

VOLES, NETWORKS AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

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This is not an 'academic' paper. It comprises some elementary reflections from a Church leader. (One of the issues that interest me is the capacity for mutual enrichment when theological reflection is pursued from a variety of cultural and linguistic starting-points). This short essay has a strong autobiographical element. I look back over 50 years or so, to note the changes in scientific fashion, culture, political ideology and the practice of faith. My theme is that scientific concerns, political priorities and the expressions of faith are all the constructs of culture. On this thesis I make some theological reflections.

A subordinate interest in this essay is a piece of speculation. In the twentieth century, quantum theory and genetics have preoccupied scientific research. One candidate for a scientific puzzle that will draw to itself, like iron filings to a magnet, the best twenty-first century minds is the brain-consciousness conundrum. May be astute theological thinking could have something significant to contribute to the research and theorising that will be required. On this topic, theologians certainly need to heed the Boy Scout motto (100 years old in 2007): 'Be Prepared'.

In the late 1950s and in the 1960s, one subject drew bright, scientifically-inclined minds of my student generation: theoretical physics. The subject was increasingly abstract because almost entirely mathematical in character. The subject had many aspirations, ranging from a 'unified theory' of everything (uniting in particular quantum theory and gravitation) to cosmological theories which would demonstrate the coherence between the forces holding together the atom and the atom's nucleus and the forces which have shaped the furthest reaches of the knowable universe (or universes?). (In due course, *A Brief History of Time* (1988), Stephen Hawking's popular monograph, gave expression to what has been achievable in this area).

Because theoretical physics was so abstract, it was deemed to be an elitist subject. But it was one of a number of competing elitisms among intellectuals in the 1960s. Or do I mean contradictory elitisms? I read the Natural Sciences Tripos (Part 2 Physics) at Downing College, Cambridge, 1960-1963. It was during that period, at my college, that the notable debate was held between F.R. Leavis (Downing Fellow in English) and C.P. Snow (distinguished scientist and novelist) on *The Two Cultures* (the title of Snow's Rede Lecture of 1959). Were science and humanities (particularly the study of literature) opposed to each other? Had they to fight to the death for the soul of western society? On the one side of this epochal debate was Leavis – renowned, if eccentric, literary critic who advocated the view that humanities were essential to a morally serious view of human responsibility. Leavis had, with his even more eccentric wife, single-handedly filtered the ever burgeoning volume of English novels through the sieve of *The Great Tradition* (1948), which made moral responsibility the primary concern of a civilised person. The giants of literature he appealed to were G Eliot, J Austen, E Bronte through to DH Lawrence. Leavis could not countenance the notion that a generation of leaders might emerge who had not been schooled in this Tradition, but had rather been educated in the soul-less, passion-

less 'sciences'. Snow, by contrast, believed it was possible for moral sensitivity to be mediated through the humanities and the sciences working together in complementary traditions or (as in his own experience) in mutually supportive harmony.

The original Downing debate was inconclusive. But it captured the concern of my generation of undergraduates. And the 'science' *versus* 'humanities' conflict took, for me, the particular form which has fascinated Church people for a generation and more, 'science' *versus* 'faith'. For, after graduation and a brief spell of scientific research, I began my theological education and became a public representative of the Christian community. People were genuinely puzzled: surely science and faith were incompatible?

By about this period, popular culture had moved on quickly (thus sidelining the battle for the soul of a culture which the Leavis/Snow debate proposed). So, through a variety of tributaries, the river of post-modernism emerged – and burst its banks in many aspects of our society.

One important tributary was the hippie movement. Rebel poet Alan Ginsberg for once struck a chord for his generation with his poem *Howl*, in 1955. *Avant garde* artists supplied further tributaries: Andy Warhol, for example, and David Hockney. In Britain first, then in the USA and ultimately globally, the Beatles, in the space of only 8 years (1962-70), exploded musical cultures and brought into being a new era. Deference of all kinds disappeared almost overnight. University professors now counted for no more than the myriad voices of their students. Indeed in 1968, in Paris, the students almost overturned a government and a society.

Intensified by the emergence of feminism, the civil rights struggle for black and minority groups, especially in the USA, and of gay and lesbian consciousness and rights, all classical sources of social authority were now dismissed to the margins – all the professions, the aristocracy, politicians and the Churches. Above all, politicians and the Churches – because they claimed to be able to put the world to rights or to hold in trust the very meaning of life. But it was now clear that they were empty vessels; the energy, creativity, adventurousness and sheer joy in living were elsewhere – especially with the young.

So every individual now had a new responsibility – to make their own sense of their experience, to find their own truths and to make their way in the world in the light of these truths. And who dared define what counted as 'truths'? For drug-induced, psychedelic states of consciousness, the new music and radically-alternative lifestyles all added to the huge jumble of options from which each individual had to try to pick out a few items with which to construct some framework or other in which to fit everything they knew or felt or imagined. In this explosion of individual pilgrimages in search of meaning, what suffered most was the notion of long-term, faithful, committed friendships. Marriage, for instance, disappeared almost overnight.

As post-modernism increasingly dominated the popular culture of the 1970s, intellectuals (particularly in the universities) – in spite of all the accumulating evidence of mass murder in the Soviet Union, in the brutish invasion of Czechoslovakia and Hungary by the repressive Soviet regime, and in the devastating 'cultural revolution' in Maoist China – maintained a love affair with Marxism. No

sociology or English course counted for much without obeisance to the great Karl: students flocked in droves to Sussex University and to the London School of Economics. And Churches, trying desperately to regain some toehold with the new generation, naively jumped on the band-wagon, with idealised advocacy in western societies of so-called Liberation Theology from Latin America.

Into this heady mixture stepped Margaret Thatcher (UK Prime Minister, 1979-1990) and Ronald Reagan (President of the USA, 1980-1988). In many senses, Thatcher captured the mood of the post-modern times: 'There is no such thing as society', but only individuals who make choices in furtherance of their interests. Individuals must be free to shape their lives, liberated from government interference and the 'nanny state' (which always pretends to know what is best for us). Certainly, using Keith Joseph as her intellectual hatchet man, she dismissed and abused the Marxist and left-leaning university departments, and confronted with brute power their *alter ego* in the trades unions (who had gained inordinate political power, without democratic mandate, by collusion from politicians of all parties in the post World War 2 era).

Thatcher struggled, however, in two areas where her populist (and, it has to be noted, her prosperity-creating) messages about choice, enterprise and risk-taking did not fit well.

One such area was the environment. Thatcher, unusually for a major politician, had been trained as a scientist – a chemist, in fact. She had been schooled in the same confident, detached, solution-finding scientific culture as I was. She was the first leading politician to hear and understand the evidence about global warming. She knew immediately the scale of the challenge facing the international community. She spoke confidently (and not a little apocalyptically) about the environmental threats to us all. But her ideology was not adequate to the political challenges, whether in Britain or globally. So her capacity to propose workable solutions was reduced almost to vanishing point – precisely when the opportunity of international leadership beckoned her.

The second area of challenge for Margaret Thatcher was Europe. Here her attitudes were always ambivalent. On the one hand she saw Europe as a marvellous opportunity. Now that Britain's nineteenth century adventures were to all intents ended, Europe offered an immense single free market: the perfect stage on which to play out her messages about freedom and prosperity for British people. Particularly encouraging to Thatcher was the shared cultural assumption across the emerging single market in Europe that efficient wealth creation was to be achieved by the application of cutting-edge scientific theory and technological innovation. This not only played to a historic strength in Britain but also paved the way for the rapid globalisation of market opportunities (e.g. through the internet).

A test case was the farming industry. In Britain, the application of technology was already transforming agriculture and the countryside. In Thatcher's view, for the better, because it meant food production was cheaper and more efficient. Thatcher longed to push European agriculture in the same direction. But in reality, the overall impact on the countryside was hugely complex. In 1969 a classic text had been produced by Ronald Blythe: *Akenfield*. I was particularly affected by his remarkable gathering of first hand accounts of change in rural East Anglia: 'Akenfield' was more

or less the place where I was born and where I spent much of my childhood during the long summer holidays.

Unfortunately for Thatcher, from 1945 onwards, Europe had developed ideologically on a basis which she found uncongenial: 'social democracy'.

Social democracy is constructed around its own 'holy trinity': democracy, free markets and social justice. In the European tradition, social justice was increasingly being shaped around the agenda of individual rights; and essential to its entrenchment was the rule of law – fairly applied to all and independent of external pressures (particularly from politicians, big business or powerful trades unions). The outcome was an emerging set of institutions (which eventually became the European Union) which negotiated the rules and disciplines for a single, Europe-wide market. But they also (necessarily) supported individual governments in their ambitions to redistribute wealth, to relieve poverty and increase social cohesion. In Thatcher's mind this meant governmental and bureaucratic systems being developed in Brussels with no democratic accountability, which would restrain British freedoms and qualify the sovereignty of the UK Parliament.

As far as Britain's security was concerned, Thatcher advocated the view that nations which trade with each other do not go to war with each other. The European market was therefore a revolutionary mechanism to undergird peaceful relations between European states, contradicting their interminably long history of mutual slaughter. This was Thatcher's response to pressure from the USA, which had been in place since the Marshall Plan after World War 2 – that the European nations must move to greater political as well as economic union. While this was precisely the general European ambition in developing towards the European Union, Thatcher stubbornly resisted the political ramifications of this because she could not contemplate undermining 'Thatcherism' in favour of transnational social democracy.

In Britain, the official leadership of the Churches found Thatcher almost impossible to take seriously. (Electoral support for Thatcher by individual Christians of all denominations was another matter: they were clear where their personal interests lay). To be sure, Church doctrines gave huge significance to ecclesiology and therefore to the human good of healthy communities. This was at odds with Thatcher's unflinching individualism. It is easy to see in retrospect what the Churches should have done. They should have expounded the subtleties of their complex insights about personhood: that we flourish when our individual identities are strengthened, our individual gifts are deployed to the full, our individual potential is realised and our capacity for making responsible choices is enhanced – all within just social structures and varied networks of interdependent relationships. But in fact the Churches did not expound their classic doctrine. They tried instead to fill a political vacuum in British society by becoming solely political advocates of solidarity – i.e. the unofficial political opposition to Thatcher. She in turn had little difficulty in ridiculing Church opposition as unaccountable and discredited leftist propaganda. The outcome was the radical marginalisation of the Churches from British political life.

By the end of the Thatcher/Reagan era, a new confidence was evident, especially among the young, in making their own choices about lifestyle and study options. Far

fewer of their choices entailed lifelong commitments. They were now short-term, provisional and experimental. In particular, the attractiveness of the scientific agenda had changed dramatically. Classical university departments in physics and chemistry began to go into rapid decline in their capacity to attract students. Single subject specialisms also began to disappear in undergraduate courses. No longer were students inspired by the prospect of discovering the fundamental building-blocks and forces of the natural world or of developing theory to hold all things together in this universe. Their horizons were now shaped by the quest for those forms of self-development which would enable them to flourish and find individual fulfilment. Sebastian Faulks (*Engleby*, 2007) has put like this the disenchantment contemporary people felt about the idealisation of the 'natural science' in the period beyond the 1970s:

That's part of the trouble with science. It doesn't always help. I don't find it useful to know that particles may appear in different places without having travelled the distance in between. I don't find it enlightening that the only truthful way of thinking of Herr Schrodinger's cat is as being simultaneously alive and dead. It may be the only logical way of thinking of it, but that's a different matter, isn't it? The real problem, though, is that I don't recall asking after the welfare of his cat in the first place....

Heisenberg and Bohr and Einstein strike me as being like gifted retriever dogs. Off they go, not just for an afternoon but for ten years; they come back exhausted and triumphant and drop it at your feet.... A vole. It's a remarkable thing in its way, a vole – intricate, beautiful really, marvellous. But does it... Does it help? Does it move the matter on?

When you ask a question that you'd actually like to know the answer to – what was there before the Big Bang, for instance, or what lies beyond the expanding universe, why does life have this inbuilt absurdity, this non sequitur of death – they say that your question can't be answered, because the terms in which you've put it are logically unsound. What you must do, you see, is ask vole questions. Vole is – as we have agreed – the answer, so it follows that your questions *must therefore all be vole-related* (pp. 16-17).

In so far as science retained some attraction as an intellectual discipline, the focus shifted from the 'hard' natural sciences to something 'softer', e.g. socio-biology. This indicated a hugely important cultural shift during the 1990s, as the young moved beyond Thatcherism. The very points the Churches tried and failed to score during the 1980s (i.e. human personhood is truly about 'persons-in-community', where the heightened sense of personal identity is nourished within networks of reliable, interdependent relationships), were now emerging in secular reflection. Scientific interests, being a cultural constraint, were some of the indicators and carriers of the new cultural concerns. So the watchwords of the 1990s were 'complexity', 'systems' and the emergence of 'consciousness' through the interplay between persons and their environment. Faulks's novel, already referred to, is an intellectual *tour de force* in investigating these sorts of themes. It plays out marvellously and reflectively themes like consciousness, self-awareness and memory; it explores the immense complexities of personality (when is it ordered or disordered?) and the impact of genes, early social

conditioning, the effect of alcohol and drugs, and the significance of adult experiences.

Three recent resources, of different kinds, I have noted which fill out these emerging emphases on the interconnectedness of biology and the environment (widely interpreted).

First, in 2006, Craig Taylor published *Return to Akenfield*, the results of his revisiting the sites of Blythe's classic text, and following a parallel method of individual interviews. It makes fascinating reading. Change has continued in the English countryside. One notable theme which Taylor highlights is the change in government and European farm subsidy policy. There has been a switch from government insistence on maximising production of crops and agricultural products by using every possible technique and innovation to improve farming efficiency. Public policy now rewards farmers for contributing to environmental management.

Second is Wendy Wheeler, *The Whole Creature: Complexity, Biosemiotics and the Evolution of Culture* (2006). The age of scientific reductionism has given way to an understanding of complexity and emergence. Post-modernism is giving way to synthetic and collective holism. The 'whole creature' (mind-body-environment) and the whole system (minds-bodies-cultural-social-and-natural-environments) must be taken into account to facilitate human flourishing. Creativity in complex systems arises in the evolution of both nature and culture.

Third, an eloquent and comprehensive statement of our current concerns in the interactions between the biological sciences and cultural development is to be found in Bruce E Wexler, *Brain and Culture: Neurobiology, Ideology and Social Change* (2006). Can we articulate the relation between mind and brain? For sure, we cannot any longer confine this question to what goes on inside an individual's head. Brain function and the development of mind depend crucially on interactions with the environment. The environment produces in the very young the conditions that are needed to experience that environment. Sensory stimulation in fact produces neural connectedness and brain function and therefore makes consciousness possible. We become what we are through our relation with the environment (physical, social and cultural). Habit, practice and custom form us, and this is a basic *biological* fact. (What a long way we have travelled from FR Leavis and CP Snow!)

Three immediate reflections. The first is that rapid and radical dislocations in a culture are bad news for mental health. This is the testimony of persons forcefully displaced from their homeland by war, natural disaster or the breakdown of government. In particular it is the loss of a language that can be devastating for personal autonomy. The same testimony is given by those who experience sudden death in a family or the irreconcilable breakdown of an intimate relationship. Dramatic environmental change forces us to change ourselves, which may cause immense damage to our sense of identity and well-being.

The second reflection is that rapid climate change is likely to produce profound psychological effects for human beings.

The third reflection is one which is now well established in the popular culture, through the plethora of 'holism' supplements in the daily newspapers (e.g. the Saturday supplement, 'Body & Soul' in *The Times*). It is that inordinate stress (of any kind) is a direct causative factor in producing heart disease (as well as psychological difficulties). There are no hard and fast category differences between the physical body, the mind and the environment (social, cultural and natural). Everything (physical and psychological) is connected to everything else. Panpsychism suddenly becomes an attractive philosophy. Among many other things this insight has enormous consequences for the practice of medicine. And for theology?

Theological reflection is not an additional chapter added to the preceding narrative. Rather, theological reflection comprises the recapitulation of the narrative of our personal experience in its sociological, cultural and historical contexts. The intention is that, in the process of recapitulation, theological reflection uncovers convictions precisely within the narrative of change which has occupied this essay so far and within the sociobiological-panpsychic picture of the origins and development of consciousness that has emerged.

The fundamental conviction of faith is that every element in the complex environments (natural, social and cultural) in which each of us is set, and each of us individually, is latent with the glory of God. Each environment and all environments which together make up the whole universe are structured and constituted to release the infinite bounties of God's grace. Thus, out of the rock at Kadesh came fresh water (Numbers 20: 1-11) or honey (Psalm 81: 16). And in the desert Israel was fed with manna and finest flour. (This is the meaning of the first clause of the creed: 'I believe in God the Father, creator of heaven and earth', i.e. of everything that exists, everything social and cultural as well as every fragment of 'nature'. Nicholas Lash, in *Believing Three Ways in One God: A Reading of the Apostles' Creed* (1993), gives stress to this broad-ranging vision of believing, so that faith declares that literally nothing comes into or continues in existence without the creative and sustaining power of God).

God's purpose in creating anything at all is to set the environment in which the 'locked up' riches of God's grace, latent in everything and everyone, might be released to transfigure and transform every person, every relationship and every community - to become the kingdom of God. So profligate is God's kindness and so latently packed full of grace is every facet of our environments, that mercifully God's grace 'leaks out' (as a sponge full of water drips water everywhere even before it has been squeezed). As in the Cat Stephens classic song: 'Can't hold it in, gotta let it out'. Thus God 'causes the sun to rise on good and bad alike and sends rain on the innocent and the wicked' (Matthew 5: 45; Job 5: 10), so that the harvests come - a true blessing. Similarly human beings everywhere are nourished by family relationships of care and love; human beings everywhere realise their potential to some degree or another and have their horizons stretched by education. Human beings everywhere, and constantly, find their lives nourished by the delights of art and music, by the setting and the rising sun, by the moon and the stars in the clear night-sky and by untold moments of joy and wonder permeating every aspect of their everyday lives.

But how does God ‘squeeze the sponge’ so that latent grace becomes active grace, which *radically* renews, refreshes and nurtures every person and every community – i.e. which reconstructs consciousness, not now in the sense of an unbidden dislocation of language and culture but in a positive and developmental sense, thus bringing to birth a trusting and righteous person (Psalm 112)?

God’s self-disclosure is channelled through two familiar routes.

On the one hand, God, in sovereign freedom, speaks to us when God wills through wise people, prophets and priests (Jeremiah 18: 18; Matthew 23: 34). In every instance the messages and the actions of these divinely appointed channels of grace are ambiguous. People must listen diligently for God’s Word in the words of the messengers; but in reality frequently mishear or blatantly refuse to listen.

On the other hand, God’s grace is released in response to the cry of people in distress, the deep-down prayer of people discerning what it is they most need and pleading to God for it – expecting to receive (Psalms 55: 1-8, 69: 1-4, 81: 7, 86: 1-7, 130; Luke 11: 9-10). While our prayer is typically articulated in words, the words must express the yearning of the whole person, i.e. the prayer is to be accompanied by religious devotion to God (Psalm 81: 9-10) and by moral responsibility to our neighbours and actions for justice and peace in our society (Zechariah 7: 9-10, 8: 16-17; Mark 12: 28-34; Matthew 23: 23). ‘It is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are raised to eternal life’ (St Francis). It has always to be observed that prayer to God from those who are dedicated to God’s way in the world confronts the mystery of God’s hiddenness and silence. We wait on God, in hope. God cannot be manipulated by us; but God can be trusted, according to God’s will, to answer our persistent prayer (Luke 11).

It therefore emerges that God’s self-disclosure as transforming grace takes place out of a *conversation*: God speaks a Word to be listened to and obeyed; people cry out to God from the inmost depths of their exhausted being (threatened by fear or expended for others), expecting to receive a response. This insight is at the heart of the Methodist tradition: God’s grace floods into our hearts, into the world and into the Church as we converse with God *by conferring with one another*. In fellowship groups, in the councils of the Church and most notably at the Conference, Methodists focus on conferring.

The ‘conversational receptivity’ of grace is an insight of universal significance. It is not confined to conferring among God’s people. It fosters the attitude of friendship towards everyone we meet. In literally every encounter with another person (whether friend or foe, whether kindred or stranger) or with an unfamiliar culture, God meets us with the longing to pour out divine blessing on us. There is no limit to the diversity of experiences, perspectives, cultures and ideologies through which God’s grace may enrich us. In every such encounter our vocation is to initiate conversation, and thereby to discern through respect, openness, trust and empathy the God who comes to us with all his grace.

Such heavenly gifts come to us where we least expect to receive them. Consider, for example, an adult encountering a child, or an injured Jew in the path of a passing Samaritan. Consider also what happens when we meet a mentally ill or mentally

impaired person, or someone whose personality is profoundly disordered. God frequently surprises and confounds us with an outpouring of divinely profligate generosity.

In the midst of complexity comes from God that peace which passes all understanding (Philippians 4: 7). In the rich profusion of many languages and cultures, as alternative lifestyle choices and competing value systems crowd in on us for our attention, God's holy presence fills our hearts with love through the miracle of grace.

At any point in our journey through life, therefore, and in every conceivable circumstance and context, whether we feel secure or insecure, the God of grace may draw out from us songs of praise and thanksgiving. 'It is right always and everywhere to give God thanks and praise'.

Praise to thee, O Lord, for all creation!
Give us thankful hearts, that we may see
All the gifts we share and every blessing -
All things come of thee (John Rutter, 2003)

The structure of Christian theological reflection is such that universal access to God's grace is placed alongside a very particular claim: that God's presence (full of grace and truth) was uniquely embodied in one individual, Jesus of Nazareth. The New Testament witnesses to this life (and death) constitute a normative understanding of divine self-disclosure. Jesus Christ therefore becomes the lens through which intimations of grace and experiences of renewal through grace in the universal mode of conferring are authenticated and evaluated. Jesus Christ is the non-negotiable and unqualifiable foundation and criterion for a distinctive Christian 'voice' or perspective in all processes for human development. In Jesus Christ, the revelation of divine love, the gift of forgiveness, the radical experience of redemption/liberation through Jesus's death and resurrection and the divine promise of the peaceable kingdom clarify definitively the creative possibilities of God's grace for all. Jesus Christ communicates the consummation of God's intention of creating human beings in God's image.

Jesus Christ engages women and men in all cultures and conditions of life as the normative vision of how to be human (and thereby in perfect communion with God). Jesus Christ calls women and men to fulfil their vocation as human beings through discipleship. Human personality and consciousness (fractured, disordered and confused as it maybe through the astonishingly complex interactions between an individual and more or less satisfactory environments, in childhood and adulthood) are drawn towards wholeness through discipleship, in fulfilment of God's kingdom-promise.

This brings us to the essential 'third note' in the harmony of Christian theological reflection: the gift, through the creative action of the Holy Spirit, of the Church, the Body of Christ, to be a richly and distinctively endowed participative community and environment for Christian disciples on the developmental journey towards wholeness and holiness. The Church's distinctive ministry is to witness to God's universal grace and to the uniquely comprehensive grace-gift of Jesus Christ. The Church, therefore, invites and empowers disciples to be open to God's presence and activity in every

aspect of life, in every relationship, culture, organisation, nation and body in which our day-to-day moral, social and political responsibilities are to be exercised. Crucially this includes our encounters with the poor and disadvantaged, including those who are marginalised from mainstream cultures because of addiction, profound mental illness or severe mental handicaps.

The Church also commissions disciples to witness to what they experience of God, not least in costly service of the poor and exploited, the excluded and the victims of discrimination.

Simultaneously the Church gathers disciples into fellowship in Christ and invites a common sharing in all the 'means of grace', so that women and men are empowered, in daily life and in the Church, 'to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out their discipleship in worship and mission' (British Methodist Church, Statement of Purpose, 1996).

Most commentators have assumed that since Darwin (*The Origin of Species*, 1859), God-given meaning has come to an end for human beings. Did not the *Origin*, after all, dispense with a pre-existing purpose for all that exists, decisively remove the notion of species which had been fixed from the beginning of time, and promote chance and contingent adaptation to environments and 'events' (natural selection) instead of 'intelligent design' by a Creator? And certainly many of Darwin's successors (most noisily R Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* [1989] and other books) have removed all enchantment from nature and natural processes, including human existence. So all discussion of meaning, values and purpose in life seems pointless. Others of course will allow the re-enchantment of the world (e.g. G Levine, *Darwin Loves You: Natural Selection and the Re-enchantment of the World*, 2006). But this in no way makes the notion of God useful or meaningful.

The starkest challenge, therefore, facing the Christian movement in the West is to speak of God and faith in ways that make sense to a generation schooled in an atheistic or non-theistic framework of culture and biology. The classic Christian tradition, which witnesses to the necessity of the infinite, incomprehensible and holy Mystery of God, needs radically to be reinvented and refreshed. Jeanette Weatherspoon writes as follows in a Foreword to the reissue of Virginia Woolf's classic novel, *Towards the Lighthouse* (1927; reissue 2004): 'In art newness and boldness is vital, not as a rebuke to the past, but as a way of keeping the past alive'. This at least reminds us that Christian witness is as much to do with artistic imagination as it is to do with analytical reflection or with holiness of life or with service and mission. Which is why there need to be many languages and modes for theological communication, alongside and in dialogue with the academic. But that precisely keys in with the significance of diverse, multicultural environments for human development and for mature consciousness.

David G Deeks/ August 2007