

movement

THE MAGAZINE FOR CHRISTIAN STUDENTS

ISSUE 172

AUTUMN 2025



EVERYDAY THEOLOGY



INTERVIEW WITH REV. LIZZIE MCMANUS-DAIL

In conversation with
Melody Lewis

PAGE 12

GOD IN THE GROUP CHAT

Reimagining faith
in a digital world

PAGE 21

THE DIVINE IN THE EVERYDAY

Reflections from
SCM members

PAGE 34

PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR FAITH IS

How theology affects
consumer habits

PAGE 41

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL 4

COMING UP 5

NEWS 6-8

COMMUNITIES 9-11



INTERVIEW
REV. LIZZIE
MCMANUS
-DAIL 12-18

Our *Movement* editor, Melody, sat down with Rev. Lizzie to discuss the joyful, inclusive space she’s created online and the message of her debut book, *God Didn’t Make Us to Hate Us*.

FAITH IN ACTION
TWO YEARS OF
FAITH IN ACTION
WITH SCM 19-20

by Phoebe Edmonds

GOD IN THE
GROUP CHAT 21-22

Matt Batten, Church Communications Specialist, reimagines faith for a digital world



THE QUIET
REVIVAL 23-25

Are Gen Z returning to faith?

REMEMBERING
PROFESSOR
WALTER BRUGG-
EMANN 26-27

Ed Ceney reflects on Bruggemann’s life, theology, and incredible impact.

MICRO BIBLE
STUDIES 28-29

Short reflections from SCM members on snippets from the scriptures.



LATE NIGHT PASTA
THEOLOGY 30-31

Jess Smith explores how everyday conversations can be sacred spaces for wrestling with doubt, expressing faith, and listening deeply.

EXPERIENCING
THE DIVINE IN THE
EVERYDAY 32-34

SCM members share the simple moments in which they most connect with the divine.

CELEBRATING
1700 YEARS
OF THE NICENE
CREED 35

by Jacob Owen



STANDING IN THE
QUEUE: HOW
WAITING SHAPED
MY FAITH 36-37

by Jem Parker

THREE
PERSPECTIVES ON
COMMUNION 38-40

A Baptist, a Roman Catholic, and an Anglican walk into a church...

PUT YOUR
MONEY WHERE
YOUR FAITH IS:
HOW THEOLOGY
AFFECTS
CONSUMER
HABITS 41

by Roux Davies

REVIEWS 42-43

Welcome to Issue 172 of Movement magazine!



Hello everyone! It is that time of year again when I get to welcome you all to another wonderful issue of *Movement*! This issue of *Movement* might feel a little different, as we now have two student editors, myself and Josh Tinker-Reid. Josh has joined the editorial team this year and we both hope you thoroughly enjoy the issue.



In this latest edition of *Movement* we explore a theme at the very heart of our faith: everyday theology. In these pages, we ask what it means to live as people of faith not only in churches or chapels, but in classrooms, cafés, protests, friendships, and quiet moments of doubt. Theology is often seen as something reserved for lecture halls or pulpits; something that is complex, abstract, and out of reach. But as progressive Christians, we believe theology begins not with theories, but with lived experience. It is found in the decisions we make, the way we speak to each other, the way we wrestle with justice, and the way we hold onto hope.

In this issue, you will hear from students and contributors writing about their faith through their everyday contexts. From navigating communion in our “Three Perspectives On...” piece by Joseph Wood, Caitlin Newman, and Shanika Ranasinghe, to unpicking the unexpected theological conversations you have with friends over a bowl of late-night pasta with Jess Smith, this issue offers a glimpse into the sacred woven through ordinary life. We are also incredibly excited to share our interview with the Rev. Lizzie McManus-Dail, whose online presence on Instagram and TikTok is reshaping how communities come together to gather and worship. Alongside this interview, we have an article from Matt Batten exploring the rise of digital faith spaces—examining how churches, ministries, and individuals are adapting to online platforms to foster connection, spiritual growth, and inclusion in the digital age. This conversation invites us to reflect on what it means to belong, believe, and build community in a world that is increasingly virtual.

Not all of us believe the same things. Our community includes doubters, questioners, deconstructors, and rebuilders. But what we share is a commitment to engaging in faith with honesty, courage, and compassion. Everyday theology is not about having all the answers; but it is about daring to ask where God might be showing up in our real, complicated lives. Our hope is that this issue will challenge and comfort you in equal measure. May it invite you to notice God not only in the extraordinary, but in the overlooked and the everyday. We hope you enjoy the issue.

MELODY LEWIS & JOSH TINKER-REID - EDITORS

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Movement is published by the Student Christian Movement (SCM) and is distributed free to all members, groups and supporters.

Our vision is of SCM as a generous community, expressing a lived faith in Jesus Christ where social action meets prayerful devotion. We seek to be both a radical voice for equality and justice, and a safe home for progressive Christian students.

SCM staff: CEO: Revd Naomi Nixon, Communications and Marketing Officer: Ruth Harvey, Faith in Action Project Worker: Cat Whitehouse, Movement Administrator: John Wallace-Howell, Finance and Fundraising Administrator: Jen Nicholas.

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ISSN 0306-980X

SCM is a registered charity in England and Wales, number 1125640, and in Scotland, number SC048506.

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Design: penguinboy.net & morsebrowndesign.co.uk

COMING UP

STUDENT SUNDAY 15TH FEBRUARY 2026 COVENTRY CATHEDRAL

Join us to pray for students around the world as we mark the Universal Day of Prayer for Students.

SCM ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 27TH APRIL 2026 • ONLINE

The annual general meeting is an opportunity to find out more about what happens behind the scenes at SCM and what plans are in the pipeline. Members also have the opportunity to elect new representatives to General Council – look out for more information about how to stand for election!



NATIONAL GATHERING: THEOLOGY DAY 20TH JUNE 2026 • UNIVERSITIES CHAPLAINCY IN LEEDS

Join us for one of the highlights of the SCM year as we gather for a day of talks, worship, and workshops.

BONHOEFFER EUROPEAN PILGRIMAGE 13TH – 18TH JULY 2026 COVENTRY, COLOGNE, BERLIN

2026 will mark the 5th year of the Bonhoeffer European Pilgrimage! Each year students come back inspired and challenged by the stories of reconciliation they hear, and we’re thrilled to be able to run it again. SCM has had a long association with the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and this pilgrimage enables members to immerse themselves in his theology by seeing the places and people who influenced him, and who went on to live out his courageous discipleship in the city where he lived.



SAVE THE DATE
**SCM @ GREENBELT
FESTIVAL**
27-30 AUGUST 2025

TO BOOK YOUR PLACE, VISIT
WWW.MOVEMENT.ORG.UK/EVENTS

NEWS

'HOPE IN THE MAKING' AT GREENBELT FESTIVAL

Greenbelt Festival is one of our favourite moments of the SCM calendar, and this year was an absolute corker! Not only did our stall not blow away (if you know, you know), but we met so many people from all over the country

who are excited by the work of SCM and want to get involved. Our volunteers did a stellar job of spreading the good word of SCM, signing up new members, and treating festivalgoers to tote bags full of SCM goodies.

We were so glad to be able to run SCM Young Voices at the Hope and Anchor for the second year running, this time with four new up-and-coming theologians! With talks on finding God in the natural world, how Jesus' wounds can speak to survivors of self-harm, choral music and inclusivity, and how we approach biblical texts on the deconstruction journey, we were once again bowled over by the depth and sensitivity of our members' offerings.



AFFIRMING
CHRISTIANITY

This year, as well as our usual student meetup in the Jesus Arms, the fabulous Trans* Theology Group ran an in-person taster session focusing on the theme of bodies. Talking about everything from the Body of Christ as trans, to Julian of Norwich, to the joyful incompleteness of transness, they created a space that was both safe and challenging. One attendee said, "It was inspiring to share the space with these four brilliant theologians and to see the very best that SCM has to offer!"



BEING AND BELONGING: NATIONAL GATHERING 2025

We returned to our friends at St Pancras Church for this year's National Gathering, on another very hot day in June! Thankfully, St Pancras was one of the cooler places to spend a summer day in Central London, and we had a brilliant time exploring building community together.

We were joined by Jo Love from the Iona Community, who, along with a group of SCM members, had prepared creative worship which threaded through the day, centring and inspiring us for the rest of the programme. As well as a talk from Alison Webster, General Secretary of Modern Church, exploring who we are, the moment we find ourselves in, and how

we respond, we heard from Kate Bradley on authentic community, and Josie Horton from Affirmation Bristol on finding community outside the church. Faith in Action Project Worker Phoebe led a brilliant creative workshop which ran alongside our worship, asking us to consider what we bring to community, and ending in a beautiful demonstration of how our unique gifts and talents fit together to form a whole.

All in all, it was another brilliant day shared with SCM members and friends. If you missed out, or want to rewatch any of the brilliant talks, find them over on YouTube at www.youtube.com/@SCMBritain/ streams.

"Let us join together in active resistance to the death-dealing powers of our world. Let's talk to one another, rather than not. Let's connect, rather than not. Let's make a choice, every single day, to prioritise curiosity over

assumption-making; compassion over judgementalism; to practise revolutionary love, and soft rebellion. Let's do this safe in the knowledge that communities survive better than individuals. As mycelium, with their track-record of billions of years of evolution, grow one cell at a time, branching out in infinite networks, let us reach out one conversation at a time; one relationship at a time – and transform our world." - Alison Webster, from her National Gathering talk 'Neon Gods and Organic Resistance'

HELLOS AND GOODBYES

Things never stay the same for too long here at SCM, and this year has been no exception!

At the end of April, we came to terms with saying goodbye to the wonderful Lisa Murphy, SCM's Operations Manager and general legend. Lisa was an absolute SCM institution – there's a reason she was nicknamed The Oracle by the staff team - and after 15 years of working with the organisation it was hard to let go! However, we're so thrilled that Lisa has gone on to become District Secretary for the West Midlands Methodist District and know for certain that she will thrive in this new role. If she was going to leave for any reason, we're glad it was for the Methodists!

At the end of August, we also said bittersweet farewells to Naomi

NEWS

Orrell, our Fundraiser of the past three years, as well as to Phoebe Edmonds and Soph Day, our Faith in Action Project Workers. Phoebe and Soph added so much to an already thriving Faith in Action project, sprinkling fabulous creativity over everything they worked on, and making deep connections with the movement through workshops and focused campaigns. You can read Phoebe's reflections on her two years with SCM on page 18. Naomi has been a superb fundraiser, and a wonderful colleague; it feels like she's been with us for much longer than 3 years. Each of them is going on to do incredibly exciting things, and we can't wait to hear about their adventures in academia, community theatre, and communal living.

The one plus side of 'goodbyes' is that they do often lead to 'hellos' as well! Early this term we welcomed Cat Whitehouse as the new Faith in Action Project Worker. Cat is off to a flying start, and we're excited for what she will bring to the movement!



BONHOEFFER EUROPEAN PILGRIMAGE 2025

On 14th July, 10 pilgrims set off from Coventry Cathedral and travelled over 1400 miles to Berlin and back on this year's Bonhoeffer European Pilgrimage.

As in previous years, the pilgrims visited sites connected with Bonhoeffer's life and legacy including the Berlin Wall, the Chapel of Reconciliation, Bonhoeffer house and Niemöller House, as well as Coventry Cathedral and the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church. Each location is one that is rich with the

legacy of peace and reconciliation work, inspiring and challenging participants to face the current injustices of our time.

One pilgrim reflects,

"When we looked at the bravery of Coventry Cathedral and Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in choosing to keep the painful reminders of their past alongside their current beautiful buildings, it reminded me of the way in which Christ calls us to reflect on and live out our lives. In striving to live the redeemed life that Christ has in store for us, we must also hold with us the pains of our broken state - it is only through recognising our brokenness that we can begin to be reconciled with each other as well as God."

SCM COMMUNITIES

If you're a Christian who wants to grow as a thoughtful disciple, belong to an inclusive, queer-affirming community, challenge injustice locally and globally, and explore a progressive faith, then an SCM community is the place for you! All of our communities look different - some meet on campus, some are connected with a church or chaplaincy, some are more of a network of like-minded students and recent graduates, some meet online - but you'll find a warm welcome at all of them!

SCM EXETER

The summer term was an exciting period for us here at SCM Exeter! We had a fantastic time marching at Exeter Pride with Christians at Pride. Our signs were made at Exeter's interdenominational 'Open Table' meetup, and the day itself was a beautiful expression of God's love and light. This term we explored issues around criminality, rehabilitation, and how faith intersects with the justice system. We discussed the role of Christian chaplaincy in prisons, and how systemic injustices and their effects on people can be approached with compassion and honesty. Our attention briefly turned to Rome as we awaited the election of the new Pope—so focused on Rome, in fact, that we also elected our first Catholic president!

We loved helping at the Anglican chaplaincy's summer fête in aid of the Melanesian Mission, raising money and having fun for a wonderful cause. As exams ended, we took a bittersweet beach trip as we prepared to say goodbye to our graduating friends. Our final session, themed 'Fresh Pastures', gave us a moment to reflect on the year and all that's changed. And finally, the highlight of our term: the baptism and/or confirmation of four of our SCM family. Congratulations to Tom, Isabella, Jamie, and Jess! It's been a term full of joy, friendship, and faith, with some stories ending, others beginning, and we're just ever-so thankful for our Christian community in Exeter.

 **SEARCH 'SCM EXETER' ON FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM**



KEELE STUDENT CHAPEL FELLOWSHIP

It's been quite a big six months for Keele Student Chapel Fellowship and the worshipping community at Keele that many of us are a part of. Our newest Chaplain, Simon, was cast into the role of 'SCF coordinator' and has helped to facilitate sessions that have been full of big thoughts, joyful conversations and folks saying, "I don't know", and "I think I think". We have been building up our community and growing in fellowship with each other through weekly meetings, attending demos and protests for Trans* and Disability Rights and snacking on quite a lot of popcorn (as well as grapes for our necessary nutrients of the week).

Keele Chapel had their annual Weekend Away in the Peaks and many of SCF went, with the theme being 'journeys'. Some of us had more of a journey on the Saturday afternoon than expected thanks to a rather large expedition led by Simon(!) This term we also said goodbye to a member of SCF who has been with us since she started at Keele. We waved her off at our annual Chapel Ball as she graduated with First Class Honours in Environmental Science and goes into the big wide world to, literally, save all the turtles. Keele SCF are looking forward to the next academic year when we meet our new Chaplaincy Assistant and students who arrive in September, welcome people back after years abroad, and continue to flourish and thrive in our little community.



SEARCH 'KEELE SCM'
ON INSTAGRAM

TRANS* THEOLOGY GROUP

This past term we've had chances to reach out beyond our group and make the nuanced, spacious, affirming faith we strive for visible to those who might need to discover non-prescriptive faith. Through links we've built, and possibilities offered by SCM, we've been able to respond wholeheartedly to big 'trans events' in the past few months. Some of us contributed to SCM's 'Little Book of Trans* Theology, Affirmation, and Joy', and many of us

worked together to produce our Trans* Day of Visibility service celebrating trans* joy.

In Holy Week, we were asked to write a reflection for Modern Church, offering a trans response to the devastating Supreme Court ruling, so a couple of our group members spent their respective Maundy Thursday vigils writing a piece which came together to express the anger and fear of that week. Further down the line, we also responded to the ruling and its ongoing effect on the trans community by holding an online session for anyone to come together to fill out the EHRC consultation that explored the implications of the ruling - a gruelling process that was made a lot easier by tackling it together.

This work is all sustained by our regular social and topic sessions, led by group members and external speakers. We've thought a lot about our favourite saints, and their theological insights (like Bernard of Clairvaux's erotic mysticism and the Eucharist); the inherent intersectionality of trans theology - exploring ideas from other faiths, and liberation theologies such as black theology; and looking at ecology - how place and bodies and spirituality come together.

We meet online every 2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month and are always keen to meet new members! If you're interested in our group, email transtheologygroup@movement.org.uk to get in touch.



EMAIL TRANSTHEOLOGYGROUP@MOVEMENT.ORG.UK TO REQUEST ACCESS TO THE GROUP CHAT.

SCM IN OXFORD

In Oxford, students meet midweek during term time for Bible study and social events. As a group we are mostly from the three non-conformist churches in the town centre (Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, St Columba's United Reformed Church, and New Road Baptist Church) because our lovely Student Outreach Worker, Kirsty, is jointly employed by these three churches, but we welcome anyone, whether they attend another church in the city, a college chapel, or no church at all. We are a mixture of undergraduate and postgraduate students, and we welcome students from any local university, although

currently all our regulars are members of the University of Oxford, probably in part due to our city centre meeting place. This year, we are hoping to develop this group to become self-sustaining, in part by affiliating with SCM as a local group.



SEARCH 'WESLEY MEMORIAL OXFORD'
ON FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM

SCM CAMBRIDGE

At SCM Cambridge this term we have had a focus on our local community and getting involved with activism. During a collaboration with SCM Britain and Cambridge for Palestine, we learned more about the history of the Israel-Palestine conflict and how we can get involved. In another session, we created banners to take to Cambridge Pride, focusing on using pride as a protest and highlighting support for the trans* community.



SEARCH 'SCM CAMBRIDGE'
ON FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM

INCLUSIVE CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT DURHAM

The past term has been busy for ICMD, as summer term always is. While our members juggled exams, coursework deadlines, and fun in the sun, we continued with our Thursday evening events as well as some extra socials organised by our new Social Secretary. Before exams started, we finished off SCM's Progressive Evangelism Course with a session about faith journeys, particularly looking at Peter. Then during exams, we had some relaxing sessions led by our chaplains on meditation and prayer. Pride always comes early in Durham, and as usual it was a highlight. The service at Chad's College Chapel in the morning was beautiful and packed out! We were joined in the parade by the Vasey group for LGBTQ+ ordinands at our local theological college. On the field we shared a stall with Durham City Methodists and handed out cute rainbow notelets for people to share encouraging messages.

A few weeks later SCM Britain led an eye-opening and encouraging session for us on Queer Theology and we rounded off the term with a Tea Social at a local café. Here's to a wonderful new year to come in September!



SEARCH 'ICM DURHAM' ON
FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM

MORE UPDATES

- **SCM LANCASTER** have gone through SCM's Affirming Christianity courses together.
- **SCM BIRMINGHAM** had a session where they discussed Creeds to mark the 1700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed.
- **SCM COVENTRY & WARWICK** had a talk on Queer Holiness.
- **SCM GREATER MANCHESTER** held an event at the Cathedral titled 'People, protest and planet'.
- **SCM BRIGHTON** held a joint Liberation Theology Workshop with Radical Pride.

SCM WHATSAPP COMMUNITY

We also have a growing WhatsApp community with groups for students, postgrads and alumni.

To join, email scm@movement.org.uk

NO COMMUNITY AT YOUR UNI? NO PROBLEM!

We currently have people on the ground interested in starting groups in York, Leeds, Reading, Aberystwyth, Southampton, and Bristol. If you're at uni in any of these cities (or anywhere else!) you can either get in touch about starting a group by emailing students@movement.org.uk, or join SCM as a national member. Either way you'll be connected to a movement of like-minded, progressive students!



INTERVIEW

LIZZIE MCMANUS-DAIL

Rev. Lizzie McManus-Dail is known for her passionate, fierce, and colourful reclamation of Christianity as a writer, priest, online creative, and proud mom of two. Lizzie has lived all over the world, including a brief stint in Scotland where she was a part of SCM Edinburgh! She's now living her dream as the founding planter of Jubilee Episcopal Church in Austin, Texas, and is passionate about evangelism for a God who makes each of us for joy. Melody chatted with Rev. Lizzie about her debut book, God Didn't Make Us To Hate Us, as well as the joyful space she's created online, and being priested in a pandemic.

Melody: Hello Lizzie! Thank you so much for agreeing to this interview for Movement magazine. We usually start off with a little warm up question to get things going. **What are you reading right now?** Lizzie: I'm reading two things. One of them is an audiobook. I love audiobooks and I love to listen while I'm embroidering. The audiobook is called *An Island Princess Starts a Scandal* by Adriana Herrera. It is a romance novel and it's great. I love how the romance genre does some really interesting historical imagining and still talks about contemporary problems in a way that is escapist and feminist. And then I'm also reading *Immaculate Misconceptions* by Amey Victoria Adkins-Jones. It is a Black Mariology, and I am loving this book. It's full of reflections on history and contemporary theology and it's so readable. I feel like I could hand this to a parishioner, and they would be edified by it rather than feeling foolish trying to read it.

Thank you so much for that! You are currently a priest in the Episcopalian church, but you were also a member of SCM for a for a short while. Could you tell us a bit about how you got involved in the group while you were studying abroad in Edinburgh? I can't overstate how important it was actually, I'm so grateful that that you asked me to do this interview because SCM was a huge turning point in my journey, even though it was a very brief time during my semester abroad. On my degree programme back in the States I was often the only confessing Christian, or one of the very few people in the room that was reading the Bible not only as an academic text to be studied, but also as a text of my faith, but in Edinburgh I was studying within the divinity school, and so to be in that space with lots of people who also believed what they were studying was a really cool and refreshing experience. I had a cadre of friends who I made in class within the first couple of days who were all involved with SCM. Right away they were so

hospitable, so kind. I can't remember exactly how it came up in conversation, but I said to them one day, 'you know, I am a Christian and I do believe this but I'm a really progressive one' and they said, 'you know, you should come to SCM'. So, I did. And I just loved it. It was one of the first times I experienced the faith that I had always known, and they were all so thoughtful and curious and compassionate, and it's where I made some of my best friends in the University of Edinburgh and I keep up with them still. It was a really special time and is still really important to me.

You have a big presence online. How did this come about and what made you want to start posting about your faith and your vocation online? I'd always known that part of my calling was a desire to see my faith as I lived it and knew it reflected in public discourse, and so I knew that part of my calling would be to contribute to that public discourse. Throughout my ordination process I thought I was going to be a very serious academic priest and was maybe going to pursue a PhD or perhaps write stirring and thoughtful articles. However, I had a real plot twist in my journey in 2020 when the pandemic happened and everyone went into lockdown. I was scheduled to be ordained in June of 2020, and though that did still happen it was incredibly different to how it was originally going to be. I was supposed to be ordained in this large downtown church with a thousand people there, but what ended up happening was that there were about twelve people in the whole building all masked up and socially distanced. My ordination also happened at a time in the United States when there was a strong expression of Black Lives Matter uprisings and protests. I've been involved with different BLM groups since undergraduate school, but there was a particular energy with the movement during the pandemic, and I think that's in part because so many people were forced to pay attention to it because we were all at home. I mention this because the only music we had during my ordination were the sounds of the protests outside of the church, and it was very powerful. After my ordination I came back home to start my first call as a deacon, and I would literally get up and put on my makeup and my clergy collar and sit in front of my laptop and meet my new parishioners via Zoom. We did Zoom church throughout the pandemic and eventually we start doing some outdoor services because in Texas the weather is pretty favourable, and we

could do outdoor services year-round. But it was really a sad and despairing time in the world, and part of the grief that I was feeling was this work that I had spent years preparing for did not look very much like what I thought it would. I also had a lot of time on my hands because I couldn't go to hospitals to visit people. So, in my sadness I downloaded a silly little app called TikTok and started watching it. And at the time, one of the people who really enchanted me was Tabitha Brown, a vegan content creator, and her whole thing is that she's just got this incredible warm, gentle presence that I really admired. I also had a couple of friends who were making TikToks as priests and I thought 'I could do that with my own little twist on it'. So, it was partially boredom, partially sadness and a need to tend to my own grief. Being in the States I obviously experienced the sort of overwhelmingly white supremacist, Christian nationalist rhetoric, and though I did experience and encounter lots of voices pushing back against that and doing some incredible ministry work, I found that these voices could often come across as quite sterile. Also, lots of this more progressive discourse was on Twitter at the time, and I wanted to show that faith can be a lot of fun and particularly that the very serious Anglo-Catholic tradition of which I'm a part could and should also be a lot of fun. God delights in us and takes great joy in all of us, and I wondered why aren't we reflecting that more? TikTok ended up being the perfect medium for short, goofy, accessible videos that have a very serious underlying message of, "God loves everyone, and everyone is welcome here."

You've spoken about how you enjoy posting online and find it an enriching experience, but do you find yourself also being enriched by consuming other people's content online? The Internet is a wild and strange and often terrible place. But it's also really beautiful. A lot of where I first encountered faith that felt reflective of the God I know was way back in the blogging days. It was the early 2000s, right? I was reading Rachel Held Evans and Nadia Bolz-Weber at the time and now seeing the huge variety of content creators posting beautiful, sassy, smart stuff is great. I am really edified by it. I'm also really encouraged by it as a priest because I have other resources that I can refer my parishioners to. I'm always trying to encourage people and tell them you don't have to be a priest; you don't have to have a degree in this. Just talk about your faith



and don't let Christianity be co-opted by white supremacist Christian nationalism, because that's not who Jesus Christ is. Speaking about our faith is not inherently trying to coerce people to believe what we believe. It's also claiming that we exist and that the God we know is a loving and just God.

I think that's really important and very relevant to this issue of the magazine. Do you find that the internet and the digital world offers a unique opportunity for people who aren't necessarily theologically educated in a traditional sense to become theologians themselves? Absolutely. I think it has always been possible for every person to be a theologian in that theology is just talking about God, it's in the word: theos and logia. So, if we believe we are all made in the image of God – which I do – and that God is within us, both individually but also within us corporately, then every single person is able to talk about God. My three year old often talks about God in ways that I find so stirring and beautiful and true in a way that connects me to the God of the earth. I also think that we are in a really fascinating cultural, social, and historical moment with the internet and the digital technology of the twenty-

first century. I'm a big fan of Phyllis Tickle and her work in The Great Emergence, explaining how every five hundred years the church undergoes a reformation. We are in the midst of a massive technological revolution right now with the internet, just like the printing press was five hundred years ago, and as a student of history I have spent a lot of time thinking about how revelatory and revolutionary that was, but I think most of us don't spend a lot of time thinking about just how incredible the access we have now to the world is. The volume of information can also be a lot to deal with, but I think there is real beauty in the accessibility of ancient texts and theological works.

You seem like a very positive person. How do you maintain a positive outlook and a positive online space for yourself and all the people that follow you? I am a positive person, but it is also something I have worked hard for and been given by God. I am thinking about what my next book will be, and I think I'm going to write about joy. I wrote a chapter in God Didn't Make Us to Hate Us called the Spiritual Discipline of Joy, which is one of the chapters people find resonates with them the most. My



church is called Jubilee. I picked that name because I’m a church planter, and the name Jubilee is all about God’s joy and God’s justice being fused into God’s commandment for restoration and liberation for all of creation. I think in sort of creating this “brand” around joy, people think that that might be something that is very easy for me but it’s not, it’s something that is a discipline, it is a practice. Joy is a fruit of the spirit that I believe God gives me and can give all of us, but it also comes out of practising it, and practising looking for the abundance and goodness of God in the face of the scarcity of the world. That is a daily choice, and I don’t always make that choice. I had a lot of loss in my life during my late teens and early twenties but it showed me and taught me that you can spend your whole life bracing and tensing for the next terrible thing as if that’s going to protect you from it, or you can cherish what is beautiful and good right now, and that’s the practice I try and lean into.

How did the book come about? How did you decide that you wanted to transition what you put online into

a physical book that people could have and read and take home with them? I’ve wanted to be a writer since I was a child. So much of the priesthood is actually a creative profession. I write a sermon every week, I write newsletter articles, and that’s a constant churning output of written work I have created. Writing for me creates a deep spiritual connection to God. I feel the most connected to God when I am co-creating with her. I’d always wanted to write a book, and it partially came about because some publishing houses started approaching me. They actually started approaching me when I was 30 weeks pregnant with my first child and it was really hard for me to say no to my dream, but I knew it was not a sensible time for me to start writing a book, and I just had to trust that if this was truly for me then it would come back around when I was ready. So I waited, and then I had my baby. Then I started planting Jubilee and some more friends in the writing world said to me, “when are you going to write this book?”. I reached out to a friend of mine who’s an agent and I said, “I really want to write this, but I don’t have time right now. Can you come back in six months?”

and he said yes. I knew from comments on my Instagram and my TikTok that what people were looking for was a devotional, because the devotional market is saturated with theology that I don’t find particularly liberating or gentle or even orthodox. Of course there is some of that out there, but if you walk into your average bookstore most of the devotionals on the shelf are written by people who are supportive of decisions made by the current political administration that I don’t think are particularly Christlike. I wanted to write a devotional that robustly engaged with scripture as something to be taken seriously, but also with gentleness and inclusivity. The book happened very fast. I was having a conversation with my agent in early summer of 2023, and the title just came out of my mouth. I said, “I just want people to know that God didn’t make you to hate you”, which was the first title actually. We changed it to us, which I love. That was a long conversation, actually. But that was the impetus really; I just want people to know that God loves them wholly, not barely. I proposed the book in the summer of 2023, sold it by the October, and by the second week of January 2024 I had sent a full draft to my editor. It was a kind of divine eruption.

It’s interesting that you mentioned the title because I wanted to ask you about that. You mentioned that you changed the original title from God Didn’t Make You to Hate You to God Didn’t Make Us to Hate Us. Why change this? Why was that important to you? We went round and round in circles to be honest. We tried God Didn’t Make You to Hate You and God Didn’t Make Me to Hate Me. We sort of flip-flopped back and forth between those two options for some time and even laid them both out on the book cover to see what they looked like. Ultimately it was actually my friend Laura who I do a podcast with who suggested the change to us, and it seemed perfect to me. In the book, every chapter ends with a prayer. In the Episcopal Anglican tradition, we call it a collect, and in these prayers, we use the phrasing, “we pray”. Both my agent and my editor asked me whether it was supposed to say, “I pray” but in my tradition we say, “we pray”. And that is actually quite unusual in the devotional genre. Most devotionals are written using the first person singular, but it was very important to me to bring in that ancient tradition and to stitch people together through the words I used.

Even as you are reading the book alone in your flat, you’re not the only person saying this prayer. That seems very important for people to know, especially if they are the only person in their life who is on a faith deconstruction or reconstruction journey, and also because I really think a lot of Western individualism is at the root of some of our really bad theology. We are part of the body of Christ and each individual body is part of the whole body, just as it says in First Corinthians, “and I cannot say to the foot. I have no need of you.” I really wanted that collectivity emphasised right in the title, and then it worked out beautifully so.

It’s a lovely title. I understand that you talk a lot in the book about liberating Jesus and liberating God. I was wondering what you mean by this, and who or what do we need to liberate God and Jesus from? I love that you asked this question! When I saw it I thought, “oh, that’s good” because this is where the poetic word play comes in. In my mind, I meant more that Jesus is liberating, but I think that there’s a fun little play on words there of saying we’re also going to liberate Jesus from the rhetoric that Jesus wants kids to be in detention centres and that Jesus wants borders to be closed and that Jesus doesn’t care about autonomy and our ability to make choices about our bodies in conversation with God, not as dictated by the federal government. Jesus is always going to be in charge of Jesus. Jesus is liberating and I think anyone who truly studies scripture and truly spends time in prayer will find the liberating love of God, I really do believe that. But I also think it’s on the rest of us to liberate Jesus from the grip of bad theology and conservative politics, to let more people know that the love of God is much bigger than we could ever imagine.

You’ve spoken a little bit about it already, but I was wondering who you wrote this book for? Was there a specific kind of person or community that you had in mind as you were writing? There are several groups in my mind who I think are more connected to God than they themselves realise. I wrote this for the person who walks into the bookstore, who is experiencing a moment of deep personal crisis or loss and is looking for something, and I wanted this book to be on the shelf as an interruption of everything else around it. I wanted it to be bold and to



be my love letter to that person in that moment. It's also written for the thousands of people who follow me online who have asked for a resource like this. I think that's an amalgamation of people who faithfully attend church every Sunday and have done so their whole lives, but it's also a group of people who have never been to church and who are curious. And it's for friends. I actually have quite a few friends and who are not Christian at all, but it is nice for me to know that there is another way for them to understand me and other Christian friends or family they might have in their lives. It's also for the people who have walked out of churches because they were so harmful, but are still looking for some kind of spiritual practice.

How do you think then that the church, and we as the church, can better reflect the truth that God didn't make us to hate us in either its preaching or pastoral care? I think it starts with realising that there's quite a lot of repair to be done. I know that us who are deep in this work can sometimes get weary, which is fair because in

some ways we are atoning for a mixture of sins, some of which we committed, but a lot of ones we did not. That is the collective corporate nature of sin. I think about that as I reflect on striving to be anti-racist. But I also think that as a queer priest, I spend a lot of time trying to repair things that were harmful to me as well as harmful to my parishioners. I'm having to clean up after those dudes, which is frustrating. It is sacred work, and there is something so powerful that occurs when we trust that God's forgiveness and mercy and reparation and restoration is at work. Beyond ourselves, I also think the church needs to be more playful. We have to be willing to be a little bit goofy, a little silly, and to take ourselves a little less seriously. This work is very serious, but we can trust that people know that. I think that often Christians act like if we do the wrong thing, we're going to break God or break the church or break people's faith, when in fact you can't break God; God is not a glass ball that we have to protect with everything that we are. God delights in us. Of course, there are times where faith is hard. There are times of great woe and loss in our lives. But faith should also be a source of joy, and our ministry should reflect that. And so I think if we could just be a little bit sillier and a little bit more playful and a little bit more childlike, I think that would do a lot of both the repair work, but also the invitation work of saying, "there is room for you here too." Jesus said, let the little children come unto me. You don't have to have this all figured out. We as ministers don't have it all figured out. We're going to co-create something beautiful together.

Yes, that is a wonderful sentiment to end on. It's been absolutely wonderful talking to you, but I did have one final question. Do you have any advice for our readers?

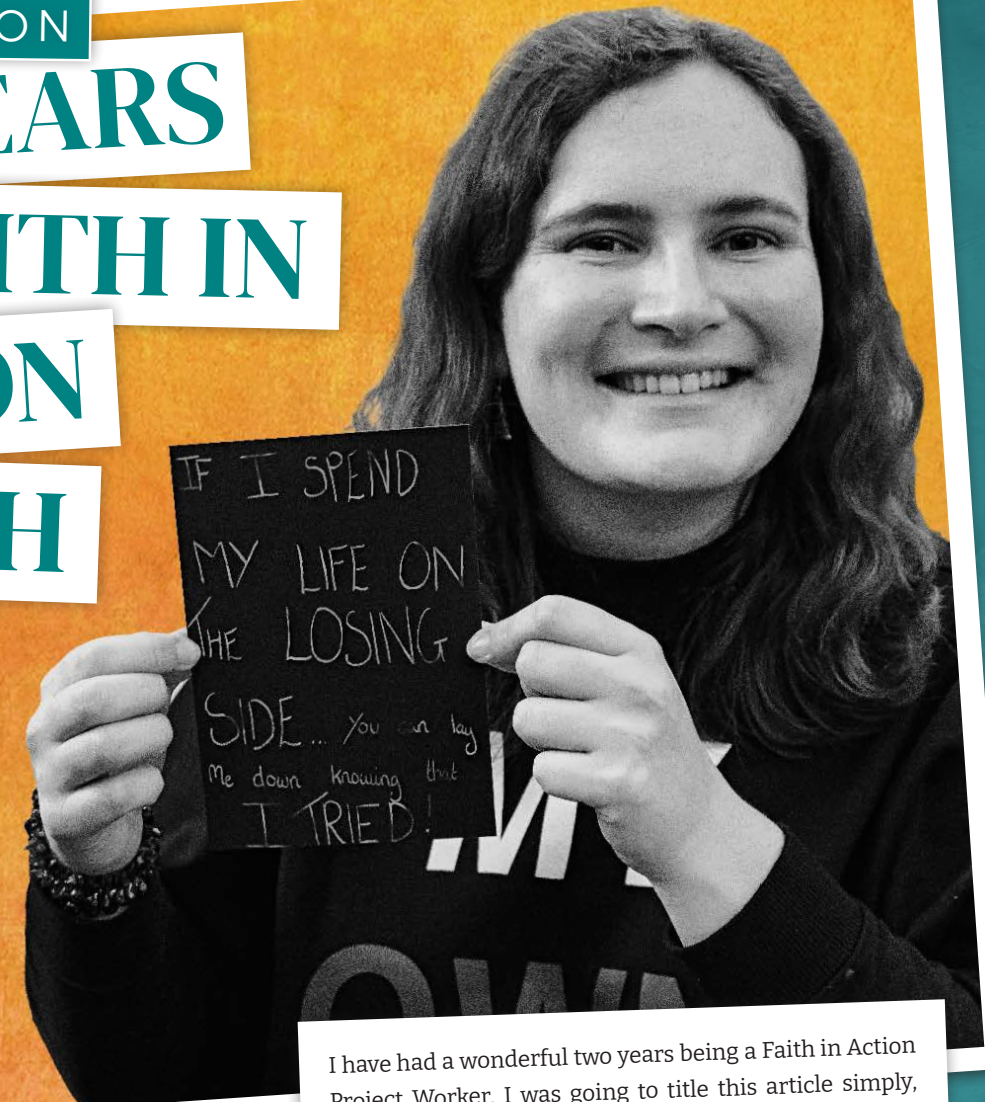
I would say, be very gentle with yourself, especially when you think you don't deserve it.

You can follow Rev. Lizzie on Instagram and TikTok at @rev.lizzie. Her debut book, God Didn't Make Us to Hate Us, is available now in all good bookshops!



FAITH IN ACTION TWO YEARS OF FAITH IN ACTION WITH SCM

Phoebe Edmonds reflects on lessons learned, experiences gained, and what it means to live a life of putting your faith into action.



I have had a wonderful two years being a Faith in Action Project Worker. I was going to title this article simply, 'Two Years of Faith in Action', however I decided that this title was factually inaccurate. Although I will no longer be working for SCM, the lessons, skills and reflections I have had over the past two years mean that long after this September I will still be putting my faith into action.

The Quaker Advices and Queries (a collection of writings that offers spiritual guidance and prompts for personal reflection on how to live according to Quaker principles) offers a lot of wisdom about the idea of putting your faith into action, and I turn to them often as I consider what the term means and how to live it out. Part of Advices

My two years with SCM are up! And so, please imagine me singing the following lines with wild abandon:

"This is the enddddddd... hold your breath and count to tennnnnnnn" Adele

"And now, the end is near, and so I face the final curtain" Frank Sinatra

"Goodbye everybody! I've got to gooooo. Gotta leave you all behind and face the truth!" Queen

and Queries 27 says, “When choices arise, do you take the way that offers the fullest opportunity for the use of your gifts in the service of God and the community?” I have always considered myself creative, and regarded this as one of the “gifts” I could use for the community. However, before working for SCM, I had never had the time to explore the various ways this could be put into action. So, I spent my first year with SCM really looking at how creativity and protest can work together, and how I could use this gift. This process was one I will value for years to come. I have a new found respect for origami, collage, and poetry as a result, and I use the lessons I learned here in my work outside of SCM with refugees and schools.

Working with SCM also led to my close partnership with JustMoney Movement, and it was with them that I found my niche-but-important focus: boycotting!

boycott

verb

boycotting (present participle)

withdraw from commercial or social relations with (a country, organization, or person) as a punishment or protest.

In other words, boycotting means choosing not to support companies whose values clash with our own, using our spending power as a form of protest.

My collaboration with JustMoney resulted in the creation of a practical resource designed to help young people switch banks, steering them away from institutions that invest in unethical trades like arms, fossil fuels, and animal testing, for example. This project opened my eyes to the wider movement of financial activism, where boycotting and divestment are powerful tools for change.

divestment

noun

the action or process of selling off subsidiary business interests or investments.

Put simply, divestment means asking organisations to take money out of investments that support harm or injustice, and redirect that money into more ethical ventures.

My journey of financial activism continued when Sabeel-Kairos, a Palestine advocacy charity, approached me to partner on a resource to empower students to ask their universities to divest from arms sales. When this opportunity arose to work with Sabeel-Kairos, it opened my eyes to the importance of examining the investments of our institutions and advocating for change at a systemic level. How are universities spending our money? In recent years, greater attention has been paid to the questionable investments of universities, and more students are raising their voices, calling on their institutions to divest from arms companies—particularly those profiting from the genocide in Palestine.

It is these three elements—creative protest, personal boycotting, and organisational divestment—that have shaped my faith in action journey and will accompany me as I move forward. By connecting my experiences, I hope to inspire others to see how individual choices, collective campaigns, and broader movements for justice are all interwoven on the path toward change.

I never thought that at the ripe old age of 23 my passion would be in financial activism, but it really, truly is! I am going on to study refugee care from October, and hopefully will use this to specialise in Refugee Theatre, something I am already exploring with my theatre company, Grapevine. I will continue to use all I have learnt at SCM to advocate for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, and importantly, campaign against our money being used to fund wars. The work of activism can often be an uphill struggle, so I would like to end my ramblings with a quote from one of my favourite singers, Grace Petrie, which lifts me up when social justice feels like a losing battle:

“If I spend my life on the losing side, you can lay me down knowing that I tried.”

GOD IN THE GROUP CHAT

REIMAGINING FAITH IN A DIGITAL WORLD



Matt Batten, Director of Communications for the Diocese of Bangor and self-professed Church comms nerd, reflects on the shifting face of faith in online spaces.

While headlines proclaim the decline of religion, nuns are hosting popular Ask Me Anything sessions on TikTok. Bodybuilding Catholic priests are sharing their ministries online. Orthodox Jews break menstruation taboos on Instagram. Faith isn't disappearing - it's becoming a more authentic and lived experience online.

This expression of faith online is not simply performative entertainment. It's reshaping how we encounter the sacred. We call this digital religion.

Digital religion explores how faith is practiced across online and offline spaces, not as separate realms but as

an integrated part of lived faith in today's interconnected world. Prayer, worship, and community no longer belong only to physical churches but also take place on livestreams, in WhatsApp groups, and through gaming platforms such as Twitch.

This doesn't replace embodied practice; it reframes it. Technology doesn't just deliver content, it reshapes how faith is expressed, shared, and experienced.

Rather than relying on traditional religious institutions, younger generations are weaving together spiritual practices from a variety of sources, such as Christian, interfaith, and secular influences. We are witnessing the reimagining of how religious authority and affiliation work in digital culture.

ONLINE FAITH COMMUNITIES

With over 42K subscribers, Discord's Christianity server is a popular discussion channel dedicated to Bible study, daily Bible posts and Ask a Christian discussions. The platform enables conversations that might never happen in churches: anonymous questions about doubt, dialogue between Christians and curious non-believers, and real-time theological discussions that span time zones and denominations.

Yet these communities reveal both the potential and pitfalls of online spaces. Some become insular spaces that reinforce existing beliefs. Others perpetuate harmful theologies or biblical interpretation weaponised to exclude rather than include. While anonymity provides a freedom of expression, it can also be exploited by those who engage in harmful behaviour online. Sadly, online faith spaces are not immune.

In this shifting landscape, many young people look to Christian content creators on Instagram or YouTube for spiritual guidance rather than clergy. You can understand why - their content feels authentic and engaging to a generation whose online and offline lives are intertwined. You feel part of a spiritual tribe who *gets you*. Does it matter whether the theology is not strictly accurate? Perhaps this

very looseness is what appeals: a faith shaped not by institutional authority, but by the lived search for meaning in the digital spaces where young people already belong.

ONLINE AND OFFLINE FAITH

Online and offline faith are not separate worlds. In the UK, the Bible Society's Quiet Revival report shows monthly church attendance among 18-24-year-olds is on the rise, with many first encountering faith digitally through livestreams, Bible apps, or Instagram. Often this can be the first step before attending a church service.

This shift in the way that faith is encountered is global. In Italy, bodybuilding priest Fr Rafael Capo has 114K Instagram followers, and uses gym selfies alongside spiritual reflections to draw people closer to the Church. Recognising this shift, Pope Leo XIV recently hosted a Jubilee for Digital Missionaries and Catholic Influencers, signalling how seriously the Vatican now treats online faith.

Rather than displacing traditional worship, online platforms can often lead to a deeper commitment and a gateway into local church communities.

THE FUTURE OF FAITH

Younger generations are exploring faith in the digital spaces where they already gather, forming communities that are creative and feel authentic. The challenge for traditional religious institutions is not to dismiss these as secondary to "real" church, but to recognise digital culture as an authentic space of encounter with the sacred.

We are not seeing faith decline but a shift in how we engage with it. The future of faith may depend on whether churches can embrace digital culture while offering an authentic offline experience that complements our online lives.

Matt Batten is Director of Communication at the Diocese of Bangor, Church in Wales, and has recently completed an MA in Digital Theology specialising in religious authority and digital culture. Follow him on TikTok at @CommsGuyMatt.

THE QUIET REVIVAL

ARE GEN Z RETURNING TO FAITH?

When the Bible Society shared their research on church attendance earlier this year, it sparked an excited discourse in Christian spaces on the so-called "Quiet Revival" of Gen Z. Ed Ceney, an SCM member, reflects on the conclusions of the report, the validity of the research, and how we can respond.



In April of this year, the Bible Society published the findings of research examining church growth across England and Wales. What the data showed was intriguing. Not only had the decline in attendance stopped, but it had grown, with one generation leading this trend – Gen Z (those born between 1997 and 2012). The report coined the now widely accepted name for this phenomenon – the Quiet Revival (QR).¹

The report hinges on a specific shift wherein young adults, particularly those aged 18-24, are increasingly engaged in Christian faith practices. Between 2018 and 2024, monthly church attendance reportedly rose by 50%. Attendance among this younger age bracket, however, quadrupled (from 4% to 16%), with 21% young men and 12% women (compared to 4% and 3% previously) engaging in Church life. Many questions arise from this research. Namely, the accuracy of the reports’ figures, and whether this means the QR is, as the saying goes, coming to a church near you?

The demise of “no religion”?

The Bible Society’s thesis posits a sudden shift in what had been a steady decline in church attendance, with only 46.2% identifying as Christian in the 2021 census and a corresponding rise in those reporting “no religion”. Research by Linda Woodhead and others further highlights this trend, showing that 65–70% of Britons under 24 identify as having no religion (“Nones”).

Not easily classifiable, “Nones” traditionally hold a heavy suspicion of “organised religion, but not necessarily atheistic.”² In her 2004 book, co-authored with Paul Heelas, they argued that patterns of church decline have not produced a wholly secular society, but rather a post-church vacuum in which former members of religious institutions now find themselves “searching for new forms of meaning and purpose.”³ Rather than setting the church on a direct path to extinction, secularism created space for varied new expressions of spirituality and community. In 2022, Theos further researched the demography, beliefs,

and practices of “Nones”.⁴ Summarising the quantitative survey of 5153 UK adults, Waite suggests many can be termed “spiritually open” but decline a single religious framework, instead being open to multiple forms of epistemology (ways of knowing the world).⁵

A Critique of the QR

So, among this generation of epistemological pluralists, do we see a quantifiable return to religion as suggested? The report’s numbers have garnered criticism from academic experts. The British Social Attitudes survey found the share of adults in England and Wales who identified as Christian and attended church at least monthly fell from 12.2% to 9.3% between 2018 and 2023. Clive Field notes that the apparent rise in figures reflects only a post-COVID rebound and has not yet surpassed 2019 levels.⁶ However, Rhiannon McAleer (Director of the Bible Society) argues that when it comes to the common disparity between surveys and the Church’s counts, they seldom align, partly because Anglicans comprise such a small proportion of the population but have a great effect on overall numbers. She claims that the data aligns well with the latest census in terms of religious demographics, indicating a “more active” Christian segment among young people and a smaller “nominal” dataset.⁷

Scepticism remains about the report’s methodology. While broad enough in some respects to provide insights, potential biases persist—not least because the longer survey on religion was voluntary rather than required of all participants. Even so, a growing body of empirical evidence indicates rising youth attendance, particularly

within Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Pentecostal churches. Among young regular churchgoers, only 20% identified as Anglican (down from 30% in 2018), compared with 41% Roman Catholic and 18% Pentecostal. This rise in complementarian traditions is potentially significant in today’s cultural climate, where toxic masculinity influencers are seemingly co-opting Christianity to amplify their messages.

So, is the QR actually happening?

The quiet revival is not a movement in the mould of the crusades of Billy Graham or the evangelistic awakenings of previous centuries. Rather, it is subtle and fragmented, deeply individual and yet deeply communal as well. It reflects the character of a generation shaped by instability, institutional corruption, deeply hungry for authentic community and understanding of “there must be something more than this”. Whether this is a revival or whether it will mature into sustainable church growth will only become apparent in the weeks, months, and years ahead. Nonetheless, it challenges scholars to move beyond simplistic narratives of secularisation and to attend to the complex ways in which faith is renegotiated in this time of meta-modernity. Only further replicable research with significant sample sizes and unbiased questionnaires will truly determine whether the Bible Society’s figures are representative of such a turn to faith from a generation which has traditionally been nervous of organised religion.

ED CENEY

¹ Southam (Bible Soc), *The Quiet Revival* (2025).

² Woodhead, “The rise of “no religion” in Britain,” (2016), 252.

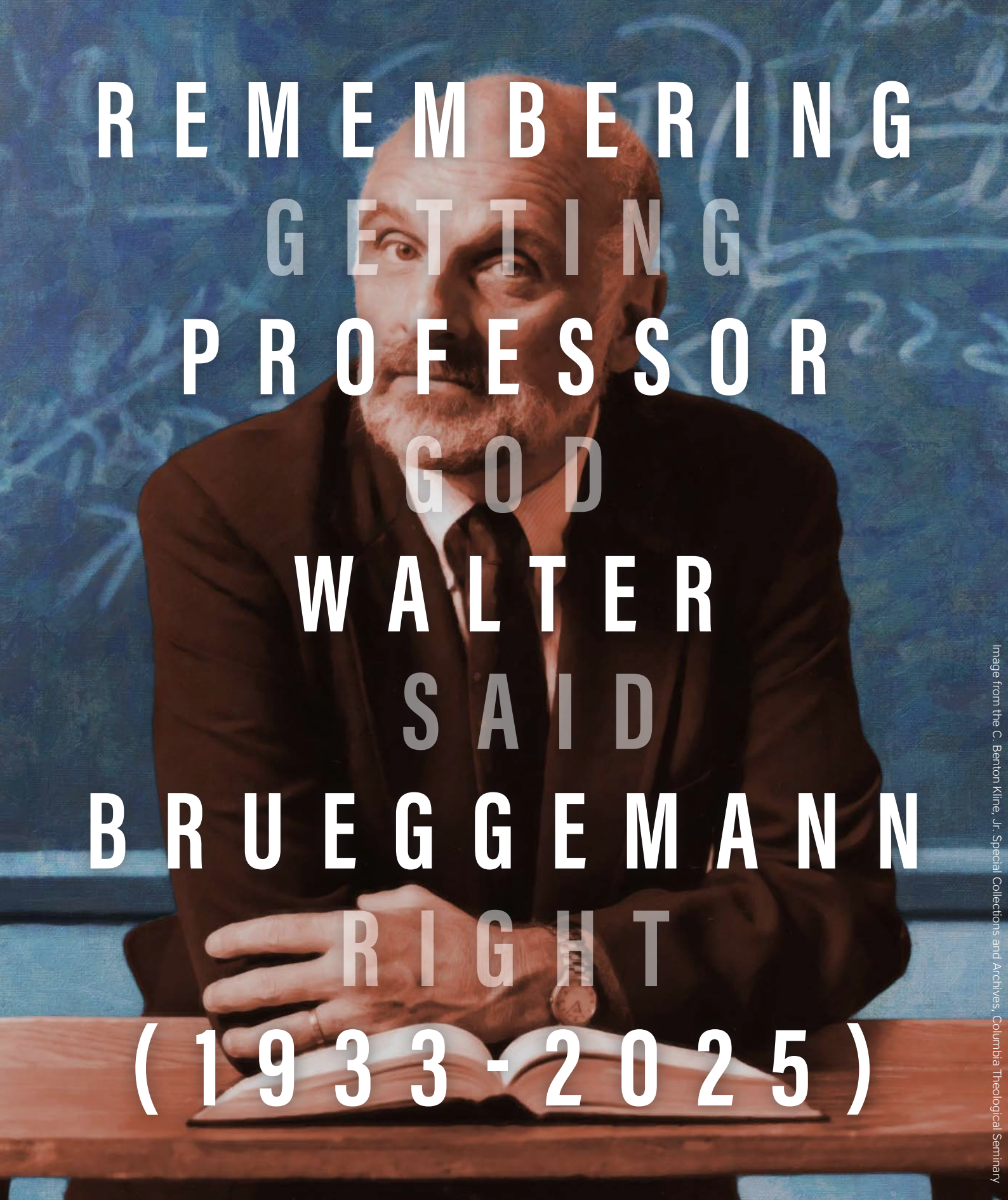
³ Heelas and Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution* (2004), 9.

⁴ Waite (Theos), *The Nones: Who are they and what do they believe?* (2022).

⁵ Ibid., 42.

⁶ Davies (Church Times), “Quiet revival: myth or reality?” 15 August 2025.

⁷ Ibid.

A portrait of Walter Brueggemann, an older man with a beard and mustache, wearing a dark suit and tie. He is seated at a wooden desk with an open book in front of him. The background is a blue chalkboard with faint, illegible writing. Overlaid on the image is large, white, sans-serif text.

REMEMBERING GETTING PROFESSOR GOD WALTER SAID BRUEGGEMANN RIGHT (1933-2025)

Image from the C. Benton Kline, Jr. Special Collections and Archives, Columbia Theological Seminary

Ed Ceney reflects on Brueggemann's life, theology, and incredible impact as a Christian scholar.

Walter Brueggemann was an American Preacher-Theologian. Upon completion of his Th.D. at Union Theological Seminary in 1961, he moved to Eden Theological Seminary as Professor of Old Testament (from 1961-1986) and Dean (1968-1982) before taking the post of McPheeters Professor of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary, which he held until his retirement in the early 2000s. Brueggemann received numerous accolades during his lifetime, including seven honorary doctorates.

His works, written in an endlessly flowing style, invite ordained and lay, academic and non-academic readers into the world of the Bible, to not only understand what the Bible meant in context but to understand the challenge of what the Bible means today. He covered many areas: the social and political dimensions of faith; rhetorical criticism of the Old Testament; and justice and social critique within biblical narratives. However, for Brueggemann, these were not individual themes but rather were interwoven threads found in the pages of the Bible, which he saw as a living, disruptive, and transformative text intricately displaying God's relationality to all creation through a plurality of voices, tensions, and contradictions.

Brueggemann's most influential and widely recognised book would without a doubt be *The Prophetic Imagination* (1978), in which he somewhat startlingly defines a prophet as one who nourishes "a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture." By "dominant culture", he referred to oppressive traits like consumerism, militarism and nationalism which dominate American and modern Western life. The book calls Christians today to adopt a "prophetic imagination", similar to the biblical prophets, to critique systems of injustice and offer hopeful alternatives grounded in faith, contrasting the "dominant consciousness" with God's liberating purposes.

It was through a different book that I first met Brueggemann on the cusp of the COVID-19 pandemic: *Message of*

the Psalms (1983). In the book, three movements in the Psalms are identified: orientation, disorientation, and reorientation, which mirror the human experience. Brueggemann emphasises the importance of lament and honesty in worship, challenging theological traditions that suppress grief and struggle. Using this framework, he rejects a static or triumphalist faith, instead arguing that the Psalter models a journey through trust, doubt, grief, and renewed hope. Not only this, but the Psalter shows God as personally responsive and intimately involved in the world, human suffering and joy.

The framework of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation, and his emphasis on the importance of lament and honesty in worship, challenging traditions that suppress grief and struggle, has stuck with me. His work accompanied me through my deconstruction at theological college, during which I discovered this feeling of disorientation and was brought to a re-orientation. Not only did Brueggemann challenge me in terms of the oppressive components implicit within conservative evangelicalism, but through reading his commentaries on the Old Testament, I have rediscovered and re-oriented myself inside a theology of justice and a God who is deeply relational to Their creation.

Until his death in June this year, he remained remarkably active, publishing numerous books and articles despite retiring two decades ago. He leaves behind a deep and varied corpus of work full of his poetic, confrontational, and deeply theological style, bridging academic biblical scholarship with pastoral and prophetic concerns, making his work influential not just in seminaries but also among preachers, activists, and other churchgoers. This unique blend of academic and pastoral insight is unmatched by any other 20th or 21st-century theologian. I am certain his writing will only grow in relevance amid today's political and theological climates, but may we never forget Brueggemann's enduring challenge to all Christians, conservative and progressive alike, to reengage with the Bible through imagination and courage.



MICRO-BIBLE STUDIES

SCM MEMBERS SHARE THEIR SHORT REFLECTIONS
ON SNIPPETS FROM THE SCRIPTURES

"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well"
PSALM 139:14 (NIV)

The psalms help to highlight the joy and struggles of life, and to praise and petition God. This verse, in which the psalmist praises God as creator, specifically for creating him in a way that is both intricate and purposeful, can be read as a celebration of our uniqueness and of the sacredness of our beings. It is a striking reminder – in a world which constantly tries to divide – that we should try to recognise and honour the divinity and wonderfulness in each other.

Jo

"I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me But I have calmed and quieted myself, I am like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child I am content."
PSALM 131:1-2 (NIV)


Sometimes, it feels very tiring and difficult to keep on thinking about God; there is so much to wrap our heads around. These verses contain the image of the great King David saying he is no longer trying to understand; he just wants to be with God. At the points in life where I'm stressing over answers to big questions, I quieten myself into the calming embrace of God, who looks after all of it whether I understand or not. And I remember that God does not expect me to have all of these answers – God simply hopes I can rest in the knowledge that I am held by Them.

Moll

"In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, enslaved and free, but Christ is all and in all!"
COLOSSIANS 3:11 (NRSV)

In Colossians 3:11 Paul discusses that we are all one in Christ, regardless of race or background. This really speaks to me when I consider those who suffer. It is so easy for us to disregard others because they are from a different place to ourselves, but suffering is universal. Christ is with us all when we suffer; he comforts both "Greek and Jew". Christ is not only for an "elect" or chosen, but he is present and active in everyone's life. This oneness mentioned in Colossians is a universal love – one that transcends international borders, war, and persecution.

Joseph



Late Night Pasta Theology

Some of the most profound theological moments don't happen in sermons or lectures — they happen over a bowl of late night pasta with a friend. Jess explores how everyday conversations can be sacred spaces for wrestling with doubt, expressing faith, and listening deeply.

When people think about church, the first thing that they might think of is the breaking of bread and the sharing of wine in communion. However, when I think of church, my mind just as easily conjures up images of bowls of pasta and homemade muffins, mugs of tea and hot chocolate, shared with friends during lunch time Bible studies, afternoon catch ups, and late night theological discussions.

When I moved to Exeter to begin studying for my master's degree, I heard about a 'Theology Club' which had recently been started by one of the chaplains. As someone who had recently come back to faith, I was eager to reengage with a Christian community, and I felt as though moving to a new city would be the perfect opportunity to do just that. I've always been naturally an extroverted person, eager to make new friends, meet new people, and to embrace God's call for me to live in community with others.

When I arrived to the first meeting, I was excited but apprehensive, unsure what I would find. The room was filled with a gentle warmth, with quiet conversation and relaxed laughter floating through the space. Perhaps the first thing that caught my eye was a set of windchimes hanging next to the open window, tinkling ever so slightly in the breeze. One of my new friends, noticing my fascination with these windchimes, shared with me that it was their belief that every time the windchimes rang, it was a sign that the Holy Spirit was present. I loved that thought, not least because the chimes rang all evening, announcing to us what we already knew — that God was there with us.

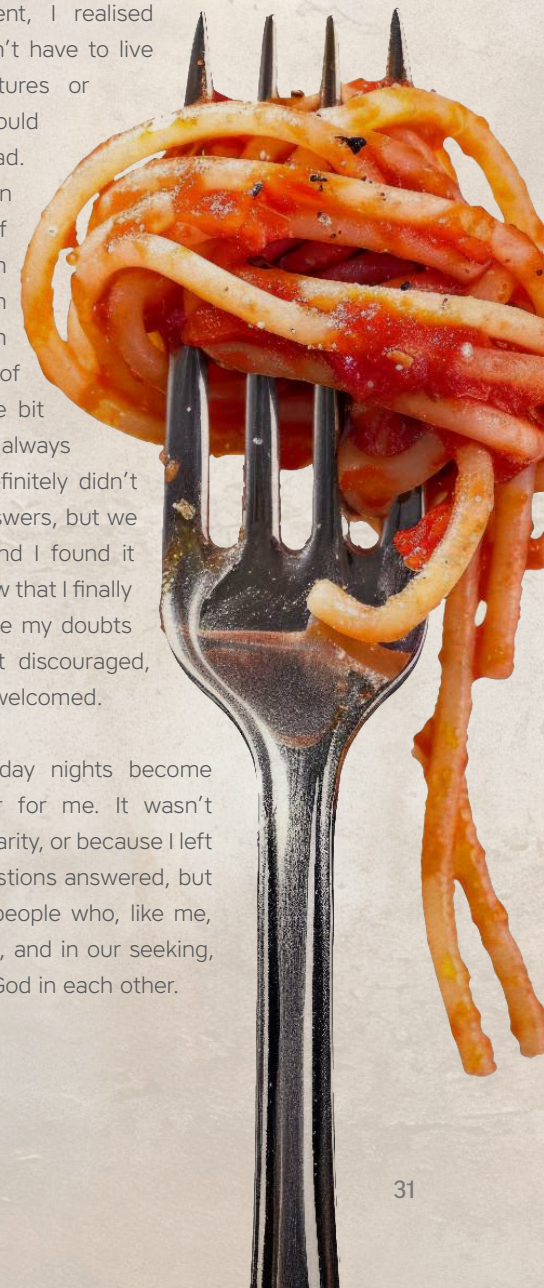
I was shocked by just how quickly I felt at ease. There was no pressure for me to sound impressive, or well-read. People spoke thoughtfully, with openness, honesty, and the humility to realise that maybe they were wrong. We might have started by examining a theological concept, or

by reflecting on a piece of scripture, but our conversations often unfolded in unexpected directions, and within that, something even more meaningful emerged. I knew that in that space, I wasn't expected to be anyone but myself, and the freedom that that gave me was transformative.

From that moment, I realised that theology didn't have to live in books or lectures or sermons, but it could live here instead. It could live in the soft hum of conversation, in the laughter, in the silences which encouraged all of us to think a little bit deeper. We didn't always agree, and we definitely didn't have all of the answers, but we embraced that, and I found it comforting to know that I finally had a space where my doubts and fears weren't discouraged, but instead were welcomed.

Over time, Thursday nights became a kind of anchor for me. It wasn't because I found clarity, or because I left with all of my questions answered, but because I found people who, like me, were seeking God, and in our seeking, we found that of God in each other.

JESS SMITH





EXPERIENCING THE DIVINE IN THE EVERYDAY

SCM members share the simple moments in which they most connect with the divine.

The other day, I stood in a hermitage that was carved into a rockface in the 1100s, nestled deep in a wood near to where I live. The hermitage is a small, empty cave with a cross etched into one wall, and hundreds of graffitied names scrawled across the others; yet somehow it still echoes with centuries of quiet prayer. Being there, surrounded by birdsong, felt sacred in a way that was different to spending time in, say, a cathedral.

I often find walking alone in nature brings me a kind of spiritual clarity. My mum would describe this as being in a “thin place”. She loves Holy Island in Northumberland for that very reason: a place where heaven feels just a little closer. There’s something powerful in the idea that certain landscapes blur the boundary between the everyday and the divine.

A while ago, I sent a voice note to a friend after a countryside walk. I’d seen so many different animals on that walk - a fox, butterflies, what seemed like a cloud of long tailed tits - and each moment of experiencing these little glimpses of colour and life struck me as so full of wonder that I had to share it. I often message that friend when nature stirs something spiritual in me. It’s in those quiet, uninterrupted walks that I feel closest to God.

It strikes me that both this hermitage and Holy Island are places deeply embedded in nature. Their holiness is not built up in gold or marble, but moss and wind and birdsong. It reminds me of St Francis and his Canticle of the Creatures, and of St Cuthbert praying among seals and birds. In those moments, I’m reminded that worship isn’t confined to buildings. We praise alongside rivers and trees, not apart from them. And often, it’s the woods that have gently led me back when faith felt far away.

BETH

Image: Stained glass window of Saint Francis of Assisi in thi Nghe Church, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (03-30-2019). godongphoto / Shutterstock.com



When I was a kid I was a young carer to my brother with Angelman Syndrome. This meant that attending church wasn't on the cards as a helpful way to spend Sundays, so I had to find the divine and faith in the everyday instead. It was probably the time of my life where finding the divine was easiest, despite having no spiritual guidance or structures to help me. I had to find it in religious studies lessons in school; in those school hymns which we were forced to sing; through my imagination, using Lego and magnets; and most of all through my relationship with, and caring for, my brother. As an adult, that freedom and playfulness decreased, and since being diagnosed as autistic I discovered that attending church is still difficult.

It's hit or miss as to whether I experience that connection to the divine in a service, but caring has always felt natural to me, like a gift, and I now experience the divine the most in my own counselling sessions, and as a counsellor myself. In my own counselling it feels like there are 3 of us in sessions; myself, my therapist and God. In counselling I have had the space to completely explore my faith, free of judgement and rules, as well as my health and wellbeing, and I've found that I have felt closest to God here more than anywhere else. On the flip side, as a counsellor myself, the work doesn't feel isolated or lonely (as is often the risk) but instead I feel connected to and supported by the divine. When I struggle to pray for myself, or others, or the world, I can usually find a moment before or after sessions, and in those moments feel that counselling and therapy acts as a different language for prayer and meeting the divine.

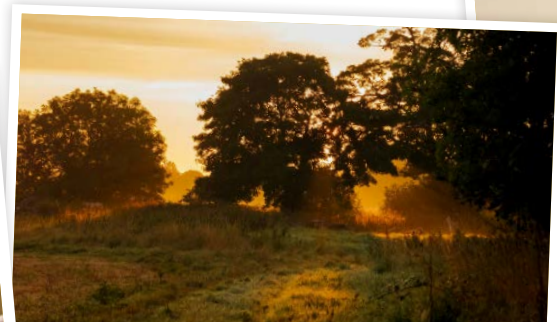
JULIE-ANNE



Every day, I see God everywhere. I hear Him in the birds that wake me. I feel Him in the wind that stumbles in through my open window. I see him in the cloudless skies that are bigger than me. I see Him in the two robins that live in our garden, and perch on our French doors to watch us. I see God in deer, which I notice during important times in my life. I saw God in the white deer that watched me through the woods the month before I moved to university, and it reminded me that He is following my path into the future. I saw God in the deer that lived outside my first year student accommodation, and it reminded me that I'd made the right choice, and that He was there. I saw God in the deer that ran in front of my car on a country road and reminded me that we are truly living in God's natural world, not our own ugly mechanical one.

I see God when I take my makeup off at the end of the day, and my bare face is staring back at me unfiltered in the mirror. I see God when I see a smile. I hear God when I hear a laugh. I see God when I see joy, and I see God when I see pain. I see God when things are hopeless because God has lived it and God lives in us. I feel God when I cry out, "why?", knowing He has done the same. I feel God in my every movement, every thought, and every breath. Every day, I see God everywhere, and I know that He is eternal. Who else could have made all this?

ISABELLA



CELEBRATING 1700 YEARS OF *The Nicene Creed*

I have long been an appreciator of the Nicene Creed and its use in Churches, but the first time I truly saw its recital as an act of worship was when I sang it as part of a Corpus Christi celebration recently. In the rise and fall of the setting, and the grandeur of the music, it became clearer than ever before that the Nicene Creed is not a stale document, and that we must never become so over-familiar with it that we fail to contemplate what it means for us. Instead, the Nicene Creed is to be celebrated!

We joyfully proclaim the truths of our faith not as an intellectual exercise, but as an act of worship and devotion. In the singing of the Creed, I came to see these words, crafted by Bishops and martyrs, many of whom bore the deep wounds of Roman persecution, as illuminating in an incomprehensible wideness and freshness the entire Gospel of Christ. From the oneness of the God who creates all things, to the desire of God to know us intimately in His Son, to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church brought into one by His body, the Nicene Creed is a celebration of the love of God, the Good News of Jesus Christ, and the unity of God's people. It is this wide-ranging significance of the Creed which reveals to us that in the dispute between Arius and Athanasius which gave rise to the Creed, the entire Gospel is at stake. Arius' assertion was that the essence of God could not be communicated or shared, and thus the Son of God is the greatest of creatures, but a creature nonetheless, coming into existence after the Father. The consequence of Arius' destructive heresy is that the very salvation of humanity is denied, our relation to God is cut off! How can humanity become sharers of the divine nature, mystically living within and through the being of God, being sanctified in the flesh and transformed from glory to glory into the likeness of Christ, if there is a fundamental and irreconcilable separation between humans and our creator?

Fr. Kenneth Leech goes so far as to say that the God of the Arian is the "theological glorification of imperial tyranny" - if God cannot be intimately involved in the affairs of creation in the total assumption of the flesh in the Incarnation ('one being with the Father' and yet entirely one with us), how can He be anything other than a distant authority? Therefore, when we celebrate the Nicene Creed, we celebrate the entirety of Gospel truth, yet perhaps most of all, that through the mystery of the Incarnation, the God of Love and His creation are oned in a deeply mystical, sensual way, and that all "may become participants of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4).

JACOB OWEN

STANDING IN THE QUEUE HOW WAITING SHAPED MY FAITH

We can be tempted to try and fast-track our formation, but so much of it happens in the waiting. Jem explores how their faith has been shaped by “standing in the queue”.

When I first felt a sense of God’s calling, I didn’t know what it was to, specifically. I just felt called to something where God was the inescapable focus of the everyday. Something where, despite inevitable distractions, I would be faced with God whether I made a conscious effort or not. That was over nine years ago, and waiting has characterised my vocation ever since. Around the same time, I was coming to understand myself as non-binary, and trying to understand how my transness, my faith, and this new sense of vocation fitted together. With all the enthusiasm to follow God’s call immediately, I wanted to skip the queue of discernment; having not yet learned that, in Teilhard de Chardin’s words, “It is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability, and that it may take a very long time.”

The first three years of ‘waiting’ I spent eagerly anticipating God’s announcement of what I should do. Did they want me to be a priest? Or maybe a monk - and if God was indeed on board with my transness, how would they find space for my non-binary self in a tradition divided into monks and nuns, brothers and sisters? Having been impatiently telling God off for not telling me exactly what to do, I had to learn that God isn’t so prescriptive. Frustratingly, God gives us options. And not even just two or three options to pick between – God created us and desires us, and at the most basic level, our vocation is simply to dwell in that love. As I realised this, I realised that monastic life is what excites me, is what fills me with joyous expectation of living out my desire for God, is the place I believe can most fully shape me into who God created me to be. I realised that this was my vocation. I took a step forward in the queue.

Once I had realised that monastic life was my vocation, I wanted to skip the queue and get on with it straightaway. To borrow an image from a friend, I’d chunked all my ingredients in the bowl and thought it was ready to bake – forgetting to mix them together. But at 19, I was sensibly advised to get a few more years’ life experience before joining the community I enquired with. The community, like many religious communities in the past few years, also wanted to learn more about transness and what it might mean to have

a trans community member. At first, I was tempted to think of my transness as an obstacle to my vocation. But during this waiting, I was able to get top surgery, and the unprecedented sense of wholeness between my body and my soul that top surgery brought showed me that the opposite was true – my transness is part of my vocation. My transness and my sense of monastic vocation shape each other and draw me to a fuller embodiment of God’s image. Vocation is never just one thing – it’s the whole of ourselves brought before the loving gaze of God. Another step forward in the queue.

By now, I was 23, but it still wasn’t time to enter monastic life. Most people exploring monastic vocation are advised to visit multiple communities to find the one that fits. Being non-binary makes this tricky, as the community I feel called to is the only mixed-gender community available to me. But I discovered another community which, while single-gendered in terms of its vowed members, has a mixed-gender lay community alongside it: Hilfield Friary, where I’ve been living for the past year. Hilfield is a Franciscan community, and while I ultimately feel called to the Benedictine tradition, this contrast has given me a deeper understanding of my vocation. It felt counter intuitive to delay joining the community I’ve been enquiring with, but it also helped me realise that not only is God not prescriptive in what they call us to but also in the route we take to get there. Rather than God planting signposts at every turn, I think that God is navigating the journey with us, waiting until, with the excitement of a friend taking you to a new place, God says, “Look! There it is!”

Now, at 25, I’ve reached the front of the queue, and I’m preparing to join the community I’ve been enquiring with since the start. Having gotten so used to the journey, it’s comforting to know that while my waiting may be nearly complete, I am not; there will be so much more of God and of myself to discover through the life I feel called to. To return to Teilhard de Chardin, “Give our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.”

JEM PARKER



THREE PERSPECTIVES ON HOLY COMMUNION

SCM is an ecumenical organisation, so there are plenty of views on communion within the membership! Inspired by conversations in our WhatsApp community, three members share what Holy Communion means to them.

Holy Communion is the keystone of my faith as a Christian. For me, it is an act of sharing and taking in which one becomes an apostle of Christ, an intimate moment between oneself and God, a moment in which one takes on the sacrifice of Christ and his disciples.

My personal Eucharistic belief is that Christ is truly present in Communion, but the way in which this presence manifests is a mystery. This is a common view held within the Anglican Church, yet the wide range of beliefs within the Church makes pinning down a theological standpoint difficult. My church lies near the centre of this range, and is neither Anglo-Catholic nor evangelical in style; Holy Communion is celebrated four or more times per week using Common Worship 2000 and the Book of Common Prayer 1662. Vestments, altar frontals, and banners change with the liturgical season, though while many things about the aesthetics of the service and liturgy may change throughout the year, one thing always remains - the breaking of bread. I am reminded of Ecclesiastes 3:1, 'For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven'.

Communion is always here. Liturgically, its focus changes depending upon the season, but mortally, communion is a constant in the lives of many. The liturgical year is intertwined with the Eucharist, it is a constant in the everchanging. Thus, as an Anglican, and as a Christian, I believe Communion must be our keystone. It is not simply one of many building blocks of faith; rather prayer, charity, community and evangelism are upheld, elevated and inspired by the keystone of the Eucharist.

JOSEPH WOOD

I have been to many communions. Ones with alcoholic wine, ones with non-alcoholic wine; ones with wafers, and ones with loaves of bread; ones with a shared cup, and ones with individual cups; ones presided over by a priest, and ones served peer-to-peer. During COVID, I even took part in an online communion where I had to use whatever was available in the house – port and cream crackers. Because Baptists have no central authority guiding how communion 'should' be done, every service is slightly different, but all share that sense of community and hospitality. In the shared action of eating bread and drinking wine, we recognise the presence of Christ among us and we, the members of the Church, represent the body of Christ. I really enjoy communion services which emphasise this sense of fellowship.

One service which particularly stands out to me was an occasion where we spent most of the service making bread dough as a group. After we had made the dough, it was revealed that this was not the dough we would be using as our communion bread. Instead, our dough would travel to another church and be used in their communion, while some dough they had made was gifted to us to use in ours. This service was particularly meaningful as, without even meeting anyone from the other congregation, I felt connected to them, and able to share communion across time and space. This aspect of communion is particularly significant for me as a Baptist. We consider communion to be an ordinance – a practice instituted by Jesus – rather than a sacrament or means of grace. Taking part in communion does not absolve us of any sins, but it reaffirms our covenant with God, reminding us of Jesus' sacrifice and the strength of the local church community.

CAITLIN NORMAN



For Roman Catholics, communion is a bedrock of our faith practice. Communion is offered at every Mass, and many parishes worldwide hold Mass daily. Roman Catholics are supposed to attend Mass and receive communion at least once a week, as well as on other stipulated holy days of obligation.

There are complex beliefs regarding communion in the Roman Catholic Church, around what is consumed and who may consume it. Communion is initially regarded as bread and wine: wafers containing gluten are kept in a ciborium and alcoholic wine is poured into a chalice. Around halfway through Mass, the priest consecrates the bread and wine, at which point transubstantiation occurs. Transubstantiation is the belief that, via consecration, the wafers and wine are transformed into the actual Body and Blood of Christ. How many practising Roman Catholics understand and uphold this doctrine is debatable!

Official Church doctrine states only those in good standing with the Church (free from sin, or with minor/venial sins only) can receive communion. Those with more serious “mortal” sins must go to Confession first. Personally, I doubt most Roman Catholics follow this rule.

Communion and Confession are two of the RC Church’s seven sacraments: an outward, tangible sign of God’s grace in the world. Other practices around communion include Adoration of the Eucharist – where people kneel in contemplation before a consecrated wafer, displayed in a Eucharistic holder called a monstrance – and belief in Eucharistic miracles.

I derive great strength and peace from Adoration of the Eucharist, which is one of my favourite things about being a Roman Catholic. St. Carlo Acutis, who was recently canonised to full sainthood on 7th September 2025, compiled a website of Eucharistic miracles before he died aged 15 in 2006. St Acutis famously described the Eucharist (consecrated wafer) as “the highway to Heaven”.

SHANIKA RANASINGHE



PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOU FAITH IS: **HOW THEOLOGY AFFECTS CONSUMER HABITS**

Technological societies are predicated on ever-increasing consumption and unlimited economic growth within a limited world that can only tolerate so much, especially of the destruction we all too often practice. Technological societies cultivate an axiomatic principle within the consumer; it is better to have, than not. Even those who are ‘conscious consumers’ struggle to escape the axiom of consumption, tending towards ‘ethical consumption’, or giving way to an apathetic doubt in our ability to effect change through our individual consumer habits.

Theology challenges consumerism by inverting the consumerist axiom: sometimes it is better not to have, than to have. In theology we find a basis for cultivating a hardness, a doing-without, that is all too commonly summarised as asceticism and dismissed as such. Through faith we know that all the best things have already been freely given and are available to all those who seek. God gave us the earth and rooted us in it. God gave us our freedom, relationships, and everything transcendent. Since all the best things have been freely given by God, it is often of no advantage at all to want, nor to have more. The truly religious today say “I do not want; I do not need.”

While theory can provide us with plenty of sound arguments that we ought to change our consumer habits either because we are causing damage to the environment, hurting other living beings, or contributing to some more amorphous moral wrong, it often falls short of effecting action. Theology, and

perhaps theology alone, can provide the powerful impetus to change our consumer habits.

Theology provides a strong motivational framework for behavioural change. Theory can, and all too often does, get caught up in a sort of nihilistic apathy that things will not change. It allows us to believe our individual contributions to the harm are materially negligible, so we may as well fall in line with wanton consumption, because it would be a shame to miss out for nothing.

Theology counters this nihilism with a radically different conceptual framework. Each being and all of creation is awarded immense value by virtue of God’s love and act of creation. Through theology, nature, people and all of creation no longer hold merely instrumental value, but intrinsic value. As part of God’s creation, the lifeworld is good and worth protecting in itself. Thus, we better have a very good reason for disrupting or damaging it, and many of our consumer habits simply do not rise to this standard.

If we are immersed in theology, and consequently take this standard seriously, then we have no choice but to act. We cannot fall back on nihilistic apathy about the dim prospects of our actions bringing about material change. We are compelled by the strength of the inherent value of creation to change our habits and must have faith and hope that our actions motivated by love will bear good fruits.

ROUX DAVIES



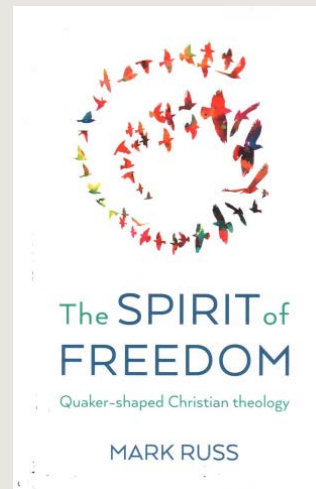
REVIEWS

THE SPIRIT OF FREEDOM

This short collection of essays, originally published in blog form, is, as described in the subtitle, Quaker-shaped Christian theology. As a non-Quaker Christian, I found it an interesting insight into aspects of British Quaker practice, as well as a collection of uplifting and challenging thoughts on the nature of theology and our understandings of God. In particular, I will be thinking more about the theological and spiritual implications of the concept, “That of God in Everyone”. I appreciate that Russ ends his work with a series of unanswered questions as his way to begin thinking about Quaker theology as relates to his own Whiteness; I think more theology texts should so clearly acknowledge that their authors do not hold all the answers.

Mark Russ has also published a book entitled Quaker Shaped Christianity: How the Jesus Story and the Quaker way fit together, which I have now added to my reading list.

SORREL EYRES



The Spirit of Freedom
Mark Russ
Paperback
ISBN: 978-1803416632

A SERIOUS HOUSE

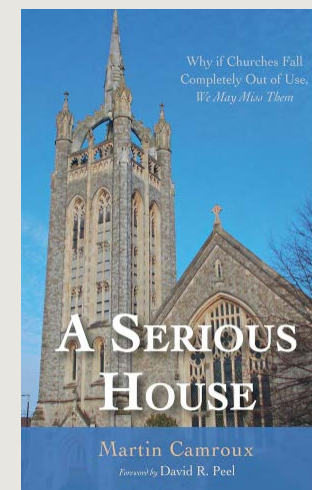
In A Serious House, Martin Camroux makes the astute observation that church-going people now often feel the need to justify their churchgoing and blends his own story with theology and poetry as he explains why he, and the rest of us, might bother with it at all.

This is no mean feat; the Church is a multi-dimensional institution both in its diversity of expression and function. As such, the book takes the Church’s buildings, its community, its moral influence, its transcendent worship, its preaching, its gospel story and the meaning it gives to life each in turn, carefully considering what it is about each of them we might miss should they disappear.

With so much to consider, the thesis can be a little sprawling at times, unclear in some moments whether the Church is being appraised or its malaise diagnosed, though Camroux does each of these well. Furthermore, the author’s scepticism of charismatic expressions at times seems borne of a curious conflation of worship style and bad theology.

Nonetheless, the book is a passionate yet honest manifesto for those who value the Church and want to keep it alive. Camroux is at his most compelling when articulating the power of the story of Jesus, whose retelling he argues is one of the central contributions of the Church. Without the Church, we wouldn’t have the story, and without the story we might not know God so intimately. The impassioned and pastoral truth-telling of Camroux is needed by the Church now more than ever, but for as long as we have those like him amongst us (and we listen), I have hope that our Church, its story and its communities will continue.

TOM PACKER-STUCKI

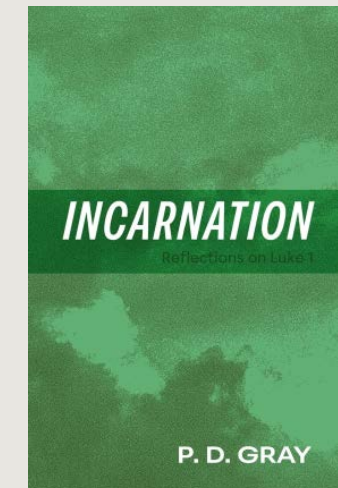


A Serious House
Martin Camroux
Paperback
ISBN: 979-8385207831

INCARNATION: REFLECTIONS ON LUKE 1

When is it too early to mention the C-word? For Patrick Gray, the Christmas narrative of Jesus’ incarnation is oft-overlooked and undercelebrated, not only during the festive season but throughout the Christian year. His new book ‘Incarnation: Reflections on Luke 1’ hopes that a closer analysis of the gospel account will revive our awe and wonder of this “glorious event”.

The book is structured around four chapters, each broken down into shorter sections. Peppered throughout are refreshing linguistic and theological insights, such as the etymology of Hebrew names and, particularly interesting, a comparison between Zacharias and Mary, the mother of Jesus. Yet, the theologian may find that the succinct nature of the book sacrifices a deeper analysis of the Incarnation’s theological complexities. Often, more questions than answers remain. There is further confusion surrounding the purpose of the book, especially if it should be categorised as a theological or a devotional resource. As an academic text, it could benefit from both a more nuanced approach and the inclusion of supporting references. A collection of short sermons’ perhaps would be a more appropriate description.



Incarnation: Reflections on Luke 1
Patrick Grey
Paperback
ISBN: 978-1666788068

Nevertheless, Gray’s zeal and conviction are apparent through his writing style and, although at times straying into the territory of fundamentalist sanctimony, he does succeed in infusing new life into the well-known Christmas story.

Overall, “Incarnation” would be an unusual selection from the bookshelf, sitting within quite a niche gap in the market, namely the gap for a distinctly Calvinistic perspective. However, for the need it does meet, Gray presents an interesting and unique case to re-spark our wonder of Jesus’ incarnation. He is correct in highlighting that it is never too early to rejoice in the Christmas story

PHOEBE PARKIN



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