended to mean his overcoming of a woman's fear of sexual relations. How he came to suppose that women feared sexual relationships is unclear. One might speculate that this was a conclusion he drew from the very good sense some of them had to decline advances whether from him or from other predators, as well as their knowledge of his being married, and with even a sense of loyalty to his wife and family whether or not they were personally acquainted with them. In the twenty-year attempt by his church until his death in 1997 to bring him to book as it were, he was adept at arguing that since the women who complained about his behaviour had not been brought forward by his accusers in person to testify against him, in accordance with his interpretation of 'reconciliation' as in Matthew 18. 15–17, neither his behaviour nor what he was advocating could be evaluated. As times changed, given credibility and support, some women were able at least to play their part in bringing him to book whether in person or in print. Depending on the jurisdiction, whether an appearance in person is bearable given the adversarial practice of some court rooms would be a matter for serious consideration, since not everyone is capable of enduring examination by a skilled barrister acting on behalf of someone accused. It is, however, essential that an accused person be deemed to be innocent unless proven to be guilty, and quite rightly provided with legal defence by someone who has

[4] Goossen, 'Defanging the Beast', p. 18.

[5] Ibid., p. 27.

a 'duty of care' for her or him. This one example has resulted in more discussion and analysis by the Mennonite Brethren than some members of the Church of England had experienced until times at last began to change. Yoder at least had to face his critics, attempting to outmanoeuvre them by arguing that moves towards his 'reconciliation' with the church could not proceed without his agreement to the process, and not everyone would agree that reconciliation could mean his return to whatever position in the Brethren he had been occupying. The Mennonite Brethren at least attempted to come to terms with his abusive behaviour, but their efforts illustrate the point that whereas some Christians sometimes misguidedly suppose that procedures in the church will always be easier than in a court of law, and that accordingly some form of reconciliation should be attempted in face-to-face contact, such hope may well be defeated by an abuser. And on the other side it needs to be recognized that the abused may well fear that such attempts will inevitably lead to their manipulation by the abuser. Problems of procedure abound whether in 'church' or 'court' and attention needs to be given to justice to all concerned. Also, there is the difficulty that any third-party present may well have their own agenda of minimizing scandal by ensuring a 'positive' outcome, as may well have been the hope in the churches in the UK and elsewhere. Unfortunately, such efforts at 'reconciliation' have now precipitated the scandal of appearing to prioritise the 'reputation' of the institution rather than the well-being of the abused, as well as tackling what is to be done about the future of the abuser, including their removal from their position of trust. A later example will illustrate one partial resolution of a comparable problem.

Domestic abuse

Turning to the UK, there is insight into abuse available.[6] Coercive control may include intimidation, degradation, isolation and control with the threat of physical violence, involve financial dealings, harassment, stalking, and abuse via telephone or social media. The available statistics for the UK show that most deaths result from abuse by a partner or ex-partner, some others by sons, stepsons or grandsons.[7] The figures are consistent year on year, the

[6] For example, Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline, which helpfully lists the range of behaviour which counts as 'abuse', such as controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and/or violent behaviour (including sexual violence) perpetrated by a partner or ex-partner, at any stage within or after a relationship has ended.

[7] On women killing their abusers, see Rachel Louise Snyder, *No Visible Bruises: what we don't know about domestic violence can kill us* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

perpetrators disproportionately male. Given the intolerable conditions in which so many citizens in the UK live and work, through no fault of their own, fatalities especially in 'lockdown' will no doubt occur. As in other matters, any perpetrator serious about changing their behaviour has to accept full responsibility for what they have done by way of the unacceptable exercise of power, which may include the 'unintended' but profoundly traumatic experience of children whether or not directly hurt. To its utter discredit, the UK is one of the few European countries which have never ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Scotland, with its remarkable ecumenical inheritance, to its credit passed The Children (Equal Protection from Assault) Act 2019, which removed the 'reasonable chastisement defence' of earlier legislation, joining the Republic of Ireland and New Zealand (Sweden having banned assault on children in 1979). Since moving from England to a small village in Scotland in 2008 I have had numerous opportunities to speak with the older generation here, and impressions gained from these conversations have been confirmed by acting on a voluntary 'listening' post for two NHS surgeries in Dundee. What these encounters have revealed is that Scots of a certain age may readily recall from their schooldays what they refer to as 'the cruelty of their teachers', that is, being beaten with a ruler on the inside of an arm, and at home being hit about the head by their mother and given 'the belt' by their father. Leaving school at the earliest opportunity ('I was no good at school') coincided with escaping such manifestations of humiliation and intimidation, leaving home, finding some sort of apprenticeship or job, somewhere to live, sourcing food and making friends, signing on with a GP, managing domestic arrangements and so on. Scots of recent generations will both be free of such physical violence and have greater opportunities for adult maturity than many in the past, in which too many of the least advantaged were hardly expected to be suitable for 'further education', given the opportunities which have developed in Scotland in recent years.[8] Such significant political and social achievements may not mean that every expectation of how people behave to one another is readily agreed by everyone.

Thus, it is regrettable but necessary to have to say that whether or not a religious tradition or combination of religious traditions continues to

[8] The Scottish Government set up an Independent Care Review in 2019 which will report on actions still to be undertaken to extend support for children and young people who have experienced being 'in care' and who cannot rely on parental support but who can rely on assistance provided by the Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund.

thrive or fail, it may be characterized by the perpetuation of male dominance and its associated habits, notwithstanding the possibilities of the ordination for women ministers. In, of, and by itself that may have little effect in the short term At least, the institutional structures of churches may not simply mask but actually generate abuse of different kinds. Depending on one's reading of either Scripture and/or Christian tradition, and despite the significant changes in the legal and social standing of women in some societies in the last century and a half, biblical texts may yet be employed to reinforce the 'submission' of women to men ('headship' e.g., I Peter 3. 1–9) combined with recommendations to women to practise forbearance, meekness, forgiveness, self-sacrifice and attempts at reconciliation whatever the cost.[9] Quantifying such influence is of course very difficult but the characteristics noted may well be integral to the utter dependability and enhancement of any close and long-term relationship, now become possible, beyond the heterosexual pair-bonding sanctioned in the past. Yet they also possibly may combine all too easily with the deeply disturbing phenomenon made possible by the deployment of the internet connections which seek to perpetuate male supremacy and misogynistic extremism. This appears to originate and be sustained by heterosexual white men, as yet not clearly in focus by those organizations and governments which tackle terrorism, and which pose major threats to men themselves.[10] Whether we like it or not, efforts are being made in widely read non-theological publications which alert us to extremism which may have connections to elements of our traditions which we would seek to discard and eliminate.

To focus more closely on the possible resources of Christian tradition as now understood, and provided that we are prepared to draw on a multiplicity of disciplines, we may find means of release for boys from

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[9] See Ann Loades, *Feminist Theology: Voices from the Past* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2001), pp. 102–5 (FTVP hereafter). Other resources abound in the biblical text, however. See Elaine Storkey, *Women in a Patriarchal World: Twenty-Five Empowering Stories from the Bible* (London: SPCK, 2020). Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* (1984; Milton Park: Taylor & Francis, 2002) remains important for her case that what has been meant by 'reason' in the western tradition has in effect been formed by the exclusion of the 'feminine'. On the over-dominance of the 'head' out of harmony with 'hand' and 'heart', see David Goodhart, *Head, Hand, Heart: The Struggle for Dignity and Status in the 21st Century* (London: Allen Lane, 2020).

[10] Laura Bates, *Men Who Hate Women: From Incels to Pickup Artists, The Truth about Extreme Misogyny and How It Affects Us All* (London and New York: 2020), pp. 309–10.

finding an identity in 'hate', and who need the support not least of men who themselves refuse the expectations of certain modes of what it is to be male/masculine. Learning both that 'power is the energy of life that mobilizes us to fashion sustaining and empowering webs for living' and that 'resistance is an act of creative freedom and vitality' may well mark the progress needed to change the character of some harmful relationships between men themselves and others, whatever their 'gender' and 'intersectionality', and the material exists for discussion of what this could involve.[11]

The complexities in understanding and analysing such behaviour, however, could once more usefully focus on a specific example. Insofar as there may be a tendency to think that domestic abuse and violence are more likely to occur in the most disadvantaged households, it must be emphasized that this is an unwarranted assumption, as can be nicely illustrated from what happened to the daughter of two very distinguished sociologists of religion, David and Berenice Martin. Thus, to make the transition from the consideration of domestic abuse to child abuse one need only consider some of the features of 'intimidation' before we consider 'grooming'. An example of the former has recently been brought to attention by Jessica Martin,[12] but an account of what had happened to her was made available some time ago by her mother, sociologist Bernice Martin.[13] Whilst still working at her doctoral degree, Jessica had become wholly committed to a man who insisted that she never be free from his surveillance, except at work, so long as she was still fit to go to her work. She put up with being brow-beaten to avoid physical violence either to herself or her seven-year-old daughter, believing herself to be worthless and incapable of getting anything right. She

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[11] Herbert Anderson, *Jacob's Shadow: Christian Perspectives on Masculinity* (Louisville: Bridge Resources, 2002) pp. 152, 158 and especially pp. 47–59; Herbert Anderson, 'Between rhetoric and reality: women and men as equal partners in home, church, and the marketplace', in *Mutuality Matters: Family, Faith, and Just Love,* ed. by Herbert Anderson et al. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), pp. 67–82. Two relevant publications by the Church of England Faith and Order Commission are: *The Gospel, Sexual Abuse and the Church* (London: Church House, 2016) and *Forgiveness and Reconciliation in the Aftermath of Abuse* (London: Church House, 2017).

[12] Jessica Martin, *Holiness and Desire* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2020), pp. 151–53.

[13] Berenice Martin, 'Whose soul is it anyway? Domestic tyranny and the suffocated soul', in *On Losing the Soul: Essays in the Social Psychology of Religion,* ed. by R. K. Fenn and D. Capps (New York: State University of New York, 1994), pp. 69–96.

forgot how to drive, and even how to spell, part of her life since the age of four, more worrying even than the possibility of being seriously hurt or killed. 'I was developing a habit of daydreams in which my partner rescued me from his own violence, and I leaned on him gratefully for the rescue.'[14] She found herself with the energizing gift of a paradisal memory from her childhood, organized her escape, clutching her feverishly ill daughter and her doctoral-thesis notes, and fled to a friend who had noticed what was happening and had offered help. Such an account could well be kept in mind when we consider why a woman cannot always defend herself from abuse if her first concern is to protect a child, and her flight will depend on being able to reach a place of safety, not forgetting that the children of the household will not abandon the family's pets — a feature regularly overlooked though it is no trivial matter — not least when trying to comprehend the continued 'readability' of C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*.[15]

To conclude this section, however, it is important to note that with the development of 'trauma' theology, there are routes to recovery from the miseries of destructive and degrading events, such that the 'energy and sources of abundant life' may be recovered, as theologian Alistair McFadyen explains. His experience of work with the West Yorkshire Police and his understanding of the 'disorientation of subjectivity' that occurs with 'coercive control' enables him both to understand it as a phenomenon so deeply continuous with 'socially accepted, prevailing patterns of behaviour in relationship between males and females' that it can be difficult to identify, but at least it is now recognized in legislation.[16] Moreover, it is now possible to appreciate the extraordinary development of responses which free people in distress without years either of drug or of counselling therapies. It could well be of the first importance that those concerned with renegotiating relationships of any kind, whether with 'perpetrators' or those they have

[14] Martin, *Holiness,* p. 152.

[15] See Froma Walsh, 'Human-animal bonds I: The relational significance of companion animals', *Family Process*, 48 (2009) 462–80; and 'Human-animal bonds II: The role of pets in family systems and family therapy', *Family Process*, 48 (2009) 481–99.

[16] Alister McFadyen,'"I breathe him in with every breath I take": framing domestic victimization as trauma and coercive control in feminist trauma theologies', in *Feminist Trauma Theologies: Body, Scripture and Church in Critical Perspective*, ed. by Karen 0'Donnell and Katie Cross (London: SCM Press, 2020), pp. 80–111 (pp. 89–94).

harmed, at least take the trouble to comprehend new developments in this whole area.[17]

Abuse of the young

The precise form that the abuse of young people takes can vary substantially from context to context. My own initial introduction to the topic came as the result of being invited to deliver the John Coffin Memorial Lecture in the University of London Senate House in 1994, again accepting the topic offered for the lecture, which was 'Thinking about Child Sexual Abuse'.[18] I mention this and the lecture's date only to explain my bafflement as to why at the present time I see in correspondence in the *Church Times* claims that 'no one' thought there were problems about the sexual abuse of children until very recently, to which one can only reply, 'Who did not know, and why did they not know after a quarter of a century?

In 1982 it came to the attention of those responsible for running a longstanding series of Christian holidays for boys that over three years one of their volunteers, J. C. Smyth QC, had perpetrated, in private, a series of severe beatings of twenty-two young men, some of them aged 17, whom he had encountered through his volunteering. The original notes compiled from interviews conducted by the Rector of the Round Church in Cambridge have been made available on the internet and expose the abuser's skill in

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[17] Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Transformation of Trauma* (London: Penguin, 2014), which includes a third section on 'The Minds of Children'. See also Giles Lascelle, *Breakthrough: The Art of Surviving* (Rickmansworth: Instant Apostle, 2019).

[18] There was certainly knowledge of sexual abuse from the 1980s onwards, e.g. the *Report of the Inquiry into Child Abuse in Cleveland* (1987) and responses; and the Canadian Council of Catholic Bishops, *From Pain to Hope* 1992 (see FTVP pp. 150–153). Also, Stephen Burns, 'Liturgy after the Abuse', in *Vulnerability and Resilience: Body and Liberating Theologies,* ed. by Jione Havea (Lanham: Fortress Academic, 2020), pp. 173–85, which indicates that as luck would have it, I was the first academic theologian in the UK to take on this agenda (p. 173). As further for comparison with the present-day Church of England's efforts, see Patrick Parkinson, Kim Oates and Amanda Jayakody, 'Breaking the Long Silence: Reports of child sexual abuse in the Anglican Church of Australia', *Ecclesiology*, 6.2 (2010), 183–200, Christina Lledo Gomez, 'Grace and Disgraced: Child Sexual Abuse and the Holy Roman Catholic Australian Church' in *Theological and Hermeneutical Explorations from Australia: Horizons of Contextuality*, ed. by Jione Havea (Lanham: Lexington, 2021), pp. 71–82.

assuming the role of a spiritual authority by weaving his practices together with pietistic and moralistic reflection. They also reveal the appalled bewilderment with which a group of pastors with experience in young people's work confronted a phenomenon of this kind for the first time.[19] In severing their connexions they acted decisively, but what strikes us more now is their lack of decisiveness in resolving to place what was obviously a criminal matter in the hands of the police. (Though they were not the only ones who might have done this, they might be thought to have had a special duty, given the view they had of the scope of the affair.) By the time a newly restructured management brought the file to the police's attention, Smyth had removed himself to Zimbabwe, where amongst other things he had set up holiday camps for boys, and it is reported that one youth died there from his attentions. Within the institutional structures and expectations of the times one can understand the original hesitations about how to proceed; one can also understand why the Church of England (with no institutional connection) took another quarter-century to become aware of the affair and set up a review of the case as recently as 2019, a year after Smyth's death. Such concessions do nothing to weaken the obvious conclusion: the structures and expectations were inadequate to the challenge.

The major 'case' which to some degree precipitated serious consideration of the interplay between abuse and religious practice was more central to the church's operations and concerned Peter Ball. Having established a 'religious community' for young men which entailed 'obedience' as a condition of membership, vital in controlling their behaviour and response to him personally, he developed certain 'practices' which were supposed to be integral to progress in spirituality. His intelligence and charm and Franciscan mode of dress in a church relatively unfamiliar with 'religious orders' helped him to identify and target vulnerable young men, not least those exploring a vocation to ordination. Made a suffragan bishop in 1997 (Lewes in the Diocese of Chichester) and subsequently Bishop of Gloucester, he continued until, after investigation by the police, a decision was made in 1993 not to prosecute him. That decision followed consultations within the church at the very highest level.[20] Ball's later conviction in 2015 resulted in a prison sentence, from which he was released a little before his death in 2019. In January 2020 the BBC released

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[19] Search engines identify the 'Ruston report'. The document on display contains annotations to the Revd Mark Ruston's memorandum added by an unknown hand in 1993.

[20] This invites comparison with the efforts of the Mennonite Brethren to initiate an investigation into Yoder's behaviour, the details of which were published in 2015 (see above).

a programme entitled 'Exposed: The Church's Darkest Secret', which focussed on the concern of the lay couple who first realized that something was badly wrong with the under-age young man entrusted to live with Ball to explore his 'vocation', though it proved impossible for this couple to have their anxieties taken seriously. The young man eventually escaped to Australia, where he committed suicide just when the police were at last taking the facts of his abuse seriously. Evidence of his need of help had certainly not been lacking earlier.

Conclusion

What now? Clear indications of attention to problems of abuse are present in the publication of the Church of England's various contributions to a whole range of issues, most recently — for the widest possible readership — *Living in Love and Faith*, which not only includes attention to domestic abuse, conditions in which it is likely to increase (p. 85), abuse of children by children (p. 86), but also attention to abuse in 'deep roots in the church's institutional structures and culture' (p. 136), 'power and pain' (pp. 184–85), assumptions about the subordination of women, and marital oppression legitimized by 'divine authority' (pp. 194–95).[21] In respect of the church's possible response to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, given its poor record on protecting people from harm, ensuring sexual safety, upholding sexual consent, protection of vulnerable adults and its responses to domestic abuse, it would seem that much work must therefore continue to be accompanied by ongoing humility, scrutiny and repentance (p. 87). While the Scottish Episcopal Church does have 'safeguarding' procedures in place, it does need to be constantly on its guard, to ensure that these are enough. It must become impossible not to be informed about what constitutes 'abuse' of various kinds, and a process of 'restorative' justice clearly needs to be identified and followed in each and every instance in addition to clear and unambiguous acknowledgement of what problems lie beyond the competence of any possible 'church' tribunal but which must be turned over to the civil courts and those professionally trained and able to help all concerned in justice to all insofar as that is humanly possible. Some suggestions for work to be undertaken follow here.

To begin with, some concentrated attention is required on the point that 'obedience' is neither a cardinal nor a theological virtue to be required,

[21] *Living in Love and Faith: Christian Teaching and Learning about Identity, Sexuality, Relationships and Marriage* (London: Church House Publishing, 2020). A major source of information may be found on the website of Simon Hackett, Professor of Child Abuse and Neglect in the Department of Sociology, Durham University.

provided or sustained except in very carefully publicly identified and constantly evaluated times and places. Thus, the church needs an 'ecclesial ethics' of the kind being advanced by Anna Abram, akin to what has been learned from mainstream professional ethics. Broad areas to benefit could be governance and decision making: who should take decisions in future and how ought they to be taken; and meaningful engagement with its members with space for constructive criticism as a sign of moral maturity and mutual care. Thus, what might develop are genuine concern for 'human resources' and the moral education and formation of 'leaders'. Attitudes of entitlement, secrecy, the avoidance of transparency — all must disappear in a fundamental 'ecclesial moral inventory'.[22]

In addition, a prime objective must then be for the church to overcome its 'deficit of attention' to children, as expressed in its inattention to the rights of children as children, a problem now brought to explicit attention in Roman Catholic Social Teaching, not least in the vulnerability of children in the context of homelessness.[23] Then the effects of the availability of 'porn' online need to be understood, and that not only for understanding the way in which it can generate 'addiction' in anyone, including the clergy, but in the damage done to desire and intention by the viewing of sexualized images of

[22] Anna Abram, 'Ecclesial Ethics — a Way Forward?', an updated version of a paper presented at a meeting of the Association of Teachers of Moral theology (UK) 13 May 2019 [accessed 26 February 20121]. See also, Church of England's Faith and Order Commission, *Kingdom Calling* (London: Church House Publishing, 2020); Barbara Bilston, 'Confront the Failures of the Past', *Church Times*, 27 November 2020, p. 13.

[23] See e.g., Ethna Regan, *Theology and the Boundary Discourse of Human Rights* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010); Ethna Regan, 'The Barely Visible: The Child in Catholic Social Teaching', *Heythrop Journal,* 55 (2014), 1021–32; Ethna Regan, 'Catholic Social Teaching and Homelessness: The World Tribe of the Dispossessed', in *Journal of Vincentian Social Action,* 4.1 (2019), 23–33. I am profoundly grateful to Regan for her contributions to my writing in this and in other cases. Mary McAleese, *Children's Rights and Obligations in Canon Law: The Christening Contract,* Studies in Religion, Secular Beliefs and Human Rights 14 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2019). See also the European Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Article 24 on the rights of the child [accessed 26 February 2021].

children.[24] Attention must also be given to childhood policy in the UK,[25] and to material of central importance for understanding children from other non-theological sources.[26] There is also much to learn from contextual safeguarding, which requires not that the young should come to church, but that intervention and support be taken to where the young spend their time, involving all sorts of help from those who might not normally be thought of as being involved in 'safeguarding' work. Much can be learned from schools where groups of problem-solving teachers find solutions for difficult areas of discussion with pupils, not least involving parents rightly concerned about the emotional health of their children.[27] For the present it is hardly good news that Melissa Caslake (appointed as the first permanent director of safeguarding in the Church of England in April 2019) has already left to take up a role as Director of Children's Services for a Local Authority, and it is to be hoped that she has not done so because of resistance to the implementation of much-needed change to institutional structures and procedures.

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[24] Martin, *Holiness*, pp. 41–79. See also Jean Bethke Elshtain, 'Pornography Politics' in *Power Trips and Other Journeys: Essays in Feminism as Civic Discourse* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990) pp. 119–33. There is a proposal for a UK 'Online Harms Bill' to be in force by 2022.

[25] See the British Academy's Childhood Policy Programme, which is attempting to open conversation on this all-too-often neglected area of public policy. Three papers to begin with are: David Archard, 'How should we think about Childhood and Children?'; Kathy Sylva, 'Thriving in the 21st Century: the new science of early childhood'; Sarah Curtis, 'The "wider" influences on mental health in childhood and adolescence'; see also Ann Longfield, *Best Beginnings*.

[26] On close attention to babies and how they can assist in helping us see problems in a new light, see Liz Mckinnell, 'Philosophical Plumbing in the Twenty-First Century', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements*, 87: A Centenary Celebration: Anscombe, Foot, Midgley and Murdoch (July 2020), 221–33; Mary Midgley, *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature* (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester, 1978) on our inherited emotional constitution, with much to learn which is directly important for understanding children; and on children's play and aggression, Mary Midgley, *Wickedness: A Philosophical Essay* (London: Routledge, 1984), pp. 88–92.

[27] Bates, *Men*, pp. 319–21 & 342–44. In Scotland, see also Alan Gibbon, *Community Chaplaincy Listening for All Ages* (Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care, University of Glasgow) and the possibility of training as a 'listener', together with NSPCC Glasgow, Safeguarding 16 to 25-year-olds.

So far as theology is concerned, of vital importance is the attention now given to the 'creative vitality' and 'convivial enthusiasm' of children from the moment of their birth,[28] and in theological reflection, to Herbert Anderson's explorations of 'childness', that is, invaluable characteristics of children which are not limited to childhood.[29] The hope could well be both that 'church' becomes a 'sanctuary for childhood' and the transformation of our habits of largely excluding them from liturgical occasions, some contribution to music apart.[30] If not 'in plain sight' it is no wonder that they are so readily abused both in the church and beyond it. This is altogether a tall order, no doubt, but the future of churches depends upon its being given priority, given the predominance of what some liturgists refer to as 'sedimented churches' where it seems to have been long accepted not merely that children should be seen but not heard, but that they should neither be seen nor heard. The future needs to be one in which we have become able to think beyond 'abuse' to the celebration of the future in conviviality and companionship with one another in the human community, a possibility yet to be discernible even on the horizon.

[28] Colwyn Trevarthen, 'What young children give to our learning', in *The Child's Curriculum: Working with the Natural Values of Young Children*, ed. by Colwyn Trevarthen, Jonathan Delafield-Butt and Aline-Wendy Dunlop (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[29] Herbert Anderson and Susan B. W. Johnson, *A New Respect for Children and Families* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994), pp. 9–28.

[30] Herbert Anderson and Susan B. W. Johnson, 'A sanctuary for childhood in a culture of indifference', *Word and World*, 15.1 (1995), 32–39.

The Case of Bishop George Bell

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In the Christian year as celebrated in the Church of England, 3 October is dedicated to the remembrance of 'George Bell, Bishop of Chichester, Ecumenist, Peacemaker.' Bell died in 1958. He is still remembered in his diocese for his care and his gentleness. He was a mild man, shy and retiring, yet during the Second World War he had stood up in the House of Lords against the British government's policy of the blanket bombing of Germany.

> How can the War Cabinet fail to see that this progressive devastation of cities is threatening the roots of civilisation? How can they be blind to the harvest of even fiercer warring and desolation, even in this country, to which the present destruction will inevitably lead when the members of the War Cabinet have long passed to their rest? How can they fail to see that this is not the way to curb military aggression and end war?[1]

Undoubtedly this courageous position lost him preferment and appointment to the Archbishopric of Canterbury.

On 22 October 2015, a statement issued by the Church of England began with these words:

> The Bishop of Chichester has issued a formal apology following the settlement of a legal civil claim regarding sexual abuse against the Right Reverend George Bell, who was Bishop of Chichester from 1929 until his death on 3rd October 1958.
> The allegations against Bell date from the later 1940s and early 1950s and concern allegations of sexual offences against an individual who was at the time a young child.[2]

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[1] Hansard, February 1944, quoted in Andrew Chandler, *George Bell, Bishop of Chichester: Church, State, and Resistance in the Age of Dictatorship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), p. 118.

[2] Church of England, 'Statement on the Rt. Revd George Bell, 1883–1958' (22/10/2015) [accessed 26 February 2021].

The current Bishop of Chichester, Martin Warner, expressed his 'deep sorrow' regarding the case. The statement indicates that the matter had been previously reported in 1995 to the then Bishop of Chichester, Eric Kemp, but he did not report it to the police or 'so far as is known, investigate the matter further.' In 2015, a formal claim for compensation was settled following what was described in the statement as:

> A thorough pre-litigation process during which further investigations into the claim took place including the commissioning of expert independent reports. None of these reports found any reason to doubt the veracity of the claim.[3]

While the statement never actually expresses conviction of unequivocal guilt beyond these reports that found no reason to doubt the veracity of the claims made against Bell, the statement was enough to lead the national press to state, unequivocally, that George Bell *was* a paedophile. The newspapers pounced upon the story of a clergyman found out. *The Times* put it quite simply: 'Eminent bishop was paedophile, admits Church'.[4] The background to this extraordinary, and actually incorrect, statement was this. Following allegations that sexual offences had been committed by Bell in the late 1940s and early 1950s against a person described as, at the time, 'a young child', a group of people, assembled to investigate the matter as a Core Group within the Diocese of Chichester, reached the conclusion that an out-of-court settlement concerning the alleged sexual offences was appropriate. However, such was the careful wording of what has become known as the October Statement that an editorial in the *Church Times* on 4 December 2015 ambiguously commented that 'Bell now rests uneasily in some sort of moral limbo.'[5] Furthermore (and in spite of settlement money having been paid to the complainant, the investigation having apparently established the 'veracity of the claim'), on 28 January 2016, the Bishop of Durham told the House of Lords that if they 'read very carefully the statements that have been put out, they will see that there has been no declaration that we are convinced that this [abuse] took place'.[6] Clearly the national press had

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[3] Ibid.

[4] *The Times*, 'Eminent bishop was paedophile, admits Church', 23 October 2015 [accessed 26 February 2021].

[5] Quoted in Chandler, *George Bell, Bishop of Chichester*, p. x.

[6] See the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure — *Motion to Direct* in the House of Lords at 5:42 pm on 28 January 2016; see also Church

interpreted the statements otherwise, and it seemed that Bell was, in the public eye, guilty, even though the House of Lords was assured that the statements put out by the Church of England, after the investigation in the Diocese of Chichester, expressed no declaration of conviction of Bell's guilt.

Here is not the place to rehearse the full sorry story of the accusation against Bell. My own position in the matter is perfectly and publicly clear. A body of eminent Anglican clerics and academics, known as the George Bell Group fought, successfully, to clear the Bell's name. My own name is on their website indicating that I am of their opinion, without reservation.

An unsatisfactory diocesan enquiry in Chichester, on the basis of which the Church of England issued the October statement in 2015, effectively found Bell guilty of misbehaviour almost sixty years after his death, and in addition he was clearly named and vilified by his own church. I describe the diocesan enquiry by the Core Group as unsatisfactory not least because the law is clear that had Bell been arrested at the time of the alleged offence, the police would *not* have publicly named him — on the fundamental principle that a person is innocent until proven guilty. In Bell's case it was precisely the opposite — he was named and to all intents and purposes immediately found guilty when he was no longer able to speak for himself. He had been dead for more than sixty years. In his statement in October 2015, Warner, stated that 'we face with shame a story of abuse of a child,' insisting that 'the scrutiny of the allegation has been *thorough, objective and undertaken by people who command the respect of all parties*'.[7] But this was not the end of the story by any means.

Despite the defence of the Chichester diocesan investigation as 'long and careful,' there were a number of clear and puzzling deficiencies in its processes. Adrian Carey, who was Bell's chaplain between 1950 and 1952 was never contacted for a statement. It was his duty to answer the door of the Bishop's Palace and has stated that he finds it impossible to imagine how such abuse could have occurred without his knowledge and that he never saw a child in the Palace in the circumstances described. Bell's niece was alive and well in 2015 but died in late 2020, and was a visitor to the Palace from time to time in the period under discussion — and was never contacted. The list of omissions goes on. What is clear from the outset is that the initial enquiry did not systematically approach the issue of liability by addressing whether the claimant against Bell 'had discharged the civil burden of proof upon the balance of probability'. Lawyers know what that means, but when

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of England, 'Statement from Bishop Paul Butler on George Bell' (08/02/2016) [both accessed 26 February 2021].

[7] 'Church of England statement on the Rt Revd George Bell (1883–1958)' (italics added) [accessed 26 February 2021].

institutional fear and public appetite for scandal are strong factors, there seems little patience for the necessary verbal niceties of the law. They are there to protect all of us. Bell was, in effect and in spite of the Bishop of Durham's statement in the House of Lords, pronounced guilty before his innocence was securely disproved. The Bishop of Chichester issued a formal apology to the complainant.

In the aftermath of the October Statement, Bell's name was expunged from a number of public places in the Diocese of Chichester. Bishop Bell School in Eastbourne was renamed, as was Bell House in Bishop Luffa School. The Bishop of Durham indicated that it was possible that Bell's name would be removed from the Church of England's Calendar in the future.

But in June 2016 the Church of England announced that an independent review would be undertaken, not to investigate the question of the truth of the allegations against Bell, but rather to investigate the handling of those investigations. Accordingly, on 15 December 2017, the church published an independent review of the Bell case by Lord Carlile of Berriew CBE, QC, together with three statements by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of Chichester and the Bishop of Bath and Wells.[8] Lord Carlile's report was, in the event, utterly dismissive of the original diocesan investigation, describing it as 'indefensibly wrong.' Significantly he wrote that:

> There was a rush to judgement: the church, feeling that it should be both supportive of the complainant and transparent in its dealings, failed to engage in a process which would also give proper consideration to the rights of the bishop.

In a damning indictment of the processes followed by the Core Group of the original investigation, Carlile stated that:

> No steps were taken to ensure that Bishop Bell's interests were considered actively by an individual nominated for the purpose. His reputation, and the need for a rigorous factual analysis of the case against him, were swept up by the focus on settling Carol's claim and the perceived imperative of public transparency [paras 142, 155(ii), 159(i) and (ii), 188]. The Core

[8] *Bishop George Bell: The Independent Review* (15/12/17). See also 'The Response of the Church of England to the Carlile Review' (23/01/18); and 'National Safeguarding Team statement on Bishop Bell' (24/01/2019) [all accessed on 26 February 2021].

> Group never seriously engaged with protecting the legitimate interests of Bishop Bell.[9]

Carlile concludes his report with a section on 'lessons learned' by the church in matters of safeguarding and stated carefully but quite categorically that 'for Bishop Bell's reputation to be catastrophically affected in the way that occurred was just wrong.' In spite of this the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, continued to reject the clear presumption of innocence as demonstrated by Carlile, commenting instead that a 'significant cloud' remained over Bell's name.[10] It is not clear precisely why he continued to assert this. Who, or what, was being protected? It is true, certainly, that the matter did not quite end here and only subsequent events, it may be argued, served to dispel any remaining 'cloud'.

For, further 'fresh information' against Bell, forwarded to the Sussex police in January 2018 (after the publication of the Carlile Report) by the Church of England's National Safeguarding Team, was dismissed in a matter of weeks and the police closed their enquiries. A senior retired police officer was commissioned by the church to further investigate the matter, only resulting in Timothy Briden reporting that all the allegations against Bell submitted to him were unreliable and unfounded. [11] In his episcopal response to the Briden Report, published on 24 January 2019, Warner continues to assert that it could not be 'safely claimed that the original complainant had been discredited'.[12]

However, it should be made clear that the Bell Group has not been concerned to question the testimony of the complainant, but rather the insufficiency of the evidence against Bell. In what was a civil matter, the failure to establish a position 'upon the balance of probability' does not necessarily discredit the complainant.

Nothing that would stand scrutiny in a court of law has been found against Bell. Carlile's independent report makes that perfectly clear. Since then, Canterbury Cathedral issued a statement on 25 January 2019 that a statue of George Bell, who was Dean of Canterbury from 1924–1929, should

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[9] 'The Response of the Church of England to the Carlile Review'. 'Carol' is the fictional name given to protect the original complainant.

[10] 'Bishop George Bell not to be cleared over "abuse"', *BBC News, 22 January 2018 [accessed 26 February 2021].*

[11] See 'In the Matter of the Late Bishop George Bell' [accessed 26 February 2021]. Briden is a barrister and Vicar-General of the Province of Canterbury.

[12] 'Bishop George Bell abuse allegations "unfounded"', BBC News, 24 January 2019 [accessed 26 February 2021].

be placed at the west end of the cathedral to commemorate his work there and to be paid for by the Friends of the Cathedral.[13] So far, no statue has appeared, although the Archbishop has expressed his 'delight' at the decision (without having rescinded his statement that a 'significant cloud' remained over Bishop Bell's reputation).[14] In Chichester itself, Bell's name has been systematically erased from public view. Looking for George Bell House where I was to lodge for the night when invited to give a lecture in the cathedral some time ago, I found it named simply as '4, Canon Lane'. On the other hand, the meeting room named in honour of Bell at the World Council of Churches in Geneva remains, and rightly remains, so named to this day.

The full story, of which I have given the merest outline, may be read online at the George Bell Group. Its initial conclusion reads:

> It is a time to conclude a matter which has lasted altogether three and a half years. The investigative activities and processes of the church authorities themselves have been devastated by independent legal judgement. The assurances with which these authorities themselves and effectively promoted a case against Bishop Bell in public have been discredited. Bishop Bell's reputation is today vindicated and affirmed by authoritative opinion. What remains of the story is only a matter of contemporary church politics.

But this last matter remains with us today. Bell has been dead for almost sixty years, but it seems that he is still not safe in the church that he served so well. As long as there is any hint that anyone is found to be guilty, or suffer the destruction of character through the undue haste of the church to defend itself institutionally in the public eye, before their innocence or guilt have been established by the due and unprejudiced processes of law, then none of us is safe. But perhaps this should not be the final word.

In this sorry case of the accusation against Bell, the Carlile Report makes sobering reading. In his final section on lessons learnt by the church, Carlile does appreciate certain changes in the safeguarding of clergy undertaken by the Church of England in recent years. He notes:

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[13] 'Statue of George Bell' [accessed 26 February 2021].

[14] 'Bishop Bell Statue to be Installed at Canterbury', BBC News, 26 January 2019 [accessed 26 February 2021].

> I support too the changes in relation to safeguarding inquiries concerning living clergy set out in the *Safeguarding (Clergy Risk Assessment) Regulations 2016*, passed by the House of Bishops.[15]

But as long as the 'significant cloud' remains over George Bell it must be questioned how assured we may be. And given that Bell died in 1958, should the initial investigation have included his successor in the See of Chichester, or even been undertaken by a diocesan group in a diocese which necessarily bore a degree of liability in the case?

Furthermore, as the reputation of a man long dead and incapable of defending himself remains tainted by the church which he served, it remains unclear even as to the nature of the case in question. In his response to the Carlile Report the Archbishop of Canterbury stated that the allegations were handled as a civil matter, not a criminal one. The question of the nature of the evidence, not to speak of continuing institutional liabilities, in the matter is crucial — and in the legal confusion a man's name is publicly dishonoured, even to a criminal degree.

In a statement of 1 February 2019, made to a local campaigner for Bell, Richard Symonds, Lord Carlile wrote:

> The Church should now accept that my recommendations should be accepted in full, and that after due process, however delayed, George Bell should be declared by the Church to be innocent of the allegations made against him.[16]

So far, it appears, the Church of England has failed to find the moral courage to match that of George Bell as he made his stand in the House of Lord's against Churchill's government, and to make this declaration of his innocence. It belittles us all.

> Let Love's unconquerable might
> Your scattered companies unite
> In service to the Lord of Light:
> So shall God's will on earth be done,
> New lamps be lit, new tasks begun,
> And the whole Church at last be one.
>
> (Bishop George Bell, 1883–1958)

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[15] The Church of England undertook to implement all the changes in safeguarding procedures recommended by Carlile except one.

[16] 'Call for the Church of England to repent over its slander of George Bell', *Anglican Ink*, 15 May 2019 [accessed 26 February 2021].

‘A Repenting Church’:
Safeguarding from Abuse and Ecclesial Repentance

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The Gospel, Sexual Abuse and the Church from the Church of England’s Faith and Order Commission begins by asking: ‘What kind of church should we be?’ The first of the four responses that frame the document is: ‘a repenting and learning church that recognizes past and present failures and the harm they have caused, and seeks forgiveness from those we have failed and from God’.[1] That statement is briefly commented on in the closing pages, with the promise of a fuller treatment of what it means for the church to repent in the text that was then published by the Commission a year later, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation in the Aftermath of Abuse*. That treatment can be found in chapter 3, which addresses the question: ‘Is there a place for repentance by churches where they have shared in some way in the sin of abuse?’ The summary at the start of the chapter notes that ‘The concept of ecclesial repentance is significant here and should be carefully considered by the Church of England’.[2]

The aim of this paper is to explore further what ecclesial repentance might mean as churches continue to seek to address their failures in safeguarding from abuse by briefly reviewing the debate about the church’s sinfulness that came into focus during the Reformation period before turning attention to the emergence of ecclesial repentance as a category to describe specific actions by churches over the past hundred years. It then considers the question of the extent to which the category of ecclesial repentance fits with the situation of churches’ responses to safeguarding failures. It shows how the distinctive character of abuse as a form of sin makes this less than straightforward and points to some limitations in the concept of ecclesial repentance.

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[1] Church of England Faith and Order Commission, *The Gospel, Sexual Abuse and the Church: A Theological Resource for the Local Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2016), p. 13; online here [accessed 29 July 2020].

[2] Church of England Faith and Order Commission, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation in the Aftermath of Abuse* (London: Church House Publishing, 2017), p. 54; online here [accessed 29 July 2020].

The church as holy and sinful

The idea of the church repenting only makes sense if one has already accepted the idea of the church sinning. Ecclesial repentance, therefore, inevitably touches on one of the issues that polarized Protestants and Catholics at the time of the European Reformation: whether it is true to say that 'There is no greater sinner than the church', as Martin Luther claimed.[3] It was an issue that went close to the heart of divisions about what kind of reform was needed in the Western church of the sixteenth century: was it primarily a matter of every member of the church being ready to renounce their sinful habits, or did it require the church as a body to give up any claim to righteousness before God? For those defending the Roman Catholic position, it seemed essential to maintain that the church on earth could be described as holy and hence without sin, just as it could be described as one, catholic and apostolic; the danger for those holding this view was that this earthly church would have to be divided in some way, to acknowledge the sinfulness of its members while still upholding the truth of its holiness. For those on the side of the Protestant Reformation, it was easy to follow Luther in distinguishing the visible church, marred by sin in countless ways, from the invisible church of the elect, whose holiness remained pure and unimpaired; the danger in this case was that the church needed to be doubled, with two parallel entities both named as the church, and the New Testament's arresting claims for it applying only to the one that could not be found anywhere on earth.

Within the ecumenical movement of the past hundred years, convergence on ecclesiology has long been regarded as pivotal for drawing churches divided by the Reformation legacy into unity with one another. Not surprisingly, addressing the confessional controversy over how to articulate both the holiness and the sinfulness of the church has been treated as one element of this task. In 1953, Lesslie Newbigin argued that it lay not only at the root of the Reformation debate about the church but at the heart of ecclesiology itself: 'The ultimate problem of the Church, the seat of the perplexity which surrounds all systematic thought about it, is the fact that it is at once holy and sinful.' While he praised Luther for realizing this, he rejected his solution: 'Yet by substituting at this critical point for the true and biblical dialectic of holy and sinful, a false and unbiblical dialectic of outward and inward, visible and invisible, Luther himself helped profoundly to confuse the issue of the Reformation.'[4] For Newbigin, articulating that

[3] Martin Luther, 'Sermon for Easter Sunday 1531', WA 34/1, 276. Quoted in Faith and Order Commission, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, p. 61.

[4] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (London: SCM Press, 1953), p. 56.

'biblical dialectic' required recovering the eschatological dimension of ecclesiology, and with it the missiological, only within which it could be maintained that the one church 'is at once holy and sinful', rather than falling back into dividing the church.

Newbigin's theological journey began from a Reformed position; the Second Vatican Council shows some corresponding desire from the Roman Catholic side to move beyond polemical and apologetic approaches to this subject, and to avoid undermining the oneness of the church for the sake of upholding its holiness. Having asserted that the church is 'one complex reality which coalesces from a divine and a human element', against attempts to separate 'the visible assembly and the spiritual community', *Lumen Gentium* also insists that 'the Church, embracing in its bosom sinners, at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, always follows the way of penance and renewal'.[5] Nonetheless, Vatican II left matters open here to a certain degree: as it embraces sinners, the holy church is in need of purification through the way of penance, but it could still be seen as remaining holy and without sin.[6] After all, it is the sinners whom the church embraces who need to repent, and it is only insofar as they are thereby transformed that they come to constitute part of it. Contrasting approaches that follow, to some extent at least, denominational divides have subsequently remained in evidence. The 2013 convergence text on ecclesiology from the World Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Order notes the tension between the holiness of the church and the sinfulness of its members and 'acknowledges significant differences in the way in which Christians articulate these common convictions', while also seeking to identify some affirmations that all can share.[7] This represents, however, more of a sketch of the parameters within which Newbigin's

[5] Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, §8 (1964) [accessed 29 July 2020].

[6] Compare Walter Kasper, *The Catholic Church: Nature, Reality and Mission*, trans. by Thomas Hoebel (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), pp. 170–74. One might contrast such an interpretation of Vatican II with the view of Nicholas Healy that 'the acknowledgement of ecclesial sinfulness is an essential part of Christian witness to the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ,' in *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 9.

[7] World Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Order, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper, 214 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, Commission on Faith and Order, 2013), §§35–36; cf. §22.

'ultimate problem of the Church' should be addressed, rather than a sustained attempt to overcome it.

The idea of ecclesial repentance

Ecclesial repentance is a term for a phenomenon that has, like the ecumenical movement, come to the fore over the past hundred years, that of churches publicly expressing penitence for sins that are understood to be actions of the church as a whole and therefore the responsibility of the church as a whole. As defined by Jeremy M. Bergen, 'Ecclesial repentance is the act in which church/denominational bodies make official statements of repentance, apology, confession or requests for forgiveness for those things which were once official church policy or practice.'[8] An early example he gives is the 'Appeal to All Christian People' issued by the Lambeth Conference of 1920, whose plea for the visible unity of the church includes the following paragraph:

> The causes of division lie deep in the past, and are by no means simple or wholly blameworthy. Yet none can doubt that self-will, ambition, and lack of charity among Christians have been principal factors in the mingled process, and that these, together with blindness to the sin of disunion, are still mainly responsible for the breaches of Christendom. We acknowledge this condition of broken fellowship to be contrary to God's will, and we desire frankly to confess our share in the guilt of thus crippling the Body of Christ and hindering the activity of his Spirit.[9]

It is worth noting that the bishops were not oblivious to the complexities of motivation and responsibility in this context, but they were also clear that sin was involved and that they and the churches whom they represented had some share in it. Moreover, they did not seek to make their confession of guilt conditional on others recognizing their own contribution as well: it is simply offered, without qualification, but nonetheless as an implicit invitation to which others might respond, either by being willing to express their own solidarity in this sin and in turn 'associate ourselves in penitence

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[8] Jeremy M. Bergen, *Ecclesial Repentance: The Churches Confront Their Sinful Pasts* (London: T & T Clark, 2011), p. 3.

[9] Lambeth Conference 1920, 'Appeal to All Christian People', Resolution 9, §III; Bergen, *Ecclesial Repentance*, p. 21. Cf. Jeremy Worthen, 'The Centenary of the "Appeal to All Christian People" and the Ecumenical Vocation of Anglicanism', *Theology* 123.2 (2020), 104–22.

and prayer with all those who deplore the divisions of Christian people',[10] or by receiving the confession as those who have suffered 'the sin of disunion' and being prepared to show forgiveness — or indeed both, in that the 'condition of broken fellowship' might be characterized as drawing all Christians into 'the sin of disunion' even as all Christians suffer at one another's hands because of it.

Most of Bergen's examples of ecclesial repentance, however, concern positions that the church has taken on what might be termed social and political matters. These would include colonialism, slavery, World War II, the Holocaust, gender equality and rights for LBGTI+ people. That failures of moral judgment in such matters can have profoundly serious implications and even jeopardize the ability of churches to recognize one another as part of the one church of Christ has been demonstrated in the crises of church relationships caused by the response of the German Protestant church to the rise of Nazism and then by the support of some South African churches for apartheid.[11] There has been an increasingly sharp sense over the past century that churches bear responsibilities for speaking and acting in society with faithfulness to the Gospel, and that where they fail in those responsibilities then public, official 'repentance, apology, confession or requests for forgiveness' are required.

What makes such a failure the responsibility of the church, however, and therefore a matter for the church's corporate repentance, rather than the responsibility of some individuals or groups within it? One factor here is the intersection between the unjust actions of people, communities and institutions that are part of the life of the church with the formal, public position taken by church authorities, who represent the church and speak and act on its behalf. The point is that those carrying out actions we now deem to be unjust could have had reasonable grounds for confidence at the time that what they did was in alignment with church teaching, which thereby inhibited the working of conscience and gave legitimation to injustice. Insofar as the authorities who sanctioned such teaching were representative of the whole church, and that teaching was accepted and not questioned by others within the church, the whole church is therefore implicated in the wrong that was committed and the whole church has a shared responsibility to recognize that and come to repentance.

A characteristic feature of ecclesial repentance is therefore the critical review of inherited theological teaching. The support given by authoritative

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[10] 'Appeal to All Christian People', Introduction.

[11] *Ecclesiology and Ethics: Ecumenical Ethical Engagement, Moral Formation and the Nature of the Church*, ed. by Thomas F. Best and Martin Robra (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), pp. 5–6.

church statements for injustice will, of necessity, express doctrinal inadequacies, in that such statements fail to bear proper witness to the God of justice and love. A repenting church will therefore want to understand how such inadequacies have come about, so that they can be addressed by a fuller and more faithful account of divine revelation within its teaching.

Ecclesial repentance and the sins of abuse

If, as Bergen defines it, ecclesial repentance is 'the act in which church/denominational bodies make official statements of repentance, apology, confession or requests for forgiveness', then failures in safeguarding from abuse would appear to be an obvious case where such acts have been performed. Numerous examples could be given from the past two decades, including the resolution of the Church of England's General Synod in 2013 that it would:

> endorse the Archbishops' statement in GS 1896 expressing on behalf of the Church of England an unreserved apology for the failure of its systems to protect children, young people and adults from physical and sexual abuse inflicted by its clergy and others; and for the failure to listen properly to those so abused.[12]

Subsequent parts of the resolution made specific commitments to address what had gone wrong. The General Synod, representing the whole Church of England, thereby gave its authority to a statement of apology expressed by the two archbishops in their capacity as the Church of England's primary representative figures. This would certainly appear to fulfil Bergen's condition for repentance being truly ecclesial, that 'it is officially sanctioned by a church body, bearing in mind that different ecclesiologies determine how speech in the name of a church is authorized'.[13]

Yet in other respects, safeguarding from abuse does not fit entirely comfortably alongside the other examples of ecclesial repentance already mentioned. A specific issue here is the reference to 'official church policy or practice' in Bergen's definition. Discrimination against people on grounds of ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation can be argued to have received support in the past, direct or indirect, from 'official church policy or practice'; so can legitimation of forms of social order that we now recognize

[12] For documents relating to this, see General Synod July 2013 [accessed 29 July 2020].

For a review of apologies for abuse by churches, see Bergen, *Ecclesial Repentance*, pp. 87–97.

[13] Bergen, *Ecclesial Repentance*, p. 7.

to have been profoundly marked by injustice. Abuse is a wide-ranging category whose boundaries can be difficult to define, but to take the case of child sexual abuse, the issue here is not so much that this has been overtly endorsed or declared acceptable behaviour by 'official church policy or practice', but rather that the gravity of it has not been grasped by church officers and members. This has contributed to serious failures in putting in place preventative measures, taking action where allegations have been made, and complying fully with 'official church policy or practice' in this area. That looks rather different from ecclesial repentance in the case of, say, colonialism or slavery, where a crucial part of the context is that the wrong things Christians have done in plain sight have at times been in alignment with what their churches have publicly taught or at least encouraged them to think.

The dimension of deceit that characterizes abuse, as argued in *Forgiveness and Reconciliation in the Aftermath of Abuse*,[14] is relevant here, and it makes failures in safeguarding significantly different from some other sins that might warrant ecclesial repentance: abuse hides from view, but at the same time draws other people into various forms of collusion, often though not always, unwitting. It is not only a question here of what representative figures in the church have said and done publicly in responding to reports of abuse, but of how they have behaved when they thought they were out of public view and therefore may have imagined themselves as also beyond public scrutiny. At this point, however, the connection between sinful action and deficient theology becomes visible in this context too: theological failure to grasp the seriousness of the sin of abuse made such behaviour appear a relatively minor matter as well. The dynamics of secrecy that are always operative with abuse make the ways in which it can become hooked into the fabric of the church's life more complex and in certain respects more challenging to address than cases where ecclesial sin is associated with the public stance taken by church authorities, the public behaviour of church members and the relation between the two. That suggests that ecclesial repentance here cannot be straightforwardly parallel to the other examples of such action over the past hundred years given in the previous section of the paper. Repentance in this case means first and foremost bringing to light what has been deliberately hidden from sight.

[14] Faith and Order Commission, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, pp. 36–40.

The church as institutional and spiritual

This is not by any means to suggest that the responsibility of the church is thereby rendered any less grave. One of the reasons why abuse has become such a significant issue for the churches is that despite official teaching, church life has repeatedly provided effective cover for abusive behaviour. Part of the background here is the inclination of Christians in modernity to oppose 'pastoral' and 'spiritual' to 'legal' and 'institutional', and to regard preference for the former as characterizing the Christian way. Faced with abusive behaviour they know to be wrong, church leaders have sometimes let themselves be persuaded that a properly pastoral and spiritual response would not, for instance, require reporting to the statutory authorities, and thereby have been drawn into colluding with hiding abusers from the workings of temporal justice. It can therefore appear that part at least of what ecclesial repentance must mean is for the church to accept that it is an institution like other institutions and must operate with policies and procedures that are parallel to those in other institutions, from schools and places of work to sports clubs. It must stop imagining itself to be different and therefore exempt from the normal rules.

There is, however, a fundamental ecclesiological question that begins to come into focus here. Is the church an institution like other institutions in contemporary society? To some extent, in order to function within society, churches have to answer this question in the affirmative, since that is how they are commonly regarded. Moreover, it is abundantly clear that churches must give up appealing to theological beliefs about the difference between the church and other institutions to justify sitting light to legal and institutional requirements regarding safeguarding from abuse. That would be another example of deficiencies in theology giving cover to the continuation of injustice and wrongdoing.[15]

The critical issue here is in what that deficiency consists. Is it the view that there is some theologically significant difference between the church and other institutions? On the face of it, to deny any such difference would contradict Christian doctrine as summarized in the creeds, but in considering how to affirm it the fractures in ecclesiology that appeared at the Reformation may start to show through again. Some might be inclined, for instance, to stress the fundamental identity of the visible church as a social institution with other social institutions, not least in its transparent lack of holiness, requiring the same kind of constraints on human sinfulness, while still believing that there remains an invisible church whose holiness

[15] Faith and Order Commission, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, pp. 25–29.

eludes institutional form.[16] Yet such a position tends to equate an apology from popes, archbishops or others with an apology from any CEO of a failing institution: it is not clear what space is left for such an apology also to serve as an act of ecclesial repentance, whereby a church that is part of the body of Christ in the world and the temple of the Holy Spirit, and therefore not simply a social institution like any other, turns away from sin and commits itself to be faithful to Christ. Moreover, the separation of the visible from the invisible church, perhaps now glossed as the distinction between the institutional and the spiritual, risks reopening the space for an ultimate ecclesial exemption from normal standards: as the invisible, spiritual church is most truly the church and transcends all institutions and structures, and as the believer is also a member of that body, then it becomes possible and perhaps necessary for the believer to act in some situations as a member of this truer, invisible and spiritual church and set aside merely institutional and legal requirements that function on a lower level.

The church as a visible society

Two strands from Anglican theology may be helpful at this point — neither of them without parallel in other Christian traditions. The first is the stress in some Anglican ecclesiology on the church as a visible society in a way that is ready to acknowledge its profound failings while insisting it is this society, in the midst of human history, that is called to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic by union with Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Such an understanding is at the heart of the 1920 'Appeal to All Christian People', referred to earlier, and underpins its expression of ecclesial repentance for disunity: Christians cannot either insist that the church is really one and its disunity ultimately illusory, or that disunity is real but just something that has to be accepted as inevitable in our fallen state.[17] The visible society of the church should make visible to the world in its common life God's justice, God's compassion and God's peace, for the sake of the world, that the world may believe. Integral to that visibility is the church's order, its structures

[16] Cf. Meissen Conversations, *On the Way to Visible Unity: A Common Statement*, 18 March 1988, the basis for the *Meissen Agreement between the Church of England and the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*, I.3 [both accessed 26 February 2021]: 'The Church is a divine reality, holy and transcending present finite reality. At the same time, as a human institution, it shares all the ambiguity and frailty of the human condition and is always in need of repentance, reform and renewal.'

[17] 'Appeal to All Christian People', §I.

that serve as 'instruments of communion', in the phrase used by ARCIC III.[18] That means that the institutional structures of the church are both interpersonal and spiritual, insofar as they express and enable the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Where those structures fail in protecting the vulnerable and in upholding justice, that is not, therefore, a matter of 'institutional' failure only conceived of in abstraction from the life of Christ's body: it is a failure of the church to receive in faith the gift and the call of God. It is sin, and it calls for repentance.

The second strand is the emphasis in Anglican social theology on the proper place of different institutions within human life as shaped by God's purposes in creation and redemption.[19] This encompasses the role of what has been referred to as temporal justice, including institutions of legal redress when wrong has been done. The church as a visible society does not displace the creaturely societies of nations and states, nor do its institutions replace or disable the institutions that belong within them. Christian faith therefore ought to foster a basic respect for the norms of justice as expressed in the human societies in which the church as a visible society participates, without losing sensitivity to shortcomings in this respect or readiness to oppose injustice where it occurs. Taken together, these two strands suggest that the theological deficiency that has encouraged some Christians to think the church constitutes a zone that can operate with its own exemptions from compliance with safeguarding requirements is not about having too high a doctrine of the church, but rather a doctrine of the church and the state that is not nearly high enough in terms of grasping the proper ends of both within the purposes of God.

Where Christians accept, for ease of communication or because they are inclined to believe it to be true, the identity of the church with the general social category of institution, then it is not difficult to understand what it means for 'the church' to apologize, if not repent: 'the church' refers to those who hold positions of authority within the institution, and it apologizes to

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[18] Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission, *Walking Together on the Way: Learning to Be the Church — Local, Regional, Universal. An Agreed Statement of the Third Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC III)* (London: SPCK, 2018). See also Inter-Anglican Standing Committee on Unity, Faith & Order, *Towards a Symphony of Instruments: A Historical and Theological Consideration of the Instruments of Communion of the Anglican Communion*, Unity, Faith & Order Paper No. 1 (London: Anglican Consultative Council, 2015).

[19] Anna Rowlands, 'Fraternal Traditions: Anglican Social Theology and Catholic Social Teaching in a British Context', in *Anglican Social Theology*, ed. by Malcolm Brown (London: Church House Publishing, 2014), pp. 133–74.

those who have suffered because those in such positions in the present as well as the past have not acted well or justly. Such a low ecclesiology, however, involves a strange reversion via a thoroughly secularized mentality to a rather older way of thinking about the church that can define it in certain contexts in terms of those holding authority within it, notably the clergy.[20] Moreover, it also raises the question of those to whom the church is apologising: implicitly, they are not part of this church — it is something other than them. That was not problematic in the case, for instance, of 'The Appeal to All Christian People', as the Anglican bishops expressed penitence on behalf of Anglican churches for wrong done in relation to other churches. Here, however, the only way to avoid the conclusion that victims and survivors of abuse, to whom an apology is made by the church, are thereby rendered outside the church is once again to introduce some doubling in our understanding of the church: on the one hand there is a church that apologizes for grave harm, and on the other a church that can include those gravely harmed, who cannot and should not be apologizing. Sustaining the insistence that the church is indeed one visible society would mean taking care that when the aim is for the church to speak as the church through forms of ecclesial authority, it truly speaks with and for all.

Conclusion

It is not straightforward, therefore, to apply the idea of ecclesial repentance to situations where there have been failures in safeguarding from abuse in the life of the church. That is not because such failures are not truly serious or because they cannot be described as sin. The dimension of deceit in abuse means that the sins committed here — of abuse and of collusion of various kinds — are generally not the kind of public acts, on the part of church authorities and church members, that have typically led to cases of ecclesial repentance, where the public quality of those acts is pivotal in establishing a sense of general responsibility that can be read as solidarity in sin. Moreover, examining the applicability of the idea of ecclesial repentance in this context also raises wider issues of ecclesiology, including how the institutions of the church are to be understood in relation to the identity of the church and to the society of which they form a part, and how to avoid locating the people to whom the word of repentance is being spoken by the church as thereby

[20] Avery Dulles identifies the dominant understanding of the church in Roman Catholicism from the Reformation to the mid-twentieth century with 'the view that defines the Church primarily in terms of its visible structures, especially the rights and powers of its officers,' in *Models of the Church*, Expanded edition (New York: Doubleday, 1987), p. 34.

necessarily outside the church, as those on whom the church acts and who have no agency within it.

None of this is to deny that, in the face of the grave wrongs that have been suffered because of failures in safeguarding in the church, we need to be 'a repenting church'. We certainly need to be a church in which repentance happens, and in which such repentance encompasses both profound transformation in terms of *metanoia* and changed ways of thinking on the one hand, and on the other commitment to practical actions aimed at making good, so far as possible, the harm that has been done. A repenting church, however, is also one where there is space for proper evaluation of responsibility and guilt, which may fall more heavily on some individuals and some parts of the church's institutions and structures than others. To resort too quickly to the idea of ecclesial repentance, even in attenuated form as an act of institutional apology, may not help the church to remain in that painful space for as long as is truly necessary.

Safeguarding and Salvation

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The Methodist Church in Great Britain (hereafter 'Methodist Church'), like other churches, is committed to making the church a safer space and is taking steps to bring about the cultural change that is needed to further embed safeguarding principles in every part of its life. It understands that its calling is 'to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission'.[1] Safeguarding, the action the church takes to promote a safer culture, is a vital part of this, as safeguarding procedures and policies concern how Christians order their life together as the body of Christ. The Methodist Church continues to review its safeguarding policies and processes, theologically reflect on safeguarding matters, and learn from the experiences of those who have experienced abuse.[2]

It is evident, however, that a tension can be perceived between the need for safeguarding and the idea of the church as a community of love and forgiveness, which seeks to welcome all people. Questions arise in safeguarding training sessions about how 'holy people' can be capable of abusive acts, and whether safeguarding practices limit the possibilities of God's grace or undermine the church as a salvific community. Enabling all members of the church to make the connection between compliance with safeguarding policy and faithful discipleship is still a challenge. [3] The

[1] The Methodist Conference, *Our Calling* (2000) [accessed 26 February 2021].

[2] 'People who have experienced abuse' and 'people who abuse' are the terms preferred in the ecumenical report *Time for Action* (London: Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, 2002), which marked a significant point in many churches' responses to those who have experienced abuse. For many, the term 'survivor' is helpful in so far as it indicates a major move forward from being a 'victim'. Others prefer to use the term 'thriver' which they feel better represents how they understand themselves in relation to their past experience of abuse. *Time for Action* recognized that different people understand the terms in different ways. It also recognized that people are more than any label they may be given or may take for themselves.

[3] Between 2013 and 2015 the Methodist Church carried out a review of past safeguarding cases, one outcome was *Courage, Cost and Hope: The*

Methodist Church continues to grapple with this, and a report on *The Theology of Safeguarding* will come to its Conference in June 2021.

In this article, I draw on the experience and teaching of the Methodist Church to reflect on these tensions and seek to learn from the particular forms they take in the light of the Methodist understanding of God's grace, often encapsulated in the phrase 'All are welcome'. I then explore the principle that how Christians are together matters, noting some of the things which Methodists have consistently affirmed in their way of being church and expression of God's love. As the Methodist Church continues to think about safeguarding, ecclesiology and salvation, it does so with particular attention to those who have experienced abuse.

The nature of the church: holiness and being human

There are many different ways of describing the church,[4] but all stem from the conviction that it is a community called into being by God to participate in God's mission, witness to divine grace and proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. The Methodist Church has long understood holiness to express a vital aspect of its life and identity, not only because it is one of the traditional four attributes of the church named in the Nicene Creed ('one holy catholic and apostolic'), but also because of its particular vocation: it 'ever remembers that in the providence of God Methodism was raised up to spread scriptural holiness through the land by the proclamation of the evangelical faith'.[5]

The church is holy because it belongs to God who is holy, and not because its members are free from sin. It is a continuing community of followers of the risen Christ and also a flawed human organization.[6] In this imperfect human community the presence of the Holy Spirit alone 'makes

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Report of the Past Cases Review 2013–15. The Report's Objective 4 is 'To learn lessons about any necessary changes or developments in order to ensure that safeguarding work within the Methodist Church is of the highest possible standard' (p. 7) [accessed 26 February 2021]. Substantial progress has been made in implementing the twenty-three recommendations made by the review.

[4] For example: the new people of God, the body of Christ, a communion in the Holy Spirit, or a sacrament or sign of Christ's continuing presence in the world.

[5] The Methodist Conference, 'Clause 4 of the Deed of Union' in *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church* (10 vols.; London: Methodist Publishing, 2020), II.213.

[6] The Methodist Conference, *Called to Love and Praise* (1999), §2.1.10.

possible the credibility of the church as a witness and sign in the world of new life in Christ'.[7]

In Methodist tradition holiness is both the inner dynamic and the outward expression of God's love:

> We become God's holy people […] through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. As we are renewed from within, we are transformed by God's patient love into the likeness of Christ, we are given the power to do the will of our Father, and we grow up into Christian maturity, individually and corporately.[8]

The holiness of the church therefore has two dimensions: it denotes the church's standing before God and it is called to be Christ-like (to show the marks of holiness which can be seen in the life of Jesus, the holy one of God). In both it is entirely dependent on the gift of God's Spirit.

Unfortunately, misunderstandings of holiness persist, and holiness is sometimes equated, often subconsciously, with fitting a particular picture of Christian life. Naïve adoptions of narratives of reconciliation and discipleship have shaped cultures of 'niceness,' where people are not to be upset and the status quo of community relationships are not to be disturbed. For example, some theologians have explored portrayals of faithful discipleship as being meek which, within a context of hierarchical patterns of relating and a dominant narrative of love as self-sacrificing obedience, produces silence, submission and conformity as desired characteristics.[9] Such portrayals have contributed to ways of being which contain unspoken and profoundly damaging assumptions that Christians should be 'good' and compliant, creating conditions which make it more likely for grooming and abuse to happen as there is a reluctance to challenge inappropriate behaviour, a difficulty in acknowledging disturbing emotions (including

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[7] The Methodist Conference, *Called to Love and Praise,* §2.1.7.

[8] The Methodist Church, *What We believe: A Catechism for the Use of the People called Methodists* (London: Methodist Publishing, 2018), §17. The Methodist Catechism, adopted by the Methodist Conference in 1986, was revised in 2000.

[9] See, for example: Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005); Daphne Hampson, *Theology and Feminism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. by Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974).

shame) and a failure to exercise 'respectful uncertainty'[10] (i.e. to recognize that colleagues, friends and those in positions of authority in the church, who have done good things, can also do harm). Not only can Christian communities be unsafe places for acknowledging difficult and disturbing emotions, doubts and fears or admitting that one's own life does not keep up to the standards set by Christian vision and values,[11] but many who have experienced abuse within Christian contexts also describe communities that do not want to hear of their pain and hurt, and silence them.[12] Aspects of church life such as the community 'family' dynamics, the prayers said and hymns sung, and the ways in which people are chosen for particular tasks all convey subtle messages about acceptable and expected behaviour. These warrant critical reflection and open discussion. The church may be a community in which God's perfect love is present, but it also continues to be a community of imperfect human beings.

As churches have had to face, with horror, the ways in which they have not always been safe places and the ways in which they have been complicit in, or perpetuated, abuse, they have been confronted, once again, with the depth of harm that human beings can cause and their capacity for horrific and appalling acts. In Christian communities we can tend to 'see the best' in people at the expense of seeing 'the worst', but taking seriously the reality of human sin and capacity for evil is part of understanding the human condition. From its beginnings, Methodism has had a robust theology of sin, which encourages honesty about the human condition. In one of his sermons, John Wesley described its power and insidious nature, and the futility of struggling against sin in one's own strength.[13] Every human being is therefore in need of God's love and forgiveness. Everyone is in need of God's grace.

The Methodist Church has named abuse, in all its forms, as sin, recognizing the profound damage, trauma and shattering of self that it causes. Abuse can cause deep and permanent physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual harm and has far-reaching consequences, sending

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[10] 'Respectful uncertainty' was one of the ten themes identified as a result of the Methodist Church's *Past Case Review* in 2015. See The Methodist Church, *Learning for Trainers Delivering Creating Safer Space Modules: The Report on the Past Cases Review Ten Themes* [accessed 26 January 2021].

[11] The Methodist Conference, *Domestic Abuse* (2005).

[12] Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, *The Courage to Tell* (London: CTBI, 1991); The Methodist Conference, *Domestic Abuse* (2005).

[13] John Wesley, 'The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption' in *John Wesley's Forty-Four Sermons* (London: The Epworth Press, 1995), pp. 96–110 (pp. 99–100).

'shockwaves of harm' [14] throughout communities. A church that is committed to safeguarding not only demonstrates its desire to protect from harm those who are vulnerable but is also taking steps to corporately face the sin of abuse.

'All are welcome'

The Methodist Church's emphasis on the universality of God's grace is often expressed in the 'four alls':

> All people need to be saved.
> All people can be saved.
> All people can know they are saved.
> All people can be saved to the uttermost.

Something of this concept of an eternal invitation to respond to the never-ending grace of God is encapsulated by Methodism's frequent use of the phrase 'All are welcome', and this driving principle is demonstrated through its practices of welcome, hospitality and openness. The idea, however, warrants examination, not least through remembering that it is a statement about God's love and grace. Welcome for all does not mean that there are no boundaries to the church's inclusivity and hospitality.

Christian history provides many examples of the church determining its boundaries as it has wrestled with the questions of when a body is rightly called 'a church' and of who belongs and who does not. The Methodist Church strives to be an inclusive community, but at the same time acknowledges the need for discipline and, in extreme circumstances, the exclusion of those who damage the integrity of the church or obstruct human flourishing. The context of safeguarding focusses questions about boundaries in a different way: it requires holding in tension the desire for safer spaces in Christian communities and the church's mission to welcome those who may pose a risk. A community without boundaries can be unsafe and a potentially harmful place, particularly for children, young people and vulnerable adults. Establishing boundaries is therefore important, particularly when welcoming those who have abused, both for the prevention of harm to those who participate in the church's communal life, and in order to enable the church to remain faithful to its identity as the body of Christ.

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[14] Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, *Time for Action: Sexual Abuse, the Churches and a New Dawn for Survivors* (London: Church House Publishing, 2002), p. 9.

Concern has been expressed, in the Methodist Church as in other churches, about the theological tensions involved in excluding, from some church roles, activities or groups, those who have abused, even when they say that they have changed and testify to God's Spirit at work in their lives. (This is demonstrated in the questions and conversations which take place during safeguarding training sessions.) God's unceasing offer of new life and the assurance that, by God's grace, we are set in right relationship with God through Jesus Christ, is at the heart of Christian faith. Within church communities, however, theological thinking about people changing has not always been robust or realistic enough. The Methodist Church acknowledges that whilst God 'can and does change people's lives and can and does offer forgiveness to all, there is and can be no sure and objective test by which we know when that has happened'.[15] An individual's testimony may or may not be true. It is acknowledged by different organizations working with those who abuse and within different medical and social science disciplines that time and again patterns of abuse are repeated, despite hopes and assurances of change. Forgiveness does not mean that previous patterns of behaviour have been left behind, nor does it remove any risk of reoffending. Weaknesses and vulnerabilities do not disappear. Learning from experiences of abuse has made it clear that churches should seek to protect the vulnerable as if not expecting change in those who would hurt them.

An over-emphasis on new life has often caused churches to fail to give proper attention to how repentance is understood. Repentance involves ownership of past actions, acknowledgement and understanding of the harm caused and its ongoing effect on others, and the recognition that there are consequences to all actions which have to be faced. It is the responsibility of the one forgiven to change their behaviour to ensure it never happens again. Change in the context of abuse thus includes accepting responsibility for past actions, making oneself accountable to others, and behaving in ways which enable others to be safe, not least by avoiding situations which put themselves and others at risk. The sign that repentance and forgiveness have happened is then seen in the fruit of change, which includes accepting the discipline of safeguarding practices. Safeguarding is a means by which those who have committed to change can demonstrate it.

Safeguarding encourages local churches to reflect on their boundaries and the resources needed to maintain them, in order that they can protect the vulnerable, welcome those who have experienced abuse, and continue to be faithful witnesses to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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[15] The Methodist Conference, *The Church and Sex Offenders* (2002), §1 [accessed 26 February 2021].

How we are together

Christians believe that God wants human beings to flourish and grow in loving relationship with one another and with God. As part of their discipleship, members of the church seek to embody the transformational love of God in how they love and care for one another and the wider world. The ways in which Christians relate to one another and others are therefore vital for both human flourishing and the witness of the church. The Methodist Church seeks to embody its affirmation of the dignity and worth of all people within its structures, processes, and patterns of relating.

From its beginnings, Methodism has understood mutual care and accountability amongst its members to be central aspects of discipleship, relating robust accountability for personal discipleship to spiritual growth. The emphasis in Methodist theology on the expectation of growth in holiness as part of Christian life is about the work of God in each life, held within the community of Christ's followers. As Methodism emerged in the eighteenth century the setting up of small Christian groups (class meetings) with an emphasis on fellowship, spiritual growth and a rootedness of Christian living in daily life was not uncommon, but in their structured class meetings Methodist discipline was distinctive. Methodists were encouraged and expected to be accountable to each other as part of their discipleship: to support and challenge one another as they reflected on how they live out their faith in their daily lives. The Methodist Church's key ecclesiological statement notes that 'the quest for holiness was not solitary but drew people together closely in a discipleship which embraced devotion, discipline and social action'. [16] Although few Methodists in Britain today attend class meetings in their traditional form, these underlying principles continue to be embodied in the Methodist structures of pastoral care and the obligations of those who have made the commitment of membership in the Methodist Church.[17]

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[16] The Methodist Conference, *Called to Love and Praise,* §4.2.14.

[17] The Methodist membership ticket, given annually to all members, has the obligations of membership printed on it, as reviewed by the Methodist Conference from time to time. The 2020 membership ticket states:

> As a member of the Methodist Church I am called to: worship within the local church, including regular sharing in Holy Communion, and through personal prayer learning and caring, through Bible study and meeting for fellowship, so that I may grow in faith and support others in their discipleship service, by being a good neighbour in the community,

Methodist theology affirms the necessity of personal responsibility alongside the possibility of growth and change. Being aware of the potential for all kinds of abuse, for maintaining boundaries, challenging inappropriate behaviour, and responding well to those who have experienced abuse is therefore the responsibility of the whole community and of each individual member of the church. Members of the Methodist Church have a responsibility to reflect on their own behaviour and ways of relating to others, and to challenge harmful behaviour and different forms of abuse and injustice, whether it emerges within the behaviour of individuals or within the structures and patterns of church life.

There are particular issues involved in challenging those who have power in the church community who may or may not be in positions of leadership (and power is exercised in many different relationships and in a variety of ways). The abuse of power is a principal dimension of any kind of abuse, and churches can be communities where imbalances of power are evident and also, paradoxically, hard to define. It is beyond the scope of this article to adequately reflect on assumptions about power, its different forms, power imbalances and dynamics in church communities, and the implicit spiritual authority attached to particular roles and responsibilities, but all of these require further attention as local churches and the different bodies within the Methodist Church consider how power can be used and misused in their different contexts. The Methodist Church's *Past Cases Review* noted that local churches will not become really safe places until 'the understanding of safeguarding, and abuse of power in relationships, is understood by the whole congregation'.[18]

All members of the Methodist Church have a part to play in promoting the welfare of children, young people and adults, working to prevent abuse from occurring, establishing and upholding appropriate boundaries of behaviour, and seeking to protect and respond well to those who have experienced abuse. Safeguarding procedures form an important part of establishing healthy relationships within the body of Christ, particularly prompting members of the church to pay attention to issues around interpersonal boundaries and power as part of their discipleship.

Welcoming those who have experienced abuse

Desiring to demonstrate that all are indeed welcome and that no one is beyond God's grace, the Methodist Church, like other churches, has therefore

challenging injustice and using my resources to support the Church in its mission in the world evangelism, through working out my faith in daily life and sharing Christ with others.

[18] The Methodist Conference, *Courage, Cost and Hope*, p. 34.

given significant time to enabling those who have abused to participate in the life of the church subject to the constraints and close monitoring that are intended to ensure that the church is a safer space. A commitment to welcoming a perpetrator of abuse is costly, time consuming and emotionally demanding work, which requires significant resources (not least from people) which are then unavailable for other activities and work. Whilst the Methodist Church has made commitments to respond well to those who have experienced abuse,[19] it is clear, not least from the Methodist Church's *Past Cases Review*,[20] that the church has not always listened or responded well and that similar time, energy and resources have not been given to enabling those who have experienced abuse to participate in the life of the church. The Methodist Church is therefore challenged to reflect on how it gives resources and energy to interpersonal and structural changes which enable the inclusion and care of those who have experienced abuse.

The Methodist Church has always had a concern for a 'social gospel' in which those who are marginalized, vulnerable and dispossessed 'may be enabled to reach a fullness of life that society often denies to people by the inherent injustices and power imbalances within it', [21] and it therefore understands that the way in which it responds to those who have experienced abuse testifies to the nature of the community and conveys something about God.

Reflection on the experiences of people who have experienced abuse raises further and challenging questions about understandings of justice, pastoral care, what 'safer space' means, and whether it is possible to welcome all people into one space. The Methodist Church is only just beginning to grapple with these and the report which will go to the 2021 Conference pays particular attention to these experiences and insights, including within its theological method. A particular challenge is when the presence of those with proven and alleged sex and safeguarding offences has caused further pain and deep hurt to those who have experienced abuse, leading to them feeling unwelcome. Expectations around forgiveness, healing, and the ways in which grief and anger are expressed, for example, have contributed to this. As it has continued to listen to those who have experienced abuse within Christian contexts, the Methodist Church is challenged to further explore how it demonstrates God's grace through the ways in which it welcomes those who have experienced abuse.

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[19] The Methodist Conference, *Response to Time for Action* (2003).

[20] The Methodist Conference, *Courage, Cost and Hope.*

[21] The Methodist Conference, *Creating Safer Space: A Connexional Training Framework for Safeguarding* (2007), paragraph 2.3.

Methodism is a 'connexional' church, its ecclesiology emphasizing that all Christians are essentially linked to one another and no local church is or can be an autonomous unit complete in itself. Some local churches may find that they need to have boundaries which exclude some people in order to be a safe place of welcome for others. The Methodist connexional principle 'enshrines a vital truth about the nature of the Church' which derives 'from the participation of all Christians through Christ in the very life of God',[22] and it is identified in terms of belonging, mutuality and interdependence. Methodist local churches are thus grouped together into circuits and there is an opportunity for the churches in each Methodist Circuit to reflect on how they collectively offer welcome and hospitality and demonstrate that God's grace is for all.

Conclusion

The Methodist Church identifies safeguarding as a fundamental part of the church's response to God and sharing in God's mission in the world. It is the Methodist Church's intention to value every human being as part of God's creation and it seeks to embody the love and grace of God in its structures and ways of relating. Safeguarding is one way in which members of the church demonstrate their care for each other and all whom they encounter. Safeguarding procedures help to protect the vulnerable, signal that the church is a place of safety and justice, and they maintain the integrity of its witness. Rather than being in tension with understandings of holiness and the transforming expansiveness of God's grace, safeguarding helps the church to pay attention to what these mean for its life and worship. Building a community of love and grace is hard work. It can also be deeply disruptive as it involves honesty about the human condition, the exercise of mutual accountability and personal responsibility, paying attention to difficult and deeply painful experiences, a preparedness to challenge and be challenged, and a willingness to change. During the past few years, the Methodist Church has been seeking to implement the recommendations of its *Past Cases Review* in order to bring about the cultural change needed to fully understand what safeguarding means in every part of the life of the church. The report concluded by underlining that this is a challenge for everyone within the church.[23] It requires, as the name of the report reflects, courage, cost and hope.

[22] The Methodist Conference, *Called to Love and Praise,* §4.6.1.

[23] The Methodist Conference, *Courage, Cost and Hope*, §40.

The Church as a Community of Forgiveness

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It is to Augustine that the idea of churches as 'communities of forgiveness' is commonly attributed.[1] But of course its roots go further back, to Matthew 18. 15: 'If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.' The parable of the unmerciful servant follows almost immediately (18. 21–35). Forbearance and forgiveness are the norm, not overly high moral expectations. And yet sin is to be called sin.

To which the New Testament adds that in the case of recalcitrance an act of penance is required on the part of the church itself, removing the offender — in this case, a sexual offender — from among the community (I Corinthians 5. 1–8). The observation that 'a little leaven leavens the whole lump' alludes to the conditions of the Passover feast, with implications, perhaps, for participation in the Eucharist, or admission to the annual rite of baptism. It suggests that the community purifies itself as the offender receives some form of purification.

In understanding Paul's injunctions much hangs on what is implied in the instruction to 'hand such a person over to Satan' (I Corinthians 5. 5). Modern commentary usually takes it to mean (i) simple refusal of the spiritual protection of the community, possibly with an allusion to the scapegoat ritual of Leviticus 16. It may, however, carry the suggestion (ii) of handing the offender over to the state and its laws, as it was commonly understood to do in the middle ages. Or is there even, perhaps, (iii) an analogy with the status of the leper, dwelling alone outside the camp (cf. Leviticus 13. 46) until such time as re-examination will pronounce him clean? The phrase, 'for the destruction of the flesh' offers some support, at any rate, to the suggestion that the laws of the state will be involved, for it is hard to take that phrase in a soft sense, to mean simply the humbling of carnal pride. But that in turn raises the question of the status of the offence in civil law: was it one that might have incurred a capital sentence, or was it left to the injured father/husband to demand appropriate damages?

Today, of course, an offence of that kind would hardly be treated with such gravity, while, conversely, we may think that offences against children were not treated with sufficient seriousness in the ancient world. If a son

[1] See J. Patout Burns, 'Augustine's Ecclesial Mysticism', in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. by Julia A. Lamm (Hoboken NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012) pp. 202–15.

runs off with his father's wife, we are likely to feel, it is a shame and a scandal requiring some acknowledgment, but pederasty is much harder to forgive. The silence of Scripture about pederasty strikes us as disturbing. It could be because the early church had no experience of it, whereas irregular consensual adult relations could have entered the church under the slogan of 'all things permissible, all things in common', and Hebrews 13. 4 has to remind its readers to keep the marriage bed 'pure'.

The answers to many questions about the Corinthian episode remain uncertain. What is quite certain is how Paul rounds the matter off, quoting Deuteronomy 17. 7 (LXX): 'remove the evil person from among you' (I Corinthians 5. 13). Expulsion from the community, at least, is involved. Yet II Corinthians assures us that rehabilitation in the community on the basis of penitence and penance was both possible and actual. Paul gives the Corinthian church the authority to forgive, 'so that we may not be outwitted by Satan' (II Corinthians 2. 5–11). (Another reference to Satan, curious but surely not insignificant!) Too severe or too lasting a spirit of condemnation is not allowed. For such a spirit is itself to be quite exceptional.

How did medieval monasteries function as centres of asylum, rehabilitation and therapy? The figure of Mendoza (played by Robert de Niro in the Robert Bolt-scripted film, *The Mission*), ready to lay down his life, doing obvious penance for fratricide and a life of exploitation, affords a popular example. Could the church today offer something analogous for those who have either not transgressed the law of the land but might be liable to do so, or alternatively have served their civil punishment? This would mean less a 'new monasticism' (or missional community) in the sense of withdrawal into collective contemplation, and more a social location for setting a new purpose, helping to discover a vocation to a field of work and its opportunities for virtue. In these ways the Gospel may move beyond the claims of law without denying those claims, pointing towards forgiveness through the power of resurrection. That Christ was raised for our justification (Romans 4. 25), was contingent on his act of atonement. Yet does the church have the right to forgive on behalf of someone else (the victim) or only on behalf of itself? The latter would seem to be what is intended, even by 'Whatever you bind on earth […]' (Matthew 18. 18).

The sins of some 'run ahead' (I Timothy 5. 24), and it may well be that we think of the sins of abuse in this light. Can they ever stop? The experience of Alcoholics Anonymous suggests that addiction does not necessarily doom the addict to recidivism. Can there be ecclesial penal colonies with restorative functions? These might have to be small: prison-released sex offenders should not cluster in groups. To preserve the state's proper interest, the church's role could well be to make sure due process is observed, both for victim and (alleged) perpetrator, and to offer hospitality to both at

different times and places, without prejudice to the roles of social workers and probation officers.

Is child abuse (and its variants) the 'unforgivable sin' (cf. Luke 12. 10), from which there is no hope of return, but only a handing over to God's judgement?[2] That question, however stark, is raised by the need to make a clear judgment on this type of offence. We may find it less stark if we place it alongside Jesus' saying, 'If anyone causes one of these little ones — those who believe in me — to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones' (Matthew 18. 6; cf. Luke 17. 2). Although the reference here is to disciples, especially those of weak faith, it is a principle properly extended to all who are vulnerable, especially those that are literally young. But it sets a premium on prevention, not on punishment. May we, at the opposite extreme, characterize these offenders as the new tax collectors, whom only Jesus is willing to associate with? That would be hasty, for the tax collectors of Jesus's time, however immoral in the eyes of the world by virtue of their office, were not guilty of action in itself illegal. With an abuser, where the requirement of a legal punishment is not in question, what the church is left to negotiate is the legacy of moral opprobrium, how they may regain an identity that is not 'who they previously were' but is rather 'ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven', allowed the space to become those who love much because they have been forgiven much (Luke 7. 47).

The pre-modern church's emphasis on sin rather than suffering, and on the sense of sin as a sense of responsibility from which one may be delivered, can seem difficult to moderns, who wish to start and finish with a concern for the victim's suffering, and think that bringing that suffering to judgment is the only means to stop the cycle of violation in its tracks. But if we develop an account of wrong and justice with no sense of solidarity in human offence, no 'there but for the grace of God go I', we shall come to imagine 'radically evil people' simply as a class apart. This is incoherent as a theological anthropology, and it leaves us blind to the dangers of further similar violations as well as of other forms of corruption to which we are all exposed. Breaking the cycle requires in the end not only suppression and isolation but deliverance and a new way of life, preferably before, but also after or together with, a proper measure of hard satisfaction of the justice of the law. The church will seek to draw contrition out from a necessary process of attrition, working even with offenders as they endure punishment, and then and only then to add its balm of absolution in Christ's name. That

[2] On this type of sin see the helpful commentary of H.-J. Klauck, *Der erste Johannesbrief* (Zürich, Braunschweig: Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1991) on 1 John 5. 16.

is not to say that the largely behavioural and cognitive therapy of the state and penitentiary psychologists is to be opposed. Yet there is a place where *that* law, too, needs supplementing with Gospel.

The church cannot be a soft touch. In preaching the law before or together with the Gospel, it lets the moral principle that says, 'thou art the [wo]man!' (II Samuel 12. 7) ring out clearly. The Gospel itself demands a certain 'destruction of the flesh', as we are called to take ownership of what we have done and how we have done it. Modern humans are not merely 'buffered selves', in Charles Taylor's phrase; they are quarantined selves who are wrongly convinced that moral contagion comes from outside to infect their basically decent homes and gardens. The church is tasked with telling the quarantined self that the sickness is already deep within, and always has been. It will not do to deflect it.

Reviews

Bryan D. Spinks, *Scottish Presbyterian Worship: Proposals for Organic Change, 1843 to the Present Day* (Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 2020; a co-publication with the Alcuin Club). ISBN 978-1-8008-3000-4. XX + 299 pp. Paperback, £25.00; Kindle, £23.75.

This book is written, in a sense, from the outside by an Anglican priest and a leading liturgical scholar now teaching in the United States. True, Bryan Spinks was elected as president of the Church Service Society of the Church of Scotland, the first non-Presbyterian and only Anglican to hold this office. But his detachment gives this learned yet highly readable book an energy and breadth of context that sets Scottish Presbyterianism within the wider spheres of nineteenth-century understandings of organic change and progress, from the development of Christian doctrine, to scientific and social ideas of evolution, devolution and development, as well as Romanticism and its aesthetic effect on religious architecture and ecclesiology. As other things develop organically so too should our corporate worship. This book should become compulsory reading for all those intending to engage in active ministry in the Scottish Episcopal Church, both lay and ordained, for part of loving our neighbours is the respect we pay them in understanding them better.

Professor Spinks begins his narrative with the Great Disruption of 1843 and with worship grounded in the Westminster *Directory* of 1644. Extensive quotations throughout this book provide immediate and often vivid experiences of worship patterns and ethos. In 1864 the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland considered reports on 'Innovations in Worship' in the context of profound conservatism yet also complaints of the poor quality of traditional worship and extemporary prayer, considering also the sacramental matter of baptism and the Lord's Supper. But the first great figure in the development of Presbyterian worship and liturgy in the nineteenth century was Dr Robert Lee, the minister of Old Greyfriars, Edinburgh from 1843 to 1870. His innovations included kneeling for prayer, the introduction of an organ and stained glass into his church, and the use of prayers read from a printed book, *Prayers for Public Worship* (1857). Inevitably there was conservative opposition, but in many ways, Lee prepared the ground for the founding of the Church Service Society in 1865 which was dedicated to the study of liturgies both ancient and modern with a view to preparing forms of public worship and the administration of the sacraments. Writing in 1910, John Kerr wrote that 'no sooner was the Church Service Society formed than

showers of polysyllabic denunciation and abuse descended upon its founders' (p. 49) as they were accused of being, among many other things, Romanists, Ritualists, Jesuits and traitors! But the Society's influence was felt widespread and it remains in being today. Not least was the publication in 1867 of the *Euchologion* — a collection of services including, among others, Communion, Marriage, and Morning and Evening Worship. Among its sources were Justin Martyr, the *Apostolic Constitutions* and the English ecclesiologist J. M. Neale's Eastern Orthodox rite. The effect of the *Euchologion* on Presbyterian worship in Scotland was lasting.

Spinks continues with a detailed history of the 'high church party' of so-called 'Scoto-Catholics' (chapter 6) as well as the influence of Romantic medievalism on the aesthetics of worship and Scottish church architecture. As the story moves into the twentieth century the nature of Presbyterian worship in both the Free Church of Scotland and the Church of Scotland (and the various smaller churches between them) is described in the context of the devastating effect of the First World War, then the founding of the Iona Community, and the later ecumenical and the liturgical movements in which Scottish Presbyterians played a full part. The reunion of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church in 1929 resulted in the publication of the *Book of Common Order* in 1940 in which echoes of the *Euchologion* are still clearly heard, its communion rite described by William D. Maxwell in glowing terms: 'This noble and notable rite indicates the richness, centrality, and uniqueness of the Scottish liturgical tradition, its catholicity yet independence. It is not a creation de novo, but a long tradition brought to its perfection' (p. 186).

Drawing on his own immense liturgical knowledge and sensitivity, Professor Spinks brings his narrative down to the present day, to questions of modern language in worship and 'into postmodernity'. In the process he includes a number of often moving descriptions of services he himself attended — from Greyfriars Kirk Edinburgh, to St. Giles' Cathedral, to Iona Abbey and, further afield, to Stornoway High Church of Scotland on the Isle of Lewis.

What strikes me especially in this book is the careful liturgical descriptions of different forms of communion, its theology and the presence of the epiclesis and other ancient elements discussed at a time when Anglicanism also, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was engaged with liturgical renewal and revision. It serves as a reminder that such liturgical education is, by and large, sadly lacking in both Presbyterian and Anglican churches and that the bringing together of those training for Christian ministry in Scotland to engage in liturgical study at this historical and theological level, could only be to the benefit and enhancement of all our acts of worship.

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Thabo Makgoba, *Faith and Courage: Praying with Mandela* (London: SPCK, 2019). X + 246 pp. ISBN 978-0-2810-8058-8. Hardback, £8.99; Paperback, £12.86; Kindle, 6.92.

Thabo Makgoba has been Archbishop of Cape Town since 2008 and is now one of the most senior and most influential primates of the Anglican Communion. This book provides an account not only of his pastoral relationship with Nelson Mandela, but of the political context in which it is set, and of his own formation, and his vision for South Africa and for global Anglicanism. The different subjects covered are fully integrated, and the insights provided will reward readers with some diversity of interests.

As one of the most prominent leaders of the Anglican Communion, and of civil society in South Africa, for more than a decade, Archbishop Makgoba's background and biography are certain to be of interest in coming years. As much of the information is dependent on oral sources, it will prove useful that this has been brought together now and annotated where possible. The family history, while unique, also reflects the experience of often violent dispossession, impoverishment, and discrimination at the hands of colonial invaders and their descendants, common not only to South Africa and other African countries, but to Australia, New Zealand, and the Americas, to cite only some examples of European imperialism in recent centuries. The son of a polygynous travelling salesman and pastor in the Zionist Christian Church, and of a domestic worker, Makgoba was raised in poverty in Alexandra, a segregated township on the edge of Johannesburg. Gifted with a formidable intellect capable of moving effortlessly between the physical and social sciences and theology, and a determination to excel through education, he persevered through forced removal of his family to Soweto, the consequent decline and early death of his father, sometimes violent social turmoil, popular uprisings against apartheid and their brutal suppression, to enter university during the turbulent 1980s. Along the way, his encounters with Anglicanism while at school led to baptism, and ultimately to a vocation to the ordained ministry. Makgoba completed his theological training and was ordained just as Nelson Mandela left prison and spent his first night of freedom at Bishopscourt, residence of the Anglican

Archbishops of Cape Town, as the guest of Desmond Tutu. Priestly ministry at Johannesburg Cathedral was combined with community work, further studies in psychology and education, university chaplaincy, administration, and teaching, marriage and parenthood, during the exhilarating but also traumatic years during which apartheid gave way to a new South Africa.

His calling to the episcopate at an early age surprised nobody, except perhaps Makgoba himself. After some years in the largely rural Eastern Cape Diocese of Grahamstown, he was elected Archbishop of Cape Town on the retiral of Njongonkulu Ndungane, who had succeeded Desmond Tutu ten years previously. By this time, the African National Congress had ruled South Africa for over a decade and dominated local government in most parts of the country. Former President Mandela, now married to Graça Machel, widow of the first President of liberated Mozambique, was fading from public life; his successor, Thabo Mbeki, was in process of being ousted by Jacob Zuma, whose rule was mired in sexual and financial scandals from which the country is yet to recover. Religious leaders, including Archbishops Tutu and Ndungane, had already established the principle that being democratically elected and having darker skins than their predecessors did not place the political rulers above criticism for their moral shortcomings and failure to improve the living conditions and opportunities of the majority of the population. Nevertheless, the Zuma regime attained particular depths of depravity, with nepotism, cronyism, and embezzlement crippling sound government and the delivery of basic services. Makgoba rapidly became an outspoken, and courageous, leader of a broadly based civil society movement against corruption in politics. It was against this background that he was invited to extend a pastoral ministry to Mandela.

The pastoral relationship which evolved over a period of years is recounted with appropriate circumspection. Makgoba's declared objective is to provide readers with an insight into the character and spirituality of a human being who had become an icon both of revolution and of reconciliation — not to gratify curiosity, but better to understand the mind of so formative a figure in the emergence of a free and democratic South Africa, through a process which has been viewed as exemplary and encouraging in a world where the need for radical economic and political change is widespread and urgent. Pastoral confidences and the content of spiritual counsel are rightly guarded, but the anecdotes will undoubtedly be analysed for any and every insight into the political machinations surrounding the Mandela family during his declining years. Prayers and addresses composed at the time are included in the text and in appendices, illustrating ways in which the Anglican theological and liturgical heritage informed both the spiritual care offered to an elder statesman (who

happened to be Methodist) and the prophetic voice of the church in a troubled society.

The closing chapter offers some wider insights into global Anglicanism, its heritage, and its future. The close alignment between the church of England and the British Empire, and its continuing consequences in a post-colonial world, may make for uncomfortable, but very necessary, reading. The involvement of the church in slavery and the slave trade, from which the Scottish Episcopal Church at the very least benefited indirectly, needs to be faced. The collusion of the church in the dispossession of indigenous people as the empire expanded, its acquisition of land and wealth through this process, and its role in cultural imperialism, all need to be acknowledged. Makgoba offers insights also into ways in which the Anglican Communion manages difference and is deeply critical of exclusion as a means of maintaining unity. While deeply committed to the inclusion of women in leadership positions in the church, including the episcopate, and a longstanding advocate of acknowledging the love and fidelity of homosexual couples who seek the blessing of the church on their unions, he calls for a deeper commitment to dialogue — which must surely include those African bishops who have urged their countries' legislatures to introduce harsher criminal penalties for homosexual practices.

This book will prove of interest not only for its insights into South African history, but also for the issues it raises for the church and society everywhere today. Where government is corrupt and incompetent, serving the financial interests of elites rather than the basic needs of the people, the prophetic voice of the church is needed. A church which does not acknowledge the darker aspects of its own past, and is unwilling that they be explored, cannot speak to society with any credibility. Questions might be raised about information included, glossed over or omitted from this book, but the challenges it poses are accompanied by a vision of what is possible, and illustrated by the example of what has taken place when leaders of courage and integrity in church and state have acknowledged the past, framed the present, and made the future possible.

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Justin Whitmel Earley, *The Common Rule: Habits of Purpose for an Age of Distraction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2019). 198 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8308-4560-6. Paperback, £9.15; Kindle, £8.70.

Christians have been formulating 'rules of life' at least as far back as the fourth century with the *Rules of St Pachomius*. St Augustine of Hippo wrote a *Rule* around 400. The sixth-century *Rule of St Benedict* is probably the most widely known Christian rule of life. Benedict, Augustine and Pachomius wrote mainly for those, especially monks, who wished to withdraw from the world's everyday life. There has been no shortage of rules through the centuries since then, but what has changed in the last century or so is the proliferation of rules of life by and for those very much engaged in the world. On the one hand, there are Christian communities who do not gather together as much as they network under a rule of life, often under the umbrella of the so-called new monasticism, for example the Northumbria Community. On the other hand, many Christians write their own, individual rules to organize their lives in such wise as to meet the vicissitudes of their divergent circumstances. What all these rules share is the aspiration to navigate the changing Jordans of their days in order to land safely on Canaan's side. Part and parcel of this aspiration is an appreciation of those changing Jordans in terms of opportunity and risk.

The opportunities and risks of twenty-first-century Christian life go hand in hand with the heretofore unknown advances in technology, specifically information technology. Never before has so much information been instantly available to us and at our fingertips. Advances in technology and communication, particularly in social media, enrich our present-day lives whilst at the same time they drive us to distraction. There is a marvellous opportunity to connect instantly with our fellow men and women, but a terrific risk of disorientation with all that is now available so quickly and easily to us. In short, a cacophony of voices not only vies for our attention but seems inescapable because it is omnipresent in our smartphones, tablets, computers etc. The borders of home and office, work and leisure, just to name a few, have blurred. Lots of people from lots of walks of life find it hard to cope. Among them are many Christians who find themselves adrift in a raging sea of commotion, consumerism and competition. How are Christians to cope?

Justin Whitmel Earley charts a course worthy of our consideration in *The Common Rule: Habits of Purpose for an Age of Distraction*. He starts with a scenario familiar to many twenty-first-century Christians, namely waking up one day, amidst the hustle and bustle of life, and wondering what distinguishes the Christian life from any other. What makes a Christian life different? Earley writes of the tension to rectify his Christian vocation with

the chaotic lifestyle of a young professional: 'while the house of my life was decorated with Christian content, the architecture of my habits was like everyone else's' (p. 4). This led Earley to look at how habits shape our lives and form our hearts. He compares habits to liturgies insofar as liturgies are meant to form people in one fashion or another. He notes how habits and liturgies, contrary to misguided and popular belief, do not limit freedom, but slavery: 'the right limits *create* freedom' (p. 11, emphasis original) vis-à-vis Philippians 2. 7. With the example of Jesus before him, Earley focusses on the love of God and neighbour to craft a 'gospel-based rule of life […]', that is 'a trellis for love to grow on' (p. 17). Earley realizes the importance of community. Hence, he defines 'rule' as 'a set of habits you commit to in order to grow in your love of God and neighbour' but sees his efforts as communal insofar as his Common Rule is ideally 'practiced [*sic*] with other people' (p. 21).

Earley's *Common Rule* is rather oddly laid out and unbalanced in its three parts: an introduction of seventeen pages; a first part of but eight pages; and the second part of about one hundred and thirty pages. The introduction does a good job of laying out his understanding of (true) freedom by carefully placed limitations that allow a person to thrive as God would have one thrive. Earley is looking to craft a 'gospel-based rule of life', that is 'the way of Jesus' (p. 17). The first part, the shortest part of the book, gives a brief introduction to Earley's four daily and four weekly habits with a somewhat befuddling chart (p. 25) that becomes clearer in the second part of the book. It is, indeed, the second part that is the lion's share of the book. There Earley clearly and cogently lays out his four daily and four weekly habits. The four daily habits are (1) kneeling in prayer at morning, midday and bedtime; (2) one meal with others; (3) one hour with the phone off; and (4) Scripture before phone. The four weekly habits are (1) one hour of conversation with a friend; (2) curate media to four hours; (3) fast from something for twenty-four hours; (4) and Sabbath.

All eight are self-explanatory, especially to Judæo-Christian readers. In terms of the first two daily habits — praying three times a day and sharing meals with others each and every day — most of us aspire to them anyway. The second two — an hour with the phone off and reading a bit of Holy Scripture before using the phone — may not be things we have thought to do heretofore per se, yet the principle is hardly novel; Earley does not have to go far to convince us that if practised, they would ease the constant distraction of our phones and, with a bit of discipline on top of that, get us to spend some more time with God's Word. The first two of the weekly habits — an hour's conversation and only four hours of media per week — are much the same: we can easily see how they would improve a life, Christian or not. Finally, the last two of the weekly habits — fasting and Sabbathing —

are no brainers: think Mount Temptation and Mount Sinai. That being said, Earley weaves a very readable, if somewhat thin narrative with lots of personal vignettes, about how these habits have helped him and many of his family and friends to live their lives as God would have them lived. Earley peppers his narrative with quotes from Holy Scripture and several fine recommendations for further reading, for example the Book of Common Prayer. None comes as a surprise.

Yet a ways into the book this reader, who is of a mind to think Earley could have said more in fewer words, was struck by these sentences:

> If you've read any of this book thinking you can muster the good life out of a few daily practices, you're reading it backward. Love has first come to us. […] Place habits before love, and you will be full of legalism, but place love before habits, and you will be full of the gospel (p. 155).

They are striking because they reveal both the strength and weakness of *The Common Rule*. The strength, of course, is that Earley is surely onto something — Someone — much greater than he or his readers. God created us in love, redeemed us in love and continues to inspire us in love. A good life has been exemplified in the Christ and chronicled in the Scripture. A few daily practices could not hope to touch the hem of their garments. The weakness, at least as this reader sees it, is that Earley's depiction of the good life is far too minimal, for the good life, the way of Jesus, needs explication and illustration in such wise as to craft a rule of life far deeper and involved than many of his daily and weekly habits in terms of their roots in love and Gospel-based living.

That said, Earley's book is well worth our while. It gets one thinking, not a shocker given Earley's obvious taste for technology and wish to share his version of the good news. Moreover, he alerts those of us who are unlikely to harbour any hopes of withdrawal from the world to the world's opportunities and risks. The conversation continues in *The Common Rule* website, which has added a special 'Spiritual Rhythms for Quarantine'. What *The Common Rule* does, and does well, is to assist us to ask questions about the harmony of our beliefs and our habits. And most of us would surely profit from that assistance.

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