Temple Tracts: Issue 2, Volume 1

Mapping The Material: Religious Practices In Changing Times

John Reader and John Atherton

William Temple Foundation

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Edited by Chris Baker

Biography

Revd. Canon Prof John Atherton's work has journeyed through involvement with issues of poverty in the 1960s – 1980s, to engagement with economic systems as a cause of poverty from the 1980s – late 1990, leading to engagement with the wider subject of economics, and its growing involvement with wellbeing studies. In 2013 this all came together as Visiting Professor of Religion, Ethics and Economics at the University of Chester, and through research at Princeton and Uppsala, resulting in *Challenging Religious Studies: The Wealth, Wellbeing and Inequalities of Nations* (SCM: 2014).

Revd. Dr. John Reader is a parish priest, theological educator and practical theologian with over 30 years' experience in rural ministry. He is a Senior Tutor in Christian Rural and Environmental Studies at Ripon College, Cuddesdon. He is a board member of the Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust, and is both interested and involved in current educational developments and the role of RE in community relations. John's publications include books on local theology, reconstructing Practical Theology, and theological reflection for human flourishing. His latest book *A Philosophy of Christian Materialism: Entangled Fidelities and the Public Good* (Ashgate: 2015) is co-written with Chris Baker and Tom James. Follow John on Twitter — @DrJohnReader.

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Introduction

One of the central questions which the William Temple Foundation has attempted to address over the years is the role of religion and faiths in the public sphere. Such a question has to refer back to the changed status of religion brought about by the eighteenth century movement known as the Enlightenment. According to the popular version of this, faith was henceforth to be limited to the private world of individuals and the domain of feeling and the subjective, whereas the public world of politics, ethics and economics was to be governed by some form of universal secular reason. In other words, faith became the 'other' of reason and thus increasingly excluded from public discourse. It is now acknowledged that this circumscribing of religion has never really been effective, and there are good reasons both practical and theoretical why there needs to be another way of describing this relationship. Recent events across the globe and the resurgence of what has been called 'furious religion' (Forrester, 2004: 19) provide one motivation for developing an alternative interpretation. Another comes from new intellectual sources which argue for a more complex and interactive understanding of this relationship between religion and a secular public sphere, one which can be portrayed as either blurred or entangled.

Within traditional theological circles however, there is a real struggle to develop this alternative. A recent publication edited by the Archbishop of York, *On Rock or Sand? Firm Foundations for Britain's Future* (2015), for instance, calls for a return to the value of the common good (see *Together for the Common Good: Towards a National Conversation*, 2015). Such an appeal may well fall upon some deaf ears as it can be seen to presuppose precisely the public consensus on beliefs and values, prominent in Temple's day, that is now no longer the case in a pluralist society and culture. Another approach proposed by Radical Orthodoxy is to claim some form of theological imperialism where theology has all along been the 'Queen of Sciences' and tells by far the best story, leaving all other disciplines and understandings as a distorted form of theology. Once again, this is likely to fall upon deaf ears beyond the circles of the already convinced and converted. Rather, what is required is a basis for genuine dialogue, communication and negotiation between the different belief and value systems in our society (and beyond), one which takes seriously and respects the different traditions and beliefs, but which also no longer sets up some understanding of a universal reason as a neutral arbiter in the debate. It is with this objective in view that the two authors of this publication offer their respective contributions, drawing upon their own research, but also framing this in the less doctrinally determined field of religious studies rather than of traditional theology. What they share is an insight into how mapping the material (i.e. the concrete, as opposed to abstract or idealised ways religion impacts on the public sphere, and vice versa) and using philosophy, economics and psychology amongst others, contributes towards developing a discourse which illustrates how faith still plays its role in the public sphere.

Blurred Or Entangled?

John Reader

I was 29 at the time. It must have been a few weeks before Christmas and I had been to visit an elderly lady on one of the council estates in the large suburban parish in south west Manchester where I was a curate. Her son had recently died leaving her with no close family members. Even worse, her son had managed all her affairs down to sorting out the heating in her bungalow. It proved to be one of the coldest winters of recent times, and when I went to visit she was sat huddled in one room with an electric fire the only source of warmth. When I asked why this was the case she said that the heating system had broken down and she didn't know how to get it fixed. It was obvious that she could soon be in real danger of contracting hypothermia. This was probably the point at which I realised that responding to individual pastoral and practical matters could involve institutional and even political action. I tracked down the phone number of Manchester City Council and eventually got through to their Housing Department in order to report a fault in the lady's heating system. 'Job done', I thought at the time. A couple of weeks later I returned to find that nothing had happened. I mentioned this to a parishioner rather more experienced in these matters who suggested a more robust approach to the officers involved. He promptly phoned them up and made it clear that if action was not taken quickly they would find themselves on the front page of the *Manchester Evening News* two days before Christmas. Needless to say this did the trick and the heating system was repaired immediately. At the same time I was doing a part-time course in pastoral theology at the University of Manchester and as a result, I encountered both liberation theology and John Atherton. I had struggled for some time to connect the academic theology I had been taught in my training to the practical tasks of ministry. There was a gap between the fine and attractive ideas and theories and the often harsh and painful realities of people's lives. Liberation theology appeared to offer some hope in that it claimed to begin from where people were and to take those realities as the starting point for theological thought and practical response. Yet Latin America was not quite the same as 1980s Manchester, so even there was a divide that needed to be crossed.

In a sense, all that now follows and all that has followed in my ministry and theological struggles, stem from that period of my life and the various attempts I have made since to cross that boundary between theory and practice, between the private and the public, and specifically between religious studies and philosophy, but with a fair amount of sociology, psychology and politics thrown in along the way. It has always been the pastoral and practical situations I have encountered which have driven my interest in other disciplines as I have sought to identify how to be faithful in changing times. Theory for its own sake is of limited value when one is constantly faced with real dilemmas and difficult decisions.

As I am co-writing this *Temple Tract* with John Atherton it is worth recording that my first conversation with him was on the subject of Paul Tillich and a shared interest in his theological attempts to work across disciplinary boundaries through what he called 'the method of correlation' (Tillich, 1978). The idea behind this was that secular disciplines raised the questions to which theology from within its own resources would offer answers. At least this felt like a way of addressing the issue of the gap even though it did so in a somewhat one-sided manner. A further development of this method was then produced by the US Catholic theologian David Tracy and his proposal for mutually critical correlations, with questions and possible answers emerging from both theology and the other disciplines (Tracy, 1981). These correlations were

technical, mechanical and schematic, but at least they acknowledged there was an issue here in contrast to the forms of theology which claimed to have all the answers - and to know what the questions were as well of course. That is exactly the problem that I have with so much church and confessional theology - it pre-empts any genuine dialogue or mutual learning. So the discussions with John Atherton over the years and my involvement with the William Temple Foundation emerge out of this striving to develop a more modest, practically grounded and open-ended search for the contribution that faith can make to those dilemmas and difficult decisions that face us once we venture beyond the confines of church and theology.

For a while I worked on what could be described as a form of contextual theology, learning from the liberation theologians but using very different sources of social and political analysis rather than their more obvious Marxism. But I will leave that part of the story further back where it belongs and bring the narrative into the twenty-first century (Reader, 1994). John and I now talk about 'mapping the material', meaning we give more attention to the physical and embodied nature of the practical manifestations of faith commitment than to the beliefs we are supposed to hold and the truth claims made for them (Bryant, 2014). It is what we actually do when faced with the challenge of putting those beliefs into action, and the ways in which we need a better understanding of how humans function, that drives this concern. So it is 'material religious practices' and how those contribute to greater wellbeing that form the focus for this work.

Three major practical commitments have shaped my ministry: housing issues, work with schools and children, and environmental concerns. The first of these again stems back to the day when a young couple arrived on my doorstep in need of accommodation and I was unable to help. This was a pastoral emergency and I felt useless being unable to respond, particularly as the church had a house next to a local school that was sitting there empty. It made no sense! In a later posting this led to my becoming a board member of one of the early stock transfer Housing Associations and a more structural level of engagement. How did this link to the more theoretical interests of that period? As I sat through board meetings and listened to talk of business plans, mission statements, assumptions about future interest rates and risk analysis, it dawned on me that this supposedly objective world of business and commerce was not quite what it appeared to be from the outside. I will explain.

The theoretical work I was then pursuing looked at the age-old question of the relationship between faith and reason. To cut the story short, for the last 250 years at least, faith has been seen as 'the other' of reason. So reason is supposedly objective, external, neutral, something universal which all of us can appeal to in our discussions of the real world, whether this is through science or commerce. Faith, on the other hand, is portrayed as subjective, internal and to do with feelings, personal and therefore representing a specific viewpoint or commitment and thus not to be allowed into the debates about matters of public concern or politics. So this is another divide or gap that is set up in such a way that it becomes impossible to cross (Reader, 2005). Once I got inside the Housing Association world, however, it became clear that what lies behind business plans, mission statements and discussions of risk, is itself much more subjective and uncertain than one might believe. Above all it required something akin to 'faith': faith that interest rates would remain low for the foreseeable future so that one could calculate the costs and build them into the business plan over the medium term. It was a little more than guesswork or wishful thinking, as one can argue for some sort of evidence base - i.e. the past - but the business plan still rested on assumptions that could easily turn out to be overtaken by unpredictable events. So if this external and objective world of business was itself already permeated by subjective judgements, could one not also argue that the other world of faith was also already permeated by elements of critical reason and rational argument?

With this in mind I developed the idea of 'blurred encounters' as a way of expressing this crossing of boundaries and intermingling of the different and supposedly conflicting elements of human thought and practice (Cameron, Reader & Slater, 2012). One cannot and should not try to simply separate what we lazily call 'the rational and objective' from the 'irrational and subjective'. They are always already part of the complex make-up of human beings and thus shape the ways in which we act in both our public and private lives. You only have to ask yourself how waking up in a grumpy mood after a bad night can affect one's judgements and decisions to see that this is the case! So this blurring of encounters, of disciplines, and of faith and reason became my touchstone for both my practical activity as a parish priest and my theoretical work as a reflective practitioner engaged with academia.

Since then, however, the ideas have been developed further, partly in response to some of my other practical engagements. Schools' and children's work have been major commitments almost since the beginning of my ministry. In addition to school assemblies and running toddler groups, it is the structural dimension of being a school governor that has taken up much time. In the current political climate where the Coalition government of 2010 to 2015 has driven the Academies agenda well beyond its original purpose as introduced by New Labour, most schools are now faced with the challenge of responding to a world where Local Education Authorities are being dismantled, and are being encouraged, or even forced, to operate in what is effectively a privatization context. External sponsors and companies are stepping into the vacuum. The Church of England through its faith schools (and of course other denominations and faiths have similar commitments) is responsible for educating around one million children, so has a massive stake in the system. One could argue, however, that the values and ideals which are now driving education and the Academies system are at odds with how Christians might understand the aims and objectives of education. It is notable that few church leaders and dioceses are willing to enter the debate on this level, precisely because they are entangled, implicated and totally wrapped up in the existing structures, and have to operate within the rules of the game as dictated by government. It is in this context that I have employed the term 'entangled fidelity' to describe what it feels like to be in this position (Baker, James & Reader, 2015).

What I am attempting to express is that the blurred encounters language of earlier days sounds a bit too comfortable; as someone once said to me, this is what you feel like when you come out of the pub after a pleasant evening. To talk about entangled fidelity is to argue that the whole experience is more conflicted and even confrontational, and that hard decisions have to be made. The question for church involvement in education is that of how to be faithful in a context where one feels hemmed in and hard-pressed on every side by a system that one finds it hard to identify with, but where there is no choice but to continue one's commitment in some form. Thus I am currently serving not only as a governor for one of our three local primary schools, but also as a board member of the Diocesan Multi-Academy Trust which has been set up as the home for church schools which are often too small to become stand-alone Academies, or want to pursue this route as remaining part of the 'diocesan family' in a relatively secure future. Whereas when I was using the language of blurred encounters and the concept of 'being eaten well' rather than the ideal of an ethics of non-appropriation (Reader, 2005) to describe the necessity of compromise in faith-based practical engagement, it now feels more appropriate to see this process as deeply conflicted to the point of a betrayal of one's principles and beliefs. It becomes even more difficult to identify the criteria by which one can judge whether or not to become entangled, especially when there is no choice in the matter. The image I have is of the ram caught in a thicket where the slightest movement just shifts the pain from one spot to another and there is no obvious route of escape.

It is through the third area of involvement that the most difficult and challenging ideas that I am now going to describe have emerged, in other words, concern for environmental issues. Once again this commitment stems back to an earlier period in the late 1980s when there was very little theological recognition that this could become the 'game changer' for theology itself, let alone for global politics. A group of us set up an environmental scheme using some church land that had been earmarked for an extension graveyard (Reader, 1994). This involved, amongst other things, constructing a pond, building new fencing, and setting aside areas for the encouragement of wild flowers, all coordinated by a management scheme drawn up by the local volunteers and the Shropshire Wildlife Trust. Even back then I had the feeling that what was being challenged was the very notion of what it is to be or to become human that was driving our culture. Are we the 'rational' beings that we imagine ourselves to be, in control both of ourselves and our instincts and emotions, and also of the inert and inanimate external objects which supposedly form all those things that we deem to be 'non-human'? So whether we are talking about our relationships with other animals, or indeed other life forms, let alone the machines and technology which we have invented, is it a mistake to understand ourselves as in control and capable of manipulating and exploiting everything non-human simply to meet our own needs?

This seems to me to be the crucial practical and theoretical issue now facing humanity. How do we appropriately understand ourselves in relation to all the 'others' with whom we form this world? There is a real possibility, as we are now constantly warned with the threat of human-induced climate change, that if we continue to get this wrong, it is the human species that is at greatest danger, having destroyed much of the rest on which we depend for our existence. The problem, as I perceive it, is that we are using an inadequate and misleading terminology to describe ourselves and these relationships. It seems ambitious to claim that changing the language will change the world, but since it is through language that we mediate our relationships and worldviews this is certainly one dimension of what needs to change. So I find the term 'assemblage' which points to the combinations and entanglements of the human and the non-human in ever-changing and dynamic configurations, of particular importance in this respect (DeLanda, 2010; Deleuze and Guattari, 2004). It tells 'us' that we are not separated from or external to those operations which form our world. We are always already fully part of the assemblages which are the depth of creation in which we move and have our being. Schools, for instance, are assemblages of different people playing different roles: teachers, governors, parents, children, other staff, Local Authority advisors (if they still exist), politicians etc, but equally of the physical constructions of the buildings, the vehicles which transport the children to school, the roads outside and parking and traffic problems, and the impact of bad weather upon school closures. Once one begins to look in real depth at the various elements that go to make up even one small school, one can recognize the sheer complexity and confusion of components. One can do the same for individual churches and congregations of course, right the way up to diocesan and even global structures. Within economics with its familiar talk about 'markets' one needs to identify which markets and in which combination of assemblages. What the language does is to enable us to examine in greater detail the actual operations and relationships which go to make up life as it exists at various levels.

This discourse I have discovered through my continuing interest in contemporary philosophy, not as an armchair pursuit, but because it helps me to understand the world in which I am entangled and in which I struggle to be faithful. The specialized terminology of the discipline can be difficult to grasp as the terms are unfamiliar and unsettling, but I believe that we need to allow ourselves to be challenged and unsettled in order to begin to see things, and ourselves, differently, and in order that we begin to behave in ways that are less damaging to each other and to our world. Thus they should be a contribution to greater wellbeing. As

you can imagine, there is much more from where this has come from, and, given space, I could talk about the New Materialism and the ways in which this takes more seriously our physical and embodied nature and allows us to understand how we are ourselves 'material' and thus in relationship with and impacted upon by the other 'materials' which we see as inert and external (Crockett and Reader, 2015). Obvious examples would be how many of us now rely upon drugs and medication to prolong our existence, plus the impact of all the food that we ingest, reflected perhaps in current preoccupations with diet and TV reality shows based on cooking (Bennett, 2010).Then there is the growing environmental concern about how animals are treated and the lengths to which humans will go to turn farming into big business and a source of profit at the expense of life both human and non-human. Energy in all its forms is a massive cause of controversy, and our fears for the future arise from the continued extraction of and burning of fossil fuels determined by the major companies who profit from this, and the need to develop alternatives in time to prevent the feared rise in global temperatures (Klein, 2014).

Finally, before I hand over to John Atherton, who is going to continue to unpack the implications of the material for the way we understand and 'do' religion, I need to mention something we are now calling Relational Christian Realism, which both draws upon the ideas mentioned above and also develops them further (Baker, James & Reader, 2015). Key aspects of this are that we are unwilling to claim that Christianity can project a clear and definitive end point for creation, so the future is genuinely open and unknown; that the claims that humans make to be in control and 'above' the rest of creation have to be treated with a degree of scepticism as we see the damage that has been caused as a result of human arrogance; that we need to stand back and reassemble and construct our arguments and analyses more slowly in the attempt to resist the short-circuiting of critical thought that has become characteristic of our culture and which is encouraged by the technology which speeds things up, from financial transactions to human instant communications (Stiegler, 2013). We need to attend to the empirical rather than resort too rapidly to grand theories and constructs, which is often a failing of theology and church discourse generally. Most importantly we need to look again at this underlying question of what it is to be or to become human, and to recognize that, like the rest of creation, we are in process rather than a completed product. It is when we claim that we have reached the final and definitive truth that we start harming each other (and beyond), so, as one of these philosophers argues (Latour, 2007), we need to keep the references circulating. We are only 'work in progress' and have to retain an appropriate humility. It is through our practical engagements as people of faith that we strive towards the forms of subjectivity that contribute positively to the greater wellbeing of all. The question that we should perhaps ask ourselves about our actions and beliefs is this: are they life-denying or life-enhancing? Where it becomes clear they are the former, we must work together to develop what I am now tempted to call 'a therapeutics of faithful dissent'. But that will have to wait for another publication.

Reflection I

1. How should those of faith engage with current government educational policies in a way that remains faithful to their principles and understandings of the purposes of education?
2. What matters of concern need to be part of that discussion?
3. How might the language of 'assemblages' lead to a deeper level of engagement between matters of faith and public policy?

Getting Better(ish) And What It Means For Religious Studies

John Atherton

Since 1800 why and how have most of our lives been transformed for the better, whether in terms of standards of living, health or happiness? Why and how, at the same time, have inequalities grown especially between nations, but also within them? The first set of changes constitute the great escapes from poverty, early death, and misery. The second reflects the great paradox of development (including the four horsemen of the apocalypse: hunger, epidemics, state failures and environmental crises). For most of my working life, but coming to a head since 2000, these profoundly material agendas have become the focus of my research. They reflect what matters to most people most of the time, and therefore they have foundational implications for our material wellbeing, not least because, for my work, they profoundly involve engaging with the discipline of economics. Economic life clearly lies at the heart of such material changes. Yet the research also has profound implications for religious studies, for religious life (in my case Christianity, yet equally relevant to all world Faiths). Mapping these implications is therefore a necessary exercise, even though, at this stage of the research, they can only be sketched in broad and provisional outline, almost as research agendas for much further work.

Part 1: Great Escapes and Divergences - The Agenda

If ever there has been a 'turn to the material' with the greatest benefits for human wellbeing it's changes in world history in the last 200 years. Beginning in Britain, these changes inaugurated by the Industrial and then Mortality Revolutions, continue to evolve to this day, cascading increasingly across the whole world. What is equally clear is these life transformations for more and more people represent the greatest changes in human history. Their comprehensiveness and decisiveness are such that they constitute a radical break with everything that went before whether economic thought and practice, or religious understandings and practisings of life. The changes really were and are so great.

The world of everyday life for most people remained in certain key ways relatively unchanged from the end of the last Ice Age about 13,000 years ago, until 1800 CE. Essentially, in Hobbes's words in the seventeenth century, life was ‘poor, nasty, brutish and short’ (Hobbes 1651, 1957: 185). Of course, life changed and improved but only very gradually indeed. Even in Britain in 1800 CE, after half a century of change which became the Industrial Revolution, 20% of the population could still do nothing more than sit around. They lacked the nutritional calorific intake of food to do anything more. They were mostly small in height, too, because of the same energy deficit (height is a key indicator of food quality and quantity sufficiency, and of diseases in early life). And they often died in childhood, so life expectancy at birth was around 40. In my home town of Bolton, a labourer's life expectancy in 1845 was only 18. Life, for most, for most of history, was profoundly affected by such scarcity and its damaging influences on peoples' capabilities to plan for the future, imagine any alternatives, and move beyond immediate oppressive and stunting presents. It's from all that, that so many have escaped in the two centuries since 1800. The achievements are extraordinary when contrasted with life for most people before 1800. For example, the average income has been increased eightfold for the world's inhabitants in only 172 years (1820-1992), giving people the resources to be and to do, freed from the ever present threats of absolute poverty (Deaton, 2013: 34, 35). Even in only 27 years

(1981-2008), 700,000,000 people were released from poverty (because of China and India's economic growth - it's nothing to do with liberation theologians!).

The results of the later Mortality Revolution were probably more significant for human wellbeing. In the USA, life expectancy increased from a low 47 in 1900, with 20% dying before the age of one, to 77 in 2000. A white middle-class woman born in the USA today now has a 1 in 2 chance of reaching 100. And my uncle, John Robert Atherton, after whom I am probably named, was one of those dying before his first birthday in 1900. I am now 76. Wellbeing cannot but profit from the near doubling of life year chances to be and to do, to pursue one's own self-chosen purposes.

Included in my perspectives on wellbeing, alongside income and health above, is subjective wellbeing. Subjective wellbeing involves using two kinds of self-reporting surveys drawn from many nations, developed and developing. It involves individuals on the one hand, evaluating their life satisfaction over a period of time and with reference to such key areas as marriage, work and health, and on the other hand, noting which emotions they experienced on the previous day. Both are important because they represent individuals' views on their own wellbeing and not the judgements of outside experts alone. And, just as income and health as life expectancy produced important evidence for the development or otherwise of wellbeing, so the third perspective complements these findings, not least because improving health and subjective wellbeing are also related to increasing incomes or material lifestyles.

It is also important to note that great improvements in these three areas of wellbeing since 1800 have been complemented by increasing inequalities, a key way of estimating the paradox of development. For example, the world's wealthiest nation is 256 times richer than the poorest, illustrating great and growing inequalities between nations since 1800. These disparities extend to health, for example as reflected in peoples' height (key indicator of nourishment and early health adequacies). The impressive growth in Europeans' height from 166cm to 178cm in only 130 years (1850-1980) contrasts starkly with the 151cm of Indian men (Deaton, 2013: 36, 42-3). It could take an astounding 200 years to catch up with where Englishmen are now. This evidence has been accounted for by technophysio evolution, the interaction of physiology and techno-economic change.

Note: I have used three classic ways economists estimate human socio-economic development; income, health and subjective wellbeing. (There are other indices of wellbeing, as economists recognise, including family life, education, and abilities to participate in governance and wider society.)

Linking Christianity with such economic findings

How do you begin to develop ways that religious studies (in this case from Christian perspectives) can enter into such secular research driven particularly by economics, but also by psychology and sociology? How do you do so in ways which begin to overcome the great gulf between say economics and Christianity (and ethics)? How do you develop ways of working which have a real chance of being heard by such secular disciplines? (Christianity is essentially ignored not least because it assumes it's got the answers to the questions arising from the world of daily life.) My work began to suggest new ways of engaging in such research on wellbeing, particularly from the vantage point of these perspectives of income, health and subjective wellbeing. I did this by beginning the task of reconstruction by listening to what economists, psychologists and sociologists judge to be important in Christian contributions to initially subjective

wellbeing. Interestingly, major contributors from all three secular disciplines concluded from their research that Christians scored higher, compared to nonreligious people, in subjective wellbeing. One scholar summarises these judgements: 'In survey after survey, actively religious people have reported markedly greater happiness and somewhat smaller life satisfaction than their irreligious counterparts' (Myers, 2008: 324).

Why is this? Examining research findings begins to suggest the feasibility of deploying three classic tools of economics: developing a **model** for illustrating why and how Christianity made such an important contribution to subjective wellbeing; identifying ways of **measuring** this impressive performance of Christians in their subjective wellbeing and their contribution to that of other people and institutions; and finally testing them in the actual historical contexts of economic ideas and history (Atherton, 2014: 64-89, 130-192).

Part 2: What this Research Means for Religious Studies

The engagement of such disciplines as economics and religious studies in wellbeing research has important implications for both, as much for economics (in terms of say the nature of agents or participants in economic life, and welfare economics), as for religious studies. Not surprisingly, given the most radical changes in human history inaugurated by the Industrial and Mortality Revolutions, their consequences for ways of thinking and doing are immense. Religions have been particularly resistant to such material changes because of their conservative institutional and cultural characters, and the role of their traditions and understandings of sacred texts, rituals and practices. All I can do, reflecting on my research on wealth, health and subjective wellbeing and Christianity's contribution to them, is to briefly sketch out areas which profoundly affect our understanding of religious studies. It's important to recognise that I am not a theologian in terms of systematic (or doctrinal) theology or biblical studies, two traditional core disciplines of theology in modern times. What follows, too, can be seen to be a mapping exercise of six key logically evolving contours for the adequate reformulating of religious studies in the light of the Industrial and Mortality Revolutions, in the search for the greater wellbeing of all.

Contour 1: The issue of scale. Questioning an exclusive focus on person and community

One of my few luxuries in old age is a three-yearly subscription for *The Economist*. In the November 2014 edition, I was challenged by the following which confirmed much of my own thought: 'A species evolves to deal with the challenges in its environment. When change is rapid, the species can rarely adapt quickly enough. Our brains are hard-wired to deal with living in small hunter-gatherer groups: we simply can't cope with the problems thrown up by 7 billion people living in a global economy.' That's the problem not just for humans in general but for Christianity in particular, not least for its often exclusive focus on the individual person including in its relationships or communities. Emerging from its understandings of God and God's incarnation in the person of Christ, it has understandably concentrated on promoting and defending that focus on humanity, on the personal. In contemporary illustrations, for example, it dominates the significant tradition of Catholic social teaching (a series of papal encyclicals on social affairs from 1891 to the present). Yet such Christianity is increasingly out of kilter with what has happened in our world since 1800. For the whole of human history it took until 1825 to reach one billion people. In only a further 220 years it will reach nine billion. And, again, in stark contrast to the rest of human history, an increasing majority will live in urban not rural areas. Such scale and concentration demands complex ways of organising the world of daily life for billions in terms of economic, political and social systems. That goes way beyond the person in community. That's why economics works with at least two dimensions of life, the macro and the micro, and with

aggregates and quantitative research. All that must now must feed into our understandings of religious studies, into how we interpret the kingdom of God, how we describe and evaluate contemporary life. In my case, I use the optometrist's tool of monovision, with one eye scanning wider horizons and the other engaging immediate short distances, with the brain putting the two dimensions together. That means I work particularly with the macro, with large scale aggregates, reflecting size and impersonal institutions, and with what that then means for persons in community. In other words, I see the facts on peoples' faces in the way St Paul talks of 'the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ' (2 Cor. 4.6).

Contour 2: The issue of measuring. An important tool in a modern armoury

Engaging with economists on material wellbeing, particularly as income, means taking measuring seriously. As an American economist puts it, 'progress cannot be coherently discussed without definitions and supportive evidence' (Deaton, 2013: 15). This certainly challenges theologians and spiritual leaders. They often regard matters of faith as beyond the quantifiable, not least the transcendent role of grace in the believer: 'For it is only by God's grace that the church, the visible, concrete product of human actions, institutions and beliefs, is the church' (Astley and Francis, 2013: 18). Now that's alright if you're only talking to yourself, which is what most theologians do, but if you want to engage in conversations with others about what matters to people, then on their own such statements are at best irrelevant. But there are other ways of understanding what Christian practices, ethics and beliefs are about, as illustrated by the rich, robust connections between secular and religious commentators in relation to my model's seven features of Christianity's contribution to wellbeing. And this will involve religious studies' use of quantitative as well as the more qualitative research tools. The former tool is particularly important for engaging size and complexity. Interestingly, this is where religious studies can learn much from the discipline of modern history, with its two traditions of narrative and scientific history (the latter, cliometrics, uses the tools of economics, including quantitative measurement systems). What's important for religious studies, with its heavy dependence on traditional narratives and qualitative methods, is to also acknowledge the contribution of 'religiometrics', of quantitative methods of measurement. The two traditions are profoundly complementary for the mutual benefit of the wider discipline itself and therefore for understanding and deploying its contribution to contemporary wellbeing.

Contour 3: Learning from the research tools of subjective wellbeing. The issue of 'ordinary theology'

In building maps of subjective wellbeing, research suggests the importance of including peoples' view themselves. This has proved controversial in economics which has traditionally relied on 'revealed preferences' as chosen measure of human welfare: in other words preferences are revealed in what people **do**. Yet many economists now recognise the importance of also deploying peoples' 'expressed preferences' by analysing surveys of self-reporting questionnaires. In other words, when mapping wellbeing, it's vital to ask people what **they** judge to be their wellbeing history. And so with religious studies. This therefore includes the significant recent growth of 'ordinary theology', the study of what 'the ordinary man in the pew' understands by Christian practices, ethics and beliefs, using qualitative and quantitative research tools. And the results can be startling, because people in the pews, the laity, can have very different views and experiences from what they are supposed to believe and experience according to bishops and theologians. Whatever the *consensus fidelium* means it surely now needs to incorporate the expressed views of the laity. Again, this will challenge official church teachings, including Catholic social teaching, which is essentially a series of top down pronouncements.

Contour 4: From theology as queen of the sciences to religious studies as contributor to interdisciplinary processes serving the wellbeing of all

Contemporary theology's problem is that nobody listens to it, not least because it has a tendency to take off into a little world of its own, a kind of fantasy speculative theology, quite out of touch with the world of daily life. Many other secular disciplines have a similar tendency. They develop their own view of the world behind the high exclusionary walls of their discipline. Yet what is becoming clear is that in this modern post 1800 world of increasing size and complexity, the global problems we face cannot be effectively addressed by any one discipline, and certainly not theology. The accurate, creative and constructive way forward in today's rapidly changing evolving world is therefore for disciplines to learn to work together, learn from each other, and listen to each other. Addressing the wellbeing of all is increasingly requiring that collaboration, and the acknowledged contribution of religious studies to that shared concern should increasingly justify the participation of that discipline in such research. That means a religious studies which recognises that it doesn't have all or many of the answers at all; indeed that it has many problems or obstructions of its own to address in order to make a more adequate and accurate contribution. Facing shared global concerns, religious studies certainly has much to offer, not least in how to deliver greater subjective wellbeing. Yet its sharing in that common task is the sharing of equals, of mutual respect for the contributions of each discipline.

Contour 5: No longer theology but now religious studies

It's clear from my research into wellbeing that theology, including systematic theology and biblical studies, can no longer operate effectively alone in engaging the world of daily life. They certainly do have important and creative contributions to make, but equally clearly, no longer in isolation. They must now be substantively joined by other forms of Christian knowledge which are increasingly operating in the effective addressing of the world of daily life (that's why I have described and ordered my survey of what is key to Christianity's more effective contribution to subjective wellbeing as Christian practices, ethics and beliefs). These include: sociological theology, the philosophy of religion, practical theology, public theology, pastoral theology, ordinary theology, the contributions of the world's great Faiths, and spirituality, including secular spirituality (Baker and Miles Watson, 2008). And that's why the contribution of practice, and reflections on it, is so important in this reshaping of necessary and different strands of enlarging religious studies, for example as practical, public and pastoral theology. This confirms the importance of secular disciplines like economics and psychology valuing the interaction of pure and applied research rather than the traditional focus on pure research alone. All these can only be made sense of if they work together under the umbrella of religious studies.

Contour 6: Then why and how does Christianity within religious studies make valued and particular contributions to wellbeing which warrant proper recognition in interdisciplinary ways of working?

This is not about demonstrating the truth of Christianity, that God exists, but that Christian beliefs do account for greater Christian wellbeing. So this understanding of Christian practices, ethics and beliefs enriches corresponding secular understandings. For a Swedish Christian ethicist, they clarify and lend depth and meaning to moral insights based on common human experiences (Grenholm, 1993: 313). It is this deepening of such values which can also prevent such anchoring experiences from slipping over time. It's recognition, too, of the role of ideas in shaping greater wellbeing, an understanding which some economists and economic historians acknowledge, including from outside economics. This has the added value of providing empirically researched means of religion engaging in the public square, say as public theology, by providing

contributions to what Habermas now identifies as 'an awareness of what is missing' in secular communicative reason (Habermas, 2010: 15-23).

How we engage effectively such complex world agendas for improving the wellbeing of all, including its material, health and subjective wellbeing aspects, interestingly requires the same approach from secular disciplines as from religious studies. I have called this the foundational skill of learning to live in more than one place at once (Clements 2013). It is required of all disciplines, whether secular or religious. It suggests increasingly and profoundly interdisciplinary ways of practising and thinking, of learning to see things from the others' perspectives. And this is both confirmed and enriched by some Christian thinking. For in the great prologue to John's Gospel, at the heart of the incarnation story, is the proclamation that 'the Word became flesh... and lived among us' (John 1.15). For this living among us, this living in more than one place at once, literally means 'pitched his tent among us' in the way the Hebrew Scriptures tell the story in the Book of Exodus of God, dwelling among the Israelites 'in the tent of the tabernacle in the wilderness'. Now that interests me because it's not simply about the personhood of God, but also the tent, the impersonal, the mechanisms, and the institutions of God. But then it means that such Christ-like Godly living in more than one place at once therefore involves Christians, through faith, sharing in that double residency in personhood, size and structures. It's about Christian beliefs and stories giving greater depth and meaning to ordinary, necessary and hopefully increasing collaborations between disciplines, traditions and practical partnerships for the pursuit of the greater wellbeing of all. In other words, there is a clear, decisive and tangible link between Reader's and my work in terms of the correlation between materiality, entanglement (in other words, Reader's view that the implication that we embrace the entanglements of the material for the good of the world rather than trying to escape it), and wellbeing. The latter, for example of subjective wellbeing, for me, is therefore best addressed by the knowledge that we have chosen to become entangled and valorise the material rather than adopt an exclusive or exclusionary approach that ignores or minimises it – and this has been done collaboratively.

Final Thought

Against the background of the paradoxes of development described in the second section of this book and the fears of a growing cultural irrationality, it is our argument that what we call material religious practices or lived religion can make a contribution to the task of how to live more faithfully and peacefully together. This is an aspiration that links back to Temple's original work, but in a way, that takes fully into account contemporary challenges and problems. By mapping these practices we hope that it is possible to identify those areas in which those citizens of faith can be so faithfully entangled that they provide not just practical support for those in need, but also some conceptual resources which add to a wider public debate. They will succeed in the latter to the extent that they move beyond traditional or conventional theological approaches and both learn from and engage with insights from other disciplines. It is in that sense that we suggest that the language of religious studies is more appropriate than that of straight theology.

We would argue, however, that not all religious practices or traditions are of value in this context, as some are as likely to be as regressive and destructive as other cultural movements. The challenge therefore is one of discernment, and of identifying criteria by which to evaluate actions and ideas emerging from faith communities. By taking the agendas from our respective books and moving beyond them, we propose that what follows should be an understanding and analysis of the external and internal conditions necessary for critical thought in the light of the realities of contemporary culture, perhaps best described now as digitally determined. Education, knowledge itself, and indeed faithful action needs to be grasped afresh in what might be seen as developing a therapeutics of faithful dissent. So what we present here is a starting point rather than a conclusion, a pointer to the next stage of the process. It is in that spirit that we offer this text as a contribution to this developing task.

Reflection II

In the light of arguments above, consider the following questions:

Why do people ignore the benefits of the Industrial and Mortality Revolutions and instead focus on their negative effects?

Why is Christianity better at delivering subjective wellbeing and health?

Why is Christianity so weak on incomes and money?

Why do Christians focus almost totally on the person in community and ignore the value of the impersonal as organisations, etc.?

Why do Christians, churches and theologians feel so uneasy about measuring religious matters?

Should theology be part of religious studies rather than kept separate from it?

Why do we think church leaders and theologians are right on matters of belief, ethics and practice? Why aren't the laity included in such judgments?

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