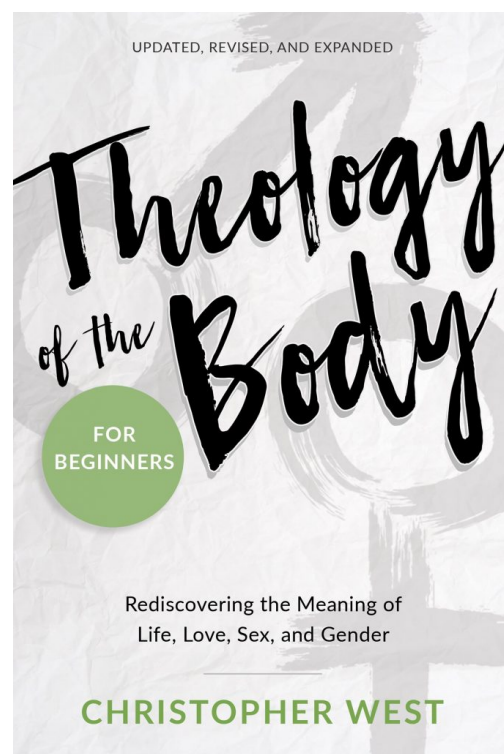


# Review: Theology of the Body for Beginners – Rediscovering the Meaning of Life, Love, Sex, and Gender

It's not often that I encounter a book that is both intellectually and emotionally stimulating. I picked up Christopher West's *Theology of the Body for Beginners* as background reading for some upcoming conversations about sexuality in the Church of England. What I encountered were some deeper insights. This isn't really a book about sex and stuff, it's a book about the stars; it beholds God's grand narrative intimately and deeply and with no loss to its grandeur.



For better or worse, it is thoroughly Roman Catholic. The reason it is “for beginners” is because “Theology of the Body” is actually John Paul II’s opus. This book is Christopher West’s commentary on that work. Some caveats are therefore necessary; it *is* Catholic, and sometimes that is jarring. The mention of Joseph and Mary’s supposed perpetual virginity, and the censuring of contraception are two cases in point. These assertions, however, are mostly tangential to the essence of West’s argument, which remains worthwhile.

I found myself exploring the content in two aspects – *personally* and *eschatologically* – and two applications – *individually* and *ecclesiastically*. They are all intertwined, and it can be a confronting exercise.

For myself, when it comes to the **personal aspect**, I am quite familiar with my body. Over time, I have learned to *listen* to it. This is partly because as I've got older I've had afflictions, such as bladder cancer, which require me to pay attention. But mostly it's because I am also familiar with *anxiety*. I know when the "fight or flight" adrenaline response kicks in, and when the knot in my stomach firms its grip. I am acutely aware when physical and existential angst overlap. I have experienced surgery trauma during a delicately intimate emergency procedure. I have also experienced, in my time, ecclesiastical mistreatment. Somehow my body conflates them and remembers both as a form of violation.

When it comes to the **eschatological aspect**, my engagement is this: I'm old enough to look back at my virile youth when zeal was pumping through my veins. Dreams and longings fizzed and popped. I would lie awake at night, not only moved by the prospect of juvenile romances, but by the sheer abundance of life ahead. I had idealism, expectation, and a simple *desire* for life. But it's one thing to dream, it's another thing entirely to pursue life "in the flesh." It's one thing to fantasize about a romance, and even act it out with someone else, exploring each other physically like adventurers on the brink of a new world. It's another thing to bring those dreams, and those romances, into steady, stable, committed, reality. Our bodies get *spent* in the pursuit of life, yet that deep foundational desire is still in there. Belief, when manifest in the physical world, takes the form of desire; we long to desire life, and for life to desire us.

My question of myself, then, is how do I process this experience? How do I process it *theologically*? Abstractions and metaphor have their place, but it comes down to something *physical*: How am I loved by God? Me, in this failing, hurting flesh? Me, a fallen man. Am I *safe* with him? Does he love me in this fat, old, pale, body of mine? Will he be there for me when me and mine need him, literally?

And what about this church that I'm a part of? If we are, together, the Bride of Christ, then I can imagine us looking wistfully in the mirror, studying ourselves with a degree of shame. Perhaps there is torpid obesity, self-afflicted wounds dividing one member from the next, a hacking sickness as yet another abusive leader lodges like phlegm in our lungs. Are we abandoned? Can we ever be fruitful? Who are we that He, our Saviour, should desire us? In our own internal monologue, we speak to each other as if Jesus isn't even in the room. Shared belief, when manifest in the ecclesiastical world, eventually boils down to desire, and therefore worship.

Do we trust that he loves us? Do we entrust ourselves to him? Forget about strategic plans and all the other church fippery; that's what it comes down to in the end.

**This is why a theology of the body is important.** It touches us deeply, intimately, powerfully – both individually and collectively. This part of theology brings implications for all the hot-topic issues; it is why I was reading the book. But those topics are touchstones for a reason. They touch places that run very, very, deep.

*No wonder we are all so interested in sex. God put an innate desire in every human being to want to understand the meaning of our creation as male and female and our call to union. Why? To lead us to him. But beware of the counterfeits! Because sex is meant to launch us toward heaven, the enemy attacks right there. When our God-given curiosity about sex is not met with the "great mystery" of the divine plan, we inevitably fall, in one way or another, for the counterplan. In other words, when our desire to understand the body and sexuality is not met with the truth, we inevitably fall for the lies...*

*(Page 108)*

What West has encouraged me to do is to not shy away from

words such as “erotic” when framing concepts of God’s love and mission. For many of us, “erotic” is a difficult word to talk about, and antithetical to anything divine. Eros often connotes uncontrolled passion, lustfulness, or a desire to dominate or manipulate. But we’re talking *pure* or *redeemed* eros here. It speaks of *yearning* and *longing* and of a form of love that is *physically* manifest. “Capital ‘E’ Eros – the very *fire* of God’s love – this is where small ‘e’ eros, the fire within each of us – is meant to lead.” (page 120). The incarnation teaches us that Jesus came in the flesh, and the defining act of “God so loved the world” was “This is my body, broken for you.” Eros is not something that taints the divine, it is the divine that defines and confines the fire of eros, and is its only satisfying end.

*This maddening ache I felt inside was a yearning for the infinite, and God put it there to lead me to him... Christ doesn’t want us to repress our desires, he wants to redeem our desires – to heal them, to redirect them toward an infinite banquet of love and ecstatic bliss called “the marriage feast of the Lamb” (Revelation 19.9). Discovering this set me on fire!*  
(Page 3)

Therefore “the body is not only biological... [it] is also theological”, West says (page 11), and he is right. Indeed, “Ours is an *enfleshed* religion, and we must be very careful never to *un-flesh* it” (page 13). When we *respond* to Jesus, we don’t merely give intellectual assent, but a *physical* response. Not only do we “come to the altar” or wash our bodies with the waters of baptism, our very selves become his. To belong to Christ is to re-orient our physical selves, our yearnings, our longings, our actions, our sufferings. Collectively and individually we respond to his perfect and holy *desire* for us.

**It doesn’t take too long for this to hit close to home. There**

were times when I had to put this book down because I was manifesting, physically, some of my traumas. I curled up in a ball. I felt, in my gut, the familiar knot of the unlovable, rejected, and ostracised teenager. I felt *lonely*; shallow-breathed, wild-eyed, scared, hiding my nakedness. I was being reminded that I want God's love as more than theory; I long to know that the me-in-my-body is longed *for*, *cared for*, *valued*.

As I dared to dwell in this, I found the answer in the physicality of the cross. There have been times – very few times if I'm honest – when, as a man, I have expressed love by serving to the point of physical pain. But Jesus on the cross exemplifies such love. His love for me, for us, is leg-trembling, blood-sweating, shallowed-breathing, pain-moaningly clear. He loves me with his body; it is tenderness, it is affection, it is embrace. His touch on my life may be scary and frightening at times; but in his arms, I am safe, and I can surrender to him and bear much fruit to his glory.

But, to be honest, I struggle with those words. I've tried, and failed, to avoid sexual imagery. West's encouragement is to not avoid it, but to find the holy foundations on which it is grounded. "In Christ *eros* is 'supremely ennobled... so purified as to become one with *agape*'" (page 23). There are two foundations that help us:

**The first foundation is our own physicality.** In the Genesis accounts God creates humanity with physical, sexed, bodies – *male and female*. Of course, in this current moment of trans and gender militancy, this is a difficult topic, and there is a complexity of "lived experience" to pay heed to. Nevertheless, the essential link between biblical ontology and physical sex is powerful and essential. It can't be eradicated without fundamentally shifting how we conceive of God, and of ourselves. We are made in the image of God, and that includes our physicality. "God inscribed this vocation to love as he loves *right in our bodies* by creating us male and female and calling us to become 'one flesh'" (page 12) and so to

“fruitful communion” (page 18).

**The second foundation is the so-called “spousal analogy.”**

Here is the coherence between marital union and the union of Christ and the Church. It is epitomised in Ephesians 5:25-33. And despite the misrepresentation of its detractors, it was also the substance of the recent CEEC video *The Beautiful Story*. West writes, “from beginning to end, in the mysteries of our creation, fall, and redemption, the Bible tells a nuptial, or marital, story” (page 21).

That’s where we can ground our language, and our thoughts.

**Take the issue of masculinity.** When talking to men about men it is easy to slip into caricatures: the emasculated man-of-the-cloth wearing vestments like a dress, or the macho preacher yelling for Jesus. It can only be approached through a theology of the body.

Us men must learn to be effective members of the church, the “Bride of Christ.” There is an unashamedly feminine form of intimacy in that notion; we rightly pray, as men, something like “bear fruit in us and with us and through us.” Our sisters, therefore, have much to teach us. The female form of intimacy allows someone to be inside and to leave something there. Men are uncomfortable with that, but need to learn what it means to embrace vulnerability with dignity, honour, and grace-filled empowerment. Without it we struggle to entrust ourselves fully to God, and we certainly cannot nurture and lead his people. For West, drawing on the example of Mary, “every woman’s body is a sign of heaven on earth” (page 25), and that, exactly, is the eschatological nature of the church.

Male bodies have their fragility on the outside, and in our corruption we cover and defend, often by domination. The spousal analogy points to a redemption of this. Christ “gave himself” for his bride, the church. For West, therefore, “the theology of a man’s body can be described as a call to enter

the gates of heaven, to surrender himself there, to lay down his life there by pouring himself out utterly” (page 25). No wonder Augustine referred to the “marriage bed of the cross” (page 26). I’ve had enough internal dialogues with myself, and real conversations with other men, to know how dearly we need a cruciform shape to our sexual discipleship.

**Clearly, some conceptions of gender, singleness, and marriage** are examined by the spousal analogy. It is why these are not second-order issues that are just going to go away. What West does really well is demonstrate how the orthodox or traditional view is not founded on prohibition or repression, but on worship and gospel proclamation. Clearly there is honour in the marriage union of husband and wife; it expresses a divine eros, and it can bear, quite literally, the fruit of new life. But it’s the divine eros that comes first; and none are excluded from it.

*...marriage does not express definitively the the deepest meaning of sexuality. It merely provides a concrete expression of that meaning within history... At the end of history, the “historical” expression of sexuality will make way for an entirely new expression of our call to life-giving communion.*

*(Page 100)*

For West celibacy is not a repression of sexuality, but a “fully human – and, yes, fully sexual – vocation” (page 36). All of us – including those of us who are married and sexually active – need to take heed. Our physical yearning is grounded in a more profound yearning that we all hold; to be united in Christ and to see his kingdom birthed in all its fullness. The older I get, the more I realise how that eternal desire is deeper and more profound than that found on the marriage bed. In fact the health of the marriage bed will usually reflect and reveal what is being grasped at the deeper divine levels.

What we yearn for, whether married or single, is a participation in the “spousal meaning” of our body. “Spousal love... is the love of *total self-donation*” (page 56), and the spousal meaning “is the body’s ‘*power to express love: precisely that love in which the human person becomes a gift* and – through this gift – fulfills the very meaning... of being and existence.’” Marriage looks back to the foundations of the spousal meaning, celibacy looks ahead to its deepest eternal fulfilment. Neither is ethereal. Undergirding both is an eschatologically pure *eros* desire for eternal communion.

Christ is the ultimate end of our search for intimacy. For those who are single; a sexual partner will *not* answer your deepest longings. For those who are married; your *spouse* and your sexual activity will *not* do it either. I echo West when he offers “great reverence” for the “cry of the heart for a spouse” of the person who is single and doesn’t want to be. *Eros* is the “cry of our hearts for the infinite... Whether we are single, married, or consecrated celibates, setting our sights on that eternal union is the only hope that can safely see us through the inevitable sorrows and trials of this life” (page 115). We all long for Christ.

*We worship whatever we think will satisfy our deepest desires. Eros yearns for the infinite, crying out to be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:19). In the divine plan, sexual love is meant to point us to the infinite and opens us up to it. But when we fail to see our sexuality as a sign that leads beyond itself to the mystery of God, eros gets “stuck” on the body itself, and we come to expect small “b” beauty to do what only capital “B” beauty is capable of: fulfilling our deepest longings.*

*(Page 62)*

**Here, at these deepest longings, the individual and the ecclesiastical intertwine.** When the church tears itself apart, it reveals what it worships. At the moment much of the



church is tearing itself apart over sexuality. Our eros, our worship, is stuck, and we “don’t really believe God wants to satisfy our desires” (page 73). While we desire something other than Christ – the lusts of our consumerism, traditionalism, activism, nationalism, and even some hedonism – we are simply not *a real embodiment of the gospel*, not really a church.

But in all things – both personal and ecclesiastical – there is hope. There is the blood of Christ poured out for us on the cross. There is new wine to receive – quite literally in Communion. There is the Spirit of God, holding us, filling us, giving voice to groans, and making all whole, new, and fruitful. God *desires* us. How can that not awaken and delight our heart?

*If Christians themselves don’t believe in the power of redemption to transform eros, what do we have to offer a sexually indulgent world other than rules and repression? If the contest is between the starvation diet and the fast food, the fast food wins hands down. But if redemption can truly redirect our desires toward a divine banquet that infinitely satisfies our hunger, the banquet wins hands down.*

*(Page 86)*

I came to this book expecting some treatise that may inform a church controversy. I have left with some of my cynicism eroded. I have left having brushed against a beautiful thought such that “I was filled with a painful longing, a kind of nostalgia that grabbed me in the chest and became a prayer.” I have found myself praying: “I have been afraid that living from that ‘fire’ inside me would only cause me pain or lead me astray. Awaken a holy and noble eros in me, Lord. Give me the courage to feel it and help me to experience it as my desire for your Fire” (page 109).

Amen.

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# Q&A: On current political and ethical issues, why do we not hear God in the same way?

**Anonymous** asks:

*I read with interest the series of Facebook posts sparked off by your post of the Christianity Today article. I think it is fascinating to see how Christians come to opposing conclusions from the same set of "facts".*

*For me, one of the biggest problems not just in the specific case of the USA but generally, is what we mean by "discerning the mind of Christ" or "listening to the Holy Spirit". I am fully in agreement with the article and your counter-arguments against the pro-Trump people. However, how do I know that this really is what God is saying to us?*

*The same can be said of other major issues on which the church is split. Each side is sure that they are listening to God. I think this conundrum is something that has got increasingly difficult over the 40 odd years of my Christian life. For example, in the early 70s, I think the evangelical world was pretty unified on the sexuality issue. We could dismiss pro-gay views as being part of the liberal wing. Now, I suspect that even the evangelical wing is probably in a minority in holding to traditional views.*

*Why does God not speak to everyone in the same way or rather why do we not hear God in the same way?*

The Christianity Today article referenced is: We Worship with the Magi, not MAGA

***[This is a Q&A question that has been submitted through this blog or asked of me elsewhere and posted with permission. You can submit a question (anonymously if you like) here: <http://briggs.id.au/jour/qanda/>]***

Thank you for this question. This was sent in a while ago, and the delay in my response comes from the fact that this is my second attempt at answering!



At the heart of it, your question is about *disagreement*. In particular, it's about Christians disagreeing on how to discern what God wants, what God wills, or simply what he is doing. In my first attempted answer I wanted to talk about epistemological differences – i.e. our understanding of how we *know* things – and then set our feet on the solid rock of God's revelation in Scripture and analyse our disagreements from there.

It wasn't a bad place to begin. From that perspective of Biblical truth we can form an opinion on whether people (including ourselves) are correct or incorrect with regard to doctrine or fact. We can also discern whether people (including ourselves) are wrong or right in terms of the spirit or character of our engagement. We can also reach for some conclusions about what things are *essential* or *primary*, and what things are secondary *adiaphora* on which we can disagree in unity.

On the matters you raise – Trumpism and sexuality – there has

been much that has been written and said and I'm not going to rehearse it all again here. If our intention is to *disagree well* while holding to a robust epistemology, there are some good examples. A number of years ago I wrote a lengthy multi-part review of a book called *Good Disagreement?*. One of that book's contributors, Andrew Goddard, has written very recently on the same topic of sexuality on the Psephizo blog. With regards to US politics, a recent podcast from Premier Christian Radio, *Unbelievable? Is the US Church in the grip of political idolatry?* with Shane Claiborne & Johnnie Moore, is useful.

The reason for my second attempt at an answer is that I think your question might be pushing a little deeper. **It is a good thing to analyse the *nature* of disagreement. But you are asking *why* it happens.** Why does it seem that God is not speaking clearly? If God's truth is real and foundational, why do Christians differ so significantly on what we think that truth is? And if that clarity is not there, *how* can I truly know anything?

Conflict and disagreement about God's will amongst God's people is self-evident, biblically, historically, and in our present moment. Our trust in God cannot depend on their being a lack of disagreement. So we must find the right place for it in our thinking. To that end, I discern two types of conflict, which I will tentatively call *unfaithful* disagreement, and *faithful* disagreement.

The first category of **unfaithful disagreement** is needed because sometimes God's truth *is* clear. The conflict arises simply because there are those who wish to be faithful to what God says, and those who wish to dismiss it, disobey it, or harden themselves to it in some way.

Many of the conflicts in the Bible are of this sort, which makes perfect sense when viewing Biblical history from the perspective of hindsight and a greater awareness of the grand

scheme of things. There is story after story of various people whose eyes are open to God's truth being opposed by those who are hardened or spiritually blinded in some way: from Cain & Abel and those who opposed Noah, through the mumbling moans of the Israelites against Moses, to Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who killed the prophets and stoned those sent to her (Matthew 23:37). This is truly the conflict of light vs darkness, truth vs lie.

These conflicts cannot be truly resolved by compromise or finding the balance of things. In such conflicts even if an "agree to disagree" can be found it resolves to a *diminishment* of unity, rather than an *increase*.

Take the issue of state authorities, for instance. With regards to Trump the normal "common ground" issues of how God ordains secular and civil leadership (e.g. in Romans 13) are not really the issues at hand. What is under dispute is whether some particular anointing, even of a Messianic kind, attaches to Trump, the nature and extent of spiritual warfare and prophetic utterances about Trump, and the intertwining of gospel proclamation with the ascendancy of one man, and the violent actions of a mob in Washington. These are matters of right and wrong, light and dark.

With regard to the issue of human sexuality; there is a lot of complexity and nuance, and things to understand and embrace in the middle of it all. Nevertheless, sometimes the dispute *does* encroach onto matters of fundamental clarity, and we do face (on both sides of the politics, to be honest) fundamental matters of idolatry and grossly negligent handling of the Scriptures.

To some extent, then, this answers something of your *why* question. Why do we disagree? Why do we claim God's support on different sides of various debates? It is simply the human predicament: We long to stand in the light and truth of God, and at the same time our rebellious self-centred

hearts oppose it. That essential conflict is therefore within society, within church communities, and even within our own souls. In our sin, we do not hear him as we should, therefore we disagree. This should not surprise us.

The response to it is *hope*. One day the Father of Lies will be defeated, and the One who is the Way, Truth, and Life, will shine and all will be revealed.

However, there is also a form of **faithful disagreement**. It rests on the reality that God made us good, and he also made us *finite*. There is *goodness* in our epistemological finitude; it is part of God's good design that we are limited in our knowledge of the truth. Those limits are a dynamic part of us that *draw* us towards a deeper knowledge of God, a deeper *worship*.

It's one of the reasons I am wary of Trumpist-like prophets who sometimes speak of getting a "downloaded" word from God. Biblical and personal experience, rather, indicates that God's truth is something that we have to *learn*. After all, Jesus had *disciples*; i.e. he had *students*! He promised that the Spirit would *lead* them into all truth (John 16:13). And through the various modes of ministry and gifts within the church, a process of *maturation* is expected (Ephesians 4:11-13).

Some of us will know certain aspects of God's truth differently than others. Some of us will be better versed in the Scriptures. Some of us will have had different experiences to bring alongside those Scriptures. In our learning there will be *difference of opinion*. But that doesn't mean that that *process* of learning is flawed.

Consider the ideal: Adam & Eve walked and talked with God in their innocence; their growth and maturation sprung, in all goodness, from that relationship. (Interestingly, the fall is portrayed as an attempt to seek knowledge on their own terms). Similarly, Jesus gathers his disciples and they sit at his

feet where they receive the words of eternal life (John 6:68) – and that was good! It was good when they first started being taught by him, and it was good after three years of walking and talking. And, we might note, it didn't stop them having disputes – some of them painful – which were, in themselves, opportunities for Jesus to teach them, yet again.

At our best, this is what we see in the “disputes” of the church. They lead to greater understanding, and deeper worship. Paul talks to the Bereans and they run to the Scriptures with *eagerness*, (Acts 17:11), to test what they have heard. The leaders of the church come together in the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 and they ponder together Peter's experience with Cornelius, and the truths of the Law, and their own eyewitness learning from Christ himself, and they resolve the dispute about the inclusion of the Gentiles. They don't pitch these things against each other to find some shallow overlap; they wrestled *in their faithfulness* to Scripture and the direct teaching of Jesus, in order to grasp what was happening in their experience. From this wrestle came a greater fathoming and proclamation of the gospel!

This isn't some mystical magical thing; it's the ordinary experience of the gospel. Personally, I remember how one of the greatest joys of my theological training was the lunchtimes debates of one topic or another – well-hearted differences of opinion that forced me back to the word of God, to wrestle, to learn, and, in the end, it led to greater worship.

Why do we not hear God the same way? Because, in his divine wisdom, our ignorance is a call to worship, as we bring each other to sit at his feet.

How, then, do we know, with the issues that are rising in our own time now, **what sort of conflict we're dealing with?**

I will always do my best to take heed of the disputes around

me – even the matters of Trump and sexuality. I may learn something from them, you see. Here's the framework I use to parse that:

1. **Is this dispute a matter of fundamentals?** Are we seeing, here, a matter of spiritual *opposition* to God and his word. Have we slipped from asking "What does our Lord say?" to "What am I going to say anyway?" In this case, I either call out the error as constructively as I can, or I walk from the dispute; it cannot lead me to greater worship.
2. **Is this dispute a secondary matter?** That is, does what I have learned from God's word stay the same on either side of the debate? I will enter into the matters if I have the inclination or energy to clarify my own opinion, but only if it's edifying. Paul warns us away from needless controversies (Titus 3:9) and about needlessly offending our brother or sister (1 Corinthians 8:9).
3. **Is this dispute taking me to sit at God's feet once more, to learn from his word, and explore his heart?** At this point I will attempt to receive the dispute as a gift, even if have to expend some energy and suck up some humility. In this moment it can be a great joy and delight that we do not all hear God in the same way; there's something more to learn from his Word.

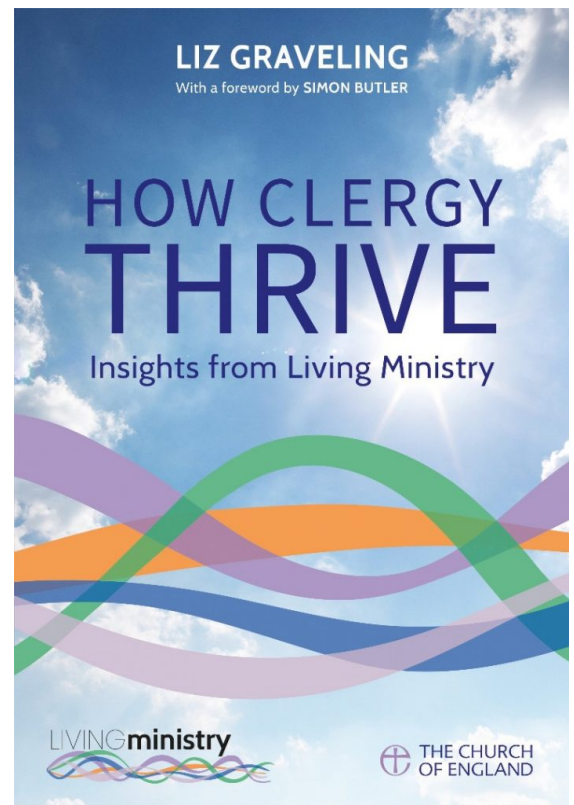
The difficulty with the matters that you raise – Trumpism and sexuality – is that in different ways, with different people, on different particular topics, I have found that all three parts apply. Sometimes it's a matter of opposing what is blatantly wrong. Sometimes it's needless controversy. Occasionally it is edifying dialogue. You will see all three aspects at work simultaneously, and because of that, much wisdom is needed.

Thanks for the question.



# Review: How Clergy Thrive – Insights from Living Ministry

*How Clergy Thrive* is a short report in the Church of England that was released in October 2020. It provides insights from the *Living Ministry* research programme, a longitudinal study into clergy wellbeing that has been following four cohorts of clergy and their families. It is substantial research and author, Liz Graveling, presents it well. It pushes in the right direction but, unsurprisingly, falls short of a fulsome exhortation for the cultural and structural changes that are really needed.



I have attended enough “resilience” sessions at clergy conferences to approach a report on this topic with a healthy cynicism. This report avoids many of the normal pitfalls.

For instance, clergy wellbeing is often reduced to a matter of individualised introspection and the promotion of coping mechanisms. Refreshingly, this report recognises that “wellbeing” is a “shared responsibility” (page 7). It notes that the “the pressure to be well”, itself, “can sometimes feel like a burden”. Indeed, “clergy continuously negotiate

their wellbeing with institutions, social forces and other people: family members, friends, colleagues, parishioners, senior clergy and diocesan officers, as well as government agencies and market forces.” We clergy live in a complex web of ill-defined social contracts. We are often the least defended from the inevitable toxicities. A recognition of this *system* is a good foundation.

Similarly, the multifaceted approach to “vocational clarity” (page 9) deals well with actual reality. There is always a gap between the “calling” of ministry and the “job” of ministry, between the way in which the Holy Spirit gifts someone to the body of Christ, and their institutional identity. In my experience, the wellbeing of a clergyperson is essentially shaped by one’s emotional response to that gap. Wellbeing is encouraged by stimulating and supporting a clergyperson to reach an honest, holistic, and healthy equilibrium. It is undermined by arbitrary training hoops and merely bureaucratic forms of institutional support. The short discussion on where annual Ministry Development Reviews are either helpful or not (page 9) or even damaging (page 10) indicates that this dynamic has been recognised. The many “questions for discussion and reflection” are also helpful.

It’s impossible, of course, to read something like this without evaluating my own wellbeing and the health of the institution to which I belong. I have my own experiences, of course, including some significant times of being unwell. Here, however, my attention has been turned to the cultural and structural problems that are revealed.

Take the surveyed statement “I feel that I am fulfilling my sense of vocation” (page 11). It is noted that “79% agreed they were fulfilling their sense of vocation.” This sounds reasonable. However, I’m not sure if that positive summary is quite what the data actually suggests. Only 47%, less than half, of the respondents can fulsomely agree with vocational fulfillment. The other 32% in that 79% can only “somewhat

agree", and a full 20% is neutral or negative.

In many professions this picture might be excellent. Retention rates for teaching, for instance, indicate a 30% loss after five years.<sup>1</sup> We must, however, make a distinction between an ordained vocation and most other professions. In ordained life, one's profession is not just one facet of life, it *is* holistic (page 7); it captures many, if not all, of life's parts. *Integration* of those parts is key to being healthy. How can it be, then, that 53% of our clergy are not able to fully find themselves within the life of the church? From my perspective, this speaks of a consumeristic culture in which clergy are service-providing functionaries rather than charism-bearing persons. Perhaps it simply speaks to an unhealthy culture in which it is tolerable for square pegs to be placed in round holes despite the inevitable trauma. Whatever the case, this isn't about the church institutions *doing* wrong things, it's about innate ways of *being* wrong; we need to change.

We see glimpses of this same sense throughout. Consider the relative benefits of the activities that are meant to support clergy (page 14). The more positive responses correlate to personal activities or activities that are outside the institution: retreats, spiritual direction, mentoring, networks, and academic study. The institutional supports such as MDRs, Diocesan Day Courses, Facilitated Small Groups and so on, are of relatively less benefit. In fact IME Phase 2, the official curacy training program, scores worst of all! I cannot speak to IME – my curacy was in Australia – but the rest of the picture certainly matches my own experience.

This is observation, not disparagement. I generally sympathise with those in Diocesan-level middle management. They have tools and opportunities that look fit for purpose, but they so often appear to run aground on deeper issues they cannot solve. Dissatisfaction then abounds. A related observation is

this: It appears to me that a common factor amongst the poorer scoring forms of support is that they are often *compulsory*. This invariably amplifies dissatisfaction. Appropriate accountability and commitment aside, compulsion usually reveals an institution propping itself up through confecting its own needfulness.

Again, when "sources of support" are considered (page 31), the ones most positively regarded are non-institutional: family, friends, colleagues, and congregation. Senior Diocesan Staff, Theological College, and Training Incumbent score low. This is understandable and perhaps it is unfair to make this comparison; no one is expecting the Bishop to be a greater source of support than one's spouse. However, the question wasn't about support in general, but about "flourishing *in ministry*", and the picture remains stark. Note, also, that the most negative response that could be offered was a neutral "not beneficial." If a negative "unhelpful" were counted, the picture might be even starker.

My point is that *cultural* problems are being revealed. If only 63% of respondents could agree, at least somewhat, that "the bishop values my ministry" (page 49) then this is not so much a problem in our bishops, and certainly not the clergy, but in the institution in which we all embody our office.

Remuneration and finances are also revealing. 45% of the respondents are "living comfortably", but 81% of the respondents had "additional income" (pages 39-40) which, I suspect, relates mostly to the income of a spouse. To some degree, this is all well and good; a dual income usually means a better quality of life. Nevertheless, the sheer disparity in financial wellbeing between clergy couples with one or two incomes cannot be ignored. The provision of parsonage housing is a factor; in other occupations accommodation costs generally rise and fall along with household income and dampens the disparity. More importantly, however, is how this reflects the *individualisation* of vocation, and the shocking

degree to which clergy spouses are simply invisible, for better or for worse, within the Church of England. It is also my experience, both personally and anecdotally, that the wellbeing of couples who are both clergy is not well assisted in our current culture. This is especially so for those called to “side by side” ministry, who share a ministry context and usually only one stipend. It’s well past time to allow for couples to be licensed and commissioned as *couples*, like many mission agencies do. We need the means to share remuneration packages and tax liability, and, at the very least, the provision of National Insurance and pension contributions for the non-stipended spouse. Our current culture does not allow for this.

Finally, this study would do well to extend its work to take into account the effects of incumbency on wellbeing. I wonder what proportion of the respondents, given their relative “youth” in career-length terms, have reached incumbent status? Incumbency comes with a certain level of stability, power, and protection. Attached to incumbency are checks and balances on institutional power. Incumbents are more clearly party to the social contract between clergy person and institution. Associates, SSMS, permanent deacons, and the increasing numbers of crucial lay ministers are not as well protected. They *do* “find themselves overlooked or under-esteemed” (page 35). The increasing prevalence of non-tenured and part-time positions in the Church of England is a structural concern that *does* effect clergy wellbeing. We need more work here.

*How Clergy Thrive* has painted a useful picture. There is scope for even more insight. The benefit of longitudinal research is that the story of wellbeing can be told *over time*. The testimonials in this report reflect this and are very helpful. It is unfortunate, however, that most of the data is presented as a snapshot census-like aggregation across the cohorts. An accurate picture of how wellbeing ebbs and flows as a career progresses would help us all. If we knew, for instance, at

what point in their career a clergyperson is most likely to not be thriving, we could respond. If clergy wellbeing suddenly drops, or if it slowly diminishes over time, that would teach us something also.

Like the vast majority of reports, this one struggles to answer the question of “What do we do about it?” How *do* we help clergy thrive? In the end, it appeals to an acrostic: THRIVE (pages 56-57). It’s not bad. It’s healthy advice that I’ve given to myself and to others from time to time: Tune into healthy rhythms; Handle expectations; Recognise vulnerability; Identify safe spaces; Value and affirm; Establish healthy boundaries.

These principles are applied, to a small degree, to how the existing system might do a few things differently. In the main, however, they describe what clergy have managed to do for themselves. It’s a story of *technical* changes for the institution, but *adaptive* change for the clergy. We need the reverse of that.

The life of a clergyperson exists in an impossibly complex interweave of pastoral, strategic, and logistical expectations. Technical changes in an institution often only add more expectation and more complexity. We have a structural problem. We have forces vectoring through things that are too old, too big, or too idolised to be modified. Instead, they are dissipated through the clergyperson, and other officeholders, but *not* the system itself. Personally, I’ve learned to find my place and peace with much of the machinery, and to look for the best in the persons who hold office. I have done this, in resonance with many of the testimonials in this report, by trusting real people when I can, and by not giving myself, or those I love, to the church system itself.

It’s not enough for the ecclesiastical machine to *do* things better. It must *become* different. Take heed of the testimonial on page 25 – “I wouldn’t really trust my diocese to make them

aware that I have a mental health issue.” Imagine, instead, that the diocese was for that person a fount, a fallback, a refuge, or a hope! In short, imagine if the church (ecclesiastical) really aligned with being a church (theological). That’s the redemption we need. I wonder if the “big conversation” alluded to on page 6 will help.

Like most intractable problems, the hard thing is not about noting the problem. It’s not rocket science; we “just” need real Spirit-filled personal nourishment and discipleship. It’s the getting from here to there that is difficult. Difficult, but not dire. There are times when the right people are in the right place and it just works. For myself, I hold to a glimpse of how things might come to be:

What do clergy need to thrive? They don’t need an “MDR”, they need to be *overseen*: a regular conversation with a little-e episcopal someone who can cover them, is for them, and who has their back.

What do clergy need to thrive? They don’t need strategic plans and communication strategies, they need to be treated as the little-p presbyters they are: brought into the loop, entrusted with substantial work without being second guessed, and given space to be themselves without having to watch their back.

What do clergy need to thrive? They don’t need a “remuneration package”, they need to be *provided for* with decent housing that’s fit for *their* purpose, enough money to feed their family and prepare for the future, and an assurance that spouse and children will also be backed and supported without needing to beg or “apply.”

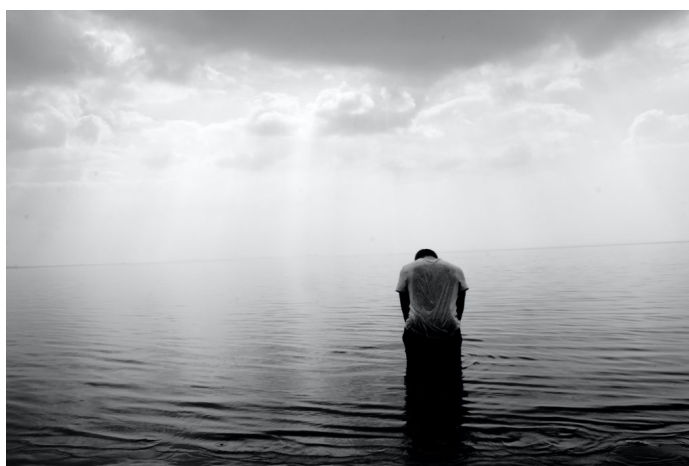
### Footnotes

1 – National Foundation For Educational Research, 2018

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# The Church as Lazarus – Following Jesus in the Emotional Landscape

Discipleship is not an academic exercise. It is often, substantially, a journey through an emotional landscape. Sometimes those emotions are negative and dark: grief, suffering, pain.



This shouldn't surprise us. After all, to “abide in Christ”, is to be *his*. To *follow* him is to live as Jesus did (1 John 2:6) and Jesus was, and is, and was prophesied to be a “man of suffering and familiar with pain” (Isaiah 53:3). Discipleship is about “sharing in his sufferings” (Romans 8:17). There is a *cost* to discipleship, as Bonhoeffer (amongst many others) would say.

I'm not trying to be morose. There is joy, peace, fulfilment, *happiness* even, on the road with Jesus. Laughter abounds. But these are not grounded in some sort of avoidance or escape, but are comingled, intertwined, with all that comes. The joy breaks out from the grief. The tears are wiped away. The peace is beyond understanding. Glory sprouts from the suffering.

A part of my emotional landscape recently has been grief. I have *grieved* this week for some reason. I was confronting



myself. I was encountering some of those pains, regrets, fears, and worries that get pushed down until they pop up like fungi in the damp of one's hidden soul.

I was also grieving for the church. This has been a week in which the ugly side of us has been on display, for various reasons. The human sexuality "debate" has yet again be broached. I have had over twenty years of experiencing this particular no man's land, and yet the vitriol, bile, and lip-curling condescension has shaken me. But my reflection hasn't really been about #LLF (for those who know what I'm referring to); it's a more general weariness. We love the church (local and large), and that involves care and belief. Yet the church often looks more like a phlegm-hacking pale-skinned shadow than the vivified vocational verve of the gospel we follow. Amidst self-referential ear-tickling comfort-mongering machinations I have also seen my own disintegrating compromises, conflicting responsibilities, and sheer plain finitude. For better or for worse, realistically or otherwise, that has been my recent emotional landscape.

So where is Jesus on that path? I've been finding him in a play of two parts:

**The first part** is an insight from my wife, Gill. This is not a surprise; she is regularly insightful. She took me to **the story of Lazarus**, who Jesus raised from the dead, in John 11:1-44.

The story may be familiar to you. Jesus is friends with Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha. While some distance away from them he learns that Lazarus is sick. He declares a hope that "this will not end in death" but it will "be for God's glory" and his own. He delays his return. Lazarus dies. "Lazarus has fallen asleep; I am going to wake him up", he says, "Lazarus is dead, and I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe." There is hope; but Lazarus is dead.

Martha comes out to meet him. She presents a rational, theological engagement to Jesus. When Jesus assures her that Lazarus will be raised, she pushes that hope off into an abstract future: "Yes, I believe that we will all rise again." Lazarus is dead, Jesus, but we get the theory.

Mary has not come to greet Jesus, but he sends for her. Mary readily emotes. She collapses at his feet, and there is a tinge of bitterness to her voice: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." It's only half a step from "Where the hell have you been! I thought we could trust you! I thought you brought hope!" Lazarus is dead, Jesus, where have you been?

Martha grieves. Mary grieves. And, even though he knows what is going to happen, **Jesus wept too.**

Here's the insight in this story for me: We are grieving for the Western Church like Mary and Martha grieved for Lazarus. Good people have been plugging away at gospel ministry for years, the church has been cared for in its fitness and its brokenness, its strength and decline. We have done our best to be faithful to our task, but in the end, we know, that none of it matters, unless Jesus shows up.

Our gospel preaching is nothing, if Jesus is not in it. Our social action. Our pursuit of what is good and holy. Our cries for justice. Our restructuring. Even our self-giving to one another in unity and peace-making. All of these virtues are not enough, except if the Spirit of Jesus be in them. There are times when we look at ourselves, locally, nationally, within our Western world and there is deathliness about us. And we *feel* the bitter tears. In that landscape, the blurted out "prayer" of the most visceral sort is: "Lord, when are you going to show up? Lord, why are you waiting? We can't change hearts. We can't overcome the power of sin. But you can! Where have you been?" We struggle to even pray "Revive us, Oh Lord" except in Martha-like abstract theory.

The church is Lazarus. And we are allowed to grieve. Yes, there is hope in this analogy, and we don't ignore it: Lazarus is called back to life, away from the stench of death; a living reflection of Ezekiel 37. Jesus is glorified, and his people believe. And now, Jesus *will* be glorified, life will come. Yes there is hope. But let's not rush quickly there. Right now can be a time for weeping.

The church is Lazarus. And *Jesus* weeps. And that's OK.

**It brings me to the second part.** I have tried to imagine Jesus weeping: tears rolling down middle-eastern skin, cheeks and beard. Were they gentle tears? Or sobbing? Were they sympathetic tears for Mary, or tears of his own response, akin to the woundedness he cried over rebellious Jerusalem (Luke 19:41)?

My task as a disciple of Jesus is to follow him. How then, may I be led by his emotions? What would I learn if I could watch his passions, see his tears, and hear the prayers he whispers through salt-dripped lips? What may I glean from his demeanour when he encounters stress, grief, injustice, and utter weariness? Where can I go to *learn* from him, and be his disciple?

The gospels are good place to start. But the Scriptures also give us a fulsome emotional repertoire: the Book of Psalms.

Let me get there somewhat theologically: Jesus is the Messiah, the anointed heir of the messianic king David. David points to Jesus. The psalms of David are the prayers of David. They are the prayers of a messiah. Prophetically, therefore, they are the prayers of *Jesus*. The New Testament often uses the psalms this way. Take a look at Hebrews 1:5, quoting Psalm 2:7 – “You are my Son, today I have become your Father.” Keep reading that Psalm and on the lips of David it is somewhat pretentious, but on the lips of Jesus it is simply, right: “I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth

your possession.”

So now I can read the psalms, and hear them on the lips of Jesus in the emotional landscape. In the psalms is faith-filled joy, faith-filled peace, faith-filled anger, faith-filled weariness, faith-filled grief. In the psalms, the Spirit of Jesus is praying, and I can *learn* from what is prayed.

I can see Jesus expressing gentle but firm defiance against political power in Psalm 2:1-3: *“Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One. ‘Let us break the chains,’ they say, ‘and throw off the fetters!’”*

I can see Jesus putting faith against fear in Psalm 3:1-3. I wonder if these were amongst his groanings in Gethsemane?: *“O Lord, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me!... But you are a shield around me, O Lord; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head.”*

I can see the protective frustration of Jesus in Psalm 4:2-3: *“How long, O men, will you turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and false gods? Know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself; the Lord will hear when I call to him.”*

I can hear the weariness of Jesus and a sinking into his Father’s arms in Psalm 5:1-2: *“Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my sighing. Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray.”* I wonder if these were in his laying-awake, or his mornings when he sought solitude with his Father.

In some psalms I think we see the prayers of Jesus on behalf of his people; the Spirit gives voice to the collective, broken, Body of Christ: *“O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline in your wrath... My soul is in anguish. How*

*long, O Lord, how long?"* (Psalm 6:1-3). Is this a glimpse of Christ's intercessions for us before his father (Romans 8:34)?

*"O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"* (Psalm 8:1) and I hear my Saviour's delight.

Right now, anyone who cares for the Lord, and for his people, is likely passing through an emotional landscape. Here, as ever, the Lord weeps too. Here, as ever, Jesus teaches us his way.

*Photo by Joshua Earle on Unsplash*

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## Lockdown #2 and the Identity Crisis of the Church

In the first lockdown of 2020 churches were prevented, by law, from opening. In my own denomination the restrictions went even further: private prayer was not allowed, funerals were not allowed, and I, the vicar, couldn't even mow the lawn. There was some sense to it; we didn't know much about the virus and we all wanted to do our bit to protect the vulnerable.



It was, at the very least, inconvenient. Then the *pain* of it began to emerge, especially for those for whom physical sacrament and physical fellowship is an essential part of comfort and faith. Most of us took on board that pain and sought to use the season as a time of refining and realigning. Here was an imposed fast, a slowing down, a solitude. There was blessing in it. If nothing else, it taught us how to go

online!

**But now we have the second lockdown.** It's different from the first. The approach is now more targetted, firstly by region, and now by activity. Schools are not closed. Some businesses are not closed. But church buildings, once again, *are closed* for public worship, even the facemasked, distanced, non-singing, non-hugging, non-chatting sort of public worship that we've been exercising and enforcing over the last few months. Private prayer is allowed. Broadcast of worship is allowed. Foodbanks and other ill-defined services of help are allowed.

The mood in the wider community is different this time. The main difference is the *inconsistency* of the response. We were all in it together in March and April. But now we know that the rules don't apply if you're powerful and have family in Durham. The rules don't apply in the North until the South gets impacted. You're allowed to have a working lunch with a colleague, but you can't share a pint a few hours later. You can pay a housecleaner to come in to your home for hours at a time, but if you meet your grandkids in the park for a few minutes you're breaking the law. There is *anger* now. Some of it is unhelpfully absolute ("The pandemic is a lie!") but most of it is about weariness, confusion, and injustice.

So what is the church to do? In comparison, for my own church context, this second lockdown isn't *terribly* inconvenient. It does affect some more than others, of course, and we're doing what we can. Once again, if we have a mind to it, we can roll with the pain and the frustration and let it refine us. Who are we? What are we missing in this moment? How does this reveal what we are longing and yearning for in the Kingdom of God? We can share in the pain of the wider community and get clarity about our sense of hope. That sounds like the stuff of advent to me!

It's not our place simply to reflect the popular mood. If there is anger in the community, might it be that our task is

to seek peace? I certainly don't think that the American-style bandwagon of #letusworship protests are in any way helpful to the gospel. Neither, in this moment, are acts of eucharistic civil-disobedience. Special pleading for churches to open is rightly met with incredulity; why should we get to operate our religious business when the gym owner can't, why should we get to meet with our friends on a Sunday morning when the local football team can't?

At this point we reach the crux of the issue. **Who are we, that we should be allowed to meet?** That's a non-rhetorical question, it needs to be answered: **Who do we think we are?**

In one of my former churches a local public relations company generously offered the church some pro-bono work. The analysis they did was helpful and insightful. But what struck me was this: They approached it in terms of "marketplace." In their framework church is a leisure activity. We are competitors seeking a share in the market of people's free-time and discretionary-spend. For a theologically pretentious person such as myself, this is a confronting thought, because there is some truth to it. For the vast majority of people there is work time, family time, and leisure time. Church fits into the last category, with some overlap into the second. There is some *good* to that; we are a place where people can *be* and *receive* and *be fed* and not have to *perform*. If we do it well, we have a positive effect on wellbeing; we strengthen families and can provide relational, emotional, and practical first-aid when times of stress come along. But, of course, a football club, or a hiking group, or a bunch-of-old-schoolmates-who-catch-up-on-a-Tuesday-afternoon can do that as well, maybe even better. **Church is not *just* a leisure activity.** If we were, then we should, rightly, and consistently, be closed up with the rest of those groups right now.

Are we anything else? To some extent, we're also a *business* activity. We employ people. Much of what we do is

charitable works (more on that in a minute), but we're also content producers, pastoral carers, cleaners, support staff, and so on. We've already had to work this one through when there were restrictions on "socialising": Is the vicar having a cup of tea with Mrs. Jones socialising or *working*? It *is* work, the exercise of a *profession*. (It's also socialising, but let's not complicate things for Mrs. Jones.) Moreover, there *is* a religious industry, and, if I were to be cynical, there may be some churches who are only pushing to open because the plate hasn't been passed and the bottom line is hurting. But, of course, **church is not *just* a *business activity***. If we were, then we should, rightly, and consistently, be closed up with the other businesses right now, and be hurting right alongside them.

Of course, churches also do *good works*. We are charitable enterprises that perform a utilitarian service. Who was it that recently tweeted that we have become the "church of good" more than the "church of God"? We run foodbanks, and support groups, and mental health services, and so on. We can argue, therefore, that the church provides essential services. Indeed, this *is* recognised; these clearly definable essential services have been allowed to continue. But is that really who we are? Such services often run out of churches because we have a philanthropic volunteer base, perhaps a higher degree of altruism. But a foodbank could be run by any group of well meaning group of civic-minded folk. The **church is not *just* a provider of essential utility**. Where we are seen to be such, we are rightly, and consistently, allowed to keep operating.

What we are running into is a different sense of what is *essential*. And that raises the question of: **Who are we? What is *our* essence?** There can be no escaping it; we are a *worshipping* community. We are *theologically* defined in our very soul. We are students of Jesus. We believe he died, rose, and is with us by his Spirit. We devote ourselves to him through private and corporate rhythm and ritual. We seek his



Kingdom Come, which is more than just the doing of good, but the pursuit of a fulsome transformation of community, society, and individual lives... for *his* glory.

We don't bother with church just because we're fond of the people there and because we get a sense of being fed and fulfilled; **we are not just a leisure activity.**

We don't bother with church just because we've got a job to do, or a duty to perform; **we are not just a business activity.**

We don't bother with church just because it can do some good in the world, and fill a gap in the social fabric; **we are not just an essential utility.**

No, we bother with church because God is bothered with us. And he calls us to devote our whole lives, our careers, our families, our passions, our dreams, our finances, and our time, to the pursuit of his kingdom.... together. We are the body of Christ. And it is Christ who is our core, our essence, our reason to exist.

So the restrictions on public worship are not just an inconvenience for us. They brush up against the existential depths of our very selves.

The lockdown is easier for some traditions than others. For some it is impossible to detach the physicality of this essence, e.g. the eucharistic presence for our Anglo-Catholic brothers and sisters, the raising of voices together in praise and worship for our Charismatic friends. For others, worship and fellowship is more cerebral and oral and aural; we can express it with some adequacy in an online setting. For myself, I think we can weather the lockdown in this current moment, at least for a short time. But, in essence, I agree with those who are starting to push back at the government: To be *who we are* we need to worship. **We don't need the building, but we do need to meet.** It is not some "essential service", **it is simply essential** to what it means to be who we are. We

don't want to lose ourselves. If this season goes on too long I will add my voice to those who are saying "We can do this safely, let us worship together."

But in the meantime there is a provocation for us. We are being made to confront ourselves. **I wonder how many Christians are actually agreeing with the government.** I don't mean about the policy decision, but about the miscomprehension of what it means to be a Christian community. Is church, to us, just a leisure activity, a practical pursuit, an altruistic provision? Is that what gets us out of bed on a Sunday morning when covid isn't around? If so, then we really really need the lesson of this moment. If so, then we have just become a hollow shell, confused about whose we are and what we actually care about.

The Archbishops' are right, let's make this lockdown a time of prayer. Let's make it a time of re-devotion to the Lord. Perhaps we'll find ourselves.

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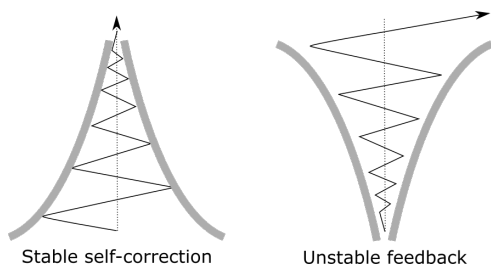
## Speed Wobbles in the World and Church

I woke up this morning, the day after the 2020 US election. I'm slightly despondent because it's close to being the worst possible result. I can say that without showing political bias because there's no winner yet! It looks set to be a close,



contestable outcome, and I can only see further division emerging.

I've been thinking about it: America, and the Western World, has the **speed wobbles**. Do you know what I mean by that? Speed wobbles happen when you're on a bike, or perhaps a scooter, or some other form of vehicle. At a certain critical moment there can be resonance with the bike's built-in instabilities; the bike lurches from left to right and left to right, again and again. It falls afoul of its own feedback loop of movement until it crashes and causes injury. It doesn't crash into anything. Nothing happens to it. It crashes into itself.



The physics is graspable. A system is in some sort of equilibrium, running along smoothly until something shifts; the bike-rider adjusts for a change in the road. At this point there is always a form of over-correction. We

start heading too much in one direction, we pull back to the other, go too far, and return back towards the centre. In a stable system these over-corrections slowly diminish until the equilibrium returns. In an unstable system each over-correction amplifies the next and it goes back and forth with increasing crescendo until it all falls apart.

We've got the speed wobbles in the West. There are two over-amplified directions. We have Trumpism on the "right", pulling back from government over-reach but also towards the gutter of blatant mercantilism and nationalist oligarchy; and the Wokeism of the "left" pulling us away from deep-seated social injustice but also towards the gutter of blatant progressive moralism and enforced globalist conformity. In the end, both extremes are terrible options; all gutters connect to the same sewer. So we lurch back and forth trying to avoid both.

The Western church is another example. We've come to look like the world, and so we reflect these two extremes. The gutter at

one end is caricature of “evangelicalism” and “traditionalism”. The former looks like a consumer-class hypocritical industry; by way of example, take a look at the portrayal of Christian marketing in Amazon’s The Boys and you’ll wince at how it hits close to home. The latter can look like a non-benign fanaticism, complete with the funny clothes. The gutter at the other opposite end is a similar Christian veneer over the worldly spirit. It is a caricature of social activism that becomes a militant more-equal-than-others paganism, preaching a message of autolatry (“You do you, you’re perfect as you are”) and burning nonconformists at a de-platformed stake. Again, both extremes are unpleasant reflections of each other.

We’re not fully in those extremes of course. But we are wary of them, and usually seek to avoid them. The world is full of good people trying to put a tick in the box next to the candidate who is the least bad. The church is also full of faithful people seeking to avoid the divisive extremes, looking for a common ground somewhere amidst the encroaching shibboleths. As we search we move from left to right, and right to left. At a certain point of instability, the speed wobbles appear.

There are many factors to this instability. Social media is certainly one of them. It forces nuanced adjustments to pick a side: “Are you for us or against us? What’s it going to be? If you’re not us then you must be them. All lives matter. Silence is violence. Wear a mask. Don’t be a sheep!” etc. etc.

So here’s the thing. What stops it? Once the speed wobbles start, how do you stop them? Doing nothing is not an option. The instability of the system itself drives the over-reaction. Without intervention a rending apart is inevitable. So what to do?

Many of us have become adept at hauling back in the opposite direction to the currently favoured force. It doesn’t work in

the end. Usually it just adds to the instability. Many of us have tried the art of the compromise, to do our best to speak of the common centre ground which will “dampen down” the volatility and bring stability. But that won’t work if that shock absorption is no longer part of the system. No bike rider can maintain a constant series of equal-but-opposite reactions when it all goes wobbly.

**What is needed is a force, a movement, a direction that cuts across the oscillation.** On a bike you get rid of the speed wobbles sometimes by slowing down, but also by speeding up, in the *forward* direction.

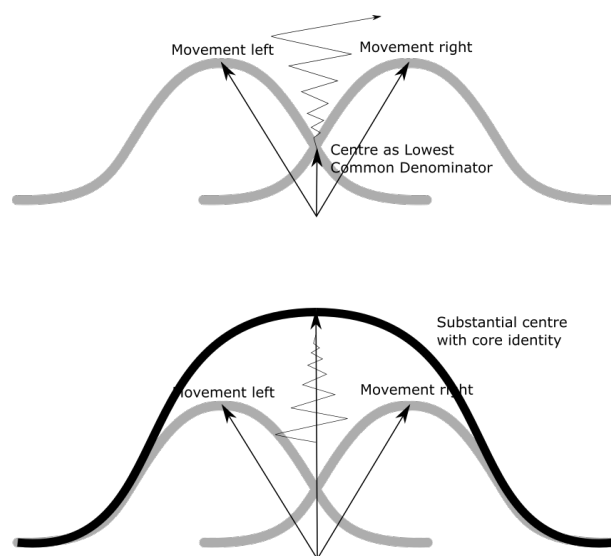
This is how it used to be in the political sphere. I heard a commentator the other day who had studied political manifestos from the 1950’s. Political rivalries were just as impassioned then, but this was the observation: It used to be that the political differences were about different ways of applying the *same idea* but now they are about two competing ideas that are different altogether. That common *idea* was the stabilising forward force.

Finding that common idea is hard. It’s not enough to long for it in the abstract, to speak of wanting *unity*, or *peace* for instance. Unity around what? Peace in what sense? These things only really exist as an appeal to something deeper, a sense of *identity*. In the UK, for instance, there was once a sense of what it meant to be “British.” For better or for worse, the notion of “For King and Country” was a unifying stabilising common ground. The Americans have had the “Free World” as their identity marker. They may not be *great* identities, but they are stabilising ones.

In the church we have a similar difficulty. Our common ground has become abstract. We reaffirm that we are the “body of Christ” and that we “see Jesus in each other, no matter our differences.” Such articulations have an admirable intent, but they only work when there’s substance underneath the form. Who

actually is this Jesus that we can conceive of and see in each other? If we can't agree on that big idea the instability only increases.

It's not enough, you see, to maintain the status quo. You can't re-centre an unstable system simply by reflecting the lowest common denominator in the middle. Look at what the church *does* talk about, either collectively or through its public persons, and you'll see what our lowest common denominator is: climate change, feeding the poor, and generally being good citizens. We agree on such things. But what *aren't* we saying? That's what is missing in the middle.



A broad church, well centred, is a thing of beauty, but that's not the same as a church with two centres and an overlap in the middle. We can do our best to maintain that overlap, but it *is* in an inherently unstable system. The speed wobbles will start, and appeals to unity in the abstract are not enough to provide the centring, stabilising force.

I'm not sure what a positively centrist message looks like in the political world. I'm actually entirely open to the possibility that we've gone past our Commodus moment. It may be that the demise, decline, and fall of the Western world is as inevitable for us as it was for Rome, once it lost its way and didn't know who it was anymore. When I pray for our leaders in the political sphere, and other places of influence, this is the heart of my prayer: Oh Lord, give us the grace of a leader with a positive vision of how we can come to a substantial centre.

I pray something similar for the church world. But, of course,

here there is a clearer kerygma. The centre has always been about Jesus. It's always been about worshipping him, learning from him, following him, as we gaze upon him through the revelation of God's word. There is no other Christian identity other than Jesus. When we are defined by him, in the ancient posture of sanctification rather than the presumption of our self-made existence, we are more and more his.

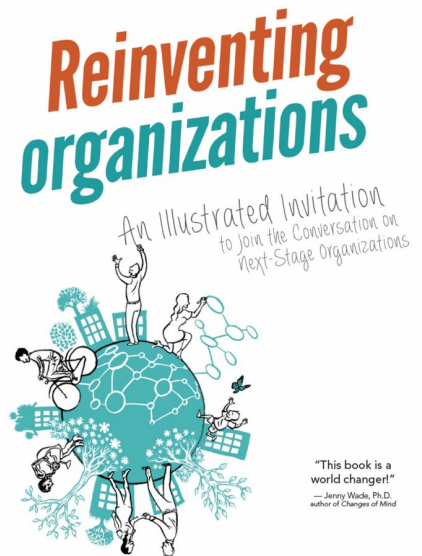
It is therefore, of course, why as Christians we are now looking to Jesus who is King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, able to still the nations (Psalm 46:10). As the political world around us wobbles into a collision with itself, we, once again, entrust ourselves to one who is a rock on which to stand.

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## **Review:                      Reinventing Organizations              –              An Illustrated Invitation to Join the Conversation on Next-Stage Organizations**

What a fascinating book. This is about more than management techniques, it's a distinct vision of how people might organise, relate, and flourish.

F R E D E R I C L A L O U X  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY ETIENNE APPERT



*Reinventing Organizations* is doing the popular rounds. I'm going to approach it, learn from it, and critique it from the point of view of church leadership. The author is Frederic Laloux, about whom I know little. It is wonderfully, helpfully (although somewhat, um, caucasianally) illustrated by Etienne Appert. This is not some tome. It's like a printed powerpoint presentation, and reading it feels like attending a seminar.

Laloux' framework builds upon an evolutionary understanding of human organisation. He imagines human society having grown through "sudden leaps" (page 18) from "**red (impulsive)**" communities characterised by gang-like dominance (page 21), through "**amber (conformist)**" army-like shaping of the world (page 22), through "**orange (achievement)**" machine-like enterprises (page 26), and "**green (pluralistic)**" family-like cultures. He imagines, and this is the book's *raison d'être*, a "**teal (evolutionary)** worldview" (page 38) which is shaped by "individual and collective unfolding... taming the ego... inner rightness as compass... yearning for wholeness" (pages 38-39). This is what he examines, explores, and seeks to apply in the real world.

There's a lot that is good in his vision, and we'll get to that, but there are two fundamental disagreements with which I



must clear the air first.

**Firstly, I disagree with the worldview** in which he explores these worldviews (his meta-worldview?). It is typical human progressivism: We were once ancient and primitive, and we have slowly grown more enlightened over the years, passing through the different colours of the sociological rainbow until we find ourselves at the brink of the next leap forward. This is not peripheral to his outlook; his vision has a religious fervour. His language is almost *eschatological*: “This might sound surprising, but I think there is reason to be deeply hopeful... the pain we feel is the pain of something old that is dying... while something new is waiting to be born”! (pages 16-17).

Such language might be novel in the business world, but it's entirely familiar to the world of faith and spirituality. This world, however, offers the necessary pushback: A linearly progressive story in which we go step by step into either utopia or the apocalypse is rarely a helpful picture. The best eschatology is an insight into the here and now. The different colours and types that Laloux puts forward are useful depictions, but they are less helpful when locked into some sequence of progression. It is more real to think of them as different facets of what human life is like now, and what it has always been. If only he would talk about organisations operating in certain ways rather than at certain evolutionary stages, his work would be much more accessible.

The fact is, we have always had the **dominant reds**, and the **conformist ambers**, and the **organised oranges**, and the **organic-but-not-quite greens**, and yes, the **wholeness-flowing teals**. For sure, they have not always been in balance, but they all have their place, and they all have their ongoing, present value. e.g. red organisations can be *excellent* in a crisis, or where order needs to be brought in the midst of chaos. These worldviews have always been there. To ignore that is to embrace a sort of generational bigotry which refuses to learn

from our ancestors who were somehow unable to “hold more complex perspectives” (page 33) than our much more virtuous generation.

**Secondly, and relatedly, his teal worldview is nothing new.** It might be that it isn’t particularly apparent in the contemporary Western world, and so it is a good corrective. But he isn’t broaching untapped waters here. At best, he is re-discovering something long forgotten.

Perhaps he can’t see it because of a typically prejudicial view of religion that sees the church as being primarily about “rules and traditions” (page 33) and conformity to hierarchy (“oppression” even, page 24). It’s clear he simply doesn’t get religion, especially of the organised Western sort, which isn’t stuck in **amber-conformity** but **orange-machine**! I audibly laughed when he assumed that “priests aren’t assigned KPIs, as far as I know” (page 27). He really doesn’t know!

It’s a shame. This prejudice makes this an awkward book to use in a Christian context. Moreover, it overlooks the deep riches there are in faith traditions, including Christian spirituality, that actually supports his teal worldview.

For instance, the language and concept of *vocation* or *calling* is ever-present in his teal world. Similarly, the sense of belonging and organic flourishing resonates with Biblical imagery of being members of a body, in which we not only *exercise* our gifts, but we *are* a gift of grace to the larger whole. Organic organisations have been part of missiological thinking for some time now; the lifeshapes framework of a couple of decades ago may not always be practiced as it is preached, but it looks to biology in the heptagon and speaks of “low control, high accountability.” Laloux speaks of being a “sensor”, the charismatic and contemplative world speaks of discernment and intuitive insight. He speaks of the teal “yearning for wholeness” (page 39) and I reflect on the language of “groaning” for fulfilment

in not only Paul (Romans 8), but the laments of the Old Testament. He speaks of the need for “reflective spaces” and I look to the vast wealth of liturgical rhythms and spiritual disciplines. None of these are on his radar, and that’s a shame.

So Laloux’ wisdom, like most living wisdom, has an unacknowledged companionship and heritage. But in the end that’s not necessarily a problem; there’s still good here.

**There’s a refreshing honesty in his analysis.** I found his exploration of the interplay between the **green-pluralist** and **orange-machine** to be very applicable to church leadership. These two worldviews are the predominant ones in the West, and they often collide. Many churches, and most church hierarchies, are unashamedly orange, and they should be ever mindful of orange’s shadow side (page 29). Many who have fallen out of the religious industry now lean towards green. Here we are “aware of Orange’s shadows: the materialistic obsession, the social inequality, the loss of community.” Greens “strive to belong, to foster close and harmonious bonds with everyone... they insist that all people are fundamentally of equal worth, that every voice be heard.” **Orange-green** typifies, sociologically speaking, the **evangelical-liberal** divide.

For many, being green seems to be the answer. The reality, however, reflects Laloux’ insight into the “contradictions” of **green-pluralist** organisations (page 32). It’s certainly something I’ve observed:

*In many smaller organisations, in particular in nonprofits or social ventures [churches?], the emphasis lies with consensus seeking. More often than not it leads to organizational paralysis. To get things moving again, unsavory power games break out in the shadows. (Page 32)*

I’ve seen such paralysis. I’ve been knocked about by these

shadowy power games. The games are often in the shadows of church dynamics; power is often pursued with a degree of self-delusion that denies that power and ego is present at all. It's a complex dynamic to navigate and Laloux does us all a service by acknowledging it.

**There is much that is virtuous about the teal (“evolutionary”) worldview.** The interplay of teal's central characteristic of “self-management”, “wholeness”, and “purpose” (page 55) is an exciting and dynamic way of exploring organisations such as churches. It leads to some aspirations: e.g. to embody a culture in which “we are called to discover and journey towards our true self, to unfold our unique potential, to unlock our birthright gifts” (page 38). I only need to look at my teacher, nursing, and clergy friends, and others who have pursued a vocational path, to see such a yearning.

I resonated with his understanding that the “one critical variable” to the success of organic teal systems is “psychological ownership people feel for their organization” (page 140). It applies to the ecclesiastical world. In the end, a church's health does not usually come down to capacity, resources, or opportunity; it comes down to motivation. What do we *care* about? Have we actually *bought into* the love of God and the Great Commission of Jesus? What's the difference between our *espoused* theology, and our actual lived-out beliefs?

I loved his image of the “bowl of spaghetti” (page 139), as a metaphor for the task of unravelling a complex system with simple, sensorial movements. In the church world we speak of “the long walk of obedience” with steps of both *discernment* and *faith*. It is similar; each step is gentle tug on a strand of spaghetti, to see what is next on the path.

Above all, I was encouraged to find that as questions arose in my mind, they would almost always be answered.

For instance, he speaks of leaderless self-managed teams, with little if any hierarchy. I could admire the picture, but couldn't conceive of it working unless there was firstly a dynamic leader who could create the culture and hold the space in which the organic could emerge. His main example of the nursing company Buurtzorg and its leader, Jos de Blok, reinforced what appeared to be a contradiction. How can self-management rely on a dynamic leader?

Laloux recognises the dilemma, and engages with it. He doesn't eschew the concept of power, as if it doesn't exist – “the goal is not to give everyone the exact same power... it is to make everyone powerful” (page 123). He recognises the necessity of visionary, culture-setting leaders, such as Jos de Blok. Sometimes “a committed and powerful CEO is needed” (page 144) to be a “public face” and a chief sensor (page 148).

It has similarities with the dynamic of being a vicar! In church traditions we speak of the “apostolic” gifting, which is interestingly connected to, and often at odds with, the “episcopal” function; perhaps that is an **orange (episcopal)** – **teal (apostolic)** creative tension! The apostolic covers, and articulates the common purpose around which others are organically coalescing. It is a joy when a church operates in this mode, and doesn't need micro-managing; “the organization's purpose provides enough alignment.” (page 125). It's why we harp on about purpose, mission, and gospel... or at least we should.

This leadership dynamic is especially applicable within the pioneering and church planting worlds. In some circles we speak of pioneer “dissenting pathfinders” who push on into the unknown with gospel purpose; and we have also learned of the need for an “authority dissenter” who covers them and “holds the space” (crf. page 149) in which they can thrive.

**Nevertheless, the self-contradictions of the teal**

**vision cannot be fully resolved.** For instance, teal is organic and flourishing with self-management, yet in the pragmatics “control is useful and necessary” (page 145). Laloux is honest about most of these tensions, but doesn’t fully resolve them.

I am left, therefore with some unease, and it comes back to the philosophical foundations. Laloux’ vision is effectively a progressive utopianism, and that is rarely, if ever, grounded in the real world.

For instance, it is a virtue for **“inner rightness”** to be our compass (Page 39); this is the stuff of vocation! But if Laloux had looked into centuries’ worth of engagement on human issues, including the monastic traditions, he would have learned how vocation falls when it becomes self-fulfillment alone. Jesus demonstrates this with his spirit and attitude of *kenosis*, or self-giving/self-emptying (see Philippians 2:1-11). Ironically, without that kenotic aspect, Laloux’ “inner rightness” is inherently egocentric, tuned in orbit to an individual reality, and not to a grounded, shared, common sense of what is right and wrong. His epistemology is on show here, and it’s basic individualism.

Similarly, consider how **“taming the ego”** is crucial to Laloux’ vision. It’s an excellent aspiration, to realise “how our ego’s fears, ambitions, and desires have been secretly running our lives” (page 38). Again, if he had looked to the richness of how the traditions have dealt with ego over the years, he may not have missed the balancing perspective. They speak of sin, corruption, depravity, and shame, and the need for communities to both allow for it and protect from it. The teal vision is appealing, but it is only effective, and safe, when there is sinlessness. This is never the case; Laloux’ eschatology is overly-realised!

Laloux speaks often of trust. Trust is valuable. Trust is precious. And it is these things because it is *rare* commodity within the tensions of the real world. It is right for trust

to be withdrawn, because sin abides. Sometimes, walls of protection are what is needed for life to flourish. A worldview that relies so heavily on trust runs the danger of coercing it, and therefore, of doing injury. I did a straw-poll of some friends about their emotional reaction to the phrase "This is a safe space": the offered responses indicated *elevated* fear and insecurity. The assertion of "safe space" into a *system* coerces trust; "If you don't trust us, you can't belong." I can't shake my sense that the teal vision rests on this subtle manipulation.

This mishandling of the human condition obscures the *danger* in the teal worldview. For sure, I can see teal dynamics bringing life (there is wisdom in this book!) But I can also see teal structures being a place where the bullies can win, the power-games can be played, dissenting voices can be silenced, and the popular majority can rule over the lost and forgotten. Perhaps, at their best, these structures can be "natural hierarchies" (page 77), but nature can be harsh! We can imagine, with Laloux, the joy of people "showing up in loving and caring ways?" (page 93), but what happens when they don't?

Similarly, I get that its a virtue to bring your "**whole self**" to work (page 82), but is it really? My whole self has corruptions as well as goodness. Is that allowed? My whole self has shames and injuries. Should I take those out from "behind my professional mask", or from behind whatever persona might actually make work a safe place for me and others? There is a subtle demand for *exposure* in the teal framework, and this is not entirely healthy.

What I do know, from observation and experience, is that the more you lead with the whole of yourself on display, the more you have to count the cost of the inevitable injuries. Every room has its shibboleths. Teal isn't a worldview in which masks can be dropped; it's a different mode in which different masks must be learned, enforced by tingsha bells.

Vulnerability is inspiring and powerful (let's hear it for Brene Brown). By definition, however, it is a choice to be self-givingly "unsafe". There is goodness in it; Jesus himself shows that it is a path through pain to life. We may aspire to this form of open resilience in ourselves, hope for it in our leaders, and nurture others towards it as well. But vulnerability cannot be demanded without causing injury. We do not cast our pearls before swine; there's a reason we offer our deepest parts to the Lord alone, or in close, intimate relationships.

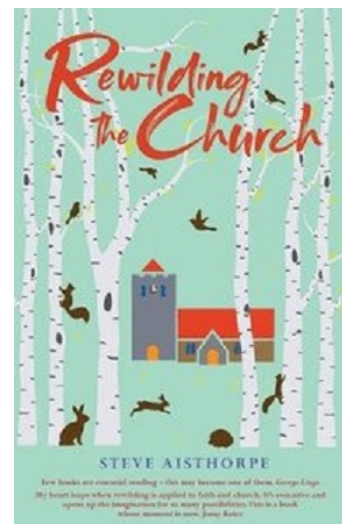
**Teal has it's virtues and I have learned much from this book. But just like all the other colours, I do not think it is entirely safe.** "Practices are lifeless without the underlying worldview", Laloux rightly records towards the end (page 131). And here's the crux of it. There is some wisdom in this book. Some good things to ponder, insights that can offer a corrective. But in the end, I cannot base my life, my leadership, my wholeness, my organisation upon his utopianism. As a church, we have our founding worldview, and we begin with Jesus.

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## **Review: Rewilding the Church**



It is very easy to raise questions about the state of the church. It's harder to provide the answers. This is a decent book, that does the easy bit, but not the hard bit.



You don't have to spend too much time in the ecclesiastical world before encountering a sort of divine discontent.

The *ideal* of the church is so profound, when you dig into it, that St. Paul could only fathom it by calling it a *mystery*. God intervenes in this world *through his people*, through his children, drawn together across time and place, by the Holy Spirit, and counted as united with Jesus himself. All that has come through Jesus to this world – salvation, forgiveness, healing, hope, truth, love, joy, sanctification, peace... – is instantiated, implemented, manifested through his people. We are a “*peculiar people*” reflecting in our very being together, the reality of Christ's resurrection and victory, and the essence of life eternal.

To be fair, this ideal is far from a pipe-dream. I have a testimony, just like millions of others, of tasting some of this in the life of God's people. I have encountered Jesus in sacrament, song, the proclaimed word of God, and the outpoured care and provision of spiritual brothers and sisters. I have known what is like for Church to be lively, dynamic, provocative, restorative, and free!

Like many, of course, I have also encountered the church as a mere shadow of this; stultified, institutionalised, divided, toxic, and sometimes even downright ugly. I was thinking about these things years ago.

How do we respond to this gap between the ideal and the real? How do we cope with it? How do we seek to *change* it? This is the age-old question that Steve Aisthorpe takes us to with *Rewilding the Church*.

Aisthorpe draws on a defining metaphor. He looks to **the ecological movement of rewilding**. This philosophy seeks to restore the vibrancy of ecosystems not through ongoing strategic management of fauna and flora, but by allowing the space for nature to run its course; it entrusts the land to the original, wild, uncontrollable, organic mechanisms that existed before domestication.

*Advocates of rewilding argue that much of what is done in the name of conservation is little more than the preservation of man-made landscapes through human intervention and and management. It's time, they assert, to step back and allow the processes within nature to reshape the environment. Pages 1-2*

The application to Church life is clear. The metaphor imagines a domesticated church, beset by an “appetite to plan, manage, contain, and control” (page 2), and in need of rewilding in order to realise that elusive ideal. It’s quite compelling.

**At first and second glance, it aligns with many of my own thoughts** about the plight of the church: We have become fear-and-performance-driven; much of our ecclesiastical structure is an attempt to provide a controlled, and thus usually dead-on-arrival, outcome. There is stability, but little faith, in following a map. A truly Kingdom Church will be blown by the Spirit, and will learn to chart new waters; it will know *why* it’s going on the adventure it is called to, but will not always be able to fully articulate what that will look like or where it will end up. Aisthorpe’s metaphor articulates something similar: “We cannot convey a vision or an outcome... we must convince people of the integrity of the process” (page

12).

Similarly, I have been known to say that my church growth model distills down to “those who seek to save their live will lose it.” That is, it is grounded on *surrender*. Aisthorpe’s metaphor resonates:

*I am... suggesting that in our well-meaning efforts to create, facilitate, organise, manage and control, we are sometimes in danger of surrendering authenticity for mere reality... By creating and maintaining congregational models that require certain functions and roles, we forego community that emerges from the gift of its people, shaped by the context of their lives and the realities of the wider community. The distinction I am making may seem obtuse or subtle, but it is certainly important. It is the difference between a community with Jesus at its heart and a club for followers of Jesus. In one we are firmly in control; the other is the result of surrendering the driving seat. (Page 27).*

His chapter on “culling the invasive species” is excellent in this regard. Through this part of the metaphor he deals with the invasive idolatry of *busyness* that feeds much of the toxicity of modern church culture. “For the kingdom that Jesus proclaimed and demonstrated to flourish and expand, ” he says, “we don’t need to *do* more and we don’t need to be cleverer; it is neither ingenious tactics nor nifty strategy that is required... we need to respond by culling what is unhelpful, live lives of simple and courageous obedience, and trust God that what emerges will reflect the splendour of his kingdom” (page 158). He channels Eugene Peterson’s *Contemplative Pastor* in this section, and conveys its richness.

Most fundamentally, (and here he draws significantly on Hirsch and Frost and their *ReJesus*), he centres it on Jesus, the “Wild Messiah”, about whom it is all about. I often perceive the church as beyond renewal, revival, or even reformation,

and in need of *resurrection*. Aisthorpe speaks, with Hirsch and Frost, of a “refounding.” “Rewilding the Church is not a call to spend more hours on our knees,” he exhorts, “although for some it might mean that... it is a refocusing of our attention on Jesus, a reinstating of him at the heart of everything” (Page 57). When we lose Jesus, our “self-identity has been eroded” (page 39) and we need to answer that deepest question of “who do we think we are?”

*Rewilding the Church begins here: knowing ourselves to be beloved, putting our roots down deep into Christ, allowing our self-identity to be reshaped in the light of Scriptures, discerning his purposes and stepping out into the adventure of faith. (Page 38)*

I have resonance, agreement even, in my engagement with this rewilding metaphor. His perception of the ills of church – that gap between the ideal and the reality – seems to align with my own. He even touches on the problems of missional language (page 46) that I could have used in a recent article on being post-missional! We have the same vista before us. But it begs the question: What now? What do we with this? What next in the pursuit of God’s kingdom, to the bridging of the gap between what is and what can be?

**At this point the metaphor begins to ring a little hollow,** and his suggestions take on that tinge of theory slightly disconnected from the dirt-under-the-fingernails practice of pastoral ministry.

His weakest chapter, on “tuning in and joining in”, is the clearest illustration of this. It has much that is virtuous; essentially he calls us to discernment and following the Spirit, to a “conscious setting aside of preconceptions and a determination to discern what God is doing and our role in that” (page 74). This is wisdom, and, in the face of a tendency for churches to grab their nearest Alpha course and

launch forth into another round of having always done it that way, it is prophetic and useful. But taken too far, as I suspect it might be, it can become an unworkable, deleterious, deconstruction.

Similarly, I admire the work he has conducted in researching the spirituality of the “dones.” I’ve even ordered his *The Invisible Church*. He recognises that legalism and dogmatism are part of the problem, and he rightly exhorts towards “creating environments where asking questions and exploring doubts are positively encouraged” (page 130). Yet he fails to recognise that there are limits to such an approach, which if transgressed, inhibits and hinders and unbalances the kingdom’s ecosystem.

Let me unpack this: What I think Aisthorpe has done is taken a small step off the edge into a prevalent postmodern fallacy that relies on two impossibilities.

**The first fallacy is this: that it is possible to approach the church as a blank slate with no preconceptions.** For sure, the kingdom of God rarely comes by means of a bulldozer, a brash leader with hardened ideas of how things should be. It is far worse, however, when it is attempted with a pretense at blank neutrality. There is a form of unhealthy (even arrogant) piety that purports to purely “leave space” for the “Holy Spirit” or the “natural processes” of wild mission. *Everyone* has an agenda, a preconception of how things should be. It is healthy to admit it, and much better to bring that agenda forward carefully, gently, and with humility.

This flaw is in Aisthorpe’s metaphor. Every example he brings of ecological flourishing embodies a preconception; it *presupposes* what that flourishing looks like. There is a hidden pre-judgment of what should or should not be the end result of the “rewilding”, of what would be considered a “successful” attempt at rewilding, or what might be considered to be a failure. Every ecologist has a hope, a dream, a

passion for what a renewed ecosystem might look like. Everyone has an agenda on their own terms.

But of course, the point of the metaphor is to consider the church: Consider a pioneering venture, a church plant or a fresh expression, launching out like an expedition into the uncharted waters of organic local ministry. The “rewilding” metaphor may help us remember that the team can’t control everything; they don’t know what lies around the corner, who will be their “people of peace”, and what aspects of their work will resonate and take hold. Flexibility, adaptability, and humility will be required. But so will a sense of vision, purpose; and understanding of *why* the venture is being started, and *why* it is worth the cost. These are preconceptions that must be owned, explored, amended, and released, not wished away by some pretence!

**The second fallacy is related, and it’s this: that it is possible to approach the mission of God as a neutral observer.** The rewilding metaphor purports to be a “hands off” approach, and its strength is in its departure from the artificial cultivation of “natural” environments. But it is not really hands-off, is it? Human agency is *involved* in the reintroduction of native species, the elimination of invasive species, and in “creating the environment” in which a new (and usually “better” in some preconceived sense) balance is achieved. Human agency is present, and can’t be pretended away.

Consider, again, his otherwise very helpful chapter about “noticing who’s missing”. He picks up on his research into “the dones” who have left church behind in their Christian discipleship, and, as mentioned above, exhorts us towards creating an environment which allows for “asking questions and exploring doubts” (page 129). It’s a great push back at dogmatism. But notice the tension: At the same time as he wants to allow for questions and doubts, Aisthorpe also has a *kerygma*, a *truth* to assert: We must “refocus our attention on

Jesus and the vision he imparted, the kingdom, his certain intention to redeem all of creation and to restore his seamless reign" (page 134).

What's it going to be? Questions and doubts? Or truth-claims about Jesus? For sure, it's both, but the rewilding metaphor doesn't hold that tension. Just as an ecologist cannot pretend that they are not present in their environment; Aisthorpe cannot pretend that the epistemological certainty of the gospel of Jesus – the Way, the Truth, and the Life – can be removed from a church environment of questioning and doubting. To be fair, I don't think he does, himself, pretend; but his metaphor gives succour to those that do, and they are invariably damaging to the church.

It is good for all mission-minded congregations to listen hard, question well, explore and wrestle with doubts and assumptions. But no-one does this in an absolute sense; no-one cuts themselves off from their epistemological foundations. Those who claim to be moved solely by "listening" are usually unhealthy pursuers of their own certainty; and being self-deceived they tend to hurt and exclude and roll over others blindly. Rather, the strength of the gospel is that it has a certainty in an objective life-giving someone other-than-us, Jesus. In the certainty of *him* is a truly safe place in which to wrestle with our questions and doubts.

**So what's underneath all this?** To be fair, I'm probably amplifying the problem here. Aisthorpe's book is genuine and temperate, and he only takes a small step into these murky waters. Maybe he has simply run into the problem of all metaphors, that they can be extended too far. I'd love to have a longer conversation with him. His insights intrigue me.

What I'm detecting however, and responding negatively to, is a crack left open for a more insidious miscomprehension of the place of human agency in the church, in mission, and in the world at large. It's the flip-side of toxic traditionalism

(crf. page 174) and just as bad. It is prevalent in the more Greenbelt-y ends of the Christian economy, which I'm sure is Aisthorpe's area of influence.

In this view of humanity, we are not merely *corrupted* and *corrupting* (as in the classical views of sin, guilt, and shame), we are *innately corruption itself*. We don't *have* a problem, we *are* the problem. By definition, humanity *unwilder*s the environment; we are the problem, in ourselves.

The classical view of the human condition at least has a "solution": At the worst (and most worldviews have it) it is answered in some form of judgement and retribution. In the gospel, gloriously, it is answered with *grace, forgiveness, regeneration, renewal*.

This other view has no grace. Can we call it some form of "nihilistic humanism? It's answer is not the *redemption* of human agency it is the *elimination* of it. It's "gospel" is the diminishment, even the eradication, of humanity itself. If we remove ourselves, the world will be pristine.

We detect this view in our post-postmodern "wokeist" world and as we smart against "cancel culture" and other intersectional diktats. There is no grace. There is no redemption. There is just the elimination of voice, and even of personhood. Where corruption is perceived, in, for example, the recent furore regarding J. K. Rowling's opinion on the essence of womanhood, it can only be solved by eliminating that voice: She should shut up, she should be nothing, her privileged existence is almost an affront. The best we can do is to rid this world of our corruption; to rid this world of ourselves.

Aisthorpe's metaphor allows space for this nihilistic humanism. The rewilder metaphor buys into it: The best form of human agency in ecology is not to act. The best form of leadership is to not lead. The best form of being church is not to be, but to dissolve into the mystery of doubt and of



questions without answer. Run to the end of this road and we deny the value of the very humanity that Christ himself inhabited; we deny Christ.

The gospel is *not* a flip to the other extreme in which human agency is absolutised. It is possible to conceive of a *dominion* ecology in which the *telos* of the environment is subservience to human passion. We can easily imagine, in a Trumpist world, the essence of church being nothing but the articulation of dogmatic norms defining human worth around legalistic performance. This also denies Christ.

Rather we must come to the middle: The gospel speaks of *sanctified, renewed, Spirit-led, life-bringing* human agency. God is an *interventionist* God, not a leave-it-alone-to-its-own-devices deity. God intervenes *through* humanity. This is ultimately, of course, in Jesus, who fulfils the heart and soul of human vocation; from the creation covenant of Adam, through Mosaic holiness, and Davidic leadership as a shepherd after "God's own heart." The *telos* of the gospel is not grasped in the disappearance of humanity-as-corruption, but in the emergence of humanity-redeemed.

All creation is groaning, Paul says in Romans, as if in the pains of childbirth. For what? To lose the shackles of it's human parasites? No! "The creation waits in eager expectation for the *children of God* to be revealed." (Romans 8:19). The children of God will not rape or pillage or ecologically destroy, but neither will they abandon, remove themselves, or deny their image of God by ceasing to be. They will act with careful, loving, Jesus-shaped agency; tending, nurturing, *intervening*, growing, proclaiming life and truth.

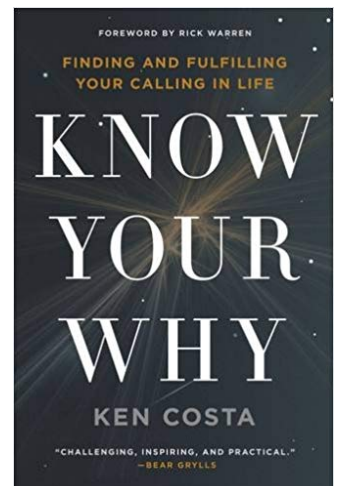
As for creation, so for the church. Both church and creation are eschatologically linked. I long for a true rewilding of both. In the truest sense, we are also creatures, and we also belong there: we hear our Saviour and the call to his wild.

I see glimpses of this call in Aisthorpe. But in the end, his rewilding is more of a *taming* of God's people towards a trajectory that's not entirely benign. There is wisdom and good to glean from this book, but the church's deepest longings are not answered here.

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## Review: Know Your Why – Finding and Fulfilling Your Calling in Life

Sometimes I read an excellent book that I find deeply frustrating. This is one of those times.



Ken Costa's *Know Your Why* is well written, right-hearted, and helpful. **This is a book about vocation.** If you are interested in what it means to live according to the calling of Christ, especially if that calling is within the marketplace of the "secular" world, this book would likely bless you. Costa is not only successful in the world of finance and investment, he is one of the key leaders behind Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB) and the Alpha movement. *Know Your Why* could easily be the "Beta" course – a follow-on curriculum about introductory discipleship for real people in the real world. What's not to like?

Yet I find myself set on edge. In this review, therefore, I am taking a lead from my own reaction. I need to be clear about that. I'm not trying to whinge or tear down. I'm exploring my response and attempting to articulate my disquiet. I am checking myself for a critical spirit!

I must admit a bias. I didn't know Costa's background when I ordered the book, and when I made the HTB connection I found myself wearily sighing. Why? Maybe the pages of endorsements from the pantheon of Christian celebrities provoked my cynicism. Nevertheless, why so critical, O my soul? On the face of it, HTB and Alpha should be "my team" to cheer for. They are the face of charismatic Anglicanism, and it's *not* the skin-deep prosperity-peddling Trumpist forms that have a similar appearance in other places. The HTB/Alpha movement has birthed or nurtured new Christians, new church fellowships, worship leaders I admire, and even the current Archbishop of Canterbury. Why can I not sit with this book, that *is* full of some decent wisdom and pastoral guidance, and savour it freely like a fine refreshing tonic? I should be reading books like this as if it is from a friend to a friend. But I can't. And if I try, I'm pretending.

Here's the thing: Every time I find myself walking in proximity to the HTB hegemony, I don't feel like a fellow-pilgrim, I feel like a *customer*. I read books like this looking for resonance with my own journey. I hope to find some guidance, some solace, or even some rebuke and correction from the steadying hand of an elder in the church. Instead, I have come away from it weary, feeling the same as I do after sitting in a conference room all day.

Am I just being grumpy and over-critical? Perhaps I'm just being a reverse-snob, smarting at receiving crumbs that have fallen from a table set in the shadow of Harrods? Maybe. I do have a reflexive reaction against the presumptive and proud professionalist proclivities of the Western church. But I don't think it's just me. There *is* some substance to my

deconstruction.

I can pull apart this book, and **I find gem after gem after gem of really good stuff**. But when I take a step back to gather the bigger picture, I realise that there is something crucial that is obscured. I can't see the cross. **I see very little of the cruciform life**. This book is about *vocation* and *calling*. In it, I can learn about success from someone successful. But **true vocation rests not on success, but on surrender, death, and undeserved grace**. Vocation, in the end, navigates a wasteland of Christ's sufferings and those who walk it need help to die and live in the desert everyday; we only flourish as a desert rose. To extend that analogy: This book is a manual on English gardening techniques. It is pleasant, useful, *correct*, aspirational, lovingly intended, and frequently applicable; but it overlooks what green English middle-class gardens always miss, that living water costs you.

Let me show my working:

**The good in this book is really good:** "At the heart of the Christian faith is a big, fat *why*," Costa says (page xx), "A calling for us to be *here*, in this place and at this time... to live out our faith and values in the rough-and-tumble of our everyday existence." If only more Christians and more churches would be moved in this way! Costa's pastoral heart is passionate and clear: "I have longed to strengthen those who try to make the very best of their lives" (page xxiv). I would love to have a coffee and a long chat with Ken.

The guidance he offers is focused on Jesus, and responsive to a God who cares and gives us his attention (page 3, *Called to Passion*), and in whom we have our fundamental sense of self ("Identity comes before destiny", page 16). He confronts our need for salvation and restoration, and pushes back at the shames and fears that will turn us from God's heart and lead us into stumbling and falling.

*This realization that life is best savored when lived for Christ is the key to living well. It moves the center of gravity from me to him, and, in that shift, is the very basis of finding my real calling. (Page 17)*

Costa is dealing with *vocation*, and that's not a churchy thing. **He doesn't just break down the sacred-secular divide, he cuts across the premise of it.** "There is only one sphere of influence: the kingdom of God", he says (page 23, *Called to Engage*). "The world tries to atomize society, but we are called to draw together the spiritual, ethical, and vocational aspects of life" (page 27).

I particularly appreciated his dealing with the problem of *distraction* (page 127, *Called to Focus*). This is a standard, but necessary, theme for discipleship in this generation. Here his experience may make him slightly blind to those for whom money issues are not matters of *distraction* (page 132) but actual *existence*. But he takes it to the right place, including the need to turn and be captured by a desire for Jesus; i.e. to *repent* (*metaonoia* in the Greek).

*No calling is complete without a true understanding of metanoia. Page 138*

**But the essential thing is missing or obscured.** This is what has frustrated me.

**The heart of vocation is cruciform.** All vocation takes us to a moment of death, surrender, and abandonment of self into the hands of God. It is there in every vocational story in the Bible. It's Abraham with a knife on Mt. Moriah. It's Moses-of-Egypt shuffling around Midian with his sheep. It's David staying his slaying hand in a cave. It's the rich young ruler facing his idol. It's Peter weeping at the sound of a rooster. It's Paul, blind and helpless in Damascus. It's Jesus hungry for bread in the wilderness, and hungry for life in

Gethsemane.

The *exercise* of vocation needs wisdom and skill and Costa is a great help with those things. But the *foundation* looks more like Bonhoeffer, who literally knew the Cost of Discipleship: "When God calls a man, he bids him come and die." In my own experience, and in walking alongside people over the years, vocation is knowing how we are to be "living sacrifices." Any sense of success is a gift and a grace. I don't quite see this essential dynamic in Costa's book.

The examples he uses, in the main, attach to career prospects and business or philanthropic projects. These are good points of application, but vocation is so much deeper than that. Moses didn't come back down from the burning bush excited about his career shift from shepherd to liberator, feeling equipped with a new-found maturity. Jonah's careerism wasn't *enabled* by his refinement in the belly of the whale, it *died*, and was *vomited* back to life, on God's terms! David wasn't moved by his future prospects in the wilderness, he was spiritually rent asunder until the fragments rested in the Lord his God: "You, God, are my God... my whole being longs for you in a dry and parched land where there is no water" (Psalm 63).

**Throughout this book, I kept falling into this gap between the exercise of vocation, and its cruciform foundation.**

As one example, consider the prophet's wife in the days of Elisha who needed a miracle of provision; she had nothing but a little oil in the house. Costa wants to turn this into a lesson about recognising what we have, even it is little (page 50, *Called to Flourish*); we should be "prepared to live by an exception." But the story is actually about someone who is at the *end* of herself, and receives a *miraculous* provision. She didn't walk away from her time of indebtedness grateful for her lesson about looking on the bright side; she came out with a testimony of "I had nothing... but God..." Her family had died,

so to speak, and had been restored back to life.

Another example: I truly appreciate how Costa devotes a chapter to the seasons of delay (page 63ff, *Called to Wait*.) For Costa, these seasons are a “a kind of spiritual workshop” (page 64). We might learn, alongside the footballer, Pelé, to imagine ourselves “performing like an irresistible force” (page 67). At this point even he realises that he is in danger of slipping into the “power of positive thinking ” (page 67). His response is a subtle deflection, to **cover self-actualisation with a Christian aesthetic** rather than deal with the principle: Perform, but of course, don’t forget that “the source of our hope and our ability to deliver come from the Holy Spirit” (page 68). Yes, “we need to be firm, positive, and inspired to believe the promises of the Bible” (page 68), but that is the *fruit* of the wilderness experience, not the path that takes us through. The wilderness isn’t an object lesson in having our “dreams and determination run together” (page 75). Rather in the waiting we learn to lay it all down, until the Holy Spirit grounds our inspiration in God and not ourselves. If we seek to save our life in the wilderness, we’ve lost it.

**These gaps matter.** “I am no longer the arbiter of success in my life” (page 17), Costa wisely says, but the measure of success he applies in his anecdotes are usually, frankly, *worldly*: measures of numbers, influence, and *size*! If it is that, and not the cruciform way, that seizes our vocation, then we are undone. Costa is borrowing his vocabulary (e.g. the sting of “satisfactory underperformance”, page 56) from his mercantile world, and that is not without merit. But the *allure*, the *pursuit*, of ‘success’ is a subtle idolatry that needs sanctification, not succour. Performance-drive *undermines* vocation. In the church world, especially, we must confront it. One of the ugliest parts of evangelical culture, the wounds of which I encounter time and time again in my walk and in others, is the invalidation of brothers and sisters;

their vocations have been weighed and found wanting by some cold measure of performance that is actually extrinsic to the vocational walk of faith. Fairly or not, in caricature or otherwise, the HTB ecosystem is often that measure.

**Those with a prophetic vocation would be least helped by this book.** Costa rightly recognises that he buys into a framework for expressing calling that is “a privilege of the few, and we should always see it as such” (page 81, *Called to Choose*). He is also wise to affirm the simple serving tasks of being a “cog in the bigger machine” (page 58). This book isn’t an insensitive triumphalist treatise! For those who are playing the game, this book will help them win it with integrity. But, for some, the game is rigged. Sometimes the machine needs breaking. At that point the prophetic vocation needs nurture and wisdom. Their “why” would collide with the milieu of this book, I think, and fall through the gap.

I admire his vulnerability in talking about fear and anxiety (page 105, *Called to Courage*). In fact, I found this chapter to be quite therapeutic as I brought to mind some of my own “disappointment and dashed hopes” (page 106). But again, the gap is evident, even in his **theology of failure**. It is good to talk about mistakes, especially painful ones, but, in the end, they are merely *mistakes*. It is *shame* that must be confronted, and Costa *avoids* it. “We will all fail at something at some point, we will never *be* failures” (page 109), he says, and skirts the issue. We can’t cover our failures with a Christian aesthetic of “There, there, think about Jesus realise that you’re *not* the failure.” Rather, it is *precisely* at the cross that shame gives way to life. I need the cross when I *am* broken and wrong – when I *am* a failure, and not simply when I’ve mucked something up. Christ took my shame, and all my *being* is now a gift from him. This is how vocation is built on his grace, and not our own sequence of little discoveries of how to do things better next time.

I appreciate how Costa may struggle with “determinist



philosophies" (page 83) such as that of Marx and Freud, but he should also be wary of the opposite extreme of **self-determinism**. He urges us to "set [our faces] like flint" (page 121) as we "throw all that we have into this struggle." But he is quoting from Isaiah 50:7 and the rest of it says this: "*Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced, therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame.*" The proactivity is not from us and our flinty faces, it is from the Lord. We realise our vocation when we realise our *utter existential* dependence upon God.

Costa gets close to it when he acknowledges that "there could never be a shaking so severe as to dislodge the life that Christ wanted to have in and through me" (page 122) and when he affirms an ethos of "not sink or swim but saved" (page 123). But he presents this as if it's our "emergency braking system" (page 124) or some sort of safety net. It's not; it's our *foundation*, and the essence of all that we are and do.

Again, I appreciate how he doesn't ignore the *cost* of calling. He quotes Paul's overwhelming challenges (page 156, *Called to Persevere*). But Paul, in fact, rests his perseverance not in his "indomitable conviction", but in *surrender and being strong in weakness*. "When we are cursed, we bless", Paul says, "when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment." (1 Corinthians 4:12-13). Paul is compelled not by self-confidence, but by Christ's love (2 Corinthians 5:14). Once again, the difference between Paul and Costa, is cruciform. All visions die; if they don't we achieve them in our own strength. **All perseverance is grounded in our total reliance on Jesus.** We don't "celebrate because our plans are completed" (page 161), we celebrate because, *he* has led us, and *his* plans have become *our* plans. *Our* plans have died, *his* have been completed. To *God* be the glory.

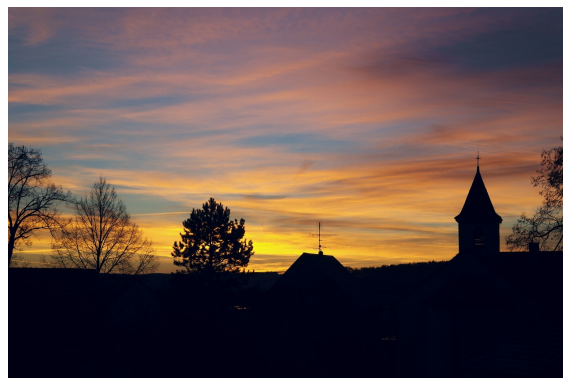
My frustration here echoes a broader angst. These various gaps

– a tendency towards self-reliance and performance-drive, deflection by appeal to Christian aesthetics, diminution of the prophetic voice and so on – are a subtle but real characteristic of the wider church culture. They are often manifest in the nuance, and so I hope I am not reading them into Costa's book or picking the nits. There is so much good in what Costa writes; I just want him to bring it all the way in. The gaps are subtle, but they do need addressing. Anyone who takes up this book will gain much from it. But start with Christ and the taking up of your own cross first. That is where the grace of vocation is rooted and grows; and it has deep joy.

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## Is It Time For The Post-Missional Church?

Useful observations about the world are often made when things shift and change. We can compare the new to what came before. For instance, we talk about “post-war Britain”; it was different, but related, to the Britain of earlier generations. We can make similar observations about the shifts and changes in how we do church.



In recent decades, the greatest shift has been into postmodernity. This worldview took the building blocks that made up “modern man” and reconstructed them. In the modern world the church's posture was intellectual defence (apologetics), explanation and persuasion. Robust debates and gospel explanation from the likes of Billy Graham were the

tools of the time. The question we sought to answer was “Is Christian faith reasonable?”

The postmodern world launched out from modern rationalism and a positive view of human progress and took us to the subjective human experience of truth, and a re-emphasis on belonging and community. The church followed; we began to emphasise the *experience* of the gospel. Early (ca. 1970s) movements formed closer knit relationships, through things like cell church, and enthusiastic charismatic experiences. **The missional church** is grounded in these modes. They became systematised and commercialised through the 80's and 90's, giving rise to the “seeker sensitive” and homogenous-unit (special-focus group) structures that are the defaults of most evangelical churches today. This is the world of the Alpha Course, and the default Sunday pathway for growing up through creche, pre-school, children, and youth programs towards our eventual ecclesial self-fulfillment.

We have also seen a late-stage postmodern pushback at how this became commercialised and conservative. Charismatics have morphed into contemplatives. Greenbelt, which once played the now-oh-so-mainstream Michael W. Smith and Amy Grant, now sits at the feet of secular sages such as Russell Brand. The “emerging” and the “emergent” parted ways. Steve Chalke, Tony Campolo, John Smith (for you Aussies), all jumped to the left. It was a shift in expression, the rise of postevangelicalism, but it was still postmodern underneath.

Throughout the postmodern age we have been playing in a pluralist world. The question we were seeking to answer was “Does the Christian faith belong, and can we belong to it?”

The world is now shifting into post-postmodernity. The pluralist project is dead; we live in a world of competing metanarratives that are overt in their attempts to totalise and win. So-called “wokeism” coerces through cancel culture and an attempt to establish its own pseudo-religion of

signalled virtue. So-called Trumpism, at the other end of the spectrum, does the equal but opposite. Each is anathema to the other, and the demand is to pick a side. The question that is forced upon us is this: “Is Christianity actually ethical and moral at all?”; which is to say, are those Christians on the “right” side?

In the post-postmodern world, our postmodern missional response no longer cuts it. The techniques for weaving worldview and experiences together to spin the narrative, change hearts and minds, and win converts, are now ubiquitous in every sphere, and usually harmful. Our missional methodology buys into that game, whether we mean it to or not. Amidst the cynicism are the real stories of people who are victims and survivors of mission’s cold pragmatism. We used to target the “unchurched and de-churched” who needed to be “won back”; now we have the growing phenomenon of the “dones” – those who have left the church, not because they have lost their faith, but because their faith has lost its place and people. I know from our experience what it means to walk alongside a new young Christian, and realise that the path of discipleship they needed was away from the programmed precision of their local church.

**It’s time for a post-missional church.** Somehow we need to follow Jesus into and through the post-postmodern world, to somehow transcend the culture wars, and by some miracle reach a cynical generation. It seems impossible, it’s hard to imagine; but that’s always the case when things start to change and shift.

There *is* a real danger of slipping into either triumphalism or nihilism. I hear and see both at work. The existential question of the post-postmodern world ties virtue to a reason for being; “I am good, therefore I am,” is the mantra of the day. With nihilism, the church is rendered as bad and therefore meaningless and unworthy of existence; it’s when we agree with the world that the church is toxic, in the same

category as toxic masculinity, heteronormativity, and other privilege, and so our moral duty is to fade away and rid the world of our corruption. The alternative takes us to triumphalism; we validate our existence by asserting our infallible, unquestionable, virtue, and we thump our Bibles against the fake news. Both options are untenable; they don't really look like Jesus.

We must discern a way forward. That is a big question, and I don't have the answer. But we *can* look to the changes and the shifts, and pick it up as prayerful project.

**This is something I want to do, and I'd like to do it in community.** Would you join me in observing the shifts and changes around us, and by imagining a post-missional church? Here is my attempt at an initial brainstorm of comparison. Note that these are observations of what has been, and what might be, not assertions of how it should be. I'd very much welcome your input and thoughts. Get in touch with me in the comments or through my other points of connection.

### Characteristics of church (initial brainstorm):

	<u>Modern / "Christendom" Church</u>	<u>Postmodern / Post- Christendom / "Missional" Church</u>	<u>Post-Missional Church?</u>
<u>Placement in Society</u>	Established institution presumed to exist.	Institution in the marketplace, competing for market share.	Heavily localised, perhaps even fragmented; akin to "pop-up" economy. Relationally unified.
<u>Structure</u>	Hierarchical, pastor-centric.	Semi-hierarchical; devolution to smaller groups as an asset for the larger whole.	Personality and cause-based. Structures reflecting networks of trust akin to social media.

<b><u>Resources</u></b>	Institutional responsibility, legacy finances, tithing.	Congregational giving, side-business investments, and “raise your support” employment.	Bivocationalism. Also patronage (i.e. directed assistance to person or cause, rather than tithes into a common pool).
<b><u>Goal</u></b>	Keep people in church, help them know Jesus.	Help people know Jesus, get them into church.	Be with people who want to know Jesus, make that church.
<b><u>Source of spiritual authority.</u></b>	Qualification and Authorisation; expressed in didactic teaching, liturgical worship, elevation of an order of leaders. We look to who is in charge. We are exhorted to “learn the truth.”	Experience and Pragmatism; expressed in dialogical teaching, stimulating events + small groups, elevation of “effective” programs and people. We look to who or what works for us, and are exhorted to “walk in your gifting and destiny.”	Kenosis and Sacrifice: expressed as a recognition of costly faith, elevation of those (both contemporary and ancient) who have had a proving experience. We look to who has been through the fire, and are exhorted to “lose your life so that you might save it.”
<b><u>Modes of discipleship.</u></b>	Standardised, formal, and curriculum based.	Formalised action-reflection, mentoring, coaching.	Rhythm of life, monastic, familial.
<b><u>Aspiration in worship.*</u></b>	Service	Growth	Adoration
<b><u>?</u></b>			

\* = Subsequently added in edit.

Photo credit: SimonAr