

Institution: University of Nottingham
Unit of Assessment: 33 Theology and Religious Studies
Title of case study: Restoring 'Fresh Expressions' to the Parish as the Focus of Mission in the Church of England
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Research on ecclesiology undertaken by Revd Dr Alison Milbank:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has informed the theology, policy and practice of mission in the Church of England by challenging the theological basis of the dominant Fresh Expressions movement and offering a new model based on mediation; • Has engaged cathedral visitors and church members in new ways of experiencing religious objects via video and barcodes; • Has informed and influenced curricula and syllabi in Anglican ordination training on mission and ecclesiology. • Has exceeded its target audience of the Church of England, being discussed by other churches in the UK and worldwide.
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>How should the Christian churches respond to the rise of a consumer and network society? The primary research, <i>For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions</i> [3.2], co-written by Milbank with Andrew Davison (Westcott House, Cambridge), was itself requested by a group of senior clergy and Anglican laity: it is a critique of current Anglican thinking on this question in the 2004 report, <i>Mission-Shaped Church</i> and the consequent Fresh Expressions initiatives, which brokered a mixed-economy ecclesiology of parish and network. The primary research finding used the linguistic turn in twentieth-century philosophy to argue that the major flaw in both the report and consequent Anglican organisational changes was an attempt to separate form and content, practices and beliefs: instead, 'to become a Christian is to cease to be an atomized individual but to enter the life of communion' (p.133). The role of material reality and relationships embodied in the parish should be central to mediating the life and mission of the church.</p> <p>Milbank, who was appointed as Lecturer in Literature and Religion in 2004, developed her own approach to religion and literature in which genres and tropes are bearers of theological meaning in their stylistics, as explored in <i>Chesterton and Tolkien as Theologians</i> (2007) [3.1]. She subsequently extended this approach to the church, presenting her findings first at the 'Returning to the Church' conference, St Stephen's House, Oxford, 5-7 January 2009, where she and Davison were encouraged to develop this further. <i>For the Parish</i> (2010) gave an account of the Church as a narrative and a <i>habitus</i> as well as an institution. The authors planned and researched the whole book; Davison drafted Chapters 1-5, while Milbank drafted 6-9, the introduction and conclusion, with Milbank performing substantial editing of 1-5 and chapter organising of 4 & 5. Milbank's contribution involved a new model of mission in relation to culture in terms of uncovering and transformation, 'unveiling what is truly real' (p.128) rather than implantation and acculturation. The book also used her research into cultural theory and virtue ethics to delineate a theology of time, space, narrative and ethics, achieved through the mediation of material reality and through recourse to theological realism.</p> <p>Milbank has also developed her reconstrual of the relation of religious practice to culture in relation to the imagination [3.3]. She seeks to found a contemporary reasoned defence of Christian belief on a recuperation of the 'magic idealism' of German Romanticism and again seeks to show how literary and artistic tropes can also be modes of reasoning, which avoid the positivism and rationalism of some apologetic modes.</p> <p>Conferences linked to <i>For the Parish</i> have also resulted in another book chapter, 'Returning to the Parish' [3.4], which grounds its theology in a recuperation of the local in politics and</p>

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ecclesiology. The research is moving towards a wholesale renewal of the Christian imaginary, and giving such practical developments an intellectual rationale.

3. References to the research

- [1] *Chesterton and Tolkien as Theologians*, (London: Continuum, 2007) [available on request]
- [2] *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions*, co-written with Andrew Davison (London: SCM, 2010) [listed in REF2].
- [3] 'Apologetics and the Imagination: Making Strange' in *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy and the Catholic Tradition* (London: SCM, 2011), pp. 31-45 [listed in REF 2].
- [4] 'Returning to the Parish' in Andrew Davison (ed.) *Returning to the Church* (London: SCM, 2012) [available on request].

Evidence of quality:

Milbank has gained international recognition for this research: she was promoted to Associate Professor in 2008 following the publication of *Chesterton and Tolkien as Theologians*. She has been invited to deliver keynote or plenary addresses at conferences in Baylor, Texas, Trinity College Dublin, University College London, Oxford and Cambridge. Both books have received numerous reviews in academic and non-academic journals, including in USA and Australia.

4. Details of the impact

Impact on debate about the theology and practice of mission in the Anglican church [5.8, 5.9]

For the Parish has sold 3,137 copies from September 2010 until August 2013. It was **reviewed** in Anglican newspapers and journals in the UK, including *The Church Times* and *The Modern Churchman*, and abroad, including the *Episcopal New Yorker*, *The Living Church*, *Anglican Theological Review*, and *Journal of Anglican Studies*. Bishop Stephen Cottrell in the *Church Times* wrote: 'this is the most serious and important book on Anglican mission that I have read for many years - not least because it is unashamedly theological..., every parish priest and pioneer minister needs to read this book as a matter of urgency'. Dr John Habgood, former Archbishop of York, wrote in the *Times Literary Supplement*: 'ought to be standard reading for Church of England clergy and leading laity'. This led to:

The new Anglican-Methodist **report** *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* [5.1]. This report, which has been accepted by the Synod, has a substantive section on the critique in *For the Parish*, as well as implicitly dealing with its criticisms throughout and in the title: instead of separating 'God's mission' from the church as in the previous report, now it is 'mission of the church'. See especially pages 138-52 on *For the Parish*: 'these [Milbank & Davison's] criticisms raise important issues in relation to fresh expressions that cannot be dismissed. A number of practical safeguards are required to ensure that the mixed economy does not compromise the integrity of the Church' (p. 151). These are outlined on pp. 153ff and demonstrate the practical outcomes of the critique. Fresh expressions are now to be committed to the sacraments (7.5), communion with other parts of the Church (7.6.1), and collaboration with the parish (7.9.1). The need for this to be applied to ministerial training is emphasised (7.11).

Invitations to give **lectures** to audiences of Anglican clergy and laity, both small-scale via clergy chapters and local theological societies: Peterborough, Chesterfield, Stafford, Leicester, Oakham; and larger scale via cathedrals: Manchester (60 approx attendees), Wells (80), Southwell (120), Truro (100), Southwark (250). Warminster Group (priest alumni of King's College, London) (60). More recently, a clergy conference in Southwell and Nottingham (October, 2012, c. 200) has been followed in 2013 by Diocesan talks at Wakefield (150), Canterbury (60), and Ely (250), and clergy training for Bath and Wells (May, 2013, c.50-100).

Debates with proponents of Fresh Expressions: Liverpool in February 2012, also a

forthcoming day conference in Cambridge, which is to be published as a special issue of clergy journal, *Theology*.

Online discussion: Milbank's book was reviewed by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in 2011 [5.2], leading to invitations to contribute online articles [5.3]. A further outcome was an invitation by Scott Stephens, Religion Editor, to publish a non-European version of the book appropriate to the Australasian parish system. Fresh Expressions is just beginning on this continent.

Ecumenical discussion: Milbank addressed Churches Together, London, in December 2010, as a representative of the Church of England (although she holds no official role in this area), which included 20 people in official roles of Anglican, RC, Methodist, Baptist, URC, Churches of Christ, Salvation Army, and independent churches, who were persuaded of the consumerism and privatisation of the church present in the Fresh Expressions agenda and said so strongly. A debate was also held at the University of Edinburgh for the Church of Scotland (June 2013) with proponents of Fresh Expressions and clergy from the Church of Scotland.

Radio broadcasts: Milbank contributed to a programme, 'Tracing Beauty', aired at 7.45pm on 8 January 2012 on Radio 3 which makes use of her approach to apologetics through literary tropes such as 'making strange', which she applied here to art and theology, as also in a radio interview with Australian Religious Broadcasting, August 11, 2012, and the Sunday programme, Radio 4, August 18, 2013.

International reach: *For the Parish* has been reviewed in non-British Anglican journals, including the non-academic *Episcopal New Yorker*, *Living Church*, as well as journals that reach the clergy, *Anglican Theological Review*, and *Journal of Anglican Studies*. Milbank also gives an annual lecture to around 3,000 Catholic laity and clergy at the Rimini meeting of Communion and Liberation: the aspect of her research developed here is how the religious sense can be engendered through imagination, literature and art, and how this may be linked to mission. As a result, she has been interviewed at Rimini by *Corriere della Sera* (2008) and *La Repubblica* (2011).

Clergy publishing books: *Generous Ecclesiology* [5.4] is a book by three Church of England clergy (Julie Gittoes, Brutus Green, James Heard) that is devoted wholly to addressing *For the Parish*. It is marketed as seeking 'to present a positive theological response to the issues raised by *Mission-shaped Church* and *For the Parish*'.

This wide-reaching debate and discussion (in both secular and religious domains) represents a significant contribution to understanding the life and practice of the church.

Creating new experiences of space, time and narrative for cathedral visitors and congregations

A series of talks on theology of time, space and narrative based on *For the Parish* at Ely in January 2011 was given to 20 canon chancellors/canons of education in Anglican cathedrals. These were later disseminated to 50 stewards at Truro Cathedral and their education officer, which led to the **Truro Cathedral Treasury Project**. This is a new Interpretation method and reorganization of visitor experience via video and barcodes to read objects. This is directly the result of Milbank's research and the talks given at Ely, based on *For the Parish*. The Education Officer at Truro [5.6] came to see Milbank, and developed the practical project from Milbank's theological methodology; Milbank also worked with interns on the project. The project has gained EU and lottery money, and has continued 2011-2013 with support for University of Falmouth Film Studies. Southwell Archbishop's Palace Project has also used the Treasury Project in their National Lottery bid which proved successful in April 2013. The projects offer a methodology as well as a practical application of reordering ideas of time, pace and narrative for cathedral visitors.

Impact on Anglican ministerial education:

Canon Prof. Martyn Percy writes:

'the book has a reasonable claim to be one of the most influential critiques of contemporary

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fads and fashions in missiology over the last decade. Speaking personally, I can testify that virtually all ordinands at Cuddesdon have read and discussed all or part of the book. The book is both a critique of Fresh Expressions, but also a profound and lively argument for ordinary parish ministry. It is, simply put, essential reading for those now training for ordained ministry. For the Parish has been one of the most influential books to have emerged in recent years in the field of missiology and ecclesiology.' [5.5]

Theological colleges for the training of clergy and lay leaders have used *For the Parish* for teaching from 2010 onwards, including the ecumenical Cambridge Federation, St Stephen's House, Oxford, and Ripon-Cuddesdon College Oxford (at least 300). Milbank gave talks to ordinands at Westcott College, Cambridge and to St Stephen's House, Oxford. The Liverpool Diocese Summer School 2011 for clergy and readers (about 150) used *For the Parish*. A follow-up seminar was held as well by Revd Dr R. Garner [5.7]. The Diocese of Lincoln encourages all prospective priests and deacons to read *For the Parish* [5.10]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- [1] Report of an Anglican-Methodist Working Party, *Fresh Expression in the Mission of the Church* (Church House Publishing, 2012).
- [2] 'Does Fresh Expressions Misrepresent the Gospel', ABC Online, 22 February 2011 [viewed 16/9/13]. Available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2011/02/21/3144358.htm>
- [3] 'Why the Parish Still Matters', ABC Online, 22 March 2011 [viewed 16/9/13]. Available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2011/03/22/3170655.htm>;
- 'The Easter Journey into Paradox', ABC Online, 24 April 2011 [viewed 16/9/13]. Available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2011/04/24/3199217.htm>;
- 'The Riddle and the Gift: the Hobbit at Christmas', ABC Online, 24 December 2012 [viewed 16/9/13]. Available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2012/12/24/3660152.htm>
- [4] Julie Gittoes, Brutus Green, and James Heard, *Generous Ecclesiology* (London: SCM Press, 2013).
- [5] Statement from Canon Prof. Martyn Percy, Principal of Ripon College Cuddesdon, Oxford (available on request).
- [6] Education Officer, Truro Cathedral (contact details available).
- [7] Vicar of Southport Holy Trinity & Liverpool Diocesan Theological Consultant (contact details available).
- [8] Director of Mission and Public Affairs for the Church of England (contact details available).
- [9] Bishop of Worcester (contact details available).
- [10] 'Opening up the Ordination Criteria for Priests', Diocese Lincoln booklet (available on request).