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From the editor

How shall we live?

When did you last make an ethical decision? Like so many words, 'ethical' has acquired a set of associations in common usage. If I don't think too hard about it, my thought train might meander from the trigger word 'ethical' towards things like shopping at the Co-op, certain types of pensions, and cosmetics that have not been tested on animals. Such things are only isolated instances of ethical living, but the ideas we receive from the media could arguably lead us to believe that opting for certain discrete behaviours of this kind will qualify us as ethical.

In fact, everything has an ethical dimension for Christians, who live in the aftermath of the Sermon on the Mount and its complementary teachings in the other gospels. Ethics for us does not mean a set of obscure ideas or legal codes, but a way of life that is centred on Jesus and true discipleship.

I am therefore delighted to introduce this issue on ethics, which I believe is timely as we seek to live faithfully in difficult times. Setting the scene, Brian Haymes argues for biblical justice at the heart of our Christian living, while John Colwell discusses the necessary marriage between doctrine and ethics. Three articles address practical ethics: the topical question of refugees from an OT perspective (Helen Paynter); the developing questions about the environment (Dave Gregory); and Michael Peat explores the complex and recurring issue of assisted dying. I commend each article as a place to deepen our thinking about the question: *how then shall I live?*

This issue also launches our first *bmj* Essay Prize, encouraging thoughtful theological engagement with the practice of ministry. If you feel inspired by what you read here, why not try to write something? See p33 for details, and spread the word.

I need also to offer an apology to readers—the article in July's *bmj* by Pieter Lalleman has a section missing. This was because of a mistake I made during the final formatting of the journal. Pieter's article will be republished in full in January, so if you want to respond to him, please wait until then.

As ever, if you would like to comment on something you have read, or write your own article for *bmj*, please contact me.

Just Baptists

by Brian Haymes

Theresa May, in her first speech as Prime Minister, focused on social justice. She said of British society, that ‘if you are born poor, you will die on average nine years earlier than others—if you are black you are treated more harshly by the criminal justice system than if you are white—If you’re a white, working class boy, you are less likely than anyone else in Britain to go to university—if you’re at a state school, you’re less likely to reach the top professions than if you are educated privately—If you are a woman, you will earn less than a man—if you suffer from mental health problems, there’s not enough help to hand—and, if you’re young, you’ll find it harder than ever before to own your own home’.¹

The editor of *bmj* has asked for a short essay on ethics and social justice. The topic is timely because it always is. We live in a world dripping with injustice. The issue, however, is far from simple. Just think of what might be involved in restructuring our national life so that Theresa May’s description were put to rights—assuming we could ever agree on what we are talking about.

We are all in favour of justice, of course. In medieval Christianity, ‘justice’ was highly prized as one of the four cardinal virtues, the others being prudence, fortitude and temperance. But then, whoever would want to be known as unjust? Being a just person is a character trait of the virtuous.

The Prime Minister’s statement was about social justice, our common life together. Here the concern is not just with personal virtue but about relationships—and the language soon moves into politics, rights, obligations and responsibilities. Remember the child’s cry: ‘It’s not fair!’. Is that what justice is, fairness, giving each person their due? This can only heighten the difficulties, especially in those societies, like ours, shaped by emphases on individual rights and freedom of choice. Then the language becomes shaped by ‘them’ and ‘us’. ‘They’ quickly becoming the ones to whom good must be done in the name of justice by ‘us’. But whose justice?² We seem agreed that economic growth is a good thing (which political party would ever get elected on any other policy?). But my economic growth is often at the expense of another. Is that just? I claim the right of freedom of choice but what if exercising that right infringes the rights of others?

In our history, Baptists have struggled with these issues. Two examples can suffice. First, William Knibb and other BMS missionaries argued with those who believed they had the right to own slaves and that no one could tell them what to do with their property. A whole social and economic order was at stake. Knibb believed that all humans were made in the image of God and thereby had a freedom not to be denied by others. Slavery was wrong before God. It was unjust. It should not be allowed in law.³

The broad issue of justice raised itself again when Rosa Parks, an African-American woman wanted a seat on the bus after her long day's work. She was denied because there were unjust laws that discriminated against her. Martin Luther King was one of the great leaders in the march towards social justice, rights for all, and the banning of unjust discriminating practices. The goal was a more just world, with justice for all. It is clear from Theresa May's statement that, for all the triumphs of Martin Luther King, we are not there yet.⁴

So it is no surprise to discover that secular ideas of justice abound:⁵ utilitarianism's greatest good for the greatest number; liberalism's individual autonomy; equality's liberty within bounds; and many more theories are commonly found in our discourse about justice. Does anyone know what this word means? It can be alarming to note how quickly Christians use uncritically these secular language forms and ideologies. It has even stirred Stanley Hauerwas to suggest that what we call justice today is a bad idea!⁶ He suggests that contemporary theories of justice can be an apology for liberal societies that willingly create and sustain great economic inequalities in the name of protecting fundamental political liberties. Perhaps appeals to justice as a central norm in Christian ethics is insufficient at best.⁷

Hauerwas argues that the church does not have a social ethic so much as it is a social ethic. He means that the church is called to live as God's people, sharing the triune life, under the rule of Christ. As such it will be an alternative countercultural community, living out its baptism, challenging in its own life contemporary forms of injustice.⁸

Biblical justice

What might the Bible say about justice? Thinking biblically might help us with what is at stake. Glen Stassen & David Gushee, the Baptist co-authors of the most comprehensive contemporary book on evangelical ethics, *Kingdom ethics: following Jesus in contemporary context* (IVP, 2013) point out that whereas the Bible uses the main words for sexual sins about 90 times, the four words for justice appear 1060 times. Hardly any other ethical concept appears so often in the Bible.

The Hebrew Bible has several terms for justice, the main ones being *tsedeq/tsedaq*, usually translated as justice or righteousness; and *mishpat*, translated judgement. These are covenant terms. 'The Lord is just in all his way, and kind in all his doings' (Psalm

145:17). The people act justly when they are faithful to the demands of the covenant, the Torah. Moses tells the people: 'If we diligently observe this entire commandment before the Lord our God, as he commanded us, we will be in the right (*tsedaqa*)' (Deut 6:25). Fundamentally, justice is the way God keeps his promises and acts.

It is no surprise then when, turning to the prophets, we find this a major theme with some of the most inspiring descriptions of God's ways and utter condemnations of those who walk unjustly. Think of Isaiah 42:1-4a, 6-7:

*Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
My chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him;
He will bring forth justice to the nations.
He will not cry or lift up his voice,
Or make it heard in the street;
A bruised reed he will not break,
And a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
He will faithfully bring forth justice.
He will not grow faint or be crushed
Until he has established justice in the earth.*

*I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness;
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,
A light to the nations,
To open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.*

This passage in Isaiah is crucial for Jesus' mission. We cannot fail to notice how vital the concern for justice is for the Servant's mission. We might also note the connection between healing, peace and non-violence and the inclusion of the nations, the others, the Gentiles. This is the work of the Lord's Servant. It declares the just purposes of God.

When it comes to selecting judges in Israel, Moses declares, 'They shall render just decisions (*mishpat-tsedeq*) for the people. You must not distort justice (*mishpat*); you must not show partiality and you must not accept bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. Justice (*tsedeq*) and

only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you' (Deut 16:18b-20).

It is with the 8th century prophets that we come to some of the hardest condemnations of a people who fail in covenant love and obligation. God, says the prophet, is unimpressed with all the religiosity going on when the people actually act falsely, taking bribes, trampling the poor, the rich living without regard to covenant neighbourliness (Amos 5:10-13). What is needed is a people faithful to the covenant who 'let justice (*mishpat*) roll down like waters, and righteousness (*tsedaqah*) like an ever flowing stream' (Amos 5:24). A living, flowing stream—there is no suggestion of trickle-down effects here.

These prophetic notes are sounded in the ministry of Jesus, announcing the presence of the reign of God. 'Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith' (Matt 23:23/ Luke 11:42). Repentance is called for. Jesus announces God's justice as deliverance of the outcasts, the poor and the oppressed from all forms of dominating greed and coercive power. The cleansing of the Temple is a bold prophetic act in keeping with this emphasis, for false religion was misleading the people, getting rich at their expense and keeping out the undesirables. Jesus confronts the Temple authorities, the public powers of his time. Conflict is a mark of his ministry, casting out demons, healing and receiving the discarded, including the others, subverting the unjust status quo. Simply doing nothing, any vain attempts to live with clean hands, would only allow the injustice to continue.

Paul speaks of justice and righteousness more than any other New Testament writer. He uses *dikaioynē* (righteousness) for *tsedeq* and *krima/krisis* (judgement/justice) for *mishpat*. Paul's gospel is the good news of God who has power to save all who believe, including the excluded. He has a universal concern for Jews and Gentiles, a ministry which soon gets him into conflict with unjust ungodly ways.

Stassen & Gushee summarise the biblical material thus:

*Justice has four dimensions: (1) deliverance of the poor and powerless from the injustices that they regularly experience; (2) lifting the foot of domineering power off the neck of the dominated and oppressed; (3) stopping the violence and establishing peace; and (4) restoring the outcasts, the excluded, then Gentiles, the exiles and the refugees to community.*⁹

No wonder those who practise this way of life get into trouble!

If justice is not such a clear and helpful term as we would wish, what might be an alternative? An obvious response would be *agape* (love). 'Let love be genuine' says Paul, exhorting the Christians in Rome (Rom 12:9). He spells out how the real thing stands in contrast to hypocrisy, repaying evil for evil, taking revenge, being unforgiving, excluding, being unwilling to trust in the work of God.

Who could deny the rightness of such an emphasis—but it leaves many questions begging, not least, what is the practical relationship between love and justice in the realms of social ethics? Here we might turn for a moment to the work of Reinhold Niebuhr, one of the most significant Christian social ethicists of the 20th century. His pastorate in Detroit in the 1930s made him aware of the structural power of sin in society. The theme of original sin became an important one in his theology, a problem he knew would not be solved by easy appeals to love. Love was the ideal, revealed in the cross of Jesus, but social sins called out for justice.

Niebuhr showed how we are willing to do together wrongs that individually we would never do.¹⁰ So the church needed practical wisdom—‘Christian realism’. It finds expression in perhaps Niebuhr’s most famous aphorism: ‘Man’s capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man’s inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary’.¹¹ He is also the author of the prayer, ‘God, give us the grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things that should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other’. Just what is the relationship between love and justice?

It is possible to seek a way of life that withdraws from all these tough and demanding questions, which avoids the struggles of discipleship born of dissent from the social norms because of the claims of the Kingdom of God. It is possible to devise a highly spiritualised form of faith, avoiding the messiness of creation and politics. It is possible to think of salvation that ignores the earthly issues of justice. At least such approaches have been attempted. But, when we start to read the Bible...when we hear the story of Jesus, of vulnerable love for others and resurrection even in the face of what we thought were dead ends...when we are faced by the injustices of the world, the children dying of hunger and war...when we hear Jesus say, ‘You are salt for all the earth’ (Matt 5:13), then discipleship is a very earthly business, an urgent vocation in the purposes of God. ‘He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God’ (Micah 6:8).

Brian Haymes has served as Principal at both Bristol and Northern Baptist Colleges, and his pastorates included Bloomsbury BC. Brian is now retired and living in the north of England.

(see next page for notes to text)

...those who
practise this
[just] way of
life get into
trouble...

Notes to text

1. Paul Donovan, 'Roads to justice and peace', in *The Tablet*, 30 July 2016, p14.
2. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose justice? Which rationality?* London: Duckworth, 1988.
3. See Brian Stanley, *The history of the Baptist Missionary Society 1792-1992*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992, pp70-82.
4. For a fine examination of Martin Luther King's ministry see Richard Lischer, *The preacher King: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Word that moved America*. New York: OUP, 1995.
5. Two helpful books which survey the scene are Karen Lebacqz, *Six theories of justice*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986; Thomas L. Schubeck, *Love that does justice*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2007.
6. Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom? How the church is to behave if freedom, justice and a Christian nation are bad ideas*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1991.
7. Hauerwas, *After Christendom?*, p50.
8. See also the writing of the Baptist scholar James Wm. McClendon, Jr.
9. *Kingdom ethics*, p349.
10. See his important book *Moral man and immoral society*. London: Charles Scribners, 1932.
11. *The children of light and the children of darkness*. New York: Charles Scribners, 1944. p xi. An important study of justice and equity showing the influence of Niebuhr is the book by Michael H. Taylor, *Christ and capital: a family debate*. Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2015.

Interested in the history of Baptist ministry?

You might like to know that we are archiving past issues of *bmj* for research purposes. If you'd like to look back at *bmj* and its predecessor, *The Fraternal*, go to:

http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bmj-05.php

There are some gaps—if you have any old copies that could fill them, then we'd love to hear from you. We can scan an issue and return it to you.

Our grateful thanks go to Rob Bradshaw, who has carefully generated this archive for us.

Love the sojourner

by Helen Paynter

‘MIGRANTS MILKING BRITAIN’S BENEFITS’

‘MIGRANT WORKERS FLOODING BRITAIN’

‘KEEP OUT, BRITAIN IS FULL UP’

‘MIGRANTS SEND OUR CRIME RATE SOARING’

Inflammatory headlines and provocative rhetoric have incited fear and carved deep rifts of division in our society in recent months. But many reasonable, temperate people are also concerned about the impact of immigration on our society. What should be our response to people fleeing the crisis in Syria and beyond? What about economic migration? And how should we, as church, be calling our nation to respond?

These are complex sociological, moral and theological issues. In an attempt to shed some light on—not solve—the matter, I shall consider just one element of Old Testament ethics: the call to hospitality. Books have been written on the subject, so this article seeks simply to highlight a few themes emerging out of one of many texts dealing with the treatment of the ‘resident alien’ or *ger*; here translated ‘sojourner’. Deuteronomy 10:12-11:1 reads as follows:

10. *12 So now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you?—but to fear the Lord your God and to walk in all his ways, and to love him and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13 and to observe the commandments of the Lord, and his ordinances which I am commanding you this day for your good. 14 Look, the heavens and the heaven of heavens are the Lord your God’s, and the earth and all that is in it. 15 Only on your forefathers did the Lord set his heart, loving them, and he chose you, their seed after them, from all the peoples, as it is this day. 16 So circumsise*

the foreskin of your heart, and no longer stiffen your neck.

17 For the Lord your God, he is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great and mighty and awesome God, who does not lift up faces [show favouritism] and does not take bribes, 18 executing justice for the orphan and the widow, and loving the sojourner, giving him bread and clothing. 19 So you, love the sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.

20 The Lord your God you shall fear, him you shall serve, to him you shall cleave, and by his name you shall swear. 21 He is your praise and he is your God, who has done these great and awesome things for you that your eyes have seen. 22 With seventy souls your fathers went down to Egypt, and now the Lord your God has established you like the stars in the heavens as to number. 11. I Love the Lord your God, observe his requirements, and his ordinances, and his law and his commandment always.¹

These verses form part of a wider oration in the mouth of Moses, calling the people of Israel to covenant obedience. It is important to take it within the context of this wider setting. Nonetheless, if we take a closer look at this section in its own right (which does not break where our translations often suggest), then its literary structure is helpful in teasing out some of the important themes it is drawing to our notice. As we read it attentively, we discover that one of the central commands, ‘love the sojourner’ (v19a), is contained within a concentric ‘onion-skin’ of layers, as shown in the table below. We will consider these layers one at a time.

Fear, love, serve, observe	Creation, election	The LORD loves the sojourner	‘Love the so- journer’	You were sojourn- ers	Down to Egypt, multipli- cation to a nation	Fear, serve, love, observe
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Covenant and narrative

First, note the recurrence of the key words ‘fear’, ‘serve’, ‘observe’ and ‘love’. They occur both at the beginning of the passage (vv12-13) and at the end (10:20-11:1). This is suggestive of an *inclusion*—a pair of literary bookends—which frames the verses it contains. This injunction to fear the Lord, love him, serve him, and to observe his commandments is, of course, an appeal to the covenant. At Sinai, the covenant is expressed in terms of obedience to God: ‘If you obey my voice’ (Ex 19:5); ‘Everything that the has spoken we will do’ (Ex 19:8; 24:3). The covenantal rewards in Leviticus are framed in the same terms, ‘If you follow my statutes and keep my commandments, and observe them faithfully...’ (Lev 26:3), as is the Deuteronomic

reiteration of the covenant (Deut 29:9,29; 30:2). This linkage of covenantal obedience and ethical responsibility to the poor and foreigner is not surprising: obedience to God is never divorced from the responsibility towards those in need. The themes are intertwined throughout the Torah, and in the prophets. (See, for example, virtually the whole of Amos.)

Second, within this *inclusio* is a potted narrative of God's dealings with Israel to date: a hint at creation (v14), election (v15), the going down to Egypt (v22), growth from a family to a nation (v22), and a suggestion of the deliverance from Egypt (the 'great and awesome things' of v21; this is spelled out more fully in 11:3-4). Embedded within the heart of this narrative is the ethical command to Israel to be particularly attentive towards the orphan, the widow, and the sojourner.

It is striking how often within the Torah the actions of God towards Israel are provided as a rationale for an imperative towards them. Time and again we read the words 'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt. (See, for example, Ex 20:2; Lev 22:33; Deut 5:6.) God's deliverance of his people from Egypt is a story which is told and retold throughout the Hebrew Bible, and it is annually rehearsed, retold, and re-inhabited at the feast of unleavened bread and Passover meal, as instructed in Exodus 13, to which sojourners were invited (Ex 12:48).

Let me draw these two threads together. As a people of God with our own (new) covenant meal, at which we also rehearse, retell and re-inhabit the gracious, saving, acts of God, how often do we include, or even bear in mind, an ethical responsibility towards the poor as we break bread together? What might our meal look like if we did? Alasdair MacIntyre, Christian ethicist, describes how the rehearsal of narrative and the characteristic practices which shape the community of the church (of which the Lord's Supper is, of course, the prime example) result in the formation of virtues within the community.² Gratitude at being recipients of grace should provoke generosity and welcome. The formation and re-formation of the community of the forgiven, where no one is fed on an inside track or receives butter on their bread or a better vintage of wine, engenders humility and grace. The eschatological dimension of the meal loosens our attachment to what is 'mine'.

The third layer of the embeddedness of the 'sojourner' command is in its immediate textual proximity. Israel is to love the sojourner (v19a) both because God loves the sojourner (v18), and because Israel herself was once a nation of sojourners (v19b).

The Lord your God...loving the sojourner, giving him bread and clothing.

So you, love the sojourner

for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.

There are two key elements here, clearly. First there is the clear example of God to follow. Second, there is the appeal to Israel's own experience of dislocation.

The hospitable God

Israel's responsibility towards the foreigner in her midst arises from her overriding imperative to be like the God she serves. As Leviticus 19:2 puts it, 'Be holy, for I am holy'; words echoed by Jesus in Matthew 5:48, 'Be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect'. Christopher Wright terms this 'reflective holiness'.³

The wider biblical narrative reveals to us a hospitable God. Genesis 1-3 shows creation itself as a supreme act of hospitality, where God places Adam and Eve into the garden which he has prepared for them, providing for their needs; a process which risks (and results in) the disruption of his own plans.

Israel is the prime recipient of God's hospitality. The eisodus—the colonisation of the land of Canaan—is expressed in such terms:

When the Lord your God brings you to the land which he promised to your fathers... great and good cities which you did not build, houses full of all good things which you did not accumulate, hewn wells which you did not hew, vineyards and olive grows which you did not plant... (Deut 6:10-11)

Yet as we return to Deuteronomy 10, despite the clear description of God's election of Israel in v15 ('Only on your forefathers did the Lord set his heart, loving them, and he chose you, their seed after them, from all the peoples, as it is this day.'), God is also (v17) described as one who shows no partiality and is incorruptible. This incorruptible impartiality is expressed in an inclination towards the orphan, the widow and the sojourner. In fact, this theme of God's intention to include the nations in his blessing runs richly through the Hebrew Bible.⁴ Perhaps the classic example is in Isaiah 2 (also in Micah 4):

*It shall be, at the end of days, it will be established
the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be at the head of the mountains,
and it shall be lifted up above the hills;
and all nations shall stream to it.
And many peoples will come, and they will say,
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord
to the house of the God of Jacob;
and let him teach us of his ways
and let us walk in his paths.'
For out of Zion will proceed instruction
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.*

There is a key phrase in both the passages we have considered above, which perhaps

provides a clue to how this 'reflective holiness' might look. Deuteronomy 10:12 says Israel is to 'fear the LORD your God and to walk in all his ways'; in a surprising development, Isaiah 2:1 anticipates the pagan nations saying 'let him teach us of his ways, and let us walk in his paths'.

This walking in the ways of the LORD has an inescapable ethical element, as summarised by Micah (6:8) 'What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and love mercy and to walk humbly with your God'. But we should not, I think, conceive this simply in terms of following a pre-prescribed set of moral codes. Rather, we might imagine God, Wenceslas-like, treading footprints of compassion, grace and justice, into which we are invited to place our own, tentative steps. Or, to use a more biblical analogy, we could turn to the book of Proverbs, where Lady Wisdom is described in very physical terms, holding out her hands in the market place to guide the steps of those who would be wise (1:20-24). This reflective holiness is a cooperative venture, a journey of mercy and justice walked in the company of the One who (in Jesus) has, quite literally, already travelled it.

Experience of dislocation

The second motivation for Israel to be hospitable to the sojourner is because she herself was once a sojourner in Egypt. This is an echo of the injunctions in Exodus 22:21; 23:9 and Leviticus 19:34, each appealing to the community recollection of the sojourn in Egypt. It is enacted in Deuteronomy 26:1-11, where the feast of first-fruits—shared with the sojourner—is celebrated with the liturgical declaration, 'A wandering Aramean was my father. And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there'.

Baptist Christians in Croatia have demonstrated their understanding of this imperative in recent months. Experiencing the overwhelming influx of Syrian refugees through Croatia in September 2015, many of them recalled their own history of fleeing the Balkan wars of the 1990s, and responded with an upsurge of practical love. Mobilising incredibly fast, they organised a very effective collection and distribution of essential supplies for the refugees.⁵ Indeed, when the borders closed, diverting the refugees elsewhere, many of them relocated to Greece to continue with their relief efforts.

Of course societal recollection can extend beyond the memory of a life-span. Jan Assmann has written of how communities remember their narratives, 'The concept of cultural memory comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals[...] whose "cultivation" serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image'.⁶ Again, we can see how the Passover feast (Ex 12 and 13) and the Lord's Supper both function in this capacity. As we participate, those of us who are Gentile Christians are reminded that we are ingrafted into the vine; that we have been received as an act of hospitality.

Further, for those of us who are native-born British, as we confront the issue of immigration into the UK, the rehearsal of our own family histories (if we could but look back far enough) would reveal that each one of us is the descendent of immigrants. The recent emergence of DNA ancestry testing is making this clear, if simple mathematics and history do not.

Additionally, this appeal to the understanding of what it is to be a sojourner is a direct appeal to the imagination. As a society, our collective compassion was powerfully awakened in response to the lifeless body of little Aylan Kurdi washing up on a Greek beach in September 2015. Suddenly the anonymous ‘problem’ of mass migration had a tragic, human face. Such a correlation of our imagination with the statistics and headlines has the potential to connect us to our modern-day sojourners in a transforming way. How might the church serve through word and action to facilitate their humanising before the wider society?

Conclusion

Deuteronomy 10:12-11:1 raises ethical challenges which surely bite as fiercely today as they did when they were first received by the people of Israel. The dual imperative to emulate the character of God and to identify with the sojourner should strike a particular resonance with Christian readers, who are followers of the One who faithfully represented God to his alienated people while utterly identifying with them. The very concrete Hebrew practices of festival celebration and liturgical rehearsal of story allowed the people to indwell their narrative, even generations later; a narrative in which was embedded a pressing summons to hospitality. In just the same way, we—the inheritors of the greater story which encompasses and develops it—are drawn into the rehearsal of our narrative through the practices of the church. May they lead us into virtue.

Helen Paynter is Associate Minister at Victoria Park BC, Bristol; and Research Fellow at Bristol Baptist College.

Notes to text

1. Translation is my own.
2. N. Murphy, B.J. Kallenburg & M.T. Nation, *Virtues and practices in the Christian tradition: Christian ethics after MacIntyre*. Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 1997.
3. C.J.H. Wright, *Old Testament ethics for the people of God*. Leicester: IVP, 2004, pp38ff.
4. It cannot, of course, be denied that alongside this hospitality is the strong theme, particularly in the Pentateuch and Joshua, of the ethical danger of the ‘nations’ around

Israel, requiring—at times—drastic measures to eliminate this danger. These texts are outside the scope of the current paper. It is, however, helpful to note that even in the midst of the highly charged destruction of Jericho, the prostitute Rahab is redeemed from the burning city through faith in the Lord, and is welcomed into the covenant community in an act of surprising hospitality. With regard to the texts of ‘absolute destruction’, the interested reader is referred to such helpful treatments as Paul Copan’s *Is God a moral monster? Making sense of the Old Testament God*, or the collaborative work *Show them no mercy: 4 views on God and Canaanite genocide*, C.S. Cowles & Eugene H. Merrill (eds). I have also written on the subject: see the conference paper *Herem and the Deuteronomist: a response to Walter Moberly’s Old Testament theology*, pp53-76, which can be viewed at https://www.academia.edu/26185672/Herem_and_the_Deuteronomist_A_Response_to_Walter_Moberly_s_Old_Testament_Theology_pp.53-76.

5. You can read an account of the response of the Croatian Baptists to the refugee crisis in an open letter jointly from the President and General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Croatia here: <http://www.ebf.org/failid/File/migration%20crisis/Croatia%20-%20Report%20on%20the%20work%20with%20refugees.pdf>

6. J. Assmann, ‘Collective memory and cultural identity’ in *New German Critique no 65: Cultural history/cultural studies*, transl by J. Czaplicka, Duke University Press, 1995, pp125-133.

Psalms and Hymns Support Fund

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Doctrinal ethics

by John Colwell

The brief was to write something on the relationship between doctrine and ethics but, thus expressed, the request itself suggests a distinction and separation that is already erroneous and unhelpful, as if the two were merely related subdisciplines, as if doctrine merely had ethical implications, as if ethics merely derived from doctrinal presuppositions, as if the claim ‘Jesus is Lord’ were not, in and of itself, both a doctrinal and an ethical claim.

Of course, it is entirely possible to approach doctrine and ethics as if they indeed were discrete disciplines—and one could argue that such a separation has been commonplace in the western church since the late Middle Ages. One can study doctrine in a detached manner, tracing the development and conflict of ideas simply as a matter of historical interest, debating the interpretation of texts, both biblical and historical, without ever exposing oneself to be interpreted by those texts, scanning the pages of scripture to extract dogmatic propositions with little reference to the defining and demanding essence of those narratives.

Similarly ethics can be studied with minimal reference to doctrine. We can pursue ideals of justice, mercy, rights and obligations while noting in passing that Jesus calls us to love one another; and without ever pausing to recognise that such virtues or values, in practice, are somewhat less than objective and universally acknowledged, tending to be specific to particular communities with their distinctive and diverse histories, traditions, and cultures.

God’s creation

Now, I happen to believe in an underlying objectivity of justice *etc*, but I do so solely because I believe this world to be God’s creation, created in Christ, through Christ, and for Christ. It is the character of Christ, underlying and ordering creation, that roots the possibility of an underlying universal justice *etc*, but this Christ in whom, through whom, and for whom all things are created is a person—not a principle or a series of principles. He is none other than the person narrated in the gospel story and present by his Spirit in the life of the disciple, in the life of the church, in the life of the world.

My problem with so much that passes as Christian ethics is that it is explicitly Christian

barely as an afterthought. But correspondingly my problem with so much that passes as Christian doctrine is that it merely propositional, omitting to recognise that, as gospel, the story of Jesus is command or, perhaps better, invitation—and this in two corresponding respects.

In the first place, Christian faith recognises Jesus as truly God. The claim is usually affirmed with reference to the titles accorded to him in the gospels and epistles, with reference to the authority he claims and exercises within the narrative, with reference to the stark manner in which Old Testament texts are applied to him, and (most significantly) with reference to the fact that he is worshipped as the Father is worshipped. All this is entirely valid but might it not rather miss the point, assuming as it does that what it means to be God is defined independently in some other place and that Jesus can be affirmed as conforming to this definition? Might not the matter be entirely the other way around: not just that Jesus is truly God but that the true God is none other than the one who encounters us in Jesus?

Jesus of Nazareth is none other than the true God made flesh. He is the Word who not only was with God but who was God in (and from) the very beginning. God has made himself known in our history in various ways, through the Torah and through the prophets, but Jesus himself is God's ultimate and definitive Word, the shining out of God's glory, the precise expression of God's essence and character.

The Son, the Spirit, and the Father may be distinct identities (subsistences) but they share one nature, one character. There is no God other than the one who encounters us in Jesus, no God of wrath lurking behind a God of mercy, no inscrutable will of God behind or beyond this will and word made flesh. God is not divided either in his attributes or his distinct persons: he is eternally who he is here, constantly, unchangeably. All that God may have said before through law and prophets must now be understood through what he has definitively said here; the shadow may inform our understanding of the reality but the shadow must yield to the reality, for us now it has and can have no independent and discrete validity or authority. It is God as defined here whose name is to be hallowed on earth as in heaven. It is the kingdom of God as he is defined here that is to come on earth as in heaven. It is the will of God as defined in Jesus of Nazareth that is to be done on earth as in heaven—he has no other or rival will.

In the second place, this single person who is truly God is simultaneously, wholly, and correspondingly truly human. Once again our instinctive apologetic impulse is to defend the true humanity of Jesus against its persistent docetic deniers, to affirm that he was truly human, genuinely hungry, genuinely weary, that he really wept at the tomb of Lazarus, that he really did die on the cross. We engage in important, though often detached, debates concerning whether the Son assumes fallen or unfallen

humanity, humanity as it was intended to be or humanity as he found it.

Moreover, we understandably assume that we are on safer, less arrogant ground here: we may not know who God is other than by revelation but surely we know what it is to be human on account of being human ourselves. But this assumption is as fallacious as the first and in some senses more so: God truly has made himself known in the past through his prophetic history with Israel, whereas our knowledge of what it means to be human is rooted solely in its distortion. It is entirely valid and necessary to defend the claim that Jesus was (and is) truly human but surely it is far more theologically and ethically significant to confess that what it means to be truly human, just as what it means to be truly God, is defined ultimately here, in this single person as narrated in the gospel story?

For Jesus to be truly human, for true humanity to be defined in him, means in the first place that only in him do we really come to understand the full seriousness, the utter lostness, the desperate rejectedness, of our own sinful position. As Karl Barth so succinctly expressed it: 'In that He takes our place it is decided what our place is' (Karl Barth, *CD IV/1*, p240). The cross, the darkness, the cry of desolation (the only instance where Jesus prays as man to God rather than as Son to Father), all this is my place not his—but I only come to recognise and confess it as my place through his taking that place for me.

We can follow the tradition in defining sin as that which we have not done and ought to have done together with that which we have done and ought not to have done, but that the one who knew no sin was made sin for us identifies the reality and depth of sin as a far deeper problem than any that could be addressed by a change of behaviour or any number of self-improvement therapies. All this may appear to have little directly to do with ethics yet, in practice, so much ethical reasoning (as Luther observed) has been driven by the desire for self-justification (*ie* can I be excused or justified for acting in such a way?). Inasmuch as humanity is defined in the place that Jesus takes for us there can be no room whatsoever for any form of excuse or casuistic self-justification—however ethics may be described or defined, an authentically Christian ethics can never take this form nor be motivated in this manner.

In the second place, for true humanity to be defined truly and ultimately in Jesus determines that this is the humanity that God chooses, the humanity in which we are invited to participate by the Spirit.

Perhaps the first doctrinal and ethical conclusion we should draw in company with the Apostle Paul in Galatians 3:28 is that since God has defined humanity in the single person of Jesus there can then be no other theologically and ethically valid definition of humanity. All humanity is defined here beyond distinctions of ethnicity, economics, or gender. Again with Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:16ff, we now have no warrant whatsoever to comprehend any single person other than one who has been defined by the humanity of

Christ. God has only one definition of humanity and there can be no valid place within the church for alternative definitions.

Since what it means to be truly human is defined ultimately in the person of Jesus, since this is the humanity God chooses and ultimately intends, then the humanity of Jesus must be recognised as God's ultimate command or invitation—this is the humanity to which we are called, this is who we truly are, this is that which we are called to become, this is the reality with which we are invited to live consistently.

Christians have debated the continuing pertinence of OT law—and such debates reveal that the matter is far more complex than all proof-text reactions would assume—but Jesus of Nazareth is God's ultimate word, God's ultimate command, God's ultimate invitation. OT law, like OT stories, may well inform our understanding of Jesus, but conversely they must now be understood wholly and exclusively as interpreted in him and thereby their provisionality and particularity must be recognised (as addressed to and understood by a particular people in a particular time). I have little time for rubber wristbands but, seriously understood, the question 'What would Jesus do?' is the most profoundly Christian ethical question: can I kill in Jesus' name; can I discriminate against anyone in Jesus' name; can I turn a blind eye to poverty in Jesus' name; can I betray another in Jesus' name; can I ever act unfaithfully in Jesus' name; can I in any way exploit the created world in the name of the one in whom, through whom, and for whom it was created?

None of this, of course, in any way diminishes the force of the ethical dilemmas that confront us on a daily basis: this world is not yet as God ultimately intends it to be and over and over again we are faced with desperate situations where the absolute best is simply not available and where to choose to do nothing is often the most disastrous choice we can make. Moreover, we too are not yet as God ultimately intends us to be—or rather, we are and we are not at the same time but in different senses: we are already defined by the humanity of Jesus; already through baptism and by the Spirit we participate in his true humanity; already we are called to be as he is within the world (1 John 4:17)—but God has not finished with us or in us yet; we are not yet what we shall be. In a society where we are so often defined by our past or our present—our family, our background, our education, our employment, our salary—disciples of Jesus are defined by their future even though that future is qualified by a 'not yet'.

Consequently, as daily we are confronted by dilemmas that remain inevitable in a world that is not yet as God ultimately intends, we respond as those invited to live consistently with the true humanity that is revealed in Jesus, the true humanity that is God's invitation to us in him, the true humanity that we will be and, by God's grace, already is our true identity. Ethical reasoning that is not rooted theologically and christologically will generally tend to respond to ethical dilemmas as discrete issues in

themselves, as if our lives were an unconnected series of ethical decisions. But as disciples of Jesus we should recognise our lives as connected and continuous narratives that gain their shape and significance from the humanity of Jesus, the humanity in which we have come to participate, the humanity which even now is the authentic definition of our lives. The valid ethical question, then, ought not to be what is right or wrong here (for inevitably every dilemma will involve a mixture of the two) but rather what response is consistent and coherent as one whose life is being shaped in this way, as one who is invited to live as he is in this world.

Lest this all sounds irredeemably individualistic, let us always remember that the Jesus who is narrated to us through the gospel story is similarly narrated to us through the life of the church; that the church is his body, the principle means by his Spirit of his continuing promised presence; that the church is the living rendering of this continuing narrative. We do not decide or live in isolation but in connectedness and accountability. What it means to live consistently as those defined by God in Christ, rather than the world, is that which we are being called to discover ever more deeply with one another. Inevitably in that journeying together we may sometimes disagree concerning that which truly is consistent with the humanity into which we are being invited—but perhaps the manner in which we continue to journey together through the tensions of such disagreements is itself one of the deepest measures of our doctrinal and ethical consistency.

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What's love got to do with it?

by Dave Gregory

In 2013, I travelled to Peru to meet BMS World Mission worker Laura Lee-Lovering, a soil scientist working in environmental mission initiatives. We visited Punchanna, a community on the edge of the city of Iquitos on the banks of the Amazon, comprised of wooden houses raised on silts, connected by flimsy wooden walk ways. It was the dry season, yet still the ground under these homes was a thick gooey mud. Six months earlier during the wet season the entire area was flooded by muddy, rubbish strewn water.

This seasonal flooding arises from intense thunder storms combined with melt water from Andean glaciers. In 2012, the floods were higher than usual, the water level marked on the side of one house by a dark line. Coming through the floor of the houses, some residents sought refuge in Punchanna Baptist Church whose floor was higher.

Local and global awareness

Stories of extreme weather are now common in the media, giving a human face to climate change. The 2014 Synthesis Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)¹ states that globally, 'human influence on the climate system is clear...Anthropogenic² greenhouse gases...are extremely likely³ to have been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-twentieth century'. On regional and local scales, identification of the impact of climate change with any certainty remains challenging, especially those concerning the water cycle. Nevertheless, the IPCC report concludes that that over Central and South America, there is 'very high' confidence that increases in extremes of rainfall and melting of Andean glaciers over the past 50 years is linked to human greenhouse gases.

When Laura raises climate change with people around Iquitos, there is little awareness of local extremes being connected to the global environment issue. Among the island communities on the other side of the Pacific however, there is greater awareness. The 2007 Pacific Conference of Churches⁴ deplored 'the actions of industrialised countries that pollute and desecrate our Oceania', calling upon 'our brothers and sisters in Christ...to act in solidarity with us to reduce the causes of human induced climate change...particularly...churches in highly industrialised nations'.

These local stories illustrate a key conclusion of the review conducted by Lord Stern which considered the cost of climate change to the world economy, present and future;⁵ 'The impacts of climate change are not evenly distributed—the poorest countries and

people will suffer the earliest and most'. Climate change, however, is not only a scientific or economic matter. It is an ethical issue, one that involves the relationship between rich and poor.

Biblical authors often comment on the injustice that often characterises such relationships. Climate change ethics is complicated in that it concerns not only current relationships, but those past and future. As with other issues, such as the continuing injustice over the legacy of slavery, climate change is a multi-generational matter. What responsibility does today's generation have for actions of previous generations, whose use of fossil fuels over the past century have resulted in the rise of greenhouse gases? Do current generations have a moral responsibility to those yet unborn?

Consideration of ethics in connection with climate change also needs to go beyond the 'locality' of human relationships to a 'global' holistic scale. While the UN Millennium Development Goals aimed at alleviating poverty and economic injustice, in the face of climate change Griggs⁶ and others suggest a broader framework of Sustainable Development Goals is needed: 'that meets the needs of the present while safeguarding Earth's life-support system, on which the welfare of current and future generations depends'. Humanity is a part of the living system that is the Earth—the Biosphere⁷—we rely upon Earth for sustaining life as well as being an agent within the system. Because of human actions, the biosphere is subject to rapid change of climate regimes, at rates 100 times those appearing in the geological record, leaving ecosystems struggling to adapt and reducing biodiversity. Climate change ethics must concern not only the flourishing of humanity but the whole creation.

Games, Star Trek and cautious love

Within western culture, three ethical frameworks have arisen: rule-based, utilitarian and virtue ethics. In framing an ethical approach to climate change, what insights might these frameworks offer?

Rule-based ethics, originating within the thought of Kant, seek to establish rational rules that shape right action. Arguably, various biblical texts suggest a basis for rules governing humanities relationship to the environment. In Leviticus, farmers are instructed not to 'gather the gleanings of your harvest (but) leave them for the poor and the alien' (Lev 23:22)—providing for the poor, but also suggesting limits to the economic productivity shaped by a concern for the environment. Similarly, Northcott⁸ draws on the Sabbath as the starting point for climate change ethics, suggesting the Sabbath rest of the land every seven years indicates that human economic systems should account for their impact upon the environment.

Attempts over the past 20 years to produce international agreements to limit the growth of greenhouse gases might be viewed within the context of rule-based ethics. However,

different levels of economic development, unequal power structures between nations, and a fear of agreeing to rules that might affect one group disproportionately has created difficulty in agreeing the rules by which the climate change game should be played!

From a wider perspective, while the biblical narrative provides wisdom for local practice, how might such wisdom be extended globally? Scientific understanding of the global climate system is incomplete. While experience of local communities rooted in place through time provides insight, not all the rules are known and may vary across climate regimes and associated ecosystems. While humanity is commissioned 'to work (the Garden of Eden) and take care of the Earth' (Gen 2:15), this is not governed by a fixed set rules such as in a game like football. Rather, the rules are discovered as the game played! While scientific research continues to map out natural rules that govern the planet, such knowledge alone appears inadequate. Even with such knowledge, political discourse may still fail in defining a moral basis that lead to both human and environmental flourishing.

Utilitarian ethics derives from the work of Mills in the 19th century, becoming dominant in ethical discourse through the 20th century. Its heart is captured by a scene in *Star Trek 2: The Wrath of Kahn*. Spock, having saved the Enterprise at the cost of his own life, explains to Kirk 'The needs of the many outweighs the needs of the few, or the one'. Here are resonances with the Christian notion of sacrifice, particularly Jesus' death on the cross. Yet, this was a free choice. A danger with this approach is that sacrifice is imposed on the few, or those who are perceived to have the smallest voice or value.

Who are the many and the few? Most global emissions of greenhouse gases to date have been the responsibility of the industrialised nations since the beginning of the industrial revolution 200 years ago. Should the current generations of these nations, who today only comprise a sixth of the global human population yet still emit over 50% of current greenhouse gas emissions, take the lead for the good of the many? Or should more be expected of a rapidly developing country like China whose yearly emissions now exceed those of the previous largest emitter, the US. Then again, how should the largest emitters be categorised? On a per capita basis, the emissions of the Chinese are only a quarter of the Americans; those of the Peruvians a fifth of the Chinese?

Such questions have proved difficult to untangle, an indication that on a global scale, utilitarian ethics is unequal to the task of providing a moral framework for action. While the 2015 Paris Agreement currently being ratified by governments around the world is a positive step in limiting human impacts on climate. Yet for some of the 'many' it may come too late. Being non-binding, individual nations are able to set their own path to reduced emissions, deciding who the many and who the few are from their 'local' perspective. Even in a globally connected world, the needs of the many whose lives appear distant from the few can seem less pressing.

What too of future generations? Reluctance among historical greenhouse emitting nations to take a lead because of current economic considerations questions again the

efficacy of utilitarian ethics. The economic costs of climate change upon future generations are also uncertain. Stern assumed that the cost borne by subsequent generations over the next century will only slowly decline from the cost of action in the near future. Yet this assumption is challenged by others. Does it make sense, they ask, to commit £100 today when in 50 years, because of economic growth and technological innovation, the cost will only be £50?

From a wider perspective, should the many and the few be determined by human considerations alone? Humanity becomes the few when the whole range of species are considered. Nor is humanity an external agent, its flourishing depending upon the wellbeing of the planet. Indeed the biblical creation narratives imply that God gives humanity a role in the nurture of creation, suggesting from a Christian perspective that a utilitarian approach to the environment should include a consideration of all life. If human actions lead to human flourishing at the expense of environmental degradation, utilitarian ethics will reach different conclusions depending upon whether humanity or the whole biosphere are central to debate.

Virtue ethics has a long history stemming back to the ancient Greeks, particularly Aristotle, although the work of Aquinas in the western medieval period gave it a Christian slant. While virtue has been variously defined depending upon culture, philosophy and religion, it seeks to define those characteristics of human beings and their relationships that lead to flourishing of existence. Recognising the inadequate response to the climate crisis at an international level, recently Hume⁹ (among others) has suggested that virtue—'what is a good life'—might enable an adequate response to climate change to be developed.

The work of Deane-Drummond¹⁰ has previously taken a virtue approach to considerations of environmental ethics, from a basis in wisdom arising from God's being, revelation and incarnation. In contrast, ecofeminist approaches have held love as the key virtue, expressed in terms of practical caring and nurturing, often explored within Lovelock's Gaia¹¹ hypothesis. Gaia stresses the interconnection and balance of life in sustaining the climate of the earth so it remains conducive to the flourishing of life, although not necessarily focused upon humanity.

Yet, Christian care for the environment is not rooted in self-preservation, but in God's revelation that the world is good. Declarations within the wisdom literature such as Job demonstrate the importance of creation to God, while the psalmists' praise, responding to beauty, is a sign of sharing in God's appreciation. Jesus, whose incarnation affirms the goodness of creation, affirmed that the greatest commandment of the Jewish Torah was to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Loving God perhaps implies we should love what he loves, including God's 'good'.

However, which epoch of creation are we to love? Notions of stewardship, common in Christian environmental discourse, suggest a focus upon preservation of the present

ecosystem. Perhaps a naïve hope, given that we do not fully appreciate the rules of the game nor possess the necessary agency. Yet the Earth's climate is not static, but undergoes periodic transitions. Over the past million years, ten ice ages have defined the dominant climate of the Earth, periods when the northern polar ice caps have extended across much of the northern parts of North America, Europe and Asia. Interglacials, warm periods between ice ages when the polar icecaps retreat, such as the one in which human culture has flourished, are transient features in the recent history of the Earth. While ice ages may not seem conducive to human flourishing, other parts of the ecosystem may thrive.

The chief virtue for Aquinas was not love but prudence—'practical wisdom'—calling for living within natural law defined as 'the good to be done and sought'. While a full understanding of the climate system is lacking, perhaps alongside the notion of love constraining human impacts upon the climate, prudence too might help frame an ethical response. Prudence may suggest the wisdom of taking note of recent historic bounds and natural rates of climatic variation, calling for human influence to fall within these, so allowing humanity and other species to adapt as they have done in the past.

What's love got to do with it?

The renowned Australian naturalist Flannery at the close of *Here on Earth: a new beginning*¹², suggests that 'if we do not strive to love one another, and to love our planet as much as we love ourselves, then no further progress is possible here on earth'. Speaking from a non-Christian perspective, these words draw upon the second part of the greatest commandment narratives in the New Testament—'love your neighbour as yourself' (Mark 12:31)—not a separate command, but an outworking of the call to love God brought alive within our relationships.

The initial context of the command was a less globalised world. Practically outworking love for neighbour in an age of global climate change needs both local and global perspectives. Local—in that an ethical response involves personal responsibility and choice: how we travel; the energy we use in our homes; how and where the food we buy is produced and comes from; how we value the natural against the built environment; how we engage in political debate that shapes local, national and global policies.

Alongside this, global awareness is needed. Greenhouse gases know no national boundaries. This year, far from the industrialised nations, measurements at Mauna Loa Observatory in Hawaii (the reference for the rise of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere) show carbon dioxide levels reaching 400 parts per million from 280 at the start of the 19th century. Yet again here, perhaps local concern is needed. Stories of Pacific islanders or those living in the Peruvian Amazon are a reminder of climate change's human and ecological impacts. Agencies such as BMS World Mission through its Worth

Saving programme keep such ‘local’ stories in the vision of those in faraway nations who to date bear the brunt of the responsibility for climate change, perhaps bringing a challenge as Jesus did long ago in the story of the Samaritan caring for a hurting, broken stranger in response to the questions ‘who is my neighbour?’ Yes, perhaps ‘cautious love’—love of neighbour shaped by prudent action working within the limits of a constantly changing creation that God declares good, will enable a sustainable future for humanity and for the whole earth within God’s purpose.

Dave Gregory is Senior Minister of Croxley Green BC. He was previously involved in meteorological and climate research before training for ministry at Regent’s.

Notes to text

1. Climate Change 2014 Synthesis Report, World Meteorological Organisation, 2015.
2. Anthropogenic greenhouse gases refer to the gases—such as carbon dioxide and methane—whose concentrations are increasing as a result of human activities.
3. The IPCC defines ‘extremely likely’ as meaning the probability of the statement being true as between 95 and 100%.
4. Quoted in *Hope in God’s future: Christian discipleship in the context of climate change*, Joint Report of the Workshop on Climate Change, Methodist Publishing, 2009.
5. The Stern Review, *The economics of climate change: executive summary*. At http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/sternreview_index.htm.
6. D.J. Griggs *et al*, *Sustainable development goals for people and planet*. Nature, 2013.
7. Biosphere refers to the global ecological system of all living things and relationships, including their interaction with the atmosphere, oceans and solid earth.
8. M.S. Northcott, *A moral climate: the ethics of climate change*. London: DLT, 2007.
9. M. Hume, *Climate change and virtue: an apologetic*. *Humanities*, **3**, 2014.
10. C.E. Deane-Drummond, *The ethics of nature*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004.
11. Gaia describes the hypothesis that through the long history of the Earth, in response to internally and externally influenced climate change, life acts to maintain a climate that is conducive to its propagation and flourishing in some form.
12. T. Flannery, *Here on Earth: a new beginning*. Allen Lane, 2010.

Dignity when dying

by Michael Peat

During the past year, Bristol Museum put on an exhibition exploring different cultural and contemporary responses to death, including the ethics of legalising assisted dying. *Death: the human experience* included a recreation of a room at the Dignitas clinic in Switzerland, where people from various countries (including the UK) with incurable, typically terminal, illnesses have received professional help to end their life. While inside this installation, visitors could listen on headphones to recordings of the last moments of life of some of the clinic's clients. Sitting in identical surroundings, with headphones blocking out ambient noise so that all you could hear were the voices of those involved, it was hard not to imagine you were actually present in those moments. You could hear the attendant making sure the client knew the drugs being offered would surely kill him, and checking repeatedly that he wanted to take them. You could also hear the frail voice of someone about to end his life, confirming his wishes, responding to loved ones around him, asking for the music he wished to hear to be switched on. Like others in the group with which I went to the exhibition, I found the experience intense and emotionally challenging; not an experience I am in any hurry to repeat!

But the fact that such an experience may be hard to witness does not necessarily mean that it is morally objectionable. One way of making sense of why Christians have disagreed amongst themselves about assisted dying is to recognise that this scene, for all its emotional intensity, has been perceived by many in positive terms. It presents us, at least where terminal illness is involved, with a person who knows his or her death is close, and who in the face of it seeks to determine the precise moment of their death so that they can ensure they die surrounded by loved ones and in an environment tailored to their vision of a peaceful ending. Paul Badham, a Christian advocate of voluntary euthanasia, suggests that legalised assisted dying would allow religious people to have a 'prayerful death', which includes the opportunity to say goodbye to family and friends and receive last rites, enabling spiritual preparation for death.¹ This is one reason why, as far as Badham is concerned, helping someone to die rather than enduring agonising and incurable suffering expresses love for a vulnerable neighbour. He also claims that it witnesses to Christian hope for eternal life by showing a willingness to relinquish a burdensome life, because a better future is anticipated.²

The possibility of legalising assisted dying in the UK has been debated in both Houses of Parliament in recent years, and the accompanying media attention has brought forth

opposing views from high profile Christian leaders. Two previous Archbishops of Canterbury, George Carey and Rowan Williams, offered contrary perspectives on the topic. But for each, upholding an understanding of human dignity is the heart of the matter. Carey confessed that the change of heart which led him to support assisted dying to end ‘unbearable pain’ was provoked when, on witnessing Tony Nicklinson’s struggle with locked-in syndrome, he wondered, ‘had I put doctrine before compassion, dogma before human dignity?’³ Williams, on the other hand, questions the veracity of the view of human dignity that affirming voluntary euthanasia entails, namely that ‘when I as an individual can no longer give meaning to my life, it has no value, and human dignity is best served by ending it’.⁴ The debate about voluntary euthanasia reveals that the very definition of ‘human dignity’ is controversial.

My aim in the remainder of this paper is to offer some thoughts about a theological account of ‘human dignity’, indicating points at which it gives direction to Christians considering the morality of assisted dying. In doing so, my aim is not primarily to be directive, that is, to lay out my personal opinions about what Christians should think about the morality of assisted dying (although no doubt a hint of these will come through at times). Rather, it is to outline theological resources that should ground any Christian reasoning about this topic: I am mainly concerned here with how to think about what to think about assisted dying.

To begin with, I will restate a point often made by theologians who write about bioethics: the prevailing value system influencing contemporary moral debate accords priority to autonomy, that is, to the freedom to choose what happens to us with minimal interference from external factors. ‘Human dignity’, according to this way of thinking, is inextricably bound up with our capacity to be decision-makers: ‘Value resides not in what we decide, but in that we decide’.⁵ Therefore, from this perspective, our dignity diminishes as our capacity to enact our choices shrinks, which is a consequence of degenerative illness, for example. Voluntary euthanasia, as the name suggests, brings our dying into the arena of choice as much as possible, and thus an understanding of human dignity that prioritises autonomy logically equates ‘dying with dignity’ with maximising ‘dying when and how we choose’.

Of course, the apostle Paul’s claim that ‘your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit’ such that ‘you are not your own’ but rather ‘bought with a price’ offers one of the more glaring indications that a biblical perspective casts doubt on any account of human dignity governed by self-determination.⁶ Martin Luther’s gospel-centred account of human dignity reveals several vital constituents which challenge the vision described above, and in doing so offers an important place to start for Christians considering the morality of euthanasia in any form.⁷

For Luther, human dignity is grounded in our being justified by faith through God’s grace. It can only properly be comprehended by holding together the threefold reality

of our being as created, fallen and redeemed. Thus, what is truly fundamental about our dignity is encapsulated in the fact that we are always dependent. Our very existence, being creatures, is owed to God's loving creativity. Furthermore, human dignity is entirely conferred upon us by God, derived and defined by our unmerited renewal through God's redeeming work in Christ. So 'human dignity', theologically speaking, is not based on any inherent quality we possess, and certainly not on a power to direct our lives as we choose. Rather, our dignity is distinctively human (*ie* different from other creatures) because God has called human creatures to be the image of God that exercises responsible stewardship in creation, thereby realizing the true meaning of freedom.

**Dying with
dignity...means
having people
beside me who
will never
abandon me**

I am suggesting that Luther's account of human dignity brings to light representative features of a vision shaped by the gospel narrative. This is a vision in which the language of 'dependence', 'need' and 'relationship' more profoundly describe the authentic human condition than an individual's power, autonomy and choice. This is a vision in which hope is shaped by the promise of resurrection, rather than by a fear-driven quest for control. On the basis of this vision, Sam Wells has recently described 'dying with dignity' in a very different way to the view that compassion for those burdened by severe and terminal suffering entails granting a final, albeit limited, measure of choice through assisted dying:

I want to die with dignity. But that doesn't mean I assume I'll be free from pain. It doesn't mean living requires the indefinite finding of solutions. It means I hope to have people beside me who I can trust will never abandon me, however miserable I am or however much I suffer, people who, should I despair and wish to take my own life, will show by their love that there's something truer and deeper than suffering. That's what compassion is. It's the most important thing in the world. It's the most significant way in which human beings, intentionally or unselfconsciously, can imitate and witness to the love of God. I fear too many arguments that advocate assisted dying assume such compassion does not exist.⁸

But it hardly seems fair to tar the likes of Paul Badham with the same libertarian brush as those who assume free choice constitutes the essence of human dignity.

Christians worldwide recognise a calling to relieve suffering

Badham is keen to stress that the element of choice he seeks is far more modest, limited by and responsive to the recognition that death is both close and inevitable, and intended to enable our dependent and relational nature to be honoured by ensuring loving others are alongside the sufferer in their dying moment.

There is another aspect of the theological account of human dignity epitomised by Luther that needs attention. The inestimable value of human life in particular, wholly conferred on us by God's loving, creative and redemptive commitment, is linked to our shared vocation as a species to be stewards of creation. It is also linked to the particular

vocation given by God to each of us to exercise stewardship in a unique way, sometimes in ways that subvert conventional assumptions about what makes for a purposeful life.⁹ For this reason, the deliberate killing of a person has long been regarded in mainstream Christian thought as morally legitimate only in highly exceptional circumstances (and, as Christian moral debate about the possibility of a just war indicates, often the circumstances proposed throughout Christian history have remained controversial).

There are situations where laudable actions have shortened a person's life, for example, when a doctor gives a dose of pain-killing medication sufficiently high that it exacerbates a condition causing death at the same time as bringing merciful relief from intense pain. But, with theological concern to honour the sanctity of human life at its root, the moral quality of cases like this has traditionally been judged according to whether death was the intended result of medical intervention (and thus unacceptable), or rather a foreseeable outcome reluctantly accepted as an unavoidable corollary of the pain relief intended.

Recent legislative changes in the Netherlands to permit voluntary euthanasia sought to maintain this emphasis on the intrinsic value of human life by insisting such intentional killing be undertaken only when 'necessary'. By this, they meant when an informed and competent person requests professional help to end their life because their 'intolerable suffering' could not be alleviated. In practice (and here I admit to exposing my own opinion), there are persuasive reasons, still disputed by some, for suggesting that the Dutch experience since legalising voluntary euthanasia has been marked by what has been customarily called a 'slippery slope'.¹⁰ There has been a surreptitious diversifying of the category of 'intolerable suffering' to incorporate a wider range of cases, alongside the embedding of subtle social expectations that mould the consent of afflicted persons in ways that are arguably coercive. While it may be possible for UK legislators to learn

from the Dutch experience, we should at least give serious attention to Rowan Williams' warning that pressure on both patients and medical staff 'will be all the stronger in a climate dominated by economic stringency...A target-obsessed NHS, managed with an eye to brisk traffic through its beds and reduction of expense, doesn't feel a very good place in which to have a reasoned and balanced discussion of assisted dying'.¹¹

Christianity has long recognised its calling to share in relieving much of the suffering found in the world, which includes both the effects of serious illness and the harms of injustice. But also woven into the Christian story are examples of those who have recognised that there are times when enduring suffering is worthwhile and responsible. Sometimes enduring suffering bears witness to a good beyond the comfort of the one who suffers, ultimately the good news that our present creaturely life is valuable not in spite of, but because of the eternal new creation that we trust it will become.¹²

In the context of considering legalising voluntary euthanasia, some instances of suffering may be the witness necessary to protect vulnerable others in danger of discreet but potent pressure to interpret their more obviously needy existence as an unreasonable burden. It may even be a form of stewardship, exercised to sustain public awareness of the importance of maintaining well resourced palliative care services rather than easing their neglect in a society where voluntary euthanasia is a legal alternative. Staying alongside people experiencing such suffering is likely to be at least as demanding as witnessing the final moments of an assisted suicide at the Dignitas clinic. But that does not mean it must lack either purpose or hope.

Michael Peat is Free Church Chaplain at Bristol University, and has taught Christian Ethics at theological colleges in Manchester and Bristol.

Notes to Text

1. Paul Badham, 'Should Christians Accept the Validity of Voluntary Euthanasia?' *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 1995, **8.2**, p12. 'Voluntary euthanasia' refers to any deliberate killing of another person with their consent. 'Assisted suicide' refers more specifically to those acts of voluntary euthanasia in which the person wanting to die receives help to do so (*eg* is given the requisite drugs at the Dignitas Clinic), but must actually perform the action that ends his/her own life.

2. Paul Badham, 'Euthanasia and the Christian understanding of God', *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 1998, **11.1**, pp1–12 (see especially pp9–12). For a more extensive account of his reasoning, see Paul Badham, *Is there a Christian case for assisted dying? Voluntary euthanasia reassessed*. London: SPCK, 2009.

3. 'Former archbishop lends his support to campaign to legalise right to die', *The Guardian*, 12 July 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/jul/12/archbishop>

-canterbury-carey-support-assisted-dying-proposal. Accessed 22 August 2016.

4. See ‘Anglican Church leader Rowan Williams says Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide Unacceptable’, Lifesitenews.com, 20 January 2005. <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/anglican-church-leader-rowan-williams-says-euthanasia-and-assisted-suicide>. Accessed 22 August 2016.

5. Nigel Biggar, ‘God, the responsible individual and the value of human life and suffering’, *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 1998, **11.1**, p30 (my italics). Here, Biggar is summarising John Harris’ view of what gives human life value.

6. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, discussed in Neil Messer, *Respecting life: theology and bioethics*. London: SCM Press, 2011, pp216-7.

7. The account which follows draws on Oswald Bayer, ‘Martin Luther’s Conception of Human Dignity’, in Marcus Düwell, Jens Brarvig, Roger Brownsword & Dietmar Mieth (eds), *The Cambridge handbook of human dignity: interdisciplinary perspectives*. Cambridge: CUP, 2014, pp101-106. Readers wishing know which of Luther’s works inform this account will find them cited in the article’s footnotes.

8. Samuel Wells, *How then shall we live? Christian engagement with contemporary issues*. Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2016.

9. Nigel Biggar, *Aiming to kill: the ethics of suicide and euthanasia*. London: DLT, 2004, pp42-47.

10. A detailed investigation of the practice of voluntary euthanasia in the Netherlands, which includes the claims of those who dispute the evidence of a ‘slippery slope’, can be found in *ibid*, pp124-151.

11. Rowan Williams, ‘Nursing, Dignity and Florence Nightingale—Sermon at Westminster Abbey’. <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1488/nursing-dignity-and-florence-nightingale-sermon-at-westminster-abbey>. Accessed 25 August 2016.

12. For an important discussion of the way Christian martyrdom exemplifies this in ways that challenge assumptions typically underlying support for euthanasia, see Michael Banner, *Christian ethics and contemporary moral problems*. Cambridge: CUP, 1999, pp68-83.

bmj Essay Prize 2016/7

The *bmj* invites entries for our first Essay Prize from those serving in the leadership and ministry of Baptist churches. We would like an essay of 2500 words on a topic and title of the entrant's choice that fits into *one* of the following categories:

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Please share this competition with colleagues to whom it might be of interest.

Reviews

Editor: Michael Peat

To communicate simply you must understand profoundly: Preparation for ministry among British Baptists

Anthony R. Cross

BHS, 2016

ISBN 9780903166423

Reviewer: Ruth Gouldbourne

In this substantial and substantially detailed work, Cross has offered us once again the kind of research and careful exploration for which we have learned to trust him.

Drawing on material from our very earliest history (and incidentally making available to us writings that are not easy to find) right through our story until publications from the last few years, Cross has both outlined the shape of the debates about ministerial education, and demonstrated the consistent presence of a commitment to an educated ministry. He not only presents the evidence, but argues passionately and coherently for his position—that of commitment to such an educated ministry. In doing this, he is not only concerned to show the disagreements that have been present, or

that even when there has been resistance, the case for proper resourcing of ministry through education and reading has survived. He also reveals his profound disquiet at the current state of theological education, and the move that he perceives in the last two or three decades away from what he argues has been a position that, if not entirely uncontested, was at least widely accepted.

This is a deeply polemical work, and is none the worse for that. But it is so much more than that. Cross never makes assertions without substantiating them, nor does he build an argument without showing its deep and substantial roots. Therefore much of this work is a close reading of the writings and careers of many Baptist scholars from a wide range of disciplines and generations. Quite aside from its value as a contribution to the discussion about education and formation, this book serves as a vital record of so many lives and offerings in the service of the Kingdom and the denomination.

Part of the remit of the Baptist Historical Society, according to the BQ, is to engage ‘with Baptist heritage and history, not only encouraging readers to recall the past, but enabling them to reflect on Baptist life today, and be challenged and inspired for tomorrow’. In the light of such an aim, the BHS is to be congratulated for publishing this book; it makes much that has been hidden in our past much more accessible, it questions deeply some of our current practice and expectation, and it very deliberately calls us to a particular future.

Encountering London: London Baptists in the 21st century

London Baptist Association

ISBN 978-09552400-1-0

Reviewer: Colin Sedgwick

‘Fascinating’ is the best word I can find to describe my feelings about this book.

Mind you, I do have what I believe what might be called ‘an interest to declare’. I was born in London, sent to Sunday School there, converted, baptised and called to ministry there. And apart from some 20 years in North Lincolnshire (bless you, dear, lovely Scunthorpe!) I have spent most of my life there.

So reading this history of the LBA over the past 50 years (not just 2000-2016, as the title might suggest) was at times uncannily like reading the story of my own life. I kept wanting to shout, ‘Yes, I remember that—I was there!’ or, ‘She was a great soul’ (or, occasionally, I must confess, ‘Goodness, is he still on the go?’).

Forgive the personal note—I’m just making the point that others might not find it quite as interesting as a long-time Londonite like me. But I think anyone with any interest in the history of Baptists anywhere, not just London, over the past 50 years will find it rewarding.

It is not professionally written or produced, but never mind; that only adds to its character. It pulls together contributions from some 30 people. Some of the articles are semi-scholarly,

others tiny testimony-type pieces, but this only gives it an attractive variety.

But it’s all here...the massive changes brought about by immigration from the Caribbean and other parts of the world; the increasing role of women in leadership; the impact of charismatic renewal; the relentless decline in numbers and influence over these years; the ways in which churches have had to reinvent themselves in order to remain (hopefully!) relevant; insights into the nuts-and-bolts workings of the various committees and administrators of the LBA. And more, much, much more.

I could very easily go on. But I hope I’ve said enough to whet your appetite. I personally would just say a big fat ‘thank you’ to the team who conceived the idea for the book, and to those who did the no doubt considerable donkey-work involved in bringing it into being

Palestinian prisoners: a question of conscience

John Calhoun & Ranjan Solomon (eds)

Geneva: WCC, 2015

Reviewer: Rosemary Kidd

Imagine you are a Palestinian teenager whose adult male relatives exist at permanent risk of arbitrary arrest and imprisonment—a risk jeopardising their employment (perhaps in retail, or as health carers, for example), their study courses at university, and the welfare of your entire extended family. Your

grandmother has just died, holding the key of the family home, which was taken over by Jewish occupants in 1948. You might well be tempted to go and vent your anger on the swaggering young men and women in army uniform whose task is to bully and abuse your community. The only weapons you have are the Palestinian stones around you, which shout aloud.

This book is a highly technical review of the appalling suffering of Palestinian prisoners, whose incarceration is a typically unjust—and in many respects an illegal—mechanism of oppressive occupation. It is calculated that 40% of Palestinian men have been detained under Israeli military orders over the past 47 years. This book explains how the Israeli military evades international law enshrined in the Geneva Convention, defining the rights of prisoners to humane care. Only 107 pages, it is packed with the fruits of thorough research and analysis and includes many factual case studies. The injustice is overwhelming.

This book is a ‘call to the churches’. At a time when international attention has perhaps been diverted by the horrors in Syria and elsewhere in the Arab-speaking world, we are being reminded of the land where Jesus lived, where today ‘invisible’ men are frequently held in unlimited ‘administrative detention’, without legal recourse. We are being alerted to the towns and villages where Jesus said he had come to set the prisoners free. Today children aged between 12 and 18 are frequently arrested in the early hours of the

morning, when a posse of soldiers breaks down the door, and terrifies an entire family. Many of these children report the subsequent use of torture and ill-treatment (p78). We are reminded that, in this land where Jesus healed, the military authorities use prisoners’ sickness as a further weapon - prisoners suffering from diseases such as cancer or heart conditions are only given painkillers; surgical procedures, sometimes offered in exchange for ‘confessions’, are delayed for weeks, even years; and transport to medical facilities means being handcuffed to the fabric of bare steel vehicles and abused by accompanying guards.

This is a prophetic book from the World Council of Churches. Please read it.

Book reviews

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