CITY theology MAGAZINE OF LEEDS CHURCH INSTITUTE

WHAT HAPPENS
WHEN
RELIGION
AND ARTIFICIAL
INTELLIGENCE
MEET?

THE CHAIR OF SANCTUARY

HOW CAN A BAD NIGHT'S SLEEP MAKE YOU MORE COMPASSIONATE?

QUESTIONS AGAINST RACISM

> SPRING 2024 SPECIAL ISSUE

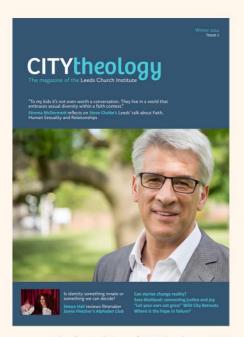
Welcome to CITYTheology

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This is my last edition of CITYtheology as Content Editor. The magazine has been published for nearly as long as I have been Director of LCI; it is currently in its tenth year, while I am in my eleventh. It is one of the aspects of LCI's work I am most proud of, because it fulfils the vision of LCI as a hub for faith and learning.





The first edition of CITYtheology: 2014

Learning is central to our discipleship and journey through life because it enables us to grow and to develop as individuals and as communities, for our own benefit and the benefit of others, all in response to God's call. Opportunities for learning should, therefore, be plentiful and varied, freely and widely available, and lead us into greater fullness of life. A key aim for LCI generally, and CITYtheology specifically, is to make such faith and learning a joy, both easy to start and to sustain.

In this context, I love the gospel verse, 'Come to me all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest... my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

Our faith and learning are a yoke and a burden because we do work at them. Certainly, writing an article for CITYtheology takes effort, as does making the time to read and reflect on the latest edition. However, CITYtheology is designed to be 'easy and light'. It is delivered to your door and available on our website; the design is attractive and inviting; It is based around ideas and questions; and it is enriched through the arts to enliven your thinking.

The content of each edition of CITYtheology is chosen to reflect everyday life in Leeds, so that it is relevant to our faith and our city. It is responsive to themes raised by city life and within church life such as inclusion, forgiveness and compassion. It is always theology, although articles are not always written by Christians, and I hope they are of interest to people of no religious faith or different faiths as well. Some articles are written by people with theology degrees, although you don't need a degree to read them. This wide range of contributors aims to offer diverse perspectives to a wide readership.

Learning at LCI is based on a eucharistic pattern in the way that we come together in faith to learn and then are sent out to use that learning for the benefit of all. In this way, and with a focus on justice issues in our learning, we seek the welfare of the city.

The issues we focus on relate to experiences of inequality in Leeds, with a particular concern for people living at the margins and those experiencing discrimination and exclusion.

There are frequently articles reflecting on racial justice, the challenges of social isolation and exclusion, and including children's perspectives.

Since the announcement that I am moving on to a new role, I have been grateful to receive appreciative and encouraging emails, phone calls and WhatsApp messages from CITYtheology readers and writers. I have been delighted by those who have told me they have saved all back copies of CITYtheology over the years, and those who shared what the magazine has meant to them. At the end of this edition, you can read a couple of reviews of CITYtheology, one from a long-time reader and one from a new writer.

Since the February issue, we have

also received positive feedback about CITYtheology's new A5 format. My favourite comment was a description of it as being 'cup of coffee friendly' because we had hoped the changes would make it more accessible to read and easier to share.

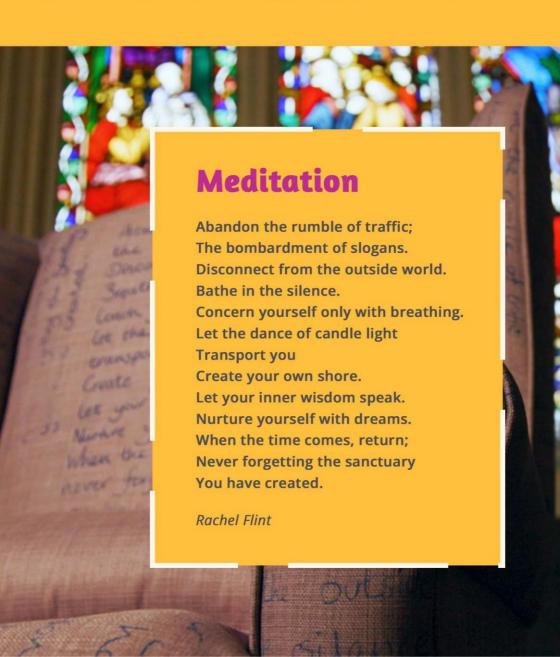
As a soon-to-be member of LCI, rather than member of staff, I am looking forward to receiving my copy of the next edition of CITYtheology through the post. I will then settle down with a nice cup of coffee, read fresh perspectives on faith and learning in Leeds, and think of others doing the same thing.

Dr Helen Reid

Director, Leeds Church Institute

The Chair of Sanctuary

BRONAGH DALY INTRODUCES NEW ARTWORK CREATED TO EXPRESS AND ENCOURAGE FAITH, LEARNING, JUSTICE AND COOPERATION.



The idea of the Chair of Sanctuary began with a vision of creating a piece of art you could sit in. It was inspired by the belief that God listens to us, and specifically to people here in Leeds. The idea came to life through collaboration between a poet (Rachel Flint), a therapist (Julia Hyliger), an upholsterer (Karen Joyce), a craftivist (Anna Bland), a

film editor (Robyn Kitley) and an art theologian (myself).

The artwork is a chair, a poem, a video and the ongoing opportunity for theological reflection. Below are quotes that illustrate the theory behind its creation and reactions to its first public residency, which took place at Allerton CofE Primary School.

THEORY The inspiration behind the pieces



What I dream of is an art of balance, of purity and serenity, devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter... for example, a soothing, calming influence on the mind, something like a good armchair which provides relaxation from physical fatigue.

Henri Matisse, French visual artist, 1869-1954

The Church has need especially of artists, using the endless possibilities of images and their symbolic force. Christ himself made extensive use of images in his preaching, fully in keeping with his willingness to become, in the Incarnation, the icon of the unseen God... Art has a unique capacity to take one or other facet of the message and translate it into colours, shapes and sounds, which nourish the intuition of those who look or listen. It does so without emptying the message itself of its transcendent value and its aura of mystery.

Pope Saint John Paul II, 1920-2005, in his Letter to Artists

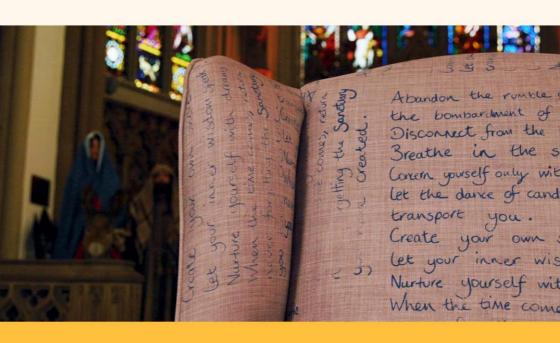
RESPONSES TO THE CHAIR

Sitting in the Chair of Sanctuary starts a process. It begins with just sitting and reflecting quietly. This then leads to talking about your emotions and feelings, and after this, you move on to drawing on theological practices and writings. It brings you to a place of inner calm and sanctuary in a complicated world.

Ann Cosgrove, Deputy Head, Allerton CofE Primary

We are conscious that children have so much to tell with the little words they know. This [Chair of Sanctuary] will encourage them to share what they feel courageously.

Tameem and Mubeena, parents of a Year 3 pupil, Allerton CofE Primary School



The artwork is available for residency at churches and schools in Leeds, with support from Leeds Church Institute. Please contact Bronagh for more details creativity@leedschurchinstitute.org

Questions Against

Racism

At LCI we believe a good question is worth just as much, and often a lot more, than a good answer.

At Churches Against Racism 2024 we asked you to pose your questions about racial justice in the church to our panel of church leaders. We were blown away by the

thoughtful responses we received, and we wanted to share some of them here for you to mull over. How would you think about these for yourself or your own church context?

What suggestions do you have to convince white folk of the importance of being actively anti-racist and not just not-racist?

How long must Black people continue to fight racism? Should we not now reach a point when white people and their organisations take the lead?

How should we address the economic impact/inequality caused by racism?

Richard Reddie mentioned the fatigue that comes with this work. How can churches support people to minimise burnout?

Churches have many up-to-date policies – however, how do we get people to realise that they need to look within themselves and identify that's where the problem lies?

How does the church intend to have the difficult conversations about its involvement in racist practices i.e slavery, wars? How can the church ensure they are strong enough to influence society to change its racist views?

There appears to be a bit of a taboo when churches are faced with the question of racism in church and society. What practical steps would you suggest to overcome this reluctance?

Much of the resistance to inclusion is due to fear of change. How do we overcome that fear?

How do you broach this with church leaders if they don't see the need?

What are some examples of actions currently by the church against racism? What are some of the plans for the future to continue challenging racism?

What is the cause of the obvious division between Pentecostal, Methodist, Anglican, Catholic, new style churches and African churches? Because I think this needs solving first before we can tackle racism. We need to be in one accord.

Is this something that LCI as a vision wants to take to educational settings? The children are the future.

How does the church write the vision on racial justice and make it clear, and what will the next steps be?

How can churches organise to better sensitise political decision-makers to the reality of eradicating discrimination?

Is it better for a church to be diverse or to reflect the local population?

What is the disconnect between churches engaging with racial justice and the apathy seen from a large number of churches?

Do you think racism will ever go away? (We all have a part to play...)





ERIN CLARK, LEEDS CHURCH INSTITUTE MA SCHOLARSHIP STUDENT 2023-4, SUGGESTS A PRODUCTIVE FUTURE LIES AHEAD.

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A future wherein aspects of Artificial Intelligence (AI) permeate daily life may seem to be a world away. Yet, it may be closer than you realise.

You may see this as threatening if you are familiar with Arnold Schwarzenegger's eponymous role as The Terminator (1984), with Hugo Weaving's performance as Agent Smith in The Matrix (1999) and its sequels, or with Hal, the supercomputer in 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968). These films inform our collective cultural imagination and portray AI as threatening and violent. They portray, however, a form of 'General Al' rather than the 'Narrow Al' which is currently entering our lives. Narrow AI is considerably less sophisticated, less developed, and has markedly less of a capacity for inflicting irreversible damage to the world.

So, where exactly does religion come into this conversation? Some believe that, with the advent of AI, religion can now be explained away as another virtual reality game, played by millions of people. In this 'game' you pray each day to get points, and by the end of your 'life' you hope to have gained enough points, so that, after you 'die', you move on to the next level. To explore such an approach, I conducted a survey of AI and

religion as portrayed in WIRED, Christianity Today & The Guardian. From this, I identified three common themes that arose when the intersection of religion and Al was being discussed.

The Guardian explored the view of Al as godlike. Just as Christianity speaks of the all-seeing all-powerful deity as a doctrine of faith, perhaps Al advancement can be viewed as an updated version of such power in our increasingly secular world. Culturally, we undoubtedly bestow a significant amount of power onto Al and respond with a level of awe and gratitude.

In a society which recognises the term 'god-like' as synonymous with power and transcendence of a human norm, the fact that Al is described as 'god-like' is understandable. Theological approaches do, however, include more essential indicators of 'godlike-ness,' such as goodness, mercy and compassion. These are not currently within the remit and capabilities of Narrow Al.

Also identified in the media are the eschatological implications of technological advancement - a second link between religion and Al.

Eschatology is a branch of theology concerned with death, judgement, and the final destiny of the soul and of humankind.

Christianity Today and The Guardian investigated whether a religious understanding of life after death could be equated with the AI concept of the point at which people could be transformed into 'Spiritual Machines'.

The concept of spiritual machines lies in the vision of transferring our minds to supercomputers. This could be seen as the time when our bodies would become incorruptible, immune to disease and decay, and we would acquire knowledge through uploads to our brains. Many advocates for the compatibility of religion and Al identify as 'transhumanists,' referring to transhumanism as a "new religion." They advocate for the integration of advanced technology, developing individual capabilities far beyond any known levels. As such, the only appropriate terms to refer to humans post-advancement would be "posthuman', 'godlike' or 'divine.'

The potential ability for AI to subvert the established natural order of life, which includes natural evils such as disease, decay and death does sound eschatological, but at what point are we no longer 'flesh and blood'? Additionally, what does this mean for the applicability and relevance of long-standing Biblical teachings about life after death?

Christianity Today expressed concerns that Al has problematic implications for Christian ethics. For example, what would it mean to love your neighbour if your neighbour is an Al chatbot? Furthermore, how essential is it to have a recognisable human body and mind to worship God?

Finally, if the goal of AI is to replicate human activity, could AI write an effective sermon, run a Bible study group or similar gathering, or facilitate religious activities with the same meaningful involvement as a human?

A productive future?

In conclusion, some media articles dramatise the situation. They set Al and religion on a collision course. Academic theological study on religion and Al instead comments that Al can - and does - work for the benefit of theology.



New and innovative technology can provide tools, methods and a process that would be instrumental in theological development. Debates around this are far more nuanced than the media currently suggests.

I fundamentally believe that reading around such nuanced issues is vital. To generalise religion is just as damaging as generalising Al. It seemingly ignores the fact that there are several ways in which Al and religious institutions can work together to productively nurture strong religious beliefs in an ever-adapting world.

One example is the use 'prayer robots,' already used in Japan and Poland to connect remote communities to share faith amidst the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Greater understanding is needed as we explore these new spaces created by the meeting of religion and Al. I believe good things can happen when religion and Al meet.



To read the full extended media survey or discuss Erin's findings in detail, please email: events@leedschurchinstitute.org

How can a bad night's sleep make you more compassionate?

REVD ANDY
MUCKLE, CHAPLAIN
AT ST GEORGE'S
CRYPT, REFLECTS
ON WHAT IT
MEANS TO SUFFER
WITH THOSE WHO
SUFFER.



It is Friday and I am feeling slightly frazzled...I admit it. I am tired, not firing on all cylinders, and by this afternoon have the sense of being hauled through the rest of the day by multiple cups of coffee. This has all come about due to my dear wife having a hacking cough for several days, making it impossible to get a decent night's sleep. Far too often I have been gazing at the alarm clock in the wee hours, something I am sure is an experience shared by many others who feel my pain!

What should my overriding emotion be? Past the slight grumpiness, which comes from disturbed sleep, my overriding emotion should be compassion. Compassion for my poor wife, and also for all those fatigued by disturbed sleep.

Reflecting on the root of words often shines a light into deeper meanings of the word. Such is the case with 'compassion.'

The Latin word (compassion) means 'to suffer with,' and as such, it is much deeper than sympathy or even empathy. Here, compassion is to not just mentally feel someone's pain, but to place yourself alongside them, walking with them, whatever their 'valley of the shadow of death' may look like. This is not a passive emotion, rather it is an emotion that drives us into transformative change.

In New Testament Greek, the word splagchnizomai creates some wonderful imagery, which describes what we might term as 'Christianity in action.' This word is used in the Gospels many times in relation to lesus' encounters with those who were lost, needed healing or were grieving, such as in Matthew 14:14; Matthew 20:34 and Luke 7:13. It literally means 'to have your bowels yearn or to be moved in your bowels.' The Greeks considered the bowels to be the seat of love and pity, so this word literally gives us a visceral description of compassion. It is an emotion felt deep within us, changing us and propelling us into transformative action. The compassion felt by Jesus was followed by transformative action; the lost found, the sick healed, and the dead raised.

This is hardly surprising because God is a God of compassion. Meister Eckhart, the 13th Century German theologian, said:



You may call God love, you may call God goodness, but the best name for God is compassion.

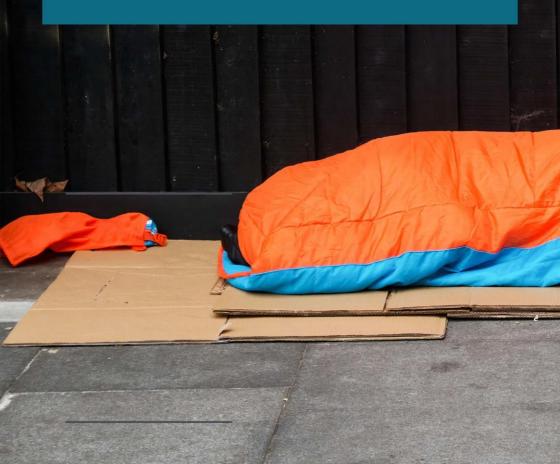


Such an idea takes us straight to the heart of the Incarnation - God amongst us in the form of Jesus to suffer with us, to walk, live, love, cry, even die as a human. The Incarnation is the ultimate radical act of compassion, offered to a humanity crying out for God's love to flood the wastelands of our existence.

Perhaps the instinctive question that follows from the Incarnation is 'what does it mean for us to be God's compassionate people?' In my work, as Chaplain to St George's Crypt (a charity that has been in the city of Leeds for 94 years, reaching out to those living with homelessness and addiction) it means allowing the disturbed sleep of my life to drive me into compassionate care of those who quite literally spend days, weeks and months trying to sleep in doorways and on benches across our city. While I have endured a few disturbed nights, I can only imagine what it must be like to live like that.

Charlie Carroll in his book 'No Fixed Abode' recalls his journey tramping from Cornwall to London as an experience of homelessness. Those he met on the road counselled him that it takes at least a month to adapt to any kind of existence on the streets, and that includes learning where and how to sleep. The reality, though, is that those living on the streets rarely sleep, they doze. Sleep itself is dangerous, for in the unguarded time of the oblivion of

exhaustion, you lay yourself open to at best being robbed, or at worst beaten up by someone seeking a quick and violent thrill. So, you learn to doze, often fitfully, snatching minutes of sleep at a time. More likely, however, you spend the wee hours walking around the city until dawn breaks and the city until dawn breaks and the city awakes. Then, as at last, the city's workers again surround you, and only then, can you, in some degree of safety, crash into nothingness.

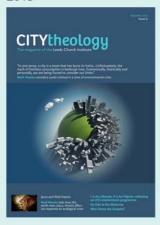


As temporary and relatively painless as my recent sleeplessness might have been, at least I can be driven by this minuscule season of fatigue to love harder and to care deeper for those who come through our doors exhausted from being on the streets.

As I gaze into their tired eyes, even if I know all our beds and chairs are full, the very least I can do is pray that somehow they will find some moments rest and, when the long night ahead stretches before them, they may know God's protection and blessing.



2015 2016 2017



















A FOND FAREWELL

Celebrating Dr Helen Reid and her contribution as Editor of CITYTheology Magazine



[Over the years] I've continued an active interest in LCI, and particularly the inspirational and motivational theological reflections delivered through CITYtheology and accompanying webpages.

As one of my current undertakings is the layout and design of Wetherby Parish's magazine, I continue to feel challenged to emulate the highly creative & eye-catching standard of the printed LCI material that regularly drops through my letterbox. Please do pass on my appreciation to Daniel and the team.

It would, however, be nothing without the thoughts and carefully chosen words from yourself and the variety of contributors, all of whom give me pause for thought, prayer and no doubt some kind of action.

Your tenure as Director of LCI has been inspirational to me, and I am sure many others, and you will be sorely missed in Leeds. I have particularly appreciated your creative enthusiasm and your ability to value and mark the contribution of others. Rooted in the Christian faith you have opened the way to learning and discovery from sisters and brothers of all faiths and 'none'.



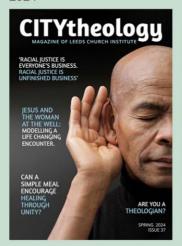
As a recent first-time writer for CITYtheology, I am suitably pensive about the publication of this edition. The magazine, for me, functions as an effective facilitator of purposeful conversation in the way that each article is a jump-off point for further consideration, research and investigation. CITYtheology is not only a product of its diligent and informed writers, but also its editors, designers, distributors, and of course, its dear readers!

The crown jewel, so to speak, of these people is the Director, Dr Helen Reid, who is soon to depart from LCI and move onto exciting pastures new. While we are suitably saddened by the thought, I am sure that I speak for many affiliated with LCI when I say that I eagerly anticipate news of Dr Reid's fantastic work over at Parcevall Hall. So, in the spirit of the spring season, I see inspiring new eras for both Dr Reid's career and LCI are in store!



Erin Clarke

2024







THE HOOK LECTURE 2024

Turning Key Moments Into Movements

For Change

The ongoing challenge to effect real racial justice in Church and society

WITH RICHARD REDDIE

Researcher, author and Director of Justice and Inclusion for Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

WEDNESDAY 23RD OCTOBER

7-9PM LEEDS MINSTER 2-6 KIRKGATE LS2 7DJ



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Do you share our passion for learning as a faithful city?

At Leeds Church Institute we're committed to learning around faith and justice, in cooperation with partners around Leeds.

If you'd like to join us on this journey, become a member!

In 2024 we're re-introducing membership fees on a pay-as-you-feel basis to support our continued work in the city. Everybody is welcome, and you'll receive a quarterly copy of CityTheology magazine as well as regular email updates for all the latest events and resources. Plus you'll help shape the future of LCI at our AGM each year.







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