

## Some Theological Resources in Challenging Times

“This is a defining moment for the Church of England. Are we truly a church for all, or just the church for ourselves? We urge you sisters and brothers to become a different sort of church in these coming months: hopeful and rooted in the offering of prayer and praise and overflowing in service to the world.”

From Archbishops Justin and Sentamu in their letter to all Church of England clergy  
17<sup>th</sup> March 2020

We have been provided with some very helpful liturgical and prayer resources as we handle the situation created by the COVID-19 outbreak. I have noticed that as we get used to the new practicalities there is also a hunger for theological reflection, both on the current circumstances and also on what this might say about how church might be on the other side of the crisis.

What follows is an eclectic and possibly idiosyncratic collection of theological resources under a number of headings, first helping us make sense of the present, then looking to the future. On the last pages are some open ended questions.

A few colleagues have already added items to my original list – thank you! Please feel free to let me know of other resources, and indeed to suggest further headings for material. Please contact me via [gavin.wakefield@yorkdiocese.org](mailto:gavin.wakefield@yorkdiocese.org)

Gavin Wakefield  
Director of Training for Missional Ministry, Diocese of York  
March 2020

### Dealing with the Present

#### ***Care for ourselves – so we can care for others***

“Keep watch over yourselves...”

(Acts 20:28 – OK, slightly out of context, I know!)

Inevitably there is some overlap between this section and the following one on pastoral care, but I think it is important we take time to acknowledge our own frailties and need of God’s help in what for us is an unprecedented situation. (I put it that way because plagues have swept the human race throughout history. You might want to share any historical reflections which could help us.)

Ministry in the Time of COVID-19: somewhat generic but may spark some good thoughts and actions for you.

<https://www.congregationalconsulting.org/ministry-in-the-time-of-covid-19/>

Washing our hands: burden or gift?

<https://faithandleadership.com/kara-k-root-20-second-gift-washing-your-hands>

Coping with fear: perfect love casts out all fear...  
<https://tanyamarlow.com/spiritual-coronavirus-fear/>

Coping in the first phase of this crisis, recognising it is a traumatic experience  
<https://tragedyandcongregations.org.uk/2020/03/24/guidance-for-ministers-as-the-coronavirus-crisis-deepens/>

***Pastoral care for the household of faith and beyond***

“So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.” (Gal 6:10)

Pastoral Care and the Coronavirus: What Can We Do? Recognises we are in this together....

[https://www.sacristy.co.uk/blog/2020/pastoral-care-coronavirus?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=March%202020%20-%20consumers%20%20coronavirus&utm\\_content=March%202020%20-%20consumers%20%20coronavirus+CID\\_9acf9a99032c9407a1d4950c85d67f81&utm\\_source=Email%20marketing%20software&utm\\_term=Read%20more#](https://www.sacristy.co.uk/blog/2020/pastoral-care-coronavirus?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=March%202020%20-%20consumers%20%20coronavirus&utm_content=March%202020%20-%20consumers%20%20coronavirus+CID_9acf9a99032c9407a1d4950c85d67f81&utm_source=Email%20marketing%20software&utm_term=Read%20more#)

Safeguarding issues, including around volunteers. See the latest information on the CoE website

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

Responding Christianly – some initial thoughts from an Irish evangelical theologian  
<https://www.christianitytoday.com/scot-mcknight/2020/march/coronavirus-and-christian-theology.html>

A reflection on how a Dallas, Texas church community coped when a member fell ill with Ebola in 2014.

“in times of crisis ... what we’ve been taught pops into full view.”

[https://faithandleadership.com/george-mason-and-mark-wingfield-how-lead-calmly-global-outbreak?utm\\_source=albanweekly&utm\\_medium=content&utm\\_campaign=faithleadership](https://faithandleadership.com/george-mason-and-mark-wingfield-how-lead-calmly-global-outbreak?utm_source=albanweekly&utm_medium=content&utm_campaign=faithleadership)

Radical ‘neighbour-love’

<https://unherd.com/thepost/hope-for-neighbour-love-in-a-time-of-coronavirus/>

Valuing isolated older people

[https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/comment/2020/03/10/selfisolation-may-be-a-nuisance-but-real-isolation-is-a-nightmare?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=March%20newsletter&utm\\_content](https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/comment/2020/03/10/selfisolation-may-be-a-nuisance-but-real-isolation-is-a-nightmare?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=March%20newsletter&utm_content)

[=March%20newsletter+CID\\_b6c0063d61c03c5fc665b8c96832d462&utm\\_source=Campaign%20Monitor&utm\\_term=Continue%20reading](#)

Search this website for “how do you lead when life throws you a curveball?”. Useful reminder on the importance of listening in leadership even (especially?) in a crisis.  
<https://leadingwithquestions.com/>

## **Suffering**

“The apologetics of Theodicy is personal... we have to learn to live with the questions.”  
Alistair McGrath

Twentieth century insights, see:

C.S Lewis *The Problem of Pain*

Elie Wiesel *Night*

Viktor Frankl *Man’s Search for Meaning*

Frances M Young *Face to Face: A Narrative Essay in the Theology of Suffering* (T&T Clark, 1990)

A video discussion on suffering by Professor Eleanor Stump, a leading Roman Catholic philosopher and theologian. Made in 2018.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gV2NMchQQTU>

## **Death**

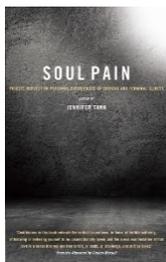
“So what is your theology of death?”  
a recent challenge by an archdeacon to a clergy Chapter

A possible starting point can be found in this Methodist resource

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/life-and-faith/death-and-dying/theological-and-spiritual-perspectives-on-death-and-dying/>

This website is aimed at wide audience. It comes from a Roman Catholic source.

<https://www.artofdyingwell.org/>



How do priests and ministers cope with their own pain and mortality?  
Some very personal reflections.

Jennifer Tann. *Soul Pain: Priests Reflect on Personal Experiences of Serious and Terminal Illnesses* (Canterbury Press, 2013)

<https://canterburypress.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9781848252776/soul-pain>

## **Ethics, Science and Faith**

“Surely science has disproved God, especially when you look at diseases in the natural world.”

Impromptu discussion on ethics in a time of covid-19 from three ethicists at Duke Divinity School (16 March 2020).

Is this a time when we suspend normal ethical thinking and re-imagine ethics, e.g. during social distancing? (after Kierkegaard)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6EBqQAZ1rDA&feature=youtu.be>

The role of viruses in creation. A short article by the Revd Dr Alison J. Gray, Priest Associate at the Ascension, Munich, and a formal medical doctor. She chairs the Royal College of Psychiatrists' spirituality and psychiatry special-interest group.

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2020/6-march/news/uk/viruses-a-good-part-of-god-s-creation>

Short introduction to the problem of evil by a priest-physicist, Sir John Polkinghorne. Polkinghorne was a prolific writer so do search for more.

<https://counterbalance.org/cq-polk/theod-frame.html>

Look up this fascinating and innovative book on science and faith by the Professor of Natural Philosophy at York University and a licensed Reader in a York church.

Tom McLeish *Faith and Wisdom in Science* (Oxford University Press, 2015)

Especially chapter 7 'A Theology of Science?'

<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/faith-and-wisdom-in-science-9780198757559?cc=gb&lang=en&>

## **Mission**

Here is a starter question:

“What are we going to do before the pandemic has passed?”

– what does mission look like now and in the weeks to come?

*What resources are helping you to engage in mission at the present time?*

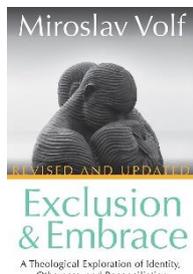
## **Re-imagining the future**

What follow are some initial ideas on material that might help us think and pray for the longer term. By their nature these items have been produced before the present pandemic but that reminds us that there will be other things to consider eventually, most especially the climate change emergency.

If you have other material to add please let me know.

## **Incarnation**

“What is of importance in being present with others and living out an embodied faith?”



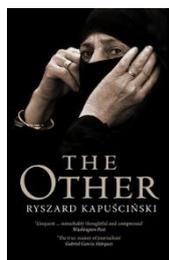
This book was birthed in the experience of the Balkans wars of the 1990s and covers a number of important theological themes, including reconciliation and forgiveness. I have included here for its discussions of distancing, otherness, exclusion and finally the costly step of embracing others as we have been embraced by God.

Miroslav Volf *Exclusion and Embrace, Revised and Updated: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Abingdon Press, 2019)

<https://www.abingdonpress.com/product/9781501896255/>

The Church of England report *Presence and Engagement* was produced in 2005 to help the Church with its tasks in a multi-faith society. Its opening chapter of Reflections provides a much broader framework for the importance of the local church engaging with its own context, recognising the centrality of the incarnation in the mission of God.

[https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/Presence\\_and\\_Engagement\\_Report%202005.pdf](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/Presence_and_Engagement_Report%202005.pdf)

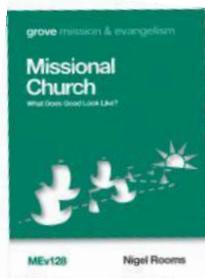


Not an explicitly theological book, but a colleague has commended these reflections on ‘The Other’, as a reminder to think widely and be taken out of our comfort zones.

<https://www.versobooks.com/authors/629-ryszard-kapuscinski>

## **Ecclesiology and Missional Ministry**

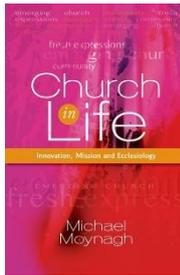
“What kind of church might we become under God?”



Like many Grove Books this is an excellent short starting point. Here are some good questions to be asking together, some inspiring and realistic stories, and some careful research.

Nigel Rooms *Missional Church: What Does Good Look Like?* (Grove Books, 2019)

<https://grovebooks.co.uk/collections/evangelism/products/mev-128-missional-church-what-does-good-look-like>



How do we go about discerning God's call in our local context? This innovative and demanding book offers both theoretical and practical wisdom. It does take some getting into, but it is worth the effort!  
Michael Moynagh *Church in Life: Innovation, Mission and Ecclesiology* (SCM, 2017)

<https://scmpress.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9780334054511/church-in-life>

What does the church need to be and do in a post-Christian context like Europe?

<https://churchmissionsociety.org/resources/pilgrims-and-priests-missional-ecclesiology-in-a-secular-society-stefan-paas-anvil-vol-35-issue-3/>

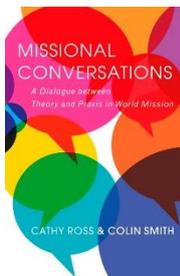
Mixed-ability socialising offers another model of building communities

[https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/comment/2020/03/13/putting-the-social-back-into-care?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=March%20newsletter&utm\\_content=March%20newsletter+CID\\_b6c0063d61c03c5fc665b8c96832d462&utm\\_source=Campaign%20Monitor&utm\\_term=Continue%20reading](https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/comment/2020/03/13/putting-the-social-back-into-care?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=March%20newsletter&utm_content=March%20newsletter+CID_b6c0063d61c03c5fc665b8c96832d462&utm_source=Campaign%20Monitor&utm_term=Continue%20reading)

## **Mission**

“What are we going to start once the pandemic has passed?”

“What are we not going to re-start once the pandemic has passed?”

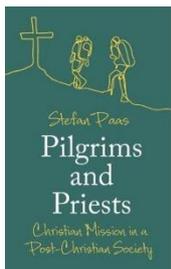


A multi-author book with contributors from around the world. Fairly accessible and is stimulating and at times moving and challenging.  
Cathy Ross and Colin Smith *Missional Conversations: A Dialogue between Theory and Praxis in World Mission* (London: SCM, 2018)

<https://scmpress.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9780334057062/missional-conversations>

here is a short review by Gavin:

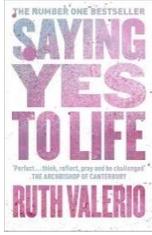
<https://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/3JZFNAKPG3ST5YEFRWQ/full?target=10.1080/1756073X.2020.1742429>



This book goes with the article mentioned above under ecclesiology! I've separated them simply to make the point that mission and ecclesiology are not necessarily two distinct topics.

Stefan Paas *Pilgrims and Priests: Christian Mission in a Post-Christian Society* (SCM, 2019)

<https://scmpress.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9780334058779/pilgrims-and-priests>



Some provocative reflections based in Genesis 1 and calls to action in the climate emergency

Ruth Valerio *Saying Yes to Life* (SPCK, 2019)

<https://spckpublishing.co.uk/saying-yes-resources>

## **Issues needing further work!**

### ***Prayer and Worship***

“What is of value in our meeting together?”

Between us we are being very creative in setting up public worship accessible in a variety of ways and this is wonderful.

Where is the reflection on what we do once we can meet again?

Do we go back to what we had unreflectively?

How might we assess some blended options for the future?

What are our guiding principles?

### ***Re-activating membership***

Here is a slightly edited version of some reflections from a colleague:

If people aren't gathering for worship, prayer, study, committees, socialising and interacting in the groups and activities we run, and if they don't have everyone's email address and phone number, will those connections fade and expire?

What do we need planned on the starting blocks to gather them and celebrate when it is safe to do so?

Initially not having things like a PCC meeting might be a relief, but if we don't have one for 6 months, what does that do to a church's sense of being an entity, let alone its strategy and vision?

And if we don't have our usual contexts for teaching and communicating, how can we do any thinking together about what all this means? Quite a few of my church are elderly and definitely not tech-savvy, so we can't rely on online systems to deliver that.

### **Finance**

Many churches won't have the money they thought they would. Cash and envelope giving at services will have stopped. My own church gets around £30,000 income per annum from its parish centre lettings, which is over 1/3 of our total income, and it's all stopped.

Most of our reserves are in a shares-based fund, so we don't want to dip into that at the moment! Issues around money and resources are going to become much more acute – especially if the economy is in recession.

But that might force us to face tough questions about priorities, viability and focus....