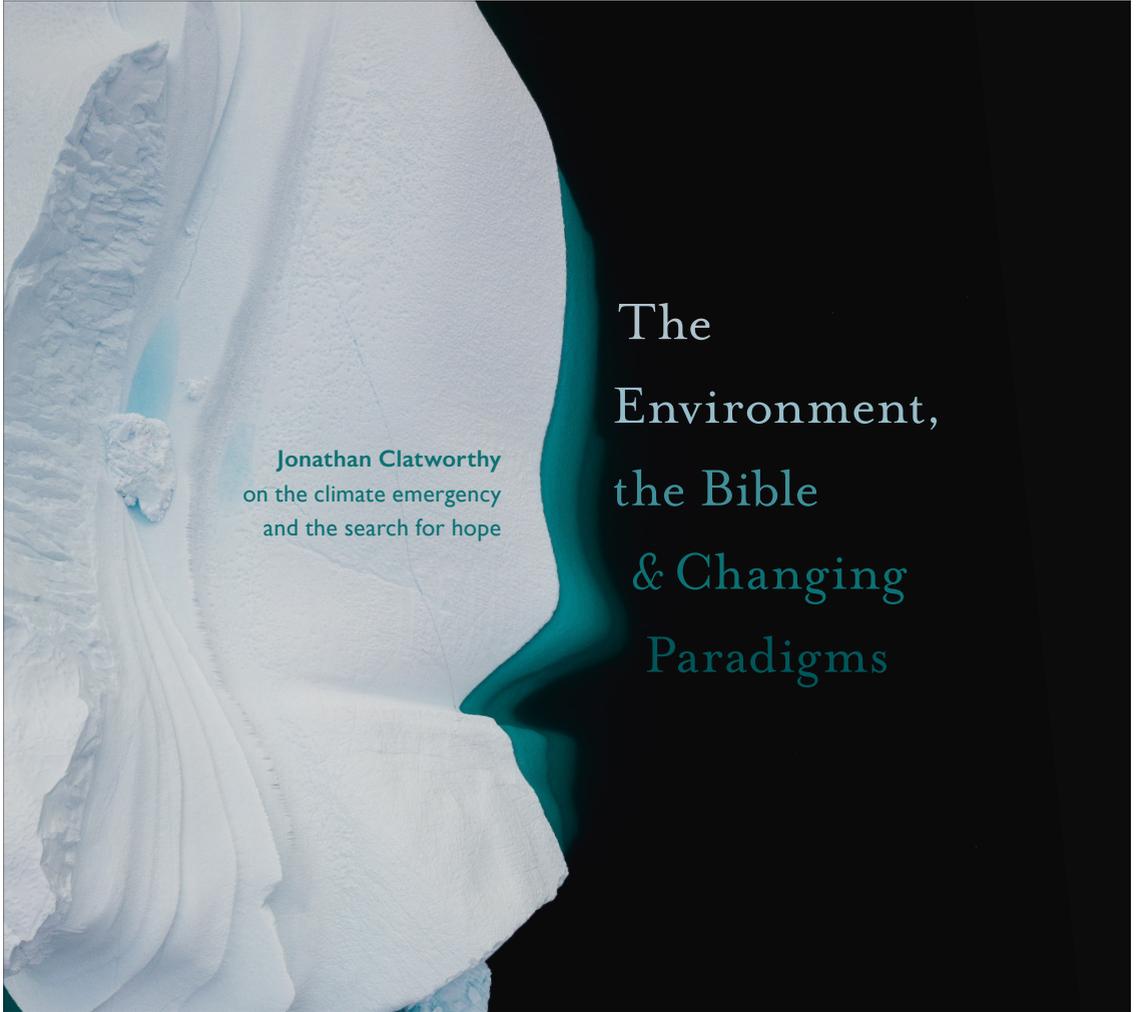


SUMMER 2021

# SIGNS OF THE TIMES

FEATURES, COMMENTARY AND REVIEWS FROM MODERN CHURCH



**Jonathan Clatworthy**  
on the climate emergency  
and the search for hope

## The Environment, the Bible & Changing Paradigms

Not So Much a Crisis,  
More a Way of Life  
**Anthony Woollard**

Book Reviews  
**Michael Chester, David Driscoll, Trevor Pitt,  
Rosemary Walters & Jonathan Ward**

The Modern Church  
Forum April Report  
**Lorraine Cavanagh**

MODERNCHURCH.ORG.UK





**General Secretary**  
Very Revd Dr Jonathan Draper  
gensec@modernchurch.org.uk

**Administrator**  
Diane Kutar  
office@modernchurch.org.uk  
0845 345 1909

Modern Church is an international society promoting liberal theology. Founded in 1898 to defend liberalism in the Church of England, we now work ecumenically to encourage open, enquiring, non-dogmatic approaches to Christianity.

---

#### SIGNS OF THE TIMES

**Editor**  
Anthony Woollard  
signsofthetimes  
@modernchurch.org.uk  
01 789 204923

**Book Reviews Editor**  
Trevor Pitt  
trevorpitt@aol.com

#### CONTRIBUTORS

---

**Lorraine Cavanagh**  
Anglican priest and writer  
@LorraineCavana2

---

**Michael Chester**  
Supernumerary Methodist presbyter and former senior lecturer in theology at Kenya Methodist University

---

**Jonathan Clatworthy**  
Theological author, blogger, and Modern Church trustee

---

**David Driscoll**  
Retired priest, member of the Council of Modern Church and joint convenor of its South West Group

---

**Trevor Pitt**  
Priest and *Signs of the Times* book reviews editor

---

**Rosemary Walters**  
Lay canon of Canterbury Cathedral

---

**Jonathan Ward**  
Commercial director at Ushaw College, Durham

---

#### EDITORIAL



Anthony Woollard  
Editor

## NOT SO MUCH A CRISIS, MORE A WAY OF LIFE

**T**his edition appears shortly before our Annual Conference, this year (online-only) dedicated to the climate emergency. Before and beyond the pandemic, that crisis looms and we dare not ignore it. After over a year of living also with Covid-19, many of us may cry “Lord, how long?” Humanity, and the Earth itself, may seem to be on a downward spiral, an apocalypse from which there is no escape. And it will not be surprising if the faith of many is deeply challenged in these times.

Faced with these twin crises, we might recall James Lovelock’s Gaia hypothesis – the idea that the Earth is a single, self-correcting system. What self-correction might be going on here? Both the pandemic and the climate crisis almost seem “intended” to reduce Earth’s human population. We have been reluctant in recent years to talk about over-population, but our new situation raises the question once again. In that case, we may ask, what sort of a God is it that creates *continued* >

---

Signs of the Times is published in February, May, August and November. It provides news and information about Modern Church and offers members an opportunity to communicate with each other in print. We welcome articles, notices, poems, suggestions, comments and suitable accompanying images. Articles published do not necessarily reflect a Modern Church perspective – in keeping with our commitment to liberal theology we believe that other views should be heard. Send material to the editor by 28th December, 28th March, 28th June or 28th September. Articles should not exceed 1,000 words. We prefer email but will process typed or handwritten text (phone for a postal address).



Printed on FSC® and EU Eco Label certified environmentally friendly paper from sustainably managed forests and other controlled sources. Please recycle after use.

Cover photo: Annie Spratt on Unsplash



It may well be that this time of crisis will become a way of life for our children and grandchildren. Perhaps ultimately it will become a way of death for the human race. Can we really trust that there is meaning in all this – that Truth and Love will prevail?

the world, and humanity, only to destroy them? That of course is the question raised by the story of Noah. And it is also the question that Job asked. I remember a lecture by the late Bishop John Austin Baker, in which he pointed out that the only answer God gave to Job is “Can you make a hippopotamus?”

Most theology, ultimately, is about theodicy: “justifying the ways of God to man”, as Milton put it. The problem of evil – the existence of a world in which the law of life sometimes seems to be based on destruction (including lots of self-destruction) – raises huge questions about the nature of whatever Mystery might lie behind creation. The work goes on, because there is no final solution that will convince all.

#### **A problem of good**

Yet at least we must say that there is also a problem of good. For many, two individuals stand out in humanity’s recent responses to the twin crises – Captain Sir Tom Moore, and Greta Thunberg. Despite their flaws, which we all share, and the misuses to which their images may have been put by some people, we must ask what sort of creation – what sort of a Creator – could give rise to such triumphs of the human spirit. Perhaps, by following their examples, we, and the human race as a whole, can turn around the crises even at this late hour. And hopefully our Conference will give us tools to help in this.

But that does not do away with the problem of evil – especially as we look at the climate-change-deniers, anti-vaxxers and others who could still wreck so much goodness and put us on a road to disaster. There are no quick fixes, and

no certain outcome. Thinking of Job, that book contains the credo “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him” – an idea which seems to make no rational sense, but which may release such faith as can move mountains. But even such faith cannot guarantee the outcome we hope for. It may well be that this time of crisis will become a way of life for our children and grandchildren. Perhaps ultimately it will become a way of death for the human race. Can we really trust that there is meaning in all this – that Truth and Love will prevail?

#### **“God is in the cancer...”**

Bishop John Robinson is another hero to many of us. His saying, as he approached death from cancer, that “God is in the cancer as He is in the sunset, and to be met and responded to in each”, is in a way a modern version of Job’s credo. And he famously said that the essence of the Christian Gospel is that Love not only ought to be at the heart of the universe but that it actually is. Many of us today struggle to reach the depth of faith displayed by that so-called dangerous liberal. Yet most of us know the mystery of Goodness, in everything from aspects of our personal lives, through some of the more positive responses which have already been made to our twin crises, to the sheer wonder of Creation (including Bishop Baker’s hippopotamus), about which our generation has learnt afresh through other heroes such as David Attenborough, and which may prove a prime motivating force for change. Yet another hero of the Sixties, Martin Luther King, believed that “the arc of history bends towards justice”, and those also are

words to encourage our faith in this dark time.

#### **More a way of life**

For those who do not recognise it, my title is based on the theme to one of the many satirical TV programmes of the 1960s:

*Not so much a programme, more a way of life  
And a way of looking at the world;  
One eye open, the other eye closed,  
And between the two the picture gets composed.*

Perhaps that is not such a bad description of how to cope, in questioning faith, with the twin crises of our times.

And meanwhile our work goes on – with the next item on our agenda our Annual General Meeting on 14 June at 7.30. There will be some important business to transact, and a lot of information to share.

#### **MODERN CHURCH AGM ZOOM DETAILS**

**In case they do not reach you by other means, here are the details of the Zoom link for the AGM on 14 June, starting 7.30pm:**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82004210467?pwd=Z3MrYnglZGVOYlE4anI0VGRDcjd6UT09>

**Meeting ID: 820 0421 0467  
Passcode: 814368**

Whilst only full members of Modern Church can vote, all who are interested in our work will be welcome.

# The Environment, the Bible

# & Changing Paradigms

The climate emergency and the search for hope

**Jonathan Clatworthy**  
reflects on the theme  
of Modern Church's  
annual conference this year,  
which runs from 13-14 July.  
For more information,  
please see our website.

Photography by Annie Spratt on Unsplash.



**F**or over 50 years scientists have been warning us that we need to change our ways. The agreements made at the Paris Conference (COP 21, in December 2015) are largely not being kept. Even if they were, scientists tell us they are not enough. There is increasing public concern, as expressed by new movements like Extinction Rebellion.

Some appropriate changes have been made, but the big decisions are still being guided by the mindset that does the damage. As I write this, my local airport is applying for permission to expand. The most influential voices address the economic impact; the environmental impact is noted but not taken so seriously. Yet if we are to meet our climate targets air travel, far from increasing, will need to be significantly reduced.

Meanwhile, as I write this the British Government is talking about building more roads, opening a new coal mine, increasing nuclear warheads and punishing protesters more fiercely. Not only in Britain, but throughout the 'developed' world, democracies keep electing governments committed to the policies causing the damage. They pay lip service to environmental concern. They agree to changes that don't

challenge their underlying mindset: electric cars, wind farms. But they don't do anywhere near as much as the scientific community are demanding.

Despairing isn't going to help. To respond effectively, we need to understand what it is about our values that make us want the wrong things.

### Conflicting paradigms

In effect, environmental awareness has reawakened a paradigm – a worldview, or framework for the way we understand the world – which has long been suppressed.

Environmental philosophers usually date the dominant paradigm from around 400 years ago, the time of Francis Bacon. Europe was suffering from successive plagues. It was easy to believe nature was hostile to human well-being. Bacon believed a combination of science and technology could correct the faults in nature which had arisen when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit.

It was a new interpretation of Genesis, but it worked. Today we can look back on centuries of Western self-congratulation. We tell ourselves we are better than the rest of the world because our science has produced useful technologies; we know more; we are more civilised; we have produced more wealth.



Bacon believed a combination of science and technology could correct the faults in nature which had arisen when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. It was a new interpretation of Genesis, but it worked.

New Testament scholars have argued that Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God appealed to the universalist theme in the Bible. The world had been designed by a supreme creator so that our lives would be a blessing. The world provided enough for everybody to live well.

We might call this 'the artificialisation paradigm'. Now scientists are telling us it has led us to damage the environment we all depend on.

There always were good reasons for challenging it. It was the narrative of the victors, not of the vanquished. It benefits some at the expense of others. The greatest benefit accrues to the ruling classes of western 'developed' countries. These are the people most determined to keep it going, and they have found ways to control elections so that they stay in power.

We are at one of those points in our history that Thomas Kühn, in a different context, described as a 'paradigm shift'. The dominant paradigm is no longer convincing. It is increasingly clear that our value systems and ambitions are making things worse. More and more people are looking for a different way to understand and evaluate the world.

### A better alternative

It is easy to argue, postmodern-style, that this western paradigm is only one of many. It is harder to argue that an alternative is truly better, and harder

still to convince people who have grown used to being surrounded by technological artefacts. I am one, typing this article through high quality spectacles onto a laptop probably manufactured by some Chinese unfortunate working long hours in conditions where I wouldn't survive at all.

Yet we do have an alternative paradigm with an impressive pedigree. New Testament scholars have argued that Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God appealed to the universalist theme in the Bible. The world had been designed by a supreme creator so that our lives would be a blessing. The world provided enough for everybody to live well. Therefore, making sure everybody has what they need is a matter of justice, not a matter of inventing new technologies.

Those Hebrew scriptures contrasted with the dominant paradigms elsewhere in the ancient near east. Mesopotamians were taught that humans were created to serve the gods with much drudgery and suffering. In Homeric Greece the gods were only interested in specific humans at particular times. It was the Jews who claimed that the world could provide enough for everybody to live well, because that is how it was designed. The early Christians spread the idea more widely. Anthropologists tell us they were right, and the aid agencies tell us it is still true.

### The proper role of technology

Bacon's tradition, of trying to improve on nature through science and technology, was in effect a revival of ancient polytheism. The *continued* >



There seem to be two main reasons for our failure to make the changes needed. One is the vested interests of the most powerful people, who benefit most from the present paradigm at the expense of the less fortunate. The other is the ordinary fear of an unknown future, especially among older people like me.

world of nature was once again deemed inadequate for human well-being. This belief has driven us onto two endless treadmills: the artificialisation of human life, and conflict over resources.

Our current environmental crisis doesn't prove that the ancient Hebrews and early Christians were right, but it does show that their way of relating to the world around us worked better in practice.

So how do I justify my specs and my laptop? The ancient Hebrews used new technologies when they had reason to do so. There was innovation, as there has been all through history. But they never wanted new technologies for their own sakes. They never thought the world God had given them needed to be replaced with something artificial. If we hadn't had our 400-year project of suppressing nature we would still have produced new technologies. But we might have been more choosy about

them, more careful not to mess up the good things we already had.

### Hope for the future

There seem to be two main reasons for our failure to make the changes needed. One is the vested interests of the most powerful people, who benefit most from the present paradigm at the expense of the less fortunate. The other is the ordinary fear of an unknown future, especially among older people like me.

In both cases opposition to change is driven by the paradigm we have inherited. We need to change to a paradigm that values the environment for its own sake. We could then start noticing what, until now, we have been forbidden to notice – that the ever-increasing artificialisation of our lifestyles doesn't make us happier or healthier.

Things are going to change: what we do, what we want, what we notice and what we avoid. They may change because we take the needs of the environment seriously, and act accordingly. Otherwise they will change because we don't – in which case our grandchildren will suffer the consequences.

The changes we need may seem a disaster to those clinging to the paradigm we have inherited. But when we let go of it, and learn to think differently, we will find it a blessing. It will benefit us as well as the Earth. It is good news.

**Jonathan Clatworthy** is a theological author and blogger, and trustee of Modern Church. His latest book is *Why Progressives Need God*.

## Introducing Modern Church Forum

**I**9 April saw the second meeting of our newly formed Modern Church Forum. The Forum is designed to be a place of dialogue and encounter for Modern Church members. We shall range over a number of topics, all of them, it is hoped, related to questions and issues being raised through the Churches or the wider secular community. The Forum welcomes everyone, so you don't have to be an academic to join.

The session focused on Dr John Prysor-Jones's paper 'Are There Limits to Tolerance?' It arose out of the negative church experiences that were described by some members during our inaugural meeting in March. Dr Prysor-Jones is a priest and a psychotherapist. His excellent paper dwelled especially on the effects of the abuse of power by clergy and how existing

Church structures make this abuse possible. He spoke of the way biblical literalism and moral certainties can give some people a sense of safety, to the extent that when these are questioned they experience a loss of their own sense of self. His paper argued eloquently for the need for 'a mutuality of relationships which has power and meaning', rather than the exercising of power and control through an increasingly managerial mindset.

**Our next meeting, chaired by Professor John Vickerman, takes place at 6pm on 31 May. I will speak on 'What is the Church For?' If you are a member of Modern Church and would like to join the Forum, please email [forum@modernchurch.org.uk](mailto:forum@modernchurch.org.uk) and a Zoom link will be sent to you.**

— Lorraine Cavanagh

### "ALL CHANGE" IN THE OFFICE

We welcome our new administrator/finance officer, Ian Munro, who was appointed from 1 May to enable a short overlap with Diane before she leaves to be ordained in the Diocese of Ely.

Ian has a musical background and has recently undertaken a range of roles in this area, most of which have a significant administrative element, including Regional Manager for Scotland for the Royal School of Church Music and the musical director for a number of choirs. He has served as the Operations Director for a Drum Shop in Glasgow. He also works as a freelance musician and is

the Founder and director of Edinburgh Festival Ensemble.

He takes over the general administrative work which Diane has been doing, together with the day-to-day aspects of the work of our Treasurer. It will still be necessary for the AGM to elect a Treasurer to oversee this work and serve on the Trustees, but this new arrangement should reduce his/her burden and streamline some aspects of the administration.

We look forward to hearing more about Ian in our next edition!

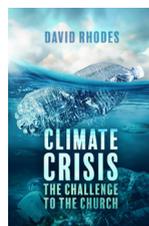
— Diane Kutar and Anthony Woollard



## Rhodes' Idealistic, Yet Prophetic, Call for Climate Justice

**This is one of the most challenging and disturbing books I have read for a long while! It would take a sea change for the Church take its message seriously.**

I had not come across David Rhodes before, and wondered how many in Modern Church had, although I wasn't surprised to discover he had been a friend of Kenneth Leech. Once a journalist, he spent much of his ordained ministry in the poorer parts of Leeds. A director of the Bible reading Fellowship, chaplain to the Children's Society, and a member of General Synod, he has written widely on social justice and the Gospel as good news for the poor. The world already faces serious trouble with millions of



David Rhodes  
*Climate Crisis: The Challenge to the Church*  
Kevin Mayhew, 2020

people blighted by poverty, injustice and racism. Climate change will make things a lot worse. The survival of our human species is threatened, and climate justice is vitally important, but the Church allows a conspiracy of silence on the subject. Rhodes wrote this book to demonstrate that climate justice must become the Church's key priority.

### Ruling elite

Rhodes begins with Jesus within the context of 1st century Palestinian society, shaped much like a spherical onion. Its long stem represents the 2% in Palestine who are the ruling elite. Below them, 8% represent landowners and traders. The 75% majority is the peasants

and the final 15% those living in destitution. Probably 90% experience genuine poverty. Palestine had been occupied by Rome since 63BCE, whose main priority by the time of Jesus was 'keeping the peace'. This meant a strong military presence, supported by an indigenous elite, including the Temple establishment in Jerusalem. Rhodes believes that something of the authentic Jesus can be found in the synoptic gospels.

### Siding with the poor

A key text for Rhodes, at the start of Jesus' ministry, is the reading from Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth, when he sets out his manifesto (Luke 4:18). Jesus reveals the 'unconditional love of God' as the basis of his ministry. As we know, the story doesn't end well for Jesus, who is nearly killed by the congregation on that day, and of course, the conflict continues throughout his life. Siding with the poor is dangerous, as it challenges civil, military and religious elites. Speaking the truth to power results in his crucifixion.

Rhodes then shows how this vital message is watered down in later periods, especially by Paul, as churches become increasingly institutionalised. Rhodes doesn't dwell on the rise of Constantine in the 4th century, which resulted in a gradual acceptance of Christianity as the privileged religion of the later Roman

Empire. But, importantly, he shows the effect of rising doctrinal controversies which created tribalism within and between churches, made worse by later controversies even up to our own time. This is the very antithesis of Jesus, who abhorred tribalism, along with the indefensible imbalance between rich and poor. But he sees light at the end of the tunnel. If the Church took the radical Jesus seriously, those who self-identify as Christian could make a crucial difference to the climate change crisis – along with many of other faiths who also teach respect for neighbours, and therefore the planet. Acting collaboratively alongside other groups, they could influence governments and international corporations. Working for the common good of all might exert massive influence and political leverage.

This an idealistic book, and open to strong disagreement. Nevertheless, it is a relatively easy read with a deep prophetic vision. We have experienced the terrible effects that Coronavirus has inflicted on our world. How much worse will climate change be? There is much to learn here.

— David Driscoll

David Driscoll is a retired priest in the Diocese of Bath and Wells, a member of the Council of Modern Church and joint convenor of its South-West Group.

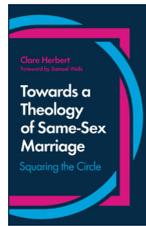


## Herbert's Challenging Work Equips Us for a Journey of Understanding

**T**his book was a hard, tough read for many reasons. Had I not been writing this review, I would almost certainly have given up within the first twenty pages or so. Am I glad that I didn't give up? Absolutely I am.

I should offer an explanation of my qualification for writing this. I'm a man, I married my husband three years ago in a Register Office, I'm a practising Anglican and heavily involved with my local rural Parish Church. Even if we had wanted to, we could not have married in my church – but as my husband does not practise any faith, the problem did not occur at the time, although it was discussed. I find it extremely sad that I was precluded from even considering holding our marriage service amongst people and in a church that both mean so much to me.

The early challenges of the book did ease though. It takes



Clare Herbert  
*Towards a Theology of Same-Sex Marriage – Squaring the Circle*  
Jessica Kingsley, 2021

an academic approach but the key initial difficulty became, to me, its best quality – that is, the stories from Christians trying to balance their faith, their sexuality and same-sex marriage. They punctuate just about every page, which can be jarring but I think that's a good thing. Those within the Church of England at every level should read their words, they are voices that need to be heard. In fact, these truly human messages, written as though they had just been uttered, also need to be heard further afield.

### Imposing labels

Just because people identify as “gay” or “lesbian” or “queer” doesn't mean that their individual stories relate to the topic of this book, all in the same way – far from it. Each person has a story, each story deserves to be told. Imposing labels can cause a lot of damage, as it can mask or taint the true qualities of a

person, or overload them with generalisations of a personality they may not have. Through the witness of the interviewees, all of those negative factors disappear and the onward journey towards the theology of the title moves slowly on.

### Those who disapprove

I do not personally feel conflict between my sexuality and my Christian faith, but it would be naive of me to think that there may not be those who disapprove of my way of life, or of the fact that I am married to another man. I also know that there are many friends and acquaintances who attended our wedding who just can't grasp the Church's failure to welcome such celebrations. One friend asked if we were getting married in my church and was amazed when I told them that we couldn't – the response was “I knew the Church of England was behind the times, but I didn't realise that it was that far behind.” It is.

The title of the book, *Towards a Theology of Same-Sex Marriage*,

One friend asked if we were getting married in my church and was amazed when I told them that we couldn't - the response was “I knew the Church of England was behind the times, but I didn't realise that it was that far behind.” It is.

indicates, correctly, that this is a journey still very much under way – as part of that journey my advice would be – read this book – whatever your standpoint – you will be better armed and informed because of it. I'm sad to say that the people that won't want to read it are the very people that most need to do so; but that's just my opinion!

—Jonathan Ward

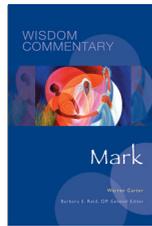
Jonathan Ward is Commercial Director at Ushaw College, Durham



## Feminist Reading of Mark Aims for ‘Full Flourishing of Humans’

**T**he dust jacket of this lengthy volume is quite explicit about its purpose. ‘This reading of Mark’s Gospel engages this ancient text from the perspective of contemporary feminist concerns to expose and resist all forms of domination that prevent the full flourishing of all humans and all creation.’ I approached it with some hesitation, distant memories of Reader training reviving a lurking suspicion that exegesis is a more legitimate activity than eisegesis. I turned to the commentary to be convinced that the ‘dance of wisdom’ referred to in the Foreword as the guiding inspiration behind the Wisdom commentaries, would dispel this suspicion.

As an introduction to feminist Biblical interpretation and Gender Studies, the Editor’s Introduction to the series and the Author’s Introduction to this work are concise, readable,



Warren Carter  
*Wisdom  
Commentary 42:  
Mark*  
Minnesota:  
Liturgical Press, 2019

and informative. The latter makes the point early on that the methodology includes feminist theology, masculinity studies and analysis of imperial structures. If, like me, you have never approached hermeneutics with any of these as a priority, then these well-articulated introductions are compelling in their new perspective.

The commentary itself takes groups of verses sequentially with input from a variety of feminist scholars, well documented and containing inter-textual links with the Old Testament. Three Hebrew women, Esther, Judith and Jezebel appear in the reflections on the beheading of John the Baptist. Bullet points, tables and articles from a variety of authors enhance information and stimulate thought. An article on ‘Body and Empire’ by Jin Young Choi contrasts Jesus’ identification with the humble (*humiliores*) rather than the more honourable (*honestiores*)

as an accompaniment to the discussion on the Messianic secret relating to events in Chapter 7. There are references to the nuances of the Greek text, narrative techniques and analytical tools familiar from but expanding the reach of source, form and redaction criticism.

The discussions of Jesus’ clashes with religious and imperial authority broaden the commentary into forms of resistance to the various contemporary elites. Nevertheless, it does seem to have to place all the characters, their sayings and actions, into categories relating to gender and oppression. It is difficult to quote examples out of context of the wider commentary without making this review sound like a parody of excessive jargon. It is fascinating and scholarly and has shaken up my perceptions of my own lack of critical awareness of gender issues and ignorance of the cultural norms of the world of the New Testament viewed in the light of our contemporary assumptions of justice and equality. The tone is confident and the

It is fascinating and scholarly and has shaken up my perceptions of my own lack of critical awareness of gender issues and ignorance of the cultural norms of the world of the New Testament...

author’s intentions transparent. In the Afterword he states that he has a clear intention to be a ‘male ally’ in the struggle for the full flourishing of humans and all creation’ and ‘redressing the particular inequalities which women experience’.

I am going to lend it to the curate and look forward to her reaction to it. I suspect I am too cautious and my own preference is still in the realm of at least attempting exegesis!

— Rosemary Walters

Rosemary Walters is a Lay Canon of Canterbury Cathedral



## ‘Book of Transfigurations’ Invites Reflection Through Poetry and Paint

**I** first came across Roger Wagner in 2014 when his portrait of Justin Welby as Bishop of Durham was unveiled in Auckland Castle.

Since then I have become more deeply acquainted with his poetry, which, like his art, is profoundly simple, and more of both is laid before us in this, his eighth book of poems and images, ‘speaking with one another’ in ways which are delightfully revealing and sometimes unsettling. Scenes from his native Oxfordshire resonate with biblical illustrations which are in some ways reminiscent of Blake’s attempts to portray a world suffused with the divine. On the other hand, biblical narratives are re-imagined in modern contexts – the woman ‘taken in adultery’ from John 8, for example, is paraded before the press cameras and the mob after her ‘trial’, and led:

*Beyond the camera’s fatal stare  
To where one writes in grit and dust  
– Of dry bones in a bone-dry place,  
Of broken hopes and powdered dreams –  
The unseen, un hoped, words of grace...*

This is accompanied by an oil painting, now in Auckland Castle, which



Roger Wagner  
*The Nearer You Stand*  
Canterbury Press,  
2019

shows quite explicitly how executions by stoning are still being carried out. Roger has travelled to the biblical lands, and to Syria, and this is reflected in many of the paintings and poems in this book, which are deceptively straightforward, but full of conviction.

This is a book to spend time with reflectively, and it communicates deeply. Rowan Williams has called it ‘a book of transfigurations’, which is exactly right.

That is how art works, both powerfully pleasing and unsettling – spirituality too. And for Wagner, it spills over into science. In 2016, Wagner co-wrote with Andrew Briggs, a British Scientist, *The Penultimate Curiosity*, an examination of the long entanglement between science and religion. That book argues that the contemporary trend of using science to discredit religion only shows that human beings have a deep-rooted need to make sense of the depths of human experience, a need which gave rise to religion in the first place.

— Trevor Pitt

Trevor Pitt is Book Reviews Editor of *Signs of the Times*, and a priest in the Diocese of Durham.



## Taking an Alternative Route from the Tyranny of Original Sin

**“I** teach Christian Theology, and farm for a living” – so the author introduces himself, and I warm to him. I am also appreciative when somebody takes me decisively on a path that reinforces my own thinking, specifically here in turning away from what many regard as the only acceptable Western theological line: the one that runs through Augustine and Calvin.

Presumably because of his affinity with Zizioulas (whose published theology he has edited since the original publication of this book in 2006) Knight rescues us from the tyranny of original sin and predestination by taking the radically alternative route in theological anthropology via Irenaeus (p.13f) and the Eastern Church. I warm to him. In the Preface, Knight pays tribute to ‘those who listened while I learned how to say things simply.’ It is this that makes a rather dense book of systematic theology a delight to read. There are simply no long, convoluted sentences. Sentences of fifteen words are ‘long’ in this context, and often five or six words suffice. The theology may be



Douglas H Knight  
*The Eschatological Economy: Time and the Hospitality of God*  
Wipf & Stock, 2019

dense, but, because of the style, it is accessible. We have here what could be regarded as a ‘systematic’ in 250 pages, when others would have written three volumes. I warm to him. He affirms from the very beginning that theology is ‘not only about ideas, but also about life, practice, and action’ (p.xx). Since the question of what it means to be ‘human’ has dominated my own theological enquiry, I warm to him.

A word to the wise: do not skip the Preface and Introduction. These lay out the background and the groundwork for the six chapters that follow. In the Introduction, Knight sketches out the argument of the book, which depends on the redefinition of certain basic terms (person, being, time, space), and a re-reading of Scripture. However, his method of doing theology leads him to constantly reassess the chapters as the book progresses.

Knight begins by critiquing Modernity, and then specifically returns to this point in the final chapters, with an analysis of the relationship between the sacred and the secular.

Between introduction and *continued >*

# An Appeal to History

**M**embers of Modern Church may be aware that you have free access to digital copies of *Modern Believing* and its predecessor *Modern Churchman*, via the American Theological Libraries Association. We've been publishing since April 1911!

We had to send hard copies, donated by members, to ATLA for digitisation. Unfortunately we were missing a few issues. If you have any back copies you no longer need, we'd welcome donations; we would reimburse postage.

Some of the ones we are looking for are comparatively recent: 1988-1999 inclusive, and 1957-1966 inclusive. The earlier missing ones are some from the 1940s, rather more from the 1930s and most from before.

## Get in touch

If you can help, please get in touch with me on [jonathan@clatworthy.org](mailto:jonathan@clatworthy.org) or 07729 886272.

We'll think up some kind of prize for anyone who can provide the September 1921 issue containing the papers of our controversial 1921 annual conference on Christology. To celebrate the centenary of that event we have a Day Conference planned for 11 September 2021. It would be really helpful to have the 1921 papers available for members interested in attending that. If somebody can let us have a copy we can then arrange for ATLA to digitise it.

## Other back copies?

We'd also be glad of other back copies – but please check with me, because there is no point in sending us copies that are already on the system.

All subscribers to *Modern Believing* are entitled to read back copies via ATLA (and also Liverpool University Press for issues from 1957). Let us know if you want to do that and don't know how.

—Jonathan Clatworthy

---

## Continued from page 19

conclusion, he refreshingly re-thinks many major theological themes. Since he has already set out his conclusions in the Introduction, it is no spoiler to share part of one of three themes in the book, which Knight identifies as a contrast between two ways of life:

*“One of these... is witnessed to by Christians... The other is that way of life actually lived by our contemporaries... [who] do not have any means of their own by*

*which to establish who they are. Nevertheless, they have Christians to point to what they can be (p.xxi).”*

—Michael Chester

**Revd Dr Michael A. Chester** is a supernumerary Methodist presbyter living in York. He was Senior Lecturer in theology at Kenya Methodist University, and latterly Director of Studies at the North East Oecumenical Course in Durham.