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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Speaking Truth to Power Structures: Integrity and Identity in Ecclesiology

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Abstract
Speaking truth ought to be normative in churches, and yet when it does, the foundations and structures of power are often shaken to the core. This paper explores the issues of identity and integrity in ecclesiology and is concerned with the ethical paradigms and moral frameworks that need to be in place if churches are to be places where honesty and truthfulness can be normative. Churches often fail as institutions because they presume they can conduct their affairs as organizations might. Churches become anger-averse, resisting the voices and experiences of victims, in order that the flow of power and its structures are unimpeded. At that point, churches become inherently committed to re-abusing victims and are unable to hear their pain and protests, which only leads to the perpetration of further abuse.

Keywords: Abuse; Anger; Ecclesiology; Emotion; Identity; Power; Scandal

Controversy and the churches: this is no longer 'news'. Ask any journalist. There are few mainline Christian denominations, it seems, where controversy on sexuality, gender and sexual abuse has not surfaced in recent years. Churches have found themselves mired in scandal, struggling, as bodies that preach and embody love, to give a public account of why their practices – and perhaps the beliefs behind such practices – have led to such awful examples of abuse.[1] This abuse has been against children, women, ethnic minorities and those whose sexuality is lesbian, gay or 'others'. Hardly a week goes by when the foundations of the churches are not rocked by fresh revelations in the media.

Many churches have seen their public reputation suffer in the wake of wave after wave of revelations about child sexual abuse – specifically in relation to clergy

[1]See my discussion of the case of Cardinal Bernard Law, child sexual abuse by Catholic priests, and the exposure of this by *The Boston Globe* in 1996; M. Percy, *Engaging with Contemporary Culture: Christianity Theology and the Concrete Church* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 20–22. On the issue of spiritual abuse, see L. Oakley and K. Kinmond, *Breaking the Silence on Spiritual Abuse* (London: Palgrave, 2013).

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abusing their power and the trust placed in them by their congregations and going on to abuse children. Many denominations have wrestled with issues of equality – not least in gender but also in relation to ethnicity and disability. Again, churches have faced accusations that they have done more to protect the interests of a Caucasian male-dominated hegemony than they have for an agenda rooted in equality. Likewise, on sexuality, churches have been charged with practices and attitudes that amount to abusive practices and to the sacralization of inequality. In all this, a 'culture of ordained clerisy' has been preserved over and against the interests and rights of the laity.

Many denominations have resorted to various processes to manage the media and growing public disquiet. Sometimes, they have conducted their reviews, which can amount, sometimes, to little more than internal arbitration.[2] Some denominations have found their practices' scale so egregious that they have undergone self-imposed independent reviews.[3] Or because their procedures for investigation have manifestly failed.[4] Occasionally, denominations have found themselves subject to public enquiries or legal investigation. In almost every case, the churches have been accused of cover-ups, of protecting their interests first, and of not putting victims before the reputation of the institution.[5]

In all this, churches have quickly lost sight of their calling to be a body of honesty and integrity. They have been guilty, sometimes, of putting expediency before righteousness; they have placed pragmatism above principle. Sometimes, the convoluted and complex nature of abuse-related cases has meant that theological truth and integrity have suffered. It has been easy, for example, to cede power to an agenda of 'diversity', in order not to face up to issues of inequality (especially on issues of gender and sexuality), where manifestly oppressive viewpoints have been allowed to vest themselves in a rhetoric of 'tradition' or other legitimacy. The churches have sometimes lost sight of their calling to be moral communities.[6]

In my work as a practical–pastoral theologian and ecclesiologist, looking at the arenas of gender, sexuality and abuse in the churches, I have been struck by the volume of 'pastoral casualties' and the range of their symptoms that have issued from this ecclesial malaise. Survivors of sexual abuse tend to receive highly partial treatment at the hands of the church. Where the abuse is male-on-female, the church can sometimes act efficiently and occasionally effectively. But because most

[2]See P. Mawer, *Review of the Nomination to the See of Sheffield and Related Concerns: A Report by the Independent Reviewer* (London: Church House Publishing, 2017). However, this report is essentially a work of internal arbitration and seeks to 'balance' the vested power interests of a small minority of clergy and laity opposed to women priests and women bishops and the majority of the church who hold different views.

[3]See Dame Moira Gibbs Independent Review of the case of Bishop Peter Ball; M. Gibbs, *An Abuse of Faith* (London: Church House Publishing, 2017).

[4]The recent review of the processes that led to the Church of England compensating a single complainant who alleged that she had been sexually abused by Bishop George Bell is a case in point. Bell had been dead for over half a century and could not defend himself.

See http://www.georgebellgroup.org/review/.

[5]Recent reviews of sexual abuse of indigenous children housed in Anglican institutions in Canada are a case in point. The 2017 Australian Royal Commission on child sexual abuse in the churches has also made extensive recommendations on safeguarding practices.

[6]See, for example, Anne Manne, *Crimes of the Cross: the Anglican Paedophile Network of Newcastle, Its Protectors and the Man Who Fought for Justice* (Collingwood, VIC: Schwartz Books, Black Inc. Press, 2024).

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denominations have unresolved policies in relation to same-sex relationships, male-on-male sexual abuse is often dealt with differently – and one suspects, mainly due to unconscious bias on the part of the bishop or church authorities receiving the complaints.

In contrast, male-on-male sexual abuse is often handled as an 'issue' in which the victim bears some responsibility (i.e. for being gay), even if the abuse took place at an age when the sexuality of the victim was unresolved. I have been struck, too, by how cathartic or coarse and vernacular modes of complaint or protest are quickly distanced by the church and labelled as 'difficult'. There would seem to be almost a class-based rhetoric for complaining about abuse: cool, calm, measured and reasoned are valued. There is more than a hint here of the confluence of emotional and ecclesial intelligence.

Denominations, like most institutions, don't like to receive complaints. When they do, they expect them, unconsciously, to be diplomatic and even, possibly, 'nice' (in terms of rhetorical cadence). This tends to compound the sense – often shared amongst victims – that behind the sexual, gender-based or sexuality-orientated abuse, there is an even deeper patterning of 'spiritual abuse'. The churches, despite their claims to be pastoral, kind, listening and incarnate, can behave in quite ex-carnate ways, failing to 'feel' the pain it has caused in the body of others and acting more like disinterested organizations rather than as 'invested-in-people' institutions.[7]

Structure as an Expression of Value

To understand the incomprehensible – why a body committed to pastoral care behaves in a way that is wholly contrary to its identity, thereby compromising its integrity – one needs to appreciate how ecclesial power structures evolve. To understand how and why churches might behave in such a manner, it is essential to understand the external factors that have shaped their identity. Churches do not exist in a cultural vacuum. Like any other body or species, they evolve and adapt in response to their environment. In the case of churches, most, if not all, denominations in the developed world have seen their spheres of influence and operation checked and constrained by their respective governments – in arenas such as education, welfare, social responsibility and more. Even where such churches are established by law or the state church of the nation, denominations have found that their primary sphere of operation is now a sacred space rather than a commonly owned public space.

Under these conditions, churches have struggled to offer a public account of their practices (distinct from beliefs) and have generally not held up well under public scrutiny in calls for greater openness and transparency. The church has taken solace in its distinctive alterity when such calls have been made. The result is a form of self-marginalization. The more the churches claim to be 'other', and not subject to worldly standards of scrutiny and evaluation, the more likely it is that the churches become peripheral bodies on the margins of society, unable to participate fully in public life. The movement from institution to (marginalized) organization is slow but relentless, and it can eventually lead to the churches becoming a kind of sect.

[7]For a personal perspective, see Martyn Percy, *Forty Psalms of Solace* (London: Bloomsbury, 2024).

Elliott Jaques argued that churches were an 'association' and clergy 'members', not its employees.[8] He argued that once clergy come to be regarded as employees in a manager–subordinate relationship, congregations become customers, and the sacred bond between laity and clergy becomes broken and turns into one of the consumer providers. Jaques specifically praised those churches that promoted life tenure for clergy because it guarded against centralized managerial interference and protected the deep communal and personal ethos of the clergy–laity bond. Overt central control and monitoring by churches, argued Jaques, slowly destroyed local spiritual life because the clergy would be subject to demands on two fronts: namely, those targets and priorities set remotely by central management and the local consumerist demands of congregations.

Similarly, Dutch ecclesiologist Mady Thung suggests that national churches in northern Europe have come under increasing pressure in the post-war years to become more like organizations.[9] She contrasts the 'organizational' model and its frenetic activism with the 'institutional' model of the church – the latter offering, instead, contemplative, aesthetic and liturgical frameworks that take longer to grow are often latent for significant periods of time, but which, she argues, may be more culturally resilient and conducive than those of the activist-organizational model.

There is an irony in this. Churches are trying to become organized and act like good organizations in the modern world. The problem is that it is primarily a voluntary association run by volunteers, who are under few obligations to abide by rules, regulations and compliance codes. Or the volunteers may simply lack the will and desire to be organized. Or the voluntary codes are merely inadequate when tested for robustness. Moreover, the churches have depleted resources, and the greater the demand for standardized forms of organization becomes, the more likely the churches are to fail and default on basic minimum compliance standards.

So, churches find themselves increasingly *failing* as organizations but unable to recover their identities as public utilities and value-based institutions. Their authority is therefore undermined as a consequence. In terms of bureaucracy, we can express the matter succinctly:

> Any social order is a tissue of authorities. In contemporary society these authorities range from the mild and provident authority of a mother over her infant to the absolute, unconditional, and imprescriptible authority of the national state. Some system or pattern of authority is involved in any continuing social aggregate. The moment two or more persons find themselves in a relationship that involves, in whatever degree of informality or formality, the distribution of responsibilities, duties, needs, privileges, and rewards, a pattern of authority is present.[10]

Similarly, authority, identity and integrity in organizations and institutions can easily be lost. Again, to express the matter succinctly:

[8]E. Jaques, *A General Theory of Bureaucracy* (London: Heinemann, 1976), pp. 344–7.

[9]M. Thung, *The Precarious Organisation: Sociological Explorations of the Church's Mission and Structure* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1976).

[10]R. A. Nisbet, *The Social Bond* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), p. 113.

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> When there is no organization, there is no authority. Authority appears only in organized groups – the associations – of society, never in unorganized groups or in the unorganized community. An absence of organization implies an absence of authority. There is authority only within an association, never in the interstices between associations. The exercise of authority, furthermore, never extends beyond the limits of the association in which it is institutionalized and which gives it support and sanction.[11]

Thus, social expectations of what it means to be 'public' may now be at variance with where the churches are, to such an extent that the authority and identity of the churches are now undermined by their failure to be well organized and the institution recognizably compliant, transparent and accountable. Under such conditions, and by way of defensive response, denominations such as the Church of England are, arguably, too willing to defer to the power and authority of bishops, often because they are perceived to possess a certain mystique, together with a wider basis of knowledge.

But congregations perhaps trust this assumption far more than is wise. Without arguments and evidence from episcopal lips, assurances and assertions from bishops often carry too much weight. Many assume bishops to be almost omniscient. Yet, there must be significant doubts about their competencies in areas in which they have had little, if any, professional training. The Lead Safeguarding Bishop for the Church of England has no external professional qualifications, certification or qualification for their work, nor does any other person on the committees they lead. One would not accept the work or direction of a teacher, surgeon or lawyer solely because a denomination designated such a person as their lead. Not unreasonably, most members of the public would want to know what qualifications and accountability that individual had been invested with to speak on behalf of the denomination with authority, let alone take any action on behalf of it. Once it becomes apparent that there is no externally accredited professional qualification behind the assertions and actions of the lead bishop, there is no further basis for trust.

Bishops, because they are bishops, often retain positions of 'oversight' in fields they simply do not comprehend, such as finance, education, safeguarding and public policy – to name a few. They often feel the need to defend their comprehensiveness and role in such oversight, even when it is manifestly the case that they are out of their depth or sometimes just plain wrong. All too often, exposure of any weakness, failure or wrongdoing is met with defensive assertions and reassertions. They can sometimes keep digging themselves deeper into the very holes they inadvertently created.

Yet the church is a sacred and public space, not a private sect. Ceding power and authority to broader society, regulators and overseers with appropriate competencies would represent a significant shift in the ecclesial polity. It would require giving away power to protect ecclesial authority in matters such as mission, ministry, doctrine and pastoral care. Where the church is ministering in public ways, it must learn to accept new standards in public life and the authority of these. If the

[11]R. Bierstedt, 'The Problem of Authority', in M. Berger, T. Abel and C. H. Page (eds), *Freedom and Control in Modern Society* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1954,) pp. 67–81. Quoted in R. A. Nisbet, *The Social Bond* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), p. 117.

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churches try and evade their responsibility here, they will lose their authority. There is something here about leadership, power, role and authority – something that Talcott Parsons would have recognized as a particular dynamic for the churches to attend to:

> Structure is a set of relatively stable patterned relationships of units. Since the unit of social system is the actor, social structure is a patterned system of the social relationships of actors. It is a distinctive feature of the structure of systems of social actions, however, that in most relationships the actor does not participate as a total entity, but only by virtue of a given differentiated 'sector' of his total action. Such a sector, which is the unit of a system of social relationships, has come predominantly to be called a 'role'. Hence, the previous statement must be revised to say that social structure is a system of patterned relationships of actors in their capacity as playing roles relative to one another. Role is the concept which links the subsystem of the actor as a 'psychological' behaving entity to the distinctly social structure.[12]

In realms where the church can no longer operate convincingly as an influential provider of public services, it should withdraw and enter new kinds of arrangements. This has already been done in a variety of arenas: schools, higher education, healthcare, social welfare, adoption and fostering, to name but a few. This does not need to be read as a kind of creeping secularization and much less as a defeat for faith-based bodies. Rather, the recalibration of the churches' responsibilities, powers and authority would allow them to focus on their areas of unique competence: pastoral, prophetic and priestly ministry in the public domain. At a stroke, the move would prevent the churches from being third-rate professional bodies trying to offer public services. I would suggest that in spheres such as gender, sexuality and safeguarding, the churches form fresh concordats with their respective countries, cultures and citizens and agree to live by the same rules that govern the rest of the nation. That way, the public knows that their churches are public, not private member-based sects seeking to operate with and secure exemptions from law.

One bishop commented on the child sexual abuse cases and safeguarding failures precisely along these lines:

> My concern is that although the Church has made some progress with safeguarding over the past few years, there is still a long way to go if it is to become a safe place . . . Over-dependence on ecclesiastical lawyers and insurers leads to defensive behaviour, selective memory, and serious pastoral inadequacy. Training is welcome, of course, but of limited usefulness if all people are being trained in is a weak and ineffective system, founded on a culture of excessive deference and secrecy. Payouts that should be the beginning of a pastoral relationship with a healing community are still too often the last word. There is still much bafflement and ignorance within the church about spiritual abuse, and even a refusal in some places to acknowledge

[12]Talcott Parsons, *Essays in Sociological Theory* [1954] (New York: Free Press, 1964), p. 230.

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> let alone take responsibility for what are patently harmful theologies . . . I dream of a day the Church of England will stop dragging its feet, be honest, take responsibility, and become a leader in understanding and effective response to and action for those who have been damaged by contact with it.[13]

What one is tackling here would be recognized by Foucault:

> Truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power . . . Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish 'true' and 'false' statements; the means by which each is sanctioned; and the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.[14]

Churches may need a new pattern of adaptive leadership – one that is reflexive, humble, earthed and wise.[15] The leadership must also be unafraid of yielding power and responsibility and losing some autonomy in its organizational power structures to regain its authority and identity as an institution. It must be a moral leadership, too.[16] This would amount to a more responsible exercise of power and ecclesial authority.[17] Sometimes to regain, you must be prepared to take the initiative and give first. As Steven Lukes perceptively says,

> . . . conceptions of power may be divided into two very broad categories. On the one hand, there are those which are asymmetrical and tend to involve (actual or potential) conflict and resistance. Such conceptions appear to presuppose a view of social or political relations as competitive and inherently conflictual . . . On the other hand, there are those conceptions which do not imply that some gain at others' expense but rather that all may gain: power is a collective capacity or achievement. Such conceptions appear to rest on a view of social or political relations as at least potentially harmonious and communal.[18]

[13]Personal correspondence with the Rt. Revd. Dr Alan Wilson, Bishop of Buckingham, March 2018.

[14]M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (New York: Pantheon, 1980), p. 131. See also Steven Ogden, *The Church, Authority, and Foucault: Imagining the Church as an Open Space of Freedom* (London: Routledge, 2017). Ogden offers a study of power imbalance, the abuse of power and equitable power sharing – all through a Foucauldian-ecclesial lens.

[15]On this, see R. Heifetz, A. Gradshow and M. Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review, 2009).

[16]Seminally cf. A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1981). Also S. Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, Ind: Univ of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

[17]On this, and for a discussion of the validity of acknowledging the death of organizations, institutions and corporations, see S. Khan, *Death in the City: On loss, Mourning and Melancholia at Work* (London: Karnac Books, 2017).

[18]S. Lukes, 'Power and Authority', in T. Bottomore and R. Nisbet (eds), *A History of Sociological Analysis* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), p. 636.

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Towards a Practical–Pastoral Theology of Emotionally Intelligent Ecclesiology

Lukes suggests the possibility of power relations that are harmonious. Foucault, however, encourages a hermeneutic of suspicion. So, at the heart of these issues of abuse, power and polity, there are some key questions. How does truth speak to ecclesial structures of power and polity? What would constitute a good 'theory of reception' for the churches in relation to the pain of those who have been disempowered by abuse? How should the churches initially receive the raw, unpasteurized anger of victims when it is directed back towards the manifest abuses of power, practice, trust, role and identity perpetrated by the churches?

Language is important, I suspect. How does the abused person 'speak' truth to power structures, exactly? Here, Ursula Le Guin makes a helpful distinction between 'mother tongue' and 'father tongue'. The 'father tongue' is the language of power: 'spoken from above . . . it goes one way . . . no answer is expected or heard . . . '.[19] The 'father tongue' in the clinical language of the lecture theatre or the professions distances the emotions, passions and desires. In contrast, the 'mother tongue' is the language of the home. According to Le Guin, it is 'inaccurate, coarse, limited, trivial, banal . . . earthbound, housebound, common speech, plebian, ordinary . . . '[20] However, for Le Guin, the 'mother tongue' is also the language of connection and relationships; its power lies in uniting and binding, not dividing. It is Le Guin's contention that much public discourse, especially professional discourse within institutions, is a learned 'father tongue' that deliberately marginalizes the realm of feelings and the scope of relationality. She argues that a recovery of 'mother tongue' within public discourse is essential for the reconstitution of public life, where 'plain' speaking can reclaim its proper value (or currency) as a *bona fide* expression.

It is often the case that in relationships where the expression of anger is denied its place, resentment festers and breeds, and true love is ultimately distorted. Strong feelings need to be acknowledged for relationships to flourish. If strong feelings on one or both sides must be suppressed for the sake of a relationship, then it is rarely proper to speak of the relationship being mature or healthy. In cases where sexual abuse has taken place or some other abuse of power within the church (say, on matters of gender, sexuality or other 'protected characteristic' in law), the church often seeks the compliance of the abused and rarely censures the abuser. Gentleness and love that is detached and self-sacrificing have often been held up as the virtues that Christians should strive for. Civility and peacefulness are sometimes paraded as ideals or archetypes for ongoing communion.

Now, civility is certainly an important virtue in the church, but often with little acknowledgement that the *form* and *patterning* of the polity have normally been established by those in power so that, consciously and unconsciously, their privileges are maintained. At the same time, we may need to appreciate that anger and aggression are often correlated with violence and chaos, and their intimate connection with love is, therefore, not acknowledged. The expression of passionate feelings, or perhaps of any feelings, is seen as a threat to the polity that maintains the

[19]Ursula Le Guin, *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Words, Women, Places* (New York: Grove Books, 1989), p. 149.

[20]Le Guin, Ibid., p. 149.

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power of an emotionally detached rational faith. The danger, as two feminist theologians, Harrison and Robb, point out, is:

> We need to recognize that where the evasion of feeling is widespread, anger does not go away or disappear. Rather, in interpersonal life it masks itself as boredom, ennui, low energy, or it expresses itself in passive-aggressive activity or in low moralistic self-righteousness and blaming. Anger denied subverts community. Anger expressed directly is a mode of taking the other seriously, of caring. The important point is that where feeling is evaded, where anger is hidden or goes unattended, masking itself, there the power of love, the power to act, to deepen relation, atrophies and dies.[21]

Equally, aggression is almost always understood as harmful and often equated with violence. Yet feminist writers such as Kathleen Greider call for a proper reappraisal of aggression and its place. She points out that the Latin etymology of 'aggression' lies in the verb *aggredi*, meaning 'to move towards', and she uses an intriguing working definition that is significant for our discussion here. Greider sees aggression as central to human nature from our earliest infancy. It is as important as love in the human capacity to survive and thrive:

> 'aggression is one primary expression of the life force, of the drive to survive and thrive, embodied in positive and negative movement toward and engagement with goals, persons, objects, and obstacles . . . These two primary forces can be seen in infants who have . . . the sentiment (love) to engage others and the force (aggression) especially through their ability to cry, to influence the powerful others around them to meet their needs.[22]

Thus, for Greider, aggression and love are interrelated. They are both deeply connected to the importance of building and sustaining relationships that enable self and others to flourish:

> . . . in this essential unity, aggression and love cannot be fully differentiated. However, an approximation of their particular contributions might be that love is "desire" and aggression is "movement". . . . . Aggression enables love to move toward the thing desired, love enables aggression to desire the thing toward which it moves. Love has gumption in it, aggression has affection in it. Without this intermingling, love might be passive, aggression might be only self-serving; with this intermingling, aggression is more likely to be constructive, love is more likely to have backbone.[23]

[21]B. Harrison & C. Robb, *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1985), p. 15.

[22]K. Greider, 'Too Militant? Aggression, Gender and the Construction of Justice' in Moessner, J. (ed.), *Through the Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 125.

[23]Greider, Ibid., 1996, p. 127

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This working definition of aggression alters our perception of the term. It relocates it as a neutral given in human and organizational relating that can be expressed positively and negatively. In its positive form, it is about drive, about the activity that moves things forwards so that love and relationship might flourish. In its negative form, it reacts violently to things that appear to deny or destroy the self. Thus, 'aggression is used negatively when it is directed toward wasteful and/or unconscious violence; aggression is used positively when it is directed toward the affirmation of life and well-being in both its personal and collective dimensions'.[24]

Greider's 'aggression' is what others might call 'assertion'. Celia Hahn writes, 'assertion means moving outside oneself, reaching out with vigour and initiative, acting on the world'.[25] Hahn draws a clear distinction between aggression and assertion, seeing the former as unfavourable; however, Greider argues that sometimes the very strength of aggression is needed. She reflects that on the rare occasions where aggression is defended, it is because it is utilized on behalf of others or constitutes a creative push. So, what is needed is a reappraisal of aggression for the sake of self and the value of its destructive and constructive power: Greider talks of the possibility of 'creative destruction'.[26]

As Lytta Basset notes,[27] Jesus does not repress the irrepressible feeling of anger, which can often spiral up within us and find expression in insults and other forms of aggression. Instead, Jesus' condemnation is of a more distant kind of anger: treating another as a 'fool' or as 'mad'. Because this kind of labelling refuses to encounter a person face-to-face and consequentially maintains inner violence, we feel that the possibility of an appropriate or equitable relationship is now severed. As Basset notes, strikingly, Jesus does not say, 'You have no reason to be angry', nor does he investigate whether the anger is justified or not. Instead, what matters is what is done with this boiling rage. And this is when Jesus appeals to us to turn to the other person: the object or subject of our wrath. Hence, we are implored not to offer a sacrifice or gift until there can be some kind of reconciliation with that other. Only then can the sacrifice be liberating.

We are starting to encroach on Girardian territory. The anger that we have and feel must be purposefully directed and responsibly communicated. It cannot be hurled at those we think might merit our fury. As Girard explains,

> Instead of giving back more of the same, we must leave the matter at hand to the potential rival. That is the unique role of the Kingdom . . . To protect themselves from their own violence, humans ended up channelling it towards innocents. Christ does the opposite. He offers no resistance. He does not devote himself to sacrifice in order to play the sacrificial game, but to put an end to sacrifice . . . .[28]

[24]Greider, Ibid., 1996, p. 129

[25]C. Hahn, *Growing in Authority, Relinquishing Control: A New Approach to Faithful Leadership* (Washington DC: Alban Institute, 1994), p. 21.

[26]Greider, Ibid., 1996, p. 133.

[27]Lyssa Basset, *Holy Anger: Jacob, Job, Jesus* (London: Continuum, 2007), pp. 70ff.

[28]See R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (London: Athlone Press, 1995), p. 76.

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Girard is also attentive to what institutions, organizations and societies do at the collective level to repress their sense of rage, impotence and violence. The collective will create scapegoats:

> . . . there is the tendency, universal among human beings, to unburden their accumulated violence on another, a substitute victim . . . Everywhere and always, when human beings cannot or dare not attack the object of their anger, they unconsciously look for substitutes, and most of the time they find them . . . .[29]

In other words, repressed anger will fall upon the innocent person. Furthermore, the scapegoat will be deemed expendable, yet also possessing 'extreme qualities' – exceptional beauty or ugliness, great wealth or poverty, disabled or (apparently) unimpaired and foreigner or neighbour. Or, generally, anyone who might be more effortless to 'other'. The choice of the victim is unconscious but unanimous and most likely to fall upon those who pose no apparent threat of resistance or reprisals.

We need to remember that when the subject of anger surfaces in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (*Matthew* 5: 21–26), the responsibility for it is reversed. Regardless of those who rage against us, we are responsible for holding up a mirror to those who are angry and standing our ground as a living hope for proper justice rather than a capitulation to instinctive vengeance. In so doing, we are asked not to become consumed and reduced by anger. The possibility of creating space for truth and justice can then emerge.

Our bible translations do not always serve us well. In *Mark* 1: 40–45, Jesus heals a leper, and most translations cite Christ as Being 'moved with compassion'. However, a better rendering of the verse is 'moved by anger' at the exclusions and marginalization placed upon the leper by society. The leper begs to be 'purified', the only means of social reintegration. Of course, compassion and anger are not mutually exclusive. Later, in *Mark* 3: 5, Jesus looks at the Pharisees 'with anger', grieved by their hardness of heart. Later still, in *Mark* 10: 14, translations of the Greek would be better rendered with Jesus 'losing his temper', 'boiling with rage' or being 'indignant'. This time, the object of Jesus' anger is with his disciples for trying to prevent the children from coming to him to be blessed. Anger and compassion belong together, and we see this with greater clarity once we have learned to rescue anger from an English ecclesial polity over-invested in polite, middle-class manners and repressing anger.

Reengaging with social, political and contextual conditions can pay significant dividends if we want to understand how widespread anger and resentment manifest across society. In the developed world, we lack a 'hermeneutic of hunger', so we fail to see how often the people Jesus ministered to were hungry and thirsty for food and water, righteousness and justice and freedom and equity. Luzia Sutter Rehmann's work draws our attention to the 'rage in the belly' that drives anger and exhaustion through the gospels and beyond.[30] The anger caused by hunger and thirst is human,

[29]R. Girard, *Celui Par Qui Le Scandale Arrive* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2001), p. 59ff.

[30]Luzia Sutter Rehmann, *Rage in the Belly: Hunger in the New Testament* (Eugene, OR; Cascade Books), 2021.

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ordinary and universal. However, when hunger and thirst are not met, sullen silence sets in, which can quickly escalate into a collective rage.

Rehmann recalibrates our understanding of Jesus' actions in the gospels by showing how many critical incidents are linked to hunger. Jesus is famished in the temptation narratives. In *Mark* 11, the disturbance in the temple is effectively a food riot and links to the cursing of the barren fig tree. There is a geography of hunger at work in the gospels, which most modern readers miss entirely – because we have no sense of how hunger and thirst can drive anger, rage and fury – especially when it is overlooked by those in authority or just dealt with by indifference. The geography of hunger also extends to the realms where justice and truth are not present – another kind of famine.

Jesus does not refute or oppose the anger of the abused or marginalized. Nor does Jesus deny his anger, nor does he soft-peddle the anger of God. Instead, Christ invites us into his relationship with God the Father, which does not model competitive desire, thereby providing us with a pattern that does not have space for mutual destruction. This allows Basset to argue that holy anger is *not* an appropriation of God's anger 'in the divine mission against others'.[31] God's anger is something altogether other than human anger. Rooted in judgement and love and in overcoming idolatry and injustice, God's anger is a positive and purposeful force that always seeks justice and peace. Indeed, the quest for perfect love, says Basset, must always pass through anger.[32] Anselm Grün, the German Benedictine monk, writes:

> Anger is a positive force that aims to render me capable of delimiting my territory, or liberating me from the power of others. But it can also devour me if I allow it to get the better of me . . . Anger is the strength to step back from someone who has hurt us. It allows us to rid ourselves of the cause of the hurt and the irritation . . . Anger, even if violent, is a good thing. If we admit this and look it in the eye, if we can go to the very heart of the matter, then it can metamorphose into a new vital energy. It may show us that until now we have behaved only in relation to others. We would like from now on to live what we are in ourselves.[33]

So, discovering how to acknowledge and give voice to raw experiences following abuse – in ways that can enable radical working together for the growth of all – is a challenge that the church needs to heed. In his ministry, Jesus always listened to the voices of the marginalized. Indeed, not only did he listen, but he assimilated such voices into his ministry, often made the marginalized central and placed those who were central on the periphery, thereby re-ordering society, forcing people to witness oppression and the response of the Kingdom of God to despair anger and marginalization. In the church, we need to allow the experiences of the oppressed and abused to challenge and shape the way we hold power and broker relationships.

[31]Basset, Ibid., 2007, p. 210.
[32]Basset, Ibid., 2007, pp. 263–64.
[33]Anselm Grün, *Petit Traité de Spiritualité au Quotidien* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998), pp. 51ff, 113 & 132.

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Thus, the churches need to continually learn from the panoply of liberation theologies: that marginalized people should not simply be made welcome in the church but that their anger and aggressive desire for justice might be allowed to reform the manners of the church. Learning to listen to narratives that convey solid and powerful feelings and experiences of abuse and marginalization, rather than seeking to dismiss such stories as 'uncultured' or as 'bad grammar', is a significant and costly task for ecclesial polity and pastoral praxis. Ultimately, the aggression of those who seek justice may help the churches to move on from its 'tamed and domesticated' valuing of the crucifixion and suffering for its own sake and work instead for the abused: 'not to perpetuate (more) crucifixions, but to bring an end to them in a world where they go on and on'.[34]

I am more than conscious that an argument for a church in which raw experiences of abuse and marginalization are allowed to be given their full vent is potentially dangerous and irresponsible. We are all aware that there is a rightful place for reticence and the withholding of emotional speech. We all understand that a temperate ecclesial polity can, to some extent, depend on finding a non-emotive language for expressing views and communicating across divisions. But I am also struck by how many churches deliberately disenfranchise and marginalize the proper expression of feelings and experience. Moreover, they have developed 'soft' and 'coded' structures for asphyxiating such speech and pasteurizing raw, robust and vernacular language. I find this not only to be poor ecclesial and pastoral practice but also theologically weak and urbane, rendering the church into some kind of semi-detached realm, in which all the correct probity of politeness and a polity of civility are observed, but 'real' feelings and experiences are never mentioned or aired.

This cannot be a proper reification of incarnational solid theology, nor can it make the church an incredibly genuine community of the redeemed. Suppose one of the church's tasks is to make it possible for people to face one another honestly. In that case, strong feelings and raw experiences must be adequately addressed so that they can be appropriately located in the body of Christ and not suppressed as part of some kind of artful process of subordination.

How do we discern when anger is a legitimate call for justice or a petulant reaction to simply not getting one's way? Here, we need to look at patterns of power and the motivation of anger. The gospel's good news is about the accessibility of God: the welcoming in of the religiously marginalized and the breaking down of barriers. So, in any kind of aggression and anger, we need to be clear about whether it constitutes a move towards a vision of the kingdom and how it is motivated by the radical mutuality of love. The command to love God and our neighbour as ourselves defines the place of our aggression and anger. It demands action, and that action demands drive, which at times needs generative anger and aggression. The church needs to find a way of holding and utilizing the intense feelings that are part of human loving, remembering, as Harrison and Robb state, 'the important point is that where feeling is evaded, where anger is hidden or goes unattended, masking itself, there the power of love, the power to act, to deepen relation, atrophies and dies'.[35]

[34]Harrison & Robb, Ibid., 1985, p. 19
[35]Harrison & Robb, Ibid., 1985, p. 15

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Part of the ministry of Jesus involved the expression of anger and was occasionally constituted in acts of wilful aggression. It is hard to imagine some of Christ's words being spoken in anything other than simmering rage. There can be something like a *creative* rage – the kind of rage that the poets and the prophets speak of – markedly impolite but utterly godly. Therefore, the church's task is to find ways that do not suppress or block out strong feelings of anger or hurt and the aggression it arouses but to help discern how to channel the energy they bring into the work of the gospel.

So, all of this means listening to the experiences of abuse and marginalization that have led to aggression and anger and seeing them as far as possible from the perspective of those with less power. It means humility on the part of those who hold power and an acknowledgement of the fear of losing power and control. It means a new way of looking at power relationships that takes the gospel seriously. It means churches and church leaders getting in touch with our feelings and developing an emotional intelligence that can lead to a new kind of ecclesial intelligence. And this, indeed, is what we want from our leaders. People who can receive and handle feelings – even strong ones – and sometimes communicate the same when necessary.

Under such circumstances, one can begin to conceive of the possibility of 'truth speaking to power (structures)'. For this speech to happen, the institution's power structures and frameworks must be robust enough and sufficiently humane (i.e. compassionate and empathetic) to understand that a 'theology of reception' requires churches to receive coarse, vernacular and strongly articulated feelings. Moreover, such feelings cannot and should not be silenced or pasteurized as a pre-condition of receiving pastoral care and, ultimately, justice. Where care and justice are denied, the church has a prophetic task to foster 'loyal dissent' until such time as the church is faithful to its incarnation and vocation – namely, to be feeling and sensing the body of Christ that proclaims the Kingdom of God – a kingdom, moreover, of justice and restoration.

Waiting for Change

As things currently stand, the Church of England has clergy subjected to multiple and properly organized and professional risk assessments, yet who appear to not be subject to them and are then 'rewarded' with large sums of money to leave ministry early. The case of Canon Andrew Hindley was instructive.[36] Accused over several decades of acts of sexual abuse, with minors and with multiple risk assessments conducted by reputable, authorized professional agencies, he nonetheless continued in ministry until 2022. He was paid a reputed £250,000 to withdraw from his post at Blackburn Cathedral. Hindley was able to leave with his pension intact and without having been through a full Church of England disciplinary proceeding (CDM).[37]

One Church of England judge – Sir Mark Hedley, a colleague of the Archbishop of Canterbury who has also been honoured in 2022 by Lambeth Palace for his legal contribution to the church – declined to prosecute Hindley for engaging in 'non-consensual sex' (i.e. statutory rape) with a young man. This disconcerting decision

[36]https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cv2gj77pvwwo
[37]https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cr5n2542q82o

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was reached on the grounds that Hedley could not be sure if Hindley's alleged victim was under-age at the time. According to one report from the BBC,

> In April 2020 Sir Mark Hedley, Deputy President of Tribunals, made what appears to be a startling ruling. He documented that while he thought that it could be proved the case involved non-consensual sex, he could not be sure if the alleged victim was 17 or 18 at the time, so the case could not go forward to a tribunal.[38]

At the same time, other clergy have been subjected to multiple false accusations and falsified risk assessments, forced into early retirement or taken their own lives, yet with no compensation from the church and no consequences for their accusers and the forgers. Sir Mark Hedley again, in one case, declined to consider clear evidence of falsified risk assessments when conducting an inquiry and declined to disclose his potential conflicts of interest policy or record a relevant register of interests that might impact the work of the inquiry. The inquiry did not go ahead. In the same proposed inquiry, Sir Roger Singleton (a former director of the National Safeguarding Team and under whose watch the false risk assessments were manufactured) was also to play a leading part, as though this constituted no conflict of interest.

It should not be necessary to ask a British judge to abide by the laws and codes of practice that govern secular law. But this being the Church of England, it operates as a law unto itself. Hedley is a member of a private dining club – Nobody's Friends – which often meets at Lambeth Palace. So is Sir Roger Singleton. Founded in 1800, Nobody's Friends is one of the oldest dining clubs in London, with roots in the High Church tradition, Conservative Party and Freemasonry, drawing its membership from senior clergy, senior ecclesiastical civil servants, church lawyers and other members of the 'establishment'. Membership is 50-50 clergy–laity.[39] The motto of the dining club is *Pro Ecclesia et Rege* – 'for the Church and King'. A private dining club that regularly meets at Lambeth Palace is flush with ecclesiastical lawyers and has leading figures from the establishment might well be above board.

Then again, the absence of a transparent, accountable and open conflicts of interest policy or proper register of interests for the Archbishops' Council, senior ecclesiocracy and many bishops does invite speculation on why such a void exists in the 21st century. Indeed, in the absence of any explanation, joining the feint dots in this chasmic governance vacuum merely seems precautionary. Despite concerns over this potentially unlawful vacuity in the governance of a major charitable foundation, questions raised at General Synod about these issues are deflected and deferred by individuals answering for the Archbishops' Council who are also members of the private club. The main law firm (Winckworth Sherwood, founded 1777) serving the Archbishop of Canterbury's work at Lambeth Palace and several

[38]https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cr5n2542q82o

[39]See Rowan Strong (ed), *The Oxford History of Anglicanism, Volume III: Partisan Anglicanism and its Global Expansion 1829-c. 1914*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 144; and *The Freemasons Chronicle* (518): 375. 13 December 1884.

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other southern provincial dioceses had, until recently, offices located in Oxford adjacent to where the University of Oxford Freemason's Lodge met.[40]

Of course, there is no way of knowing if Canon Hindley was ever a member of Nobody's Friends or had personal support from any of its members, though the latter seems highly likely on the basis of associations. Hindley, as a High Churchman, senior Canon and well-connected would certainly fit the profile. Certainly, the existence of the dining club and its previous record on protecting alleged and proven perpetrators of sexual abuse was noted by Alexis Jay at Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) in 2018.[41] More recently, the conservative evangelical clergyman Jonathan Fletcher (colleague of John Smyth QC, and both involved in allegations of abuse against young boys attending Iwerne Camps over many decades) emerged as another member of Nobody's Friends, as was his father Lord Fletcher.

Predictably, bishops in the Church of England have doubled down on the problems posed by the failure of the disciplinary proceedings against the likes of Canon Hindley and called for risk assessments registering concerns to be sufficient grounds for removing clergy. The Bishop of Blackburn, Philip North, made such a call in the *Church Times*,[42] although his plea is somewhat problematic on several grounds. First, North was Bishop of Burnley in the Diocese of Blackburn for several years, whilst Hindley's alleged abuse was known of, yet little was done, seemingly. Second, if it is to be made easier to remove clergy for safeguarding abuses and failures in policy and practice, then bishops should be subject to those same rules – though North says nothing on this. Third, North himself is strongly supported by the same senior lawyers at Lambeth Palace who are members of Nobody's Friends. This group represents a clandestine alliance of High Churchmen opposed to the ordination of women, and enjoy significant financial leverage through their organisations, including one simply known as The Society, of which Bishop North is a key member. Fourth, the opacity of episcopal decision-making does not inspire trust and confidence. Bishops in the Church of England, without exception, have consistently presided over catastrophic safeguarding procedures. Yet Bishop North argues for even more powers for the bishops, and is seemingly unaware of their lack of competence, insight, expertise and accountability. (Far less episcopal power, or better still none, would be preferable). Fifth, and to emphasize this point, there is plain evidence of clergy being subject to false accusations, subject to vexatious and

[40]Apollo University Lodge No. 357 founded in 1818. The Sherwood family appear to have prominent Oxfordshire and Berkshire Freemasonry connections dating from the 19th century. See Transactions of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076, *The Masonic Year Book Historical Supplement*, based on the 2nd edition of that work, published in 1969, with a Supplement in 1976, and Colin Dyer's *The Grand Stewards and their Lodge* (Grand Stewards' Lodge, 1985).

[41]See 'IICSA Peter Ball investigation 23–27 July 2018', *Child Abuse Law*, 6th November 2018; IICSA Inquiry Anglican Church Investigation Hearing, Day 5, IICSA p. 13., September 2018; 'Religious power and privilege failed the victims in the Peter Ball affair', *National Secular Society*, 11 August 2018; and Stephen Parsons, 'Toxic Masculinity – A problem for the Church?', *Surviving Church*, January 2019.

[42]https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2024/23-august/news/uk/risk-assessment-should-suffice-to-remove-a-cleric-from-office-bishop-of-blackburn-argues

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manipulative processes and forged allegations,[43] and falsified risk assessments, which invariably bishops and senior legal figures in the church will try to conceal or even endorse.[44] Here the autocracy shifts to being a 'vetocracy' – some things can never be changed and will be subject to perpetual veto by the leadership.

As I have argued before, the Church of England just looks askance at the civil law that binds all other citizens on equality, sexuality, gender, data protection, personnel, employment, safeguarding and the like.[45] As a law unto itself, it can do so since it sits outside English legal processes that bind every other citizen by virtue of its position as 'established by law' and so enjoys many exemptions under normal law. In such a bubble, quasi-regal pretensions are easier to develop and the monarchical culture of patronage that accompanies it. Yet a weak autocracy is arguably the worst of all worlds. The key courtiers that surround the monarchical figure – the Archbishops in this case – have access to unrivalled financial powers, legal and public relations resources, and significant leverage. The culture of patronage presides over the culture of preferment, and whilst that is made to appear as though it is democratic, transparent, accountable and open, the reality is otherwise. Those favoured by the patronage are fine. Those who find themselves at odds with it can easily find they are subject to secret campaigns or vendettas. As there are no operational conflicts of interest policy or register of interests amongst the highest echelons of the leadership of the Church of England, concealment of malice is relatively straightforward.

Some in the field of ecclesiology may wonder, 'Why the polity of governance in the Church of England has developed like this?' I think the answer partly lies in its protected elite status, its quasi-regal operatives, multiple forms of episcopal–monarchical simulacra, aloofness from normal civic law and professional codes of conduct, high-handed lofty entitlement and also its faith-based hubris that is simultaneously anti-modern and yet also lays claim to be progressive and cutting edge. This paradoxical, some might say oxymoronic, position will usually present itself as close as possible to being omniscient and omnicompetent and will offset its rare displays of omnipotence with fetishized pastoral beneficence.

But for victims of abuse, and those abused by the (so-called) 'systems' of the church, this will all be reified as systemic and harrowing re-abuse. In turn, protests

[43]https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-57780729 and https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-58326903

[44]See the determination of Lyndsey de Mestre KC in Diocese of Oxford vs. Revd. Canon Richard Peers, para 9.4., p. 7, https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/peers-determination.pdf

> four risk assessments were subsequently prepared on the basis of the conclusions in the Wood Report. These and other safeguarding processes put in place at the time have been criticised. For the avoidance of doubt, the Tribunal is not concerned with the details of how those operated or with evaluating their appropriateness.

The respondent was not licenced, authorized or approved to write or commission risk assessments, and the church court presided over by Lyndsey de Mestre KC declined to consider the manufacture of bogus risk assessments, which the Bishop of Oxford, for the plaintiff, had previously endorsed. Later in her determination, de Mestre praises Canon Peers' 'professionalism' in safeguarding, having decided to ignore serious written evidence to the contrary.

[45]See Martyn Percy, *Power and the Church: Ecclesiology in an Age of Transition*, London: Cassell, 1997, and *Salt of the Earth: Religious Resilience in a Secular Age*, Continuum, 2002.

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about that will be met with protestations of well-meaning innocence. Diagnosing this ecclesial polity – it is a kind of social–mental condition of the soul of the church – is complex. But the diagnoses would lie somewhere in the terrain of dissociative identity disorder, with bishops and senior ecclesiocrats alternating between possession and non-possession. Whilst that is tormenting for the patient, it is terrifying for those made to live under such leaders. Add in the hubris – some might say with a large slug of corporate narcissism concerned only with *appearances* – and the recipe for the leadership in perpetrating further abuse is fully set. A final heavy seasoning of certainty-orientated evangelicalism or 'father-knows-best' High Churchmanship completes the fare on offer.

Strange though this may seem, there are instructive ecclesial parallels. The Christian Science Church was certain of its superiority to modern medicine. It refused modernity's interventions and, in its own way, also enshrined being 'a law unto itself'. Exactly parallel to the Church of England's safeguarding history, however, Christian Science quickly appropriated the terms of modern medicine. There were Christian Science physicians, nurses, carers, diagnoses, prognoses and even nursing homes – just as the Church of England's safeguarding has its core groups, lessons learned reviews, national panels, officers, advisors, investigations, audits, assessments and determinations.[46]

The similarity is striking here because in both cases, none of the practitioners have any independence from the institution they represent, are subject to any external professional independent regulatory body, work under proper codes of practice or have any need to demonstrate accountability, transparency, justice or competence. Safeguarding in the Church of England, exactly like the 'medicine' of Christian Science, is not related to any external teaching, training or research-based body that confers qualifications or assesses expertise. The person who is subject to the Church of England's safeguarding is ultimately in the same position as any ill 'patient' under the care of Christian Science.

Perhaps the only difference between these two polities to note here is that whilst those who opt into Christian Science teachings and beliefs probably do so consciously, and have some knowledge of the risks they undertake in doing so, and what security they forego, the same can seldom be said for those who are served by the Church of England's safeguarding. The unwitting will assume that their experiences of the Church of England, as the established church of the land, will have some secular-normative foundation and correspond to normal standards in public life. It does not. Even those inside the Church of England's governance just cannot see how detached their systems are from normal functional reality.

Meanwhile, the Church of England continues to adopt hollowed-out secular terminology in the name of keeping up *appearances*. This is an endemic trend in the leadership of the Church of England, with its appropriation of terminology including 'mission statements', 'vision statements', 'strategy', 'healthy organization', 'KPIs' and the like.[47] Lessons learned reviews in the Church of England are, on average, delivered more than 750 days late (and rising), cost hundreds of

[46]See, for example, Caroline Fraser, *The Guardian*, 6 August 2024: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/06/christian-science-church-medicine-death-horror-of-my-fathers-last-days

[47]See Martyn Percy, *The Exiled Church*, London: SCM-Canterbury Press, 2025.

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thousands of pounds, are heavily redacted by the Secretariat and legal staff at Lambeth Palace (even when they have set the terms of reference for the work) and result in absolutely no change in culture or practice or any identifiable lessons being learned or implemented. The *Makin Review*, which is meant to be focussing on the abuse perpetrated at Iwerne Camps, is now over 1600 days late and unlikely to appear before most of its subjects retire from episcopal ministry, which speaks for itself (Having said that, a version is now scheduled to be published on November 13th 2024, albeit heavily redacted).

Conclusion

Given this, how might the fusion of required emotional and ecclesial intelligence we have been discussing offer some kind of indicative pathway ahead for congregations and denominations that are struggling with strong feelings, raw experiences of abuse, the victims of flawed power structures and intense, hostile expressions of anger? Several things can be said here.

A practical–pastoral theology that took victims of abuse seriously, and the role of the churches and their structures in not only perpetrating that abuse but also in compounding the original abuse by further abuses of power, would require churches to become more emotionally engaged and spiritually intelligent than is the case at present. The failure of structures, governance and leadership on the part of churches, as well as their transparency and accountability as public bodies, has dire consequences for identity, authority, mission and ministry.

What this paper calls for is a new pattern of adaptive leadership. This involves the transfer of the theology of reception from the ecumenical domain into intra-church life, pastoral care and policy and politics, rooted in first-hand grounded experiences and reflections on anger and assertion within the church. It remains to be seen what spiritual, ecclesial and emotional intelligence will be required by any ecclesial leadership to identify true victims of abuse. Furthermore, the ecclesial leadership will need to engage in systematic introspection to unmask the underlying 'systems of abuse' that actively percolate through the church, whereby a powerful reversal of victim/perpetrator occurs. These issues are becoming increasingly acknowledged in courts of law especially in relation to family matters.

We are, effectively, witnessing a power failure in the churches today. And in turn, this has led to a crisis in the authority of the churches. Put plainly, the churches are no longer trusted or believed and are perceived to be only looking after their interests. The structures of the church need serious recalibration. At present, the church is merely a broken body when it comes to dealing with victims of the abuse it has perpetrated. The churches have inadequate structures and provisions that are not fit for purpose and cannot receive the brokenness of their victims. As Jesus said, 'Physician, heal thyself' (Luke 4: 23).

Sometimes, expressing anger and acting out is essential and even prophetic. What are we to make of Jesus driving out the money changers and traders from the temple precincts, recorded in the Gospel of John? Jesus creates mayhem in the temple and upsets all the people going about their lawful trading in dubious religious bric-a-brac. And he delivers his judgement in full measure and

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unreservedly, driving them out with a whip that he made himself. Jesus does not deliver in half measures. His action in the temple – reckless, violent and intemperate – contains a *complete* message in a sign. It conveys wisdom. Sometimes, breaking our frames of reference with such sharpness is the only way to get people to see how foolish they have been. This is the key to understanding the incident: this is about breaking paradigms. So, there was no point in 'trading up' from a pigeon to a dove. Neither sacrifice would bring you closer to God; you wasted your money. There was no point in going for the 'three for two' offer on goats or the 'buy one, get one free' offer on lambs.

Much of the gospel is about reconciling to what has been hidden, looking deeper into what has been revealed and seeing beyond the obvious: to find wisdom in apparent folly. And this is why his 'anger' in the gospel is so interesting. For it seems not to be a hot, quick, irrational 'snap' but rather a cold and calculating anger. There is a difference between hot anger and cold, perhaps righteous anger. Jesus went away and *made* the whips of cords. This is a cold, premeditated attack, not a rush of blood to the head. As the Epistle to James puts it, he has 'been slow to anger' – but he's got there. So, there are three things to say in conclusion.

First, what is Jesus so upset about in the temple? It seems to me that it lies in assumptions about the 'natural order of things', status and privilege, possessions and prevailing wisdom. In other words, these are unexamined lives and practices lived in unexamined contexts. Everyone is blind. Jesus' action forces us to confront the futile sight before us. His anger forces us to look again.

Second, the story chides us all for those most simple venial sins: overlooking. The trading has been happening for donkey's years. It is simply part of the furniture; it barely merits a look, let alone comment. Jesus, of course, always looks deeper. But the story's lesson is that having investigated this with such penetration, Jesus' gaze often shifts – to those below and beyond us.

Third, the besetting sin is the temple traders accepting the status quo. The story has one thing to say about this: don't. Don't accept that a small gesture can't ripple out and begin to change things. Don't accept, wearily, that you can't make a difference – you can. Sometimes, the change can be radical, but often, the change comes about through small degrees. We need to press for both.

Jesus' actions in the temple are profound, prescient and prophetic. The activist Audre Lorde describes the painful cost of speaking out for black women's movements working for equality:

> Oppressed people are always asked to stretch a little more, to bridge the gap between blindness and humanity . . . We are expected to use our anger only in the service of other people's salvation, other people's learning. But that time is over. My anger has meant pain to me, but it has also meant survival, and before I give it up, I am going to be sure that there is something at least as powerful to replace it on the road to clarity.[48]

Anger is freighted with information, passion and drive. A good institution will engage with anger waged against it. A failing institution, however, desperate to

[48]A. Lord, 'The Uses of Anger', *Women's Studies Quarterly 9* (1981), pp. 7–10.

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preserve its culture and political status quo, can only pretend to listen – purely to cling to its remnants of power.

True prophets do not relish their vocation. They don't enjoy alienating people; speakers of uncomfortable truths rarely do. They don't enjoy the sound of their solitary righteousness or being in a minority of one. True prophets find their burden heavy-laden and do not meet it with alacrity. They know they will be scapegoated and persecuted for endeavouring to speak truth to power. Live or die, they stand and strive for truth and justice.

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