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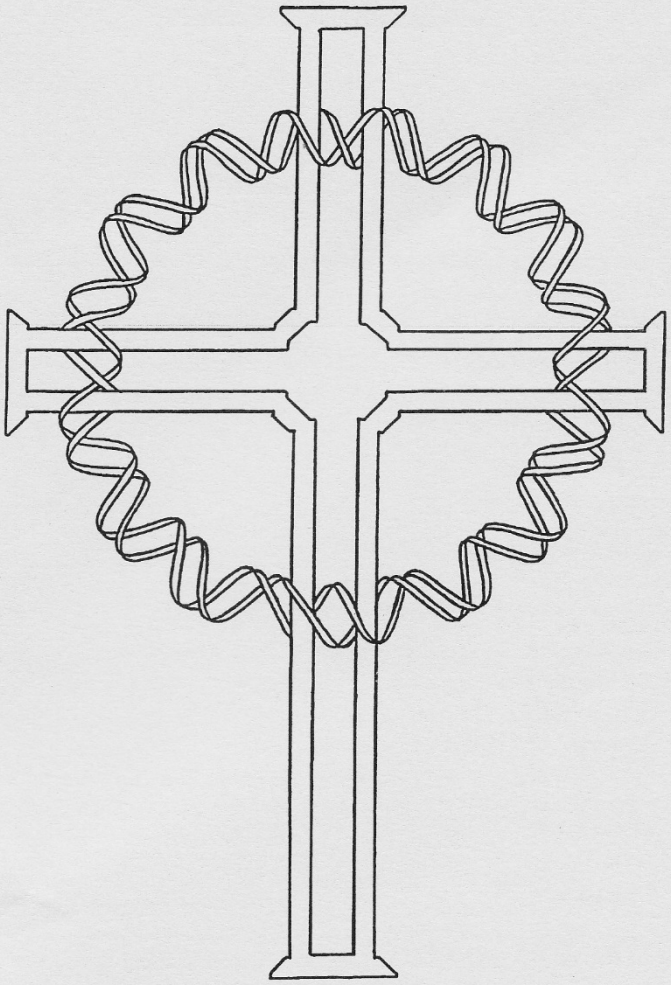
ORDAINED SCIENTISTS



BULLETIN

Summer 2023

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INDEX

EDITORIAL

The Summer Bulletin for 2023 is a bumper issue! We had a very successful Gathering at Hinsley Hall in Leeds and a series of very helpful Meditations given by The Revd Mark Gratton, priest and barrister and an expert in medical ethics. During the Meditations he discussed various issues focussing on the premise that human beings are 'embodied, vulnerable and dependent creatures, who depend upon the care and compassion of others to get on well in life'. He discussed the issue of individual autonomy with regard to the beginning and end of life, gender and transhumanism.

Lucas Mix, our Warden designate, contributed the text of a talk he had given at the Science Museum in 2023, entitled 'It is as if'.

Each day members of SOSc are committed to renewing their belief in the 'Aims of the Society', one of which is 'To express both the commitment of the Church to the scientific and technological enterprise and our concern for

its impact on the world'. Mark Siddall has given two thoughtful examples in his engagement with Primary School children in his article 'Quiz a Vicar' and 'Teaching Creation Care'.

Liverpool Cathedral has always been at the forefront of the engagement between Science and Faith and Mike Kirby, who has the title Canon Scientist, has contributed an article about 'The Gilbert Scott Lectures on Science and Faith.'

We were so delighted to welcome John Kerr back after his remove back to the UK. He has written for us an article based on his lecture 'The Search for Meaning in Nature: a colloquium for Unitarian Ministers', in which he explores some of the anomalies which disturb us and our congregations. He has also contributed a review of the book 'Magisteria' by Nicholas Spencer.

We were sad to hear of the death of David Talbot's father, Jarad, and David has given us the text of the Sermon he preached at his father's Memorial Service.

David Gosling is still actively pursuing his anxieties about the education of women in Pakistan. Recently he met with Judith Henderson, who is Head of Girls' Education Department in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and he has contributed a report of that meeting.

Finally, our new member, Robin Sims-Williams, introduces himself to us.

Please continue to supply me with articles, comments, book review so that we can keep in touch through the Bulletin!

GATHERING 2023 HINSLEY HALL, LEEDS

Wardens: Past, Present and Future

John Kerr: Maureen Palmer: Garth Barber: Keith Suckling: Stig Graham: Lucas Mix
[Lucas Mix is the Warden elect]

MEDITATIONS given by MARK BRATTON

Tuesday, 13th June 2023 at 3 p.m.
Meditation 1

1. I am grateful for Stig's kind invitation to offer, over the course of the Conference, four 'Meditations' focussing on some of the ethical challenges created by modern science, and how they might apply within

society and for us as Christians. My main area of interest and experience lies in the field of medical ethics and law. For a short while, in the late 80s and early 90s I was a practising barrister in a set of chambers which included several specialists in the field of medical law and medical negligence, including my first pupil master on whose papers I was required to work. This sparked an interest in the subject which led to an MA in Medical Ethics and Law at King's College, London, and, later, at Warwick University, where I was a Chaplain for 10 years, a PhD, examining judicial uses and understandings of the principle of autonomy in medical law cases.[1]

2. Medical law and ethics is a fascinating subject. Not a week seems to go by without some media discussion of an intractable medico-legal dilemma engaging public interest, and perhaps even the 'hard edge' of the law. [2]Medical law and ethics is technology-driven, and therefore perhaps a proper subject to reflect upon with a group of ordained scientists. Even more so, when we consider, and this is the contention that will inform all these meditations, that the construction of modern medical law and ethics is problematically influenced by an implicit, highly individualistic, 'anthropology', which is obscuring other ethically-important values relevant to the reality of the human condition. This may be an oversimplification, in need of qualification, but I believe it to be broadly true.[3]
3. And I am taking the so-called 'reality' of the human condition to be powerfully and parabolically expressed in our biblical and Christian tradition, the view that human beings are embodied, vulnerable, dependent creatures, who depend on the care and compassion of

[1] Bratton, M. Q. (Mark Q.) (2012) *A clash of traditions? An investigation into judicial interpretations of autonomy in ethically-contentious medical cases.* PhD thesis, University of Warwick.

[2] E.g. the Archie Battersbee case, https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/feb/08/archie-battersbee-death-accident-coroner, accessed 6th July 2023.

[3] I am indebted to the work of the legal scholar, O. Carter Snead, in particular Snead, O.C.(2020) *What it means to be Human: The Case for the Body in Public Bioethics*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA.

others to get on well in life. And that good law and good ethics requires good 'anthropology' if it is to avoid contributing to the public policy dilemmas that inevitably arise if important aspects of human experience are concealed from view, wittingly or unwittingly.[4]

4. Each of the four meditations is an attempt to make the deep unease in me caused by this disjunction a little more reflective in ways that might prompt thought and be helpful to you.

5. I have a very small publication record, but I have written for a decent journal an article about the law and ethical aspects of separating conjoined twins, which raises some profound questions about the nature of human individuality or personhood, which also interest me as a Christian and ordained priest.[5] That case drew out into sharp relief many of the anthropological issues we shall ponder and made me especially attentive to the language that lawyers and ethicists use to refer to people when conflicts arise. That case was a vivid illustration of the law's hard edge confronting ethics and human reality.

6. In his textbook, *Statutory Interpretation*, the distinguished lawyer, Francis Bennion, describes law as 'the hard edge of ethics'.[6] In other words, the law, especially medical law, is not a solely technical discipline standing independently of moral considerations, but inherently value-laden, having an ethical significance apart from its practical application. This raises important questions such as what the ethical issues are at stake and the legitimacy of judges to make decisions in cases engaging vital ethical issues. These questions should concern an intelligent lay public.

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[4] By 'anthropology', I mean a concept, or view, of what it means to be human and to flourish as such.

[5] Bratton, M.Q. & Chetwynd, S. B. (2004) One into Two Won't God: Conceptualizing Conjoined Twins. *Journal of Medical Ethics* 30 279-285.

[6] This tome is in its seventh edition and can be cited as: Bennion, F., Bailey, D. & Norbury, L. (2020*). Bennion on statutory interpretation* (8th edition). London: Lexis.

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7. I think it raises important spiritual and theological questions as well, and so should be of interest to an audience of ordained scientists who I assume habitually seek to reconcile scientific, moral and theological insights. One of the questions I am particularly interested in as a lawyer, applied ethicist and Christian priest is whether contemporary medical law and ethics reflects the full complexity of lived reality adequately. I am interested in the question whether existing laws and policies express a proper and enriching vision of human identity and flourishing. And that question invites us to consider the deeper issue relating to the particular understanding of the human person underlies the law and the policies that engage and reflect medical law. I want to suggest that underlying all the dilemmas and "vital conflicts" of modern medical ethics is the usually unarticulated question of what it is to be a human being. If I have a central ethical and theological preoccupation, then these questions of 'theological anthropology' are probably it.

8. I can probably trace the preoccupation back to the mid-1980s as a young lawyer beginning to specialise in personal injury and medical law and which has continued throughout my sessional teaching career at Warwick Medical School and as a parish priest with responsibilities involving the pastoral care of the sick and the dying. From the outset, I had the sense that the principle of autonomy was being oversold as a principle in medical ethics and that its supremacy was being established at the expense of other ethical principles, in particular the effect that an unqualified right to autonomy gives the individual to make decisions which might have profoundly negative consequences for others, let alone for the individual herself.

9. This impression was reinforced in the course of preparing a co-authored article for publication on the ethics of separation surgery on conjoined twins following the widely-publicized legal case of Maltese conjoined twins, known for legal purposes as 'Jodie' and 'Mary'.[7] The suggestion

[7] *Re A (Children)(Conjoined Twins: Surgical Separation)* [2000] 4 All ER 961.

of one of the three appeal court judges that surgery that would be fatal for the weaker of the twins, 'Mary', would be in her best interests because it would restore to her that bodily integrity and autonomy that nature had denied her was startling.[8] It seemed to be a good example of the insight of the philosopher and psychiatrist George Canguilhem that "the abnormal, while logically second, is existentially first".[9] By that I mean that it seemed that in the face of the spectre of the entangled flesh of two would-be singletons, the medical profession and the courts were driven to define autonomy in terms of bodily integrity, and the importance of physical circumscription, all the more strongly.

10. My co-author – who is also a practising Anglican Christian - and I were critical of this stringently individualistic reasoning because it didn't properly capture some of the other important moral dimensions of the case. Even if it was in the final analysis morally right to separate the twins, it was important we thought to recognize and articulate what would be lost in the separation. Viewing the twins as two people with an unbroken history of physical connection and interdependence, rather than two singletons who have somehow unfortunately got tangled together, shapes the analysis in importantly different ways, even if the outcomes of the decision-making processes are the same.[10]

11. Walker Percy writes appositely, "Everyone has an anthropology. There is no not having one. If a man says he does not, all he is saying is that his

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[8] The appeal court judges were Lord Justice Ward, Lord Justice Brooke and Lord Justice Robert Walker. It was Lord Justice Robert Walker who opined, ''Each twin's right to life includes the right to physical integrity, that is the right to a whole body over which the individual will, on reaching an age of understanding, have autonomy and the right to self-determination'' (*Re A*,1 1066 j).

[9] Canguilhem G. (1991) *The Normal and the Pathological* [trans Fawcett C R]. New York: Zone Books: 243.

[10] In that case, the appeal court unanimously decided, as the single judge in the lower court (the High Court) had done, to uphold the lawfulness of separation surgery, despite the prospect of the inevitable and immediate death of the weaker twin. The judges justified the decision by extending the legal doctrine of necessity to encompass the unique facts, thereby supplying a legal defence to a potential charge of unlawful homicide.

anthropology is implicit, a set of assumptions he has not thought to call into question." [11]This is as true of the judiciary as it is of the general public.

12. Since the 1960s, there has been increasing emphasis placed on the primacy of individual autonomy as an ethical principle. It is the first of the famous 'four principles' of biomedical ethics identified by Childress and Beauchamp in their standard textbook first published in the late 1970s,[12] and proclaimed *primus inter pares*, 'first-among-equals' by one of the godfathers of medical ethics in this country, Ranaan Gillon[13]. The legal and academic literature have tended to interpret the meaning of autonomy in highly individualistic terms as the right of the individual to decide their own fate against the potentially coercive incursions of the medical profession and the state. And the judiciary, influenced by these trends, has followed suit in their emphasis on bodily integrity, and the right to self-determination and freedom of choice in medical decision-making.

13. The concept of individualistic autonomy, of course, is premised on a particular view of the human person, an 'anthropology' the substance of which is rarely made explicit in the academic literature, let alone the law reports. This view sees the human person as an individual unit that exists independently of others whose wishes, desires and inclinations must be respected unless there is a good countervailing reason. Individualistic autonomy is strongly associated with notions of personal sovereignty and self-government, and the concept has been effectively deployed against the perceived culture of paternalism that characterised the medical profession up to the early 1960s. I came

[11] Percy, W. 'Rediscovering a Canticle for Leibowitz'. In *Signposts in a Strange Land* cited in Snead (2020), p.65.

[12] Beauchamp, T. L. & Childress, J. F. (2019) *Principles of Biomedical Ethics.* 8th edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[13] Gillon R. (2003). Ethics needs principles--Four Can Encompass the Rest--And Respect for Autonomy Should Be "First Among Equals". Journal of Medical Ethics, 29:307-312.

across this gem from the distinguished judge Lord Devlin which accentuates how radically the dynamics of the doctor-relationship have changed since then. Writing in 1962, he enquires rhetorically, "Is it not a pleasant tribute to the medical profession that by and large it has been able to manage its relations with its patients ... without the aid of lawyers and law makers?"[14]

14. The idea that the individual person considered in isolation is the fundamental and defining normative reality has been termed "expressive individualism" and explored in depth by thinkers of the stature of Charles Taylor and Alastair MacIntyre. I will want to say more about this in the context of gender in my third meditation. The difficulty with this normative stance is of course whether it represents an adequate account of the reality and complexity of being human. There is an increasing unease within certain sections of the legal profession that suggests it doesn't. The academic medical lawyer Jonathan Herring has argued that in the context of medical law, the emphasis on individual rights does not account for conditions of vulnerability and relationships of dependency in the medical context, especially in the context of care where the law unhelpfully tends to separate the interests of carers from those cared for.[15]

15. There is a growing consciousness amongst medical lawyers of a need to understand autonomy socially and to develop legal concepts which capture the daily realities of relationships of interdependence and care. For example, the dominant individualistic model of the care relationship has led to a narrow definition of a patient's best interests whereby the welfare of the carer is only considered in relation to its effect on the cared-for, rather than both considered as an integrated unit. There is a growing appreciation amongst medical lawyers of the vital importance of independency and a concept of autonomy that reflects it.

[14] Devlin, P. (1962) Samples of Lawmaking. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 103

[15] Herring, J. (2008) Caregivers in Medical Law and Ethics. *Journal of Contemporary Health Law & Policy* 25: 1-37.

16. The Nuffield Council on Bioethics (2009) – probably the closest thing we have in this country to a national bioethics committee in its report on the ethical issues arising in the context of care for persons with dementia, argues that autonomy should be understood in relational terms: "… that is, that a person's sense of self and self-expression should be seen as being firmly grounded in their social and family networks. In addition, most people would wish that their carer's interests should be given considerable weight: their interests include their carer's interests.'[16]

17. An approach solely based on rights and rules cannot adequately account for relationships of vulnerability and dependency. So, lawyers like Jonathan Herring are turning towards alternative ethical approaches such as an ethics of care for the basis of an alternate legal framework. Care ethics offers a distinctive approach to ethics in its recognition that our most significant relationships are ones of interdependency which supply the context for care and support and are essential for a flourishing human life. It takes the prior interconnectedness of human relationships as its starting point in contrast to individualistic approaches which assume a prior independence and competitiveness.

18. The difficulty in the conjoined twins case mentioned earlier was there was no serious consideration of their integrated and intertwined bodies and futures. There was no acknowledgement of the relationship – they were treated as strangers to each other rather than siblings at the intersection of an admittedly intractable ethical predicament. Similarly, in the controversial context of abortion, where for legal purposes the law treats the maternal -foetal relationship individualistically and competitively, rather than interdependently. The individualistic anthropological premise of the law prevents key moral dimensions from beings seen and represented in the law.

[16] Nuffield Council on Bioethics (2009) Dementia: Ethical Issues. London: Nuffield Council: 117.

19. So, my contention is good law and good ethics requires good anthropology, a vision of the person which encompasses the reality of the human condition - embodiment, vulnerability, dependence and awareness and respect for our natural limits.

20. As Christians, we are all too aware of the fragility of our human condition and our dependence on each other and God. We are creatures before God. And acknowledgment of this creaturehood is vital if we are to avoid slippage into the various forms of hubris and idolatry to which the biblical tradition attests. The glory of the gospel message is that God himself in the form of his Son shared this vulnerability with us through the embodiment of the Word and the voluntarily subjection of himself to the constraint of natural human life.

21. One of the paradoxes at the heart of the story of the Fall is that after partaking of the fruit of the tree of good and evil, the first humans become at once aware of their 'nakedness' and shame, conscious for the first time that the each depends on the perspective of the other for their own sense of self, and on the support of the other if they were to survive and flourish. Vulnerability can of course be exploited, but the sense of it forms the basis of the compassion and the solidarity that binds people together. Indeed, it could be said that this awareness is the basis for law, ethics, politics and the building of a just society. Also, through this sense of vulnerability, the first humans also become aware for the first time also of the need for God, as a resource beyond natural limits, of which they had been unaware in their prelapsarian state. Without this sense of dependence and vulnerability, we can neither be truly open to each other, nor to God.

22. But vulnerability has its shadow side and easily degenerates into hubris and idolatry. They could be said to represent two aspects of vulnerability in denial mode taking myriad modern forms which are organically related. The current controversy over gender identity which is so difficult and risky to talk about in the public square is perhaps one

example. In its most extreme form, gender identity theory asserts that one's subjective psychological truth is immutable, unconstrained by the natural limits of our embodied reality.

23. The transhumanist movement is an extension of this style of thinking. If our true selves can be located outside the material constraints of created humanity, then, in principle, there is no reason why we cannot translate these immutable psychologic features into forms that promise a 'technological' immortality – a 'triumph of the spirit over nature', an end to finitude, and the vulnerable self-awareness on which openness to God and neighbour is founded.

24. The law has a role to play here too. The law, as I said earlier, has expressive value, it encodes the values we cherish and wish to transmit. And it is always worth pondering whether the values that currently underprop the law align with a Christian vision of the truly human and our status in the good world in which God has placed us.

Wednesday 14th June 2023 at 9 a.m.
Meditation 2: The Beginning and End of Life

1. In my earlier reflection, I discussed one of my key concerns as a lawyer, ethicist and pastor: what is the Christian vision of fully human and abundant life. Quoting Walker Percy, I emphasised that every person has an "anthropology" regardless of their awareness or acknowledgement of it, including medical lawyers and ethicists. I pondered the potential challenges that can arise when these disciplines operate from a limited perspective of humanity, neglecting to acknowledge the reality of our embodied existence, vulnerability and interconnectedness.

2. I proposed that the underlying anthropological foundation of contemporary medical law and philosophical medical ethics rests on the notion of the isolated individual, and assertive citizen, evident in the significant emphasis placed on principles like individual autonomy and self-determination. This individualistic anthropology finds its roots in the liberal individualism that emerged during the Enlightenment, reflected in the philosophies of influential thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, and John Stuart Mill.

3. I further proposed that this Enlightenment tradition of individualism has undergone a transformation in contemporary times, manifesting as a potent form of individualism known as "expressive individualism."[17] This ideology asserts that the central moral imperatives lie in demonstrating personal sovereignty, exploring and affirming one's self identity and pursuing individual authenticity. These priorities supersede our responsibilities towards our families, communities, societies and the collective well-being of the common good.

4. However, it is important to acknowledge that the picture is more nuanced. Modern medical law, medical ethics and healthcare public policy have never endorsed absolute autonomy or granted unrestricted dominance to the philosophy of "expressive individualism".

5. Throughout history, there has been an inherent recognition that individuals are not isolated entities but integral parts of communities, reliant upon the support and assistance offered by others during moments of vulnerability. In order for society to function harmoniously, the conflicting interests and demands of individuals must be reconciled in some way.

6. This principle is implicitly reflected in legal and ethical codes, such as the European Convention on Human Rights, which has been incorporated into domestic legislation. For instance, the right to privacy outlined in Article 8 is not an absolute right but rather a presumptive right that can be outweighed by specific public interests. It is noteworthy that this article serves as the foundation for the human right to autonomy, which has been invoked in discussions surrounding assisted suicide or euthanasia.[18]

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[17] The use of the term 'expressive individualism' is principally associated with the work of the American sociologist and author, Robert N. Bellah, especially his work Bellah, R.N. (1985) *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*¸ Berkeley: University of California Press. However, it has also been used by other influential thinkers such as the Canadian philosopher, Charles Taylor, especially Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of the self: The making of the modern identity.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, and the English philosopher, Alasdair MacIntyre, especially MacIntyre, A. (2016)**,** *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning and Narrative***, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.**

[18] e.g., *R (on the application of Pretty) v Director of Public Prosecutions* [2002] 1 AC 800; *R (on the application of Debbie Purdy)* [2010] 1 AC 345.

7. Furthermore, there is increasing acknowledgment within the legal field and scholarly discourse that a sole focus on individualistic autonomy fails adequately to address situations involving vulnerable and dependent individuals. In the realm of bioethics, philosopher Onora O'Neill has formulated a concept of autonomy influenced by the ideas of Immanuel Kant.[19] This perspective highlights the importance of balancing individual rights with corresponding responsibilities towards others. It underscores the notion that autonomy is not an isolated or self-centred concept, but one that necessitates consideration of our obligations and duties to others.

8. Moreover, philosophers rooted in feminist and communitarian traditions have contributed to the development of a concept known as "relational autonomy." This perspective recognizes that human agency is profoundly intertwined with our relationships, and that our capacities and capabilities as individuals are intricately linked to the care and support we receive from others. The notion of relational autonomy has gained traction in recent times, notably highlighted in a report by the Nuffield Council on Bioethics—a prominent bioethics committee in the UK—on the topic of dementia care. This report acknowledges the significance of relational aspects in understanding and addressing the complex ethical considerations surrounding dementia.[20]

9. Indeed, academic medical lawyers like Sheila Maclean and Jonathan Herring have considered whether and how medical law can incorporate a relational perspective. They have examined the extent to which such a perspective can be integrated into the legal framework governing medical practice. Alongside their work, the Nuffield Council on Bioethics has introduced a novel ethical principle that is gaining prominence in public bioethics: the principle of solidarity. This principle emphasizes the recognition that challenges in public decision-making affect all individuals and underscores the notion that we are interconnected and share a collective responsibility in addressing these challenges

10. This morning, let us embark on a reflective exploration of two ethically contentious areas of law: abortion and assisted suicide and euthanasia. While my focus will be on UK law, I will also touch upon other legal systems. In the United Kingdom, these domains are primarily regulated by statutes, namely the Suicide Act of 1961 and the Abortion Act of 1967. Presently, the legal stance in the UK allows abortions under specific circumstances outlined by the statute, while assisted suicide and euthanasia

[19] O'Neill, O. (2002) *Autonomy and Trust in Bioethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. O'Neill calls this deontological construction of autonomy 'principled autonomy'.
[20] Cf. Nuffield Council on Bioethics (2009) *Dementia: Ethical Issues*. London: Nuffield Council. See Meditation 1, n.16.

remain grave criminal offenses. There have been persistent endeavours in parliament and the courts to decriminalise these offenses, but thus far they have not succeeded.

11. Indeed, within society as a whole and even within the church, there exists a diversity of opinion regarding the morality of abortion, assisted suicide and euthanasia. Empirical research indicates that members of the clergy often hold more conservative views on these matters compared to their congregations, and lay members may be hesitant to express their perspectives on these contentious topics openly within the church. However, rather than seeking to resolve the legal and ethical standing of these practices definitively, my intention is to encourage us to reflect on how we would approach these issues personally, considering our embodied, vulnerable, dependent, and creaturely natures.

12. The concept of embodiment is undeniably central to the abortion issue, as highlighted by a judge's characterisation of the maternal-foetal relationship as *sui generis*—a uniquely intertwined reality of fleshly existence—in the landmark US Supreme Court case of *Roe v. Wade*.[21] However, the prevailing jurisprudence and ethical discourse surrounding abortion often approach the matter from a highly individualistic standpoint. Legal and ethical discussions predominantly employ the language of "rights" rather than the language of "trust," which is more conducive to understanding relationships of dependence and vulnerability. Notably, influential thought-experiments in ethical debates about abortion often treat the foetus as a priori separate and distinct from the pregnant woman, with her "consent" or lack thereof determining the significance of the presence of the foetus in the womb.[22]

13. My focus here is not to delve into the moral rightness or wrongness of abortion itself, but rather to question whether the prevailing conceptualization of the relationship between the pregnant woman and the foetus is appropriate and realistic. If this conceptualization is deemed inadequate, then it becomes crucial to explore the correct understanding and its legal and ethical implications. In the case of the conjoined Maltese twins, while I agreed with the outcome given the tragic and complex circumstances, my concern principally lay with the court's failure to recognize the unbroken history of physical interdependence between the stronger

[21] Roe v Wade 410 U.S. 113 (1973)

[22] Most famously (or notoriously) Judith Jarvis Thompson's article, Thomson, J.J.(1971). "A Defense of Abortion". *Philosophy and Public Affairs*. 1 (1): 47–66. In this article, Thomson likens the moral status of the foetus whose ongoing presence in the womb the pregnant woman has not consented to , to a famous violinist with kidney failure, who is surreptitiously connected up to a sleeping person with healthy kidneys during the night for the purposes of life-saving dialysis, and forced to remain there until the dialysis is complete.

and weaker sibling. In my view, it was a distortion to view the weaker sibling as an intruder or "parasite," as one of the judges actually described.[23]

14. Similarly, in the context of abortion, it is worth considering whether it is proper and realistic to portray the foetus as an interloper whose presence in the womb depends on the woman's "consent" within the framework of ordinary interpersonal relationships. By defaulting to this perspective, are we not presumptuously treating the foetus as a rival and a stranger, rather than as a friend and familiar—a vulnerable and dependent being inherently constituted within the human community from the very beginning?[24]

15. Currently, there exists a prevailing atomistic mode of thinking in moral philosophy that attributes "personhood" to beings based on their possession of certain psychological capacities such as the ability to give consent, engage in contractual agreements, and navigate life rationally. Within this framework, the status of personhood is considered a metaphysical question that assumes the separateness of individuals. Determining whether one qualifies as a person is approached through an examination of the cold, objective, scientific facts pertaining to our neurophysiology. The logical consequence of this ethical perspective leads its proponents to question whether infants, the elderly with dementia, and even foetuses warrant the status of personhood, which is the basis for full legal protection. Ethics in this context is contingent upon metaphysics, while the law serves as the rigid boundary that follows from it.

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[23] e.g., Lord Justice Ward at paragraph 9(iv) of his judgment states: In this unique case it is, in my judgment, impossible not to put in the scales of each child the manner in which they are individually able to exercise their right to life. Mary may have a right to life, but she has little right to be alive. She is alive because and only because, to put it bluntly, but nonetheless accurately, she sucks the lifeblood of Jodie. She will survive only so long as Jodie survives. Jodie will not survive long because constitutionally she will not be able to cope. Mary's parasitic living will be the cause of Jodie's ceasing to live. If Jodie could speak, she would surely protest, "Stop it, Mary, you're killing me". Mary would have no answer to that. Into my scales of fairness and justice between the children goes the fact that nobody but the doctors can help Jodie. Mary is beyond help.

[24] In his 2002 London Review of Books review of the philosopher Jeff MacMahan's book *The Ethics of Killing* (Stephen Mulhall, ''Fearful Thoughts,'' London Review of Books 24 (2002), p. 18.), the philosopher Stephen Mulhall writes in criticism of metaphysical approaches to the definition of human personhood declaring:

" our concept of a person is an outgrowth or aspect of our concept of a human being; "and that concept is not merely biological but rather a crystallisation of everything we have made of our distinctive species nature. To see another as a human being is to see her as a fellow-creature – another being whose embodiment embeds her in a distinctive form of common life with language and culture, and whose existence constitutes a particular kind of claim on us. We do not strive (when we do strive) to treat human infants and children, the senile and the severely disabled as fully human because we mistakenly attribute capacities to them that they lack, or because we are blind to the merely biological significance of a species boundary. We do it (when we do) because they are fellow human beings, embodied creatures who will come to share, or have already shared, in our common life, or whose inability to do so is a result of the shocks and ills to which all human flesh and blood is heir – because there but for the grace of God go I."

16. There exists, however, an alternative approach that views the question of personhood as fundamentally ethical from the beginning. According to this perspective, our understanding of a person emerges as a result of our conception of a human being, which extends beyond a purely biological framework. As philosopher Stephen Mulhall suggests, a person is "a crystallization of everything we have made of our distinctive species nature." When we encounter another human being, we perceive them as fellow creatures—beings whose embodiment connects them to a unique form of shared life encompassing language and culture. Their existence inherently generates a particular kind of claim on us. Mulhall argues that it is not misguided to recognize the full humanity of our vulnerable and dependent fellow beings, such as human infants, children, the senile, and the severely disabled, even though they may lack certain intellectual capacities that are often considered the morally neutral basis for personhood. We do so because they are embodied, dependent, and vulnerable creatures with natural limitations, much like ourselves, with whom we share a common life. Ethics, therefore, emanates from "the concrete reality of moral experience and the possibilities of human fellowship."

17. I want to emphasize once again that my intention is not to take a specific stance on the ethical aspects of abortion, whether it be pro-life or pro-choice. Rather, my aim is to propose that a more comprehensive understanding of what it means to be fully human—embracing our embodied nature, vulnerability, dependence, and creatureliness—challenges the individualistic assumptions that have thus far influenced the discourse and legal framework surrounding this issue. By broadening our perspective, we open up the possibility for a more nuanced and holistic exploration of the complex questions at hand.

18. Turning to the vexed issues of assisted suicide and euthanasia, arguments advocating for changes to assisted suicide and euthanasia laws in many countries often rely heavily on the principle of autonomy. The underlying claim is that if individuals have the right to make decisions about their own lives, they should also have the right to choose the circumstances and timing of their own death. Within a culture that emphasizes expressive individualism, the pursuit of control over the end of one's life is seen as a moral imperative, irrespective of the potential social consequences, or impact on vulnerable and dependent individuals.

19. The UK courts have interpreted the right to privacy, as articulated in the European Convention, to encompass the right to autonomy, which, in this country, could potentially extend to include the right to assisted suicide and euthanasia.[25] However,

[25] E.g., *Pretty v. United Kingdom* 2346/02 [2002] ECHR 427: This case involved a terminally ill woman who sought the right to die with the assistance of her husband. The ECtHR recognized that the right to respect for private life encompasses the right to personal autonomy, including the ability to make decisions about the end of one's life.

the courts in the UK have consistently rejected attempts to utilize the Convention to overturn the existing prohibition on assisted suicide and euthanasia.[26] They have emphasized that legal changes in this area may pose risks to individuals who are weak and vulnerable. In this regard, the UK courts must balance the public interest in the promotion of individual autonomy and the countervailing public interest in the protection of those who are vulnerable and dependent. States bound by the Convention have a certain level of discretion, known as the "margin of appreciation," in their interpretation and application of the provisions of the Convention.

20. The European Convention on Human Rights recognizes the importance of interpreting individual rights within a broader moral and political framework that includes the safeguarding of vulnerable and dependent individuals. This recognition is rooted in the historical context in which the Convention was drafted, as a response to the atrocities committed against marginalized and disadvantaged groups during World War II. However, despite this underlying principle, different European countries have interpreted the Convention in varying ways, leading to the establishment of regulated laws regarding assisted suicide and euthanasia. These countries have chosen to balance the protection of vulnerable individuals with the recognition of individual autonomy in end-of-life decisions, allowing for legal frameworks that permit assisted suicide and euthanasia under specific conditions.

21. It is notable that in jurisdictions where assisted suicide or euthanasia have been legalised, such as Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg, there has been a marked expansion in the categories of eligibility over time. This expansion has raised concerns about a potential "slippery slope" effect. In those jurisdictions where the law has been liberalised, eligibility was initially restricted to those who were terminally ill and experiencing unbearable physical suffering.[27]
22. However, in nearly all these jurisdictions, the criteria have gradually expanded to include individuals who are not terminally ill but suffering from psychiatric conditions or existential distress. There have even been cases involving children and individuals who are unable to make autonomous choices. This broadening of eligibility criteria has sparked debates about the ethical implications and the

[26] *R (Nicklinson) v Ministry of Justice* [2014] UKSC 3.

[27] Gerritsen v Chabot, Medisch Tuchtcollege Amsterdam, nr 93/185; Medisch Contact nr 21 (1995) pp 668-674. Dr Chabot was prosecuted for assisting the suicide of an otherwise healthy, psychologically well, 50-year-old woman who wished to die following the deaths of her two sons. The Dutch Supreme Court ruled he was guilty under the Dutch Criminal Code because the relevant facts and circumstances of the patient's death did not amount to 'necessity' for the purposes of a criminal defence. However, the Court chose not to impose a penalty because he had acted professionally, albeit unlawfully.

potential risks associated with legalising assisted suicide and euthanasia. Critics argue that such expansions undermine the original intent and may expose vulnerable individuals to risks and societal pressures. These concerns highlight the complex moral and societal considerations that arise when contemplating the boundaries of assisted death legislation.

23. In Canada, there has, in practice, been a strong extension of the eligibility criteria for Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) to include people who opt for MAID because of their impoverished circumstances, or debilitating state of health, exacerbated by their lack of access to proper medical and social care. A recent poll has revealed that a majority of 18 - 24 year olds, incidentally the generation most deeply influenced by the culture of expressivist individualism, were in support of such an extension. These developments stand to reason if autonomy is the underlying operative principle. The restriction of the availability of an assisted suicide to the terminally ill or those experiencing unbearable and unrelievable physical suffering is eventually overcome by the overriding logic of individualistic autonomy. [28]

24. Numerous empirical studies have shed light on the challenges patients face in the medical consent process and their actual desires in such situations. It is often found that patients feel burdened by the complex and transactional nature of the process and would prefer their doctors to make decisions in consultation with their families. The reality of their condition, including co-morbidities and physical limitations, can significantly impact their ability to maintain the clarity of mind and will that the expressive individualist anthropology assumes.

25. Furthermore, extensive evidence suggests that a significant portion of individuals who express a desire for an assisted suicide or euthanasia suffer from treatable depression, which can often go unrecognized amidst the demands of busy clinical environments and the lack of accessible psychiatric services. This underscores the importance of comprehensive psychiatric care and support to address underlying mental health issues and provide appropriate treatment options.

26. These findings challenge the assumptions of expressive individualism by highlighting the complex factors that influence patients' decisions and the importance of addressing underlying psychological and emotional distress in healthcare settings. Indeed, a legal approach rooted in an anthropology of embodiment can provide a more comprehensive understanding of human life and its vulnerabilities. Such an approach acknowledges that throughout our lives, we navigate a spectrum of

[28]Cf. https://bioedge.org/end-of-life-issues/euthanasia/one-in-four-canadians-are-cool-with-allowing-euthanasia-for-poor-people/

vulnerability and dependence. It recognizes the inherent fragility and limited agency of individuals who are facing terminal illnesses or chronic suffering. It acknowledges their susceptibility to neglect, fraud, abuse, duress, and mistakes, highlighting the need for legal protections that safeguard their well-being and ensure their voices are heard. By considering the reality of human embodiment and its inherent vulnerabilities, a legal framework can be developed to provide adequate support, care, and safeguards for those in need.

Tuesday, 14th June 2023 at 4.45 p.m.
Meditation 3: Gender

1. In our recent meditations, I reflected that the development of the law in medicine, and the style of ethical thinking currently dominant in the West, has been heavily influenced by a stringently individualistic concept of the human person, which has tended to prize the principle of individual autonomy and right to self-determination. The importance of consent in medical law reflects the emphasis that modern western ethics and culture placed on notions of personal sovereignty.

2. I also suggested that this individualistic philosophy, which has its origins in the cultural developments of the European Enlightenment, has intensified in the last few decades, into a form that philosophers and cultural critics have dubbed "expressivism" or "expressive individualism". According to Alasdair McIntyre, this is the view that there is no "authoritative standard, external to, and independent of an agent's feelings, concerns, commitments, and attitudes, to which appeal can be made." According to Charles Taylor, another philosopher, expressive individualism is a moral outlook that emphasises the importance of self-expression, self-realisation and personal authenticity. The goal of expressive individualism is to discover and express one's unique inner nature and desires in pursuit of self-fulfilment and self-actualisation, regardless of societal norms and expectations.

3. In the last meditation, I considered how this philosophical world view presupposes a view of the human person as an atomised individual whose desires, inclinations and wishes are of paramount importance, and must be respected. And how this individualistic anthropology has expressed itself in the language of autonomy and rights in the ethically-contested areas of abortion, and assisted suicide and euthanasia. I suggested that competitive language of individual rights obscures the embodied, dependent, vulnerable and creaturely character of most human relationships especially at either end of life. I have

wanted to argue that 'good' law and ethics requires good anthropology, and that our Christian tradition provides us with a rich resource to supply one.

4. In this meditation, I want us to consider how these observations and insights might apply to another even-more fraught area of ethics and culture, that of *gender*. I have been anxious about discussing this topic, even in the context of a meditation aimed at a community of ordained scientists, because of the profound, often visceral, reactions it elicits. I recently learned, on good authority, that this is a subject not even the Nuffield Council on Bioethics – the closest thing we have in this country to a national bioethics committee – can address because its members in various ways fundamentally disagree with each other about the subject. I am talking here about some of the foremost researchers in their field, from a range of disciplines, including anthropology, biology, law, medicine, philosophy and sociology.

5. However, I am presupposing that ordained scientists are uniquely equipped to hold together in tension the human and pastoral dimensions of the issue, with the empirical and scientific, with charity and firmness. And this subject needs to be talked about, and collectively reflected upon, if we are to fully understand what is at stake, legally, morally and spiritually, and how to respond appropriately. I am therefore parting company from those who contend that discussing matters of sex and gender is of itself, to put the integrity and 'existence' of transgender or non-binary – people into question. All human beings are made in the image of God and therefore and thereby have an inviolable integrity and dignity. Rather it is to engage with the worldview and anthropology that underpins some of the influential thinking about questions of gender that I want us to reflect upon. If we presuppose that human beings are embodied, vulnerable, dependent and creaturely, then how does this vision of the human shape our thinking about the vexed questions of gender and our views of the public policy implications of particular views of gender.

6. The terminology of 'gender' has evolved significantly over the last fifty years or so. Originally a grammatical term to distinguish between nouns in languages, in the late twentieth century, it began to take on new meanings, relating to social and cultural ideas about masculinity and femininity. In the 21st century, however, the term gender has come to be understood to describe a subjective sense of identity which may, or may not, align with biological sex, meaning that one's gender can vary completely independently of one's biological sex, with significant conceptual implications.

7. So, it has become possible to distinguish between those whose subjective sense of gender identity conforms or is misaligned with their natal sex, viz 'cis' gender and 'trans' gender, and the notion that 'gender' is something 'assigned', rather than 'identified', at birth. Gender identity – the person's internal sense of their own gender – which may or may not correspond with their biological sex - is distinguishable from gender expression, which refers to the way that a person publicly presents their gender identity. Indeed, on this view, it is possible for gender expression to vary independently from gender identity, for the outward manifestation of gender need not necessarily correspond with one's private internal feelings.

8. The influential gender identity philosophy I have in view makes it possible to be male, female, or some *tertium* quid, in a metaphysical sense, and that these identities – which are innate, fixed and immutable regardless of biological sex, - demand respect and solicitude. The individual is the absolute authority to determine what gender they are, including the 'gender fluid', who like Eddy Izzard, purport to move frictionlessly between 'girl' and 'boy' modes.

9. This gender identity philosophy is having important public policy implications because it is perfectly logical for, say, a transwoman to claim a right to enter spaces traditionally restricted to biological females by self-identifying as females, and doing so without undergoing the medical interventions to help them 'pass' as such. This is disturbing conventional social norms about how such spaces are used. The logic has also equally controversially extended to the sports field, where issues of fairness and categorisation are engaged. Gender identity philosophy is carrying tangible implications in the practical realm, and therefore cannot be regarded solely as an abstract perspective.

10. There are also legal implications. Currently, the Equality Act 2010[29] provides specific protection for individuals on the basis of 'gender reassignment' which the Act defines as a 'process of transitioning from one gender to another'. This includes people who are proposing to undergo, are undergoing, or have undergone a process to change their gender. And the Gender Recognition Act 2004[30] stipulates that in order to have this acquired gender legally recognised it is necessary to obtain a Gender Recognition Certificate which requires evidence

[29] Cf. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents

[30] Cf. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/7/contents

that a person has been living in their acquired gender for at least two years and intends to continue to do so for their rest of their lives. They must also provide evidence of a diagnosis of gender dysphoria and have their application reviewed by a panel. In line with the logic of the particular gender identity philosophy I have in view, the Scottish government is taking steps to remove the required formalities in favour a more perfunctory statutory self-declaration.[31]

11. There are also medical implications. Traditionally, gender dysphoria was widely regarded as a condition of serious gender-related distress which invited rigorous differential diagnosis, trying to bring a patient into psychological conformity with their biological sex if at all possible and prescribing gender reassignment only in the most serious cases. But following the logic of gender identity philosophy, a gender affirming care approach has supervened, especially in centres dealing with children, often leading to medical interventions designed to bring their bodies into conformity with their expressed psychological instincts. This has proved enormously controversial given the recent exponential increase in the number of adolescent girls presenting with late onset gender dysphoria and proceeding on medical pathways entailing irreversible chemical and surgical interventions.

12. The claim to possess indisputable knowledge about one's inner psychological reality of one's gender seems to be a recent variant of the expressivist standpoint that is said to be one of the defining marks modern Western culture. The idea that the dictates of psychological instinct override and vary independently of material reality represents an even more intense individualism than ideas of bodily autonomy in contemporary medical ethics and law, reflected in some of the statements of the appeal court judges in the conjoined twins case.[32] It gives primacy to subjective experience over rational considerations and bodily limitations, and in this draws on several older philosophical traditions which give moral weight to self-proclaimed 'lived experience'.

13. The claim to have indisputable knowledge about one's inner psychological reality also has an ancient pedigree. In the ancient world, there were religious and philosophical beliefs that emphasised the roles of special or hidden knowledge (or *gnosis*), as a means to salvation or enlightenment. The material world was often seen as distinct from the divine realm and associated with ignorance and

[31] Cf. https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/legislation/bills/s6-bills/gender-recognition-reform-scotland-bill/stage-3/bill-as-passed.pdf

[32] Cf. https://www.mentalhealthlaw.co.uk/media/Re_A_(Conjoined_Twins)_(2001)_Fam_147_report.pdf

imprisonment. The material realm generally, and the physical body specifically, were regarded as hindrances to the purification, illumination and reunion of the divine spark within each human with the ultimate spiritual reality. This has led the prominent American lawyer and philosopher Robert P. George to coin the term 'gender Gnosticism' to refer to a world view that puts forward an individual's inner sense or self-perception as the sole determinant of their gender identity, which must be accepted without question or critique.[33] It reduces the importance of the biological differences that distinguish males and females and ignores the social and political implications of gender identity theories.

14. The ancient Christian church expressed various criticisms of these religious and philosophical beliefs, in particular the retreat from material reality they represented, including the denigration of the embodied, vulnerable, dependent and creaturely nature of human personhood, and the sacramental community in which Christian identity was formed and nourished. In one of early books, *The Wound of Knowledge*, Rowan Williams, in his chapter entitled 'The Shadow of the Flesh' writes of this Gnostic retreat from the particular, "there can be no sense of bodily life as something to be brought to maturity, something to be completed",[34] indeed something to be contended with. There is little room for the doctrine of the Incarnation, whereby the God who made and framed the good world becomes part of creation itself, taking on human flesh, and living a human life.

15. Cultural commentators have attempted to explain the reasons for current crisis of gender as part of a broader crisis of identity brought about by the rise of identity politics and the cyborg transformations brought about by an expanding virtual reality. Mary Harrington in her book *Feminism Against Progress*, in a chapter entitled 'Meat Lego Gnosticism' observes that the virtual world offers "a space where selves are detachable from embodiment". [35] She synchronises the exponential rise in adolescent girls presenting to the UK's only Gender Identity Clinic with the rise of disembodied form of sociality brought about by social media. She adduces the work of the transgender pharmaceutical entrepreneur Martine Rothblatt in evidence for the proposition that "the question to master one's sexed body is merely the first step in a far greater question to master

[33] Cf. https://www.firstthings.com/article/2016/12/gnostic-liberalism

[34] Williams, R. (1979). *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St. John of the Cross*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd.

[35] Harrington, M. (2023). *Feminism Against Progress* .Forum, p.136.

embodiment altogether." "In this vision, selfhood and embodiment are wholly separate things: humanness, Rothblatt asserts, 'is in the mind'.

16. Mary Eberstadt has found the identity crisis in the collapse and shrinkage of the family. She argues "that it has erased the givenness into which generations are born" and loosened the familial and organic connections though which humanity until recently channelled everyday existence. [36] The need to adopt a number of different identities in the context of domestic fracture has led inescapably to an increased capacity for a fluidity of identity which has found expression in the context of gender.

17. There is a famous story told in James Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson* in which Samuel Johnson rebuts Bishop Berkely's attempt to prove the non-existence of matter: He writes, 'I never shall forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it, "I refute it *thus*."'[37] This "appeal to the stone" riposte has perhaps in the context of contemporary arguments about gender its modern variant. At the level of public policy, does the attempt to prioritise psychological reality over the material order rebound from the inescapable properties of human embodiment, vulnerability, dependency and natural limits?

18. As scientist priests, we cannot forget that at the heart of these troubled times in our social and cultural life, there are hurting people, who need our care and compassion and love, who need people dedicated to protecting and promoting their best interests. But we are also called to 'discern the signs of the times', to understand and interpret our social, cultural and historical context to make informed judgments about the present situation. Drawing on the resources of the Christian tradition, we need to be observant, reflective and perceptive in order to navigate and respond effectively to the specific circumstances and demands of our era.

19. In an era of social media, virtual reality, and epoch-changing developments in AI, this presents an enormously complex challenge. And it is drawing into sharp relief the fundamental question of what is to be human and to flourish as such. My suggestion is that from a biblical and Christian perspective, human beings are inescapably bodily and that the 'good life' is a divine gift which can only be

[36] Eberstadt, M. (2019) *Primal Screams: How the Sexual Revolution Created Identity Politics*. Rutgers University Press, p.38.
[37] Boswell, J. (1791). *Life of Samuel Johnson*.

realised in acknowledgment of, and alignment with, our vulnerability, dependence and creatureliness. The dominant modern philosophy of expressive individualism militates against the good life in important respects because it blinds us to the reality that our identities are not ultimately the products of our atomised psychological instincts but socially negotiated in families and communities. Our bodies are inescapable realities to be contended with, not taken flight from. What that means in practice is something to be deliberated upon and worked out collectively.

20. Our Lord himself, the incarnation of the invisible God, came to us bodily, lived a human life was put to death on a Cross, but by an act of the Spirit's power was raised bodily, and in whose risen body, bore the marks of his earthly life.

21. The expressivist assumption that a person's inner, subjective, psychological reality is paramount has implications for movements which seek to employ technology to 'lift' humanity beyond its embodied boundaries and expunge as far as possible its condition of vulnerability, dependence and natural limits, a topic we will reflect upon tomorrow.

Thursday 15th June 2023 a.m.
Meditation 4: Transhumanism

1. Throughout these four reflections or meditations, I have taken the opportunity of expressing my unease with the way the principles of personal autonomy and self-determination have come to dominate medical ethics and law to the detriment of other important values, such as care and solidarity. The highly individualistic way the law has been, and is being, interpretated, accounts for its inability to address, the inescapable realities of human vulnerability and dependence, and the networks of support that are essential to the exercise of human agency in those contexts. We reflected upon this in the highly-contested areas of abortion and assisted suicide where the realities of vulnerability and dependence in those contexts are often obscured by the predominant language of autonomy and rights.

2. I suggested that the law in these areas, and the ethical principles that underpin the law, is grounded in an implicit 'anthropology', or view of the human, that profoundly shapes the way medical law and medical ethics is articulated. This anthropology is rarely, if ever, explicitly acknowledged in print or in public, perhaps because it is largely taken for granted by ethicists, lawyers and judges,

who are usually too busy, or indifferent, to engage in sustained philosophical, let alone theological, reflection in this area.

3. I also suggested that the dominant trends in medical ethics and law are underpropped by an 'expressivist' philosophy, alternatively known as 'expressivist individualism', which gives priority to human psychology and feelings as the key determinants of individual identity. For the expressivist, the chief purpose of human life is to discover and live out that identity as the means to personal authenticity and self-realisation. This identity is not something that is socially negotiated, but rather a function of the individual's 'lived experience' which, in principle, cannot be impugned by society or the state.

4. I shared my interest in the ethics of the transgender movement, in particular the claim that gender can vary independently of sex, and be 'self-described', as a vivid contemporary manifestation of the expressivist worldview. And I drew attention to some of the practical public policy dilemmas to which the unhindered logic of expressive individualism is leading in the area of sexual and gender politics and how that logic might soon find expression in UK law.

5. Underlying these trains of reflection is a concern whether because of its uncompromising individualism this expressive individualist philosophy is compatible with a truly Christian vision of the human person and human flourishing. The biblical tradition presents a picture of the human person as a creature made in the image of God and reflecting God's likeness. In the second creation story the first human is moulded out of the clay of the earth and inspirited with the breath of God so that God's breath becomes human breath, and the human becomes a living being. The first human is created as an integrated totality of body, mind and spirit. There is little basis here for the Cartesian dualist split between body and mind, or body and soul. The American philosopher Nancy Murphy has coined the term 'non-reductive physicalism' to account for the distinctively human capacities, including spiritual, which supervene on humanity's inescapably physical mammalian substrate.[38]

6. The first humans come to share that divine capacity to mould clay, "tending and tilling" the earth and drawing forth fruit from the earth through their creative labours. And later their descendants turn this clay-moulding capacity into a

[38] Cf. Nancey Murphy, "Human Nature: Historical, Scientific, and Religious Issues" in *Whatever Happened to the Soul?*, ed. Warren S. Brown, Nancey Murphy, and H. Newton Maloney, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998) pp. 1-2.

technological capability. A revolution in brick-making technology occurring on the cusp of the agricultural revolution enables the building of ziggurats and pyramids, structures that symbolically connect heaven and earth. The story of the 'Tower of Babel' suggests the dangers that flow from an unholy alliance between technological development and capability and the totalizing authority that drives technological development in particular hubristic directions. [39]

7. There, it was the hubristic assumption of technological mastery and social control that God scrambles, when he confuses the language of the inhabitants of the Plain of Shinar and scatters them to the four corners of the earth. The paradox of the Babel story is that the divine judgment on the Promethean project to build a tower that reaches up to the heavens, becomes the very means through which the bible's very first commandment continues to be fulfilled, "Be fruitful and multiply and occupy the four corners of the earth. The sermonic trope beloved of jobbing parish priests is that "God desires unity in diversity, not unity in uniformity." And this presupposes a view of the human as a being with an identity which is neither divorced from the network of relationships of which humans are a part *ab initio*, nor absorbed facelessly into their communities, in the service of an abstract agenda.

8. Recent technological developments resulting from dramatic breakthroughs in genomic science have given humans an unprecedented capability for moulding the clay of our genetic inheritance and exercising control over the evolutionary process. These developments are raising the possibilities of new therapeutic interventions that short decades ago would have been simply unimaginable. Indeed, the technological possibilities are such that the very meaning of human therapy and the purposes of medicine are now being put into issue. And these scientific advances are drawing into even sharper relief the questions of 'anthropology' which has been my principal concern throughout these meditations.

9. In last Sunday's gospel reading, which focussed on the call of Matthew and two healing stories, for those of you who follow the RCL, there seems to be an inescapable relationship between Jesus' holiness, healing and hospitality, words which in the Hebrew share a common root. According to Matthew, Jesus' purity is more contagious than the impurity of the impure, and the

[39] Cf. https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/noach/a-story-of-heaven-and-earth/ accessed 29th July 2023

woman with the issue of blood, is not only restored physically, but the stemming of her menstrual tide means that she can be restored to her community, and indeed to the religious life of Israel. She is cured not only of her disease, but also of her 'illness', which, in the terms of medical anthropology, connotes our abstraction from the relationships of care and compassion on which we are all dependent. The hospitality that Jesus affords the toll collectors and sinners who meet in his own home holds a resurrection power that is capable of healing people, individually, socially and spiritually. Perhaps this 'restorative' ethic provides us with some kind of framework to assess the nature and trajectory of these extraordinary technological developments.

10. Advances in medical technology are raising sharp questions about the meaning of 'healing' and the limits of the 'medical boundary', and between the limits of medicine and the scope of a worthwhile human life. Common to both these boundary issues is the distinction between 'therapy' and 'enhancement', that is, the endeavour to alleviate genuine misery from a self-centred desire to be higher up the ability scale in terms of height, strength, speed, and intelligence. Modern reproductive medicine has extended the realm of reproductive choice beyond the decision whether or not to have children (assisted by contraception and selective or 'therapeutic' abortion) to decisions about the kind of children one wishes to have, through pre-implantation genetic diagnosis, pre-natal screening and testing, genetic therapy and in-vitro fertilization.

11. With gene-editing technology, like CRISPR Cas9, the possibility of bodily alterations at the molecular level is now giving prospective parents increasing discretion to choose against, or for, particular traits and characteristics in their intended children, prompting questions about whether there should be any limits to reproductive autonomy, beyond the harm that exercising freedom of reproductive choice might do to others.[40] Ethicists such as Julian Savulescu go one step further. He is currently arguing on utilitarian grounds that parents not only have discretion, but a positive obligation to use enhancement technology to maximise their children's longevity, intelligence and well-being. Indeed, Savulescu and others have argued in favour of a 'moral transhumanism', that biomedical research and therapy should make humans in the biological sense

[40] Doudna, J. A., & Sternberg, S. H. (2017*). A crack in creation: gene editing and the unthinkable power to control evolution*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

more 'human' in the moral sense, and that to that end it is not important that humans remain biologically human.[41]

12. The Peruvian philosopher Miklos Lukacs de Pereny would regard the idea of moral transhumanism a contradiction in terms. "What is sold as a material improvement replaces God and becomes God thanks to technology". "The *sine qua non* of this process" he declares, "is that the human being ceases to be human. You will progress, but the cost of that progress is that you cease to be what you are." He calls this transition from the human to the *post* human or *trans* human a 'neo-entity'. "Basically", he goes on to say, "technology is going to allow you to be whatever you want to be and that is one of the promises of progress."[42]

13. The title of his new book, "Neo entities: Technology and anthropological change in the 21st century", warns of the dangers of transhumanism. "The great war of the 21st century is the anthropological war". He relates this broader technological concern to the issue of transgenderism and the idea that a person can define their sex and gender at will. He sees it as part of a broader drive to reconfigure the human being, so that all categories of human being are emptied of their ontological content, including sexual and gender categories, and even those distinguishing adults from children. Sexual diversity can be enjoyed without limit provided there is 'consent', and advocates contend that the capacity for such consent develops very early.

14. He regards this progressive morality as profoundly anti-Christian because it is attached to a postmodern ideal of moral progress and because it dissolves the categories that Judeo-Christianity has established in the last 2000 years "The great war of the 21st century", he declares, "is the anthropological war between progressive visions *[sic]* who conceive of the human being as improvable and those who believe that the human being must maintain his dignity and integrity. Human beings at the service of technology versus technology at the service of human beings."

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[41] Cf. Ingmar Persson , Julian Savulescu, Moral Transhumanism, *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy: A Forum for Bioethics and Philosophy of Medicine*, Volume 35, Issue 6, December 2010, Pages 656–669, https://doi.org/10.1093/jmp/jhq052

[42] Cf. https://corvinak.hu/en/velemeny/2022/04/12/human-beings-of-the-21st-century-objects-or-subjects, accessed 29th July 2023

15. I want to suggest that in the face of the blurred boundaries between disability, normality and enhancement, and between the human, post-human and transhuman, Christian theology can offer a more objective standard for the medical boundary and the understanding of human flourishing than philosophical medical ethics can. The clinician John Wyatt offers a 'restorative ethic' to define the ends and limits of medicine in a manner consistent with a biblical view of the human person. Wyatt suggestively draws an analogy with the ethics of art restoration in which the intention of the original artist or creator in producing his artwork is normative.

16. The creator's intention guides the restorative interventions of the restorer who intervenes with a combination of knowledge, understanding, judgment and skill. The therapeutic interventions of the doctor, likewise, should be guided by a biblical understanding of the human being as an embodied, vulnerable, dependent creature, damaged by sin, and damageable by the various forces that sometimes deleteriously come into play in a world of cause and effect, moral chance and human perniciousness. Any restorative intervention on a human person needs to honour the dignity of the finite physical form within which the human being is constituted as a creature, including the unique genetic inheritance with which that person has been endowed. But this restorative intervention also needs to embrace the promise of that fullness of life and fuller restoration which God has inaugurated in the bodily life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Somewhere within the creative tension of God's creative and recreative work lie the limits of therapeutic discretion. Even though this restorative ethic does not offer action-guidance of algorithmic precision, it does at least offer a helpful means of negotiating the indistinct borderlands of disability, normality and enhancement and of resisting developments which direct us to take leave of our embodiedness altogether.[43]

17. Jesus' restorative work is never solely individualistic, but also communal and social. Human beings are bound into networks of relationship and solidarity on which we inescapably depend for our welfare, and which together forms the common good. Perhaps another objective standard for developments in medical and scientific technology are its impacts on the common good, whether they serve to promote kinship and social solidarity which are

[43] Wyatt, J. *Matters of Life and Death*, Nottingham: IVP/CMF, 2010

essential to human flourishing. The American moral philosopher Michael Sandel in his critique of what he sees as the hubristic drive for human improvement and perfection highlights the necessarily contingent nature of human bodily existence. He argues that "the problem with eugenics and genetic engineering is that they represent the one-sided triumph of wilfulness over giftedness, of dominance over reverence, of moulding over beholding."[44] According to Sandel, the substitution of an ethic of wilfulness for an ethic of giftedness threatens three key features of a Judeo-Christian moral ecology: humility, a sense of indebtedness for our talents and performance; and a sense of solidarity with those less fortunate than us.

18. Technologies such as artificial intelligence, gene editing, or robotics, have the proven potential to reconfigure the human being as a species. They provide the means to achieve a vision of the perpetual perfectibility of the human being, an idea traceable back to Enlightenment thinkers of the 18th century such as the Marquis de Condorcet and Denis Diderot, who was already predicting the rise of the 'superman'. The 20th century witnessed the consequences of this particular 'theology' in the form of the ideal superior man, the *Übermensch*, rising above conventional Christian morality, in Nazi ideology, and the aspiration of an invincible man in the *homo sovieticus* of Communism. There is supreme underpinning irony to both these ideologies. They are both at the same time stringently materialist, but also utterly bereft of sense of solidarity with the natural, animal and cosmic orders.

19. This contrasts sharply with the biblical and theological emphasis on the fundamental solidarity of the human persons with these three levels. The Romanian Orthodox theologian Dumitrue Staniloae, drawing on the thought of Maximus the Confessor (580-662) conceptualizes the human person as a 'little universe' (a *microcosmos*) as 'humanity-writ-large' (*macanthropos*). Human beings paradigmatically encompass the cosmos with an entailing vocation to 'humanize' it. [45]According to Staniloae, the sub-personal world (which for our purposes includes the genomic) finds its meaning in relationship with the human person who is higher than mere nature; and the human person, by his or her very nature, aspires to fin fulfilment in communion with a transcendent and free person – Jesus Christ. The rationality

[44] Sandel, M (2007)***The case against perfection: ethics in the age of genetic engineering*** Harvard University Press, p.85.

[45] Staniloae, D. 2000. *The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, "*Creation: The Visible World,"* Holy Cross Press, Brookline, MA 2000, pp. 18-19.

of the created order – even at the genomic level – is therefore a means of interpersonal 'dialogue' between rational human persons and the supreme rational person, namely God. Our failure to experience the world as a means of ever deepening personal communion with God is one of the consequences of the Fall. But in overcoming the Fall through Chris's atoning death on the Cross, God demonstrates that the world at whatever level is not the last and final reality.

20. Staniloae's approach provides a powerful way of reconciling the scientific and technological enterprise with the human vocation to work with God to bring all of creation into communion with the supreme rational person, God in Jesus Christ. It also provides the basis of a powerful critique of any attempt in the scientific enterprise to depersonalise the human person by assimilating him to the sub-personal (such as the genome), or any attempt to exalt the human person by alienating him from the created order (including his genetic inheritance), which is the God-given means of communion with God. The apostle Paul describes Christian bodies as 'temples of the Holy Spirit'. The human body stands not only as the potential *locus* of the divine presence, but also at the centre-point of the world and the cosmos, in fundamental solidarity with all levels of reality.

21. This is a glorious vision of what it is to be a human being. It recalls those beautiful words of Irenaeus, "The glory of God is a human being fully alive."[46]

Mark Bratton
June 2023

Warden's Address

Annual Gathering, Hinsley Hall, Leeds, 15th June 2023

[Readings: 2 Corinthians 3.3-end – 4.1-6, Matthew 5.17-26]
There are times when I miss the King James Version, when I want the old ways back. '**18** For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.'

[46] What Irenaeus actually says is *"For the glory of God is a living man (vivens homo); but the life of man comes from the vision of God. . . the revelation of the Father which comes through the Word gives life to those who see God." Against Heresies* (4.20.7). It is a Christological, rather than humanistic, statement, although, of course, those who imitate Christ, who are 'in Christ' participate in that fullness of human being and in so doing realise the image after the likeness of God.

Catch me unprepared and I might struggle to tell you what the difference is between them, but I know what I like, and I miss my jot and tittle. But it's not just the words themselves, it's the rhythm and the cadence of the King James and the BCP. But there is an irony that a tittle was a small pen stroke which could be used in Medieval Latin to indicate missing letters in order to abbreviate a word – so, yes, things could be changed if it made life more convenient.

Change is always difficult. The traditional version of the Lord's Prayer is, in my experience, still the preferred version at funerals. On a larger scale, the recent shenanigans at General Synod here in the UK in the debate on Living in Love and Faith showed how challenging doctrinal change can be. There was genuine and great distress displayed by speaker after speaker insisting their lives would be wasted and their faith destroyed if the rules were changed, and also if the rules were *not* changed, and a sizeable group whose distress lay in trying to hold the family together in the face of vitriolic accusations being hurled back and forth.

And yet, throughout the Bible, in Old Testament times, there were massive changes: the transition from being a nomadic people to a settled agrarian nation required new laws, the switch of power from judges and prophets to kings was no small step theologically and legally. And however difficult our teenagers might be I don't imagine any parent seriously wanting to take our obstreperous teenage children outside the city gates and stoning them to death.

In New Testament times, the food laws were changed thanks to one man's vision, the rules on circumcision after much dithering were modified or forgotten, and holding all our wealth and goods in common never really took off.

Since then, through to modern times, there have been volte face moments. Some have happened without fuss, the recent removal of purgatory, and usury, despite being very biblical and clearly sinful, being permitted and even encouraged. In ancient times, the lending of money at any rate of interest was considered heinous, (though I presume that only positive rates were intended). Convenience counts.

Thankfully, this is not true of science. As my Humanist friends tell me, 'I believe in Science', and 'The data doesn't lie.' Most of us here would agree, I imagine, with the first statement but how many of us shuffle our feet at the

second. All of us would subscribe, I imagine, to the idealised version of Science, and the application of reason and observation in understanding the visible and invisible universe. But equally as many of us would acknowledge that Science is frequently let down by the behaviour of the scientists as humans, as sinners, falling short of the required ideal behaviours. The data may not lie, but it can be very dependent on which data was collected, which selected, and when, and by whom, and who was paying for it.

The history of science is replete with examples of reluctance to change neither jot nor tittle of orthodox thinking. Ph.D. students being advised, if they want a career in science, not to pursue a particular approach, avoid an area that is politically contentious, might conflict with sources of generous funding. It would be generally *in*convenient. Or when it is written, the energy with which both the paper *and* the author are attacked and even mocked and ridiculed.

Galileo ran into problems not so much for challenging the Church as challenging the dominant Aristotelian academics. Nor is it only impolite argument. The Spirit gives life but the word can kill. Ignatz Semmelweis died in 1865 in very suspicious circumstances, having called his medical colleagues 'irresponsible murderers' for not washing their hands between patients. Other scientists have died by their own hand. Richard Altman, the discoverer of mitochondria, killed himself because of the negative and harsh response to his work.[1]

There are, and have been, more recent examples, across many fields, cosmology, climate change, genetics, gender studies, right up to the present day. Just a few years ago, The World Health Organisation started a programme of vaccinating children in the Philippines against dengue fever. Doctors on the ground realised that though beneficial for many, a substantial minority of children were later even more ill than ever and even dying. Persuading the government and the World Health Organisation to stop the programme was a monumental task. Ironically, ethically, this still leaves me with a dilemma – with whom do I share this story? In world where the value and efficacy of vaccination is being dismissed and not taken up, should I be sharing stories that show that science can get it wrong, especially if the takeaway is just simply, 'Don't trust vaccinations'. Or is that a convenient excuse on my part?

Jesus is notorious for challenging conventional beliefs, both in his day and still here and now in ours. Not just in the wider world, but even within Christian communities, we struggle to implement his teachings, to be open, loving, receptive to different ways of expressing different ways of being, thinking and feeling. We still have structures which say – to belong you must agree, you must be like us, you must conform.

When reading the gospels, I am always struck by the number of people who walk away saying, 'No, this teaching is too hard', even with Jesus in front of them.

And yet the teaching is ultimately a simple one. Jesus clearly doesn't think in terms of jots and tittles when he summarises the Law, 'Love God, love your neighbour as yourself', and by way of example, 'Love one another as I have loved you'. Whether you come via the roof or the door, you are welcome here.

Or as some scientists have suggested - in science, we really could be a lot kinder to one another'.

[1 No text reference to this but it was bluntly stated by Professor Nick Lane, Evolutionary Biology at UCL, in a science discussion programme 'In Our Time', BBC, Mitochondria, 1/06/2023, time into broadcast 13.30 – 15.45. He ended the passage by saying, sadly, 'Yes, it happens in science too'.]

"IT IS AS IF"

Lucas Mix, from a talk given for the ECLAS "Science, Fiction and the Christian Imagination" at the Science Museum in London, 7 June 2023.

It has been said of Dante's *Divine Comedy* that readers speed through the *Inferno*, struggle through *Purgatorio*, and rarely make it to *Paradiso*. Some have suggested, and I think it true, that Hell is easier to imagine. We write powerful stories about suffering because we experience suffering. We can even write stories about repentance and penance, but it's hard to imagine true blessedness. Our stories about heaven end up rather bland because, by its very nature, grace is infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. And so, we speak of an absence of suffering rather than an abundance of good. Only the rare genius can imagine true, transcendent, and transformative grace. Only the rare genius can tell us a story that captures it.

Too often we do evil things because we cannot imagine a better option. The kingdom of heaven remains just beyond the reach of our imagination. This is, perhaps, one reason it has not come.

In the New Testament, Jesus uses a phrase that is, I think, at the heart of science fiction: "It is as if" The Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25: "it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them". Or, The Parable of the Seed in Mark 4: "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how." In the parables, Jesus shares an imaginable story that hints at something, as yet, unimaginable. In the words of John, things we cannot yet bear to hear. "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him" (*I Cor 2:9*).

These things <u>can</u> be communicated by the Spirit and by grace, but they cannot be said directly. God is not obscure, but we are obtuse. And so, God helps us along with stories that train the imagination, that help us to understand the heaven that earth can be.

The "as if" of the parable is the same "as if" that we say in the Lord's prayer. May your will be done on earth, as if it were in heaven. We forget that earth is in heaven. Both physics and scripture constantly remind us, but it can be terribly hard to imagine. Forgive us our debts as if you were us and we our debtors. A lovely act of double imagination there, both putting us in the shoes of our debtors and imagining ourselves capable of God-like forgiveness.

What is faith if not a heartfelt exercise in "it is as if"? It is as if we were saved. It is as if we were chosen. It is as if we were called. This is not to say that these are fictions. They are true. They are simply difficult to imagine. And so, we need help. Madeline L'Engle, a Christian science fiction author, put it thus. "Truth is what is true, and it's not necessarily factual. Truth and fact are not the same thing. Truth does not contradict or deny facts, but it goes through and beyond facts. This is something that it is very difficult for some people to understand. Truth can be dangerous." GK Chesterton with his usual humor said it this way. "Fairy tales are more than true – not because they tell us dragons exist, but because they tell us dragons can be beaten."

Science fiction trains the imagination. All fiction does that, but science fiction with its explicit focus on the real, the possible, the future, and the alien, can

do this in a very explicit way. It can tackle the bigger questions. Its focus on technology and human agency, has great power to shape our thinking about what we can do and should do, both as individuals and societies. Thus, Science fiction has been called the most explicitly theological of the modern genres.

To be clear, I cannot say that all science fiction is good or that every space opera operates as a Christian parable. There is plenty of bad sci-fi out there. I am not trying to convince you that science fiction is good, but that science fiction is powerful. Many of the fundamental myths of our cultures are communicated and reinforced through science fiction, through novels and movies and popular imagination: the hopefulness of *Star Trek*, the compassion of *Dr Who,* the courage of heroes in Marvel and DC universes. These are the myths and fairy tales of the 21st century. These are the training ground for our moral imagination.

Science fiction can be called good in at least three ways. First, science fiction can be good science. It can communicate accurately the findings of scientists and the state of the art in contemporary knowledge of the physical world. Second, science fiction can be good narrative. It can be compelling and convicting, stirring us to thought and action, and drawing us in. Third, and perhaps most importantly, science fiction can be good morally. It can train our imaginations in a way that helps us see the good and do the good. It can empower us, priming us with Godly perspective and Godly options for how to live, how to respond to suffering and sin, and how to participate in the coming kingdom. The best science fiction is all three.

We must not underestimate the power these stories have for good and ill in shaping the cultures around us. We must not underestimate the power we have when we tell imaginative stories mindfully, compassionately, and prayerfully. Ursula K LeGuin once said, “The only questions that really matter are the ones you ask yourself.” Her stories made me ask very deep questions of myself. And for that I am grateful. CS Lewis said, “Reason is the natural order of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning.” His stories taught me how to reason better both about what is and about what could be. And that could be the trickiest piece of all. How do we think about what is and what could be? How do we know? And what about those time when we don’t know what could be, when we have to guess? This is, after all, most of the time.

Let me suggest that the scientific imagination navigates exactly these waters. The scientific method and scientific institutions exist to constrain the imagination. Not to limit it exactly, but to channel it in ways that align with observation. Scientific narratives are not fictions, *per se*, but they are imaginings. They are "it is as if" stories. It is as if electrons were tiny moons orbiting atomic nuclei. They're not really, but it's a very helpful story. It is as if light was both a wave and a particle. It's neither, really, but both perspectives are useful.

There are bigger science stories as well, stories that tread the line between foretelling the future and revealing the present – much like the apocalypses of Isaiah, Daniel, and John. They are not fictional accounts, intentional falsehoods. Neither are they simply predictions. They are revelations. Ideally, they are accurate, compelling, and empowering. Scientific stories like disappearing ozone, rising temperature and sea level, and the heat death of the universe serve these functions. They should be scientifically accurate – and I think these stories are – but they should also be compelling and empowering. We need to think carefully about how these stories work and how we respond to them. Science fiction can help with that.

I want to leave you with one concrete example. It starts with another parable, the Wise and Foolish Servants in Luke 12: "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded." This passage has resonated with me throughout my life and throughout my ministry. It speaks to me about what it means to be an authority figure – in academia, in the church, and in science. It speaks to me about who I am called to be.

I turn to it again and again, but I must admit the language does not roll trippingly off the tongue, and I do not remember the passage clearly. It was easier when John F Kennedy said it in 1961. And Winston Churchill in 1906. What sticks with me, though, is Stan Lee writing in *Amazing Fantasy* #15. A phrase that would become the core principle in *Spider Man* comics. "With great power comes great responsibility."

The idea is Biblical, and I turn there to understand it fully, but it's not an easy idea. Easy enough to say, once you work out the grammar, but what does it mean. How do you explain responsibility to someone unfamiliar with the concept? Or faith? Or love? These words are meaningless to those who have never experienced them. It is not enough to show; we must also tell. And so

we tell stories and say, “It is as if…” It is as if you had superpowers and lived with others who do not... It is as if you met an alien… It is as if the labor you need could be done by a robot…”
To be honest, I was never a big comic book reader. Spider Man gave me the language, but others gave me the idea. I learned about responsibility, how it worked and what it meant from the stories of Lois McMaster Bujold, Terry Pratchett, JRR Tolkien, and Madeline L’Engle; each one unafraid to dive into practical, explicitly religious morality; each one concerned with emotional and psychological accuracy, compelling narrative, and empowering perspectives.
These stories shaped me, the more so because they were fantastical and extreme. They caught my imagination, and shaped my imagination. They shaped the options I considered and, thus, the decisions I made. My parents and teachers and pastors made this possible. They helped me make the connections, from the pithy *Spiderman* to the insightful L’Engle to the authoritative scripture. They helped me see the power behind the phrase, “It is as if.”
As you think through your own experience of science fiction, on the page and on the screen, I hope you will ask a few key questions:
What am I being asked to imagine and what am I told is true?
What am I being offered to choose and what am I told I must accept?
In what do I trust and for what do I hope?
These are at the heart of good science fiction and, I believe, at the heart of Christianity.

‘To express both the commitment of the Church to the scientific and technological enterprise and our concern of its impact on the world’ – two lived examples.

Background
Like so many of us in the SOSc, my vocation as a priest and Climate Scientist came sequentially. Temporally at least I was first a scientist before my calling as a priest became overwhelming. I wrestled for a number of years whether my calling was to combine both from the outset but reading about the career trajectory of John Polkinghorne helped me realise that at least the next steps

dual in calling as priest and scientist would be sequential rather than in parallel. I have always been attracted to SOSc because of the sense that it's founders had that we each need support in that struggle of weaving together those dual vocations of Priest and Scientist. Right from the outset I knew that communicating Climate Science and our biblical mandate to care for our only home planet had a lot to do with my priestly calling. Having made some tentative efforts 'To express both the commitment of the Church to the scientific and technological enterprise and our concern of its impact on the world' at theological college, I was ready when opportunities came about within parish and diocesan ministry. I will describe two lived examples here.

Example 1 – 'Quiz a vicar'*

Something I have taken to doing in my parishes is providing a 'resource portfolio' for the schools in my parish, which includes my background in Climate Science. I have also been able to let our Diocesan schools team know of my particular background as a priest and scientist and so schools within my parish and further afield have often called on me as a Priest-Scientist. Many primary schools in England have as part of their Religious Education (RE) curriculum a 'Science and Faith' component. In some instances, this is set up as a 'debate' between Creationism versus Evolution or Faith versus Evidence. This can be very tricky to teach without taking sides and so I have been invited on multiple occasions to attend a 'quiz a vicar' event for RE classes. The intensification of culture wars over the last decade has only made this harder. The 'quiz a vicar' format allows teachers to provide input to teaching in the category of personal testimony rather than purely in a debating format. So, what does this involve? We set a date and time, the teacher gives me some background, age range etc and then the teacher helps the pupils to put together questions for me of the right academic level. We learnt the hard way to put together the pupils questions in class because when we asked the children to do this at home the questions seemed to come from mum and dad trying catch the vicar out rather than to help the pupils! The teacher then sends a representative sample of the questions so that I can gauge the level. Here are some questions from 9 year olds:

If God was the only one alive how did the creation story get passed on?
If Adam and Eve, are we all related?

How do we know creation story is true?
What about science and the big bang?
How did God make light/ humans/ animals?
How was God made?
How was there light on first day if sun only made later?

I really enjoy going into schools and the children are very engaged. My take home message for the pupils: 'I respect my colleagues in science and in ministry who are not able to reconcile science and faith and you might feel that too. However, be careful not to assume there are only two choices. I love my joint callings to science and faith and I am here to just be myself so that you can meet someone, among many others I know, who feels that science and faith can be reconciled'

Example 2 – Teaching 'Creation Care' to lay and ordained ministers over Zoom.
The report by Martin and Margot Hodson '*The Environment in UK Theological Education Institutions': Report on the Environmental Consultation for Theological Educators* describes the woeful state of the teaching of environmental issues in UK theological institutions. Partly in response to the Hodson's report and partly in response to requests from colleagues in ministry, I wanted to offer the Ministry Development Team a course that I could easily teach over zoom. Rather than develop something new I lent on the book '*Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World'* by Douglas J. Moo and Jonathan A. Moo, which was led by Douglas Moo during a sabbatical at the Faraday Institute. The seminar series aimed to equip preachers and church leaders for the years and decades ahead by studying the scriptural, theological and missional imperative to Care for God's Creation. The text is aimed at final year undergraduate and MA students and offered a rigorous level of engagement, which exposed participants to a range of approaches and scholarship on this subject. The course was very well received. As a seminar format we were able to really unpack our old assumptions on this subject and the feedback from students was very encouraging. A highlight for me was the way the conversations helped me grow my own understanding, which will help to inform my own writing and teaching in future.

Over to you

I close with two questions for the reader: What opportunities/needs in your Parish/Diocese might weave together your own vocation as Priest and Scientist? What unique aspect of your distinctive calling might speak to the challenges we face in our communities today? In humility I offer these two simple experiences and pray that you can discern your own means 'to express both the commitment of the Church to the scientific and technological enterprise and our concern of its impact on the world'. In the name of our greatest teacher, Jesus Christ. AMEN.

[* Some background if you are not familiar with the English school's system. Primary schools run from age 4 to 11. Secondary schools cover from 12 to 18. Because the Church of England set up many of the first schools in England the Church has always maintained important links to education.]

** Hodson, M.J. & Hodson, M.R. (2021) *The Environment in UK Theological Education Institutions: Report on the Environmental Consultation for Theological Educators (07-08 December 2020)*, Gloucester: The John Ray Initiative. https://jri.org.uk/resources/the- environment-in-uk-theological-education-institutions/

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The Gilbert Scott Lectures on Science and Faith – Liverpool Cathedral

As fellow members of the Society of Ordained Scientists, we have much in common – not least the love of God as creator and redeemer of all that is; source and foundation of time and space, matter and energy, life and consciousness…as we commonly and frequently pray together. We have that common calling – to a combined life of science and faith; gifts from God we use within our calling to a ministry in Christ Jesus our Lord, and also to use our God-given talents within the wonders of science.

I am still in awe of my own calling to a life of science and faith and as such, always love sharing my experiences of both; as I am sure we all do. Especially so, when there are still many who feel that the two are not compatible – when we are all living proof that it is quite the opposite! As such, within my (relatively short!) ministry so far I have enjoyed sharing my own professional and ministry experiences in many different places and contexts and organising series of talks, lectures and other events to bring the voices of many (often much more experienced and knowledgeable than myself!) to be heard further.

One such medium has been lecture series held in the cathedrals in which I have had the honour of serving. So an inaugural series of lectures on Science and Faith was developed at Blackburn Cathedral in 2016; and a similar series (entitled the Max Planck Series, in honour of the famous physicist) was held at Chester Cathedral in 2018 (see here). It was at Chester that I was introduced to our Society by the Dean there, The Very Revd. Prof Gordon McPhate (one of our SOSc members and now Dean Emeritus). At Liverpool Cathedral (where I was initially the Cathedral Chaplain, but am now a residentiary canon with the title of Canon Scientist), we now have the Gilbert Scott Lectures on Science and Faith which began in 2019 and are still on-going (see here).

Contrary perhaps to one's initial impressions, the current series is not named after the famous Giles Gilbert Scott, the wonderful architect of the cathedral, but after his brother Dr Sebastian Gilbert Scott, who was a nationally and internationally renowned physician and radiologist in London. Twenty-nineteen (the year in which our series of lectures started), was a special year which marked the 140th anniversary since his birth in Hampstead in 1879. His obituaries in the British Journal of Radiology and the British Medical Journal highlighted his many clinical accomplishments….but also how good a teacher he was, teaching by example through a kindly, cheerful and optimistic manner with his patients to many a young, trainee radiologist.

In that vein, all of the series that have been organised (at all three cathedrals) invited speakers who would do just that - share their own thoughts, expertise and experiences in a similar manner; and also include speakers and discussions which are as accessible as possible to many different people, with elements of living a life of science (all types of science) within the realities of the world in which we live.

The pandemic changed everything for all of us – as such, the Gilbert Scott series moved to being fully online in 2021. That brought a greater visibility, as the internet naturally does; and so now the current series is a hybrid of online lectures and in-person ones; the latter also being recorded and uploaded so that they are also available online.

The online world also opened up the possibility of speakers from across the world – so earlier this year, we had our first lecture live from the US, from our very own Revd Dr Pan Conrad giving the wonderful talk on "Catastrophe, Resilience and Evolution: A Planetary Record of Redemption" that she shared with us at our digital annual gathering back in 2021.

We've also just recorded our first short (about 30 min) 'In Conversation' piece between myself and Dr Bethany Sollereder (previously at Oxford University, now at Edinburgh University) on "Compassionate Theodicy"; and we are working on a similar pre-recorded lecture with the experts in AI analysis of the Dead Sea Scrolls (from Profs Popovic and Dhali from the University of Groningen in the Netherlands) for early 2023.

It would be great to open out the range of topics and, above all, experiences of lives of science and faith through these types of lectures, but also further 'In Conversation' pieces, pre-recorded talks, live (online and face-to-face) lectures, short podcasts etc…for which it would be great to have more voices from ourselves as a Society of Ordained Scientists; either sharing our current or previous experiences and subject expertise. So…would you like to help develop the series with offerings of your own? I'd love to hear from you if you would, and it would be excellent to expand the involvement of the society here!

As we know, there are many other societies, and growing opportunities, for studying, researching and continuing to share so many glorious aspects of our science and faith, for which we should give thanks to God…and give our encouragement and support to. If you are interested in helping to support this particular example of those, at Liverpool Cathedral, please do get in touch!

Access to our dedicated webpage (which gives access to all available recorded lectures) can be found on the link or through the QR Code below. And please feel free to email me on mckirby@liverpool.ac.uk.

Mike Kirby - Canon Scientist, Liverpool Cathedral; Senior Lecturer (Radiotherapy Physics), University of Liverpool

https://www.liverpoolcathedral.org.uk/exploring-faith/learning/lectures/the-gilbert-scott-lectures-on-science-and-faith/

THE SEARCH FOR MEANING IN NATURE: A COLLOQUIUM FOR UNITARIAN MINISTERS

“Nature”, says the ad-man, means “good”, “full of natural goodness, all-natural ingredients”!

And yet, COVID, paediatric cancer, the Anopheles mosquito, the Great White Shark, death.

“Nature”, says the industrialist, means "natural resources to exploit. Nature means money, progress, wealth!”

And yet, extinction of species, poisoned habitat, burned rainforests, depleted water tables, global warming.

“Nature”, says the poet, is “the source of my dreams and my inspiration; some impulse from a vernal wood, a host of golden daffodils, David Attenborough’s nature series on the BBC, beautiful sunsets”.

And yet, flooding in Pakistan, a hurricane in Florida, the radiation released when the Uranium 235 atom undergoes fission, skin damage by uv light.

“Nature”, says the scientist, is "merely the sum of all phenomena, governed by mathematical laws; all a matter of inference to the best explanation…"

And yet, and yet.....

But as we are a gathering of ministers of religion, is "Nature" a subject to which we may have anything distinctive to contribute?

I'd like to begin with the Collect, the common prayer, of the Society of Ordained Scientists. That will give me a framework for this address, and then I'll ask some questions for us to consider trying to give meaningful examples as we go along.

[The SOSc Collect]:
"Almighty God, Creator and Redeemer of all that is, source and foundation of time and space, matter and energy, life and consciousness, grant us in this Society, and all who study the mysteries of your creation, grace to be true witnesses to your glory and faithful stewards of your gifts. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen."

Shall we start there in our search for meaning in nature?

One big question for this morning might be: "Could nature actually be said to have any *intrinsic* value or meaning, or even teleological purpose?" I.e., could we read off from nature a meaning or meanings that are already there, or must we merely project meaning onto it? If there is meaning, can we understand it? The answer to questions about value may determine where and how we ministers search for meaning in nature.

Science asks specific sorts of limited questions from nature: that's why the sciences make such progress as they do; time and space, matter and energy, life and consciousness; <u>all that is</u>. There are no *scientific* answers to questions about meaning or value: that's not what science does.

Some scientists have asserted that the practical and intellectual successes of science prove that only science can explain everything about reality (eventually), without limit. All else is meaningless and therefore scientists, "real scientists", must be atheists. Such a view, scientism, has its advocates: Peter Atkins and, in his earlier writings, Richard Dawkins[47], Francis Crick, E.O.

[47] R. Dawkins, Unweaving the Rainbow, Houghton Mifflin, 1998. Q.v. The Selfish Gene and other writings by Dawkins et al.

Wilson, Carl Sagan. Scientism is not in itself science: its approach to answering questions about morality or the meaning of life is disguised naturalism and materialism.

May I give you a real and positive example of the limited questions by which science seeks for meaning in my research at Leeds University in an arthritis and rheumatism lab. We found an answer to this question: "What does this constant error in our measurements of the porosity of cartilage mean?"

A member of our team discovered that cartilage was piezoelectric: when you compress it, squeeze it, a small electric charge is generated. Finding that effect answered the question of what one puzzling aspect of nature meant. No-one had ever understood it before, but this effect is essential to how our body's arthrosic joints function. So what? Too esoteric an example? Too boring? Too trivial? …… unless you suffer from arthritis or rheumatism.

In our time, science sets the agenda for theology. Our environment is in peril because of increasing greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere. Scientific discoveries provide the data, and yet science does not have a vocabulary for motivation to solve the problems. Although there are climate change deniers, the data are hard to ignore. Nor is the earth flat.

I am quite sure that science cannot provide the moral imperative for the urgent, necessary, change in values, the *almost* unprecedentedly rapid evolution in values, we need. That's where we ministers may come in. And, to my great surprise, there is a very unlikely, and yet to me encouraging, historical example of just the sort of huge change in values we must struggle to achieve. But it's not found in science, but in history, and in theology.

But where to begin? Not with science, not yet.

The C19 British poet, Robert Browning, wrote a long narrative poem about a quattrocento Italian artist, Fra Lippo Lippi.

The artist, who is a monk, is out wandering the dark streets one night (all who wander are not lost), when he's stopped by two security guards who ask him who he is and what he's doing.

"I'm an artist, I paint things, people", says the monk.
"An artist? What's that mean when it's at home?" the guards ask. They want to know why anybody would spend their life painting pictures. Scientists and theologians, artists and poets, believers and atheists alike, love the artist's reply:

"This world's no blot for us, nor blank; it means intensely, and it means good. To find its meaning is my meat and drink."[48]
Thing is, finding meaning is the Friar's *vocation*: and he searches to reveal or express meaning by painting pictures from real life. The artist plays an active part in the search for meaning. Painting is his research method into thinking God's thoughts after God, portraying and interpreting the creation. He is a person of faith: he is matter and spirit, both real and both good, an artist, a created co-creator, like us. What he's doing is trying express what he sees of *creation*, of God's glory in creation. He represents three dimensions of space in two dimensions on canvas, using the medium of oil paints, to express the meaning of all that is, at least, all that he can see.
The Church authorities, the security guards of doctrine, say that's totally the wrong approach. They actually make him redo his canvases: they tell him to paint the soul, not the flesh. ("Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!"). Nature has no meaning except what the ecclesiastical hierarchy says it is. The powerful church authorities have been replaced in our day by industrialists, economists, plutocrats: they tell us what nature must mean. Theologians, ministers, even those who paint, even Unitarians, are out there on the silent margins. But, given a lever and a place to stand, one could shift the world from such a point. It has been done before.

The C19 Jesuit poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, saw God's glory in the natural world, but he was not a nature worshiper, nor a scientist. He believed that

[48] R. Browning, "Fra Lippo Lippi" in "Men and Women" 1855.

there was sanctity in nature: his response was to praise the creator and sustainer of all that is in his poem, “Pied Beauty[49].

Meaning in nature, as revealed to Hopkins, meant: “this world’s no blot for us, it means intensely, and it means *God*.” God’s presence, everywhere, in everything, at every level, gives praise just by being what it is, created and sustained in existence, and that includes Gerard Manley Hopkins, SJ, poet. Nature means us or includes us. Hopkins’ meaning in nature is deeper than just aesthetic, though the aesthetic response is important to scientists and theologians. Is the source of beauty the meaning you see in nature, whenever you think of it? And do we see meaning IN nature, or is nature a lens THROUGH WHICH we may seek and see meaning, an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace? A sacrament?

Hopkins again from his poem “God’s grandeur”: “There lives the dearest freshness deep down things’.[50]

And therein lies a complication: we cannot see very far deep down things. Our senses can only see slow-moving, cold, relatively large objects, within the narrow range of frequencies of visible light; and then we can paint pictures of them or write poems about them. We identify that superficial and naïve glimpse with nature. The Nobel Prize-winning quantum physicist, Werner Heisenberg humbly agrees: “What we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our questioning.”[51] “Not only is the Universe stranger than we think, it is stranger than we can think.”

There really isn’t much we can say about time, except to note that, as Star Trek had it: “Time is the fire in which we burn.”

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3. G.M. Hopkins, “Pied Beauty” in G.M. Hopkins, Collected Poems, R. Bridges, edit., 1918

[50] G.M. Hopkins, op.cit.

[51] Werner Heisenberg, “Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science”, Penguin Classics, (2000).

We are constrained to live and move and have our being, and exercise our ministry, always in the present moment. This is what De Caussade called "the sacrament of the present moment."[52]

We have no choice about the age which we are born and our inheritance of very unstable ecosystems, war in Eastern Europe, and natural or engineered weaponized pandemics lurking in the wings.

Our legacy reaches us from an unalterable past – "the past is another country: they do things differently there."[53]

We have inherited burdens and choices, an agenda, and the values that shaped such nature as we experience: they are not of our own making. I suppose that is the theme of those movies "Ice Age."

But the time-dependent search for meaning poses a moral question: what do we owe future generations?[54] When it comes to making decisions about the future, you and I have a very impoverished vocabulary. We speak in the abstractions of investment: short term. Medium term. Long term: abstract ideas from business investment.

Macaskill[55] reminds us that the Iroquois people in North America speak of a seventh generation principle. "We make every decision that we make relate to the welfare and well-being of the seventh generation to come. We consider: will this be to the benefit of the seventh generation."

Seven generations ago, the fastest any human could move over land was on a fast horse. Seven generations from now, your great-great-great-great-great … given the rapid changes over the last seven generations, is their future even less imaginable than your seventh generation ancestor could have predicted about our present day? What do we owe unimaginable future generations in an unimaginable future?

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[52] J. P. DeCaussade, "The Sacrament of the Present Moment", Harper, San Francisco, 2009.
[53] L.P.Hartley, "The Go-Between, Hamish Hamilton, (1953).
[54] W. Macaskill, "What we owe the future", One World, 2022. The following example and analysis draws strongly on this book.
[55] W. Macaskill, "What we owe the future", One World, 2022.

There are some who say, cynically, that we owe them nothing. These future beings, and that's perhaps most of the human beings who will ever exist, don't exist, can't vote, can't influence the market, consume nothing, manufacture nothing, can express no opinions……so whatever damaged 'nature' we leave for them is not our concern. "In the long run", said, J.M. Keynes the great economist in 1923, "we are all dead". That is the 'value system' we have inherited, and which has bent the trajectory of the future downward. Nature's future and those who may inhabit it, is meaningless, some say.

Perhaps we owe the future *hope,* and can at least try to make evidence-based choices that would allow them to live without cursing us. But hope is not a plan. Nor is hope a scientific principle. And always, the grammar of hope contains a seed that hope will be unfulfilled, and, in Keynes' long run, we won't be there to see it.

Poets are the prophets who look at nature past, present, and see, as in a vision, the shape of things to come. What they have to say provides us, ministers, with resources for liturgies of lament, of grief and guilt.

The late Poet Laureate, Philip Larkin, felt no hope in January 1972 – half a century ago - when he wrote this prescient poem about nature and us, "Going, Going".[56]

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[56] P. Larkin, "Going, going" in High Windows, Faber, 1972.

I thought it would last my time –
The sense that, beyond the town,
There would always be fields and farms,
Where village louts could climb
Such trees as were not cut down;
I knew there'd be false alarms

In the papers about old streets
And split level shopping, but some
Have always been left so far;
And when the old part retreats
As the bleak high-risers come,
We can always escape in the car.

Things are tougher than we are, just

As earth will always respond
However we mess it about;
Chuck filth in the sea, if you must;
The tides will be clean beyond.
But what do I feel now? Doubt?

Or age, simply? The crowd
Is young in the M1 Café;
Their kids are screaming for more –
More houses, more parking allowed,
More caravan sites, more pay.
On the Business Page, a score

Of spectacled grins approve
Some takeover bid that entails
Five percent profit (and ten
Percent more in the estuaries): move
Your works to the unspoilt dales
(Grey area grants)! And when

You try to get near the sea
In summer …
It seems, just now,
To be happening so fast;
Despite all the land left free
For the first time I feel somehow
That it isn't going to last,

That before I snuff it, the whole
Boiling will be bricked in
Except for the tourist parts –
First slum of Europe: a role
It won't be hard to win,
With a cast of crooks and tarts.

And that will be England gone,
The shadows, the meadows, the lanes,
The guildhalls, the carved choirs.
There'll be books; it will linger on
In galleries; but all that remains
For us will be concrete and tyres.

Most things are never meant.
This won't be, most likely, but greeds
And garbage are too thick-strewn
To be swept up now, or invent
Excuses that make them all needs.
I just think it will happen, soon.

Was Larkin, writing in 1972, too pessimistic?
In Iceland, you'll find a bronze plaque on a hill where, until recently, there used to be a glacier. An ancient hilltop glacier, Okjökull, has melted away to nothing. A funeral was held for this inanimate bit of vanished nature, and a bronze plaque in several languages, 'A Letter to the Future', was cast and put on a memorial stone. The English translation reads: "This monument is to acknowledge that we know what is happening, and what needs to be done. Only you know if we did it." [57]
There is a text for you. If there is hope, it is faint, implicit, and conditional. As Kierkegaard wrote, "Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards."

Perhaps some are tempted to preach about *stewardship*.

Stewardship treats nature as "*the external world in its entirety*" – this definition comes from a well-respected dictionary (Webster-Merriam).

Nature, as the Collect defines it, is "all that is; time and space, matter and energy, life and consciousness." That includes us. The dictionary definition mistakenly defined nature as "the external world in its entirety", and by "external" it meant only plants and animals and their habitats, coral reefs and the like.

But, nature – 'all that is'- is not merely 'the *external* world in its entirety.' We humans are inextricably part of nature. We are late-comers, true, having emerged comparatively recently in the long evolutionary history of Earth's "interconnected web of life ". But we are not apart from nature: human nature, whatever that may be, is still part of the evolved nature of our species, genes, memes, cartilage, bacteria, viruses, and all.

What's wrong with the stewardship model? It places humankind in a grandiose managerial role as if we were outside and above nature, acting responsibly on behalf of an absentee God, standing under God, between God

[57] W. Macaskill, op.cit.

and nature. It does not allow for an immanent God's indwelling presence in humankind as part of creation. It is bad theology.

Stewardship? Of what? Nature? Stewards of the tiny bit of nature we see, but don't understand? Homo sapiens cannot be held responsible for managing the 13.57 billion light years of expanding universe, nor the 5000 exoplanets discovered so far, nor most of life on earth today, nor over almost all of earth's history.

'Stewardship' is something of a weasel word. For energy companies, it means a somewhat less-rapacious exploitation now, in order to provide dividends for future shareholders. Nature is a thing, a conglomerate of useful things.

An example of what "stewardship of nature means" in this context? An unmanned impact probe in a deep crater found there was much more water (ice) on the moon than had been thought. What did that discovery mean? That 'we' could have a permanent base on the moon, and 'we' could mine its valuable minerals to send back to meet our growing needs!!!

We are not wrong to be concerned about that banausic outlook, are we?

David Attenborough ended the last of his series on 'Frozen Planet II' on a note of hope. That last programme was bleak. Nature, in the sense of the natural world, is a mess. For 70% of species, there is no hope because they have become extinct in the last 70 years.

Frans De Waal's excellent book, "Are we smart enough to know how smart animals are?"[58] sums up research that shows how very little we continue to understand animals.

Animals, such as dogs, pigs, chickens, have evolved advanced central nervous systems anatomically just like ours. Anatomy and physiology demonstrate that form and function are related. Their central nervous system, like ours, means animals can feel pain, can suffer. Physically and emotionally. When

[58] F. De Waal, "Are we smart enough to know how smart animals are?", Norton, 2016.

hurt animals made noise, it used to be dismissed as like a squeaky wheel in a machine made of meat. Even knowing the facts about the nature of animals suffering, we still ignore it, and condone it. Change in values does not necessarily follow from increased scientific knowledge. Greater scientific knowledge should widen the circle of moral concern, and to some extent, it has…..and yet.

But is all nature is precious? Must all life must be preserved?

Two species of living creatures have been made deliberately extinct in the last fifty years. *Variolus Major*, that's the smallpox virus, and the *Rindpest* virus. Ernst Schrodinger speculated that viruses are not really alive; they are just opportunistic crystals[59], but we shall leave that aside. The WHO's programme eliminated the smallpox virus from nature in 1977. The last case 'in the wild' was a Kenyan called Ali Maolin.

The ecosystem to which it was so well adapted, and in which it evolved, is *homo sapiens*. It was a terrible scourge throughout history, a 'natural evil', causing death and disfigurement to millions. Now it is extinct. Deliberately extinct.

So is the *Rindpest* virus. When that virus first arrived in Africa, some 90% of cattle died, bringing about starvation and vast social disruption. Now the *Rindpest* virus is extinct. Both were part of the interconnected web of the natural world of living creatures. Were they therefore good? Does good stewardship include eliminating naturally-occurring species for human purposes? Are human purposes (such as corporate profit or reduced human suffering) good enough grounds for eliminating polar bears or just disease vectors? If, because thanks to medical technology and scientific knowledge, we *can* make species extinct, does that mean we *should*? These are questions of *value* to which there is no scientific answer.

Another e.g.? The most loved piece of classical music in the UK is Ralph Vaughan Williams', "Lark Ascending". Yet how many of you have ever heard a skylark? I find that a great many people have not. The skylark is on the

[59] E. Schrodinger, "What is life?", Cambridge, 2012

RSPB's rather long Red List of extremely endangered species. Nature is transient, species come and go. Does it matter that the rainforest is turning into ash and CO_2, or that skylarks, like Dodos, may soon become mere references in books? Or in the case of the lark ascending, moments of beauty on Radio 3? What does an absence from nature mean for the future?

Smallpox, Rindpest, skylarks: if we were called upon to construct a ritual or liturgy appropriate/necessary for the natural world in our time, and for future generations, might we not prepare a lament for all species? There are lots of sources for laments, the psalms for instance. A lament normally expresses grief and loss, but we would need to incorporate another factor: guilt. The task for we ministers, but not scientists, could be to express grief and guilt in a lament, not an hypothesis or theory.
Grief and guilt liturgically, in a service of lamentation: grief and guilt for nature and the rapacious anthropocentric values that have brought us to the eve of destruction. And hope? Can you also preach on realistic hope?
Now for the science bit, then an unlikely historical source of hope.

MATTER, ENERGY, SPACE

Is there meaning in nature? If there is, could we discover it, express it? Nature consists of all that is: time and space, matter and energy, life and consciousness. What about matter, energy, and space?

Einstein, who devised Relativity Theory said: "The most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible." Is it? Is 'all that is, time and space, matter and energy, life, and consciousness' comprehensible to us humans? Einstein thought so, perhaps he hoped so.

Others disagreed with Einstein: "Not only is the Universe stranger than we think, it is stranger than we can think." — Werner Heisenberg[60].

In the 1930s, a very distinguished Cambridge physicist, Paul Dirac, was thinking about the electron. I know you are familiar with electrons: you did them at O-Level or GCSE: small negatively-charged particles of matter

[60] W. Heisenberg, Across the Frontiers, Harper and Row, 1974.

located in space in orbitals around the nucleus of atoms. As an electron shifts from one quantum energy level to another, the light emitted is responsible for the colours we see in Fra Lippo Lippi's canvases (electrochromism).

Back to Cambridge: because a purely mathematical symmetry led to a discovery in physics, Dirac suggested there should be a subatomic particle corresponding to the electron only positively charged: the positron. There was no evidence for any such a thing – until forty years later, when new technology revealed it to be antimatter. And because nature may be more strange than we can know, Richard Feynman suggested that a positron may mean that it's an electron moving backwards in time. Stranger than we can know?

Reality, nature, is not what it seems: at the quantum level of quarks – the very small scale, - time and space do not exist. And yet the quantum universe is the foundation of all we see and experience: it underlies all physical reality. But in nature at that level, there is no death, no life, no beauty, no hope. At the experienced level of nature, there is order, law-like behaviour. At the quantum level all is chaos, indeterminacy, disorder. How does that work? What meaning lies there? And can we fully know it?

After all this superficial level of what we call nature is gone, there will still be quarks and gluons and Higgs Bosons, and the elusive dance of probabilities in Hilbert space.

Our common sense understanding of all-that-is nature is as far from reality as flat-earth theory, or that the sun goes around the earth.

Maybe meaning in nature, every aspect, lies more deeply, out of sight but not out of mind, and written in a strange language understood by few.

Nature, as the SOSc Collect defines it, is "all that is; time and space, matter and energy, life and consciousness." Each of our disciplines maps nature in a different way, and in different, sometimes mutually incomprehensible, languages.

That's what Galileo Galilei came to see. He wrote:
"[Natural] philosophy is written in that great book which ever lies before our eyes, I mean the universe, but we cannot understand it[s meaning] if we do not first learn the language and grasp the symbols in which it is written. *The book is written in the mathematical language,* without whose help it is humanly impossible to comprehend a single word of it."

And that search for meaning in nature by means of mathematics inspired the great scientists of the Scientific Revolution and beyond – Newton, Kepler, Maxwell, Einstein,….. But the mathematics was not as simple as the Euclidean geometry that Galileo thought. His experiments with throwing things (fundamentalists, claim my Harvard colleagues, wistfully) off the Leaning Tower of Pisa would never have led him to conclude that gravity is a geometrical property of the space-time matrix. Nature is stranger than the past knew or than we know. But that will be my conclusion.

Maybe mathematics is the best way to map the universe and explain nature at the deepest level. But behold, I show you a mystery.

Mathematics is the free creation of the human mind. The bit of nature where mathematics has its birth and being is us. "If nature leads us to mathematical forms of great simplicity and beauty—by forms, I am referring to coherent systems of hypotheses, axioms, etc.—to forms that no one has previously encountered, we cannot help thinking that they are "true," that they reveal a genuine feature of nature…. You must have felt this too: the almost frightening simplicity and wholeness of the relationships which nature suddenly spreads out before us and for which none of us was in the least prepared." [61]

A mathematical physicist, Eugene Wigner began a paper with the belief that mathematical concepts strangely map realities far beyond the physics for which they were originally developed.
Wigner sums up his argument by saying that "the enormous usefulness of mathematics in the natural sciences is something bordering on the mysterious, and that there is just no rational explanation for it".

[61] W. Heisenberg, op.cit.

Behold, I show you a mystery.
He concludes his paper with the same question with which he began:
“The miracle of the appropriateness of the language of mathematics for the formulation of the laws of physics is *a wonderful gift* which we neither understand nor deserve. We should be grateful for it and hope that it will remain valid in future research and that it will extend, for better or for worse, to our pleasure, even though perhaps also to our bafflement, to wide branches of learning.”
“It is difficult to avoid the impression that a miracle confronts us here, quite comparable in its striking nature to the miracle that the human mind can string a thousand arguments together without getting itself into contradictions, or to the two miracles of laws of nature and of the human mind's capacity to divine them.” [62]
Or the physicist, Robert Jastrow:
“At this moment it seems as though science will never be able to raise the curtain on the mystery of creation. For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.”[63] And Werner Heisenberg, the distinguished quantum physicist: The first gulp from the glass of natural sciences will turn you into an atheist, but at the bottom of the glass God is waiting for you.” [64]

Is he joking? An example from the mediaeval schoolmen: “How many angels can dance on the point of a needle?” (NOT on the head of a pin, by the way, if you wish to be correct). But that’s not the pointless mediaeval question about angelology Richard Dawkins derided: it is an attempt, using the language of theology in the Middle Ages, to express an extremely difficult problem in mathematics: the nature of real infinity. Angels have no dimensions, no geometry, but even the sharpest point of a needle does, so what does infinity mean? Can one add one more angel, or an infinity of

[62] E. Wigner, "The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences," Communications in Pure and Applied Mathematics, February 1960,
[63] R. Jastrow, God and the Astronomers, Revised edition, 2000.
[64] Werner Heisenberg, “Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science”, Penguin Classics, 2000).

angels? Or an infinity of infinities of angels? Does nature contain infinities? With infinity, what you see is not what you get. And the formalism to resolve that seemingly absurd question was not devised until Georg Cantor in the C19 in his work on transfinite numbers and set theory. And what possible sense can stewardship of nature make of quantum gravity? And what can we preach about the search for meaning in nature on the point of needles?

Or eternity. Time is neither everlasting or infinite: in modern physics, space-time, and matter and energy
($E = Mc^2$) are bound together. And at the quantum level, time and space disappear.

But eternity? The English metaphysical poet Henry Vaughan described a vision using a simile. I have been wondering what that symbolism means.
The World

"I saw Eternity the other night,
Like a great ring of pure and endless light,
All calm, as it was bright;
And round beneath it, Time in hours, days, years,
Driv'n by the spheres
Like a vast shadow mov'd; in which the world
And all her train were hurl'd."

What does time mean, past, present, or future? McTaggart's A and B: time is unreal because our experiential descriptions of time are either contradictory, circular, or insufficient. That is for another day.

Now for my hopeful example from history, not from Unitarian history, but from another minority powerless fringe denomination, The Society of Friends, the Quakers[65]. And one very eccentric man in particular: Benjamin Lay in C18 Pennsylvania. I find this example to be hopefully relevant to our search for meaning in nature and our present crisis.

[65] W. Macaskill, "What we owe the future", One World, 2022. This example comes from that inspiring book.

One aspect of society we happily did not inherit from the past is the slave trade: its abolition is my historical example providing hope.

Almost every society throughout history held slaves. Why? Economics! Labour costs are the expense of capturing someone and maintaining that person at subsistence levels until they died: a perfect example of a renewable resource.

But here is why the abolition of slavery encourages me: it was a very improbable value change, a huge rapid moral change, *brought about by the very society which benefitted from it*. When self-interest concludes that we can't afford to slow or stop climate change, (it would ruin our economies), recall similar arguments from seven generations ago.

Benezet and Wilberforce and the other abolitionists (Darwin included) achieved the British ban on the slave trade in 1807, just over seven generations ago. By 1833, just over six generations ago, slavery became illegal over most of the British Empire. Surely abolition would have happened anyway? Wasn't it just a matter of economics? Wouldn't technological advance have made slavery unprofitable? Keep in mind the parallel with the urgent, short term, two-generation, changes which must be made to slow or reverse the effects of global warming.

At the time of abolition, slavery was enormously profitable and getting more so for the British. Our colonies produced more sugar than the rest of the world combined, and Britain consumed the most sugar of any country. When the slave trade was abolished, the cost of living shot up: sugar cost about 50% more, and the UK economy took a hit of 21 million pounds over seven years. To pass the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act, the UK government also paid off slave owners at a cost of 20 million pounds: that's 40% of the Treasury's annual expenditure then. They took out a loan of 15 million pounds, which was not paid back until 2015. A moral decision was taken to change the future of the world.[66]

CONCLUDING UNSCIENTIFIC POSTSCRIPT

[66] W. Macaskill, "What we owe the future", op. cit.

"All Christian life is sacramental. Not alone in our highest act of Communion are we partaking of heavenly powers through earthly signs and vehicles. This neglected faith may be revived through increased sympathy with the earth derived from fuller knowledge, through the fearless love of all things."[67] Increased sympathy with the earth. Fuller knowledge. Through the fearless love of all things. Could such a theology of world as sacrament bring about the rapid changes we now need?

As a scientist and a Christian theologian, I am what's called a critical realist. I believe there really is such a thing as nature 'out there' as it were, and, also, that I am an integral part of it, a facet of created nature's evolutionary history, the praying bit of the universe. I believe that to some limited extent, we can make surprising sense of nature.

Unlike the empiricist Bishop Berkeley in the C18, I think that our senses, - what we see, hear, taste, touch, smell, - directly or through our most sophisticated instruments, really react to nature, and are not just ideas floating around in our minds, mere replicating memes as it were.

Nature is real. Stones are real: they fulfil God's will because they exist, and they fall in a gravitational field. Does that make nature good, as Fra Lippo Lippi thought? I think nature, including us, as far as we can see it or model it, or can understand it, is morally neutral or ambiguous, at best. Yes, there is a Wordsworthian delight in a 'host of yellow daffodils', but also a Tennysonian revulsion in 'nature red in tooth and claw.'

Nature may be stranger than we know, stranger than we can know. What meaning there is in nature, "all that is, time and space, matter and energy, life and consciousness", is a mystery, only very partially comprehensible to fallible humans. That is my conclusion. But that's OK. More than that, it is humbling and inevitable. In this, De Saussure was right: "Placed on this planet since yesterday, and only for a day, we can only hope to glimpse the knowledge that we will probably never attain."[68]

[67] Hort, F.J.A., The Way, the Truth and the Life, MacMillan, London, 1908, p.213.
[68] De Saussure, H. *Voyages dans les Alpes,* Barde Manget, Geneva, Vol 1&2 1786; Vol 3&4 1796.

That is my conclusion: that it is the search itself that provides meaning. The search itself, driven by curiosity and compassion, illuminates our minds and informs our moral decision-making. It is the search that makes us human.

October 15, 2022.
Harris Manchester College in Oxford University.
John Kerr

MAGISTERIA: The Entangled Histories of Science and Religion,
Nicholas Spencer, Oneworld Publications, London, 2023.

Some caricatures are so deeply embedded, so taken for granted, therefore unexamined, that, despite the past forty or so years of academic and popular writing on the diverse historical relationships between the sciences and religions, the conflict model's mythology still clouds the minds of churches and the wider public. Anachronistic views of how 'science' and 'religion' conflict are endemic in every classroom.[69]

There is no shortage of excellent scholarly books and articles accurately guiding readers to a better-informed understanding. Many of our Members and Associates will have shelves full of such books. Why might this reviewer so very emphatically recommend reading Nicholas Spencer's "Magisteria"?

The title, "Magisteria", at once brings to mind Stephen J. Gould's proposal that science and religion occupy "non-overlapping magisteria". Spencer focuses on the historical inadequacy of discrete competing claims for authority, each isolated within its own private magisterium and disputing the authority of the other. These wide fields of human endeavour are, and always have been, entangled, for good or ill.

Spencer begins by setting out "Three tense exchanges. Three quick-witted responses": the trial of Galileo on June 22, 1633, the Wilberforce-Huxley debate on June 30, 1860, and the Scopes trial in Dayton Tennessee on July 20, 1925. Later, he devotes chapters expanding in detail how each of these "exchanges" has led to the distortions of the popular conflict thesis.

[69] Q.v. Billingsley, B., Abedin, M., and Chappell, K. , edits, A Teacher's Guide to Science and Religion in the Classroom. (2018)

In his chapter on the C17 controversies about heliocentrism, Spencer's scholarship is demonstrably current: he refers to the crucial discovery in 2018, of Galileo's original, unredacted, long-vanished letter to Castelli. An Italian graduate student, Salvatore Ricciano, rooting through the archives of the Royal Society in London, came across Galileo's original MS letter, complete with edits. It had somehow found its way to London but had been misdated when archived.

Spencer's conclusion asserts, 'There is no such thing *as* – and still less *the* – history of science and religion'. (Italics mine) In this he stands with John Hedley Brooke (to whom "Magisteria" is dedicated), Peter Harrison and others, who question the historical viability of the very categories 'science' and 'religion'.

Beyond the chapters on Christianity, I was singularly impressed by "A Fragile Brilliance: Science and Islam" and "Ambiguous and Argumentative: Science and Judaism."

And this is the time to note something distinctive about "Magisteria". Spencer writes witty, lively, and engaging prose, with no diminishing of academic acumen. This is a book which is a pleasure to read. "Magisteria" is THE book to catch the imagination of students new to our discipline and to awaken, and engage the interest of, even those somewhat jaded readers who may believe they have heard it all before.

Spencer illuminates his well-argued, clever argument by setting out novel historical examples I, for one, had not considered.

In his brief foray into the study of medicine in Edinburgh in the late 1820s, Charles Darwin was convinced by a new scientific theory, soon set out in one of the two scientific bestsellers of the nineteenth century (Darwin himself wrote the other one):*"The Constitution of Man and its Relation to External Objects."* [70] This new science, was "determinedly empirical. It firmly rejected metaphysical speculation in favour of careful observation, measurement and, where possible, anatomical investigation". Ideas of 'mind', let alone

[70] George Combe, 1828.

'soul', it insisted, were "vague, unscientific, and ultimately untenable." This description fits the premises of twentieth century scientism and determinism. "*The Constitution*" remained in print until the end of the nineteenth century, not just shaping Charles Darwin's understanding of what science paradigmatically was, but more: one prestigious review exclaimed "No book published within the memory of man, in the English or any other language, has effected so great a revolution in the previously received opinions of society". This new science played a large role in determining nineteenth century public understanding (in Europe and America particularly) of just what defines and constitutes a science. The century ended with A.D. White and J.W. Draper and the 'conflict thesis".

No, this wasn't a book on geology but on *phrenology*, the study of the relationship between skull surface features thought to reveal the size of underlying cortical gygi, and thus mental facilities. Phrenology is dismissed now as utterly bogus pseudo-science and yet it surely fulfilled the criteria of what counts as science.

I set out this example at length because it shows that the physico-theology of earlier centuries still held the power to convince believers. Phrenology asserted that there were organs of veneration and wonder in the brain proving God's wisdom and benevolence. The Phrenological Society's collection of skulls included one of an African, Eustache, which displayed "a degree of shrewdness and disinterested benevolence very rare, even in Europe." Moral conclusions were drawn from phrenology: the slave trade was wicked, education was good, as was exercise, temperance, vegetarianism, better working conditions, and prison reform. If concern for climate change were included, phrenology could catch on today. But it was materialist and deterministic, reducing the mind to brain, and many Christian theologians abhorred it.

Phrenology exemplified science in the nineteenth century and was widely accepted. One cannot but wonder why one substantial and reputable work on "Science and Religion: a historical introduction"[71] does not so much as

[71] Ferngren, G.B. edit, "Science and Religion: a historical introduction, John Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 2002.

refer to phrenology but devotes a whole section to astrology, another pseudo-science.

Later chapters take us into the twentieth century and beyond covering most of our present concerns. The final chapter deals with AI, a pressing point for science and religion dialogue.

"What marks this moment out as especially interesting is that AI demands we go beyond the familiar territory of 'how should we use this new kit?' and enter the realm of 'what even *is* this new kit?', 'how similar is it to ourselves?' and, by implication, 'who then, are we?' It would appear that the entangled histories of the sciences and religions still have a long way to run. And "Magisteria" will give SOSc readers a scholarly, thought-provoking and eminently readable foundation to address the challenges of the new.

John Maxwell Kerr, SOSc.

A Homily for the memorial Service of David Talbot given by
Jared Talbot on 23rd May, 2023.

Some of you may remember me from my time at St.Matthew's, but just in case – I am Jared Talbot, David's son. I am a deacon at St.James', Old Town, Maine. I am also a scientist, studying developmental biology and life on the scale of tissues. In this moment I am carrying a lot of roles all at once, and they will weave together throughout this sermon.

I loved dad – so did everyone gathered here. We have gathered to remember David, and in a gathering like this we also turn our hearts to God – to think about what lies beyond and to remember the resurrection of our Saviour, and what that Easter moment means to us. It is a time to let go and weep; and it is a time to strive to find hope in equal measure.

At the moment, I find myself divided by this service, which is based in the Easter Season, and grief because dad died so recently. It takes a little while emotionally to process anything, let alone an even as big as this. However, the time for the service is … now, because we can all be here now, and in this community, we can find healing together.

Most of the family are experiencing various stages of grief right now. In a very non-linear fashion, we are feeling moments of denial, anger, acceptance, and depression – mixed with levity, work, steadfastness, community, even silliness. Our feeling shift in waves. Such responses are normal, and do not follow a schedule. Some of the congregation may be processing their own separate losses at this moment, which is normal too. I think that these waves of emotion are a path to healing, even holiness. I think we can understand the process of loss with holiness from both a spiritual and a biological perspective.

First, a biological explanation: I can wax philosophical at length about how our neurons build patterns of grief and beauty – but for that, see me after the service with a scrap of paper and a pen! For now, I will say that I think our minds do not act alone – our little neurons talk to each other and they weave their patterns around with the people around us. Dad influenced how I think, not just in my neuron signal, but actually how they connect to each other in physical space. In a very real sense, dad's life has patterned who I am, not just through genetics or nurture, but in how my mind is built. My little neurons, that build my physical mind – they are trained to reach out to him when I have certain questions, because they know that he will have an answer. And likewise, the neural space that is you, is shaped by everyone around you. And my mind, and heart, and self, aches for the loss of dad.

Second, a spiritual answer. Through the scriptures, from stem to stern, we find God meeting people amidst a time of loss. God appeared to Moses in a burning bush at a time when his people were enslaved and illtreated. Elijah carried God's word during a period of spiritual rejection and potential invasion. Most of the later prophets wrote with enemies at the gate or even in the midst of loss. We surely hear this pain in the words of Job. And then Jesus – he was born in Israel during a new period of occupation and loss, but his disciples found him again, alive, after his darkest hour. Again and again, in word written by humans through Millenia – we repeatedly find the most profound encounters with God amidst the most desolate moments.

The disciples were in anguish after they lost Christ to the cross. However, instead of scattering to the winds they gathered, wept and tried to comfort

one another. The people who denied Jesus – no matter how firmly – were welcomed in that room of mourning, And somehow, into that room stepped Christ, alive. Folks have been debating for Millenia whether this was a literal resurrection or not. Were they simply seeing the patterns that Christ left in one another's hearts? I will leave it to scholars to reach a decision … but I think it is striking that Jesus invited Thomas to poke at the holes in his side. I do not think that is something folks normally experience during a grieving period. I also love that same vulnerable Lord invited Thomas back as soon as he was ready. And I do not think my grief will ever cook me breakfast by the seashore, the way Jesus did for his disciples – so, yeah, I think Christ came back for real – both changed and himself transformative.

And now, I turn my eye back to dad. Dad's faith was steadfast, but never showy. Megan rightly pointed out that the only thing he kept for flashiness sake was his 'Cuda'. He had the sort of faith that I think Jesus considered when he said that we should do things in secret.

Dad did not talk with me much about the hereafter, but he did indulge me when I asked what would happen next while he was on his deathbed. He chewed over the question for a moment. "Maybe I just die, and maybe that's it." Then a pause, "Or maybe, I will become one with God. I would like that." I looked at him to question which is true and he gave me a look that I took to mean "That's not up to me." Dad was articulating the same duality that lives within me – and you. We inhabit concurrently a world that simply is and can be touched and one that is divine beyond comprehension.

I asked mom for help with this sermon. She talked about how dad was very in touch with God 'in the trees' and the world around us. Also, in a God that is present in the moment, in church, abiding with us. But perhaps even more than that, dad experienced church in community, and that church community lived within him. When he had his stroke, still in hospital on one of his worst days, we had a tough time talking. But I could say the Lord's prayer and he would join in every word with me. And I could stumble through the Nicene creed and he would stumble through it with me – with both of us forgetting the same words and laughing at where we forgot.

He experienced community with you. He would come and pray in church, and let the meaning of the words soak into his bones and makes them his own. He came to life in his involvement with Cursillo. He loved his bible studies with Kitty. He read the bible and prayed – but saw all of that as an act of the community of Christ. The same community, connected through time, with the one who saw Jesus walking around after he was gone for sure.

Jesus promised us that he has many rooms in his home. And I believe that dad has found his way to this home. Dad tended to speak with his face as much as he ever did with words – with those little looks like the one he gave me in the hospital. So, perhaps it is fitting that he now lived in the place that is beyond what words and our minds can understand. A place where all the contradictions of this world finally make sense. And we keep pieces of him here in the marks and imprints he has left in our minds, hearts and souls. AMEN.

From: David Gosling

Meeting with Judith Herbertson, Head of Girls' Education Department, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCO), on 20/06/23.

We began by discussing some characteristics of the region in which I had been working, tribal, largely self-governing, etc, and the absence of an effective border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The region from Peshawar to beyond Kabul is predominantly Pashtun, and the Taliban leadership is dominated by this tribal group. This means that in addition to Islam (mostly Sunni) Taliban thinking can also be influenced by the tribal Pashtunwali, which in some respects is more tolerant of women (eg historically they sometimes led the tribe into battle). The Afghan Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, has quoted from the Pashtunwali on several occasions. We considered Edwardes College from the point of view of its commitment to female inclusiveness. It was the first university college in the province to become co-educational, but although only 12% of the student population during my time was female, they were carrying away 53% of all the academic prizes and 40% of the sports prizes. In justifying the increased inclusion of women, it seemed more effective to quote such statistics than to talk in terms of women's rights.

Two major achievements during my principalship at Edwardes College were the appointment of a women's officer, and the setting up of a women's centre. The latter included several rooms used as bathrooms, a kitchen, a room with a bed, and a garden where female students could relax, play badminton, or entertain their parents. Some had serious problems with their fathers. One was reported to my office for going into a male student's room after an exam. She came with her local guardian – a primary school teacher from Peshawar. I failed to understand why this was such a big issue until the local guardian leaned across the table and told me that if the student's father found out about this incident, then he would kill her. I therefore moved her to an all-woman's college.

I pointed out to Judith that it was very brave of a particular student to play the part of Lady Macbeth in a college play. I also much admired Sarah Safdar, a professor of social work in Peshawar University and a visiting lecturer in our college, for her active participation in academic and related affairs. She was a member of the Edwardes College Governing Body, representing the local church. I had hoped for her to become college principal at the conclusion of my five-year contract but it was not to be and an American replaced me.

I met parents of students at their homes in different parts of the country, such as Chitral and Bannu. Several fathers had three wives, explaining that they could not afford four, as permitted by Islam. Travel became more difficult as the Taliban became more active. Peshawar's first female suicide bomber blew herself up near the college in December 2007. She was a 19-year old Afghan.

I received a *fatwa* accusing me of promoting female education. It was written in Urdu and distributed round the college one morning.

At the end of our discussion, which lasted one hour, I gave Judith some responses to her initial list of concerns. These included one from Timothy Spafford about his work in Africa, and correspondence and an article from the Barefoot College founded by Bunker Roy. The Barefoot College has developed solar panels in many places, and this had facilitated opportunities for young women to study at night. So important were these panels to many poor refugees that they kept them among their most treasured possessions!

Robin Sims-Williams - an introduction.

At this year's gathering, my first, I was admitted as a member though I have been an associate since 2016. I was born in Canada and came to the UK to study Engineering at Trinity Hall in Cambridge in 1998. I then moved to Bristol to join the graduate programme at Airbus. During that time I had a stint at Singapore Airlines, and another with the National Aerospace & Technology Strategy Secretariat in London. I then settled into the Landing Gear Systems department for the A380. I was on the Landing Gear Extension-Retraction Team working with mechanical, hydraulic, and electrical components, as well as computers and software through Flight Test, certification and entry into service. In 2010, after having avoided the call long enough, and with the support of my wife, Helen, I moved back to Cambridge to begin training for ordained ministry at Westcott House. In 2013 I began my title post as assistant curate of St John's Hyde Park. It was while I was there, aware of what I had left behind, I first looked into membership of the Society. In 2017 I moved a little way North on the Finchley Road to Child's Hill, just south of Golders Green, where I am now Priest-in-Charge. In Child's Hill I find myself busy in a whole range of areas of interest, from responding to food poverty by setting up a local food bank, being chair of the local Churches Together, getting involved in Interfaith relations and as governor and priest to our local CofE school. I love to bring science and the scientific method into my assemblies alongside exploring faith. Helen is now a priest too and we have two daughters; Iris (12) and Meredith (9).

Thank you to all those who made me feel so welcome at the gathering and I look forward to getting to know many more of you at future opportunities.

CHANTRY LIST TO JULY 2023

Kumyul	Albone	2021
Robyn	Arnold	2022
Peter	Arvedson	
Michael	Benton	2013
Sjoerd	Bonting	
John	Brennan	2023
Robert	Buckley	2014
Mary	Catterall	2015
Reed	Freeman	2022
Peter	Fulljames	2020
Tim	Gouldstone	2006
+John	Habgood	2019
Richard	Hills	2019
Jack	Hird	2013
Eric	Jenkins	2006
Lucius	Johnson	2020
John	Loxton	2023
Hubert	Makin	2008
Philip	McPherson	
Michael	Meredith	2014
David	Moore	2018
James	Moran	2010
Rowland	Moss	1993
John	O'Hearne	2017
Arthur	Peacocke	2006
John	Polkinghorne	2021
Michael	Pragnell	2020
Barbara	Pursey	2014
Michael	Ranken	2003
James	Sawers	2017
Robert	Semeonoff	2009
James	Skehan	2020
Helen	Stacey	2013
Bill	Stoeger	2014
George	Tolley	2015
Frank	Topham	
+David	Young	2008