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# Challenging Religious Issues



Supporting A-level Religious Studies. The St Mary's and St Giles' Centre

# Challenging Religious Issues

## Supporting Religious Studies at A-level and beyond

## Issue 18 Spring 2022

## Contents





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*Challenging Religious Issues* is a free, open access on-line journal designed to support teachers and students engaged in A-level Religious Studies, bringing recent and relevant scholarship and research from the University into the A-level classroom. If there are any topics you would like to see included in the journal, please contact us.

This issue publishes three *two-part* articles (although each part is fairly self-contained). These more extensive pieces allow a topic to be dealt with in more depth or detail, while keeping the usual shorter length for each separate part so as to retain flexibility in how students and teachers use the material. *We should be grateful to receive reader feedback (addressed to smc.taniaapsion@gmail.com) on your preferences with respect to such longer articles, as well as their division into two parts, compared with having more shorter ones in each issue.*

Challenging Religious Issues
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# Jesus' Public Ministry
# Part 1: Words and Works

James M. M. Francis

*This two-part article presents a critical account of what can be known of Jesus' ministry from his baptism to his crucifixion. No suggestion is made concerning an historical order for these events and for the most part it relies on the evidence of the Synoptic Gospels. It does, however, affirm that much can be known about the historical nature of Jesus' ministry. Part one explores his preaching and teaching, his miracles and the titles ascribed to him.*

*Specification links:*
*AXA Section A: Christianity: God • Christian Monotheism: the meaning and significance of the belief that Jesus is the son of God*
*EDEXCEL Paper 3: New Testament Studies: 1. Social, historical and religious context of the New Testament 1.1 Prophecy regarding the Messiah; 2 Texts and interpretation of the Person of Jesus, 2.2 Titles of Jesus in the synoptic gospels; 2.3 Miracles and signs; 5. Texts and interpretation: the Kingdom of God*
*OCR Developments in Christian thought (H573/03): 2. Foundations, The person of Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ's authority as the Son of God*

**Introduction**

A succinct summary of Jesus' life and work is expressed in a sermon by Peter recorded at Acts 10:36-39. It says that Jesus began his work soon after the mission of John the Baptist (though the Fourth Gospel has them overlapping for a time, and Luke records a memory from Jesus' youth at 2:41-52); that he worked outwards from Galilee; that he was a preacher, healer and exorcist; that his mission took him to Jerusalem (likely more than once, according to the Gospel of John) and that he was crucified.

It is undoubtedly an historical memory. The church certainly reworked the tradition of Jesus in the transmission process behind the Gospels but in a way that retained an authentic recollection of his words and deeds. Recent scholarship has argued that traditions of Jesus' ministry (oral and written) began to be gathered even during his lifetime (Dunn, 2003, pp. 173-254).

**Preaching the Kingdom of God**

Mark provides a summary of Jesus' message at 1:15 (cf. Matt. 4:23 and Luke 4:43): 'the time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the Gospel'. Luke 3:23 says that Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his ministry (furnishing a

genealogy, cf. Matt.1:1ff). Again, Luke at 4:16-21 describes what Sam Wells calls 'A Nazareth Manifesto' (Wells, 2015), which echoes very much the style of a prophet (not unlike John the Baptist, 3:1ff, which Jesus must have assented to in being baptised by him). A further statement is found at Luke 13:32.

The phrase, 'the Kingdom of God', lies at the heart of Jesus' message. The word 'kingdom' in its Jewish background refers not to a noun (as in the UK) but to a verbal notion of God ruling as king. In Jesus' day the hope was very strong of a territorial link between the ruling of God and the land, but Jesus' use of the phrase is essentially non-territorial. R. T. France makes a telling point that we do well not to shorten the phrase 'Kingdom of God' to simply 'Kingdom' (though it is difficult not to do this). 'If the "Kingdom of God" means "God being King", then to abbreviate to "the Kingdom" is to focus on the wrong one of the two nouns' (France, 1990, p. 13). The roots of God's kingship go back into the OT (cf. the royal psalms, Ps. 2; 20; 21; 45; 72; 101; 110; 132), and Judaism cast its hope forward to an age when God would be sovereign (Isa. 24:23; Obadiah 21; Zech.14:9ff.).

The Kingdom in Jesus' proclamation seems to be neither wholly present nor entirely future; it is a reality 'in process of realising itself', as it were. In Mark 1:14 the reference to the Kingdom being 'at hand' captures the sense of immediacy of arrival. It may echo the preaching of John the Baptist, who also pointed to the nearness of the End, but there is a claim implicit in Jesus' message that the Kingdom is near enough to be actually present.

The response (in Mark 1:15) is to 'repent and believe in the gospel', i.e. the good news of the Kingdom that Jesus is announcing. According to Luke 4:18ff, this was summed up as 'good news' after the manner of Isa. 61:1ff. It represented something new and, at least in its manner, was quite unexpected. This message was expressed in the style of prophetic action, in that Jesus lived it out by being known as a friend of the unrighteous (Matt.11:19/Luke 7:34; cf. Luke 15:1ff and 19:7).

**Teaching in parables**

Jesus taught people (including women) openly. His style in part reflects that of the conventional rabbi and yet differs from it. He is called rabbi (Mark 9:5; 10:51; 11:21; 14:45) and others come to ask for his own interpretation of the Law. Jesus' teaching owes much to the wisdom tradition of Jewish tradition which stretches back more than a thousand years before him. In this he shares an affinity with wisdom in three particular ways: (i) an epigrammatic style, (ii) morals based on personal observation and (iii) lessons drawn from life and Nature. All this forms the background to his parables of the Kingdom which range from short maxims such as Matt. 5:13 ('if salt has lost its taste how shall its saltness be restored?'), Luke 17:37 ('where the carcass is there the vultures will be gathered together') and Matt. 8:22 ('leave the dead to bury their dead'), to elaborate stories such as the Waiting Father (Luke 15:11-32). The parables form a valuable resource for appreciating the social context of his day (Gooder, 2020, pp. vii-xii). The parables, along with the gathered instruction of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew) and the Sermon on the Plain (Luke), contain the substantive content of his teaching. Added to that is teaching on discipleship in servanthood and cross bearing (Mark 10:45).

On the other hand Jesus is not linked to any scribal background and appears (highly unusually) to be self-taught. Hence questioning arises about where

Jesus' authority comes from. And his own family express doubt concerning him (Mark 3:31-35).

Jesus' parables provide a pictorial sketch of his understanding of the Kingdom. There are parables concerning the arrival of the Kingdom (e.g. Wineskins and Patches (Mark 2:21ff), where the Kingdom is new and cannot be confined within the old); there are parables of response to the message (e.g. Treasure and Pearl (Matt. 13:44ff), about the worthwhileness of the Kingdom) and parables about the crisis the Kingdom brings in its coming (e.g. Wise and Foolish Maidens (Matt. 25:1ff)).

**Miracles**

The working of miracles was also part of the recorded ministry of Jesus. That Jesus is recognised as having curative powers is something almost accepted within the society of his day, but it did not make him unique – others were also regarded as similarly gifted. Miracle working in the Ancient World associated itself with authority figures (cf. Alexander the Great, Vespasian, Apolonnius of Tyana). Prophets in the Old Testament worked miracles (e.g. Exodus 14:21ff; 16:4ff; 1 Kings 17:1ff; 19:1ff) and some of Jesus' contemporaries (e.g. Honi the Circle Drawer, cf. Hanina ben Dosa) were accredited with miracle working. We might almost say that, given the authority of Jesus, it might be expected that he had miraculous powers. In one story a Gentile woman challenges Jesus to heal her son, reaching out beyond the confines of Judaism (Mark 7:24-30). In the early church, miracles (healing and exorcism) were regarded as evidence of the inspiration of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:7). We might say that Jesus' miracles fall into the category of 'enacted prophecy'. One miracle (the cursing of a fig tree, Mark 11:12ff) may have been a literalising of a symbolic wish (Mark 13:28ff). By and large, the 'Nature miracles' (walking on water, calming a storm, multiplying loaves, changing water to wine) all draw heavily on symbolism and imagery. Whether Jesus actually did these things we cannot say from an historical point of view. Of course, our understanding of illness is rather different from what obtained then, and medical diagnoses would have been imprecise, especially in terms of mental ilness which was often viewed as demon possession. It is the association of the miracles with the Kingdom that gives the miracles of Jesus, such as they are, their meaning.

**Titles**

A broad assessment of Jesus by others through his words and actions is that he was regarded as a prophet. The title is amongst the oldest recorded in the Gospel tradition, see Mark 8:27ff and Mark 9:1ff, and the question put to John the Baptist in John 1:21: 'Are you the prophet?' Here, the definite article recalls eschatological expectation of the return of prophecy as a feature of the end (cf. Joel 2:28), where a prophet like Moses or Elijah was expected to return and to herald the arrival of the Messiah or the Messiah himself was expected to be this Prophet of the End. At John 6:14 the crowds decide that Jesus is this prophet, though Matt. 21:11 says he is more 'the prophet . . . from Nazareth', cf. Luke 7:16 'a great prophet has arisen amongst us'.

The tradition about being a prophet (if not *the* prophet) contains within it reference not only to Jesus' teaching but to his deeds (since prophets such as Elijah could have special powers) – so Mark 6:5-6 links Jesus' teaching to his mighty works (cf. Matt.12:28/Luke 11:20: 'if I by the Spirit/finger of God . . .'). In the context of this last passage, the discussion about Jesus as prophet raises

the issue of Jesus' authority – so Mark 6:4 (Matt. 13:57; Luke 4:24). This passage about a prophet not being without honour except amongst his own kin, while it is a proverb, betokens the fact that Jesus did accept at least the role of prophet as a description of the style of his ministry and that a prophet should not perish out of Jerusalem (Luke 13:33; cf. Matt.23:37/Luke 13:34 in his lament over Jerusalem). But even if Jesus does act in prophetic ways (Matt. 5:17-20), he does not adhere to the usual prophetic formulae such as 'thus says the Lord'. His style of ministry is paradoxically more direct ('It has been said to you, but I say to you', Matt. 5:21ff).

From the evidence of the Gospels is it possible to say anything about Jesus' own understanding of himself? We can cite his own sense of a special dependency upon God in the almost consistent address to God as Father (save Mark 15:34). His address to God as 'Abba', while intimate, seems to retain (unlike 'Daddy') a mature adult term of address. From this sense of dependency flows the theme of obedience in relation to the title 'son of God' which does not necessarily imply divinity but a sense of loyal obedience, as of a son doing a father's will, even to the poignant narrative of Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-50) and the cry of dereliction (Mark 15:34, on which see below). In the context of Mediterranean values this becomes a crucial perspective and appears in the stories of Jesus' baptism, temptations, the Transfiguration and the Passion. In these stories there is an undoubted development of the church's appreciation of Jesus as obedient son. But as a title ascribed by others to him it reflects Jesus' own sense of obedience to and dependency on God.

The mention of sonship also relates to the difficult question of the phrase 'Son of Man'. Whether this was actually a title is also uncertain and in some instances it could be merely an indirect reference to himself as a human being, meaning 'I, me' (cf. the Irish 'Yer Man'). In Jesus' belief that God would vindicate him and his mission, reference is made to a heavenly being of 'one like a son of man' as in Daniel 7:9-13. Jesus is represented as referring to the coming of such a Son of Man in vindication (Mark 8:38=Matt. 10:32-33; cf. Luke 12:8-9; Mark 13:26=Matt. 24:30/Luke 21:27; Mark 14:62=Matt. 26:64/Luke 22:69). Where Jesus refers to this heavenly Son of Man, a distinction is made between himself and the Son of Man e.g. Mark 8:38.

On the other hand, there are instances of an identification between Jesus and the son of man that evoke a sense of humanity e.g. Matt.8:20, humility e.g. Matt. 20:18 or obedience (servanthood) e.g. Mark 10:45 (=Matt. 20:28). From this somewhat confusing picture no consensus has emerged in the long scholarly debate about the use of the phrase 'son of man'. The problem is intriguing because it is the one phrase that is found only in use by Jesus – the church does not confess Jesus as 'son of man' as a credal term. At the least, we might suggest that it relates to Jesus' own sense of his mission which, despite (and indeed through) its weakness and frailty, will be vindicated by God (Vermes, 2010, pp. 249-250).

The title Messiah (Christ), the one significant title ascribed to Jesus by the church, is one that he accepts cautiously within the circle of his followers who are to tell no one (Mark 8:30-31). Only at the end of his ministry is it acknowledged openly, in answer to the High Priest's question (Mark 14:62).

But it is not only or even primarily through the titles that we can reflect on Jeus' self-understanding. More significant

is the question of how he might have understood his fate. The course of his ministry would have given him the experience of rejection as well as acceptance, and he would have seen the fate of John the Baptist as a possible likely outcome for the role of a prophet. Did Jesus view his sufferings, described early on in the temptation stories, as a byproduct of his mission (a 'nevertheless God's will is to be done' perspective), or as the means through which the mission was itself advanced? The answer is hard to find (even if the church came to the latter view in developing its doctrine of the atonement), but at least we might suggest that the theme of obedience as a way by which wisdom is discerned (cf. Psalm 119; Proverbs 3:11-12/Hebrews 12:3-11) had some relevance to the shape of Jesus' ministry. His determination to go to Jerusalem, with its messianic gesture of entering the city as a planned event but then deliberately letting the moment of popular enthusiasm slip away to leave him vulnerable to the decisions of others: that, too, represented a reckoning with risk as a necessary part of his mission. The linking of his baptism to his passion at Mark 10:38, cf. Luke 12:49ff, in its evocation of conflict and crisis, may also represent authentic reminiscence.

For those with a wider interest in drama and literature Terry Eagleton, in his book *Radical Sacrifice* (Eagleton, 2018), reflects on the Passion of Jesus from the perspective of carnival, as in the unruly Roman mid-winter festival of Saturnalia. For Eagleton, Holy Week is indeed a kind of carnival where 'an obscure layman' from up country Galilee is publicly welcomed with palms 'only to be crucified days later under the mocking title of "King of the Jews"' (O'Brien, 2018). Eagleton argues in his chapter 5, 'Kings and beggars' (Eagleton, 2018, pp. 142ff), that this is a form of comic role reversal, in that the crucified is indeed God incarnate. In Mark's Gospel (15:39) the Roman centurion's words in response to Jesus' cry of dereliction and death, that 'this man truly was the [or a] son of God' recall the beginning of the Gospel at 1:1, where in some manuscripts the title 'son of God' is added. Eagleton asks what Jesus' sense of abandonment implies about the Kingdom he publicly proclaimed (1:15)? He answers the question by affirming that 'the Father . . . is an abyss of love rather than a copper-bottomed metaphysical guarantee. It is the Father himself who lies at the source of Jesus' faith, as the object-cause of his desire, and in that sense he has not been forsaken' (Eagleton, 2018, pp 39-40).

## Internet Links

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ministry_of_Jesus Ministry of Jesus (Wikipedia)

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-35120965?ns_mchannel=email&ns_source=inxmail_newsletter&ns_campaign=bbcnewsmagazine_news__&ns_linkname=na&ns_fee=0 What did Jesus really look like? (Joan Taylor)

https://bibleinterp.arizona.edu/articles/bon368024 Ten things I learnt about Jesus (Helen K Bond, in The Bible and Interpretation)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-EhIHz3CDc My Soul Glorifies the Lord: Jesus' female disciples (Helen Bond and Joan Taylor, YouTube, 2018)

## Discussion points

1. Why do you think Jesus did not openly proclaim himself as Christ/ Messiah during his ministry?
2. What can we learn about life in the Near East of Jesus' day from his parables?
3. Do you think the Syrophoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30) changed Jesus' outlook?
4. From Jesus' teaching, what do you find in common with other world religions?
5. How do you think Jesus' message and Jesus' person are interrelated?

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# Jesus' Public Ministry
# Part 2: Rejection and Responses

James M. M. Francis.

*The second part of this reflection on Jesus' public ministry focuses on the circumstances that led to the trial of Jesus and his subsequent crucifixion. These contexts are a combination of the religious and the political, which could not easily be distinguished in his day, a combination that still obtains in some contemporary parts of our world.*

*Specification links:*
*AXA Section A: Christianity: God • Christian Monotheism: the meaning and significance of the belief that Jesus is the son of God*
*EDEXCEL Paper 3: New Testament Studies: 1. Social, historical and religious context of the New Testament 1.2 The world of the first century and the significance of this context for the life and work of Jesus. (c) Roman occupation. (d) The role and impact of these influences on legal and ethical dimensions of life in first-century Palestine and the relationship of Jesus' life and work to these influences; 5. Texts and interpretation: conflict, the death and resurrection of Jesus*
*OCR Developments in Christian thought (H573/03): 2. Foundations, The person of Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ's authority as a liberator: Jesus' role as liberator of the marginalised and the poor, as expressed in his: challenge to political authority; challenge to religious authority*

**Introduction**

The public prophetic act of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem at the time of Passover met with widespread acclaim which soon dissipated, perhaps because of the non-fulfilment of messianic hope. It would also have brought Jesus to the attention of the Roman authorities at what was a significant time in the overcrowded city of Jerusalem. The subsequent act of cleansing the temple would have alienated the Jewish authorities. With this background, the drawing in of rejection to the way of Jesus' mission finds poignant expression in the words at the Last Supper over the bread (at the beginning of the meal) and the last cup of wine (assuming this was a Passover meal). Whilst the exact words have undergone liturgical development we may discern a clear meaning: 'This is my flesh for you/

This is my blood for you'. His further exhortation to 'Do this in remembrance of me' would then refer (as if his death had actually happened) to his followers' remembrance of the sacrificial offering of himself. The cross represents for Jesus the enactment in a prophetic gesture of his own commitment to his cause (and as such his willingness to face martyrdom). For him, it represents the way by which God's Kingdom is to be achieved. It is significant, therefore, that in the Resurrection narratives reference is made to his wounds (which, as appearances, distinguish these narratives from the Transfiguration), and which enabled the church to understand the significance of Jesus' death.

**The Jewish religious response**

Certainly, there were features of Jesus' message which could have alienated as well as attracted others. His message of the Kingdom of God reflected a sovereignty of God which could be at variance with some contemporary outlooks.

(1) There is the absence of a commonly-held idea that God shows his sovereignty by rewarding the good and punishing the wicked (Matt. 5:45), as well as the idea that calamity is a sign of divine wrath (Luke 13:1-5, cf. John 9:1-3). Jesus clearly regarded the poor and socially disadvantaged as under God's special care (Luke 6:20-22).
(2) The offer of forgiveness as part of God's sovereignty is reinterpreted on the basis that the only condition necessary to receive it is a willingness oneself to forgive others (Matt. 6:14-15; Mark 11:25-26; Luke 17:3-4). Contemporary views were more complex: e.g. that forgiveness was the result of expiatory sacrifice or penance by good works, to be confirmed by signs of God's blessing that such repentance had been duly carried out.
(3) A counterpart to Jesus' pronouncement of forgiveness is his association with society's outcasts, e.g. Mark 2:16 as a reliable reminiscence. The jibe at Matt.11:16-19/Luke 7:31-35 that Jesus (in contrast to John) is 'a glutton and a drunkard' has to be set alongside his own estimate of himself as a celibate with no home of his own (Luke 9:58), and whose life is hard and exhausting (Mark 3:20) and where time even for a meal may be hard to come by (cf. John 4:6-8).
(4) The question of Sabbath observance is also part of the radical nature of Jesus' understanding of the sovereignty of God. Jesus clearly felt he could call on God's help even though the Sabbath commemorated God's resting on the Sabbath. So was Jesus presuming to dictate to God against God's own wishes? That would seem blasphemous (John 5:15-18 and 10:32-33 being a possible reminiscence of Jewish polemic at this point).

Nevertheless, Jesus continues to observe the traditional forms of Jewish worship. That he is invited to speak in synagogues and receives Pharisaic interest (Luke 7:36-50) and approval (Mark 12:28-34) means that his message did receive support. Thus the anti-Pharisaic tone of the Gospels is likely coloured by later conflicts between Judaism and the church.

Yet Jesus' ministry ended in public execution. We will have to make some kind of decision as to whether Jesus' death was the result of an accumulation of events at a particular point in his life,

and thus to some extent distance the course of his ministry from that end, or whether it was inherently a likely outcome within the structure of that ministry itself. But could such Pharisaic conflicts have actually created his downfall? We may note, for example, the gathering of opposition at Mark 3:6, but this early reference in Mark may be due more to Mark's own arrangement of his Gospel. The faith-response of the church, e.g. 1 Cor. 1:23, claimed within its own theological rationale that Jesus' ministry led to the cross, and it may be that the end to which he came could perhaps be seen as inevitable given the content and style of his ministry (Matt. 23:37; Luke 13:34). He was not the only one to die a martyr's death, in that his cousin John the Baptist was similarly executed. Geza Vermes remarks, 'His approach to the Torah and his perception of its main message may have borne an individual mark, but neither in general, nor on any particular point, can he be identified as an antinomian teacher' (Vermes, 1993, p. 26)

**The Roman political response**

Problematically, although it was the Romans who executed Jesus according to the evidence, it was not the Romans whom he antagonised. John 19:12-16 says that the Jews arraigned Jesus before Pilate on a charge of sedition and similarly the trial in Mark seems to turn on the phrase 'the king of the Jews' (15:2, 12, 18, 26, 32). There is an issue whether the Jews had the right of the death penalty at the time. Jewish sources, e.g. Talmud j. San. 1:1 and 7:2, say that the Jews did not have the right of capital punishment 'for forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem'. That would agree with John 18:31 that the Jews did not have authority in the matter of the death penalty. But according to Acts 7:54-60, Stephen was stoned to death at Jerusalem. Stoning is also mentioned with regard to James the brother of Jesus (in 62 AD), as well as the stoning of the adulteress at John 8:3ff and attempts to stone Jesus himself at John 8:59. If the Romans did not intervene in the case of Stephen, then presumably the Jews could have dragged Jesus out and stoned him (cf. Luke 4:29-30). Some scholars have argued that the reason why Jesus was not simply stoned was a wish on the part of the Jewish authorities to heap maximum shame on Jesus – in line with Deut. 21:23 his crucifixion would symbolise his status as an outcast and law-breaker, and as one who was in truth really utterly rejected by God cf. 1 Cor. 1:23. (It may be that Paul is aware of this issue and provides a counter-interpretation at Gal. 3:13-14. According to 2 Chron. 24:20-21, stoning was compatible with innocence – but crucifixion would avoid any possibility of a martyr movement.) But then again, the Jewish authorities must have taken something of a risk in using Rome to dishonour Jesus in this way. What if Rome found him not guilty (as Pilate tried, at least for a time, to say)? However, the incidents of stoning that we hear about may be more to do with local action. Stephen's death sounds more like a lynch mob, and James' death took place between the procuratorships of Festus and Albinus (and, according to Josephus, Annas as High Priest acted illegally in the eyes of some of his contemporaries in agreeing to James' death).

That Jesus was crucified means that he was condemned on a political charge and there are a number of points which could lend themselves to such a revolutionary interpretation. He came from Galilee (a noted centre of unrest) and included at least one Zealot amongst his disciples

(Luke 6:15). According to John 6:15, the response to the feeding of the five thousand was a wish to make Jesus king 'by force', and Jesus' final visit to Jerusalem is marked by some elements of prearrangement in the obtaining of an ass and the room for the Last Supper. (Scholars debate whether this meal was a Passover celebration, depending on the assessment of the evidence of John's Gospel compared with the Synoptic Gospels.) Again, at least one of Jesus' followers was armed at the time of Jesus' arrest (see Mark 14:47 and the corresponding passages in Matthew and Luke), and there is the curious phrase in Mark 11:16 that Jesus would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. On the other hand, Jesus repudiates violence (Matt. 26:52) and the early church embraced a policy of civil obedience as part of its faith.

The charges before Jesus were:

*Before Pilate:*

(a) king of the Jews = possible sedition (in all four Gospels);
(b) 'being an evildoer' (John 18:30);
(c) 'perverting the nation / forbidding tribute to Caesar / claiming to be king' (Luke 23:2 cf. John 19:12).

*Before the Sanhedrin:*

(a) 'destroying and rebuilding the temple' (Mark 14:58 and 15:29; Matt. 26:60. See also Stephen's critique of the Temple in Acts 7:44ff);
(b) 'being God's plenipotentiary' as 'son of God' (John 19:7; Luke 22:70; Mark 14:61-62; Matt. 26:63).

A trial before the Sanhedrin is improbable. According to Mishnah San. 4:1, cases concerning a capital charge could not be heard at night, so that they would not be rushed. It is more likely that there was some sort of informal hearing. We cannot separate religion from politics at this time, but Jesus was put to death by the Romans. It may be that, with some Jewish support, especially from the Sadducees and a concern for the Temple, they viewed the 'Jesus movement' as destabilising. The act of cleansing the Temple (surely a symbolic prophetic act) would have been viewed as a radical gesture even though its meaning might not be exactly clear. As prophets often gave symbolic enactment to their message, so here perhaps Jesus warns against the way in which the Temple actually obstructed the true worship of God, if by that was meant that ritual observance lulled Israel into complacency before God. Micah 4:1ff and Isa. 2:3; 56:7 predicted a new Temple and the Messiah was expected to come to the Temple and purify it. According to Zech. 14:21, an end in the trade in the Temple would be a feature of the Messianic Age. If Mark 14:58 (cf. 15:29 and Acts 6:13ff) is authentic, then the intention of Jesus' action is not about Temple management (11:17) but signals either a renewed Temple (14:58) or (radically) even an end to the Temple (13:2ff). Micah 3:12, cf. Jer. 7:14 and 26:6, had foreseen the destruction of the Temple, and other groups (e.g. Qumran and the Samaritans) were critical of it as a focus of corruption and compromise. Given that Jesus must have visited the Temple often (following the evidence of John rather than the Synoptists), perhaps his action was the outcome of a longer acquaintance and observance of the role of the Temple in Jewish life. To this extent it is not a random act but in keeping with the pattern of his ministry, in which the arrival of the Kingdom of God signalled a radical challenge to personal faith and conduct and to the oppressive structures

of his day. In the Fourth Gospel the temple incident is placed early, at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, and lays a foundation for opposition to him. That could be so. However, there is evidence in John's narrative of echoes of Mark and so the event may actually have happened at the end of his ministry and tragically contributed to his downfall.

Following the Temple incident, Jesus did not withdraw but stayed teaching in and around the Temple. That must have heightened the tension. At some indeterminate point, the Roman authorities were drawn in, either by request or their own intervention, and Jesus was arraigned on the formal charge of being 'king of the Jews'. (Could Mark 11:16 be seen as a sort of royal act?) For Rome, that would be a capital charge.

We may conclude that the charge before Pilate was not a true indictment in so far as Jesus did not claim to be king. But in public perception the Entry into Jerusalem would not have gone unnoticed by the Romans, especially with Passover being a time of civic unrest and the city having a hugely increased population for the festival. To that extent the Roman authorities would have been sensitive to any presentation of evidence that others might, for whatever reason, wish to bring as part of another agenda.

Jesus' public ministry ends with his death by crucifixion. Jesus was put to death on the political charge of claiming to be in some sense a king. The irony of this was not lost on the early church in the context of its awakening to mission in light of Easter. But the response within the emerging church to what it celebrated as Jesus' resurrection, or more precisely the belief that God had raised Jesus from the dead, belongs in another discussion.

## Internet Links

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ministry_of_Jesus Ministry of Jesus (Wikipedia)

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-35120965?ns_mchannel=email&ns_source=inxmail_newsletter&ns_campaign=bbcnewsmagazine_news__&ns_linkname=na&ns_fee=0 What did Jesus really look like? (Joan Taylor)

https://bibleinterp.arizona.edu/articles/bon368024 Ten things I learnt about Jesus (Helen K Bond, in *The Bible and Interpretation*)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-EhIHz3CDc My Soul Glorifies the Lord: Jesus' female disciples (Helen Bond and Joan Taylor, YouTube, 2018)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AVZbNkDG5J4 (Rowan Williams, You Tube, 2019)

## Discussion Points

1. What can we know about Jesus' self-understanding and does it matter?
2. Do you think the Last Supper was a Passover meal? (Compare the Synoptic Gospels with John's Gospel on this point.)
3. If Jesus' death was a miscarriage of justice, why should it be given such religious significance?
4. What has religious belief to say about upholding justice?

## Reference

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# Hume's Criticism of the Argument from (to) Design Part 1

L. Philip Barnes

*This two-part article summarises some of Hume's influential criticisms of the design argument in support of belief in God.*

*Specification links:*
*AQA 3.1 Component 1: Philosophy of religion and ethics: 3.1.1 Section A: Philosophy of religion: Arguments for the existence of God: Design: Criticisms: Hume*
*EDEXCEL Paper 1: Philosophy of Religion: 1.1 Design argument: Hume*
*OCR paper H173: 2. The Existence of God: the teleological argument*
*WJEC/EDUQAS Unit 2: Section B - An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion Theme 1: Arguments for the existence of God – inductive: C Challenges, David Hume - problems with analogies; rejection of traditional theistic claims: designer not necessarily God of classical theism; apprentice god; plurality of gods; absent god (teleological)*

**Introduction**

The design argument has a long philosophical lineage, going back to the ancient Greeks. It enjoyed popularity up until the early nineteenth century, when its popularity waned under the force of increasing appreciation of David Hume's (1711-1776) criticisms in his posthumously published *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* in 1779, and under the challenge of Darwin's theory of evolution which provided a naturalistic explanation for what *seemed* purposeful intelligent design (the teleological form of the argument; see below). William Paley's (1743-1805) claim, ironically made over twenty years after Hume's criticisms, that the complexity and purposeful nature of the world and its constituent parts bespeaks an intelligent designer; just as the complexity and purpose exhibited by a watch bespeaks an intelligent watchmaker, is often regarded as capturing the essential (or at least the most familiar) form of the design argument.

The appeal to design is an *'a posteriori' argument*, that is an argument based on experience, upon which an *analogy* is drawn between human products of design ('artifacts') and the world or aspects of the world (such as the human eye) that similarly are taken to exhibit design and purpose, and thus require a designer. More recent interpreters typically distinguish between

(1) the traditional design argument that focuses on purpose, which is believed to be evident in the universe and in Nature, and is often referred to as the teleological argument (from the Greek term, *telos*, meaning 'purpose,' 'end' or 'goal'); and
(2) a design argument that focuses on the order that is manifest in the laws of the universe – on either the enduring constancy of physical laws, such as that of gravity, for example, what John C. A. Gaskin (1988, p. 13) calls 'the regularity argument' and Richard Swinburne (1979, p. 133) 'the regularity of succession argument' – or on the combination of laws (of physics) jointly acting together in mathematically precise ways that caused the original creation of the universe (often referred to as the 'fine tuning' or "anthropic" design argument).

Hume does not, however, as most philosophers now do, carefully distinguish between the teleological version of the design argument and the regularity version, and his criticism is confined mainly to the former, which obviously reflects the emphasis of the religious apologists of his time. The designation 'design argument' will be used here to refer to both the teleological and the regularity version of the argument, when very little turns on the difference between them; when something of philosophical consequence relates to one version and not the other then they are appropriately distinguished.

**Sources**

Hume's criticism of the design argument is confined to two sources, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1748) and *Dialogues on Natural Religion* (1779), in which it receives its most extended treatment. As the title of the *Dialogues* suggests, it presents conversations, 'dialogues' of Hume's production, between a group of friends on the truth and rationality of natural religion, that is, the truth of religion that is accessible to all through the exercise of reason and argument. The main interlocutors are Cleanthes, a theist who supports the design argument and believes that God can be known through observation and argument; Philo, a critic of the design argument, at least in its claim to support the existence of God, as traditionally interpreted by theists; and Demea, who has little patience with the project of natural theology and rational proofs for the existence of God. Our focus is on the objections raised against the design argument, which means that in the case of the *Dialogues* all criticisms and objections will be accredited to Hume.

There are different ways of identifying and categorising Hume's criticisms, which in part indicate the challenge of how the continuous flow of conversation and argument is sub-divided. An objection to some aspect of the design argument often 'crosses over' or is expanded and revised into an objection to some other aspect; thus making it difficult to demarcate objections one from another, for when does an expanded or redirected objection become a separate criticism? Gaskin (1988, pp. 16-17), an authority on Hume's philosophy of religion and on his criticisms of 'design' in Nature, identifies four different groups of related criticisms:

- criticisms focusing on the use of analogy;
- an objection that is rooted in the nature of causation;
- restrictions on the conclusions that may be reached, even if the argument

is valid; and lastly,
- alternative explanations for the presumed order in the natural world.

**Cleanthes' statement of the design (teleological) argument**

> Look round the world: Contemplate the whole and every part of it: You will find it to be nothing but one great machine, subdivided into an infinite number of lesser machines, which again admit of subdivisions to a degree beyond what human senses and faculties can trace and explain. All these various machines, and even their most minute parts, are adjusted to each other with an accuracy which ravishes into admiration all men who have ever contemplated them. The curious adapting of means to ends, throughout all nature, resembles exactly … the productions of human contrivance; of human design, thought, wisdom, and intelligence. Since therefore the effects resemble each other, we are led to infer, by all the rules of analogy, that the causes also resemble, and that the Author of Nature is somewhat similar to the mind of man, though possessed of much larger faculties, proportioned to the grandeur of the work which he has executed. By this argument *a posteriori*, and by this argument alone, do we prove at once the existence of a Deity, and his similarity to human mind and intelligence. (Hume, *Dialogues*, Part II; *Hume on religion*, 1968, pp. 115-116)

**A singular universe**

Hume claims that analogical reasoning does not hold in the case of singular objects. Philo states:

> When two species of objects have always been observed to be conjoined together, I can infer, by custom, the existence of one wherever I see the existence of the other …. But how this argument can have place where the objects, as in the present case, are single, individual, without parallel, or specific resemblance, may be difficult to explain. (Part II; *Hume on religion*, p. 123)

The universe is unique and by virtue of it being unique an analogy cannot be drawn on the basis of experience, which is confined to the things that can be observed as 'conjoined' within the universe. We do not know anything about the creation of other universes, if there are such, for there is only one with which we are familiar. Perhaps if we were acquainted with other universes and had reliable knowledge that they were the product of an intelligent designer, then we could, by analogy, reason that 'our' universe is likewise the product of an intelligent designer. Without such knowledge, the inference to a designer is without rational force.

Hume believed that we cannot use an argument from analogy if one of the items in an analogy, in this case the universe, is unique. Is this convincing? Cosmologists who study the origins of the universe or the nature of the Big Bang that caused the formation of the universe make use of analogical reasoning in their explanations, even though both are singularities. Analogy (and inference) is also used in scientific enquiries into the origin of the human race, which again is unique; uniqueness does not necessarily exclude analogical reasoning on occasions. Not all reasoning in cosmology and palaeoanthropology, however, depends exclusively on the use of analogies and this may suggest that analogical reasoning is only convincing

when complemented by other forms of reasoning that include more direct forms of observation. The issue here boils down to the strength of the analogy between the evidence of design in the universe and that of human artifacts that we know are the objects of intelligent design; and on this there is disagreement. Interestingly, William Paley argued that even if we had never seen a watch before, seeing one on the ground while out walking would cause us to regard it as the product of a designer (on Paley's argument, see Wynn, 2011).

**Weaknesses in the analogy**

Hume, through Philo, objects that the analogy between the universe and the human artifacts (products) that exhibit design is too weak to support the conclusion of the argument that there is a God. According to the design argument natural objects (the human body, for example) are similar to artifacts, which are caused by human agents; therefore natural objects are caused by a non-human agent similar to human agents, except in so far as the dissimilarities between artifacts and natural objects require us to postulate a difference. Hume's oft-repeated criticism in both the *Enquiry* and the *Dialogues* is that an analogy is strongest when there is both a range of common features and when the features are similar in scale.

> If we see a house, CLEANTHES, we conclude, with the greatest certainty, that it had an architect or builder; because this is precisely that species of effect which we have experienced to proceed from that species of cause. But surely you will not affirm, that the universe bears such a resemblance to a house, that we can with the same certainty infer a similar cause, or that the analogy is here entire and perfect. The dissimilitude is so striking, that the utmost you can here pretend to is a guess, a conjecture, a presumption concerning a similar cause; and how that pretension will be received in the world, I leave you to consider (Part II; *Hume on religion*, p. 117).

The problem according to Hume, given that for him God is not a direct object of experience, is that the similarities that are postulated between human artifacts (as in a house) and the products of Nature, or indeed the universe as a whole, are narrowly confined to that of order or purpose and that the difference between the complexity of Nature and the complexity of human artifacts is striking: human artifacts are simple by comparison; consequently the analogy is weak. There is not a close similarity between human artifacts and natural objects. Limited points of similarity between two compared 'objects' weaken the strength of any proposed analogy and any conclusion that is based on it. According to Hume, the 'immense grandeur and magnificence of the works of Nature' so exceed human creations that any positive or favourable comparison between them is presumptuous on the part of humans (Part V; *Hume on religion*, p. 138).

One response to this is to point out, which was unknown to Hume, that human creations now far exceed the complexity of design and production than those with which he would have been familiar in the eighteenth century. The technology needed to transport a man to the moon, or the technology that was needed to create the Large Hadron Collider in France/Switzerland certainly narrow the gap between the complexity of human creations and the grandeur of the works of nature. A large gap in complexity remains, but arguably the analogy carries greater weight now than in Hume's day.

It may be accepted that some analogies are weak and that little can be established on the basis of them. For example, an orange is spherical, as is the world, yet there the similarity ends. The world is not composed of juicy segments. Yet some analogies can yield important insights, even when confined to a single feature. If the case for a designer can be made on the basis of the similarity between natural objects in the world (or the universe as a whole) and human artifacts, this designer is also necessarily a being of great power and knowledge, with the ability to plan and execute intentions.

**Whole and parts**

Hume asks, through Philo, '… can a conclusion, with any propriety, be transferred from parts to the whole?' (Part II; *Hume on religion*, p. 121). We observe, however widely, only a small part of the universe, but how does this justify us in in thinking that the whole universe exhibits design either now or over the whole course of its existence? The observation is that design may be a feature of parts of the universe but we cannot extrapolate from this to the conclusion that the whole universe exhibits design (but do we need to find design in the whole to support the argument?). The objection here relates to a wider philosophical point, which is sometimes referred to as the *fallacy of composition*.

The informal fallacy of composition (which is questioned by some philosophers) is an invalid inference of the form:

> all the parts of X have/are Y; therefore, X has/is Y, where X corresponds to wholes, and Y corresponds to properties or parts.

Examples are easily cited: Each brick in the building weighs less than two kilograms. Therefore, the building weighs less than two kilograms.

The fallacy of composition is more frequently discussed in the context of the cosmological argument (as it is by Edwards, 1972, pp. 264-270). Every single event in the universe has a cause; therefore, the universe as a whole has a cause. In relation to the design argument:

> Part of the universe that we observe exhibits design; therefore, the universe as a whole exhibits design.

If this form of reasoning is fallacious then (this version of) the argument from design breaks down.

But is it fallacious? Not every argument of the form 'all the parts of X have/are Y; therefore, X has/is Y' is invalid. It is sometimes reasonable to argue from a part to a whole: Every part of the desk is made of wood; therefore, the desk is made of wood. Examples where the move from parts to whole is valid could be multiplied. Is the move from parts of the universe exhibiting design to the universe as a whole exhibiting design valid or not? It all depends on whether design is the kind of property that *transfers* from parts to whole as some versions of the design argument maintain or is it the kind of property that does not transfer from parts to whole, as Hume believes.

Does the fallacy of composition apply to both the design argument and the *cosmological argument*? In the latter case, a cause is postulated for every contingent thing and the question then raised whether a cause is needed to explain the whole causal chain. The design argument is arguably different, for the whole may have the (same) property its parts distributively possess, and thus the whole (the universe) has design relevant features (designedness) without

the illicit inference. Design does not have to be identified in things within the universe (and used as the original premise), and an inference then made to the universe as a whole: it is the universe as a whole that is directly perceived as designed. Some argue that the fallacy of composition does not apply here, setting aside whether it is a fallacy or not. It might be contended that the 'fine tuning' argument also does not have to begin with the premise that there is design within the world, but with the detection of design at the origin of the universe or with the universe as a whole (see the important discussion by Collins, 2003).

## *Glossary*

*analogy:* a partial similarity between two different things.

*a posteriori:* derived from experience.

*cosmology:* a branch of astronomy concerned with the origin and evolution of the universe.

*design:* the structured arrangement of the different parts of something or the structured arrangement of the whole.

*fallacy of composition:* an informal fallacy that arises when one infers that something is true of the whole from the fact that it is true of some part of the whole (not accepted as a fallacy by some philosophers).

*inductive reasoning:* a method of reasoning in which the premises support the conclusion but do not confer certainty, only probability.

*naturalistic explanations:* explanations of the causes, nature and influence of things or religion without reference to God or the supernatural.

*natural religion:* the religion supported by appeals to Nature without the need for religious revelation; the religion of reason.

*palaeoanthropology:* the study of the origins of humankind.

*teleological:* concerned with purpose.

## Internet Links

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LPevykeGl0U&ab_channel=WorldFaiths (The Design Argument for the Existence of God)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=foeM6vXZCys&ab_channel=MrMcMillanREvis (MrMcMillanREvis, The Design Argument, Part 1)

https://iep.utm.edu/design/ (Kenneth Einar Himma, Design Arguments for the Existence of God, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*)

https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/teleological-arguments/ (Del Ratzsch, Teleological Arguments for God's Existence, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*)

http://www.leaderu.com/offices/billcraig/docs/teleo.html (William Lane Craig, The Teleological Argument and the Anthropic Principle)

## Discussion points

1. Explain why some versions of the teleological versions of the design argument are undermined by appeals to the theory of evolution.
2. Would it strengthen or weaken the design argument if there were a large number of universes?
3. How good do you think the analogy of the human eye is to that of a modern-day computer? If there are similarities, does this strengthen the design argument?
4. Why is the appeal to arguments from design enjoying a new lease of life among philosophers?
5. How is the apparent design of the universe best explained?

## References

There are numerous editions of Hume's *Dialogues concerning natural religion*. In the text, page references are to *Hume on religion* (1968), selected and introduced by Richard Wollheim, London: Collins. *The Dialogues* are also available on the web, for example, at http://www.public-library.uk/pdfs/5/234.pdf.

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# Hume's Criticism of the Argument from (to) Design Part 2

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*The second part of this two-part article summarises further aspects of Hume's influential criticisms of the design argument in support of belief in God.*

*Specification links:*
*AQA 3.1 Component 1: Philosophy of religion and ethics: 3.1.1 Section A: Philosophy of religion: Arguments for the existence of God: Design: Criticisms: Hume*
*EDEXCEL Paper 1: Philosophy of Religion: 1.1 Design argument: Hume*
*OCR paper H173: 2. The Existence of God: the teleological argument*
*WJEC/EDUQAS Unit 2: Section B - An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion Theme 1: Arguments for the existence of God – inductive: C Challenges, David Hume - problems with analogies; rejection of traditional theistic claims: designer not necessarily God of classical theism; apprentice god; plurality of gods; absent god (teleological)*

**Introduction**

The arguments already considered in Part 1of our discussion of Hume's criticisms of the design argument all challenge the central contention that human observation of design and purpose, and the human propensity to see design and purpose in the world (the universe), provide the foundation for a rationally convincing inductive argument (or for a family of rationally convincing arguments) that justifies belief in God. Hume deems the design argument to be rationally unpersuasive. The criticisms discussed below, he believes, support a more modest conclusion, namely that even if successful the design argument in any of its versions falls short of supporting belief in God, that is, where God is understood in traditional terms as something like a 'person, without a body (i.e. a spirit) who is eternal, free, able to do anything, knows everything, is perfectly good, is the proper object of human worship and obedience, the creator and sustainer of the universe' (Swinburne, 1977, p. 1).

At every point Hume rejected this understanding of God. We might add that he also rejected any kind of post-mortem existence.

**The rule of 'just reasoning'**

In *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1975 [1777], p. 136), Hume sets out a number of rules to guide the proper and 'just' use of human reason, one of which is: 'If the cause be known only by the effect, we never ought to ascribe to it any qualities, beyond what are precisely requisite to produce the effect'. The same principle is present in much that Hume says in the *Dialogues on Natural Religion*, though it is expanded somewhat and integrated into his criticism of the design argument.

One can anticipate his reasoning: even if the design argument is valid, only what can be inferred from the design of the world or the universe can properly be accredited to the deity – great power and knowledge, presumably, but not infinite power (omnipotence) and infinite knowledge (omniscience). Such a 'god' falls far short, however, of the God of Christianity, Islam or Judaism. This same rule of reasoning is given even greater force when considered in the context of Hume's discussion of the implications for belief in God of the existence of evil and suffering in the world.

**The problem of suffering and evil**

The 'problem of suffering and evil for theistic belief' is discussed at various points in the *Dialogues* but mainly in Parts X and XI.

At some points Hume seems to be criticising the logical possibility of the existence of God and the existence of evil in the world (though Philo, the religious sceptic, concedes that a benevolent deity and evil are logically compatible); at other points he seems to be adducing evidence that challenges the probability of God's existence (what is now called 'the evidential problem of evil'); and finally, he argues that the existence of various forms of evil place significant restrictions on the inference that can be drawn from the order in the world to the character of the 'orderer'. Of the three, the last mentioned is the most characteristically Humean and our discussion will be almost exclusively confined to it.

What may be called *'the inferential challenge of evil'* can be straightforwardly expressed: the phenomena of the world forbids an inference to the existence of God, who is believed to be *limitlessly* powerful and good. Evil of one sort or another exists in the world in sufficient amounts to forbid an inference of this kind. There is an abundance of natural evil – states of affairs that do not result from the intentions or negligence of human agents, such as earthquakes, disease, hurricanes and famine—and of *moral evil*, i.e. suffering and pain that result from the immoral choices of human agents, such as murder, torture, theft and so on.

Over a century before Hume, Thomas Hobbes described life as 'nasty, brutish, and short'. He was describing life *outside society*, 'man in the state of nature'; whereas for Hume a disinterested perspective on life in society was also 'nasty, brutish, and short'. 'The whole earth … is cursed and polluted. A perpetual war is kindled amongst all living creatures. Necessity, hunger, want … Fear, anxiety, terror agitate the weak and infirm'; animals prey upon each other and each is kept in 'perpetual terror and anxiety' (Part X; *Hume on religion*, p. 167).

> And is it possible, CLEANTHES, said PHILO, that after all these

> reflections … you can still persevere in your Anthropomorphism, and assert the moral attributes of the Deity, his justice, benevolence, mercy, and rectitude, to be of the same nature with these virtues in human creatures? His power we allow is infinite: whatever he wills is executed: but neither man nor any other animal is happy: therefore he does not will their happiness. His wisdom is infinite: he is never mistaken in choosing the means to any end: But the course of nature tends not to human or animal felicity: therefore it is not established for that purpose. Through the whole compass of human knowledge, there are no inferences more certain and infallible than these. In what respect, then, do his benevolence and mercy resemble the benevolence and mercy of men?
>
> EPICURUS'S old questions are yet unanswered.
>
> Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil? (Part X; *Hume on religion*, pp. 171-172)

The last paragraph raises what is now regarded as *'the logical objection' to belief in God*: how evil can exist alongside the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God. This logical objection to the existence of God is now widely regarded as failing, for reasons set out by Alvin Plantinga (1967, and in a less philosophically demanding version, 1974), and which need not be rehearsed here. For Hume, however, recognition of this failure is of limited relevance: his intention is not to show that the inference from design to God *refutes* the existence of God, rather it is to show that perfect power and benevolence cannot be attributed to the deity— a god of limited powers may exist but not the God of traditional theism. Moreover, the validity of the design argument does not give any support to the belief that God is morally perfect or even that 'he' is interested in human affairs. The world as designed, as Hume writes above, 'tends not to human or animal felicity'. None of the traditional moral attributes of God find any justification in the natural and human worlds of experience. That the designer of the world has no moral interest in humankind is, for Hume, justified by recognition of the pain and misfortune that attend those who pursue virtue as well as those who do not. God does not reward virtue or intervene to rescue the innocent or act to diminish suffering. The deity is indifferent to our moral endeavours. These conclusions, or more exactly limitations, that attend any design/teleological argument, are intended by Hume to undermine traditional *Christian* theism, though he is careful not to state this openly.

There is a range of replies that can be made to Hume at his point, though space forbids a fuller development here.

- First, proponents of the design argument in any of its forms may contend that it establishes or makes probable the existence of a designer, no more but no less. A designer of the universe or the world is necessarily a being of great power and great knowledge. Such a being is not the God of classical theism, who is infinite in power and knowledge, and a maximally great being; nevertheless, such a 'god' is minimally the God of classical theism who possesses great power and knowledge, which God exhibits in the design and ordering of the universe.

- Second, and following on, if the design argument falls short of justifying the existence of God as traditionally understood, there are other arguments and considerations that can complement and add to the modest conclusion that there is *probably* a designer of the universe: say the cosmological argument (Craig, 1979) or an argument from the objective nature of moral obligations to the conclusion that God is their source (Evans, 2014). Each argument makes its own distinctive contribution and gives support to different aspects of God's character, as creator, as morally excellent, and so on.
- Finally, there are numerous philosophical responses to the challenge of evil and suffering to theistic belief (good overviews are provided by Meister, 2012, and Speak, 2015). Some are intended as defences – as critical responses that aim to demonstrate that anti-theistic arguments fail; others are theodicies – attempts to show why God may be justified in allowing suffering and evil.

**Further limitations**

Here is how John Gaskin (1988, 21) summarises additional limitations that Hume believes follow from the validity of the design argument:

> *If valid, the design argument could establish a number of conclusions incompatible with monotheism, namely, that the universe is (1) the product of a committee of designers, (2) a discarded experiment in universe making or the product of a second rate god, or (3) a creation which has ever since been allowed to run on its own devices (author's italics).*

(1) Hume points out that a 'great number of men join in building a house or ship … Why may not several deities combine in contriving and framing a world?' (Part V; *Hume on religion*, pp. 140-141). The point is that complex artifacts produced by humans are typically the product of a number of designers (and we may add artisans); consequently, given the complexity and intricate nature of the world, we should infer that it too is the creation and design of many (designers) working together on a collaborative project. The obvious objection to this contention is that the same natural laws operate throughout the universe, for example, the inverse square law of gravitation. Such is the inter-connectedness of the laws of Nature and how they operate together that a group of designers would require a working knowledge of them all in order to synchronise their limited portion of design of the whole with that of others. Alternatively, there would need to be one designer charged with oversight, a view that reinstates the concept of a supreme, unique designer. It is when encountering speculations such as these that an appeal to the *'principle of parsimony'* (referred to alternatively as Occam's Razor) is properly applied, that is, the principle that the most plausible explanation of an occurrence, phenomenon or event is the simplest, and the one involving the fewest entities or assumptions.

(2) The idea of the universe (or world) as a discarded experiment in universe-making or the product of an apprentice god ('some infant deity') are both unlikely possibilities (Part V; *Hume on religion,* p. 142). If the universe has been discarded by God,

it is, because of its imperfect nature (for Hume has already argued that the universe is imperfect), which then begs the question that if God has the requisite abilities and powers to design the universe then by parity of reasoning he has the powers to overcome the imperfections that result. The further idea that the deity serves an apprenticeship before taking up his full divinity with its associated powers would be excluded on all traditional understandings of the nature of God.

(3) The suggestion that the world runs, as Gaskin says, 'on its own devices', abandoned by God, is a novel suggestion, as is the suggestion that this situation has come about following the death of God (Part V; *Hume on religion*, p. 142). What evidence or considerations could establish this?

What Hume seems to want to show by these arguments is that, even if the design argument is valid, there are numerous explanations for the existence of the order and purpose that the world exhibits; and what is important from Hume's critical perspective is that, from what we know *on the basis of our experience of the world*, any of these explanations are as valid as any other: a divine designer is just one of many equally plausible possibilities, or if one prefers, and more in the spirit of Hume, one of many equally implausible possibilities.

**'The gods must have a human figure'**

In the *Dialogues* Hume refers to Epicurus' (ancient Greek philosopher) facetious claim that 'the gods must have a human figure' (Part V; *Hume on religion*, p. 142). The critical point is simple: the analogy in the design argument between the order in artifacts and the order in natural objects leads us, if the analogy is convincing, to an agent similar to 'man', yet all the human agents we know are 'corporeal', and 'have eyes, a nose, mouth, ears, etc.' (Part V; *Hume on religion*, p. 142). According to Hume, the design argument concludes in a fully anthropomorphic God, a God who is just like us in all respects. Richard Swinburne (1972, p. 199) refers to this as the 'supersimilarity fallacy', which is 'to postulate similarities in causes in respects in which difference between effects suggests that causes are also different.' Basically, the difference in effect between (a) the production of the world and (b) humans producing an artifact is sufficient to exclude the idea that God is embodied; notwithstanding that both are designed. Differences in effects means differences in the nature of the causes. 'The pervasiveness of the natural order means that if an agent is responsible for that, there is no boundary to the region of the universe under his control' (Swinburne, 1972, p. 199).

**Alternative forms of order**

In Part VII of the *Dialogues*, Hume takes up the hypothesis of the world as a living organism, which he introduced in Part VI. His purpose is to suggest that there are other possible sources of order and purpose in the world that do not require reference to a (divine or supernatural) designer.

> If the universe bears a greater likeness to animal bodies and to vegetables than to the works of human art, it is more probable that its cause resembles the cause of the former than that of the latter, and its origin ought rather to be ascribed to generation or vegetation than to reason or design (Part VII; *Hume on religion*, p. 149)

The problem with this suggestion is that there is a significant difference between the origin of human products as a result of design and that of animals and vegetables by processes which Hume calls 'generation' and 'vegetation'. In the case of human design, materials which are in a nonorderly state are transformed into an organised system; but in the case of generation or vegetation this is not the case. As Leon Pearl (1970, p. 282) has stated:

> What we find instead is a process by which organized bodies generate other organized bodies. There is no genesis of order here, but rather its transmission from one body to another. Generation and vegetation are themselves orderly processes which the argument from design tries to account for.

**Conclusion**

The focus of our discussion has been on summarising the main criticisms that Hume brought against the design argument. Many of them still have philosophical advocates, though new versions of the argument, for example, the 'regularity argument' and the 'fine tuning' or 'anthropic' design argument in places evade many of Hume's criticisms, and in places invite new Humean inspired criticisms.

The deeper question, however, is whether evidence and arguments are required to justify belief in God. Perhaps God can be perceived directly through human experience of the world and of the universe, as the imprint of design in Nature and in the universe elicit a natural and warranted belief in a designing God. The onus then shifts to arguments establishing the fact that there is no God.

## Glossary

*anthropomorphic:* the attribution (projection) of human characteristics or behaviour to God or gods.

*defence:* a response (in this context) that aims to show that God is logically consistent with the existence of evil.

*inductive argument:* a type of reasoning that involves drawing a general conclusion of probability from a set of specific observations.

*maximally great being:* to be maximally great is to be perfect in every respect in every possible world.

*moral obligation:* a duty which one owes, and which ought to be performed.

*omnipotent:* all-powerful.

*omniscient:* all-knowing.

*omnibenevolent:* all good/loving.

*principle of parsimony:* the principle that the most plausible explanation is the simplest and involves the fewest entities or assumptions.

*supersimilarity fallacy:* to postulate similarities in causes in which difference between effects suggests that causes are also different (Swinburne).

*theodicy:* a response to the argument from evil that attempts to explain why God may permit evil and suffering.

## Internet links

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9NGj6Zk9Wj0&ab_channel=MrMcMillanREvis (MrMcMillanREvis, The Design Argument, part 2)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_oIkBdA3Q4&ab_channel=CloserToTruth (Robin Collins, What Does a Fine-Tuned Universe Mean?)

https://iep.utm.edu/design/ (Kenneth Einar Himma, Design Arguments for the Existence of God, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*)

https://infidels.org/library/modern/theism/design.html (Arguments critical of the design inference from *The Secular Web*)

https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/teleological-arguments/ (Del Ratzsch, Teleological Arguments for God's Existence, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*)

## Discussion points

1. Does Hume paint an exaggerated picture of the amount of suffering and evil in the world?
2. Why do theistic philosophers think of God as unlimited in knowledge, power and goodness?
3. If there is no God how are the laws that operate throughout the universe to be explained?
4. What reasons could be given for belief in the existence of numerous gods? Are they convincing?
5. Which version of the design argument do you think is the strongest?

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# Considering the Impact of Covid-19 on Christianity in the UK: Opportunity or Challenge?

Leslie J. Francis and Andrew Village

*This article reflects on what may be the likely impact of Covid-19 on church leaders (clergy), church members (churchgoers) and the visible public future for churches. It advances five theories about the impact.*

*Specification links:*
*EDUQAS/WJEC Option A: A Study of Christianity. Theme 2: Religious concepts and religious life. Knowledge and understanding of religion and belief. E. Religious life – the community of believers: the role of churches in providing worship and sacraments, religious teaching, mission, service and outreach, and fellowship for the community of believers. Theme 3: Significant social and historical developments in religious thought. Knowledge and understanding of religion and belief. D. The relationship between religion and society: Historical developments in religious thought – challenges from secularisation: The conflicting religious and non-religious views on Christianity in the UK (the value of Christian faith schools; whether the UK can be called a 'Christian country'); beliefs conflicting with laws of the country; perceived challenges to Christianity (decline of role and status of Christianity; reduced impact in public life; restricted religious liberty)*

## Introduction

During the opening days of 2020, Covid-19 took the world by surprise. It became clear that decisive action was needed and decisive action was implemented at short notice. In England, the government imposed a lockdown on the nation on 23 March 2020. Going beyond the immediate requirements of the government, on the following day the Church of England imposed a total lock-up on all its churches. Churches were closed completely for religious and liturgical provisions, even for private prayer and even for the clergy. According to the guidance for churches offered by the Church of England:

> Our church buildings are therefore now closed for public worship, private prayer, and all other meetings and activities except for vital community services until further notice. (McGowan, 2020, p. 4)

Churches that pre-Covid were known primarily for offering vital religious services (like holy communion) could now only remain open to offer vital community services (like food banks).

The sudden closure of churches and other opportunities for offline services prompted clergy and church leaders to grapple with establishing overnight an online presence and to provide services on a variety of digital platforms. Since church buildings were now closed, this online presence had to be implemented from the domestic space occupied by church leaders. This significant change was exemplified when the Archbishop of Canterbury presided at the Easter morning eucharist for the nation from his kitchen table, and when the Dean of Canterbury Cathedral began to conduct the daily offices from the deanery garden.

The closure of churches and the move to an online future was not met with total enthusiasm by Church of England clergy and churchgoers. In his editorial to *Journal of Anglican Studies*, McGowan (2020) documented some of the disagreement voiced in the church press and on individual websites. He concluded that:

> Many worshippers, not just clergy, wanted to be connected with the spaces and places that meant so much to them. Members of the Church were now being offered alternative forms of prayer and worship, via technologies not always familiar or welcome, centred on clergy whose faces have become personal avatars of worship. Without the context of stone and wood that spoke of a larger reality than personality or family, and reminded them of a past and future beyond the challenging present, this personalised corporate worship as never before. (McGowan, 2020, p. 31)

**Reflecting on the impact**

One way in which we can try to anticipate the longer-term impact of Covid-19 on church leaders (clergy), church members (churchgoers) and the visible public future for churches is to examine current research on the health and wellbeing of churches in England and Wales, and to develop theories about how such research may give us insights into the future direction after the pandemic.

Examining recent research we identified five specific themes that we considered could be relevant, and began to develop theories arising from each of these themes. Our five hypotheses were as follows:

- closure of churches will lead to church leaving;
- already fragile churches will grow more fragile;
- older people who keep churches open will not return;
- men who are already a minority in church congregations may resent being locked out of their churches;
- Catholics will fare less well than Evangelicals during lockdown.

We will now examine each of these hypotheses in turn.

**Theory 1: closure of churches will lead to church leaving**

A major focus of our research in the past has been trying to understand the diverse motivations behind people leaving churches. Our research book on that topic, *Gone for good?* (Francis & Richter, 2007) drew together the findings from interviews and from a questionnaire survey. Interviews were conducted among 75 individuals, including churchgoers, church leaders and church-leavers. We made 7,195 random phone calls to find people who identified as church-leavers. In this way we found

1,611 people who were willing to receive our questionnaire: 56% of whom completed the questionnaire and posted it back to us.

The major thing that we learned from this survey was that there is no one reason for people leaving churches. In fact we identified 15 different reasons, and some of these were for quite opposing reasons. For example, some people left their church because they thought that it was too liberal, while others left because they thought it was too conservative. Yet a major, and for us a surprising, reason was that many people simply got out of the habit of going. For one reason or another, something got in the way and interrupted their pattern of churchgoing and they never got back into the habit. An astonishing 69% of leavers said that 'I got out of the habit of going to church'.

Now the lock-up of churches was an excellent way to get people out of the habit of going. We suspected that many would not wish to come back.

**Theory 2: already fragile churches will grow more fragile**

One of our colleagues, Anne Lawson, has in a series of recent studies established the 'fragile church' hypothesis (Lawson, 2018, 2019, 2020). In her research, Anne set out to build on earlier work of another of our colleagues, Christine Brewster (2012). Fifteen years ago Christine had interviewed rural clergy and conducted a large-scale survey among rural clergy to assess the issues that caused them stress. Christine distinguished among four groups of issues that caused stress for clergy. She described these four groups as time-related over extension (too many things to do), emotional difficulties (things that generated anxiety and frustration), things that interfered with church development and local conflicts.

Anne's research found the same kind of issues as Christine had found earlier, but Anne also found another group of issues that had not emerged in Christine's earlier research. Anne described this new group of issues as 'marks of fragile churches'. Clergy were worried that their churches were growing too weak to survive. Anne identified five core marks of fragile churches, as perceived by their clergy. The two strongest marks involved the fear of running out of money and the fear of key local lay leaders stepping down and there being no one ready to step up into their place.

Now the lock-up of churches was an excellent way to accelerate these two marks of fragility. Since much of the money needed to keep churches running comes from the people who attend, locking the doors is likely to have an impact on income. Since the local people who keep churches running are likely to get out of the habit of doing so, locking the doors is also likely to have an impact on sustaining volunteers.

**Theory 3: older people who keep churches open will not return**

One of our other colleagues, Albert Jewell, has had a long interest in the place of older people within churches (see Jewell, 2001, 2004). In designing the survey we took into account two important findings regarding the place of older people within churches. *In UK church statistics: 2021 edition,* Peter Brierley reported that, while in 1979 19% of Anglican churchgoers were aged 65 or over, the proportion for this age group then rose to 22% in 1989, 28% in 1999, 35% in 2005 and 40% in 2015. Clearly, the Church is relying increasingly on older members to keep going. The findings from one of our surveys conducted in 2001 and published in our

book *Fragmented faith* (Francis, Robbins, & Astley, 2005) drew attention to ways in which older people were feeling uncomfortable with changes in the church life. For example, older churchgoers were less likely to be helped in their faith by new forms of service (37% compared with 55%), less likely to be in favour of admitting children to communion before confirmation (38% compared with 56%), less likely to favour the ordination of women as bishops (53% compared with 71%), less in favour of divorced people as bishops (29% compared with 57%) and less likely to feel that they could influence their church's decisions (51% compared with 61%).

The pandemic had a particularly powerful effect on people aged seventy and over who were seen to be most vulnerable to the lethal consequences of the virus. Those aged seventy and over had been advised to shield and may have been preparing for the long haul of self-isolation, largely avoiding group activities and human contact. Now this advice to shield may have been the ideal way to break a lifetime's habit of churchgoing. Older people may have been particularly badly affected by their enforced separation from the local church.

**Theory 4: men who are already a minority in church congregations may resent being locked out of their churches**

Visitors to church services in mainline denominations, like the Church of England, may be struck by the way in which women outnumber men, with roughly two women for every one man in attendance. In an early study, *Church watch,* Francis (1996) trained participant observers to attend nearly 200 church services and to describe what they observed. Overall their data confirmed this ratio of two women for every one man. More recently, Francis and Lankshear (2021) reported on a questionnaire survey in which 348 of the 360 churches in the Anglican Diocese of Southwark participated. Of the 31,521 questionnaires completed, 65% were completed by women.

In our earlier study, *Fragmented faith*, Francis, Robbins, and Astley (2005) drew attention to the fact that the men who attended church were generally less content with their churches than the women. For example, men were less likely than women to want to engage with group activities designed to develop faith, like discussion groups, Bible study groups or prayer groups. Men were also less likely to turn to fellow members of their church when they need help. Men were less likely to be helped in their faith by new forms of services or by new hymns. Men were less likely to have confidence in the leadership given by the General Synod, or that given by the Archbishops' Council. Men were more likely to support the disestablishment of the Church of England.

Perhaps, then, the sudden decision by church authorities to insist on the lock-up of churches may have been more readily challenged by male churchgoers than by female churchgoers.

**Theory 5: Catholics will fare less well then Evangelicals during the lock-up**

A major division in Western Christianity took place in the sixteenth century between the established Catholic tradition and the emerging Reformed (Protestant) tradition. The differences between the Catholic tradition and the Reformed tradition were visible both in terms of beliefs and practices, and in terms of leadership and liturgy. The Church of England emerged from the Reformation as a Church that combined strands of the Catholic tradition (like

bishops) and strands of the Reformed tradition (like breaking away from Rome). In the nineteenth century this division between the Catholic and the Reformed roots of the Church of England became much more visible through the emergence of the Oxford Movement, emphasising the Catholic roots (Hylson-Smith, 1993), and the Evangelical Movement, emphasising the Reformed roots (Hylson-Smith, 1988).

The visible differences between the Oxford Movement and the Evangelical Movement could be seen in: the style of church buildings (the Oxford Movement giving more emphasis to the altar and the Evangelical Movement giving more emphasis to the pulpit), and the style of church services (the Oxford Movement giving more emphasis to the celebration of communion and the Evangelical Movement giving more emphasis to preaching. These differences in emphasis have continued.

One of the key consequences of the lock-up of churches was the move to the delivery of online worship. Services based on preaching found the migration to online provisions easier than services based on the celebration of communion. This was the case for two reasons. First, in the Anglo-Catholic tradition (heir to the Oxford Movement) the communion service is closely connected with the architecture of the building. The altar is really important and so is the ritual and movement associated with the altar. It is difficult to replicate the ceremony and the movement of this form of liturgy around the kitchen table (even in Lambeth Palace, the official London residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury). Second, in the communion service beliefs about the bread and wine play an important part. These beliefs link the bread and the wine closely to the activity of the authorised president at the service (the priest). The Anglo-Catholic tradition finds it difficult to envisage quite how people can fully participate in a communion service delivered online to their own homes.

Therefore the transition to online services may have been harder for Anglo-Catholics to accommodate.

## Discussion points

1. What do you envisage to be the impact of the pandemic on accelerating church leaving and on the place of Christianity in the UK?
2. What do you see as the consequences of the fragile church thesis for the UK as a ‘Christian country’?
3. What do you see as the consequences of the impact of the pandemic on older churchgoers for the service and outreach of local churches (say through food banks)?
4. What do you see as the consequence for the social role of churches if fewer men participate in the future?
5. What do you see as the consequence of the different views of Anglo-Catholics and Evangelicals for the role of Anglican churches in providing worship and sacraments after the pandemic?

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# Assessing the Impact of Covid-19 on Christianity in the UK: Opportunity or Challenge?

Leslie J. Francis and Andrew Village

*This article draws on the findings of an online survey, live between 8 May and 23 July 2020, that was designed to assess the impact of Covid-19 on church leaders (clergy) and church members (churchgoers). Did they experience the pandemic as offering opportunity or challenges for the future of their churches?*

*Specification links:*
*EDUQAS/WJEC Option A: A Study of Christianity. Theme 2: Religious concepts and religious life. Knowledge and understanding of religion and belief. E. Religious life – the community of believers: the role of churches in providing worship and sacraments, religious teaching, mission, service and outreach, and fellowship for the community of believers. Theme 3: Significant social and historical developments in religious thought. Knowledge and understanding of religion and belief. D. The relationship between religion and society: Historical developments in religious thought – challenges from secularisation: The conflicting religious and non-religious views on Christianity in the UK (the value of Christian faith schools; whether the UK can be called a 'Christian country'); beliefs conflicting with laws of the country; perceived challenges to Christianity (decline of role and status of Christianity; reduced impact in public life; restricted religious liberty)*

## Introduction

In our earlier paper we advanced five theories concerning the potential impact of Covid-19 on church leaders (clergy), church members (churchgoers) and the visible public future for churches. Our five hypotheses were as follows:

- closure of churches will lead to church leaving;
- already fragile churches will grow more fragile;
- older people who keep churches open will not return;
- men who are already a minority in church congregations may resent being locked out of the churches;
- Catholics will fare less well than Evangelicals during lockdown.

Each of these hypotheses was rooted in discussion and evaluation of recent literature (see Francis & Village, 2021a).

The major problem with our five hypotheses is precisely that they were only hypotheses. Hypotheses of this nature need to be tested against evidence. In one sense we will only really know about the impact of the pandemic on churches in ten years' time, when we look back through the lenses of historians. In another sense, however, we can sharpen our predictors by engaging through the lockdown and living alongside the experience of the pandemic. That is precisely what we set out to do in the *Coronavirus, Church & You Survey.*

**The Coronavirus, Church & You Survey**

Recognising that, in the long term, it may be found helpful to the church to know how the pandemic (and the church's response to the pandemic) impacted on clergy and church members, we launched the *Coronavirus, Church & You Survey* during early May 2020. This survey was established as an online platform (on Qualtrics) and made known through the church press. We built on previous good experience of working with the *Church Times*, a weekly newspaper read mainly by Anglicans, and colleagues further extended the reach of the survey within the Roman Catholic, Baptist and Methodist Churches. By the time we closed the survey in July there had been over 10,000 participants. Since over half of these participants identified as Anglicans living in England, we decided to focus our initial analyses on this group.

When we designed the survey we had our set of five well-defined research questions and theories in mind, shaped by our previous research among churchgoers and among church-leavers. Our aim now, in this paper, is to draw on the responses of those participants who identified as Anglicans living in England, so as to test the five theories that helped to shape the survey. In doing so we shall distinguish between the responses of clergy and the responses of lay people because we suspect that these responses may differ on a range of issues, since that is what we found in our earlier study reported in *Fragmented Faith* (Francis, Robbins, & Astley, 2005).

When we listed our theories, we introduced the theory about church-leavers first, because this helped to focus our perspective on the other theories. Now, in examining the data we will leave that theory about church-leavers to the last, because this will draw together the other four sets of data.

***Fragile church thesis***

There were two questions in the survey designed to test the fragile church thesis, as shaped by Lawson (2018, 2019, 2020). Participants were invited to assess the impact of the pandemic on the Church in the long term:

- Our church buildings will not be financially viable
- Key lay people will step down and be difficult to replace

As well as distinguishing between clergy and laity, we also distinguished among four geographical locations: rural, town, suburban, and inner city. The data presented in *table 1* (see **THE LIST OF TABLES** below) makes it clear that clergy had a more pessimistic view about the future than laity. Both clergy and laity associated with rural churches had a more pessimistic view than those associated with churches in other areas.

Against these data, the effect of the pandemic on rural churches looks very serious. One in three rural clergy fear that their church buildings will not be financially viable after the pandemic (34%) and nearly as many fear that key

lay people will step down and be difficult to replace (29%). Nearly a quarter of churchgoers in rural areas agree. Here is a picture of fragile churches running low on resources: low on financial resources and low on human resources. Further data and discussion are provided by Francis, Village, and Lawson (2021).

***Older people and the church***

There were two sets of questions in the survey that revealed clear differences between the responses of those aged seventy and over, and those under the age of sixty, drawing on insights gained from Jewell (2001, 2004). These two sets of items concerned:

- Attitude towards the churches as local place and sacred space
- Attitude towards the online future

For this section we are comparing the responses of two groups of lay people, those aged seventy and over with those aged under sixty. We are giving clarity to the contrast by omitting those in their sixties.

The set of three items in *table 2* focuses on attitude towards churches as local place and sacred space. Across all three items the older churchgoers aged seventy or over held a more positive attitude towards the church building and consequently were less impressed by the lock-up and by the lock-out. While 25% of the younger group maintained that churches should stay open whatever the crisis, the proportion rose to 36% of the older group. While 61% of the younger group maintained that clergy should always be allowed into their churches, the proportion rose to 68% of the older group. While 53% of the younger group maintained that closing churches to everybody was the right thing to do, the proportion fell to 42% of the older group.

The set of three items in *table 3* focuses attention on attitude towards the online future. Across all three items the older churchgoers aged seventy or over held a less positive attitude towards the online future. While 49% of the younger group considered social media to be a great pastoral tool, the proportion fell to 35% of the older group. While 47% of the younger group considered social medial to be a great evangelistic tool, the proportion fell to 32% of the older group. While 38% of the younger group thought that more pastoral work will be done online, the proportion fell to 27% of the older group. Further data and discussion are provided by Francis and Village (2021b).

***Men and the church***

There were two sets of questions in the survey that revealed a clear difference between male churchgoers and female churchgoers, drawing on a recognition that for every one man in congregations there tends to be two women (Francis, 1996; Francis & Lankshear, 2021). These two sets of items concerned:

- Assessing responses of the national Church and local churches during the lockdown
- Embracing the digital future

The first set of three items presented in *table 4* was designed to explore the way in which church members evaluated the responses of the national Church and of local churches during the lockdown. The data are clear that men evaluated the responses of both the national and the local churches less favourably than women. More than two fifths of the women (42%) felt that their denomination at the national level had responded well to the crisis, but the proportion dropped to 30% among the men. While 43% of the women felt that their denomination at the national level had done a good job

leading us in prayer, the proportion fell to 29% among the men. While 62% of the women felt that the churches in their area had responded well to the crisis, the proportion fell to 48% among the men.

The second set of three items presented in *table 5* was designed to explore the attitude of church members towards the sudden trajectory into the digital age during the lockdown. The data are clear that men evaluated the move to a digital age less positively than the women. While a third of the women (35%) considered that forced closure of churches has focused us on proper priorities, the proportion fell to 26% among the men. While 77% of the women considered that the lockdown has helped the church to move into the digital age, the proportion fell to 69% among the men. While 72% of the women agreed that it had been good to see clergy broadcast services from their home, the proportion fell to 59% among the men. Further data and discussion are provided by Francis and Village (under review a).

### *Catholics and Evangelicals*

There were two questions in the survey designed to test the thesis that Anglo-Catholic clergy and laity would take a different view on online communion services, compared with Evangelical clergy and laity, drawing on the distinctive profiles of these two traditions within the Church of England (Hylson-Smith, 1988, 1993). The first question explored attitude towards clergy celebrating communion at home without a congregation. Historically, Evangelicals were opposed to priests celebrating communion alone. The second question explored attitude towards people at home receiving communion from their own bread and wine. Historically, the Church has maintained the importance of the physical connection between the priest and the gathered community within which communion is celebrated.

- It is right for clergy to celebrate communion at home if they are broadcasting the service to others
- It is right for people at home to receive communion from their own bread and wine as part of an online communion service

For this section we found it important to compare the responses of clergy and laity.

The data presented in *table 6* make two clear points. The first point is that for both clergy and laity there are clear differences between Anglo-Catholic and Evangelical Anglicans. While Anglo-Catholics give more support for clergy celebrating communion at home if they are broadcasting the service to others, Evangelicals give more support for people receiving communion from their own bread and wine as part of an online communion service. These two differences are consistent with the higher importance that Anglo-Catholics attribute to the sacrament of holy communion. It is more important for Anglo-Catholics to celebrate and to attend communion services, to safeguard the integrity of the sacrament and not to allow that to be diluted by people thinking that their bread and wine at home is the body and blood of Christ.

The second point to emerge from these data is that the views of Anglo-Catholic clergy and Evangelical clergy are further apart than the views of Anglo-Catholic laity and Evangelical laity. These fine matters of theology matter more to the clergy. Further data and discussion are provided by Francis and Village (under review b).

### *Church-leavers*

In the earlier study, *Gone for Good?* by Francis and Richter (2007), seven out of

ten church-leavers said that they had simply got out of the habit of going to church (69%). With the lockdown being effective now, on and off, for over a year, many churchgoers will have got out of the habit of going and some of those may now never return.

The results from the *Coronavirus, Church & You Survey* suggest that some groups of churchgoers may have been more heavily hit than others, especially men, especially those aged seventy and over, and especially Anglo-Catholics. It is reasonable to assume that those hardest hit may be the most reluctant to return. If this is the case, the ratio between men and women in the pews may widen even more; the older generation may be laying down their responsibilities in their local churches and discovering that there is no one left to pick them up; and Anglo-Catholics may be retreating, giving way to the Evangelicals to lead the Church into the unknown future.

# THE LIST OF TABLES

| **Table 1** | ***Assessing the impact of Covid-19 by location (percent agreeing)*** | Rural % | Town % | Sub % | Inner % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Clergy* | | | | | |
| Our church buildings will not be financially viable | | 34 | 20 | 18 | 24 |
| Key lay people will step down and be difficult to replace | | 29 | 24 | 23 | 20 |
| *Laity* | | | | | |
| Our church buildings will not be financially viable | | 22 | 16 | 15 | 8 |
| Key lay people will step down and be difficult to replace | | 23 | 16 | 17 | 18 |

| **Table 2** | ***Attitude towards the churches as local place and sacred space by age (percent agreeing)*** | < 60 % | 70+ % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Churches should stay open whatever the crisis | | 25 | 36 |
| Clergy should always be allowed into their churches | | 61 | 68 |
| Closing churches to everybody was the right thing to do | | 53 | 42 |

| **Table 3** | ***Attitude towards the online future by age (percent agreeing)*** | < 60 % | 70+ % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Social media is a great pastoral tool | | 49 | 35 |
| Social media is a great evangelistic tool | | 47 | 32 |
| More pastoral work will be done online | | 38 | 27 |

Note: Sub = Suburban; Inner = Inner City

| **Table 4** | ***Assessing responses of the national Church and local churches during the lockdown by sex (percent agreeing)*** | Women % | Men % |
|---|---|---|---|
| | My denomination at the national level has responded well to the crisis | 42 | 30 |
| | My denomination at the national level has done a good job of leading us in prayer | 43 | 29 |
| | The churches in my area have responded well to the crisis | 62 | 48 |

| **Table 5** | ***Embracing the digital age by sex (percent agreeing)*** | Women % | Men % |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Forced closure of churches has focused us on proper priorities | 35 | 26 |
| | The lockdown has helped the church to move into the digital age | 77 | 69 |
| | It has been good to see clergy boadcast services from their homes | 72 | 59 |

| **Table 6** | ***Views on online communion service by church tradition (percent agreeing)*** | Cathol % | Evang % |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *Clergy* | | |
| | It is right for clergy to celebrate communion at home if they are broadcasting the service to others | 70 | 39 |
| | It is right for people at home to receive communion from their own bread and wine as part of an online communion service | 18 | 41 |
| | *Laity* | | |
| | It is right for clergy to celebrate communion alone in their own homes without broadcasting the service to others | 46 | 31 |
| | It is right for people at home to receive communion from their own bread and wine as part of an online communion service | 26 | 62 |

Note: Cathol = Anglo-Catholic; Evang = Evangelical

## Discussion points

1. Why might the fragile church thesis be more evident in the countryside?
2. Why do you think older people were more opposed to the lock-up of churches during the pandemic?
3. Why do you think men were more critical of the way in which the Church of England responded to the pandemic?
4. How do you explain the different views on communion held by Anglo-Catholic and Evangelical clergy?
5. If people really do get out of the habit of going to church because of the lockdown, what does this say about their Christian faith?

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