2022

God, Others, and Ourselves - The Stories We Tell and the Meaning We Make: A Narrative Approach to Adventist Mission in the South England Conference of the British Union Conference, United Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

GOD, OTHERS AND OURSELVES—THE STORIES WE TELL AND THE
MEANING WE MAKE: A NARRATIVE APPROACH TO ADVENTIST
MISSION IN THE SOUTH ENGLAND CONFERENCE OF THE
BRITISH UNION CONFERENCE, UNITED KINGDOM

by

Wayne B. Erasmus

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ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Professional Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: GOD, OTHERS AND OURSELVES—THE STORIES WE TELL AND THE MEANING WE MAKE: A NARRATIVE APPROACH TO ADVENTIST MISSION IN THE SOUTH ENGLAND CONFERENCE OF THE BRITISH UNION CONFERENCE, UNITED KINGDOM

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Date completed: August 2022

Problem

A disconnect exists between the Adventist Church in the United Kingdom and its wider context as evidenced through the reduced number of accessions coming from the majority population and from second, third, and subsequent migrant generations. This present study was to propose and trial a worldview awareness training experience.

Method

A Six Conversation journey experience was devised and presented over a six-week period in the summer of 2021 via Zoom, in line with adaptations due to the COVID pandemic. Volunteer Adventist participants would explore their individual

and collective meaning and identity narratives, grow awareness and understanding of other such narratives in their context, and engage these meaning/identity narratives considering a Scriptural perspective in which God consistently seeks ways to be among, and identify with, humankind. Seven participants agreed to be interviewed at the conclusion of the training experience. Qualitative interview data was evaluated using the Kirkpatrick model for training evaluation.

Results

The study brought a range of individuals together with varying ethnic and national identities and invited them to journey together for six weeks. The online nature of the presentations and interactions were a hindrance to relational interface intended to draw participants into the experiences and perspectives of others. Nevertheless, interviewees shared regarding intersecting points with their faith journey that brought both affirmation and challenge, while also indicating that intervention concepts were found to be worthwhile in individual mission and ministry contexts. Most expressed confidence that they would be able to practice these locally. At time of evaluation there are no visible or discernible Level 4 outcomes due, in part, to the nature of the online platform combined with participants who were not otherwise known to one another and who were geographically separated, but more importantly because such outcomes cannot be meaningfully measured two to four weeks after the Six Conversation experience.

Conclusions

While the qualitative data does not seek to objectively measure the results of the intervention, the insights gained from this study suggest, (a) value in and appetite for the general approach, (b) the desire from a diverse church membership for the

journeying experience, and (c) that there should be further, more intentional development of the intervention for a hybrid digital/in-person experience to facilitate the maturing and expansion of the concepts. This intervention appears to have found touch points within the Adventist community in the UK.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With deep appreciation to my family—Karliese, my wife, and our daughters Matthea and Michaella—who have been valiantly long-suffering through this study and writing experience. And to my friends who have borne long with me as I talked about the same thing from as many different angles as I could imagine. I used to think that writing a dissertation was about the mind that creates it, but this journey has once more emphasised the profound value of community and of our shared lived experiences. Non Solum Iter. Soli Deo Gloria!

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Mission is integral to the life of the Church and is rooted in the movement of God toward humanity as told through Scripture. It has been understood in a multitude of ways through history and has at times been co-opted as part of national and other identity narratives. The emergence of a Glocal perspective (Hiebert 2008, 241) highlights the challenges for mission as it seeks to engage the dynamic considerations of globalisation and localisation since both are present and real factors for the contemporary British context. Adventist contextual mission engagement has functioned as an approach outside of Western nations, however, the significant cultural and worldview shifts in those geographic areas indicates that the traditional evangelistic assumptions of Adventism cannot be taken for granted there.

This introductory chapter describes the ministry context in which these challenges are lived and currently addressed, before providing an overview of the stages of the project development, along with a summary of the implementation experience and an evaluation of the project. These steps include a theological reflection, a review of recent and relevant literature, along with the development, implementation, and evaluation of an intervention. Finally, it will offer definitions for selected technical or particular use terms employed in this study, along with a concluding summary of the chapter.

Description of the Ministry Context

The South England Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (SEC) is the largest Conference in the British Union Conference (BUC) and has experienced meaningful growth in recent decades. A demographic study of the ministry context (Appendix B) revealed that a majority of church members were born outside of the United Kingdom (UK) and of those born within the UK less than 10% may be described as 'White British'. In depth analysis of membership growth figures has been intermittent and often used to highlight the statistics mentioned. This positions the conversation in the realm of ethnicity and incorporates a long and painful story for many church members for whom exclusion and the struggle for welcome are significant themes.

I serve as the Church Growth and Adventist Mission Director for the SEC (November 2017 to present—2022), a role that includes resourcing and supporting upwards of 60 Church Plants and Groups within the Conference. The position of Church Growth Director was historically created to provide strategic support to what was termed, "the White work" in the SEC. Many of the 60 Plants and Groups began intending to deliberately reach the majority Anglo population though not exclusively. A number represent ethnic or language specific groupings consistent with the range of migrant communities who have made the UK their home in recent decades.

As the primary researcher and implementer of the project, my personal and professional location is an important factor in the overall narrative. I am a married white male, and father of two daughters. I was born in Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) at the time of the Liberation Struggle and lived my first three decades on the continent of Africa. I am a fifth generation Adventist and have served as a Pastor for 25 years. My undergraduate degree is from Andrews University, obtained at the Helderberg College extension Campus in 1996. My MA (Theology): Pastoral Family Therapy is

from the University of Pretoria (South Africa). I have served in pastoral ministry in Zimbabwe, South Africa, and the UK (2008–present).

Statement of the Problem

A significant challenge for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the UK, and the SEC specifically, is that of engaging the largest population segment of the UK, namely the 'white British' or 'majority population' as part of its wider missionary effort. Despite a strong heritage of Christian and Adventist mission to and from the British Isles, the UK, like most European nations, has moved away from these faith roots (Trim 2019). A Christendom structuring of society—in which Church and State held one another in tension—has been exchanged for a more secular model in which Christianity is one of many Faiths to be engaged with as part of a pluralistic and diverse society.

Seven decades of migration to the UK from the Commonwealth and the European Union have facilitated greater diversity to the social discourse and made a significant impact on the Seventh-day Adventist Church. BUC membership records show that in 2017 just over two-thirds of constituents were non-British born (17,089 of 25,149: unpublished membership data, BUC Secretariat. See Demographic Study Appendix B). This presents Adventism in the UK with the challenge of being a largely 'immigrant' church in which the concerns, worldviews and struggles of immigrant communities and families are dominant. This is not to say that these concerns, worldviews, and struggles are irrelevant or even wrong; indeed, there is significant mission to engage within such paradigms. The question becomes one of contextual connection for mission by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the UK in general and the SEC in particular. Indeed, the UK narratives around immigration; the agenda of Brexit to secure UK borders; and the recent Windrush debacle (Gentleman

2019) often positions the members of a largely immigrant church as potential targets of their host context.

Historical tensions around social change—including those of immigration—have played themselves out in the British Seventh-day Adventist Church. To some extent, these tensions remain unresolved, perpetuating strained relationships around historic actions and even between recent and established immigrant communities. Many of the historical conversations are rehearsed, though brought up to date through the presence of more recent arrivals to the UK and therefore as conversation partners growing in their own positions and perceptions. The internal struggles to embrace one another; to find satisfying community; and to attain functional integration, while surely valuable at some level, continue to absorb much energy and often dictate strategic agenda. As these issues have percolated over the past forty years, the presence of the majority population within the British Adventist Church has dwindled to fewer than 10% of membership, with 50% of that number over 70 years of age in 2017 (unpublished membership data, BUC Secretariat. See Appendix B). The reasons for decline and disconnect have been explored by others (Lawson 2019; Trim 2019; Woolford 1992) and blame may be placed at the door of any number of factors. However, the fact remains: The Seventh-day Adventist Church in the UK is not growing from the majority population and is experiencing additional challenges in connecting with second, third, and subsequent migrant generations. Research (A. Peck 2017; A. Brown and Woodhead 2016; Ottesen 2015; Moreton 2011) suggests that this is due to two main difficulties: (1) failure to perceive the impact and implication of worldview shifts in society, and (2) the challenge of an Adventist subculture markedly disconnected from its wider context.

These difficulties, combined with cultural factors, have hindered efforts to share the Gospel with the majority population of the UK. The net overall effect has been a steady decline in the majority population from the wider demographic of the SEC membership and diminishing returns on traditional evangelistic methods with established migrant communities.

Statement of the Task

The task of this project was to develop, implement, and evaluate a transformational, faith-based, and contextually cognisant, awareness-building intervention that might better position church members and potential Church Planters as modern missionaries in the contemporary postmodern/metamodern landscape of the SEC.

Experience indicates that a transition from "no faith" to "Adventist" within the UK context is a process that can take up to and beyond a decade of patient presence and ministry. Consequently, the project provided a foundational platform from which future projects and ministries may be built.

Delimitations of the Project

The scope of this project was limited in several ways. In the first instance, the project was framed within the Seventh-day Adventist faith and community with all interviewed participants being baptised members of the Adventist Church. Secondly, the project was situated within the SEC, located within the BUC. Thirdly, the COVID pandemic in the UK placed restrictions on in-person gathering for an extended period. Fourth, the decision to take the course online limited participant to those with access to the necessary media equipment and ability. Fifth, being online instead of in-person reduced the likelihood of participants being geographically proximal and/or known to one another. Sixth, participation in the project was limited to individuals who

registered through Eventbrite for the online conversational journey. Finally, as the presenter and researcher in this project, my own identity narratives as a non-native UK citizen are a potentially limiting consideration.

Description of the Project Process

Developing the project process included establishing a theological foundation, surveying recent relevant literature, and implementing a congruent intervention. An evaluation of the intervention was undertaken, and the results reported within a selected methodology and protocol.

Theological Reflection

Provision of a theological foundation for contextual mission positioning within a multicultural/multi-ethnic environment took me on a narrative journey through Scripture. Since the full sweep of Scripture is too large for the scope of this project, the narrative was refined to explore those instances in which God comes to be with and among humanity. Key narratives progress the theme and emphasise the determination of God to seek out human relationships, meeting humanity where it is. Such connections consistently require significant accommodation to the human context on the part of the Divine and provide deep insight into the heart of God for humankind. Creation, the patriarchal era, the Exodus, and the desert tabernacle are key Old Testament narratives that stand in contrast to their contemporary theologies while signalling that something radically different is being formed. The Incarnation of Christ brings the Old Testament advances of God into sharp focus and provides confirmation of God's intention. The book of Revelation affirms the continued and eternal desire of God to be with humanity, speaking once more in the language of tabernacle. The mission work of Paul in the book of Acts provides insight into early

contextual mission approaches, in particular his ability to meet people where they are in their own meaning and identity narratives.

Review of Literature

A review of the literature regarding the importance of context in mission was undertaken. Though priority was given to current literature within the last ten years, several earlier works have been included, especially those that might be considered foundational in the field, namely Bevans (2002), Hiebert (2006, 2008, 2009) and Kraft (1997). I initially undertook a brief survey of Christian faith in the British Isles, looking for meaningful contextual intersections, before extending the survey to include the arrival and work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the UK. Second, I explored multicultural/multi-ethnic dynamics noting both advocates and critiques on monocultural approaches to mission. Third, I looked at indigenisation and contextualisation, the use and meaning of the terminology along with how the concepts are applied in practice. In this respect, Bevans (2002) was especially helpful. Finally, I looked at the concept and function of worldview and its associated assumptions raised as one of the blind spots of non-contextual approaches to mission. The work of Hiebert (2008, 2009) and Kraft (1997, 2013) were particularly helpful in this regard.

Development of the Intervention

The project intervention grew out of my experience as a non-native pastor in the UK and drew on my pastoral experience along with perspectives gained while serving as the Church Growth and Mission Director for the SEC in the BUC. Disconnectedness seemed to be a theme that repeatedly appeared in conversation, church life and conflict, evangelistic approaches and in pastoral evaluation interviews. I noticed it in my own life, and in the lives of church members and administrators

alike—disconnection from the wider context, from 'others' and from a Scripture narrative that embraces the fullness of humanity. Insights into the history of the SEC along with a demographic study provided key insights into membership and contextual dynamics in which the theme of disconnectedness surfaced once more. This provoked the question, "Why the disconnect?" which took me on a journey to find and ultimately, devise, a conversational framework through which to surface uncritiqued assumptions about worldview, context, and the overwhelming desire of God to be with humanity—the three elements of the missional lens, and the key areas emphasised in the literature review and the theological reflection. The missional lens has become a rich framework from which to model, coach and teach contextual mission in the UK.

<div align="center">Structure of the Intervention</div>

The intervention was devised as an immersive journey of Six Conversations (sessions), each with a key starting point. Since conversations generally do not strictly stay on topic, each conversation was designed with segments of presentation, group interaction/discussion and reaction to engagement with pre-session material. The conversational journey was divided into two halves of three session each. The first half sought to lay the foundation of the missional lens, the contextual narratives of Self, Other and God. The second half looked at the dynamic interaction between those three contextual narratives as part of faith-based missional interaction in the world. In the week prior to each session participants were provided with a handout containing recommended media, relevant Scripture portions, questions to stimulate reflective practice, and practical suggestions for walking out the concepts of the session. Each handout was divided into three portions, namely ReThink, ReFrame and ReTell, designed to help move participants through a process through which they might

reflect on, and possibly reconsider their current thoughts on a theme, begin to place those conclusions within a new conceptual frame, before taking steps to transition their thinking and processing into lived experience. The Six Conversations relied on participant engagement with both passive and active learning opportunities.

Research Methodology and Protocol

The evaluation the intervention is drawn from its purpose, namely, to explore participant identity and meaning narratives within their contextual positioning with a view to positively impacting their self and contextual awareness for mission. To this end, acquisition of qualitative research data was obtained through interviews filtered through the four level Kirkpatrick Model (2016) for training evaluation. Since it was unlikely that Level 4 of the model would be immediately discernible, I supplemented the model with the "getting to maybe" concept from Westley, Zimmerman, and Patton (2007).

Due to the COVID pandemic the intervention transitioned to an online version using the Zoom platform. Accommodations to the methodology and protocol changed aspects of evaluation and assessment, most importantly, my ability as the researcher to gauge individual participant interaction and engagement. One hundred online registrations translated into 50+ participants beginning the conversational journey, with just over 30 completing it. Ten individuals volunteered to be interviewed regarding their experience of the intervention. Three withdrew for personal reasons. Seven interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed. Measures were taken to ensure the confidentiality of data and the identity of participants along with the credibility and reliability of the study. The narrative of the intervention data is offered in Chapter 5. Conclusions from the interpretation of the data along with other project conclusions may be found in Chapter 6.

Definition of Terms

While every effort has been made in the writing of this paper to explain and define any specialized terms used, it may be helpful to highlight some frequently used terms and be overt regarding their use and meaning in this document.

Contextual connotes the intent to serve individuals and groups meaningfully and appropriately within their geographic, linguistic, cultural, worldview, and supplementary environmental circumstances.

Contextualisation is the process by which Christians seek to work within a given set of environmental circumstances. Moreau (2012) describes it as "the process whereby Christians seek to adapt the whole of the Christian faith (forms, content, praxis) in diverse cultural settings" (46).

Evangelism as used in this paper refers to a mainly propositional approach to Gospel work in which it is assumed that the recipients of such efforts share a similar worldview paradigm with the proposer(s) such that contextualisation is not needed since there are few barriers need to be crossed beyond that of intellectual assent.

Incarnational is a term and a metaphor used to express a "conceptual framing for contextualisation on the basis of God coming as Jesus Christ which gives us a foundation for 'incarnating' the gospel in new cultural settings" (Moreau 2012, 138).

Indigenisation is used to convey a mode of being that sits naturally within its environment such that it could well have been birthed by it. The term is drawn from a shift in some 19th Century mission thinkers and denotes the incorporation of the "self-functions" of an indigenous—used here to mean non-Western— church: self-image, self-functioning, self-determining, self-supporting, self-propagating, self-giving, and self-theologizing (Moreau 2012, 138; Doss 2018, 251).

Masculine Pronouns for God are utilised throughout this dissertation in keeping with Christian tradition and convention. Though use of the third person collective pronouns may more adequately express that God supersedes gender and sex and provide a middle road between traditional and progressive readings of the text, in this project the masculine pronouns circumvent potential obstacles in the ministry context. Nevertheless, the project did invite individuals to engage challenge with respect to their view of God and to at least consider portrayals of God that do not match their gender or ethnic norms.

Mission is most frequently used in this paper to reference the broad salvific work of God in the world—the holistic *missio Dei* (mission of God) and any human participation in that work including the crossing boundaries of faith, language, culture, geography and sometimes all of these at the same time (Doss 2018, 5, 8). Fraser (2021) adds that "mission is… a sending, a going out, a restlessness with how things are and the taste of what they might be" (3). Hardy and Yarnell (2018) present the Anglican Lambeth Declaration of 1984 as a holistic expression of mission which is "(a) to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom, (b) to teach, baptise and nurture new believers, (c) to respond to human need by loving service, (d) to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation, and (e) to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth" (221).

Missional is a somewhat recent term which may be described as adjectival use of the word "Mission" and denoting aspects related to or characterised by mission. It may also have qualities, attributes, or dynamics of mission (Doss 2018, 9). The word is also used to reference mission work in the West (Hardy and Yarnell 2018, xiii). When used in connection with worshipping communities or churches, missional

means, "through the Spirit and birthed by Christians mainly among people who do not normally attend church" (Moynagh 2017, 3).

Missionary comes laden with meanings gathered through colonial mission endeavours of the 19th and 20th centuries. In this paper it is most often used to simply denote someone who is on mission with God and is not used in the specialised sense of someone specifically sent by the denomination (Doss 2018, 9).

Participant(s) within this paper denotes individuals who signed up for the online course, "Through a Glass Darkly". The term also connotes an interactive connection over a more passive relationship to the intervention.

Worldview refers to the "foundational (and hidden—or unconscious) perspective on life that constrains human observation, reaction, and action" (Moreau 2012, 170), functioning on both individual and collective levels and providing "the guidelines in terms of which people assign meanings" (Kraft 2008, 23, 35). Hiebert (2008) reminds us that our "worldviews declare the way things are and are true in the ultimate sense… and are based on experiences, assumptions and logics…below the surface levels of behaviours and beliefs" (69).

Summary

This brief introduction has offered a snapshot of the mission challenges that must be navigated by the Adventist Church in the UK as it seeks to engage its context in appropriate and meaningful ways. Though limited, this project has attempted to take up the task of addressing those challenges from a pastoral and missional perspective that takes the multicultural/multi-ethnic dynamics of the Church and National context seriously. The interpretive analysis resulting from the intervention, along with the theological reflection and literature review, are offered as potential

insights and encouragement toward the contextual positioning and practice of

Adventist mission in the British Isles generally, and the SEC in particular.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Introduction

This chapter seeks to grapple with the historical revelation to better understand the ways, the times, and the places where God is "with us", with the view to discern implications for mission in the UK. To this end examples from Scripture will highlight God's accommodation to the ontological, epistemological, and moral situations of humankind. Incarnation—as a motif through Old and New Testaments—will be explored as a function of God's accommodative posture in the person of Christ, as a function of how God's agents might understand their calling and purpose in relation to the 'other', and as the intended experience of re-Creation and restoration.

Biblical Theology, as a theological discourse, serves as a primary lens through which this chapter will explore the scriptural narratives. This approach leads one to understand the Old Testament from the perspective of the Christ-event and a New Testament reading of salvation history. We cannot, however, hope to hear a refreshed mission narrative while listening to a single theological voice. To that end, an effort is made here to include additional approaches to the text as counterpoints to an exclusively Christian reading.

God with "us" (Imminence)

Creation and The Fall

The scriptural narrative opens with the genesis of our earth and proclaims good news as "the triune God who eternally dwells in loving community also welcomes into existence a world of creatures different from God" (Migliore 1991, 80). It presents a picture of God that stands against the creation stories of other religions and affirms an intentional Creator with a personal interest. As the pinnacle of God's forming and making work, humankind is not an end in itself. Instead, God has in mind a very particular relationship between himself and his "last-formed creatures" (Bartholomew and Goheen 2006, 10).

This particular relationship is unique within the creation and the wider creation narratives of the world. In the narrative God addresses only the man and woman in the narrative implying intimate relationship with them. "Men and women are made for intimate relationship with God, and our earthiness is no obstacle to that relationship" (Bartholomew and Goheen 2006, 14). On this point Turner (2009) observes, "Humans are thus distinguished from the rest of creation, and their significance is further highlighted by God's command to make them 'in our image, according to our likeness' (Gen 1:26)" (14). He continues, "…the 'image of God' in humans refers not only to what humans *are* but primarily to what they *do* (see Gen 9:1–7)" (15). As the broader narrative of Scripture unfolds, this original personal 'image' connection translates not only into the living out of the "threefold blessing" (15) in which the created reflects the Creator, but also into a missional out-working in which the redeemed reflect the Redeemer— thus "Eden portray[s] God's great desire to be in relationship with humanity" (de Waal 2017, 17).

God is described as "walking and talking" (Gen 3:8 NIV) with our first parents in the garden of Eden, with the ones who bear his image (Gen 1:26–28). This action is seen as descriptive of the later presence of God in the tabernacle (Beale 2011, 617), itself an expression of the desire of God to be 'with' and 'among' his human creation. Indeed, the garden connection between God and humanity is viewed by some as the first sanctuary in Scripture (Davidson 2015).

When death enters the narrative, it is far more than the ending of physical life. 'Death' comes through distorted and broken relationships among the created order along with the shattering of their confident connection to the Creator. God does not change his approach but seeks them out, ultimately clothing them (Gen 3:21) to cover any shame that might exist between the man and woman, and between humankind and their Creator. Bartholomew and Goheen (2006, 25) view God's action here as redemptive of their inheritance and promissory of its fulfilment. These early instances would certainly not be the last in which God—who exists above and outside creation—accommodates himself to the created order to exist in community and communion with it.

The promise that "the seed of the woman" (Gen 3:15 KJV) would break the curse is a Christian reading considered to be a prefiguring and prophetic statement of Messiah and a bold commitment on the part of God to pursue radical relationship with humankind. Kaiser (2008) speaks of it as a prophetic word against the "temporary coup" of the serpent (43). The Christological view is so strongly held that Hamilton (2005) states, "I believe that any reflection on Genesis 3:15 that fails to underscore the messianic emphasis of the verse is guilty of a serious exegetical error" (51).

Mariottini (2013) argues for a plural meaning in Genesis 3:15 such that both the descendants of the woman and those of the serpent are referred, thus the Hebrew

word (*zera'*) is understood collectively, meaning posterity (14). Turner (2009) concurs, "they will strike at each other" indicating that the actions of the serpent shift animal-human relations in which "intended dominion (Gen 1:28) will be heightened into enmity" (24). Indeed, there is a collective shift of relationships reflected in those words of God.

Richards and O'Brien (2012) note that "we can easily forget that Scripture is a foreign land and that reading the Bible is a cross-cultural experience" (11). The depth of the narrative is not only in the form it takes, but also in the locations of geography and time. To this end Wenham (2014) notes that "while a messianic interpretation [of Gen 3:15] may be justified in the light of subsequent revelation… it would perhaps be wrong to suggest that this was the narrator's own understanding. Probably he just looked for mankind eventually to defeat the serpent's seed, the power of evil" (81).

These opening Genesis stories convey the interactive and interacting nature of God who remains present—speaking, listening, discussing, asking questions—and contrast with the creation narratives of the ancient Near East in which mankind was created for the service of the gods. A radically different narrative is forming in which "human beings are not there simply to do the bidding of God. Quite the opposite— rather it is God who is at the service of the humans whom he has created. And to achieve this, nothing works better than living side by side with them" (Verrecchia 2015, 4, 5).

Post-Fall

Numerous Old Testament examples express God drawing relationally and redemptively near to humanity despite the growing and changing contexts of their lives. Though expelled from the Garden Adam and Eve, along with their descendants, are still invited into an intimate relationship with God reflective of their Edenic

experience (Kaiser 2008, 44). As the narrative unfolds, God will interact with humanity through personal presence, actions that show power in nature in supernatural ways, and through proximal engagement.

Presence

When God next speaks after the expulsion from the garden, he does so not with the righteous, but with the murderer Cain. It is a personal and robust interaction in which Cain is evasive and apparently unrepentant. He does not seem willing to accept responsibility for his actions and declines to see them as having any significance. His response to the questions of God might be paraphrased, "am I to shepherd the shepherd?" (Turner 2009, 30).

While the writer could not have known how future generations might incorporate it, the phrase, "am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen 4:9b NRSV)—at least in the English-speaking world—carries inference of extreme individualism in which the happenings in the life of another are of little or no concern to me. In contrast to the glib responses of Cain, God does not surrender his interest and concern in his welfare. Amid judgement there is also mercy offered in a personal and intimate interaction, "in much the same way as Yahweh's gift of clothes to the human couple are reminders of their offence yet also of Yahweh's 'grace' (3:21)" (Turner 2009, 30).

Much of the Divine/human interaction of the Old Testament uses 'talking' as the primary means of engagement. God speaks through dreams, visions, and direct conversation. However, from time-to-time God still comes to humanity through personal presence. Kaiser (2008) comments:

> Even more startling was the fact that the Lord himself appeared (Lit., "let himself be seen" [*wayyera'*]) by these men in what has subsequently been called a theophany. The reality of the living God's presence underscored the importance and authenticity of his words of promise, comfort, and direction. (53)

God continues these 'talking' interactions as he reaches out to Noah (Gen 6–10) and to Enoch, a man who 'walked with God' (Gen 5:22, 24). Genesis 18:1 (NIV) states that "the Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre". In the context of this conversation a meal is shared, and a son is promised. This incident is, in some ways, a reiteration of Gen 17:1 when 'the LORD' interacts directly with Abraham, promising a son (Gen 17:19) through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen 12:2; 22:18). Jesus seems to connect these two passages in his statement of John 8:56, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: he saw it and was glad." Rheaume (2019) makes a compelling argument for the connection between the narratives. Similar accommodations on the part of God to the human experience appear in Genesis 32, Joshua 5, and Daniel 3.

In Genesis 32 Jacob becomes Israel, and we are privy to a physical expression of the presence of God. This is the understanding of Jacob as he names the place of their wrestling 'Peniel', meaning 'face of God'; and he comments, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared" (Gen 32:30 NIV).

Joshua confronted by a man with a drawn sword (Josh 5:13 KJV) perceives himself to be in the presence of God. His understanding is evidenced through the words, "take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy" (Josh 5:15 NIV)—a statement almost identical to the words spoken by God to Moses at the burning bush (Exod 3:5).

In Daniel 3 Nebuchadnezzar exclaims that within the fire he sees a fourth man who "looks like a son of the gods" (Dan 3:25 NIV). When the account concludes, only three men come out of the fire while the fourth disappears from the storyline. It is a small mention, almost glossed over in the narrative and not mentioned again in Daniel, nor in the rest of Scripture.

There are objections to be raised regarding such a Christocentric reading of these Scriptures: Most importantly, how should they be understood considering the New Testament Incarnation? Sanders (2017) argues for the "unrepeatable uniqueness of the incarnation of the Son" (226), while Rheaume (2019) contends that "theophanies in the OT serve to prepare the way and generate anticipation for the climactic revelation of the Divine Christ" (80). Boshoff (2018) suggests that these manifestations both model the desire of God for personal presence with his creation and prefigure the Incarnation of Christ. Instances such as these continue to remind humanity that God still seeks us out, finding points of intersection and interaction as he consistently accommodates himself to our humanity in order to be in communion and community with us.

Taken together, these Old Testament occurrences speak to the desire of God to engage and interact with humanity. Despite deterioration in the human condition and experience, as seen in the breakdown of human relationships, God still comes 'walking and talking' in the midst of human living and dying in ways the echo the "where are you?" (Gen 3:9 NIV) call of Eden.

Power

A significant number of the 'natural and supernatural' expressions of presence emphasize power and holiness. Sinai (Exod 19), the Burning Bush (Exod 3), the 'cloud' by day and the 'fire' by night (Exod 13:21), and Horeb (1 Kgs 19) offer examples of God seeking to be present with humanity while at the same time emphasizing holiness and the inability of humanity to draw closer to him aside from any accommodations he would make. Such accommodations are evident, for example, in the construction of the tabernacle and its placement in the centre of the camp (Num 2:17), the use of manifestations congruent with human expectations of how the Divine

reveals itself, and the presence of 'the Lord's angel' sent ahead to guard and direct, and in whom the Name of God resided (Exod 23:20–21; 33:34).

Proximity (Tabernacle)

Perhaps the most significant Old Testament expression of God's desire to 'be with' and among his people is the instruction given to Moses, "and let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them" (Exod 25:8 KJV). Positioned at the centre of the Israelite encampment (Num 2:17), the desert tabernacle was understood to be the place where the 'shekinah' resided, and it was the place of meeting between God and Israel. It is presence with proximity.

The function of the Tabernacle focuses on the cultic system of sacrifice and atonement. However, we should not lose sight of its purpose in which "'closeness' and [the] active presence of God was to be Israel's" (Kaiser 2008, 86). The depth of the desire of God to be with humanity should not be underestimated. Verrecchia (2015) adds:

> It [is] the obsession of a God who cannot and will not live alone in splendid isolation. It is true that he frequently came to meet men but it was always rather a brief stay… With the birth of this people whom he brought out of Egypt, the time is ripe, he thinks, for a change of plan: "Human beings can no longer live in my home so I am going to live with them! (11)

The tabernacle or dwelling (*miqdash*) of Exodus 25:8 is the centre of the camp and of the worship system as the place of sacrifice, confession, and atonement. However, there is another place, a second tent (*moed*), that Moses makes (Exod 33:7–11) outside of the camp (Verrecchia 2015, 14). Both speak of the presence of God within the physical domain of the people, located within and alongside their camp, amidst the hustle and bustle of daily life and human living.

The tent (*moed*) is the place where Moses and God meet and speak "face to face, as one speaks to a friend" (Exod 33:11 NRSV). It will be helpful to bear this

phrase in mind when considering Exodus 33:20 "you cannot see the face of God and

live" (NRSV). Verrecchia (2015) makes a very helpful observation here:

> . . . after the regrettable episode of the golden calf, Moses fears that in spite of
> God's pardon and the renewing of the covenant, the people become nervous
> about a God who lives in the middle of the camp, after they have put themselves
> beyond the pale and are no longer worthy of his presence—and besides it could
> be threatening. Moses then plants the tent outside the camp. It is not the house of
> God but it is his lodgings, shall we say, where he agrees to meet them. (15)

Just as the purpose of the Tabernacle was more than the system around it, we

should be cautious not to reduce the Incarnation of Christ and the essence of the

Gospel to the death of Jesus (Hollinghurst 2010, 168). God establishes a point of

personal contact through the introduction of the tent (*moed*), accommodating himself

to the dynamic nature of human relations. The Tabernacle (*miqdash*) and the Tent

(*moed*), understood from a New Testament perspective, speak to a foreshadowing of

the Messiah who personally carries the implications and expressions of 'tabernacle' to

their fullest and most profound conclusions.

It is also to these desert structures, gifted to people grappling with being

transplanted and struggling with their understandings and misapprehensions of God,

that the final Scripture passages refer. In the eschaton we hear the final expression of

the three-fold formula repeated across the promise-plan (Kaiser 2008, 85): "Behold

the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his

people, and God himself shall be with them and shall be their God" (Rev 21:3 KJV).

In this final vision, God and humanity reside once more in the same space.

Proximity (Incarnation)

Thus far we have seen God draw near to humanity through natural and

supernatural occurrences, through physical manifestations of presence, through

dreams, visions, and voices. The Old Testament bears ample witness to the numerous

interactions between God and humanity in which the Divine takes the initiative to

draw near to direct, to comfort and to intervene. The physical manifestations foreshadow the Incarnation when God will truly be with us, Immanuel (Isa 7:14). Matthew quotes the prophet Isaiah in Matt 1:23 while John's Gospel connects with Isaiah 40:5, when he states, "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only son, who came from the father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14, NIV). A more literal translation of which might be "The word became flesh and pitched his tent among us" (REV).

These passages reference both the tabernacle (*miqdash*) and tent (*moed*) experience of the Exodus narrative. While other temples had been built—Solomon, Nehemiah, Herod—the allusion is not to any of these hard structures but to the rather more flexible and agile tent-like constructions. The fascination with a Temple, with permanent structures and with opulence, was not a primary concern for God. Instead, it served the ends of the dynastic ambitions of David and of a worldview that required the capital city to house a temple as a mark of subduing and taming effect of governance (Verrecchia 2015, 31, 52).

So strong is the love of God for the world that he desires to share himself with it in life-giving connection and relationship with the Godhead (John 3:16). 2 Corinthians 5:19 speaks to this desire explaining that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself". Through this unique and profound act, God not only seeks to be among fallen humanity, but he also takes redemptive action (1 Cor 15:45–49, Rom 5:12–21). The early Christian hymn in Phil 2:6–11 expresses the extent to which the Incarnation bridges the gulf between a holy God and fallen humanity declaring that it is God, not humanity, who does so.

In this way, God once more locates himself with humanity. In a particular time and in a particular place, as Bevans (2002) notes,

If God was going to do this, the means of communication would have to be in a way that human beings could fully grasp, a way that expressed the reality of what this invitation into friendship and relationship was all about. And so God became *flesh* (Jn 1:14), and not generally, but particularly. God became flesh, a human person of such and such a height, with a particular color hair, with particular personality traits, etc. Incarnation is a process of become particular, and in and through the particular the divinity could become visible and in some way (not fully but in some way) become graspable and intelligible. (12)

Frost (2006) picks up on the particularity of the incarnation and emphasises its lack of remarkability. "The incarnation remains an offence of monumental proportions. Theologically, the idea of God presented in human flesh is absurd enough (1 Cor 1:18–21), but as if to emphasize that the incarnation calls for action, not just reflection, God's human manifestation occurs in an exceedingly ordinary way" (37).

"Christ, as Martin Luther expressed it, is never God 'in himself'. He is always God 'for us' and 'with us'. He is *Emmanuel*, meaning the God of relation" (Raschke 2008, 19). Thus, it is He who "first loved us" (1 John 4:19 KJV). He is the one who accommodates himself to the limitations of humanity to restore communion and community to have, once more, eternal dimensions.

Re-Creation

The broad strokes of the interactions between God and humanity guide us through the biblical narrative bookended by creation and re-creation, in anticipation that what was broken might be restored. The pure, intimate relationship of the Creator with his created ones must be reinstated to its original design. The One who called "into existence the things that do not exist" (Rom 4:17) is also the One who "make all thing new" (Rev 21:5). This is what Wright and Bird (2019) describe as a "fully biblical eschatology [in which] the biblical vision of a new creation, of a new heaven and a new earth, inaugurated when Jesus announced God's kingdom and rose from

the dead after defeating the powers of darkness, and to be consummated when he returns in glory to make all things new" (884).

Migliore (1991) notes that, "the creation of the world, its reconciliation in Jesus Christ, and its promised renewal and consummation are all acts of the one triune God, and they all exhibit the astonishing generosity and beneficence of this God" (80). It is the fulfilment of the entire plan of salvation, that holds within its scope both cosmic and personal redemption (Bartholomew and Goheen 2006, 166). As the apostle Paul emphasises, 'For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in [Jesus], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross' (Col 1:19, 20 NIV).

In the final chapters of Scripture, a loud voice exclaims, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God." (Rev 21:3 KJV). Bartholomew and Goheen (2006) observe that,

> The physical re-joining of heaven and earth is a dramatic image of restored peace and harmony between the Creator and what he has created. God himself comes to dwell on the new earth with humankind. Sin and all its effects are removed. There is no more sickness, pain or death because the relationship between God and humankind has been healed. God is once again as close to us as in the days when he walked with our grandparents, Adam and Eve, in the garden. (162)

As Revelation 21 unfolds its vision of the recreation that it describes a city wall pierced by 12 gates above which are written the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. Through these gates the city is entered from the four points of the compass (21:12,13) and are never shut (21:25), which is to say that "the city is both universal and accessible" (N. T. Wright and Bird 2019, 842). The picture offers a counterpoint to that from Genesis 11 in which another city was built, but from which many departed as fragmented communities (Turner 2009, 54). The nations walk in the light

emanating from the city and are willing place their wealth within it (21:24). The coming together of the nations is emphasised in Revelation 21:1 by the absence of the sea. This is not simply a 'coming together' in a tacit peace, instead it is about restoration, a new union in which the nations are healed (22:2). This is a new beginning, not a reset. The "concept of salvation as the restoration—rather than the destruction and remaking—of creation implies significant continuity between the world we know and the world to come" (Bartholomew and Goheen 2006, 165, 166).

Verrecchia (2015) points out that "no sooner does John see a new heaven and a new earth, [but] the temple disappears for good from the text" (145). Revelation 21:22 states that there is "no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb" (RSV). What unfolds in these final verses of Scripture hints at what God has intended and designed since the genesis. As in the garden sanctuary, there are no more obstacles, hurdles, or impediments to Divine access. The Revelation of Jesus Christ makes clear that to enter the Temple is to be at home with Christ (146).

These closing words of Scripture are also the opening phrases of a fully redeemed and reconciled new earth in which the curse is reversed; right relation is restored between God and humanity, between humans, and between humanity and the earth. It is comprehensive and complete. "Every facet of it is to be brought back to what God has, all along, intended for it. And within that glorious fullness and perfect wholeness, there is a place for us" (Bartholomew and Goheen 2006, 166). In all the ways that God can be with humanity, he will be most fully and most profoundly, 'Immanuel', 'God with us' (Isa 7:14). Which is to say, God with all of us, "every nation, tribe, people and language" (Rev 7:9 NIV).

<center>**Contextualisation**</center>

The broad sweep of Scripture shows the engagement of God with humanity across changing times and contexts. God's accommodative approach to redemptive interaction might be expressed as contextualisation. Such interaction with the specifics of a context does not necessarily make those eras holy nor imbue them with Divine sanction, neither does God appear to address every ill of each epoch (e.g., slavery or polygamy). Instead, God engages with humanity "where it is" at any given time and place while using common imagery, modes of thought and cultural customs. Old and New Testament examples will be considered, along with the concept that God's people are called to live as a blessing to others, to fulfil a mediatorial role not only in their native milieu, but also in exile and diaspora contexts.

<center>Old Testament</center>

Tabernacle

The desert tabernacle opens a picture of just how far God is willing to go, not only to be among and with humanity, but to draw on pictures, experiences, constructs, and forms that are present in the wider historical context. One imagines that this tabernacle might be a fresh idea, a new construct and concept without human context. Verrecchia (2015), in confronting the tabernacle from ethnocentric, atomistic and Christian readings, notes that this is not the first nor only sanctuary in Scripture, neither is it exceptional in terms concept and structure (20).

The threefold structural divisions are by no means unique and would certainly have been familiar to those who spent generations building temples and monuments in Egypt. There are differences, of course, in terms of scale, directionality and decoration. Compared to the temples of Egypt, the tabernacle is simple and modest. And yet, it is a product of the Egypt experience since,

<center>27</center>

> This building is… designed to deconstruct the beliefs, traditions, habits and customs of Egypt. In some strange way, it is Egypt that makes the sanctuary of the Exodus what it is… [it is] a response to the stay in Egypt, a labor of reconstruction and purification, both intellectual and spiritual. (Verrecchia 2015, 18,19)

Baker (2019) concurs, concluding that there is "clear cultural influence" (246). By engaging with a context familiar to the Hebrews he suggests that God "communicates with them in a language that they could understand. By using a culture with which they were familiar, he could alter and introduce elements where they would expect something else, and then those changes and introductions would gain tremendous meaning" (247).

Circumcision

As a rite given to Abraham in Genesis 17, circumcision was not a unique or strange practice within the cultural context of the Ancient Near East. Meade (2016) argues that the rite of circumcision was known in Egypt from the 4th millennium BCE. There is evidence from North Syria and Canaan of some form of circumcision taking place, though he argues that the Egyptian practice is the most likely background to circumcision as understood by Abraham. While there are differences in how it was used and to whom it applied, there is some resonance in the Egyptian practice of circumcising priests as a sign of their belonging to the deity (45).

Living with Particularity

In the time of the Old Testament Patriarchs, God seeks out those who are attuned and attentive to His overtures with humanity. Through specific interactions God breaks into their world and speaks to them in culturally appropriate, but direct ways. God uses their language, idiom, and context to frame these interactions in understandable, yet unique events. God's people are not separate from their context, rather they are situated within their milieu in every discernible way. The Patriarchs

are called to geographically relocate; however, they do not find themselves isolated but rather are in constant interaction with various tribes, clans, and people groups. In the view of this wider context God's word comes to Abraham saying, "the whole earth will be blessed through you" (Gen 12:3, 18:18, 22:18 KJV). There is a wider impact for the interactions of God with an individual:

> God narrows his redemptive focus to one man, one nation. But his ultimate purpose is to bring redemptive blessing to the whole creation… From the beginning, God's people are to be 'missionary', chosen to be a channel of blessing to others. (Bartholomew and Goheen 2006, 36, 37)

There are questions, nevertheless, regarding how Genesis 12:3, 18:18, 22:18 might best be understood. The verses are contentious in translation, providing scope for readings of the text that differ from a Christian salvation-history approach. It is true that the key concept of 'Abraham being a blessing to the whole earth' is referenced in the New Testament (Acts 3:25; Gal 3:8) where the phrase is understood—from a Christian perspective—to have broader application including all who would have faith in God, and by New Testament extension, in Christ.

Gruneberg (2001) notes that, in the 12:3a God offers security to Abraham and, implicitly, to his descendants, and further that in 12:3b the promise is that the families of earth will be blessed because of Abraham. The security that Abraham is assured is because "others will find that seeking to further his good benefits them, while any attempt to lessen his prosperity will lead to Yhwh's disfavour" (255). The second part of Genesis 12:3 draws attention to the nature of the blessing that would result:

> While this promise does result from Yhwh's concern for all humanity, in context its primary force is to stress Abraham's greatness as the one through whom this momentous divine purpose will be achieved. His role is more probably that of modelling or pioneering the way of Yhwh's blessing than that of more directly effecting it for others. We have suggested that in [Genesis] 18:18 and 28:14, Yhwh likewise affirms that through Israel others will be blessed. (256)

This line of understanding shifts when considering Genesis 22:18 and 26:4. In these instances, Gruneberg (2001) argues, God is promising that the extent of Israel's blessing would draw attention from other nations who "will use her name as a byword of blessing" (256). Thus, an alternate rendering of those verses might read as, "and all nations will use the name of your offspring in blessing" (NIV footnote, see also Gen 48:20).

Turner (2009) takes a slightly different angle to the translation of Genesis 12:3 by noting how "the injunction moves from the general to the specific, 'your country… your kindred… your father's house'. This narrowing focus of the imperative is matched by a widening focus of promise, moving from Abram (12:2) to his associates (12:3a) to all the families of the earth (12:3b)" (58). Noting the challenges for translators he observes that Abram is not merely told that he will become a blessing, but rather that he is commanded to be such. "If the force of the imperative is retained then the following Hebrew clauses should be rendered as consequences of that imperative: 'Be a blessing, so that I may bless those…'" (58). Genesis 12:3b, despite any ambiguities in the original language, is therefore understood in light of the imperative in 12:2, thus favouring a reading of 'be a blessing' over 'by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves' (58).

Elements of the 'blessing' motif are visible through the Old Testament narrative. Examples of living with particularity that speak to a form of incarnational living might also be found in the lives and work of Joseph, Esther, and Daniel with his three friends who all accepted new identities, names, education, occupations, clothing etc. as part of living in changed circumstances.

Embedded in the collective narrative is the idea that those who live in close connection to God, do not live only to themselves and for God. Instead, their role in

community and in communal life among the nation neighbours, or their transplanted location, positions them as a nexus in which the particularities of human life, culture and worldview intersect with Divine activity and accommodation. In this way their stories bear markers of incarnationality. We should not deny the nature of relocation for Joseph, Daniel, and Esther for whom there is the reality of living as strangers in a strange land—not because of their missional zeal—but rather as the result of political conflict and upheaval in their life and times. Their lives, and that of Abraham, underscore the complexity and completeness of trans-locational living with God. Hollinghurst (2010) observes that "in a sense cross-cultural mission is like this; we are called to be a blessing to those we are among yet discern the points at which we cannot embrace their culture" (105).

Living as Mediators

In line with the promise to Abraham that "all the nations of the earth were to be blessed" the Divine plan for Israel included their proposed acceptance of a priestly calling in which they would live out a universal priesthood akin to that of Abraham their ancestor and father in faith (Exod 19:3–6). The horizons of God take in both the universal and the specific, or particular. God is concerned for all the people of the earth and all the created order to which end he chooses agents, mediators, channels of redemptive blessing through whom the breadth of his vision is served, and through whom we begin to understand what it might mean to be the people of God (Goheen 2011, 192, 193).

Commenting on the various permutations of Israel—loose confederation of tribes, united kingdom, and diaspora—Goheen (2011) notes the need in each context was to "forge new ways to bear God's promise of renewal for the sake of the nations" (194). "Such a people," he continues, "must find new forms to embody and nurture its

identity in the new cultural setting, not allowing itself to privatise its faith, to withdraw and separate itself from its cultural setting" (194). This emphasis on the nations is noted by C. Wright (2006) as relating to the mission of God working out between the scattering of the nations in Genesis 11 and the healing of the nations in Revelation 22 (455).

Accustomed to being the channel through which God spoke, it was difficult for Israel to grasp that at times God would speak to people outside of their communion and at times bring a word of warning or rebuke from pagan sources. An example may be found in 2 Chr 35:21. Pharaoh Neco sends a message to King Josiah warning him not to join a battle that is not his concern. Not only should Josiah stay clear, Neco states that God is with his cause and requires Josiah to remain outside of the conflict. Josiah refuses to heed the message and dies in battle largely because he failed to identify the 'word of the Lord' when it was spoken by someone outside of the community (Winkle 2020).

The interactions of God with ancient Israel are a reminder, particularly for Adventists, that we cannot become so settled in our 'light' identity that we assume there is no darkness within us on which it too must shine. Failure to understand that 'light' and 'dark' are not absolute categories that fall neatly into "us" and "them" caricatures is an Achilles heel for God's people of any time or era. The infamous "cows of Bashan" expression of the prophet Amos (4:1–3) is part of a prophetic reminder to Israel that their way of being was becoming inconsistent with their calling to be a mediating and ministering presence in their time and place.

In summary, we observe that in the same way that the Levites were priests for Israel, so Israel are to be priests for the nations of the earth. Privatising faith and withdrawal were, and remain, temptations for God's people across time. The broad, or

universal view of God is for the nations and to that end he works in and through his mediators—his people.

Living in New Places

Israel struggled with the concept of a mediatorial role in relation to the surrounding nations and often became enamoured with either their own importance or with the ways of their neighbours. Exile came to them as a shock, discontinuous with their narrative of being 'Gods people' among all the people of the world. It was "the end of privilege, the end of certitude, the end of domination, the end of viable political institutions, and the end of a sustaining social fabric… not to overstate, *it was the end of the life with* God, which Israel had taken for granted" (Brueggemann 2000, 60).

A simple survey of human history would predict that Israel would disappear from the nations of the world, swallowed up in more dominant cultural and religious narratives, their gene-pool diluted to oblivion, their names erased and forgotten. Instead, "in exile Israel arrived at a new faith in God, building on its ancient traditions, but full of new discoveries. The people demonstrated the power of a good story; and its capability of keeping defeated exiles together and to give them a new perspective" (Paas 2019, 126).

Exile was almost exclusively understood as punishment for abandoning covenantal living. Yet it also brought an added dimension to what it meant to live as God's people in which we see the growing image of living as "salt"—as a minority within a foreign context in which they have little or no control of their circumstances. It is in exile—those places where faith is not in the position of power, control, and influence—that we find a credible perspective on mission as 'salt'. Frost (2006) argues that,

> This is the work of the exile—not the discovery of a new gospel, or a new Christ, or a new Bible, as some more liberal thinkers have suggested, but the rediscovery

of the original genius of the teaching of Jesus and the missional practice of the earliest Christians, all lived out boldly on the soil of a post-Christian empire. (26)

If we are to learn anything from the exile experiences and literature (e.g., Lamentations, Psalms, Ezekiel, Daniel) it is in the invitation to learn to understand God with fresh perspective. To discover that God does not belong to us alone, but that his reach is much broader than our history, culture, and identity (Halik 2009, 49). Paas (2019) suggests that "in exile we can learn that God is not ours, but that we are his—wherever we are. In this way exile can become an adventure, an invitation to a life with God outside the gates, and to rediscover your own tradition in Babylon" (137). In exile, we are no longer able to speak from the "high pulpits [from which we] tell how the world is, what the truth is, and how nations should behave. But for a church that is expelled from the centre it is no longer possible to 'speak from the clouds'… instead she will have to assume a *testimonial* voice" (139).

Exile holds the potential to offer us an experience, an insight, and a way of being that we cannot have when we occupy the places of power and the voice of authority. It is in exile that we discover that "this Lord can come to us in the most unexpected ways, [even] through pagan 'servants'. God is always greater than we think. He is also the God of the others, the seekers, the outsiders, the critics… [It is] precisely in exile [that] the Church receives the freedom and relaxation to face this, without feeling threatened" (140). It is in exile that we learn to "sing the Lord's song in a strange land" (Ps 137:4 KJV).

New Testament

Within the New Testament, the Incarnation of Christ—that God has come to live among human beings—releases a growing awareness of contextual presence, influence, and mission-based activity. Before the end of the First Century Jewish

nationhood would be obliterated and the early Christian Church would be dispersed

across the Roman Empire. Forced to find its way in any number of new cultures and

contexts, contextual expression would become imperative. Experiencing a new kind

of exile, Christians would be driven to new contexts by economic need and in search

of security where they would live as refugees of a nation and foretastes of a Kingdom

living in the world as salt and light (Matt 5:13 NIV).

Living with Particularity (Incarnation)

The boldest expression of the contextual activity of God is found in the

incarnation of Jesus Christ, located in a specific time, within a particular context,

taking on certain characteristics—male, Jewish, having features and accent etc. in

keeping with his context. In this sense he was not generic to all humanity—being a

little of everything and therefore nothing to anyone—but was rather *for* all humanity.

Bruinsma (2009) comments that,

> Christ was and is the supreme missionary. He was sent by the Father, yet came
> voluntarily. He recognized no social, cultural, or ethnic barriers. Examples in the
> Gospels of how He ministered to people of all kinds of backgrounds and all walks
> of life and of how His teaching emphasized the universal nature of God's
> boundless offer of grace abound. (179)

Understanding incarnational importance within the wider narrative of Scripture leads

us to look at the example of Jesus as a model through which incarnational Christian

witness might find expression.

The Gospels describe the ministry of Jesus speaks in fresh and inclusive ways,

breaking with the formalism of his time. Through his teaching and relational

modelling, Jesus speaks of God, of life, of community and of identity in ways that

challenge and even alarm those around him (Frost 2006, 55). Even the guards

remarked, "no one ever spoke like this man!" (John 7:46 ESV). The remarkability of

Christ's message was its ability to speak directly into the local context and make

profound sense, but it also had a deep connection to his sense of purpose (Luke 2:49,

John 13:3). Raschke (2008) observes that,

> Jesus contextualised because he came to reveal the Father (cf. Luke 10:22). Jesus
> revealed the Father in his teachings, which were always contextualized in terms
> of his relational dealings, especially those who were neither morally nor
> doctrinally pure—prostitutes, tax collectors, and thieves, as well as the unlearned
> and unwashed. (118)

When Jesus spoke truth, it was self-revelation for "anyone who has seen me,

has seen the Father" (John 14:9 NIV). It was real, and as Raschke (2008) notes, "the

'real' is always relational, and the relational is the genuine *ens realissum* (final goal),

the most real aspect of religious reality" (118).

The Apostle Paul directs the church in Philippi to take special notice of the

'mind' and 'attitude' of Christ in their relationships by living in self-emptying ways

(Phil 2:1–11). Alexander (2009) observes that *kenosis* is used in Scripture as the verb

kenoo (Phil 2:7) emphasising that it is an expression of an action or way of being (15).

He goes on to state that "this counsel requires that the church and the believer adopt

an incarnational demeanour" (31).

Our calling as Christ followers reflects a profound revelation in that we are

those who are called to reveal who Christ is—through our witness (Acts 1:8), our

imitation of Christ (Phil 2:1–11), and our sense of connectedness to one another (1

Cor 12:27). Thus, the Christian life amounts to a radical relationality, a readiness to

reveal who God is while "being Jesus" to one another when the occasion arises. "As

Christians we are always Christs to one another" (Raschke 2008, 119).

Incarnation in ministry is the implied outworking of connection with Christ

and would therefore become central in discipling. "Just as I have loved you, so you

should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you

have love for one another" (John 13:34, 35 NRSV). These words of Jesus might also

nuance our understanding of Matt 28:19 (KJV)—to "go and make disciples"—as something of an incarnational enactment. Love and discipleship are linked together through claim, but ultimately through demonstration. Claims to love the other are hollow without some form of tangible or physical expression. Such claims ought to be enacted in some way.

By way of example, the words of Jesus expressed in John 13:34,35 are part of the narrative in which he washes the feet of his disciples (John 13:1–17). John 13:1 is rendered "loved them to the end" in several contemporary translations. However, the NLT carries a footnote suggesting, "he showed them the full extent of his love" as alternative wording. Schmidt (1996) would support this alternate reading given the importance of the narrative in John's Gospel and (*telos*) carrying the dual meaning of 'end' and 'completely, or fully'. He also notes a possible link between John 13:1 and 12:3 where the feet of Jesus are washed, not by one of the Twelve, but by Mary. In both narratives, the actions of Judas are contrasted as being self-serving, and not other focused (59–62). Here the call to "love one another as I have loved you" draws on the physical enaction of the claim to love through service and leads into the instruction in John 13:12–17 to follow the example of service that has been set and to "do as I have done for you" (NLT).

Raschke (2008) asserts that our discipleship and our discipling must take on such a radial direction in which "incarnate presence is the activation of profound rhizomic relations that explode from the center toward the ends of the earth [to which we go as] perpetual Christ incarnators ("disciples" in the post-Easter and perhaps— dare we say?—powerful postmodern sense of the term)" (133). Bruinsma (2009) adds, "the incarnation of Jesus Christ provides the indisputable argument that

contextualization is essential to God's method of communication and should therefore be the key to any mission strategy the church devises" (187,188).

Living as Mediators (A Taste of the Kingdom)

Throughout the narrative of Scripture there is a sense in which God's people are to be a foretaste of the Kingdom of God. This might be in their living as a Nation among the nations; as a "kingdom of priests" (Exod 19:6; Isa 61:6; 1 Pet 2:5,9; Rev 1:6, 5:10, 20:6); as a community in which race, gender or class (Gal 3:28–29) are not divisive because the embrace of God diminishes their importance; where people of "every nation, tongue and people" (Rev 7:9) might find a place and a welcome—not because their identities are demolished—but because they are valued as Kingdom agents with purpose and mission. This is a community that is growing in their understanding of servanthood, taking the words of Christ that certain ways of being should "not be so among you" (Matt 20:26).

God embraces humanity with all the variations and differences it contains not to build a community of cultural "sameness" but in order to show the breadth and the depth of His Kingdom and its ability to make brothers of all the nations (Acts 17). Together these brothers from all nations find collective calling to a priesthood of believers (1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1:6; 5:10) that is an expression of Gods intended desire for Israel (Exod 19:3–6 NIV). Kaiser (2000) affirms that this New Testament expansion of missionary and mediatory purpose was not a recent change of plan on the part of God. Instead, Gentiles had always been part of his long-term plan and redeeming commitment (2000, 82).

Living in New Places (Apostles and Early Church)

Defaulting their own context was understandable for the early Jewish Christians. However, it soon became a challenge as the church became more diverse.

The book of Acts records the challenges of their early efforts outside of Judea as they began to move toward "the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8 NIV). Understanding that the demands placed on Jewish Christians need not be made of Gentiles was a significant step forward in the spreading of the Gospel without barriers and divisions (Acts 15:19, 20). Paul took up this challenge as he raised up churches across Asia Minor. His expression, "all things to all people" speaks to the need to work within human contexts in order to "win some" (1 Cor 9:22 NRV).

That counsel (1 Cor 9) comes after a discourse on food sacrificed to idols (1 Cor 8) and how different parts of the early church were responding in their context. Paul's concern is that one part of the community should not become a stumbling block to another (see Rom 14). It was possible that in the exercising of their liberty they might inadvertently cause others to struggle in their immature faith, leaving them scandalised (*skandalon*)—which is to invoke the image of the stick that an animal might stumble over causing the trap to shut (Rienecker 1980, 380).

Paul swiftly sets out a principle drawn from this conflict, "Give no offense to Jew or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 10:32–11:1 NRSV). He is mindful, not only of those with whom he is in relationship and of their differing expectations and understandings of faith, but also of how his actions can impact relationships in ways that might become obstacles to those for whom Christ is not clearly visible.

Read as part of the larger narrative rather than a stand-alone verse we see that Paul understands his course of action in 1 Corinthians 11:1 to be an extension of his discipleship: he is imitating Christ in his 'incarnation' and understands his actions to

be consistent with the ministry and person of Christ. It is a model for others to follow in their discipling relationships. As Keller (2012) observes,

> We must avoid turning off listeners because *we* are culturally offensive rather than the gospel… sound contextualisation is an expression of unselfishness. It is choosing in love not to privilege yourself or to exercise your full freedom as a Christian so people can hear and follow Christ's call… Proper contextualisation means causing the *right* scandal—the one the gospel poses to all sinners—and removing all unnecessary ones. (110)

We see this in the way that Paul challenges Greek and Jewish cultures as he addresses the things they epitomise within their separate contexts (1 Cor 1:22–25). To speak meaningfully into Greek or Jewish contexts Paul needed to understand the key drivers within each. He does not simply 'proclaim the gospel' but seeks to incarnate himself to the mind of each and so helps Greeks to see the cross as ultimate wisdom and Jews to see it as true power. "He confronts each culture for its idols, yet he positively highlights their aspirations and ultimate values" (Keller 2012, 112).

Acts records the preaching and teaching ministry of Paul as he traverses Asia Minor. His speeches and interactions are not verbatims and some are fragmentary. Their breadth and diversity give us a sense of his ministry practice, that is, that Paul adapts his message to the context of his listeners.

In Acts 13:13–43 Paul addresses a mixed group who believe the Scriptures. Among them are Jews, Gentile proselytes and "God-fearers" and so Paul appeals to Scripture and quotes John the Baptist. He takes little time on the 'doctrine of God' and gets right into speaking about Christ. Acts 14:6–16 shows Paul addressing a crowd of peasant polytheists—uneducated folk who still believed in the old gods—in Lystra. Here he makes no appeal to Scripture, arguing instead from general revelation and the greatness of creation taking time to develop a 'doctrine of God'.

While visiting Athens, Paul speaks to a sophisticated crowd who held to metaphorical and philosophical views of the gods (Acts 17:16–34). He appears to be

at pains to find common ground with them, quoting their own sources to engage the idea that God is the supreme originator. Paul adjusts his language in order avoid unnecessary objections before using commonality as the basis of a challenge to their beliefs.

Christian elders are the audience for his farewell message at Miletus (Acts 20:16–38) while Acts 21:27–22:22 records him speaking to a hostile Jewish mob in Jerusalem. Paul's passionate speech in Acts 24–26 takes place in Caesarea where he addresses governing elites (Felix, Festus, and Herod Agrippa) with mixed cultural backgrounds who have an understanding of both Judaism and paganism (Keller 2012, 112, 125).

Through Paul's speeches in Acts we discern that though he holds the Gospel in high esteem, his ministry among different groups begins with the people in that he recognizes that one formulaic presentation will not be effective across all audiences. He starts where the people are and builds from there. Where he opens and how he builds are driven by culture, context, and exposure of the audience to the things of God. He seldom gives a full presentation of the Gospel all at once, being willing to take the time to gradually build the picture and grow the understanding over various interactions. Paul is willing to change the order in which he presents Gospel truths, often using a common ground as the raft on which to float another truth. Where people are, what they believe, their 'idols'—those ideals most cherished in their culture—are integral to sharing the Gospel in such a way as to make it possible for some to believe. This is the foundation of Paul's claim to become 'all things to all people' (1 Cor 9:22) and a picture of what his invitation for others to imitate him, even as he imitates Christ in these things (1 Cor 11:1). "In identifying with context to

be distinctive within it, Paul was imitating Jesus and he expected the small congregations he founded to do the same" (Moynagh 2012, 33).

Conclusion

The Old and New Testaments reveal that God approaches humanity within time and space and within the specificity of local contexts, adapting himself to find the best approached by which to engage with and influence them. To this end God uses presence, power, and proximity, making all his interactions with humanity entirely, and unavoidably, an act of personal divine accommodation necessitated by the human condition and consistent across the scriptural narrative.

Such interactions are characterised by revelatory, relational, and restorative qualities that demonstrate the desires and intentions of God toward humanity, and in which human culture, language and faith serve as bridges for these Divine overtures. Through the creation, patriarchal, Exodus, and Exile narratives, we are drawn toward the conclusion that placement in foreign contexts is an invitation to pursue Gospel connections with the 'other' for which we willingly make adaptations and accommodations because we go in the name of the One who first came to us. "Like Joseph in Egypt, Esther in Persia, or Daniel in Babylon, we are called to the ongoing and risky negotiation of engagement and resistance" (Frost 2006, 82).

The Incarnation of Christ is perhaps the deepest and strongest expression of the desire of God to be with humanity, of radical embrace, and profound accommodation. God and humanity are bound together through creation, through redemption, and through incarnation. Christ is the Embodied Word of God made such that the human creation might have a sturdier grasp of God. It is in the form of embodiment that God calls his people to reflect him: in how he comes to us and how he works among us as a redeeming presence. C.S. Lewis (2012) comments,

Our imitation of God in this life… must be an imitation of God incarnate: our model is the Jesus, not only of Calvary, but of the workshop, the roads, the crowds, the clamorous demands and surly oppositions, the lack of all peace and privacy, the interruptions. For this, so strangely unlike anything we can attribute to the Divine life in itself, is apparently not only like, but is, the Divine life operating under human conditions. (17)

God calls his people to ideals, ways of living and being that extend beyond time and space. While our call is specific to context, it also extends beyond each individual time-bound context speaking to a unifying Gospel identity across time. The Gospel must speak directly and insightfully to a particular time and place but must never be limited only to that time and place. As Bevans explains,

It follows quite naturally that if [the] message, through our agency, is to continue to touch people, we have somehow ourselves to continue the incarnation process. Through us God must become Asian or African, black or brown, poor or sophisticated. Christians must be able to speak to inhabitants of twenty-first-century secular suburban Lima, Peru, or to the Tondo slum dweller in Manilla, or to the ill-gotten affluence of a Brazilian rancher. Christianity, if it is to be faithful to its deepest roots and to its most basic insight, must continue God's incarnation in Jesus by becoming contextual. (Bevans 2002, 12)

Determining the nature, scope and extent of Divine accommodation requires one to differentiate the essential (the permanent/timeless) and non-essential (transient/temporary/culturally conditioned) aspects of one's perception of reality. Both the Gospel and the human context must be taken equally seriously, therefore we cannot approach any culture simplistically. For the sake of the Gospel, we cannot afford uncritical assumptions about our own cultures of origin or of those that we seek to minister in and through. "Our stance toward every human culture should be one of critical enjoyment and an appropriate wariness" (Keller 2012, 109).

At the same time, we may need to be alert to the possibility that God may also speak through persons outside of our circle (Pharaoh Neco) or he may have been working in Athens unseen and unnoticed. And it will demand that we expand our

vocabulary beyond that of our church, cultural, or ethnic context to speak and live in ways that offend because of the Gospel and not our preferences.

As modern exiles in the West, 'relics' of a colonial and Christian past from which distance is desired, we must find ways to speak to a society that is barely listening. We "seek to thrive within [our] host culture without becoming slaves to it, forever seeking to forge another way forward in which we neither hide from the values of our contemporary society, nor do we embrace them uncritically" (Frost 2006, 82). Like Christ and like Paul we begin where the audience 'is' in their own context. We understand that diverse contexts require us to start with differing aspects of the Gospel story, and that the emphasis may need to be placed differently. We seek to avoid formulaic presentations of the Gospel while at the same time seeking to speak to the idols and ideals of each people group to share the Gospel in a way that makes it possible for some to believe.

The nature of the Gospel as told through Scripture and modelled through the life and Incarnation of Christ is that there are no irredeemable people and no verboten places. All may be changed by an incarnational Gospel presence. It is the image of Revelation 7:9 expressed in seminal form within our own time and context. To this end "we are, as it were, borrowing from God's future, planting seeds of hope, raising the flag of the yet-to-be-consummated kingdom [of which] the church… is to be the advance guard of what is still to come" (N. T. Wright and Bird 2019, 884, 885).

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Historically speaking, the various elements of mission have often been treated as separated components of the problem, engaged as individual entities rather than as functional parts of an integrated narrative whole. Gladwell (2019) explores this as a dynamic of seeking to understand our encounters with strangers—others—in which we default to truth and embrace the illusion of transparency, with the fatal flaw being that "we do not understand the importance of the *context* in which the stranger is operating" (280).

Marsh (2016) echoes this thought asking, "what change might occur in theological writing, research, and teaching, when theologians engage lived experience with the same care and precision with which we read and interpret books, articles, and historical documents?" (5). Referencing Moltmann (2009) he continues, "in order to explain who 'God the Lord is,' we will have to be willing to tell the stories of what people have actually experienced, and to do so with unflinching honesty" (Marsh, Slade, and Azaransky 2016, 5).

As a countermeasure to a segmented approach, I will seek to follow a narrative journey through the historical and contemporary Christian and Adventist context of Great Britain while noting three key motifs: contextualisation, multicultural/multi-ethnic dynamics, and concerns of worldview. The theoretical aspects of the review will emerge from within the narrative reflecting a more integrated approach.

To position ourselves for a conversation on the contextualising of Adventist faith and practice in the UK we will consider a brief overview of Christianity in the UK, along with a brief supplementary overview of Adventist history as it intersects with that broader context. Both overviews will be undertaken with a view to noting and identifying opportunities for, and examples of, contextualisation.

Multicultural/multi-ethnic dynamics and the shifting of worldviews are two additional factors that intersect with this dominant concern and to which some focus will be given. To conclude this reflection on contextualisation we will seek to understand the concepts within current thought and practice, with an emphasis on authors and mission-practitioners from within the UK and Europe, and with a view to determining key indicators for developing approaches for Adventism to speak more meaningfully to the British context.

Overview of the Historical Context

Christianity in Great Britain

The English hymn "Jerusalem" references a medieval narrative in which the young Christ travelled to Britain with his tin merchant uncle, Joseph of Arimathea. Joseph later returned, bringing with him the holy grail: a legend taken up at Glastonbury Abbey (M. P. Brown 2006). The hymn, which came to the public in 1916 during the Great War, was well received and quickly grew in popularity (Dibble 2016). While modern minds would tend to discount the veracity of the legend, its existence and use in what some term the 'unofficial English national anthem' affirms the deep connection to historic Christian faith in Britain and her perceived place in that narrative.

Christianity travelled to Britain not only on the wings of legend, but also on the feet of Roman Legions and the roads they built. The inclusion of Britain in the

Roman Empire from the mid-1st Century CE, and the greater safety and stability provided by that presence, facilitated the early spread of the Christian faith to its shores. There is ample evidence of numerous small Christian settlements across the British Isles that date from the Roman period. Very little is recorded from these early days of Christian mission in Britain and any history of that time inevitably relies on the writings of later clerics. However, by the 3rd Century CE Christianity was sweeping through the empire, taking root in even the farthest reaches, and it is from this time that we find some of the overt signs of its presence in Britain (M. P. Brown 2006). It is also in this period that the earliest British martyrs emerge, and British clerics play an active role in the life of the European Church (Marshall 1994, 9).

Rome withdrew from Britain early in the 5th Century CE effectively abandoning the tribes to their own political devices, but with a flourishing Christian Church (M. P. Brown 2006, 48). Christianity saw periods of growing acceptance facilitated by the so-called Roman and Celtic missions of the 5th and 6th Centuries (Hunter 2010). It is from this period that we know names such as Patrick (Ireland), Columba (Iona), Ninian (Scotland) and David (Wales) (M. P. Brown 2006, 64–88). Reed (2013) observes that this period might teach the modern Church about community and mission, suggesting that "the first-millennium British church has got [much] to offer the third-millennium British church" (12). By which he means "an Evangelical emphasis upon the Scriptures and upon mission, a Catholic sense of the importance of incarnation and sacrament, a Pentecostal-charismatic experience of the work of the Holy Spirit, and an Orthodox vision of God as Trinity" (Reed 2013, 21).

Drawing on the work of Hardinge (1972), Marshall (1994) finds that there was "significant evidence that Patrick observed the seventh-day Sabbath", with a high regard for Scripture, an expectation of a literal second advent of Christ, and salvation

by grace through faith and baptism by immersion (29–35). If these observations tell us anything of the reality of Christian faith in the Early Middle Ages of Britain, they suggest that several basic tenants of Adventist faith were held in common with those Briton believers in Christ.

Having taken root, Christianity spent the next thousand years embedding itself into the hearts and minds of Britons and even their invaders. Traditional native religions were often violently persecuted and ultimately driven out to the edges of the Isles as Christianity steadily assumed the dominant voice in society and remained that powerful voice through periods of much change and upheaval. Alfred the Great expanded his control over much of Britain in the 9th Century and with it, the reach and dominance of Christianity (Latourette 1975, 1:367).

It would be tempting—in Reversionist fashion—to view the Christianity in Britain of these times as somewhat monolithic and uniform, but that would be an idealising of the context and narrative. It would coax us toward the desire to recreate our present in the form of our past. While much effort was exerted to consolidate the Church and to exercise control toward more uniform practice in a time of mass conversions, mystics, Crusades and the burgeoning of monastic movements (Latourette 1975, 1:443), this time of discord and dissent also produced John Wycliffe's translation of the English Bible from the Latin Vulgate. In his desire to keep Scripture central and current in the common tongue, Wycliffe made a very English connection. Faith was not simply about the organisational Church with a focal point in Rome, but about how it was lived out in the every-day lives of the English people.

The English Reformation drew on the view that English Christian leadership, faith, and practice should find a locus in England rather than in Rome. It would be

tempting to argue for these views on missional or theological grounds, but the truth is more closely aligned with national interests and political design. The formal break with Rome by the English State brought the challenges of unified faith closer home. More than ever, the desire to keep England orthodox—the Church of England, of which the King was supreme—had political implications. Those who now dissented were at odds not only with the Church but also with the State. The aftermath of Henry VIII's decision brought the Dissolution. Of the 800 monasteries, nunneries and friaries and the 10,000 monks, canons, nuns and friars they contained in April 1536, none were to be found four years later (McIlwain 2007, 1). What was the result of the monastic Church being removed from the social landscape in this way? Some argue, a significant shift in English Christian praxis:

> Probably the most noticeable change… was the ending of pilgrimages. Most of the famous destinations… were destroyed in 1538 for being focuses of undesirable superstition. The devotional practices of many Englishmen were, as a consequence, profoundly changed. (McIlwain 2007, 20)

Against the background of these rapid changes and the complications introduced by the general mood of the era, Anabaptists, Puritans and later, the Methodists would raise dissenting voices and be deemed "nonconformists" by the English State.

Puritan Government under Oliver Cromwell survived for little more than a decade before returning to the Monarchy and to the Church of England. "Non-conformist" was apparently not truly part of the English way. Paxman (2007) writes that, "it is in the fight with Church and State, first to get access to the Bible in their own language, and then to use the Scriptures to establish their own relationships with one another and with authority, that we see the spirit of English individualism at work" (113). This individualism—a Protestant ideal—combined with a growing "linguistic nationalism" in England paved the way for the King James Bible, a

particularly English translation that has styled formal and common religious language for centuries (McGrath 2002, 92, 94; Pruitt 2019).

Brown (2009) argues that the strength of Christianity as a guiding religious and moral voice continued largely unchallenged until the mid 1960s, at which time there was a marked decline in the role that the Church of England played in the lives of average citizens. Brown and Woodhead (2016) agree, stating that "what brought the Church of England plunging downwards was a deep change in the society of which it had been a part"—the decline of paternalism and the breakdown of "an interlocking set of authorities which supported one another" (63, 65).

Whilst the liberation of women from the neo-Victorianism of the 1950s shaped church participation and contributed greatly to the decline of the influence of the Church of England (C. G. Brown 2009; Mcleod 2010), the 1960s also introduced waves of renewal in the non-conformist denominations in Britain. Pentecostalism, though not new to Britain's shores, was making a fresh impact growing in presence and remarkability into the mid 1990's. Of significance here is the so-called Toronto Blessing, which drew attention from the Press, especially as it spread to middle-class congregations in Knightsbridge and Holy Trinity Brompton (Hilborn, n.d.). The Church of England has sought, through the development of Fresh Expressions, to take the challenge of renewal and contextuality seriously, though this has been met with criticism (Davison and Milbank 2013).

The question as to whether the Christian Church continues to have relevance in contemporary Britain remains. In the face of declining church attendance and shrinking congregations, articles in the British Press have asked the same question (Sherwood 2017; The Spectator 2017). Perhaps it is not that the Church has lost its place and position in society, but rather that the society it so ardently and ably

represented no longer exists (A. Brown and Woodhead 2016, 219, 220). The challenge for the Christian Church to be contextual and therefore current within the shifts of a more diverse and diverging society remains a pressing reality.

<div align="center">Seventh-day Adventism in Great Britain</div>

In many ways the narrative of Seventh-day Adventism in the UK mirrors and echoes that of its host community and is, in many respects, a concentrated microcosm of the wider context. Adventism's UK arrival in the latter part of the 19th Century was, to a degree, a spiritual home coming. Deeply rooted in Puritan thought, 'nonconformist' Adventism was an extension of Reformation thought brought to maturity in 17th Century English Puritanism (Ball 1981, 3). As obvious as the theological links might be to later historians, they were unlikely to have been seriously considered as part of the context of Adventist mission in Great Britain in the late 19th Century.

Evangelistic work in Britain began very much as it was being conducted in the United States, by means of public meetings held in a marquee tent. This was the obvious and logical choice for John Loughborough who had many years of experience as a public evangelist in the United States and had been appointed by the General Conference to lead the British mission work in 1875 (Delafield 1975). However, it was not a great choice for 19th Century Britain—the weather did not co-operate. Even more so, the use of a tent sent an unintended message: this was a curiosity for the lower classes. In class sensitive Britain a public tent was associated more with the circus and vaudeville than with religious meetings (Leonard 1992). Those early Adventist missionaries to Britain did find some success among the 'lower classes', though Loughborough needed to school his converts not only in Scripture, but in basic literacy. Even the optimistic Ellen White wrote that these converts were "unruly

<div align="center">51</div>

and undisciplined" (Leonard 1992). Loughborough had transgressed what modern missiologists would consider the first rule of evangelistic work: know your audience (Doss 2015). The misstep was to set the tone for Adventist Mission in Britain.

To position oneself and one's faith within a new context is no small feat. Though there were 19th Century missionary endeavours reflecting more contextual approaches—James Hudson Taylor, for example (Austin 1996)—this was not echoed well within Adventist Mission generally—the clerical collar was occasionally adopted "to help smooth the way in many situations" (Crocombe 2007)—and in Great Britain specifically. While, and perhaps because, the challenges in European countries were not as overtly obstacle ridden as those in India and China, too many assumptions were made regarding the similarity between contexts.

In Britain, Adventism quickly became identified as foreign. It was clear that it did not sit easily in the British social and religious landscape. Proud of their cultural, religious, and political heritage and convinced of supremacy in all things, the British (generally) did not take well to instruction from outsiders (Leonard 1992; Paxman 2007).

While progress in those early years was slow, lessons were also being learned. Campaign tents were slowly abandoned in favour of public halls, a choice helped along by an increase in available funding. Conscious efforts to attract those from the "better classes" bore some fruit and by the time Adventism in Britain was thirty years old, it had begun sending missionaries to other parts of Europe and to Africa (Phillips 1992; Trim 2019). Through the Northern European Division (now Trans-European Division), the Adventist Church in Britain would send a steady stream of workers to places as far afield as Pakistan and Ghana. So zealous was this missionary drive that

later church historians would observe that the focus on foreign missions brought an inadvertent neglect of the growing mission-field at home (Trim 2019).

The world was changing and, indeed, has continued to change. Two world wars contributed to an increasingly spiritually jaded populace and forced Adventist members to face very difficult years with no sight of the anticipated Parousia (Dunton 1992). The "golden age" of public evangelism (1920's and 30's) during which the public had relatively few diversions had faded, and new pastimes were available. Fewer were attracted by the public lecture format in a time of "talkies" and growing disposable income. The Vandeman Efforts of the 1950's brought new life to this work and saw a resurgence in collective evangelistic efforts seeking to capture public interest around astronomy, music, and later archaeology, as entering wedges for the Gospel. Later initiatives such as "Dial a Prayer" by Pastor Amos Cooper and the "5 Day Stop Smoking Plan" with Pastors B. F. Kinman and K. A. Elias are also indications of innovative efforts to connect with the local context in a more meaningful way (Anthony 1992).

However, there was another change force at work within British Society. The 1930's drew the Enlightenment Age to a close and brought into being anticolonial movements and Other-centred anthropologies (Hiebert 2009, 71). British Adventism was already beginning to contend with postmodern shifts in worldview and would need to embrace a growing ethnic and cultural diversity facilitated by the coming Caribbean, Asian, African, and European migrations.

Multi-Cultural Multi-Ethnic Dynamics

The British Adventist Experience

British Adventism experienced slow and steady growth through the first half of the 20th Century. This strengthened through the second half and into the present

day—drawing largely from immigrant communities. While precise demographic data is not collected and more current data is not available, the British Union Conference estimates that fewer than 10% of the current membership might be identified as "indigenous British" (Oliver 2011) (see also unpublished data BUC 2017 in Appendix B).

The social upheaval of the 1960's and 70's had, perhaps, the most lasting effects on the ability of Adventism to locate itself sufficiently well in the British landscape. Immigration grew from a trickle to a steady stream drawing largely from former British colonies and the Commonwealth (Green 2014). Several factors combined to bring Britain to the place where the infamous "No Dogs, No Blacks, No Irish" signs would be posted outside properties by landlords (Lonergan 2018). The promised welcome wore thin in society and, later, within the Church (Griffiths 2003). Conflict was inevitable.

Early efforts to address the challenges were not well met from higher organisation (Woolford 1992). Appeals to the General Conference for assistance, and later, intervention, eventually brought about the "Pierson Package" designed to facilitate ethnic diversity among the leaders of the Conferences and Unions (Anthony 1992; McFarlane 1992). But the conflict had already begun to influence membership demographics forming a tableau of many poor and few good reasons for a Church at war with itself. There is anecdotal evidence of casualties from that time; and there are equally many who might be described as the "walking wounded" (de Lisser 2015, 87). The price for the conflict was high, and to some extent, is still being paid as Adventism in the UK is still reaping the consequences of choices and directions chosen several decades before.

Historically, clashes of nations, cultural and religious traditions are part of the story of the British Isles. It is unlikely that anyone who calls the UK home is truly indigenous. Historically the Frankish and Norse invasions contributed to the genetic heritage of Britain and the evolving socio-political landscape have challenged the stereotype of what British looks like. In a poetic sense, this is somewhat parabolic of the Christian, and later Adventist, struggle for indigeneity in Britain.

Official definitions of what it means to be British centre on British values (of democracy; the rule of law; individual liberty; mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs) and have been expanded to embrace greater ethnic diversity and individual expression. Platt (2019) suggests that "what constitutes being British is a 'flexible menu', and to pin it down to core elements results in a level of generality that is not very informative."

The conversation around what British Adventism means remains. Those who desire to outline it also struggle to define it. Like the national identity, it remains a somewhat nebulous thing—clear in the imagination but foggy in the articulation. Perhaps it would be an Adventism that sits more comfortably in the British social landscape in line with what Trim (2019) describes as "becoming as fluent in the cultural idioms of Europe as in its linguistic tongues and dialects… [so as to]…truly focus their energies on being European" (375).

Homogeneity and Diversity

In a diverse socio-political context with a dominant ethnic majority, mission with specific people-groups comes with definite social, ethical, and theological implications. Seeking specificity for the parameters around a target group may lead toward numerical growth in the short-term but away from theological depth in the long-term. Forming congregations around ethnic and/or language affinity has support

in sociological trends (Penno 2009, 39) and church growth models (29). However, there are also strong critiques of this approach, arguing that Scripture calls us toward the 'other' in ways that expand our concepts of identity and broaden the extent of our inclusion (Ellis et al. 2000; Volf 1996).

Donald McGavran (1991) championed the idea of the Homogenous Unit Principle based on the understanding that, "men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers" (163). Wagner (1979) argues that the idea that all cultures merge into one another thus forming a new human identity is a notion rooted more deeply in American ideology than in biblical orthodoxy or mandate (53). This is not to say that every Homogenous Unit is based on ethnicity, or indeed that ethnicity is the major criteria for homogeneity.

Kraft (1997) discusses monoculturalism arguing that though it is the default for the human experience, it presents a naïve perspective of reality that is essentially myopic and narrow (70). His critique presents 7 points of consideration (70–71):

1. Monoculturalism is naively ethnocentric in that it struggles to appreciate or understand points of view that differ from its own.
2. A monocultural point of view is absolutistic.
3. A monocultural perspective buys into naïve realism.
4. Monocultural people seem to assume that their views have been arrived at because they are superior.
5. A monocultural perspective has no respect for other people's ways.
6. Condemnation stems from the monocultural habit of always evaluating other people's customs and perspectives in terms of one's own culturally learned assumptions and values (worldview).

7. A monocultural perspective readily uses pejorative terms to contrast their ways with those of others.

Mission and ministry may require us to think and work in the context of all manner of "homogenous" groups—age, class, language, gender, interest, tribe etc.—while keeping in mind that this kind of specificity is not the mature perspective. Where demographic specificity overshadows reconciliation, it should be contested as a deviation from Mission and from Church. We are challenged to understand that "the future of our world [and our Church] will depend on how we deal with identity and difference" (Volf 1996, 20).

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in the UK in general, and the South England Conference in particular, remains a largely ethnically divided church. The number of language and ethnic specific congregations continues to increase to address the needs of first-generation migrants and to preserve cultural and ethnic expressions of Adventism. The church will have difficulty moving toward a heterogenous ideal without taking painful stock of where it is and where it has been.

Amid sharp divisions and increased diversity, the Church should be a reconciling influence both in the wider societal context and within its own adherents. In its best ideal, the Church would be bringing and encouraging people toward transforming inclusivity while celebrating a broad diversity (Chester 2006). This is the kind of interconnectedness of mutual responsibility that ideally should come with spiritual maturity (Yancey 2006).

Our use of terms will need to advance the conversation from language defined only by national and ethnic narratives and place it more firmly within the linguistics of worldview and cultural intelligence, both of which will help to articulate and expand the concepts and methods of contemporary British contextualisation.

Contextualisation

Focus on contextualisation along with its various terminological and methodological forms is a recent addition to the theological and missiological conversation receiving greater attention since 1950 (Bruinsma 1997). Contextualisation as a term was coined in 1972 in a report written by the Third Mandate of the Theological Education Fund, an agency of the World Council of Churches (Bruinsma 1997).

The practice of contextualising, however, is something that the Christian faith has enacted in varying degrees over the past two millennia, though Western Christian Mission efforts generally did not consider context particularly relevant to how that mission was done. Mission, under Christendom, was effectively "the West to the rest" (Hardy and Yarnell 2018, xiii) and did not view the West as a mission-field. Yet the collapse of Christendom and a post-Christian world have removed the privileged Christian voice, shifting it toward the margins of society and relevance. Indeed, some have argued that "the rest" are now evangelising the West (Kuo 2017).

Approaches to Contextualisation

"Everyone contextualises", Keller (2012, 97) would argue, "but few think much about how they are doing it." Speaking of the inability to diagnose our own level of enculturation, he adds "without realizing it, [we] become method driven and program driven rather than theologically driven" (97). Hiebert (2009) similarly expressed that our contexts and our faith are so merged as to make the distinction appear irrelevant for some people groups (18).

In a brief overview regarding views of contextualisation, Hiebert (2009) observes three prevailing approaches: Noncontextualisation, Uncritical Contextualisation and Critical Contextualisation.

Noncontextualisation is an approach often taken by missionaries from monocultural contexts. Unaware of how their culture and context have shaped their Christianity, they evangelise under the assumption that new converts should take on the cultural form of the missionary (19,20). Theological Positivism provides the underpinning of this view in which the over-riding concern is with objective, rational, propositional truth under the assumption that related theological positions have direct equivalency with Scripture. This position assumes that the Gospel is acultural and ahistorical without need of an original or present context (21).

Minimal Contextualisation usually follows as missionaries enter another context and find that some adjustment is required. To some extent, this has greater implications for the missionary as they seek to preserve their culture in a foreign place. Christianity is linked to civilisation and so to become Christian is also to become 'civilised' and to reject all former cultural expressions as being tainted with pagan meaning (22,23).

Uncritical Contextualisation refers to anthropological and missiological positions in which all cultures and contexts find equivalency and viewpoints are relativized. It asks whether accurate literal translation is achievable between cultures and, if translation is possible, that we measure the success of our communication by what is understood by the listener and not by what is expressed by the speaker. Dynamic equivalence Bible translations are an expression of this perspective (Hiebert 2009, 25). As a result of developing such, more Other-centred, missiology, it became clear that Christians in Western contexts operated with a largely uncritical approach to their understanding of both the Gospel and their context. Hiebert notes that Newbiggin and others observed "that the culture had moved on, leaving the church

behind." The church had lost its prophetic voice and needed to update, drawing many evangelical congregations toward seeker-sensitive expressions (26).

Critical Contextualisation moves our view of the Gospel beyond culture and context, arguing that while it must find local expression, "culturally, contextualised Christianity is always a reflection of a much deeper universal reality" (Hiebert 2009, 26). While still reluctant to express the exuberant certainty of the Enlightenment and Modern paradigms, there is acknowledgement that reality can be known in part—like a map (28). Within this framework all cultures are relativized by the Gospel and no one cultural expression is absolute or privileged; however, contextualisation must bear in mind that no culture is neutral and discernment between good and evil must be exercised. This leads us to understand that our theology, too, is contextual. It is our understanding of Scripture, inevitably partial and shaped by our perspectives, expressed within a particular human context (29). Here, Gospel workers find themselves as "inbetweeners" or "transcultural people"—those who operate both from within and without the context (29,179).

Bevans (2002) offers six models for doing Contextual Theology: Translational, Anthropological, Praxis, Synthetic, Transcendental and Countercultural. The Translation Model and the Anthropological Model represent the extremes of missiological thought and practice with the remaining four located on a continuum between them (Bevans 2002, 54). The former is generally accepted as the starting point of mission while the latter is the most radical in its emphasis on the local context.

The Translation Model is the default setting for theology and mission in context, being considered the oldest and perhaps original way of taking the Gospel from one place to another (Bevans 2002, 37). While each model seeks to translate in

some measure, the key departure point here states that the Gospel is unchanging and supracultural and therefore, supracontextual and may be expressed apart from cultural nuance and historical context. Both the strength and weakness of this model lie in its approach to truth as largely propositional and quantitative, thus giving the impression that Christian identity is a cohesive norm that can exist apart from human formulation (42, 43).

The Anthropological Model represents thought and practice that takes the human person and their experience most seriously, understanding that it is in the varied aspects of human life and living where genuine religious expression is truly authentic and valuable. Within this model the term 'ethnographic' articulates concern with what is "indigenous or proper to a people and their culture" (Bevans 2002, 55). This deep and uncompromising emphasis on the value of human culture sets this model apart. Its greatest strength is treating culture and context as primary to discovering the prevailing witness of God within a people and time. However, to work faithfully from this perspective is more easily said than done since there is so much to be deconstructed, nuanced, attended to, and carefully held in tension while still operating from a predominantly Western science of anthropology. Cultural romanticism may diminish the ability of the Gospel to confront the context (61).

In evaluating Evangelical Models of contextualization, Moreau (2012) discusses critical realism as the prevailing evangelical approach but goes on to suggest that "dynamic equivalence" (317) will likely become the dominant mode of contextual practice.

More recently, the challenge of ignoring or minimising the local experience as the means to expressing and experiencing the Gospel has been addressed in discussions on Theology of Place—a discourse focusing on questions related to the

specificity of locality and geography to calling, mission and Gospel living within a context of modern mobility, fragmentation, and the virtual world (e.g., Rumsey 2017; Inge 2003; Hjalmarson 2015). Pearson (Höschele and Wogu) captures this tension in a succinct phrase: "If my Church is not interested in my 'place'; then why should my 'place' be interested in my Church?" (2020, 2:258). Thus encapsulating the challenge of ignoring or minimising the local experience as the means to expressing and experiencing the Gospel.

To sincerely express the interest of "my Church in my place" (Höschele and Wogu 2020, 2:258) in a manner that reflects integrity and faithfulness to Scripture while simultaneously respecting human cultures and contexts without resorting to the extremes of cultural aloofness—Noncontextualisation (Hiebert 2009, 21)—or cultural naivete—Uncritical Contextualisation (25)—a synthesis of approaches may be required. Adventism has traditionally favoured the Translation model (Bevans 2002, 37) while tending to assume possession of a superior denominational culture to which Adventists generally conform. This approach fails to notice the rootedness of Adventism in its 19th Century American context of origin, while perhaps not noticing that our contexts and our Adventist faith are so merged as to make the distinction irrelevant for some (Hiebert 2009, 18).

To meaningfully position Adventist mission practice for contemporary Western contexts, I would propose that we lean into Bevans' (2002) Anthropological Model (55), borrowing from Moreau (2012) the value of seeking dynamic equivalence (317), and Critical Contextualisation from Hiebert (2009, 26) so as to firmly grasp both the narrative of Scripture and the human (UK) context. Through the synthesis of these perspectives, we would better understand that human contexts are not static and require constant interaction and interrogation. The Adventist

understanding of progressive truth along with greater appreciation for the brokenness of human cultures, including what we might term 'Adventist culture', might serve us well in navigating the dynamic nature of this proposal. Such a stance resonates with Lazić (2019) who argues that to survive with integrity in an increasingly fast-paced change environment the Adventist movement must continually investigate and assess both its relevance to the world and its identity in Christ (27).

Contextual mission aims for a local flavour and sits less conspicuously in the immediate social/cultural landscape. In that case, faith should not be so enveloped by local culture as to lose its own voice, but culture is expected to serve as a vehicle connecting believers with God in locally authentic and meaningful ways. It is to "give the water of life but in an Indian cup" (Vedhamanickam 2011, 64). In the UK, it would be to offer the Gospel in a Scottish 'quaich', an Irish 'mether' or a British tea-cup. However, we must also recognise that Western civilisations have moved on from the assumptions of Christendom and have been discarding traditional understandings of faith along the way. If we are to say something meaningful about God, Christ and faith to this new world, then we must say it in ways that address the contemporary context (Doss 2015; Laxton 2019).

<center>The Adventist Challenge</center>

Authentic contextual theology is challenging to Seventh-day Adventists who have a narrative of unchanging interpretation and meaning. Truth, it would be argued, has always been truth and therefore cannot be changed by differing contexts, nor by the changing of times. Bevans (2002) notes that "revelation was conceived largely in terms of propositional truth" (13). This is also an apt description of how Adventism has understood truth. While the movement would argue that 'truth is progressive'—it may enlarge over time—and that we hold to 'present truth'—our understanding at the

current time— in practice, however, there is a tendency toward a fixed position. This tension between continuity and change has been well articulated (Pöhler 1998). Literalism in our reading of Scripture grounds us in a high view of the text, but simultaneously places context—both then and now—in a less secure position and may even render it irrelevant.

For much of Adventism the mode is, effectively, the message. The context of our formation and our view of Scripture produced a faith-child—to coin a phrase—with significant limitations when it comes to contextualisation. We are rightly afraid of syncretism—incorporating human/cultural elements incompatible with the Gospel— resulting in "a rejection of the full authority of the Bible" (Keller 2012, 93). It may be that these limitations can be overcome; however, I suspect that this will not be without significant difficulty and challenge within the local context. The implications for our global church family remain to be seen along with the ability of global Adventism to make a shift toward more localised expressions of the Gospel while bearing in mind that "all gospel ministry and communication are already heavily adapted to a particular culture" (Keller 2012, 96).

Peck (2017) picks up on this theme when he writes,

> … meeting people where they are involves more than just meeting people where they are in terms of their location. It is not just an injunction to meet folks in their homes, workplaces, and the local shopping malls. Meeting people where they are involves meeting them in their context… be it sociological, psychological, spiritual, intellectual or more. It is about where people are in their lives and on their life's journey. (125)

Such efforts are not about finding methods that work elsewhere that are easily reproduced in our own setting. Ideas may transfer, but if they work, we should take time to understand why they work and how to optimise those dynamics. This is where we begin to work more contextually, and it is where we have not done especially well

in the UK. To move in this direction the Church must be more missional, accessible and engaging (A. Peck 2017).

McGrath (2002) suggests that Christianity will survive the 21st Century, though it will of necessity undergo significant transformation. He sees the role of the West in the broader Christian conversation declining, even as the voice of non-western Christianity grows in strength. This is a time for significant and ponderous reinvention (119). Raschke (2008) would concur, arguing a parallel between the growth and decline of the Roman Empire and that of the West. A new world will emerge that "remains Western in character, but no longer in name." Christian faith will outlast the West while simultaneously "undergoing a dramatic global metamorphosis" (18).

In a denominational climate that prioritises budgets, attendance, and membership figures, it is counterintuitive for a pastor to invest vast amounts of time in relational and evangelistic pursuits that are unlikely to result in baptisms within a reasonable length of time; and, if no baptisms result, there is an impact on budgets. While the challenges and dynamics are varied and complex, Paulien (2008) argues that the key comes down to how people approach and understand "Truth" (41). While this is, in part, an epistemological concern, it is also a matter of worldview.

When sketching a picture of what the Christian Church of the future might look like, Paas (2016) suggests that every new expression will find itself in tension along three axes. Firstly, "private and public", where the Church is hardly distinct from the world on the one hand and where it's buildings and structures and communities are clearly visible and identifiable on the other. The second axis relates to contextualization with extremes of "consumption (choice)" on the one hand, and "sacrament" on the other. And thirdly, the axis of "community and institution"

(organism vs organization) (194). We are caught between what we have been and what we must be and somehow authentically remain "the Church" to all who need it and even to those who view it askance. As we seek to work contextually, we may find that "our best may become our worst overnight"—the traditions and structures that have historically sustained and enabled us may become the very things that hinder us moving forward (199).

With a worldwide membership in excess of 20 million, it can be difficult to imagine a scenario in which the Seventh-day Adventist Church might find itself fading from sight. And yet it should be noted that the Adventist Church across Europe represents the smallest portion of the global membership. The Trans-European Division remains numerically small with 0.17% of world total accessions, while the Inter-European Division holds 0.45% (Trim 2021, 9). If we—as a global church and as European Adventists, —are to take the social trends and literature seriously, we will need more than a shift in terminology in which we re-style our traditional methods with new names while simultaneously retaining our prevailing mindset and approaches.

Ottesen (2015), writing about the Danish context, makes a helpful observation for Adventism: "the Adventist Church may have to define its ministry and identity less in terms of what it thinks and more in terms of what it is and does" (157). This observation is borne out in recent research conducted within the United Kingdom by the Barna Group (2018). After noting significant evidence "that the Church in the UK is generous and engaged in a range of needs" they go on to share that, "a sizeable percentage of the population is unsure or sceptical of its impact" (68). As an expansion of his broad-stroke statement, Ottesen (2015) adds,

> … the Adventist Church has three options. First, be radical in implementing new methods and new ways to present the gospel. This might estrange and upset long

time and traditional members and create conflict. Second, simply cater to current members and become more and more out of touch with present culture thereby finding membership and attendance dwindling. Finally, a combination of the two which seems at best difficult, but might become a reality by doing the progressive moves in new church plants and pilot projects. (156)

This approach emphasises stable, long-term, discipling relationships as the proposed primary means of Adventist evangelism. This is not to preclude teaching opportunities and programmes. However, there should be a marked shift away from these as the primary means of evangelism as they mitigate against the relational aspects by absorbing time and energy spent in preparation and presentation, not to mention the financial resources they absorb (164). The way forward, according to Ottesen, is a return to small-group ministry (167). Paulien (2008) would concur and proposes the term "salt ministry" with reference to Matthew 5:13 (KJV). Ogden (2016) would recommend the potency of "microgroups (a group of three or four)" (138).

The cultural context of Europe and Great Britain has continued to move toward individualism and the value of smaller relational units as a point of reference and grounding (Ottesen 2015, 174). Ireland and Booker (2015) echo this noting that active, ongoing, intentional discipleship is the best way forward (170). They go on to note that, "small, fragile and slow are key words for future ministers to absorb; however, large numbers of small, fragile churches growing slowly but genuinely can transform the landscape" (177). It is in the context of small groups or missional communities (Hirsch and Frost 2013) that agility in mission and ministry can be both affected and effected, and it is there that new and transformational communities might be formed.

Ottesen (2015) would agree: "A move towards a small group emphasis will call for looser structures, more organic and relational evangelism and a more

existential presentation of Adventism" (178). Care should be taken to affirm that a "move towards" is not a repudiation or disregarding of our historical journey, but an extension of it. Nevertheless, space and time for this kind of relational approach to sufficiently take root must be facilitated by the more traditional forms of the Adventism. Support from the traditional core is central to the ability of Adventism to connect more meaningfully with its British context, and yet it is counter-intuitive for the core to empower such innovation in the liminal spaces between a modernist church and a post-Christian society. The traditional core and the innovative edge need one another; a relationship that must be held in tension. The innovative edge needs the traditional core to ground, empower and resource, while the traditional core needs the edge to keep the primacy and passion for ministry among those who are increasingly different from ourselves, thus connecting the church with a future.

Paulien (2008) proposes a nine-point basic strategy for "living like salt in a secular postmodern world" (121).

1. From public to relational evangelism;

2. From short term to long term;

3. From our agenda to felt needs;

4. From church based to neighbourhood/workplace based;

5. From one way to a multiplicity of approaches;

6. From a conversion to a process focus;

7. From church to community;

8. From church controlled to God controlled;

9. From exclusive to inclusive (121–34).

Through their campus work Everts and Schaupp (2008) identify five significant shifts or thresholds for the journey of conversion that should inform

missional engagement within a Postmodern context: "from distrust to trust"; "from complacent to curious"; from being closed to change to being open to change in their life"; "from meandering to seeking"; and finally they "cross the threshold of the kingdom itself" (23, 24).

Lazić (2019) argues that to survive with integrity in an increasingly fast-paced change environment the Adventist movement must continually investigate and assess both its relevance to the world and its identity in Christ (27). Additionally, we cannot assume that simply by holding a high view of Scripture that its value and content will therefore be clear to all. "Faithfulness to the written revelation of God… requires gradual discernment, a process that needs to happen in the context of community" (19). It is this working in community that requires expansion within the Adventist understanding of mission as "the denomination grasps the complex interface between the community of believers and the world" (261). To move in this direction Lazić suggests four considerations: (1) a God-centred approach to mission as opposed to the traditional ecclesiocentric model of Adventism; (2) a significant shift in Adventist attitudes regarding 'non-Adventists'; (3) a broadening of the Adventist mission perspective and scope; and (4) intentionally moving toward more communal and relational modes of evangelism/outreach (262).

It would be challenging for traditional Adventism to embrace Bevans' Anthropological Model since it places value first in the human cultural identity. However, if we are unable to take the human cultural identity more seriously in all parts of the world—not only the non-western regions— we will continue to suffer the results of our cultural misconceptions and uncritiqued biases. Worse still, we will arguably hold to theological and missiological positions that minimise contextual

identities, adopting approaches that do not take the local human story seriously enough (Bevans 2002, 54).

Coffin (2019) writes of the continued challenge for Adventism in the West where traditional methods and mindsets are doing far less well than they did in the past. We are all affected by the shifts and changes in society (postmodernity) and that it would be more helpful to see us and them on a continuum rather than in terms of dichotomy. With a stronger emphasis on community, authenticity and lived meaning, our wider context asks questions of our Adventism that we have not been used to answering. If we cannot find a way to rearticulate and contextualise our faith, then we simply are not meaningful to this new world. But more than the concern for relevance is the gospel imperative that in each time and for each people the word may once again "become flesh" (John 1:14 KJV). For such contextualisation to become possible, worldview as a core context shaping factor should be considered.

Worldview

The concept of a worldview has been with us since the writings of Immanuel Kant (Sire 2015, 23). In his substantial work, Naugle (2002) gives an extensive and detailed history of worldviews. Sire (2015) proposes that:

> A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being. (141)

Particularly pertinent to the discussion of worldview and mission is the use of the phrase, "worldview is a commitment" suggesting that we are not addressing a set of propositional truths or fundamental beliefs per se, but rather that the formation and "essence" of a worldview is something deeply personal, even spiritual, encompassing

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more than intellectual assent and is a matter of the heart (Sire 2015, 142). Whatever else a worldview may encompass and imply, if we fail to meet individuals on this basic, even pre-rational level, we fail to connect at the level that drives cognition and action, "[that which] is actualised in our behaviour" (153).

Hiebert (2008) sees worldviews as "organic, dynamic systems in a state of constant flux and change" as they impact and are impacted upon. Meaning is given to our lives through our stories, which are told and retold to grow, develop and reshape that meaning (31).

It is this dynamic quality of worldviews that is both promising and problematic to those who seek to engage mission in post-Christian Britain. Promising, in that by seriously engaging worldviews with a will and the patience to understand people in their full context we might effectively share the Gospel with them beyond superficial changes of lifestyle, behaviours and dogma. Problematic, when we fail to understand our own worldview and how it is not as static as we have believed. Hiebert (2008) notes "Christo-paganism", the result of insufficient depth in conversion in which our pagan worldviews are baptised by new behaviours and beliefs (69; 315), as meaningful risk in uncritical approaches. It is the very organic and dynamic nature of worldviews that makes them open to change, thus presenting meaningful opportunity for mission, even in so-called 'hard' places.

As we engage in mission, we bear in mind that (a) transformation is the work of God both in the life of a sinner and in the life of the church. This reminds us that there are aspects of this work that are beyond our grasp and beyond our control. And that, (b) transformation takes place in the "particularities of history" meaning that it happens within societies and cultures thereby impacting even our reading and understanding of Scripture (Hiebert 2008, 307).

Within each culture and society exist four cognitive categories: Intrinsic (because of what you are) vs Extrinsic (because of your relationship) Sets and those that are Well-formed or Digital (clear boundaries with no intermediate options) vs those that are Fuzzy (shading into one another with very little sharp distinction) (Hiebert 2008, 36). Rootedness in one or more of the cognitive categories will lead one to view transformation primarily within that framework. When we root ourselves in the intrinsic category we are concerned with orthodoxy—ensuring that beliefs are correct—and orthopraxy—ensuring that behaviours are correct. When we root ourselves in the relational category, we are interested in the direction of travel—toward, or away from Christ (308, 309).

This presents Adventism with a challenge: In practice 'believing' (intrinsic categories) must come before 'belonging' (church membership) (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 2016, 44). At which point do we recognise that a person has come to faith and action (baptism) should be taken? How do we understand and articulate the journey of spiritual transformation? How are we to avoid the temptation to believe that knowledge is the key to salvation? It is apparent that greater nuance is needed around the articulation of our policies and practices.

Hiebert (2008) speaks to this difficulty: "If behavioural change was the focus of early Protestantism, and changed beliefs the focus of the twentieth century, transforming worldviews must be central to church and mission in the twenty-first century" (315). This correlates to his three levels of conversion: (a) Behaviour and Rituals i.e., conform to standards and norms within the new community; (b) Beliefs and belief systems i.e., repentance, confession, believe and follow Jesus; and (c) Worldview i.e., transformation to a biblical perspective. His model moves from a

concern primarily with "surface culture" toward the "deep culture" that drives how we live (316).

So how do worldviews change? Both Kraft (2008) and Hiebert (2008) address this question, agreeing that the dynamism within worldviews that allows them to be impacted by interaction with other worldviews—smaller adjustments to conscious belief and practices brought about by incremental change—and by paradigm shifts—significant shifts in which there is considerable reorganisation of internal worldview configurations (Kraft 2008, 343–67; Hiebert 2008, 307–33). While there are several steps along the route of change, Hiebert (2008) notes that, "at the core of worldview transformations is the human search for coherence between the world as we see it and world as we experience it" (315).

Kraft (2008) makes a profound observation regarding major change, saying, "a worldview is such a complex thing and so deeply engrained in its adherents that I strongly doubt the possibility that a person can completely escape from the one he/she learned as a child" (347). This would likely account for the addition of Fundamental Belief #11, "Growing in Christ" as an effort to address what is essentially a worldview challenge (Ministry Magazine 2004). Despite this view, Kraft (2008) believes that the significant elements for change are all "person factors," meaning that our "appeal is always to be to persons" and not to structures. We must always keep sight of the whole person before us as we work with worldview transformation "the keys to which are will, knowledge, experience, and the abiding grace and encouragement of God" (348).

This suggests that Adventists in Britain need to build capacity to re-articulate their faith within a new paradigm while working under the belief that faith and the Spirit are not limited to nor bound by a singular, immovable worldview. The

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alternative is an attempt to transition (convert) people to a particular worldview to then share faith with them.   If the latter is chosen—which is likely the Adventist default—one is tempted to believe that there is only one 'Adventist' worldview from and through which to make sense of the world and faith. In so doing, a more static and orthodox position is chosen with the pitfall that it does not easily recognise its own cultural and worldview influences. What people are converted to is not faith per se, but our worldview.

Kraft (1997) argues that there is not a single Christian worldview, certainly not if we are to take the anthropological implications into account (67). He goes on to state that simply because "Christian assumptions, values, and allegiances [have spread] into a worldview [we cannot operate] as if that input constituted the whole worldview. It does not" (68). Hiebert (2008) observes that minority groups, in contrast with dominant communities, tend to be more aware of their worldviews. "Dominant communities deny that they have a constructed worldview. They accept without question the established ways in which they live" (320). The implication is that the work of worldview transformation in the mission context cannot proceed without critique and transformation within the life of the missionary especially when locus of ministry is with a dominant community. To this end, missionaries are "inbetweeners" (Hiebert 2009, 179), standing between different worlds and communities as cultural and worldview bridges.

The inclination toward "three easy steps for identifying our cultural assumptions" (Richards and O'Brien 2012, 211) is a particularly Western concern rooted in a love for "systems, processes and checklists". Through their cross-cultural work Richards and O'Brien (2012) recommend five approaches to surfacing personal uncritiqued cultural and worldview assumptions through personal and corporate

interaction with Scripture. Additionally, these approaches may serve to raise awareness of cultural and worldview assumptions within Bible contexts along with those within contemporary settings, belief systems and emergent culture.

"Embrace Complexity" (212) understanding that any given Scripture narrative may contain multiple assumptions and presuppositions, and that the reader(s) will bring several more of their own. Honour/shame, right/wrong, individualism/collectivism and many other themes will be potentially present depending on locus of the Scripture narrative, who is narrating it and to what end, along with who the reader/hearer might be. We step cautiously recognising that "we do not see things as they are, we see them as we are" (Nin 1961). This approach aligns with Hibert's (2008) first way to transform worldviews, namely, to examine them (319).

"Beware of overcorrection" (Richards and O'Brien 2012, 213) alerts us to a Western tendency toward 'all or nothing' extremes in which we fail to appreciate nuance and mystery. Hiebert (2008) observes that the lack of awareness of alternative worldview options within dominant communities raises the spectre of chaos when assumptions are challenged. By presenting plausible alternatives "the validity of the establishment worldview comes to be seen as less absolute" (320). Gould (2019) also argues for plausibility structures (139) presented through the nuanced mediums of imagination, reason and morality (72).

"Be teachable" and "embrace error" (Richards and O'Brien 2012, 214, 215) follow one another closely. It is easy to misunderstand their language, especially when orthodoxy is viewed as superior to orthopraxy. Richards and O'Brien are inviting contemporary Western missionaries to lean into a leaning posture in which one does not need to consistently be an expert and where awareness, discovery, and

cultural literacy are developed through the risky exercise of engagement with the ubiquitous potential for mistakes. Our cultural and worldview blinkers are not removed all at once—this is the patient work of a lifetime.

The fifth approach or practice advocated by Richards and O'Brien (2012) is "read together" (216). This, I believe, is their most valuable recommendation which resonates with Hiebert's (2008) second way to transform worldviews, namely, "exposure to other worldviews" (321). They write, "other times, though, we misread because we read alone. That is, we often hear only the interpretations of people just like us… we need to commit ourselves to reading *together*" (Richards and O'Brien 2012, 216). Declining to read Scripture alone and actively seeking to read it with a Rev 5:9 perspective will highlight two key realities: (1) "all people everywhere have their own cultural blinders", and (2) "all of us read parts faithfully and misread other parts. Because of our different worldviews, we often misread *different* parts" (217).

Hiebert (2008) offers a third way to transform worldviews that does not immediately align with any single approach recommended by Richards and O'Brien (2012), namely through "creating living rituals". This is important because "living rituals are nondiscursive [speaking] of the transcendent—of our deepest beliefs, feelings, and values—which cannot be reduced to words. They point to mystery, root myths, and metaphors, and fundamental allegiances, and express our deepest emotions and moral order" (322). This third way leans into the value of imagination as an avenue toward the plausibility of worldview transformation as highlighted by Gould (2019). Imagination—as expressed in visual and performing arts—is an under-utilised mission approach within Adventism and deserves greater attention in the British context.

Working with worldview as a function of missional engagement will require greater emphasis on local knowledge and understanding. Our traditional models for pastoral placement and community projects that reflect a 'plug and play' approach will no longer serve us well in a world more interested in truthful relationships established with integrity over time than in truth presented with authority and intensity in a short time.

Doss (2018) notes that, "Europe, once the hub of Christianity and Christian missions, now presents a major missional challenge, with secularism and large immigrant groups" (281). This context requires a 'multi-focal mission vision' that takes both people group and geographic focus into view (282). The geographic focus reminds the world church that there are many people who live "over there" and for whom the Gospel must become a real and transformational presence, while focus on people groups will encourage attention on local communities (282, 283).

In a globalised context, society is in a state of constant flux in which postmodernism has given way to subsequent shifts in worldview. Hiebert (2008, 241) speaks of a 'Glocal Worldview' whereas others speculate on a post-Christian age (Aquilina and Papandrea 2019). Adventism remains concerned with postmodernism—and it should take note as it remains a prevalent worldview in the West—it should be mindful that the rate of institutional worldview adjustment is likely to remain half a century or more behind the missional curve. Denominational entities and their subsidiaries need to actively pursue a 'research and development' arm to mission work within their territories.

Conclusion

A brief survey of Christian faith in Great Britain showed how it came to these Isles, the dynamics around its growth and establishment as the dominant faith, and

how it has been losing ground in the hearts and minds of the British people over the past five decades. Reformers sought to instil a Christian faith located and lived out in the everyday lives of English people, expressed in the English language and accessible to all while also drawing away from an organizational locus in Rome. Europeans have been witnesses of the steady collapse of Christendom and the return to a neo pre-Christian era in which biblical literacy is low and where loss of human dignity, violence, and exploitation form part of our entertainment fare (Aquilina and Papandrea 2019). Faith must inevitably critique culture, but it must also speak into culture and context. Maintaining cultural and worldview awareness will be integral to contemporary contextual mission in the UK.

Efforts to contextualise Adventist Christian faith in Britain cannot begin as though entering this mission field for the first time. Christianity and Adventism have established history and presence that cannot be denied. However, we must also look with fresh missional eyes for we have collected many assumptions regarding our context, its history, its culture, and its people. We have much to learn and much to unlearn (White 1892).

Hiebert (2009) observes that within our 'Glocal' contexts communities are increasingly diverse with "immigrant communities find[ing] social and cultural assimilation in their adopted lands full of tensions and misunderstanding. Internally, these communities face additional generational differences that engender conflict and misunderstanding between parents and children" (178). His apt description highlights the layers of contextualisation required within the multicultural/multi-ethnic dynamics of the South England Conference and the British Union as a whole. Not only are we seeking to missionally meet a more diverse and significantly changed dominant

cultural context, but we are also seeking to help the various communities within Adventism discover their own identities as part of a cosmopolitan whole.

"Meeting people where they are" (A. Peck 2017, 125) is far more complex than tweaking our methods and incorporating refreshed jargon. To contextualise with integrity and compassion is to engage on the deeper levels of identity while taking the time to understand how we are being comprehended and experienced through that engagement. By this we take our Adventist organisational and theological worldviews along with the local/Glocal worldview(s) more seriously, including the willingness to adopt a more intentional listening posture as part our mission interactions, growth in our ability understand the Gospel and Adventist faith from additional perspectives, while meaningfully addressing the need to rearticulate the Gospel and its implications using the language of a new paradigm. Hollinghurst (2014, 255) summarises, "as Christendom fades, the challenge is to affirm that diversity, and ensure a renewed call to mission-shaped evangelism in the new 'foreign cultures' of former Christian nations, a call to find out what God is doing in all creation and nurture into life the seeds of the kingdom."

Paas (2016, 199) reminds us that in this new mission environment, aspects of our 'glorious' Christian past along with our most successful strategies, may need to be surrendered or reconsidered as they become hindrances for current and future mission. The Adventist Church in Britain is approaching a watershed moment in which such a choice between the past and the future will be made. Those who serve as innovators and pioneers in this pivotal time will need to work with greater intersectionality, taking the wholeness of humanity into missional view, while seeking a truly incarnational expression of Christian faith in the UK.

CHAPTER 4

DESCRIPTION OF THE MINISTRY INCARNATION INTERVENTION

Introduction

A review of the relevant literature (Chapter 3) showed Christian faith as

historically integral to the culture and context of Britain. The narrative of these Isles

cannot be told without reference to Christendom with its characteristic interplay

between the Church and the State. While most UK Seventh-day Adventists may not

view their faith stream as being directly connected to this historical context, an

understanding of the mission context into which they speak and in which they live is

likely to be helpful.

Drawing on the Theological Reflection (Chapter 2) to understand the

Incarnational presence of God with humanity across time, along with the Literature

Review which draws on contextuality as the backbone of mission, this project sought

to: (a) provide a framework for Adventists wanting to initiate Church Plants or

Groups to explore their assumptions and presuppositions regarding themselves,

others, and God; and, (b) through that framework to open up the possibility for

expressions of Adventism that are more adept at meaningfully articulating faith in our

post-Christian society.

Background to the Intervention

As an immigrant to the United Kingdom there is a personal dimension to the

intervention. My family and I came to take up a pastoral position in the Southwest of

England in 2008. For a child of the colonies—I was born in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) birthed and raised in the Commonwealth, Britain loomed as a kind of 'ancestral home'. Though remote, it was the place and the people who shaped the world into which I was born; and which sent my forebearers to Africa in regiments and as settlers.

Early in our migration journey we were denied a visa on the probability that I could not speak English. It would be the first of many overt and subtle indications that we were foreign—regardless of our sentiment, association, and heritage. Living with this difference developed as a private experience, occasionally vented when among others who had travelled a similar path. We did not believe that the 'locals' around us could understand the dynamics of our struggle for place and identity.

The passage of time and local pastoral work provided insight into the dynamics of the Weston-super-Mare Adventist congregation of 40. The struggle over identity, to a greater or lesser extent, was a common theme. Many felt the loss and erosion of identity and it gave rise, at times, to resentment that was often misdirected and hurtful. Individuals and groups played into stereotypes of the other, often without realising what they were doing.

Pastoral observation brought the realisation that members of this Adventist congregation, whether British or migrant, were each separated from their contexts in some meaningful way and, while they struggled to have conversations among themselves that allowed each to be heard, understood, and embraced, they were equally alienated from their local British context as well. All struggled to speak meaningfully into the local context which was viewed as 'Babylon' from both cultural and spiritual perspectives. Our various understandings of "come out of her and be "separate" (2 Cor. 6:17 NIV) kept us suspicious and reticent. Migrants were appalled

at Easter, Harvest and Christmas services, along with elements of jewellery worn by female members. The 'white British' majority was often experienced as distant, uncaring, and disinterested. They, in turn, were often affronted by what they experienced as 'entitled foreigners' wanting to dictate terms and conditions in a place they had neither built nor sacrificed for, and who represented a 'legalistic Adventism' that several British Adventists had spent a lifetime trying to recover from.

One December, I was approached by a member of the community who asked, quite innocently and honestly, "Are you like the Jehovah's Witnesses who don't celebrate birthdays and therefore the birth of Jesus (Christmas)?" The conversation afforded an 'outside' glimpse of my faith community. The interaction began to shape the direction of my ministry, though my energy was directed less at addressing the assumptions of individual members and more at what we were intentionally communicating into our local context.

"The stranger who looks like me" became a poetic expression for the cultural distance that exists between much of the Adventist Church in Britain and its wider cultural and ethnic context, but in particular—and this is often overlooked— for White British Adventists. Inherent to the British Adventist conversation is the largely uncritiqued assumption that each ethnic group will focus on reaching those most like themselves. If true, then it appears to work more effectively among recent immigrants to the UK more than it does in the wider British population historically termed "indigenous white British" or "Anglo". The passing decades, however, have also broadened the meaning of "indigenous" as 2nd, 3rd, and 4th generations descendants are born and raised in the United Kingdom. "The stranger who looks like me" is a phrase that speaks to the growing disconnect between Adventism in Britain and the British in all their permutations.

Development of the Intervention

Chapter 3 provides a brief overview of the history of Adventism in the British Isles; a history that reveals challenges with contextuality and incarnational mission built, perhaps, on the assumption that biblical truth requires no context and is therefore supra-cultural, standing above time and context. The challenge for Adventist missionaries to Britain was the supposition of a common understanding through shared history and language. One might also wonder if there was also an underlying, uncritiqued belief, that Adventism, as shaped by 19th Century America, was normative for the whole world. Certainly, subsequent generations of Adventists in Britain must grapple with their own assumptions as to what normative British Adventism might look like.

Contemporary British Seventh-day Adventism remains primarily concerned with identity. Some might suggest that the present-day Adventist Church in the United Kingdom is "the largest Black Church" and should be accorded commensurate status in official interactions with the State. Others might ask if the Adventist Church in Britain is British at all, or if it has the capacity to be a broad church in which several contrasting and competing identities might find a home and where we might discover that our various versions of Adventist identity are themselves more layered and complex than we have previously been able to admit, both to others and ourselves.

Petersen (2013, 277) notes that the Church has a dual identity rooted in the moving of the Spirit: It is both "called out of the world" and then "sent into the world". Any identity that the Church embraces should be rooted and articulated 'by' and 'between' those two pneumatological movements.

When Frost (2006) remarks, "Our churches, under the guise of doing the work of Christ, are inadvertently sucking us away from the very people that Jesus would want us to hang out with" (63), he is getting at the one of the deepest challenges we face in a post-Christian context: We are simply too busy with good things, church things, to be an incarnational presence. Indeed, incarnation is hardly necessary if we spend little time among those whose context and ways of being we might incarnate to. He argues that an overcommitment to church things deprives us of the two keys to missional proximity, "frequency and spontaneity" (62), leading us, ultimately, to an excarnate way of being church (Frost 2014). Thus, we may still identify the Church within the twin pneumatological movements (Peterson 2013, 277), while employing methods and models that keep ourselves largely separate from anything we might term 'the world'.

If true, then perhaps UK Adventism has capitulated to an internal organizational culture that represents a stereotype of Christianity to our culture and context. Such a capitulation potentially removes us from the coalface of mission and dampens our ability to both speak and live with authenticity in our changing context. It is a challenge of identity and identification.

My role as Church Growth and Mission Director for the South England Conference of Seventh-day Adventists has allowed me to observe the Church Plants and Groups within our territory. Sabbath worship remains the single largest investment of volunteer time, energy, and financial resource. Capacity for meaningful mission and ministry by most members is reduced by this disproportionate investment allowing the words of Frost (2006, 63) to ring powerfully true at this time. An underlying assumption of ministry within my context is that the worship service is the single most important tool for mission. The UK Barna Report (2018) reflects

discipleship and worship as the top two priorities identified by Church Leaders and Active Christians in the UK (19).

The challenge of Christian mission in Britain, as noted in Chapter 3, is not a uniquely Adventist difficulty. The battle over faith in Britain and the efforts toward more local and contextual expressions of English faith are expressed through the history of these Isles. An English vernacular translation was, perhaps, the most simple and profound expression of a desire for faith that lived out in the every-day lives of the English people. The continuing challenge for rootedness is noted by Ireland and Booker (2015). Commenting on cell church and small group ministry, they observe:

> Our conclusion then was that while this model seems to work well in other cultures, we could find little evidence of being effective in a British context… It is significant that tools for discipleship that arise from a UK context, such as Alpha and Messy Church, have proved hugely effective, while models from overseas, such as cell church and seeker services, have not. (29)

They go on to note though, that even "British style" home groups and similar initiatives often fail in their goal of consistent transformation due to a reliance on knowledge impartation or pastoral support approaches which tend to nurture conservation or maintenance (Ireland and Booker 2015, 29). Ireland and Booker place their emphasis on navigating "the disconnect between church culture and 'normal' life" in a context where people are unlikely to "stick with a church that is estranged from much of contemporary culture" (168). This is "ministry in a complex world" in which mission (discipleship) is a serious priority in which [individuals engage] as "belongers and not outsiders" in which all are challenged by "the significant ethical issues with which both the Church and wider society are grappling" (180, 181). Through this lens, the challenge for Christian mission in Britain is more than finding the right method or technique. Instead, there are deeper, more searching questions to be grappled with, worked through, and navigated in which challenge is a two-way

street and a long-held defence of authority and power will need to soften to more ably hear and listen to the context.

The broad view of this project was to establish a Missional Adventist Community presence in a new area of the South England Conference. In time it was hoped that this modern mission outpost would mature into a vibrant, welcoming, and intentionally discipling Adventist community in line with that envisioned by Ireland and Booker (2015). It is plausible that a contemporary discipling and worshipping community may grow to maturity from these efforts to better understand a local context. Such empathetic local knowledge could shape mission and ministry through contextual understanding and an emphasis on incarnational ministry in which it is the missionary that travels the cultural distance to where people are located. However, the intention was not to 'plant a church' in the traditional sense. Rather the focus was on relational investment with deep discipleship as the priority outcome. While well discipled people may choose to formally plant a church at some point on their journey, it was not the starting point of this intervention.

The intervention intends to take a step further back, moving behind the traditional starting line for new initiatives to expose and explore the individual and collective narratives and contexts of those desiring to plant a church in the near or distant future. This is done to provoke greater emphasis on the value of personal and group formation and identity as it asserts a pivotal role in the mode and method of going as a modern missionary. It seeks to help modern missionaries to be more intentionally aware of their individual and cultural lenses as part of an incarnational and contextual approach.

Minding the Gap

An oft repeated phrase on the London Underground is "Mind the gap!". It is intended to alert passengers as they alight to and from the carriage that there may be greater difference with the platform level than anticipated. Within the context of this project, "the gap" references the distance between where I am, where British Adventists are, and where emergent British culture is. There is almost always a greater gap between the premise of the well-intentioned contextual missionary and their British context of which many a benevolent initiative has fallen foul.

Peck (2017) speaks to this challenge when he writes that our desire to meet our context where it is should drive us beyond geographical locations—though they are important—into engaging and interacting with them in their "sociological, psychological, spiritual [and] intellectual [settings]. It is about where people are in their lives and their life's journey" (125). To have a greater appreciation for where others may be in their lives and on their life journeys, the would-be missionary must take the time and make the effort to be more perceptive regarding their own present stasis and their assumptions of their own journey.

In the intervening years since Paulien (2008) addressed the Postmodern shift, the term itself has persisted—often as a byword—within Adventist circles. It seems challenging to a denomination well-schooled in objective and authoritative truth to consider that those who reject such notions might still be meaningfully engaged by the claims of Scripture, while using an idiom that is more respectful of emergent culture. This alone is challenging for traditional congregations—who are largely accustomed to a narrative in which Adventism stands in opposition to popular culture—to navigate.

Paas (2016) reminds us that "our best may become our worst overnight" (199) as we consider that our cherished traditions and structures, our ways of speaking and of being may be among our hindrances as we press forward into a new mission context. This is often the precise point on which local Adventist congregations contest their identities and challenge one another on orthodoxy. We have not yet imagined that a serving, worshipping and discipling community might be thoroughly Adventist whilst operating within a paradigm without modernist underpinnings.

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

Any discussion regarding a ministry intervention in 2020/21 would not be complete without mention of the COVID-19 pandemic that has enveloped the globe. National and local lockdowns have closed church buildings for months with varying limitations on in-person gatherings being imposed by the UK Government. This has limited the potential for gathered teaching and interaction which would be the preferred modus operandi for the intervention. Nevertheless, it may provide the watershed opportunities we have been anticipating as the Adventist Church in Britain must show missional and organisational agility during this time of societal change.

Theologians such as Wright (2020) and Brueggemann (2020) have sought to address the Christian community on the need for adjusted perspective and engagement in the light of a global pandemic. Perhaps Adventism may wish to consider a wider perspective less driven by the expectation of an imminent apocalypse and more by the nearness of the God who has persistently sought the company and confidence of humanity.

Description of the Intervention

Having narrated the development of the intervention, we turn our attention to the description of the intervention. Here we unpack the structure and core elements of

a three-pronged incarnational triangle along with the corresponding six conversation experiences that emanate from it.

To some extent this is unfamiliar territory. Baker (2020) describes hiking in the wild places of Scotland: "Maps can be deceiving here. The confident black dashes, stretching out across the grid squares indicating a track, feel fictional at times. Instead, a route must be felt through the landscape, tracing the idea, rather than the certainty of the path" (35). There are very few paths through secular mission that are laid out, secure, tried and tested. Reaching into emergent culture with a desire for incarnational presence and contextual understanding may often mean "tracing the idea rather than the certainty." It follows that this intervention assumes the need to move with confidence while at the same time holding to a tentative approach regarding what is certain.

Based on Chapters 2 and 3, it was apparent to me that the heart of an Incarnational approach lay in a growing, three-pronged relational understanding, in which we assume the connecting and mediatorial role of God (Bonhoeffer 1963, 109, 110):

1. Who is God? What is God's story? Where have I heard that story, and how has it been told? What are my take-away perspectives and understandings from that story? How might I have come to these conclusions? Am I willing to reassess, if needed, my relationship with those conclusions? What does it mean that God comes to us? Where might obstacles and bridges have been observed if the Incarnation were up for discussion? Where am I located in God's story? Where are Others in God's story?

2. Who am I? What is my story? What does it mean that I am here? Where is my story rooted? How have significant events shaped my story? What are the

underlying worldview assumptions of my narrative? What do I need to explore
in greater depth? Which obstacles and bridges present themselves in relation
to the story of God and of Others?

3. Who is around me? What is their story? How do I know that story? What is it
   like for me to hear a different story? What significant factors/events have
   impacted the story of the Other? What are the underlying worldview
   assumptions might there be? Are there areas/aspects of the narrative that I may
   need to explore in greater depth? Which obstacles and bridges present
   themselves in relation to my own narrative and to the story of God?

These three questions, or awareness perspectives, form the basis of a narrative
lens in which they interact with one another in the formation and re-formation of
individual and collective faith narratives. The three points of the lens also provide a
missional identity triangle as the activity of God engages individual identity along
with narratives of context. Together, the narrative lens and missional triangle may
potentially combine to form a prism through which refract engagement around
mission.

Using the narrative lens as the broad frame for expanding awareness and
integration of perspectives, I engaged the core group of a potential mission initiative
regarding six conversations through which to grow an understanding of incarnation as
a fundamental frame for missional living and respect for contextual practice. The six
conversations are aimed at coming to six key relational understandings: Relationship
with self and personal narrative; relationship to 'otherness'/a perceived 'other';
perceptions of God and his activity; relationship with God, God's story and my own;
relationship between God and 'others'/perceived 'other'; relationship between myself
and the 'other' in the light of God's connection to us both.

Figure 1. The missional triangle and six conversations.

The intervention placed those six questions as foundational to positioning ourselves for incarnational ministry, unpacking them in turn with a core group and revisiting them as required by practical ministry. Repeatedly returning to this missional identity triangle as a lens through which to view, explore and articulate an identity narrative for a new Adventist missional community in Berkshire will become key to a more incarnational mission presence within the South England Conference.

Six Conversations

The Six Conversations were envisioned as the structure of a participative, learning and re-framing experience for the potential founders of a fresh Adventist missional community within the South England Conference in which more locally rooted expressions and explanations for mission might form. The ability to link explanation and experience was vital to the value of the intervention. Overarching

these conversations was the desire for participants to engage shifts in their lived experience while exploring fresh perspectives (explanations) in missional living with a spirit of curiosity.

Each conversation engaged three elements, namely: self-reflection; self-learning; and collaborative re-framing of narratives. Inventories (e.g., MBTI), case studies, podcasts, research/discover opportunities, group discussion and written reflections, will provide tools with which to engage meaningfully. It should be noted, however, that these conversations were not intended to be clinically therapeutic. Any individual areas of concern within the context of a conversation were referred on to a suitable professional. Outcomes from individual reflection and group work were recorded, however the content of individual inventories remained private. Inventories taken were generically noted as having been used as a resource.

Given the level of vulnerability required as the core group explored these conversations, matters of confidentiality along with a supportive environment were addressed through verbal and written consent prior to engaging the process. It was hoped that a pre-conversation social gathering might have been possible as it would have proven helpful in setting the tone for our interactions which were styled as a journey. In the documentary "I am not your Negro" (R. Peck 2017) James Baldwin augments the nuance of the word 'journey' through the clarifying phrase, "A journey is called that because you cannot know what you will discover on the journey, what you will do with what you find, or what you find will do to you".

Conversation One—Who am I?

The goal of the initial conversation was to engage or augment self-awareness: to become more aware of how one sees and experiences the world. Our own individual and collective stories are the lens through which we make sense of the

world. Through individual reflection and collective conversation, one may become intentionally aware of that lens and account for it when interacting in a mission context.

The conversation begins with 'ourselves' since who we are is, in many respects, the departure point for any missional conversation. The world, other human beings, God, and faith are all viewed through lenses that are particular to 'me' and 'we'. Individual and collective identities are formed and shaped, challenged, and re-shaped over a lifetime of relationships and experiences. We might assume that most people feel that they know themselves well enough without a need for greater self-reflection. However, Eurich (2017) believes that "this confidence is often unfounded [as] our self-assessments are often flawed in substantive and systemic ways" (6), while Eberhardt (2019) notes that "our experiences in the world seep into our brain over time, and without our awareness they conspire to reshape the workings of our mind" (15).

A clearer perception of who I am, my heritage, my story, my prejudices etc. would inform the framework through which I view and navigate the world. Engaging the personal narrative makes one more aware of one's own assumptions and presuppositions and how they potentially intersect with faith and mission.

Personality, worldview, and personal narrative inventories are available for use at no, or minimal, cost. A free version of the Myers Briggs Personality Test (MBTI) is available here https://www.16personalities.com/free-personality-test; A worldview questionnaire is available here https://www.culturalevolution.org/worldview-questionnaire/; built on what she terms, "seven pillars of insight", Eurich (2017) offers a range of self-reflection exercises in the appendices of her book. Participants were encouraged to take a selection of the

short assessments and to engage the self-reflection exercises with a view to further group reflection and collaboration.

Group work initiated the groundwork for a deeper understanding and appreciation of the people and personalities that God is bringing together to birth a new mission-based Adventist community.

Conversation Two—Who is the 'Other'?

Stereotypes and caricatures are integral to the human story. Those we disagree with, do not understand, or view as an enemy/adversary/competitor are the usual target of such characterisations. It is likely that every person holds prejudice, buying into a stereotype through which they think or speak of another group. Conversation Two desired to gently open these realities, in particular, how preconceived ideas of the 'other' inhibit and challenge mission. Cleveland (2013) addresses the concepts in terms of cognitive miserliness and cognitive generosity (44, 45, 61, 62). She also offers several searching questions aimed at unpacking the concepts (64, 65). Curiosity about others, the way they see and experience the world, their thoughts about spiritual and other matters, are among the foundational elements of human relationships. These elements become important for mission that seeks to reach beyond 'our group'— whomever that may be—toward a multicultural/multi-ethnic experience. DeYmaz and Li (2010) have a helpful discussion on exclusion and inclusion (100–110). Watching the film, "I am not your Negro" and using the discussion guide (BazanED nd) may also be useful to highlight issues of exclusion and embrace, while opening space around bias.

Building a clearer perception of the 'other', in this instance post-Christian Britain—predominantly White British and with a growing ethnic diversity that is equally British—we ask: What stories need to be engaged? History? Prejudices?

Idols? Aspirations? Etc. How might individuals view and navigate the world? This conversation may open our metaperceptions regarding the 'other', in particular, what we think they think about us (Cleveland 2013, 55). Engaging these questions, however, is best done from the position of a learner—someone who engages from a non-expert position to understand more deeply and meaningfully.

Conversation Two benefited from the use of the Cultural Intelligence Inventory. Revisiting the individual worldview questionnaire proved helpful to engage a conversation on differing worldviews. Marcos Torres hosted a helpful podcast on the secular mind (https://thestorychurchproject.com/podcast) that would be beneficial for a core group desiring to think differently and creatively around contextual mission and ministry.

Listening, however, should also engage real world activities. Participants were encouraged to seek out opportunities to listen to the opinions and perspectives of those who are different from themselves. Suggestions included, taking a walk with a neighbour, meeting for coffee with another parent from school or striking up a conversation at the gym. The specific setting was less important than each person seeking out listening and learning opportunities in the course of daily life.

Conversation Three—Who is God?

The third conversation sought to explore the question 'Who is God?' from within the assumption that the project participants are Seventh-day Adventist Christians and have accepted certain foundational beliefs, including the existence of God and his ongoing interaction with human beings across time. The conversation was not asking IF there is a God, rather, what our individual and collective perceptions and understandings of God might be.

Richards and O' Brien (2012) observe that "we easily forget that Scripture is a foreign land and that reading the Bible is a cross-cultural experience" (11). Seeking to understand God as portrayed through the Scriptures without considering the differences in time, context and culture is likely to distort our perception. Indeed, some of the understandings we currently hold might be the result of such distortions. Conclusions that come too quickly may take too much for granted.

In preparation for the conversation, participants were invited to watch the film "The Shack". Additionally, participants were led to explore key Scriptures—Chapter 2—based on several readings of Scripture, while seeking to understand who they understand and believe God to be. Drawing on those Scriptures, participants then explored implications for community and mission, e.g. What might it mean that the entirety of the human story is held within the reach and embrace of God? Deepening this understanding should open space to realise that God operates both within my worldview and its conceptions, and outside of it.

Conversation Four—Who am I in Relation to God?

The fourth conversation wanted to discover the dynamics of the reciprocal relationship between God and humanity as understood by participants—both as individuals and as a collective—within an Adventist heritage and tradition.

The documenting of one's spiritual/faith journey was a personal exercise to be drawn from a series of open-ended questions, however, participants are guided to seek out another trusted person with whom to share it. Part of this journey included the engaging of a Spiritual Gifts Inventory, which also encourages engaging with a trusted individual for reflection. This sharing and listening exercise served as a precursor to the telling of a more collective story of Adventist faith in the UK. The collective storytelling was intended to be a collaborative experience in which

participants would anticipate articulating their personal connections to the wider story.

Hirsh and Kise (2006) have written on the interplay between personality types (MBTI) and spiritual paths. Their work is a potential resource for those seeking to better understand how their individual formation interacts with the nature of their spiritual experiences. Participants were encouraged to use their earlier MBTI results to explore the area of personal and collective spirituality.

Drawing on earlier conversations, participants explored what it might mean that God interacts with them on a personal level. Having begun to explore the breadth of incarnational presence on the part of God—including individual and collective aspects of God coming to be with us—they would unpack what it might mean to employ incarnation as a model for ministry and mission in a particular location.

Having earlier explored "Who am I?", we also unpacked "Who are we?" as the Seventh-day Adventist Church. For many who still locate their view and experience of the world from a Modern perspective, it is an irreverent question; impertinent, even to question the identity of "God's Remnant People" and our position in terms of biblical prophecy and the Three Angels messages of Rev 14:6–13. And yet we must own our history, our participation in the world of Christendom and our desire to perpetuate a world that is—perhaps irretrievably—fading from view.

Brueggemann (2000, 59) notes that "because the church has been intimately connected with these old realities of certitude, privilege, and domination, it shares a common jeopardy with other old institutional patterns in the face of such dislocation". While Seventh-day Adventists may desire to view their collective narrative as standing aside from these 'old realities' they cannot, either by desire or dissociation separate themselves from how religious institutions are viewed in this emerging

world. The question, "Who are we?" must also take British Adventism into an exploration of the ways in which it has been intimately connected with certitude, privilege, and domination.

Participants were asked to watch a couple of helpful resources, including a video on the UK Adventist story, 'A story of perseverance' available here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uoG29UlDXnQ and produced by the British Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. David Trim presented a lecture on behalf of the Trans-European Division in 2019 entitled, "Becoming European" available here https://youtu.be/cwHW78pfFQE. Both presentations share perspectives on the history and mission work of Seventh-day Adventists in Great Britain that could serve as a background for conversation on a collective identity.

Reflecting on the collective story drew out aspects of alignment and variance within the group; not only among one another, but with aspects of the UK Adventist narrative. Additionally, efforts were made to address areas where that narrative may have followed national and cultural themes in ways that do not reflect God and Gospel in helpful ways.

Having explored who I am in relation to God and who I have come to understand God to be (Conversation Three), there was an opportunity to unpack what it might mean to imitate God's incarnational presence in my context. In this respect, we aimed to enquire as to which aspects or characteristics of God were most needed as we began this mission journey with the people of this place? Which aspects of who I am might prove helpful, challenging or become obstacles? What could I be intentionally praying about as I work through and work out this conversation, both on an individual level, and communally?

Conversation Five—The 'Other' and God

The fifth conversation connected with the third as it drew on our articulated perceptions and understandings of 'who God is' while seeking to relate them to our perceptions and understandings of otherness. Revisiting the concept of metanarratives (Cleveland 2013, 54–60) within the context of the Scripture narrative helped to broaden both our reading of Scripture and our picture of God.

This conversation opened with several examples in which God appeared as instrumental in the lives of individuals and nations 'outside' of Israel. Drawing on the research in Chapter 2 (Theological Reflection), the group was invited to spend time reading a selection of Scripture narratives while seeking to 'hear' them from different perspectives and seeking to hear familiar passages address them differently (e.g. How might the Exodus narrative challenge me if I read it as Pharoah instead of Moses?).

OT: Pharaoh Neco (2 Chr 35:21); Melchizedek (Gen 14:18), Rahab (Josh 2), Ruth, Cyrus (2 Chr 26; Isa 45:1), Nineveh (Jonah 1:2).

NT: Wise men (Matt 2:1), shepherds (Luke 2:8), Samaritan woman at the well (John 4), non-disciple casting out demons (Mark 9:38), Paul & missionary journeys (Acts; 1 Cor 9:22; 10:32–11:1).

Exploring this conversation should invite participants to take another look at who the "other" might be in relation to God, and how we have softened the challenge of Scripture to our own narratives of power and privilege. Such engagement might challenge how they have understood 'other' and, perhaps, how we have thought God might think of those who are 'other' to ourselves. It may also be helpful to look at the ways in which God incorporates our 'other' into his activity in the world, blending them into the wider narrative while also considering the implications of this discussion for UK mission and ministry.

Conversation Six—God, the 'Other' and me

The final conversation proposes to bring the threads of each preceding conversation to a point of gathering. Having already taken time to reflect on our individual and collective departure points—our lenses through which we view and experience the world—we have also sought to take another look at ourselves, God and others. Who is the "other" to me in the light of Gods connection to us both? What does it mean that 'we three' are potentially connected in ways we have yet to understand? Have our 'in/out' groups presumed inclusions/exclusions that may need adjustment? If so, what might those adjustments look and feel like?

When Robert (2019) observes, "if we cannot imagine others as potential friends, and therefore as equal to ourselves, then we cannot survive on a planet that gets smaller all the time" (1), she is venturing toward the heart of the matter. Foundational to any missional presence is the desire to venture into relationship. As the earlier conversations have noted, the Scriptures present God as having made the first move toward humanity; our movement toward 'others' reflects the Divine hand of friendship. This 'hand of friendship' is another way of expressing "shared discipleship—faithful obedience to the God of love, walking together in equality with and respect for specific persons whom God loves, and caring for the world God loves" (6).

Ideally, this conversation might take place in conjunction with a meal— prepared on site by the group, with each person contributing to the cooking, table setting, etc. Conversation could be guided using numbered "starter cards" placed in envelopes at each place setting. Using numerical order, each participant would read their card aloud, posing a question, or reflection to the group for discussion. The cards would draw on the previous five conversations, asking for personal reflections,

observations, shifts in thinking or experience, while drawing the conversation toward what the conversational journey might mean for mission and ministry as the group considers establishing a new worshipping and ministering community. The whole experience would be documented by means of audio recording.

The Value of Relationships

Among the underlying assumptions of this intervention is the conviction that human relationships are of utmost importance. Westley et al. (2007) observe that "relationships exist between things. You can point at the things, but you can't point at relationships. They are literally hard to see" (10). Robert (2019) agrees saying, "the joy of friendship is so intimate and so personal that it is mostly invisible to history. It is hard to trace except through exceptionally frank personal letters and memoirs" (141). Yet, at the same time, the vulnerability and struggle of friendship is the setting for friends to "cocreate a new narrative of grace" (113). This is the story of Scripture; the struggle of relationship—of friendship—between God and humanity through which a continually surprising narrative of grace is expressed. Human relationships are important in and of themselves; not as merely a means to an end, but as valuable for what they are and the possibilities they provide.

Incarnation as a paradigm for 'faithful friendships' (Robert 2019) has profound implications, not just for mission as "going", but for discipling within the community of faith. "By your love" (John 13:35 NIV) profoundly includes the "other"—which is to say—those whom we know well and from whom much idealising has been stripped away, and those we do not know well and may still afford to idealise.

Research Methodology and Protocol

Drawing on the 'new world Kirkpatrick model' (Kirkpatrick 2016) as a guide for evaluating the intervention, I was especially interested in Level 4 (results and desired outcomes) and Level 3 (changed behaviours through on the job learning) indicators. Within the scope of this intervention, Level 4 indicators would include the formation of an incarnational and contextual Adventist missionary presence in Berkshire, England. Level 3 indicators might reflect through greater sensitivity and curiosity regarding perceived and experienced difference with others, particularly the wider British context, along with the ability to begin to read and apply Scripture with a more rounded, 3-dimensional approach. Level 4 relates to the extended aspirations of the intervention, Level 3 is about "getting to maybe" (Westley, Zimmerman, and Patton 2007, 46).

Level 2 (learning) outcomes would see participants engaged through broader knowledge gained, a deeper self-awareness built and greater confidence in the narrative of an immanent God. Desired outcomes at Level 1 (reaction) would see participants engaged in the conversation as the themes intersect with their lived experience of faith and mission.

Each conversation provided 90 minutes of interaction time. Engagement with concepts, assessment tools, and assigned activities outside of the meeting time was required but should not have absorbed more than an additional 90–120 minutes during the intervening days.

Level 1 and 2 outcomes were gauged through group interaction and participant comments. Conversation Six provided a sense of conclusions participants arrived at and whether they represented a shift in perception and understanding over the course of the conversations. Level 3 assessment of the intervention was conducted by means

of recorded individual interviews which provided the opportunity for me to press into any behavioural changes about missional curiosity. A representative percentage of participants were interviewed to ascertain the extent of Level 3 outcomes.

A national lockdown closed schools and prevented informal gatherings of people in the UK. This was reviewed on the 8th March 2021 but did not ease concerns regarding in-person gatherings. For the purposes of the intervention a small group for interaction and shared experience was believed to be important. The Zoom platform remains a helpful alternative to in-person gathering but has limitations, namely, the interplay of non-verbal interactions, the ability of the facilitator to manage environmental factors and along with reduced capacity to read the room and adjust.

Conclusion

The purpose of the intervention was to create the possibility for change within a complex contextual and relational dynamic. It was about the intentional creation of reflective opportunities where personal and collective narratives could be shared, explored, and potentially reframed so that a group of potential church planters were able to "get to maybe" (Westley, Zimmerman, and Patton 2007, 46). Given the inherent uncertainty in the complex dynamics of mission, faith, relationship and change, the intervention therefore, did not focus on 'certainty' as an outcome, but rather on 'possibility' (53).

CHAPTER 5

NARRATIVE OF THE INTERVENTION IMPLEMENTATION

Societal restrictions in the United Kingdom were imposed to mitigate the spread of infection during the COVID-19 pandemic and had a significant impact on the implementation of the intervention. Additionally, the intended implementation group withdrew from the process. The structure of the intervention continued as designed with some adjustments. A virtual platform, as opposed to in-person, became the mode of gathering and the invitation to engage with the Six Conversations was extended to a wider audience than originally envisioned. The online course was offered under the title, "Through a Glass Darkly: Face to Face with Ourselves, Others and the Story of God". The sections of this chapter—Impact of COVID, Narrative of the Six Conversations, Evaluation Methodology and Protocol, and Conclusions—outline my experience and that of participants over the duration of the "Through a Glass Darkly" mission course. Participant comment is drawn from seven online interviews conducted following the conclusion of the course.

Impact of COVID-19

The Adventist Church in Britain is still determining the breadth of the impact that COVID-19 on operations, on ministry, and on mission. The COVID-19 pandemic brought practical implications for the gathering of people with a UK limit of six persons permitted to gather in homes or as a group outdoors, lasting until the end of

summer 2021. These restrictions limited potential gathering options for teaching and scope for interaction which were the intended modes for the intervention.

Mode of Delivery

The Zoom platform was identified as a potential alternate delivery option for the intervention. Recognizing that Zoom cannot adequately replace face-to-face, 'in the room' interactions and that table fellowship would have to be set aside, there would be interpersonal dynamics that an online platform could not provide. Given the choice between further delaying the implementation of the intervention or proceeding by means of Zoom, the online option was preferred. While the full range of intended outcomes for the project could not be achieved via an online mode, there were nevertheless valuable opportunities to test and learn from this initial presentation opportunity, which included: (a) the opportunity to trial the prepared material as a resource, (b) to gauge participant interest in the subject matter, (c) assess engagement along passive/active learning opportunities, (d) ascertain the validity of an online offering of what would usually be a gathered, in-person experience, and (e) reassess the overall strategy and transformation dynamic with a view to redesigning the intervention for multiple platforms and experience opportunities in the future.

The online mode of delivery impacted negatively on overall participant engagement with the material. Additionally, rapport between the presenter and among participants was lower than anticipated. This reduced sense of interaction and connection was likely due to the following factors:

1. The number of participants meant that it was impossible to 'see' all connections on a single screen, thus some participants were less visible.

2. Inability to read sufficient body language of both presenter and participants meant greater reliance on facial expression and timbre of voice. Participants

on a Zoom platform may not be aware of the need for others to experience heightened voice and facial cues, possibly assuming that their contribution of presence is not significant in the virtual room.

3. Accountability to the group was diminished on the virtual platform as evidenced by the number of switched off cameras. Some participants expressed a dislike to being 'on camera' while it is possible that others expected their involvement to be limited to listening only. Some participants logged on and then did not monitor or remain with their connection. This was evident when break-out groups were assigned, and participants did not migrate to their assigned group. Unattended connections were again evident at the close of the session. The ability to navigate the Six Conversations as a shared experience and create the sense of a collective journey was thus meaningfully diminished.

4. Accountability to the presenter was diminished as evidenced through reduced participant preparation. Material was provided in advance of the weekly conversations and participants were invited to write personal reflective notes based on pre-prepared handouts distributed by email a week in advance. Two dialogue sessions were planned for each conversation session in which participants were placed in break-out rooms where their small group would engage the 'reThink, reFrame and reTell' questions posed in the weekly handout. Reflection required engagement with various sources including film, inventories, and passages of Scripture. Decreased accountability to the presenter was especially noticeable in the break-out groups where the questions being asked from the handouts had not been actively reflected upon or when participants had not engaged passively with film or other media

recommendations. Individuals in some groups did take the initiative to share, however this would have been improved by intentional guidance from additional designated facilitators.

5. Group conversations are difficult on the Zoom platform due to technical limitations for some participants, and the difficulty with audio clarity when people speak over one another. This factor alone made the presentations more presenter focused.

Advertisement of a defined session duration was important for the sake of boundaries and time commitments for participants. At least three sessions went past the advertised time—due in part to technical difficulties, group discussions, and participant questions—and this was problematic for some individuals. However, the digital platform was kept open after the close of each session allowing those who desired further interaction to remain online. This opportunity was almost always taken up by a handful of participants and provided meaningful in-depth discussion.

Wider Range of Participants

"Through a Glass Darkly" was envisioned as a framing process through which potential church planters in the South England Conference would engage with their own identity and mission assumptions while growing awareness of their wider community and its constituent groups. These aspects of our human stories would then be framed within the larger divine/incarnational narrative of Scripture.

Engaging potential church planters was advantageous for the project since some foundational formative thinking, and positioning would already be part of their experience. Church planters tend to be proactive in piloting the unsettling and destabilising aspects of missional dynamics, grappling with the experiential and worldview gaps between themselves and their context, while actively looking for

creative ways to navigate those spaces. The advantages of guiding a group that had already begun to adopt attitudinal changes in keeping with the level 4 outcomes of the project through a framing experience and on a relational journey were significant.

Ongoing conversations with a potential church planting group did not ultimately prove fruitful. Despite their desire to be instrumental in bringing a new worshipping community into being, they expressed concerns that this project was not suitable for their group. Reasons given ranged from it being too academic, along with fears that participating individuals would be evaluated in some way, while others felt that the framing process might take them backwards and not forwards towards their desired outcomes.

Advertising "Through a Glass Darkly" through digital networks meant that it was not possible to work only with potential church planters. Several very motivated and engaged individuals did register, attend, and complete the course (some of whom were willing to be interviewed about their experience). Working with disparate levels of participant motivation led the presenter to provide greater interrogation of the subject material while also requiring an increased level of framing to be provided for participants. These dynamics resulted in the expanding of presentation time and the diminishing of group discussion time. A less cohesive and invested group of participants who do not live or minister relationally with another also altered the level of commitment and motivation to the material and process. Simply put, less was at stake for the collective experience and participant outcomes.

The wider range of participants offered an opportunity to consider the relative value of collective and individual training experiences, particularly when considering new initiatives and framing for ministry direction. The participant dynamic also gave a sense of whether the framing provided was foundational enough for wider use and

to what extent any future presentations should account for bringing participants into a greater shared experience prior to any initial presentations. The offer of a wider invitation also brought increased diversity to the participant group. Joining the Six Conversations were individuals from the territory of the South England Conference, along with participants located in Scotland, Wales, USA, Hungary, and Croatia. The breadth of age demographic ranged from 16 to over 80's with an excellent range of ethnic identities being represented. These insights speak to the need for greater curation of participant perspectives, experiences, and expectations.

<div align="center">Broader Collaboration</div>

The change of participant group lead to an opportunity for collaboration with Dr Tihomir Lazić, Public Campus Ministries Director for the Trans-European Division, which allowed the presentation of the intervention to be shared within the South England Conference and Newbold Church as intended, while also giving it a wider reach. A promo video (https://powerupacademy.teachable.com/p/mission) was recorded and placed online with registrations taken via the Eventbrite platform. Despite the relative shortness of promotional time, "Through a Glass Darkly: Face to face with ourselves, others and the story of God" received 100 registrations with around 35 participants completing the course.

The reshaping required due to COVID, and the change of participants brought an adjustment to the focus of the intervention. While still holding the long-term view of new initiatives, the intervention sharpened it's focus on a more contextual, local, anthropologically conscious mission paradigm that seeks to explore and grapple with the interaction of God with 'self' and 'other' narratives as framed within the Gospel story. The Course Guide, Session Handouts, and PowerPoint presentations referenced

in this chapter are available in Appendices C and D. The names of participants have been changed in the interest of confidentiality.

Narrative of the Six Conversations

This section presents a reflection on the Conversation experience, noting session content and purpose in summary form, sharing participant observations that point to aspects of the presentations that worked well alongside those that did not work as expected. Where relevant, illustrative reference will be made to specifics from Conversation sessions. A more detailed description regarding the content of each Conversation may be found in Chapter 4, while Appendices C and D contain all the material used for the Six Conversation sessions.

Each session was framed within a 90-minute block of time and presented as an interactive Zoom gathering as opposed to a Webinar format with the hope of preserving an in-person, 'small group', conversational experience. The sessions were hosted by Dr Lazić under the PowerUp Academy banner and took place on Wednesday evenings beginning 7 July 2021, concluding 11 August 2021. Sessions were recorded and made available (https://powerupacademy.teachable.com/p/mission) for further use by participants. All handouts were made available on the same platform which has continued to receive registrations as a self-paced learning experience. At the time of writing there were 80+ individuals engaging the material in this way.

The Six Conversations were designed to take participants on a learning journey that provided opportunities to enhance self-awareness and self-knowledge in terms of personal and collective storied identities. With 'self' as the starting point— the lens through which all other stories are filtered and understood—the journey progressed to explore 'the Other', othering and otherness as part of the wider

relational and societal context, as a function of personal and collective identity, and as an integral aspect of the story of 'God' as narrated in the Scripture. The dynamic interaction of these three identity narratives was highlighted as being central to the storylines of Scripture and continues to find expression in contemporary mission experience.

<center>Self—7 July 2021</center>

The Conversations began with the question "Who Am I?", in part to engage participants self-awareness and, by extension, to begin drawing out aspects of their personal narratives using inventory tools and reflective questions. While increased self-awareness was a stated goal within the intervention, the objective was to help participants become aware of the lenses through which they view and understand their world and to facilitate the grappling with uncritiqued aspects of their worldview assumptions. While most individuals do not struggle to talk about themselves in common conversation, the level of self-reflection requested in the initial conversations drew mixed responses. It was anticipated that engaging in self-reflection would be challenging to some. Many are unused to greater depth to their self-reflection which can feel scary and destabilising. However, Angelina found this aspect very engaging saying, "I'm very interested in knowing myself, and self-awareness is something that I have done quite a bit on it, and I actually love it! As the very first thing, it sold me to the program."

John was quite philosophical about these aspects, sensing that it might be related to his phase of life, "I have done psychometric testing with the company [I worked for] and wrote in my MBA against using such tests… I learned very little [about my own story] because I am set in my ways and am at an age where my interests are not in trying to change the world."

Rob expressed that "the section about 'my story' definitely impacted me. It made me reflect on myself and the journey that I am. That I am on several different journeys at the same time. One of the points you made that really hit home was about changing how we tell our stories. You opened me up to thinking differently, but it all came back to me telling my story."

Those participants who were able to engage with the handouts and reflective work prior to the session on the 7 July 2021 tended to get the most out of this conversation—both from the group discussion opportunities, and from the presentation. Engaging the handouts, not merely as additional information, but as a form of both active and passive learning opportunities was a key factor for optimal participant engagement throughout the 'Through a Glass Darkly' series. The handouts and the various reflective questions, activities and media recommendations provided additional opportunities to engage the themes at a slower pace and with less of the pressure within the 90-minute session time allocation.

In his interview John mentioned that "the beginning was little bit strange because it wasn't a seminar—like Daniel and Revelation when you say. "Right, we're now doing chapter 1, 2, 3 or 4". It was something quite strange and interesting." Maria noted, "that in the first couple of sessions I found it quite difficult to engage with the language… I felt as though it was above my head even." It is probable that these obstacles might have been experienced by other participants perhaps prompting some participants to disengage. These comments also reflect elements of the disconnect that occurred when participants relied largely on the 90-minute presentation as the basis of their experience. Additionally, some of these early expectations and disconnects might have been more readily identified within a smaller group setting in which the relational basis for journeying through a process had

already begun to form. This raises some important questions regarding the experience of personal growth and transformation, e.g., How can we journey together when we do not open ourselves up to be known, or if we do not feel accountable to one another? What happens to potential change opportunities when we don't "show up" for the process? Do we understand the value of our presence and our personal story?

Other—14 July 2021

The second conversation focused on the 'Other', specifically those individuals and groups within local contexts that are identified to be outside of the Adventist group and indeed any group with whom the 'self' does not identify. Such groups and individuals are often seen as having physical characteristics, habits of life, worldview perspectives and theological positions that, at best, identify them as 'not us' or, at worst, allow us to label them as beyond our love, compassion, or relational engagement.

This session sought to assist participants to catch glimpses of when they might be relying on caricatures, stereotypes, prejudiced narratives and otherwise relying on 'othering' narratives. Dr Tom de Bruin highlighted the opportunity to augment the use of the term 'other' and its associated dynamics, in particular noting that in defining someone as 'other' we are also defining ourselves. The work of Zevallos (2011) was very helpful in unpacking these dynamics with reference to power differentials which serve as key elements of gender, race, sexuality, and religious identities. Reflective assignments and presentation material were augmented to include the discussion around power and the role it plays in contextually informing our individual identities and the collective narratives of which we are a part.

Having noted that several participants appeared to have struggled with understanding personal narrative and what it might sound like to tell their story along

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a dominant theme, I chose to use part of the presentation time of this session to share part of my personal story particularly as it related to the theme of 'otherness'. This short, written autobiographic piece was not part of the original intervention descriptor, but it drew a significant amount of resonance in the interviews. Ed expressed that "it all started with the actual personal story [of the presenter]. Understanding the different narratives and stages that you went through and then you go into a different grouping, and there you become the other, was quite insightful and it made me think, 'yes, that is how I think about people.'" John shared that, "your story was the best for me and has probably touched some point of my understanding. It was more than autobiographical." Angelina spoke of a similar sense of being moved by the sharing of my personal story, saying "it was very touching, and it challenged a lot of my preconceptions of what I think I see. It really did sink very deeply. I never thought I would listen to a story like yours because I (as a black woman) could resonate with the kind of issues you talked about."

Participants were also encouraged to view the film, "Not your Negro" (R. Peck 2017) which brought several strong participant perspectives to the fore. Gary noted that he was struck again by the way that a group of people with power can treat another. He said, "I found it chilling and it really disturbed me. I have had to go on a journey of my own to figure out how I can stop contributing to the problem and start becoming part of the solution." Maria also found the film difficult, choosing a more limited engagement through YouTube clips. She shared that she was "quite offended" at being asked to watch it. She explained, "Is Pastor Wayne wanting people to engage with this? Is he appealing to a European audience? Is he thinking about what that might mean for people of African-Caribbean heritage who've had the kind of experience of racism and how painful that might be?" Both perspectives highlight the

challenges for participants engaging dominant themes within personal and collective narratives, when it comes to those we view as 'other'—not us.

In session 1 the break-out groups did not operate as envisioned for two main reasons (a) participants had largely not engaged with the pre-session material and were not prepared to discuss and share their perspectives, and (b) there were no appointed facilitators for the break-out groups. Facilitators were sourced to assist with the break-out groups from session 2 onwards and were coached to focus on one or two key questions in each break-out session which significantly improved the overall experience for participants even if pre-session material was not engaged.

<div align="center">God—21 July 2021</div>

The third conversation was intended to challenge participants on their thoughts about God. The session handout recommended "The Shack" as a media resource to be engaged prior to the presentation and group discussions. Additionally, for the first time in the conversational journey, there were assigned Scriptures for reading and reflection. The motivation was not to have participants delve deeply into exegesis, but rather to begin hearing Scripture describe God differently while remaining mindful of the cross-cultural reading experience of Scripture (Richards and O'Brien 2012, 11). It was anticipated that this might be an area that many participants may find difficult as their assumptions, preconceptions, understandings, and perceptions about God might be challenged. The session did not disappoint in this regard.

To further explore reactions to ideas, representations, or pictures of God— whether held cognitively or observed physically—the presentation also drew on visual portrayals of Jesus that represent ethnic expressions (Copage 2020). In discussion groups there was significant interaction around these portrayals with one participant in the group I led expressing frustration that such portrayals were all inaccurate since

"Jesus was Jewish". This provided a meaningful teaching moment regarding default concepts and narratives that often go unchallenged and uncritiqued, in particular that the collective Christian narrative has not concerned itself with producing visual portrayals of Christ that reflect the 1st Century context. Historically, most artistic representations show Jesus as a white male, like those in the Western context that produced the artworks. The artworks and subsequent discussion provided rich opportunity to notice how our cultural perceptions and parameters define what Jesus should and shouldn't look like when imagined in our minds or presented on a canvas. Maria specifically mentioned the images of Jesus portrayed by people of varying backgrounds as being initially difficult, but "it still remains in my mind because it's not something that I would ordinarily have thought of. There is such richness in knowing and listening and hearing."

This session made a significant impact on Gail who shared, "I had always seen God the father as someone very distant, but [the film] portrayed God as someone that is an actual father figure and Jesus as the one that is more relational and the Holy Spirit as the peacemaker… that has really stuck with me and has changed my whole perspective on who God is and how he relates to me." Gail was referring to the "The Shack" in which God is portrayed as a motherly African American woman. While not directly connecting with the feminine interpretation of God 'the Father', Gail did connect with the portrayal of a nurturing parent.

Angelina experienced this conversation as coming alongside the work that God has been doing in her life in which God has been a "peeling the layers [of misconception] one by one getting [her] to see 'This is me [God]!'" The removing of layers is an apt description of the purpose of Conversation 3 which surfaced a range

of responses for participants as they began to intentionally handle their picture of God.

God and Self—28 July 2021

This conversation invited participants to dig deeper into their own personal narratives while also considering the collective narratives of which they are a part. For most participants, this would mean considering their individual faith journey alongside a denominational and organisational story. In addition to the media resources, 'A story of perseverance' (BUC News TV 2019) and 'Becoming European' (TED Adventist 2019), participants were also encouraged to complete a Spiritual Gifts Inventory (https://spiritual-gift.org) and to reflect on their personal faith journey by means of a fillable PDF reflection document (Appendix C).

The interviews did not raise any specific comment on these resources, though all interviewees were willing to speak about their relationship with God and did so in positive and enabling ways. Gail expressed her anxious childhood experience of anticipating punishment from God and her faith being fear based. However, she has found that prayer has become an ongoing dimension of her daily life. "It is constant now," she says, "from the time I get up in the morning until the time I go to bed at night there is a conversation [with God] going on in my head. It's certainly helping to process a lot of the emotions, feelings, and conclusions that I sometimes come up with." Prayer was also a key meaningful factor mentioned by Gary who expressed the desire to have been more intentionally taught the dynamics of prayer earlier on in his faith journey.

The sense of a shifting personal dynamic with God that extends beyond the intimacy of private prayer was shared by the remaining interviewees. John expressed being comfortable in 'mystery' with God, while Maria spoke of the nuance between

"always deeper not always changing." The shades of meaning between 'deeper' and 'changing' are in dynamic relationship with "how she is understanding and living out her faith." This was a very personal journey for Maria who shared that, "I am in a constant state of amazement at how God is and how he is teaching me personally to be reliant on him through lots of little things that probably won't make sense to others but to me these are huge things in my life." These little personal things were highlighted by Rob who is re-journeying faith, this time, with a friend. Commenting on his faith journey he spoke into the sense of "consciously watching for God's gifts to that we don't miss them. Too many days have already passed and when we see them, we say "there's our gift from God today!" Then that leads to discussions which are leading us deeper conversations about God and our beliefs. It's been wonderful!"

Ed and Angelina shared similar experiences in which they have a sense of transition and transformation in their faith journeys. For Ed, this means noting how things are less "black and white" for him but that there are "so many shades in 3D". This reflects a growing appreciation for the complexity of life and personal growth. Angelina speaks of her journey as a "re-storied experience with God that has given me new lenses to look at people and myself. That process of changing, of seeing God love me and accept me and work with me and getting rid of guilt and shame—erasing that—and embracing me I can almost visualise. It is like he just embraced me and let me cry for a long time in his arms and took that brokenness and said come out of the cocoon stage and come and fly!"

Each of the interview participants was able to engage with their faith journey and integrate aspects of the earlier presentations into their present understanding of how God is active in their lives. Individual location within the faith journey took priority in the interviews over a more collective journeying. I have found this to be

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encouraging evidence of their individual faith re-storying and meaning making process. With different circumstances, it would have been valuable for interviewees to tell their faith-journey stories in a manner that could be witnessed and affirmed within a small group. Such an experience might have augmented the sense of collective story and their participation as part of a larger whole.

<center>God and Other—4 August 2021</center>

As the conversations moved past the half-way mark and the summer drew on, several participants took summer breaks and online attendance began to settle around 35 participants. New participants had been discouraged from the second week (14 July 2021). However, changes in attendance meant that break-out groups would not necessarily see familiar faces and group sharing might remain at the surface level. A few participants were keeping up with the pre-session handouts, while others had fallen behind and were largely reliant on the presentations. As a result, group discussion time was impacted by the lack of pre-session work done by most participants and therefore the usefulness of the discussion time to get below superficial commentary. Consequently, break-out discussion slots were reduced from two to one in the later sessions.

Conversation 5 sought to help participants engage meaningfully with familiar passages of Scripture while attempting to provide an opportunity to be differently addressed by them. Emphasis was placed on the narratives of Zipporah (Num 12:1,2), Jonah, Ruth, Jesus in the Nazareth Synagogue (Luke 4:16–30) and Peter at Cornelius' house (Acts 15:25–29), although several additional narratives were recommended in the pre-session handout which would have increased awareness of God's engagement with those outside of the dominant narrative around Israel as God's people. Alongside the passages of Scripture, participants were invited to explore episodes of their

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choosing from Season 1 of 'The Chosen' (https://watch.angelstudios.com/thechosen) with the task to notice 'in/out' groups and any narratives, actions or dialogue that informs such groupings.

The stronger emphasis on Scripture in the later sessions appears to have resonated more strongly with several participants who may have been wary of perspectives from sociology, psychology, and the use of self-awareness language. Alongside the strong emphasis on narratives within Scripture suggestions from Dr Tom de Bruin were incorporated in the session, including inviting participants to try identifying with less usual characters in those narratives. By way of example, discussion questions drawing on the Ruth and Nazareth Synagogue narratives included: Where are you in this story? How often are you that character? What would it mean to hear the narrative from the perspective of the synagogue congregation? Imagine retelling the story of Ruth and Boaz today (e.g., Boaz the Israeli and Ruth the Palestinian). What other combinations might be challenging to modern hearers? Some helpful discussion took place in the session as participants heard familiar narratives told in ways in which present othering themes were gently challenged.

Gail found that her engagement with 'Through a Glass Darkly' has helped her to locate the 'Other' in God's story: "My concept of 'others' was always non-Christians, or people that as Adventist we feel we needed to convert, but in actual fact 'others' in the story are the people that I interact with no matter what walk of life they are from… and our interactions are something that we can both draw from, it's not a one-way street."

For some participants, their own experience of being 'othered' fed into this conversation very strongly. Several interviewees mentioned their heritage in terms of being 'Other', while also recognising that at times the heritage narrative may become

a means of keeping 'Other' individuals and groups at bay. Ed observed in his interview reflection that there are "a lot of others in my life and it has taken me a long time [to work through some things] even sexual orientation is a difficult subject—and it's contrary from where I'm coming from—but time has given me opportunities to learn to be more understanding towards groups that are easily discriminated against. Suddenly it hits you that there are so many groups and there are so many more levels than you actually thought." He continued, "just listening to people's stories through the course (Through a Glass Darkly) has helped me to be more cautious and aware of God's presence in what I am doing."

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The final session intended to draw the threads of the previous conversations together with a view to bringing a sense of resolution to the journey. A meaningful part of the anticipated resolution would be what Robert (2019) describes as "faithful friendships"—an incarnational relational posture modelled in the Divine hand of friendship extended to humankind and told through the narratives of Scripture. An expression of this 'hand of friendship' would have taken place over a shared meal in which intentional conversation starter cards would be used to surface the personal reflections, observations, shifts in thinking and variety of experiences of the previous five conversations while perhaps pointing to elements of cohesion around mission insights for a new worshipping and ministering community. The change of delivery method of the Intervention along with the change in participant group precluded this experience, resulting in Conversation 6 being redesigned.

The film "Of Gods and Men" was recommended as pre-session viewing along with a significant range of Scripture passages from Old and New Testaments. The film tells the true story of nine Cistercian monks living at the monastery of Tibhirine,

Algeria in late 1990's ministering among a predominantly Muslim population. Seven of the monks were kidnapped and assassinated in 1996 during the Algerian Civil War. Engagement with the film and with the Scripture passages was intended to expand thinking space around what it might mean to commit to a place and a people and to live incarnationally among them.

The use of 'incarnation' as a model for mission and ministry appears to have been an unexpected concept for several participants—one later referred to it as 'avant-garde'. Maria commented, "How do I meet the Lord in conjunction with people of these different backgrounds? How do I do that? Your course has started me thinking about that and it's quite a rich course with a rich set of material resources, including these films that I wouldn't necessarily have thought about, and these dialogues with people from all these different angles continues to challenge me." Ed spoke from a similar angle in which he found affirmation: "It was quite rewarding to see alignment with some of the things I have been thinking about but probably not having an opportunity to know that other people are thinking in that direction as well… I am willing to dive into the change a little bit more, I think I am willing to go out there." A minority of interviewees felt that it took too long to get to this section of the conversations, which they felt to be among the most insightful and 'fresh' for their experience. This is not entirely surprising given the emphasis and content of the final conversation. Additionally, one might also wish to consider whether these perspectives would be as impactful if it weren't for the prior journey. In this respect, destinations without journeys are simply places on a map.

Most interviewees had developed formative thoughts regarding their personal involvement in mission. For some this was a sense that God was nudging them toward greater openness toward 'Others' with a willingness to hear different stories. For

others (e.g., John) there was a sense that there was more to discover around the Holy Spirit and to be paying attention to that in his life journey, while for Gail there was nothing concrete presenting itself and she was choosing to remain expectant anticipation of God showing up to give direction. There was no cohesive sense that 'Through a Glass Darkly' had moved any of the interviewees toward the need for new worshipping or ministering communities which was a stated desired outcome of the journey. Varying geographic locations mitigated against collective lived outcomes. Nevertheless, all interviewees spoke positively of their experience indicating that they were viewing their local mission contributions differently.

Summary

My experience of the intervention was generally positive despite the change in mode of delivery and interaction, along with the sense of not being able to sufficiently manage the dynamics of the group size along or to sufficiently gauge the depth of interaction via online platform. It may be that I remained deeply located within the 'in-person' paradigm and despite significant work to make the online version available, the digital experience still felt like second prize. Nevertheless, the overall experience remained very meaningful for growing awareness of self and others and enlarging the reading of Scripture from the incarnational posture of an immanent God, thus meeting the general stated expectations for the intervention.

CHAPTER 6

PROJECT EVALUATION AND LEARNINGS

Summary of the Project

The project began with a strong sense of the disconnect between the Adventist

Church in the United Kingdom and its wider context, the reasons for which, I had

assumed, lay somewhere within the nexus of a diminished sense of the story of

Christianity in Britain, a misplaced nostalgia for an Adventist evangelistic heyday, the

scope and scale of social change within Britain over the past century, and the ethnic

tensions within the historic UK Adventist narrative. I am not the first to notice this

disconnect, nor is this project the first to attempt to address it.

While these dimensions are certainly part of the disconnected mission

landscape, a more challenging factor came into focus, namely, meaning narratives

centred around self, others, and God. These dynamics are not meaningfully addressed

by traditional programmatic methodologies, requiring instead more transformational

approaches that consider multiple access points and potential outcomes with a strong

theologically incarnational foundation. Transposition of theological information as

'input' into missional lived experience as 'output' is not necessarily correlative and

meaningful results are often not immediately observable nor measurable.

To coalesce meaning narratives within the multi-cultural/multi-ethnic

landscape of British Adventism and its wider context, a Six Conversation journey

experience was devised. Volunteer Adventist participants would explore their

individual and collective meaning and identity narratives, grow awareness and

understanding of other such narratives in their context, and engage these meaning/identity narratives considering a Scriptural perspective in which God consistently seeks ways to be among, and identify with, humankind. The Six Conversations were presented via Zoom over a six-week period in line with adaptations due to the COVID pandemic. This immersive journey was divided into two parts of three conversations. Participants were invited to consider their narratives around Self, Other, and God, before exploring the dynamic interplay between those narratives as framed by the missional lens (Fig. 1, page 91) in the second part. Weekly handouts contained recommended media, reading, and activities as part of the journeying experience as an opportunity for additional reflective work to take place prior to each weekly session to deepen the level of interaction and shared experience in the collective sessions (Appendix C). Within a month of the Six Conversations, seven voluntary participants were interviewed (Appendix E). Qualitative data from these interview reflections, along with my own notes and observations were included in the study.

Description of the Evaluation

What follows is a brief description of how data from the intervention (Chapter 5) was evaluated and interpreted. Resulting conclusions and observations are also included.

Evaluation Method

A qualitative approach to researching this project was adopted with individual interviews providing the primary data collection method. Individual one-hour Zoom based interviews were conducted with seven participants who volunteered to be part of the research dimension of the course. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed. 10 individuals indicated their willingness to participate in this way,

however three withdrew for personal reasons. There was a good range of demographic variance within the interview group: four males, three females, representing a mix of ethnic and language backgrounds and ranged in age from mid-forties to mid-seventies. All interviewees were asked the same set of questions, with minor variations depending on the extent of reflection. Observations made by interviewees provided qualitative data from which to observe areas of commonality and divergence within the Six Conversation experience, along with the opportunity to notice the meaning that each interviewee made around the experience, and aspects of their intersecting individual journey.

The Kirkpatrick model for training evaluation provided the foundation for interview questions. Within the model, Level 1 outcomes relate to the reaction of participants to the intervention itself—Were they engaged? Was it well received? What did they appreciate about the experience? Was it relevant to their ministry? Level 2 outcomes are concerned with the quality of participant learning that takes place relative to the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitude, confidence, and commitment. Level 3 outcomes (based on Levels 1 and 2) are focused on changed behaviour—the extent to which participants apply their training experience when they are outside of that environment. Level 4 outcomes focus on the results i.e., the extent to which the desired results occur as a consequence of the training program (Kirkpatrick 2016, 39, 42, 49, 60). Interviews sought to surface participant experience on the first three levels of evaluation with the fourth level falling beyond the scope of the intervention.

The Six Conversations were not intended to prove a hypothesis nor a method by which to achieve replicated results, nor should the observations and conclusions be generalised to make wider inferences. Rather, they were intended to explore four

suppositions located in a faith-based situation, namely (a) that participants should be appreciated for their agency and lived-experience, (b) that it may be possible to facilitate an environment in which the average church member might be guided to explore and possibly adjust the storied meanings of their individual, collective and God/faith narratives, (c) that individual transformational meaning making may be augmented by the collective co-creating and co-authoring experience, and (d) that these revised meanings may have a positive impact on mission approaches and practice in the UK.

<div align="center">Interpretation of Data (Chapter 5)</div>

Level 1 (reaction) outcomes were markedly evident through the interviews conducted. At this level, I was listening for phrases and statements that reflected the interviewees experience of the intervention. All seven interviewees expressed appreciation for the Six Conversations while emphasising varying portions that were personally meaningful. Several spoke of intersecting points with their faith journey that brought affirmation for some and challenge for others.

Meaningful Level 2 (learning) outcomes were evident as interviewees expressed their experience of knowledge and skill acquisition, the attitude of the intervention concepts being worthwhile in their mission and ministry, confidence that they would be able to practice the themes in their local context and a commitment to a lived experience that incorporates their learning in the Six Conversations.

It was anticipated that Level 3 (changed behaviours) would be evidenced through greater sensitivity and curiosity regarding perceived and experienced difference with others, along with participant ability to begin reading and applying Scripture from a broader perspective. Participants would start actively discerning the activity of God in their local context through such practices. The question, "what is

next on your missional journey?" was posed to each interviewee, with the expectation that it would assist me to discern whether the individual was "getting to maybe" (Westley, Zimmerman, and Patton 2007). Several interviewees spoke meaningfully about increased curiosity about 'the Other' in their day to day lives.

Level 4 (results) would indicate that targeted outcomes are evidencing themselves because of participant experience through the Six Conversations. Such outcomes might include the formation of an incarnational, contextual Adventist missionary community, but would also extend to participants living and ministering in ways that highlight and facilitate greater awareness of the Kingdom of God as something larger than denominational interest. At this point there are no visible or discernible Level 4 outcomes due, in part, to the nature of the online platform combined with participants who were not otherwise known to one another and who were geographically separated, but more importantly because such outcomes cannot be meaningfully measured two to four weeks after the Six Conversation experience.

Conclusions Drawn from the Data (Chapter 5)

The interview reflections indicate that the Six Conversations as an attempt at a collective, narrative-based, journeying experience did have perceived practical, paradigm-framing, and spiritual value for participants. Most participants desired to expand their engagement with mission in their local context and were already sensing that there were points of disconnect between their existing paradigms, programs, and approaches, and the wider community in which they were located. Key points of intersection and potential transformation centred around the following, (a) Personal Narrative—the power of story and of thoughtfully telling one's 'truth', (b) Collective listening—media assignments, breakout sessions, wider conversations, in which dialogue becomes a path to dispelling unhelpful narratives (c) Narrative themes in

Scripture—in which familiar stories were engaged from less familiar perspectives, and, (d) Incarnation—as a model for mission and ministry and as a transformational, communal and collectivist mode of being.

Personal Narrative

I was surprised by the impact and value that quickly surfaced in the sharing of my personal story. Interviews revealed that there was strong resonance with themes within my personal story, with four out of seven interviewees specifically mentioning it as something powerful for them. Since our stories are located in various geographies (Pearson 2018) a significant dimension of personal narrative is rootedness and awareness of context as shaping and forming factors.

Collective Listening

Robert (2019) and Westly, Zimmerman, and Patton (2007) press into the invisible, but critical dimension of faithful friendship generally, which has critical dimensions in cross-cultural connections. The growing of personal self-awareness is a dynamic experience with potential to enhance our lived experience and inform our human relationships, particularly as we listen to narratives that contrast with our own. A key aspect of the Six Conversations enlargement of space and opportunity for participants to have such an experience. This worked well, as evidenced by the interactions in which participants became unsettled e.g., pictures of Jesus, James Baldwin, Cultural Intelligence, to name a few. Discomfort naturally occurs when hearing alternate stories and is an important aspect of expanding self-awareness and is thus integral to the session modus-operandi. Time taken to explore identity narratives, bias and categorisation was especially useful in unsettling and challenging uncritiqued participant narratives.

Narrative Themes in Scripture

Presentation of Scripture from varying perspectives and with an emphasis on cross-cultural awareness (Richards and O'Brien 2012) proved to be engaging for participants. This is not entirely surprising since Adventists place a high value on Scripture and are generally interested in additional insights. Giving participants the opportunity to explore familiar Scripture narratives from the viewpoint of less familiar characters and perspectives helped to bring both freshness to the well-known and insight into the presence of uncritiqued narratives when reading the Bible. It also brought some discomfort, and I sensed that not all participants were at ease during some of the sessions. Understandably it is difficult to hear narratives in which one has always identified with the oppressed as speaking directly to the ways in which one may hold and exert privilege and power. As not all participants were willing to be interviewed, I was unable to explore this aspect more fully.

Incarnation

Incarnation as a lens to view mission engagement resonated in ways that some participants had not heard before. Several sensed that this was the point to which the Six Conversations were driving and expressed the desire that speedier progress had been made toward this goal. Not only does it provide impetus for taking human contexts more seriously (Bevans 2002, Hiebert 2009, Kraft 2013);it also provided participants with an alternative paradigm through which to understand the heart of God for humanity. There appears to be a desire to explore such conversations given the online take up, continued recorded course engagement, and requests for a shorter presentation of the Six Conversations.

Outcomes of the Intervention

While the qualitative data does not seek to objectively measure the results of the intervention, the insights gained from this study suggest, (a) value in and appetite for the general approach as evidenced by the initial take-up (100 registrations) and the additional registrants for the initial self-paced online version (https://powerupacademy.teachable.com/p/mission), (b) the desire from a diverse church membership for the journeying experience, and (c) that there should be further, more intentional development of the intervention for a hybrid digital/in-person experience to facilitate the maturing and expansion of the concepts. Continued evaluation could incorporate the use of a short focused online questionnaire based on the Kirkpatrick model, while taking advantage of additional pedagogical tools e.g., Blooms taxonomy. Thus, an initial outcome of this intervention is affirmation that the intervention has found touch points within the Adventist community in the UK.

A second outcome of this intervention has been the invitation for me to teach a version of my project at Newbold College as part of the Postgraduate Certificate in Ministry and Mission, under the title, "Engaging Contemporary European Culture". This class will form part of the expanded emphasis on practical theology for the next five years at the College.

Summary of Other Conclusions

In addition to conclusions drawn from the intervention data (Chapter 5), brief summaries of the theological, theoretical, and methodological conclusions reached in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 are provided.

Theological Conclusions (Chapter 2)

Since narrative is the primary mode of revelation in Scripture and is God's chosen means of interaction with humanity Chapter 2 undertook a brief study of

Divine/human interaction in Old and New Testaments. I concluded that these interactions are characterised by revelatory, relational, and restorative qualities that reveal the Divine intent and desire for humanity in which God consistently accommodates himself to the human context. This intent and desire found seminal and continued expression through the creation narrative, patriarchal era, Exodus experience and the building of the desert tabernacle culminating in the Incarnation of Christ as the deepest and strongest expression of God to be with humanity, of radical embrace and of profound accommodation. I further concluded that there are indications that God invites disciples to model this approach in the world and through the sharing of the Gospel story. As modelled by Christ and Paul, we seek to work respectfully within time and contexts without being unnecessarily bound by them. The modern missionary cannot afford to ignore context, nor to diminish the human narratives and meanings that exist in any given place. Context must be taken as seriously as the Gospel which envisions a culmination in which the variety and diversity of humanity once more finds itself at home with God.

<center>Theoretical Conclusions (Chapter 3)</center>

The literature review was prefaced by a contextual survey of Christian and Adventist faith in the United Kingdom which concluded that the UK context is witness to the steady collapse of Christendom and a return to a kind of pre-Christian era and that Adventism in the UK is losing touch with the majority people group, but more specifically unable to speak to contemporary worldviews. It followed that a review of literature related to the presuppositions, concepts and practice of contextualisation and worldview was undertaken with a view to navigating the multicultural/multi-ethnic dynamics of the SEC and its wider context. I concluded that to speak significantly to the contemporary UK context there needs to be greater

appreciation for meaning narratives and the extent to which individuals and groups locate identity and meaning withing uncritiqued narrative assumptions. We are often oblivious to our worldview underpinnings and assume our conclusions to be self-evident, particularly as Adventists engage from a perspective of faith. It is difficult to listen carefully and well as part of our mission interactions when a position of cultural and spiritual superiority is assumed and uncritiqued. Thus, the need for the means to surface these assumptions in a guided and accessible way became apparent.

Methodological Conclusions (Chapter 4)

My theological study and literature review brought me to the conclusion that a process was needed to assist Adventist church members to consider their individual and collective identity narratives, along with the numerous caricatures and stereotypes that are held regarding other groups in the British context. Since a ready-made process did not readily present through research, I devised to the Missional Lens (Fig. 1, page 91) and the Six Conversations to test the assumptions and concepts drawn from these foundational chapters. Finally, I concluded that a qualitative approach to the research would best suit the intervention which was designed to explore identity and meaning narratives around Self, Other and God, by means of knowledge presentation, participant led discovery and guided discussions. While intended and written as an in-person, small group experience, the COVID pandemic significantly altered the modes of the intervention along with my ability to evaluate the methodology as intended.

Personal Transformation

Observations regarding the intervention cannot be fully considered without some reflection on its role and function in my personal and professional life. My post-graduate work has been in the field of practical theology. I am interested in the question, "How does it live?" This project gifted me the opportunity to press into that

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question in a way that pastoral ministry, ironically, sometimes obscures. I have been challenged in my writing to notice where my theological positions have not been grace-filled or I have lacked nuance where it was greatly needed. In these instances, aspects of my theology were not living well, and I appreciate those who have challenged me in this way. A key theological perspective that has surfaced and grown through this course of study is that while God is always at work within our personal and collective narratives, God is always bigger than our stories. We have frames— worldview, cultural, ethnic, gender—through which we view God, but they cannot be ultimately definitive.

My ability to be adaptive and work within new paradigms was challenged by the shift to the online platform (Zoom). I was not adept at this medium and had several areas of discomfort, not least of which was the loss of the personal interactive element. I continue to value the in-person, relational dynamic for its ability to draw on multiple levels of connection present in a physical space that can be managed to minimise distraction and optimise connection, nevertheless being pressed into adaptation has been a growing experience for me.

Questions and challenges posed by participants allowed me to interrogate some of my own assumptions regarding my identity where I may still be quite rooted in a 'white male' perspective. Some of the inventory tools I used may be biased toward helping white individuals consider their cultural intelligence (CQ) and thus be less helpful in multicultural groups. There was some criticism over the James Baldwin film—at least one respondent was offended by it—and I would need additional conversations to explore my own bias in selecting the film with persons who could meaningfully critique my thinking.

Finally, I have developed greater confidence in the value of my ideas and my ability to articulate them in different contexts. Though the thoughts themselves may not be original, I believe I have found a means of converging them in a way that says something fresh to Adventism in the UK.

Recommendations

Several recommendations for further action and extended research have surfaced from this limited intervention and research project:

General Recommendations

1. Narrative as a means of understanding ourselves, others, and God is an underdeveloped framework within Adventism which exerts a strong preference for propositional, supra-cultural, positions within an overarching meta-narrative. I would recommend the teaching of narrative approaches to meaning making at MA level for seminary students, including teaching skills in cultural exegesis alongside that of scriptural exegesis.

2. All interviewees described the sessions as content rich and dense with the pre-session handouts offering deep reflection opportunities. All sensed that they were unable to manage the pace of the course and thus were not able to mine all its value. Adaptations for future use might require more compact presentations over a longer period to allow for valuable reflective work and learning activity to take place.

3. The uptake for "Through a Glass Darkly" indicates an appetite for a fresh approach to mission in the UK. In-person journeying opportunities have financial and geographic limitations while offering the strong advantage of dynamic interaction. I recommend furthering plans to reformat the intervention using current online pedagogical methods and models, breaking the conversations down into smaller components, re-record relevant portions more professionally, and relaunch the course

in online and hybrid forms.

4. Greater awareness of the contextual backdrops of Scripture and their role in framing and shaping those narratives through a hybrid option that includes on location learning opportunities for members, students, and colleagues.

5. Regardless of the mode of delivery, any future use of the Six Conversations will require additional effort to increase the level of participant accountability which may include greater awareness of the nature of the course they have signed up for.

6. The value and impact of personal story was an underdeveloped dimension of lived faith for most interviewees, and the locus of many blind spots in mission/evangelism expectations. Coaching participants in the writing and witnessing of one another's personal stories would be something to expand in the future development of the intervention.

7. I recommend that context awareness be improved in Adventist UK congregations through on location learning that explores the faith history of the British Isles and sketching the current faith landscape while assisting church members to identify the touch points with their lived experience. I plan to continue offering such opportunities on an annual basis.

8. It is often easier to focus on action points—method and training—over transformation which is key to what the Church is about. In particular, the core Gospel message describes transformed relationships among human beings and with God. I recommend greater emphasis be given to the dynamics of transformation as fundamental to current outreach and evangelistic approaches in the UK.

Recommendations to Pastors

9. By leaning into the "inbetweener" or bridge builder metaphor of Hiebert (2009, 179) local Pastors might implement aspects of this approach. Greater

rootedness in the communities surrounding Adventist Church buildings and hired places of worship along with intentional connections with local civic and community leaders on social and strategic issues holds the potential for collaboration and faithful friendship. If a teachable posture is adopted, Adventist Pastors might find that through showing up well in the wider community, their own cultural and worldview assumptions may be meaningfully challenged. This could hold potential for increased local awareness, and a rooted lived wisdom to their pastoral ministries.

10. Appreciation for mission as wider than Bible Studies and traditional evangelistic campaigns—though it includes these important aspects—might be expanded through exposure to wider resources. Pastoral Book Clubs, or Film Clubs might provide helpful opportunities to dialogue among colleagues and to deepen appreciation for narratives and perspectives with difference.

11. Encourage inductive methods for reading scripture within a journeying paradigm. Discipleship is a marathon, not a sprint. Deconstructing and rebuilding worldview assumptions and challenging cultural narratives is a matter of the heart and therefore a one of spiritual concern for faith leaders. See also recommendation #8.

Recommendations to Conference and Union Leaders

12. If recommendation #9 were taken on board BUC and SEC Administrative levels, this might provide additional impetus and modeled missional leadership from which to encourage, mentor and direct the broader mission work.

13. When considering the strategic pathway for Adventist mission and ministry within the BUC and its subsidiary entities, including the SEC, attention should be given to reliable data as a lens for the observation of both membership and organisational trends, and a tool by which to anticipate potential shifts in the local and national contexts. Greater understanding of contextual landscape through use of think-

tanks, focus groups, and reliable research surveys that intentionally include internal and external perspectives would greatly benefit and nuance strategic thinking and planning.

14. SEC and BUC Leaders may wish to take the Newbold Class "Engaging Contemporary European Culture" as a Continued Education Unit.

15. The "Through a Glass Darkly" course could be made a pre-requisite for any new initiative whether directly under Conference management (Plants) or local Church guidance (Groups).

16. Additionally, viewing all pastoral work in the UK within a missionary frame might shift expectations and requirements for new hires and influence pastoral placement decisions. A structured approach to equipping existing employees to function as leaders of missionary outposts would help to raise awareness and build capacity to navigate the nuances of worldview and cultural assumptions and presuppositions.

17. To support recommendation #14, I would suggest working with established congregations within streams i.e., Traditional Adventist, Contemporary Adventist, Language and Ethnic specific, while creating and intentional, supervised, and resourced Research and Development (R&D) arm. This R&D arm would need to operate parallel to the existing structures and it would take creative administrative minds to work out the details. It may also need to operate a national level with support from the regional Adventist subsidiaries.

Recommendations to Local Churches

18. Local strategy may be re-framed with the congregation as a mission outpost that not only (a) proclaims the Gospel, (d) instructs, baptizes, equips and nurtures new believers, and (c) responds to the world around them through acts of loving service,

but very intentionally also seeks to (d) transform unjust systemic and institutional structures through the ardent pursuit of peace and reconciliation and the rejection of all forms of violence as being antithetical to the Gospel, and (e) to live within the world as people of integrity who understand our duty to care for the earth and all its inhabitants (Hardy and Yarnell 2018, 221). The potential for co-creating new narratives with a wider community in this way is exciting! Particularly when the co-creating process brings the Gospel to new conversation partners.

19. Actively encourage the nuanced and reflected telling of personal and collective narratives as a function of communal worship and practice. Holding and preserving sacred space for storytelling might potentially provoke the surfacing of worldview and cultural assumptions.

20. Regularly seek to arrange opportunities for worship and social occasions with congregations who are different in some way (e.g., language, ethnic concentration, worship style) as a constructive step to walking out reconciliation and peace within the body of faith.

Final Observations

While I do not view the intervention as 'avant-garde', it is a phrase used by a participant when describing the course in a WhatsApp group. Perhaps there are aspects of the Six Conversations that feel new and experimental within a traditional Adventist mission mindset. Among these dynamics might be the emphasis on incarnation as a frame for noticing and nurturing the possibility for change in human relationships and our wider societal contexts in which personal and collective stories are given more value as a functions of belief systems and theological narratives. In this context, being willing to reconsider traditionally supra-cultural aspects of a collective identity narrative feels avant-garde. Perhaps it represents permission to ask

different questions and explore other solutions that offers a sense of being new and experimental to a stagnating experience.

I am struck again by the aptness of Baker's (2020) description for mission in contemporary Western civilisation: "Maps can be deceiving here. The confident black dashes, stretching out across the grid squares indicating a track, feel fictional at times. Instead, a route must be felt through the landscape, tracing the idea, rather than the certainty of the path" (35). The intersection between the intervention and Baker's descriptive metaphor leads me to conclude that a meaningful UK mission paradigm should position the membership in approaches that are, (a)Wholistic—taking the whole person and their context(s) seriously, (b) Participatory—in which truth is located in shared discovery more than through propositional assertion, (c) Communal—so that diversity can be emphasised as integral to a common journey and where guided dialogue provides a path to dispelling unhelpful narratives, and (d) Narrative—the means by which we make meaning, build coherence and establish plausibility structures.

APPENDIX A

RESEARCH APPROVAL AND CONSENT

March 30, 2021

Wayne Erasmus
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RE: APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS
IRB Protocol #:21-038 **Application Type:** Original **Dept.:** Doctor of Ministry
Review Category: Exempt **Action Taken**: Approved **Advisor:** David Penno
Title: Six conversations toward incarnational mission and ministry in the South England
Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Your IRB application for approval of research involving human subjects entitled: "*Six conversations toward incarnational mission and ministry in the South England Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*" IRB protocol # 21-038 has been evaluated and determined Exempt from IRB review under regulation CFR 46.104 (2)(i): Research involving online virtual data collection procedures including audio or video recording in which information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subject. You may now proceed with your research.
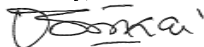
Please note that any future changes made to the study design and/or informed consent form require prior approval from the IRB before such changes can be implemented. Incase you need to make changes please use the attached report form.

While there appears to be no more than minimum risks with your study, should an incidence occur that results in a research-related adverse reaction and/or physical injury, this must be reported immediately in writing to the IRB. Any research-related physical injury must also be reported immediately to the University Physician, Dr. Katherine, by calling (269) 473-2222.

We ask that you reference the protocol number in any future correspondence regarding this study for easy retrieval of information.

Best wishes in your research.

Sincerely,

Mordekai Ongo, PhD.
Research Integrity and Compliance Officer

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary
Informed Consent Form

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Title of research project: Six Conversations toward Incarnational Mission and Ministry in the South England Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Introduction:
I am Wayne Erasmus, currently the Church Growth and Advent Mission Director for the South England Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in the British Union Conference. I am collaborating with PowerUP (Trans-European Divison) Campus Ministry to provide a platform from which fresh and refreshed ministering and worshipping communities might emerge. Since you have expressed interest in engaging around the theme of mission, I would like to invite you to join this research study. The research will span the months of July and August 2021. UK Government restrictions may apply and accommodations to the nature of meeting (Zoom/In person) may be required.

Background information:
Mission work within the South England Conference has shifted over time to focus on new immigrant groups. While the Church continues to grow among recent migrant communities, membership data suggests a stagnation and decline among indigenous and indigenised population groups with post-modern/meta-modern worldviews. Traditional concepts of evangelism reliant on propositional truths find less resonance with such groups and often serve to reinforce unhelpful perceptions of Christianity and of persons of faith. As a result Christianity, and Adventism in particular, runs the risk of losing meaningful connection with the broader British context.

Purpose of this research study:
The purpose of this project is to develop, implement, and evaluate an intentional and contextual model for impacting indigenous/indigenised population groups (many of whom reflect a postmodern/metamodern mindset) within the territory of the South England Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This model will ultimately need to be trialled by potential church planters, in order to test for signs of effectiveness.

Procedures:
The project moves through six group conversations of approximately 90 minutes each. Each conversation is focused on a particular dynamic of the missional lens and is intended to open up space to reflect meaningfully on each dynamic. The conversations are styled to be somewhat informal, with both presentation and collaborative elements playing a role. Individual interviews will be conducted after the conclusion of the six-conversation journey and will be led by the principal investigator.

Possible risks or benefits:

There is no overt risk involved in this study. There is also no direct benefit to you. It is possible that the conversations may engage themes that evoke a sense of vulnerability for some participants. The results of the study may help to form a platform from which to engage incarnational and contextual mission in the UK, while also assisting and informing the preparation pathways for future UK based Church Planters.

Right of refusal to participate and withdrawal:

Participants are sought on a voluntary basis and are free to disengage at any point in the process, however, it should be noted that disengagement may have an effect on the conversational dynamics. It may be difficult for new participants to join part way through the journey which is somewhat predicated on a collective experience and a journeying process. You may also withdraw any time from the study without any penalty or any loss of benefit to which you are otherwise entitled if you had completed your participation in the research.

Confidentiality:

The information provided by you through interview will remain confidential. No one except the principal investigator (Wayne Erasmus) will have access to it. Your name and identity will also not be disclosed at any time. However, the data may be seen by an ethical review committee and will eventually be published in a Doctor of Ministry thesis and possibly elsewhere, but without ever giving your name or disclosing your identity. Please note that one of the course experiences will include participation in a final audio recorded conversation within a group setting. Audio recording will also extend to simple oral interviews (individual) which will be transcribed.

Available Sources of Information:

If you have further questions about the research or your rights as a participant or if would like to receive the results of this study once it is completed, you may contact principal investigator (Wayne Erasmus) through the South England Conference, 01923 656518 ext. 518 or by mobile phone 07521391487 or email werasmus@secadventist.org.uk. The research project advisor (David Penno) is also available to answer any questions you might have and can be best reached via email: penno@andrews.edu . You may also contact the Institutional Review Board at Andrews University about this study (irb@andrews.edu).

AUTHORIZATION

I am aged 18+ and have read and understood this consent form. I volunteer to participate in this research study and understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate, but I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable legal obligations.

Participant's Name (printed): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Principal Investigator's Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC STUDY

Demographic Study: South England Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

Author: Wayne Erasmus

I.   **SOUTH ENGLAND CONFERENCE**

Legally constituted as a UK Charity on 4th April 1995, the South England Conference of Seventh-day Adventists lies within the territory of the British Union Conference and operates from its historic location of 25 St John's Road, Watford, WD17 1PZ ('Charity Framework' n.d.). Within the British Union Conference the South England Conference is accepted to be the largest organisational entity in terms of geography, membership and financial resource. With the exception of geography, the South England Conference is also currently the largest entity within the Trans-European Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

With regard to territory, the South England Conference covers the following counties of southern England: Bedfordshire; Berkshire; Buckinghamshire; Cambridgeshire; Cornwall; Devon; Dorset; East Sussex; Essex; Gloucestershire; Greater London (32 Boroughs & City of London); Hampshire; Isle of Wight; Kent; Oxfordshire; Somerset; Suffolk; Surrey; Norfolk; West Sussex and Wiltshire. These counties largely correspond to the regions known as: East, South East, South West and London.

At the time of writing, the South England Conference is constituted by 160 organised churches, 61 companies and 48 Church Plants and Groups including Simple Churches (McCormac 2019). More congregations worship in hired buildings than in properties owned by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Many congregations feel that this severely limits their ability to run programmes and to intersect with the wider community. This is one of our challenges as we seek to move our members toward more missional thinking and away from attractional models.

Official membership stands at 25,696 while our attendance data gathered by counts done on the 2nd and 7th Sabbaths of the Quarter suggest that we are seeing closer to 16000 on a regular basis.

Institutions associated with the South England Conference include Newbold Primary School (located in Binfield, Berkshire), Hyland House Primary School (located in London), Fletewood Primary School (located in Plymouth, Devon) and the Advent Centre (located in Central London).

I came to the role of Church Growth and Adventist Mission Director in November 2017 as a mid-term appointment. I was elected to the role at the Constituency Session, September 2019 for a four-year term.

II.   **History.**

When John Loughborough began to work in the British Isles following a vote taken at the 1878 General Conference, he located the headquarters of the British Mission in Ravenswood, a substantial house in the city of Southampton (Leonard 1992). The use of the term British Mission continued for several decades as an Adventist presence began to take shape and a pastoral workforce was educated and equipped.

At a camp-meeting in Leeds during August 1902, President of the General Conference A. G. Daniels chaired the reorganising of the British Mission into the British Union Conference (Dunton 1992). While the name has persevered, the structure itself underwent numerous revisions and divisions into smaller administrative units that did little for stability and much to tie workers to desks (Dunton 1992). With the acquisition of Stanborough Park in 1907 the British Union Conference moved to centralise its administrative work and institutions on the site. While the various institutions have either closed their doors or relocated elsewhere,

the British Union Conference still operates from the Stanborough Park property on St Albans Road, Watford.

In 1919 the British Union Conference had divided the work into three smaller administrative entities: The North British Conference (including Scotland); the South British Conference; and the Welsh Midland Conference. A further reorganising came in 1922 with Scotland and Wales becoming Conference and new North England Conference annexing the Midlands, but this was short-lived. In 1924 Scotland re-joined the North England Conference, while Ireland and Wales became attached to the South England Conference and forming the South British Conference, and arrangement that continued until 1928 when further reorganising brought us the structure more-or-less as we have today: South England Conference, North England Conference, and the three Celtic missions, Ireland, Scotland and Wales (Porter 1992).

III. Internal statistics and trends

Membership of the South England Conference currently stands at 25,696 (McCormac 2019). There has been significant growth over the past decade (Figure 1) showing an increase of around seven thousand in the Conference membership.   A more detailed look at how that growth occurred can be seen in Figure 2. It should be noted that while baptisms still account for the major part of the membership growth, the transfer rate has remained quite consistent as migration factors bring Adventists from elsewhere to our Conference territory.
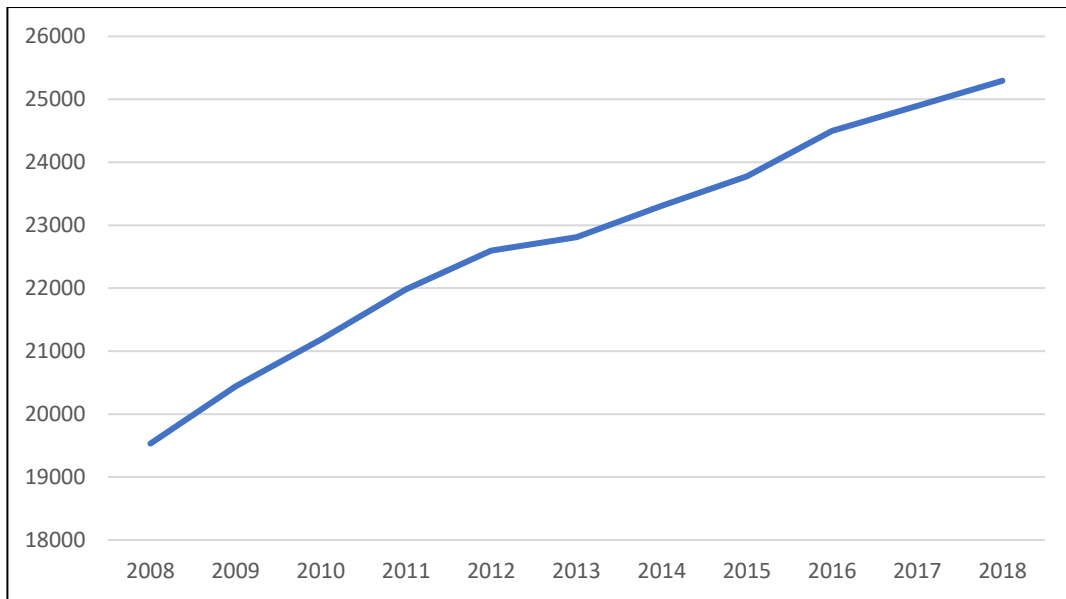
Figure 1. South England Conference membership 2008–2018. Data provided by D. McCormac, SEC Executive Secretary (September 2019).
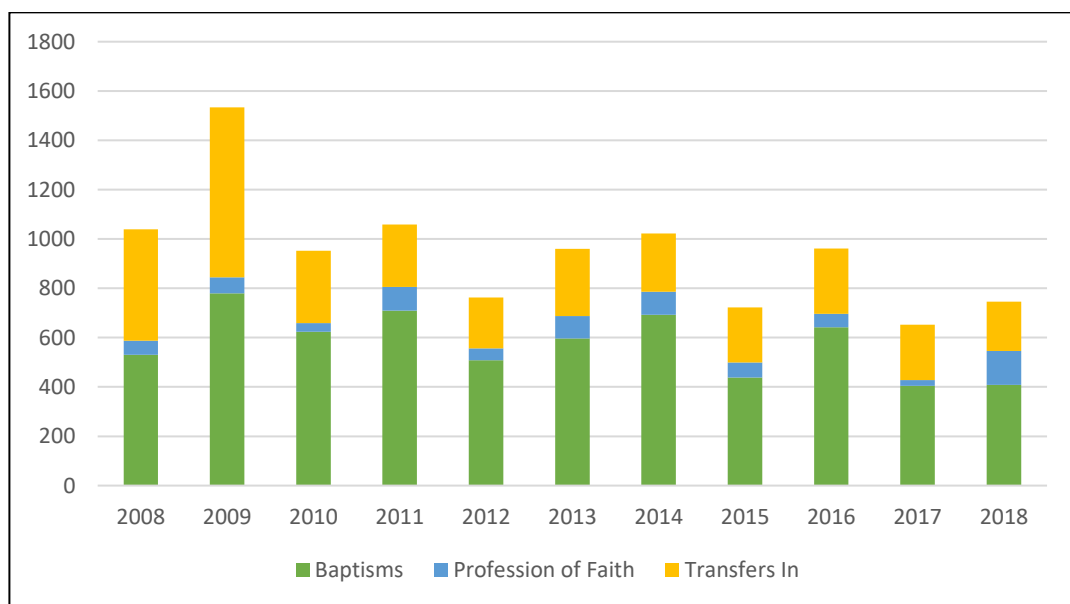
Figure 2. South England Conference membership accessions 2008–2018. Data provided by D. McCormac, SEC Executive Secretary (September 2019).

Of course, membership statistics should also reflect data on the various losses as part of the wider picture. Accuracy of data in this regard remains challenging due to unintended organisational incentives to keep local church memberships at high levels. These include, but are not limited to, (a) size of church membership is linked to status; and (b) delegates to constituency meetings are linked to local membership statistics. It should be noted that in the years 2013 and 2014 significant work was

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done to try and bring greater accuracy to our membership records both at the
Conference and local levels. This work reflects in Figure 4 as a downward spike in
membership but should not be taken to suggest that there was no significant
evangelistic work done in these years. The years 2013 and 2014 are also among our
highest baptismal reports in the period 2008–2018.
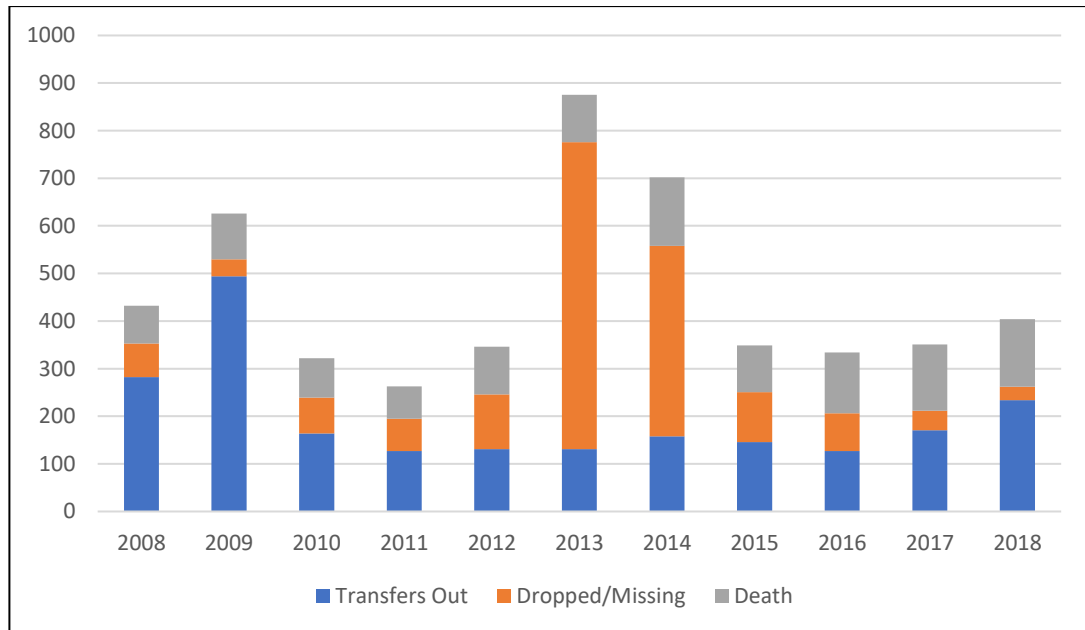
Figure 3. South England Conference membership losses 2008–2018. Data provided
by D. McCormac, SEC Executive Secretary (September 2019).
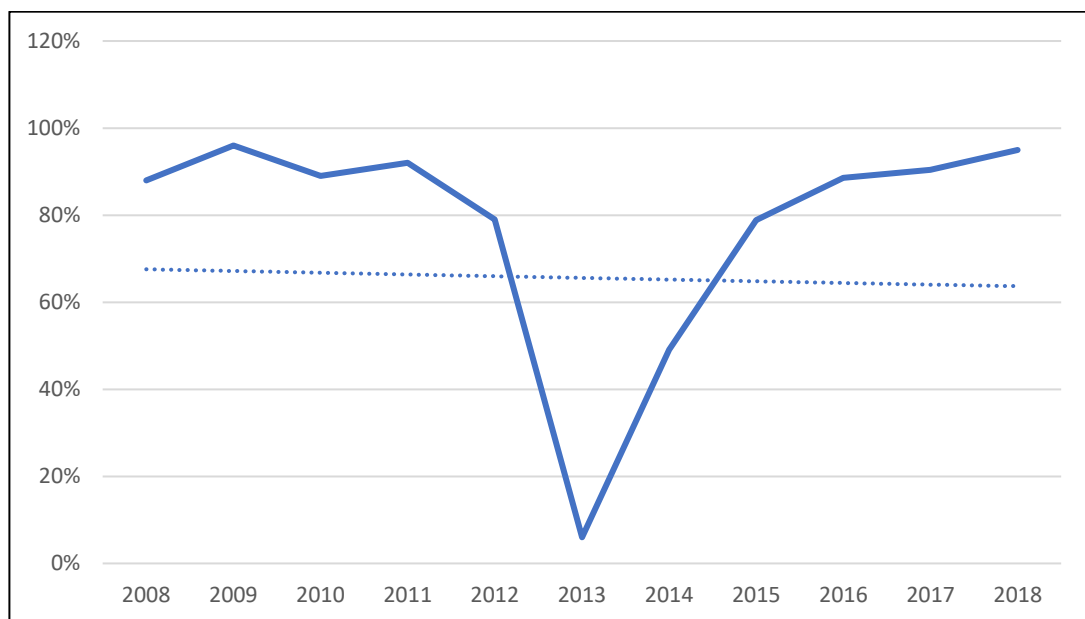
Figure 4. South England Conference membership retention 2008–2018. Data provided
by D. McCormac, SEC Executive Secretary (September 2019).
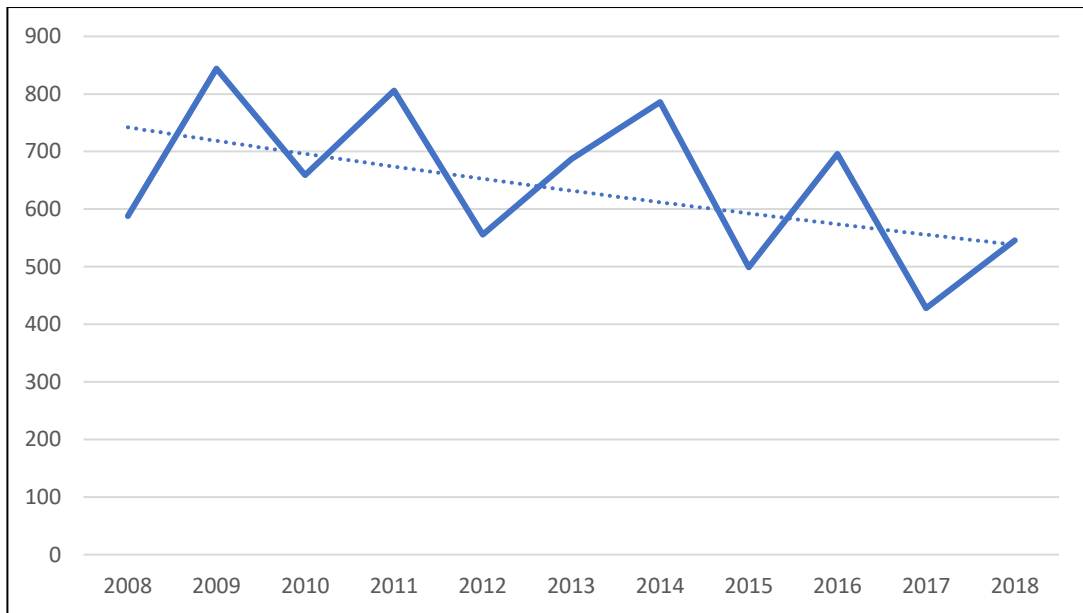
Figure 5. South England Conference membership accession trend 2008–2018. Data provided by D. McCormac, SEC Executive Secretary (September 2019).

Despite the good work being done, there remains a general trend toward lower accessions within the South England Conference (Figure 5). We understand this to be a combination of several factors: (a) slowing of migration from European Countries due to Brexit uncertainty (transfer growth); (b) fewer baptisms per annum due to change within our usual growth groups ("secularisation"); and (c) the contextual challenges for wider evangelism in a post-Christian society.

IV. Ministry overview

While it is difficult to estimate the number of members and community volunteers who are active within the Conference, there is a wide variety of programmes and activities that are engaged across our territory. Through teaching, preaching and various seminars and training weekends we seek to inspire greater health and dynamism within our faith communities as a springboard to greater blessing within the wider neighbourhoods that our members are a part of.

With this in mind, we invest by offering: (a) regular training opportunities and coaching for local church pastors and congregations in community engagement; (b) sacred and safe spaces for personal prayer and contemplation; (c) pastoral care for people living in the community including visitation of the sick and the bereaved; (d) opportunities to learn about Christian faith through sermons, courses and small groups; (e) religious assemblies in schools; (f) various clubs that operate from the local church building with a Christian ethos for such groups as teens, youth, senior citizens, parents and toddlers, single mums, the homeless and many other need-specific groups; (g) a wide variety of other activities have been encouraged and organised through the local churches including keep fit classes, stop smoking courses, stress management, healthy life style, cooking on a budget and positive parenting.

V. Community context

The South England Conference covers a significant geographical area that includes three of the major urban areas in the United Kingdom, namely, London, Southampton/Portsmouth and Bristol (Citymetric Staff 2015). The East and South West regions are less densely populated than the South East and London. It is in these regions that we find more of our smaller congregations. Outside of London, there are significantly more congregations with fewer than one hundred members (McCormac 2019).

The South England Conference is divided into smaller units internally termed "Areas". There are nine Areas, with London (Area 6) being subdivided into four units (Areas A–D). All Areas outside of London (Area 6) are termed Provincial. In the past, the designations Provincial and London served to make several distinctions in addition to that of geography. These included ethnicity (Provinces were perceived to be more "white" and London more "black"—this distinction is no longer helpful or

credible); financial resource (London being, historically, the stronger of the two though there is currently greater parity); and political strength (London being considered the powerhouse, but this is being challenged). The Provinces were also perceived to be less credible in terms of ministry and it would be difficult to move a Pastor from London to the Provinces.

Providing meaningful information on more local aspects of the Conference territory is challenging from an administrative level, however, the United Kingdom conducts a census every ten years that provides a searchable database of reports and information that provide a broad picture of the territory as a whole. As such there is a great deal of information available on virtually every aspect of the population. The next UK census is scheduled for 2021 meaning that the census information currently available dates from 2011 and is thus eight years old. There is, however, still a great deal to be gleaned from the census data in terms of population trends and shifts.

The 2011 Census also provides information that relates to migration within population groups. This would be interesting to explore, however, I am not able to provide comparative data from the South England Conference as we do not collect that kind of demographic information from our members.

Adventists as a proportion of the population.

The total population of the regions covered by the South England Conference is 27,944,591. When viewed according to regions, one notes that the South East is the most populous (Figure 6). Membership of the South England Conference represented in a similar way shows that our membership is disproportionately concentrated London Churches (Figure 7). In order to determine if all of the London members live in London, a different set of data would need be compiled by selecting postcodes— too onerous a task for the scope of this paper.
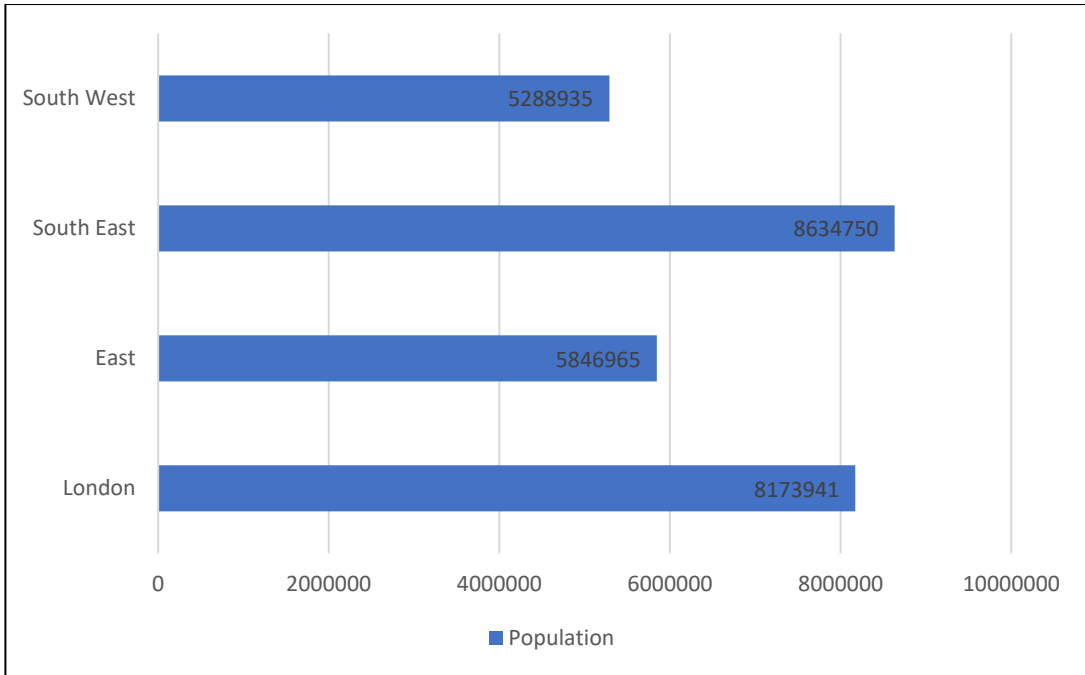
Figure 6. Population by Region of South England Conference territory. Data taken from https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/ks101ew

Figure 7. South England Conference membership by geographic region. Data provided by D. McCormac SEC Executive Secretary (September 2019).

The general population data placed alongside South England Conference internal data allows us to understand Adventists to represent 0.9% of the combined populations of the East, London, South East and South West Regions of the United

Kingdom. This gives us a ratio of 1:1088 (one Adventist for every one thousand and eighty-eight persons).

Gender

Understanding Gender as part of the ministry and mission of the South England Conference allows us to understand our ministry as it relates to the wider context and to note whether we are appealing with sufficient meaning and congruence between male and female. It is also noted that while there is a wider conversation regarding transgender persons and a "third sex", this is not reflected in the Census data nor is such information collected within the South England Conference.
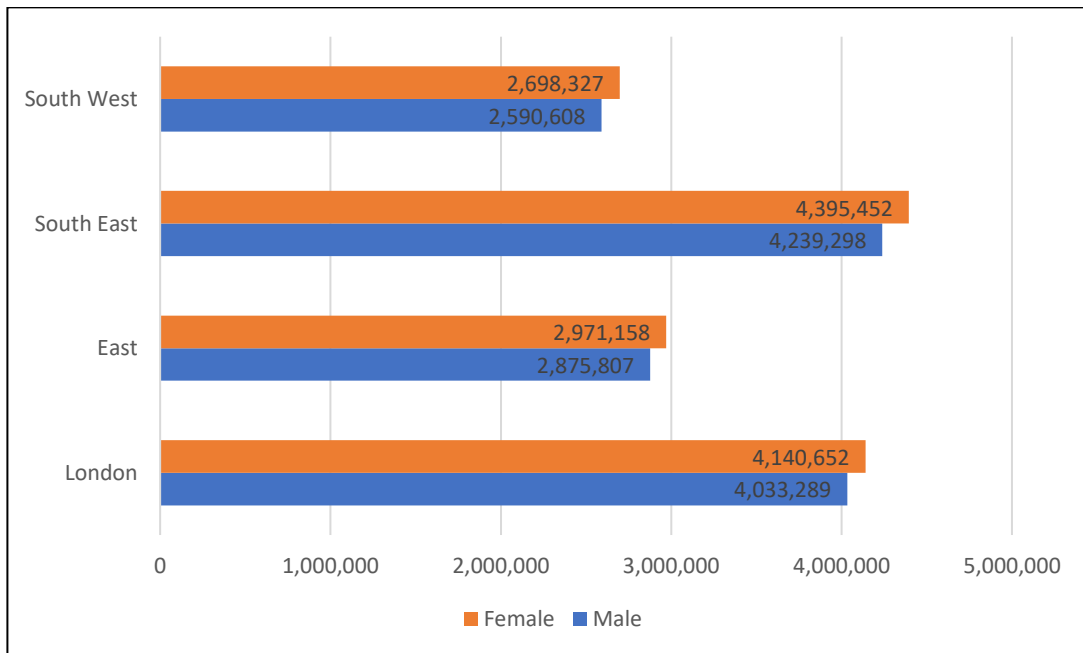
Figure 8. General Population with reference to gender. Data taken from
https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/ks101ew
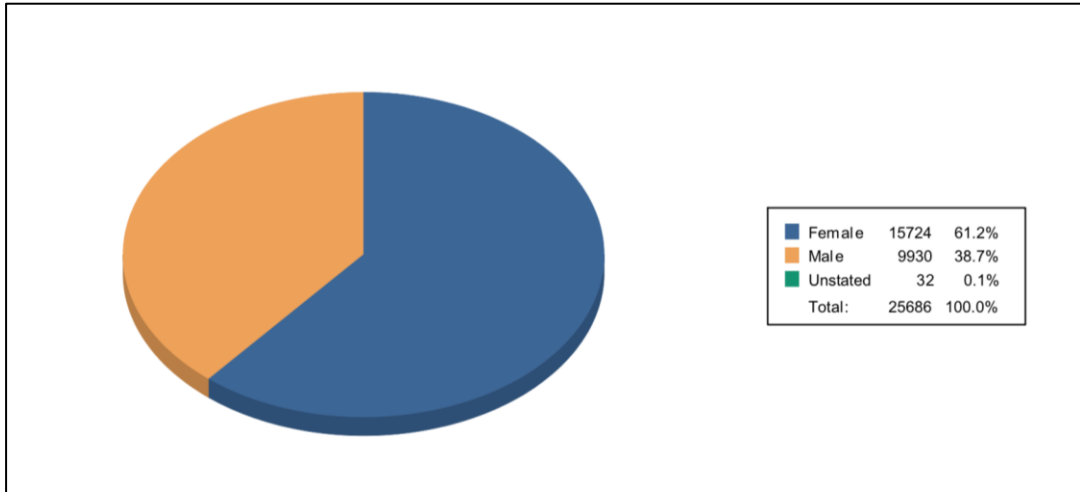
Figure 9. South England Conference membership by gender. Data provided by D. McCormac SEC Executive Secretary (September 2019).
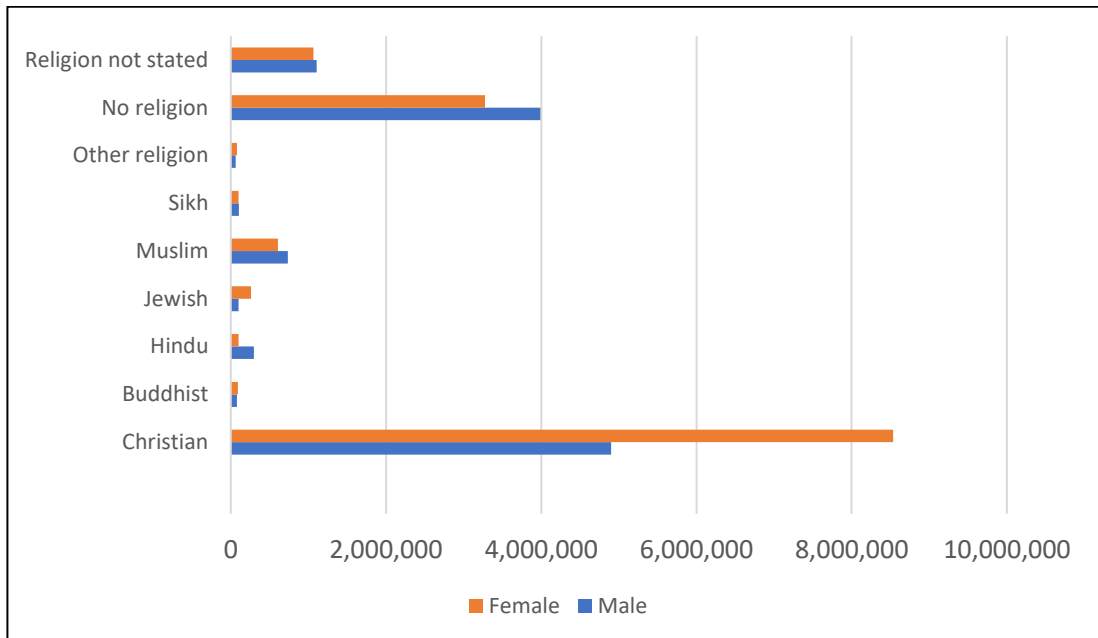
Figure 10. General Population with reference to religion and gender. Data taken from https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/dc2107ew

Based on a comparative reading of the data it appears that the South England

Conference is more effective at resonating with and reaching women through its

ministry and mission efforts (Figure 7). However, this is in line with the broader trend

within Christianity community of our territory. It is interesting to observe that Islam

and Hinduism seem to have a stronger male representation than their religious

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counterparts. Additionally, males are more represented than females in the "no religion" and "religion not stated" categories (Figure 8).

Age

When seeking to understand the "age" of our Conference, it is helpful to view this alongside that of the wider demographic context. The mean and median ages of the Regions show that London retains the youngest population concentration. We would hope to see that this is reflected in our membership demographics, however the age range specificity of the Census data is beyond our scope to collect as a Conference. Our membership data reflects only those who are baptised, not all who attend on any given Sabbath. In order to gain a more accurate picture of the potential age of our Conference we may need to consider a "census Sabbath" once every quadrennium.
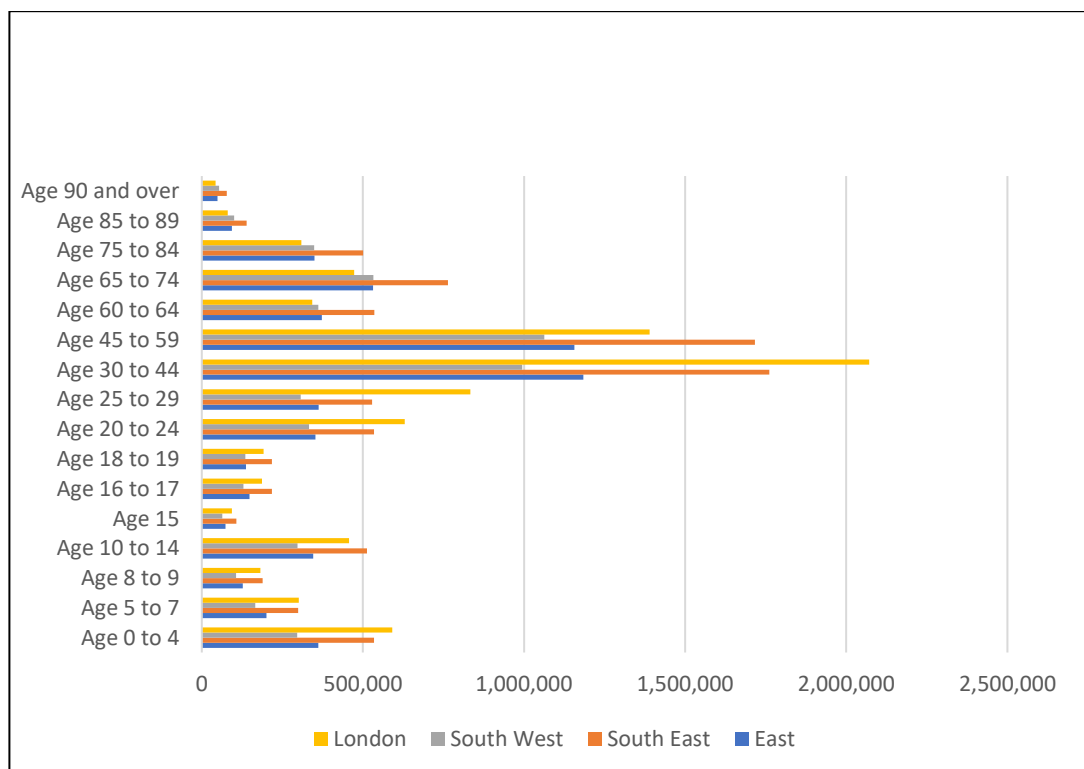
Figure 11. General Population with reference to age. Data taken from
https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/ks102ew

For ease of reference, the input data is included in Table 1. Of particular interest are the mean and median ages for the various regions. For three of the regions (East, South East and South West) there is little difference between the mean and median population ages and there is relative congruency across the three regions. However, London reflects mean and median ages that are 6 and 9 years different from the other regions. London generally has a younger population than the other regions which we would hope to see reflected in our membership data. This younger population is a demographic that could receive more focus and attention as part of our Conference strategic plan.

Table 1. General Population with reference to age.
https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/ks102ew

Age Range:	East	South East	South West	London
Age 0 to 4	361,269	534,235	296,094	591,495
Age 5 to 7	201,093	299,327	166,138	301,095
Age 8 to 9	127,419	188,731	106,551	181,714
Age 10 to 14	345,453	512,875	296,892	456,865
Age 15	73,398	106,916	64,003	93,599
Age 16 to 17	148,076	217,612	128,935	186,626
Age 18 to 19	137,223	217,156	135,139	191,434
Age 20 to 24	352,974	534,287	333,166	629,972
Age 25 to 29	362,643	528,057	307,159	832,966
Age 30 to 44	1,183,973	1,761,278	994,693	2,070,954
Age 45 to 59	1,156,696	1,716,857	1,063,214	1,389,882
Age 60 to 64	372,566	535,399	361,507	342,590
Age 65 to 74	531,393	763,695	532,902	473,058
Age 75 to 84	350,137	501,118	348,759	308,661
Age 85 to 89	93,653	139,576	99,900	80,574
Age 90 and over	48,999	77,631	53,883	42,456
Mean Age	40.20	40.00	41.60	35.60
Median Age	40.00	40.00	42.00	33.00

The South England Conference does not collect data on the younger attendees of our worship services so we are not able to compare the age of our Conference

alongside that of the wider context. However, we can give a sense of the age ranges of our members. In the Figure 10 below, please note that the high numbers in the 0-7 age range are where the system placed those members whose age is undetermined.
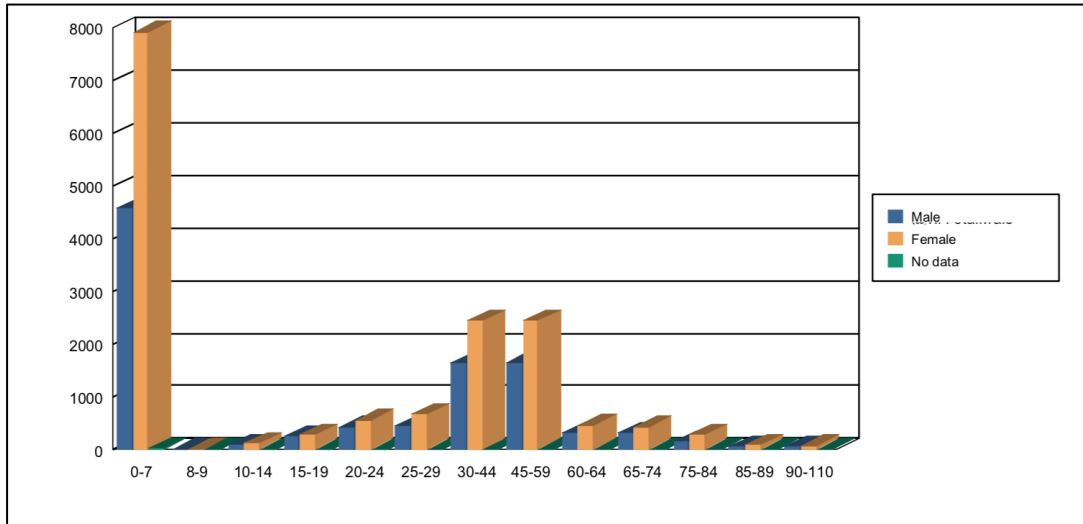
Figure 12. South England Conference membership by age. Data provided by D. McCormac SEC Executive Secretary (September 2019).

Ethnicity

Conversations regarding ethnicity are very difficult to have within the South England Conference. This is likely to be true in almost every church setting and is not unique to this Conference: our past always has an impact on our present and our future. Over the past few decades several leaders, at Union and Conference levels, have spoken about the challenges of a Church that does not represent its local population and much has been written about how we arrived at such a predicament (Anthony 1992; Woolford 1992; Griffiths 2003).

Much has been said locally regarding the membership of the British Union Conference as an inverse representation of the wider demographic: meaning our membership statistics show a Church significantly comprised of minority ethnic and language groups with a small minority of "majority" population represented (Figures 11 and 12). Time and again the data is presented to spur the church and her leaders on

toward a greater impact with the "host population" or White British. For all of the conversation and discussion we have found very few solutions—neither separately nor together—and at times it seems the groups are as far apart as they have ever been.

The South England Conference and the British Union Conference have not been able to stem them attrition from the indigenous British ranks. What was historically conceived of as a distinctly "white British" problem is beginning to evidence itself in the Seventh-day Adventist Caribbean community as they struggle to retain their young adults. While one cannot discount "race" as being a factor in this conversation, one must also ask additional questions to tease out some of the less obvious dynamics including relevance, worldview and cultural experience.
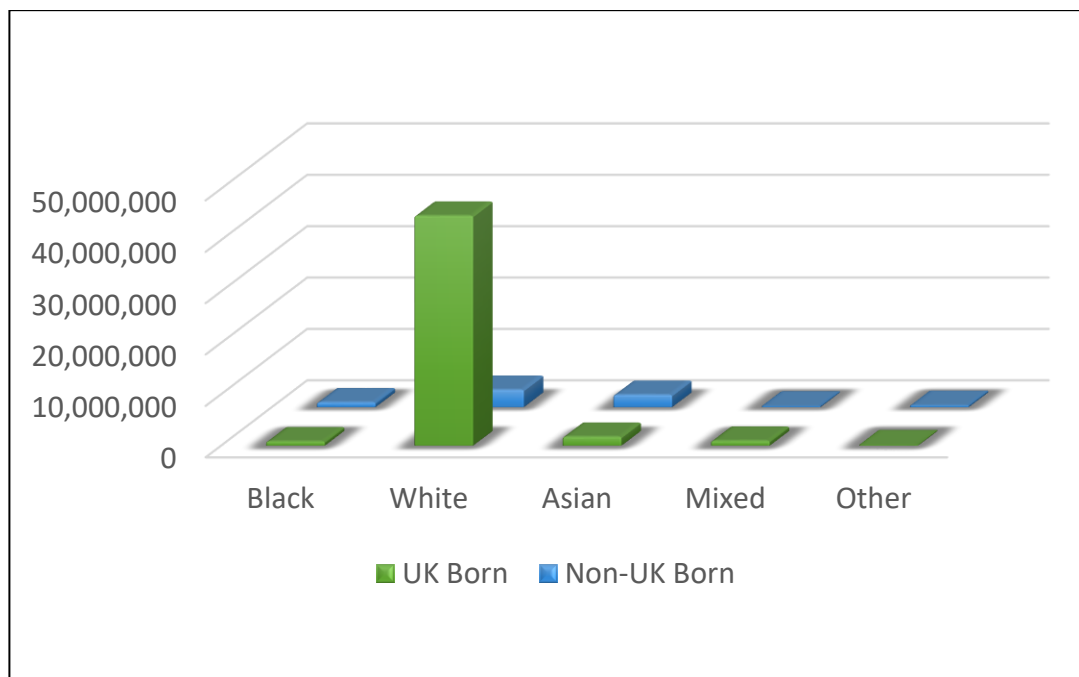
Figure 13. Ethnicity in England and Wales by place of birth. Data taken from
https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/lc2205ew
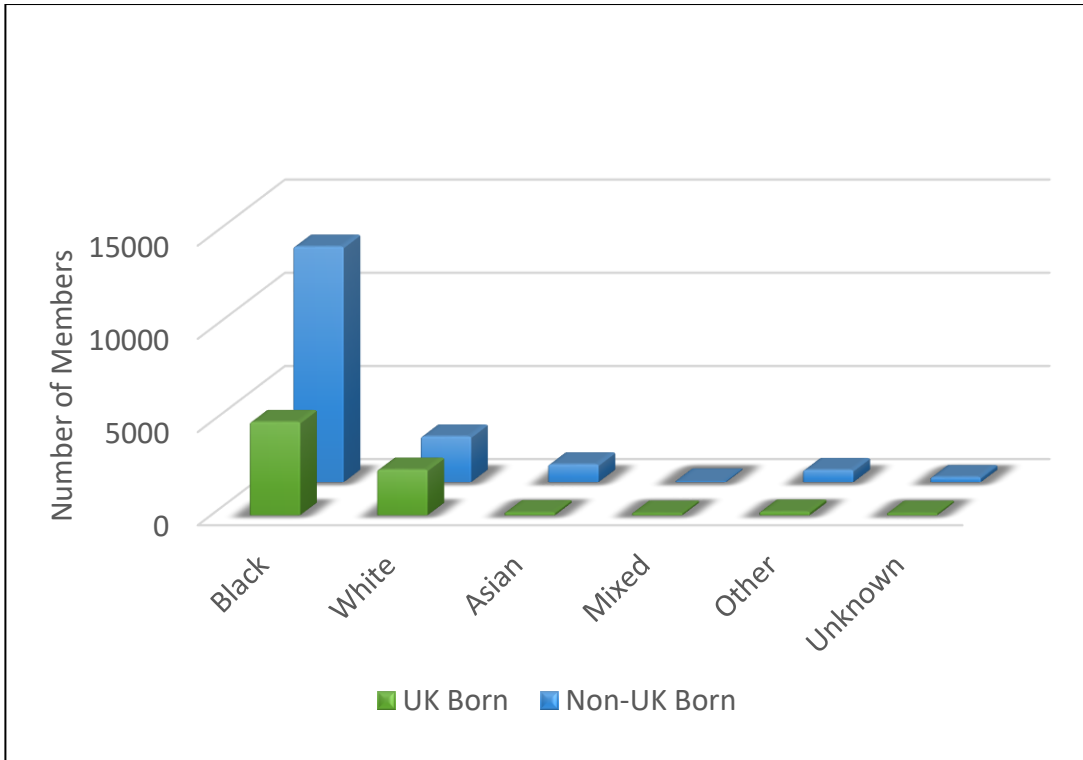
Figure 14. Ethnicity of British Union Conference members by place of birth. Data provided by J Surridge (May 2017).
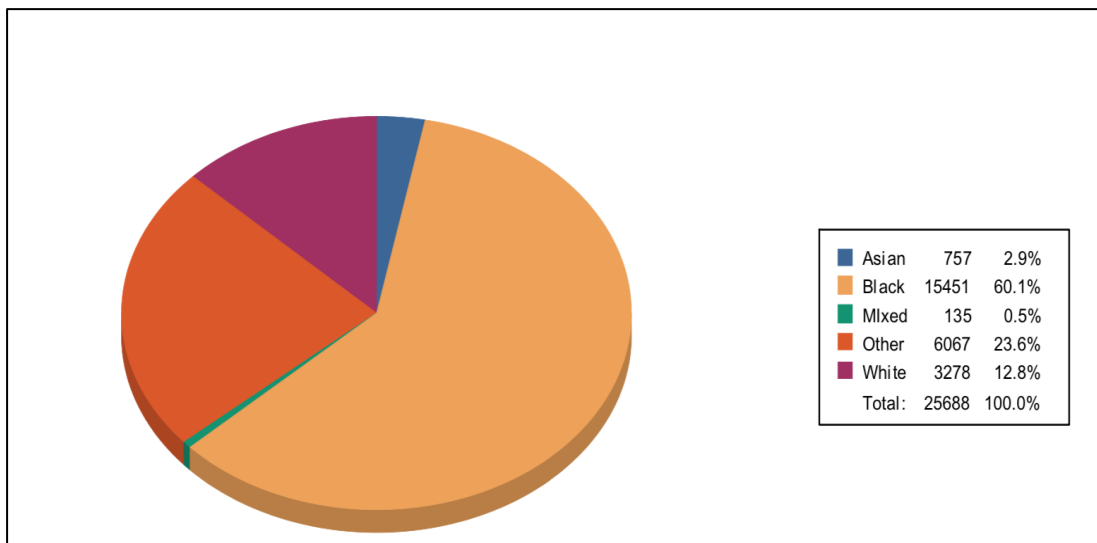
Figure 15. South England Conference membership by ethnicity. Data provided by D. McCormac SEC Executive Secretary (September 2019).

A more detailed break-down of Ethnic Groups within the territory of the South England Conference offers a sense of the diversity of the communities we serve along with the regions that reflect that diversity to a greater and lesser extent. Figure 14 and

Table 2 serve to show that while the majority of the population is White British, it is not the only form that British identity can take.
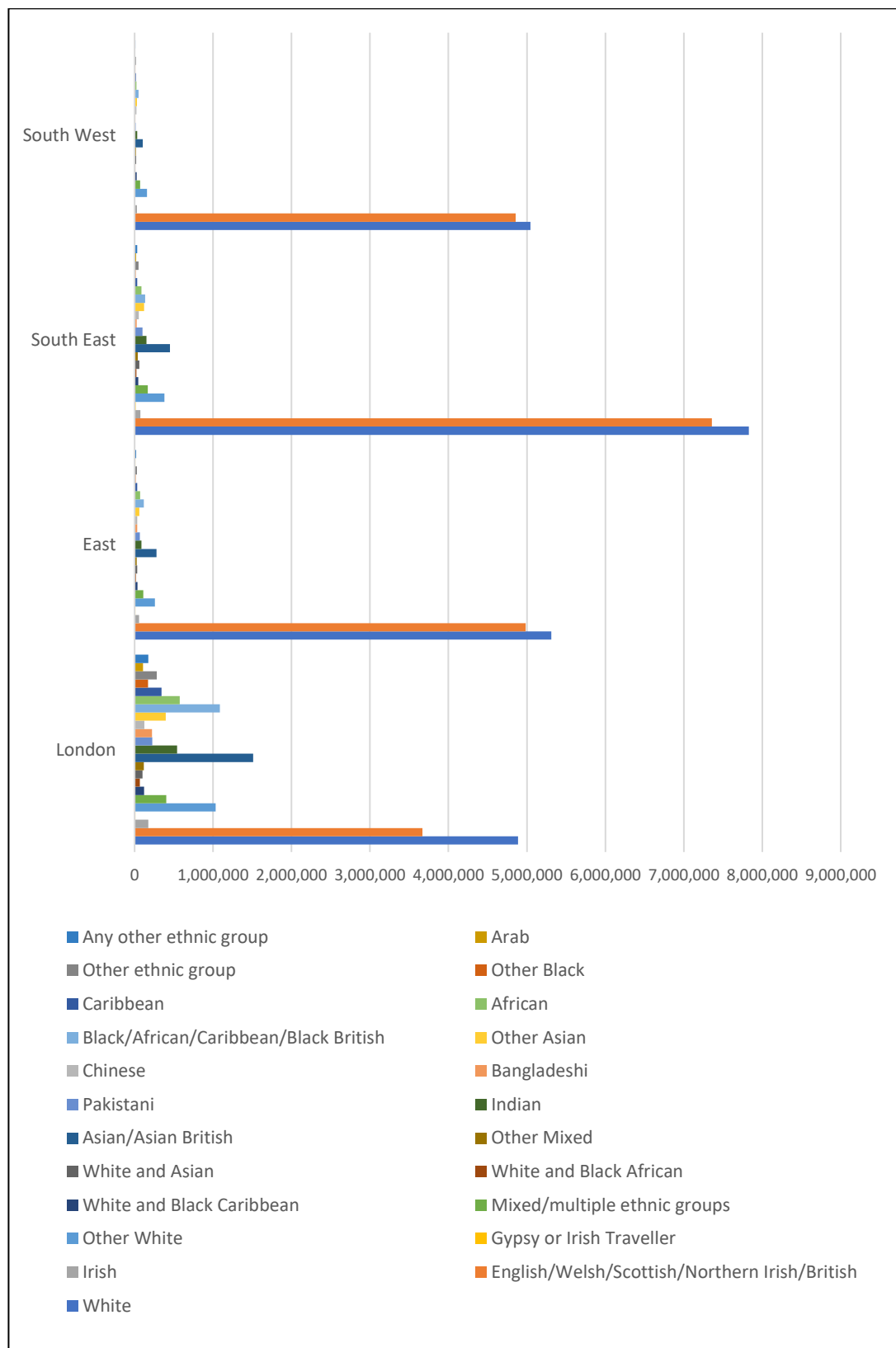
Figure 16. General population with regard to ethnicity. Data taken from https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/ks201ew

Table 2. General population with regard to ethnicity. Data taken from
https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/ks201ew

Ethnic Group	London	East	South East	South West
White	**4,887,435**	**5,310,194**	**7,827,820**	**5,046,429**
English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	3,669,284	4,986,170	7,358,998	4,855,676
Irish	175,974	55,573	73,571	28,616
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	8,196	8,165	14,542	5,631
Other White	1,033,981	260,286	380,709	156,506
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	**405,279**	**112,116**	**167,764**	**71,884**
White and Black Caribbean	119,425	37,222	45,980	25,669
White and Black African	65,479	15,388	22,825	8,550
White and Asian	101,500	32,226	58,764	21,410
Other Mixed	118,875	27,280	40,195	16,255
Asian/Asian British	**1,511,546**	**278,372**	**452,042**	**105,537**
Indian	542,857	86,736	152,132	34,188
Pakistani	223,797	66,270	99,246	11,622
Bangladeshi	222,127	32,992	27,951	8,416
Chinese	124,250	33,503	53,061	22,243
Other Asian	398,515	58,871	119,652	29,068
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	**1,088,640**	**117,442**	**136,013**	**49,476**
African	573,931	69,925	87,345	24,226
Caribbean	344,597	33,614	34,225	15,129
Other Black	170,112	13,903	14,443	10,121
Other ethnic groups	**281,041**	**28,841**	**51,111**	**15,609**
Arab	106,020	10,367	19,363	5,692
Any other ethnic group	175,021	18,474	31,748	9,917

The Census data reflects London as the most ethnically diverse of the four regional profiles. As a result, it also reflects the fewest number of ethnic white British as usually resident there. By contrast, the South East reflects double the number of residents from the same population group and is less diverse than London. It should also be noted that the South East also serves as a commuter belt for London. The South West is the least ethnically diverse of the four regions.

The observations over four decades are borne out in the Census data: The South England Conference is a better reflection of the migrant and immigrant communities than it is of the wider context.

Religion

The United Kingdom has experienced a steady decline in religious affiliation over the past fifty years (Sherwood 2017). Attendance at Christian worship services in the United Kingdom is at an all-time low with the Church of England accounting for less than 40% of the Christian population.
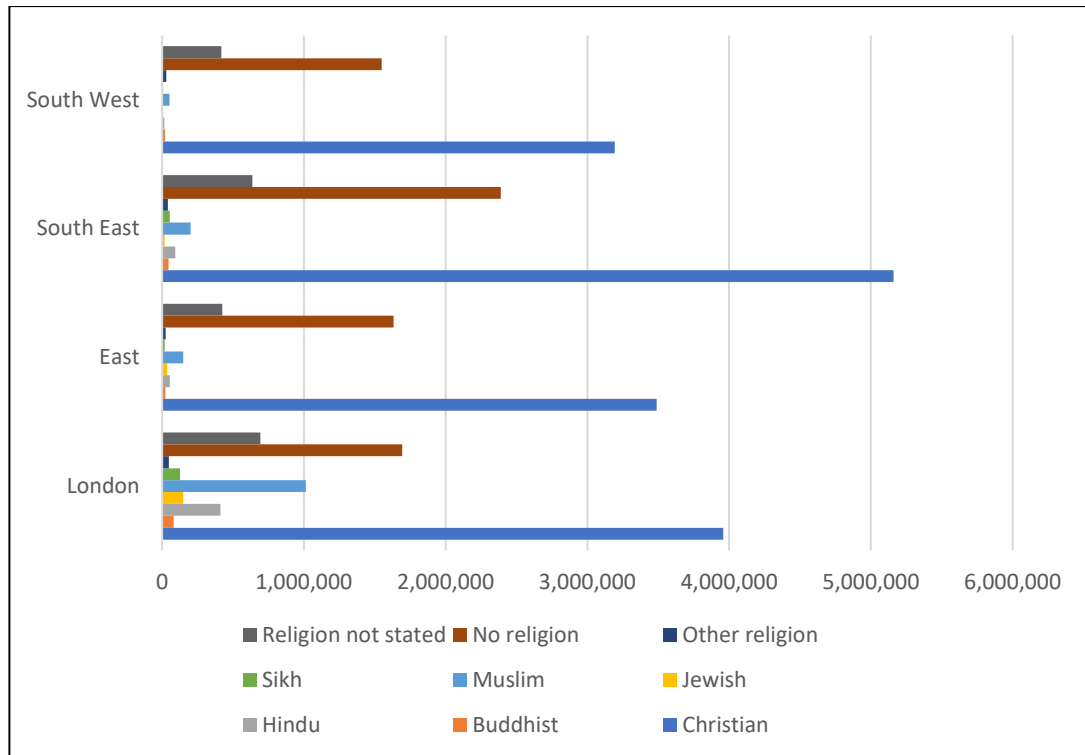
Figure 17. General population with regard to stated religion. Data taken from https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/ks201ew

By combining the regional statistics we are able to produce a diagram showing the demographic make-up of the South England Conference territory with regard to prevailing religious identification (Figure 16). It is no surprise that those identifying as Christian still represent the major portion of the population, however, it should be noted that next largest groups are those who claim No Religion (26%) and those for whom Religion is not stated (8%).

The Muslim community represents 5% of the population context for the South England Conference. This is perceived to be a presence and threat significant enough

for the Conference to invest in three employees (one 50% Director and two part-time

associates).
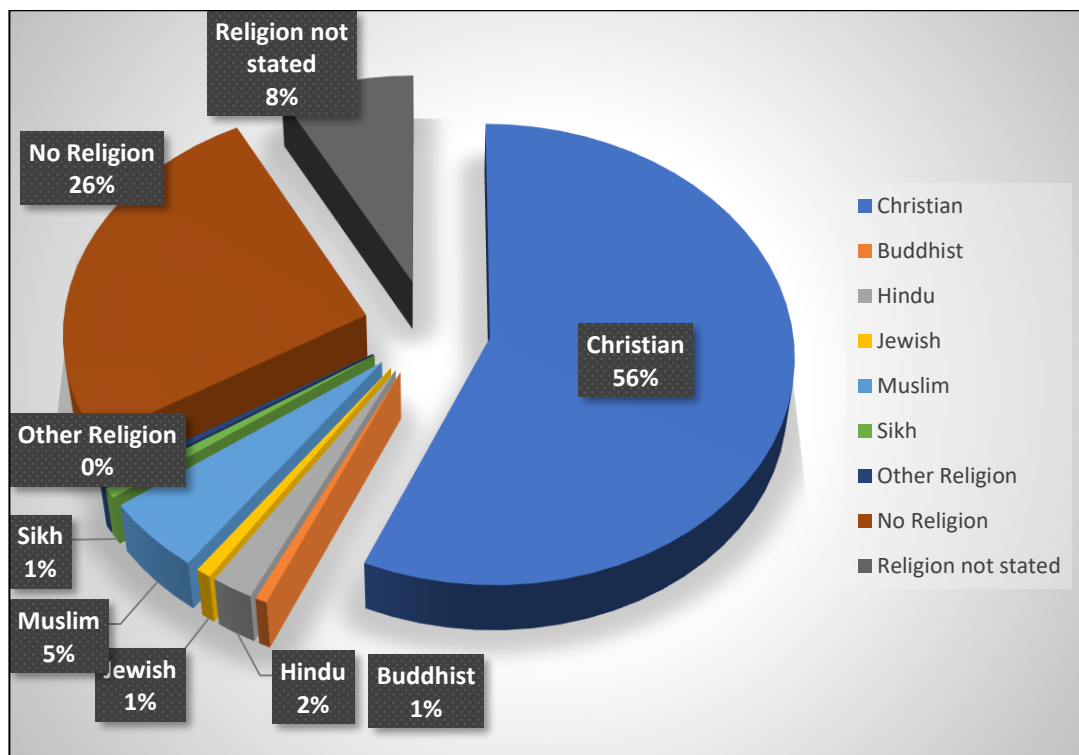
Figure 18. General population with regard to stated religion. Data taken from
https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/ks201ew

Given that one of the significant challenges for the South England Conference

is its inverse ethnic profile when compared to the wider population context, it is

helpful to consider the intersect of the ethnic and faith profiles with a view to

understanding the community better (Figure 17).

The Christian population of the wider South England Conference territory as

represented in Figure 18 shows that 89% of the Christian population is White British.

Given that traditionally Adventist evangelistic work has focused on Christians from

other denominations we have to dig deeper as to why this significant population group

remains largely unaffected by our efforts.
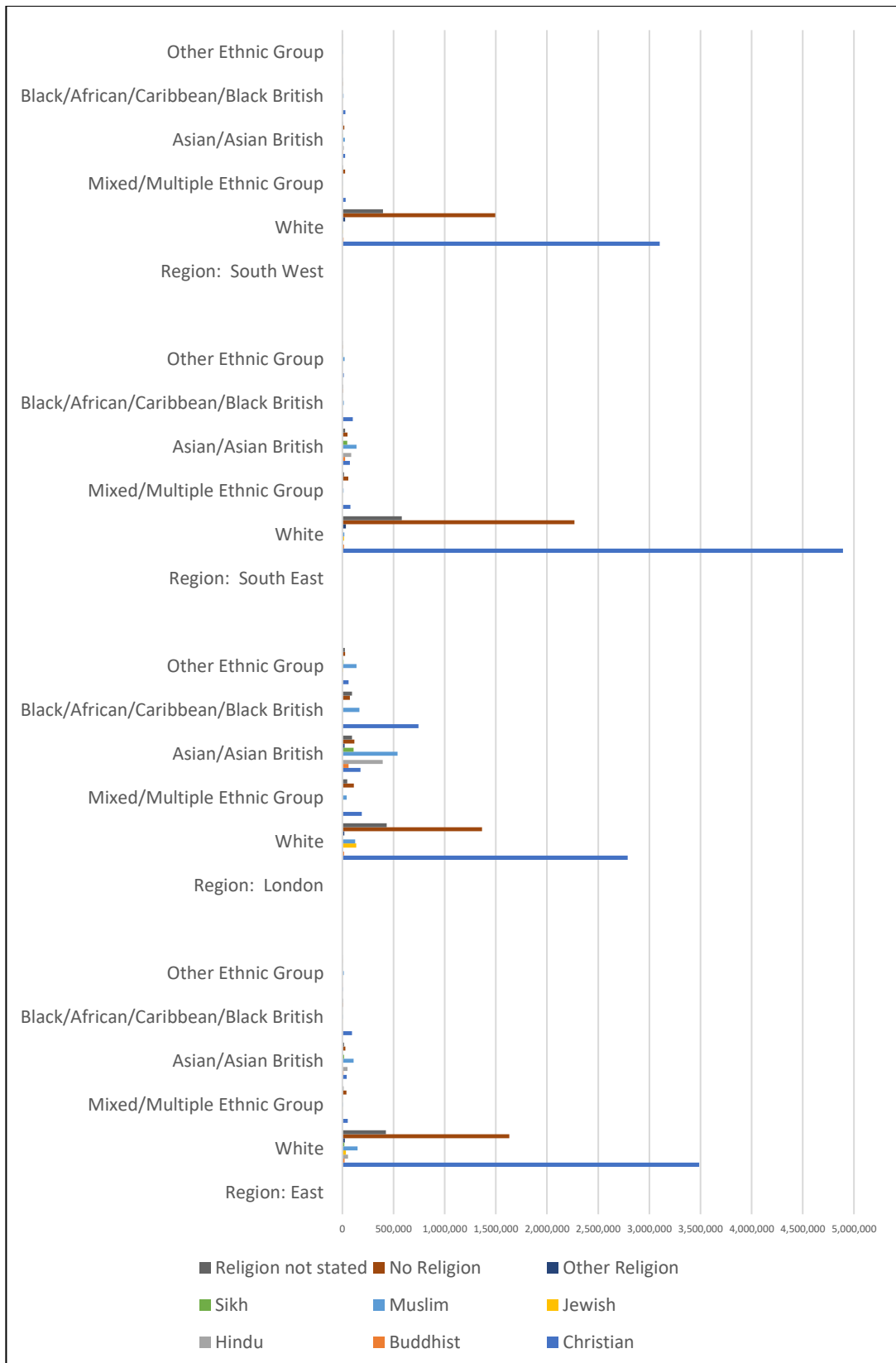
Figure 19. General population with regard to ethnicity and religion. Data taken from
https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/dc2201ew

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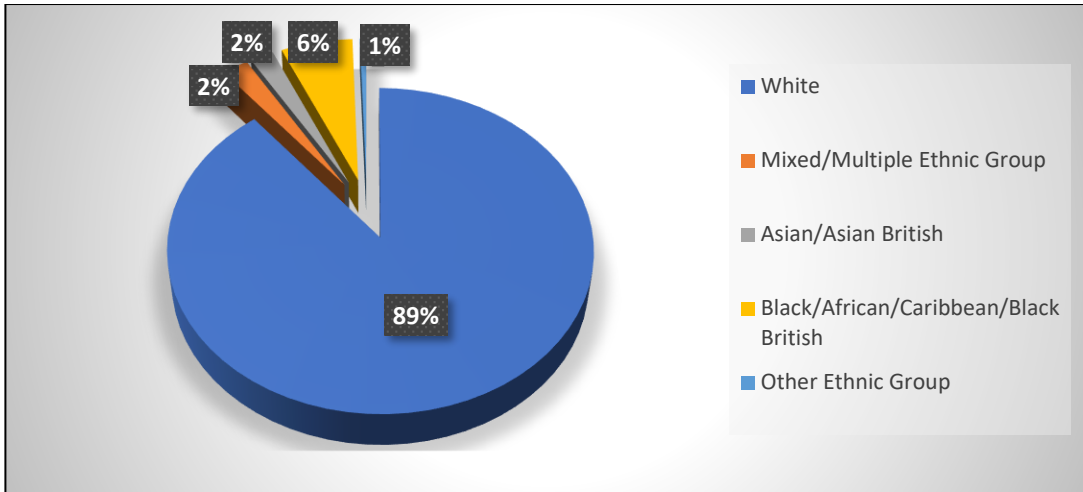
Figure 20. SEC territory Christian population with regard to ethnicity. Data taken from https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/dc2201ew

It is also helpful to consider the demographic aspects of the "No Religion" (28% of the SEC territory population) and "Religion not stated" (8% of the SEC territory population) which together represent the next largest religious groupings after Christianity. The overwhelming majority of these groups are from the White British demographic, an observation that once more highlights the difficulty UK Adventists have in reaching this group and the urgent need to take stock and work more strategically in this regard.
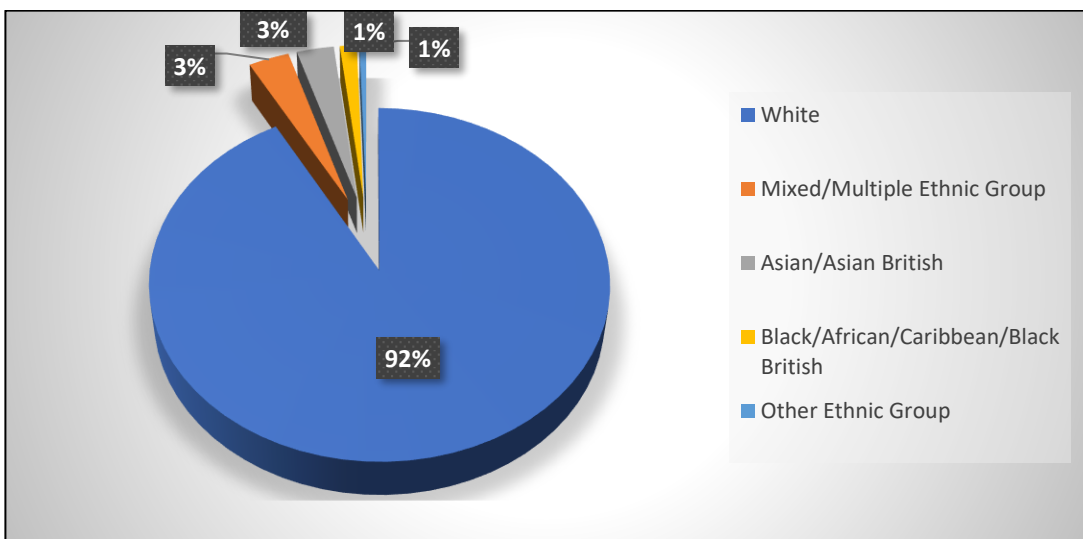
Figure 21. SEC territory No Religion with regard to ethnicity. Data taken from https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/dc2201ew
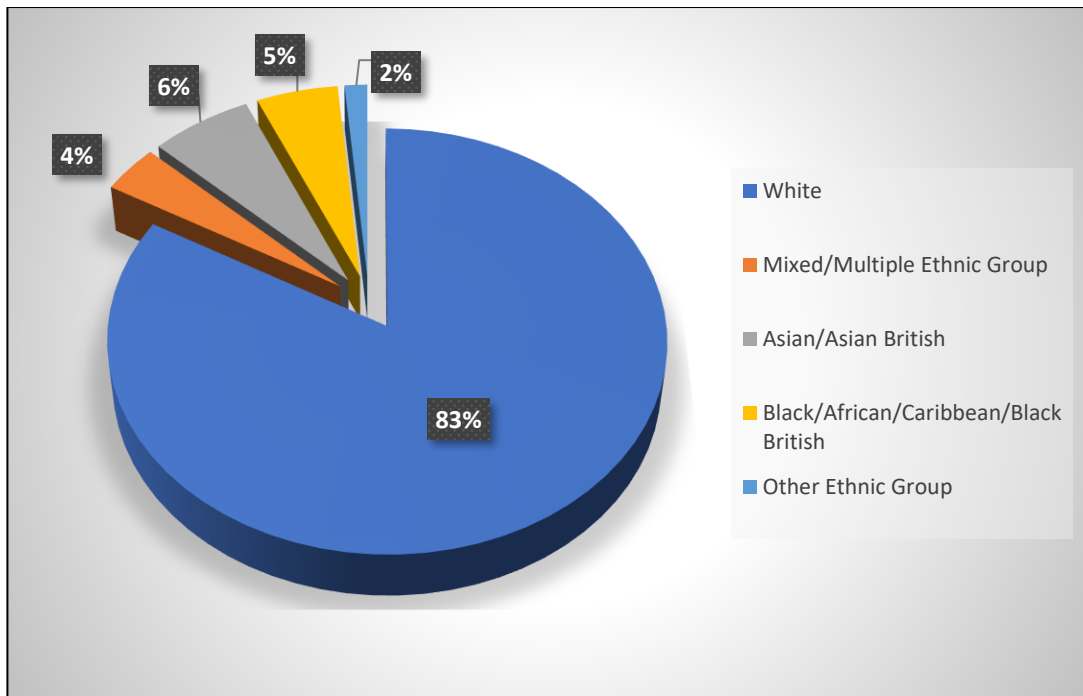
Figure 22. SEC territory Religion Not Stated with regard to ethnicity. Data taken from https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/dc2201ew

VI. Project correlation

The United Kingdom is far more diverse than it was in the closing decades of the 19th Century when John Loughborough and John Andrews arrived as Adventist evangelists. Society and community have changed considerably leaving the Church somewhat bewildered and often nostalgic for a time when the values of society more closely reflected those of Christianity. It longs for a time when the complicated issues of contemporary society (gender, sexuality, loss of objective truth and distrust of corporations) were less intrusive to the realm of evangelism and the Church could speak with accepted authority. One would have hoped that after one hundred and fifty years of Adventist work and presence in the British Isles that we would see a more "British" Church. Most of the members of the South England Conference are foreign-born (including this author) and British by choice (which must surely count for something).

While the designation "British Church" may carry negative association for some, the intent is to speak of a Church deeply rooted in its context and connected in meaningful ways to the wider society. Such connection should speak into every part of the diverse community of Adventists calling us toward incarnational presence, ministry and mission. In a time of Brexit and the rise of nationalist movements across Europe, there is also a new "britishness" that must be engaged. One that is more inclusive, more diverse, and less tolerant of sexism, racism, and separatism.

As I have explored the demographics of the South England Conference and observed the correlations and disconnects, I have been more convinced of the need for this field of study and a project that seeks to: (a) open up space for expressions of Adventism that are more adept at meaningfully articulating faith in our post-Christian society; and (b) come alongside a growing unchurched population in ways that both bless and disciple.

If these demographics speak to the South England Conference at all, it is to say that modern missionaries will once again need to position themselves on the margins of society and in the liminal spaces of community in order to find their voice and their influence. We no longer speak from the societal centre and we cannot assume a place there. This is where my project must locate itself.

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APPENDIX C

SIX CONVERSATION HANDOUTS

COURSE GUIDE

THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY: FACE TO FACE WITH OURSELVES, OTHERS AND THE STORY OF GOD

A guided, conversational journey towards discovering your incarnational ministry and mission in the new normal.

ReThink, ReFrame, ReTell

SIX TOPICS:

Session One (July 7): Who am I?
Session Two (July 14): Who is the Other?
Session Three (July 21): Who is God?
Session Four (July 28): God and Me
Session Five (Aug 4): God and the Other
Session Six (Aug 11): God, the Other, and Me

OUTCOMES:

Through course engagement you will:
Bring your own lived experience and perspectives into intentional conversation with that of other mission-minded individuals

1. Gain a deeper sense of your own story as an integral aspect of being on mission with God
2. Build a conceptual, but practical platform for living on mission with God and others
3. Develop an increased sensitivity to and collaboration with the incarnational activity of God in your local context
4. Be equipped to articulate and engage meaningfully with the mission triangle—God, the Other and You—in the place where you live.

HANDOUTS:

You will receive an electronic (PDF) handout prior to each session. Each handout will be divided into four sections:

a. "**In preparation**" gives you pre-session assignments to help you engage with the session themes in advance. This will help you interact meaningfully with the group by drawing on the insights emerging from your individual engagement with these preparatory activities.
b. "**ReThink**" presents exploratory questions about the theme, revealing your understanding of this area and the ways you currently navigate it in your life. These questions will likely come up in group conversation during the session.
c. "**ReFrame**" seeks to come alongside your personal story, suggesting ways in which some of its aspects could be viewed differently. It explores a new relationship to an event or concept, inviting you to relate these shifts to your life on mission with God.
d. "**ReTell**" comes after the session and relates to walking out the theme in your life and personal mission context. Engaging with this section will help to strengthen the concepts discussed, inviting you to explore the theme further.

Conversation One: **Who am I?**

Key Thought: *"Our experiences in the world seep into our brain over time, and without our awareness they conspire to reshape the workings of our mind." Jennifer Eberhardt*

In preparation:
Take at least two of the following free, online inventories and bring the results with you to Conversation One:

- https://www.16personalities.com/free-personality-test;
- https://www.culturalevolution.org/worldview-questionnaire/
- Self-Awareness Quiz can be taken online here https://www.insight-book.com/quiz
- Cultural Intelligence (CQ Inventory) PDF attached

Remember that inventories are great self-discovery tools, but they also have limitations. There is a great deal more to who you are than the result of an inventory/survey!

ReThink:
- In which ways did the inventories affirm what you already think or believe about yourself?
- Were there any aspects of the inventory reports/results that challenged you, or that you are inclined to disregard?

ReFrame:
- Who are you?
- What specifics form the basis of your personal identity?
- How would you describe yourself? What are the collective or personal stories you would narrate to affirm your description?
- In which ways might your identity be positively framed?
- In which ways might your identity be negatively framed?

ReTell:

- Human beings are always telling stories. This is the way we form and reform our identities. We tell and we retell our narratives, each time bringing a new nuance or shade of meaning to the telling.
- Reflect on your story – it may contain the full range of human experience from agonising darkness to overwhelming light. Aim simply to 'hold' your story. Note any strong emotions, when and where they arise, without getting overly engaged with them. It is true that these things have happened. Choosing a new relationship to those things is about retelling your story. How have you chosen to tell that story in the past? In which ways have you begun to tell your story differently over time? With whom might you want to share some part of a retelling of your story? Who will be a witness of your journey?

Conversation Two: Who is the "Other"?

Key Thought: *"One possible sign that you have succumbed to self-esteem and identity fuelled division is that you're unwilling to admit that <u>they</u> have something valuable to teach you." -Christena Cleveland*

In preparation:
- Watch the Film, "I am not your Negro" (93 minutes)
  Available from Amazon:
  https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/video/detail/B071WSVYD6/ref=atv_dp_share_cu_r
- Take the Cultural Intelligence Inventory: If you did not opt to take it in Conversation One, make sure to take it prior to Conversation Two.

ReThink:
- Humans categorise all the time. When do you see this helping you? When do you see it hurting you?
- In your opinion, why do you think some people hate other people?
- Where does this feeling of hate originate?
- Are you affiliated with a political, social, or religious group? If so, describe it. If not, is there a reason why?
- What surprised you from your Cultural Intelligence Inventory? Why?

ReFrame:
- In your context, who are "they"? How did this come about?
- What are the narratives around the Other in your context? Who tells these narratives? Describe the value of being able to tell one's own story.
- Metaperceptions can be described as, 'what we think they think of us'. Consider those who are 'Other' in your context, what do you think they think of you? How would you assess your perception? When do you play to the stereotype?
- In which ways/times/telling of the narrative, do you function as "they"/Other?
- In "I am not your Negro", Baldwin defines segregation as "apathy plus ignorance". How does that resonate with you? In which ways might apathy and ignorance be descriptive of our human tendency to categorise or "other"?

ReTell:
- Baldwin speaks of being a witness. What does it mean to be a witness? How is the role of witness in history different from the roles of others – such as perpetrators, victims, bystanders, or allies? What are the responsibilities of a witness, and why is it important that there be witnesses?
- Do you find any resonance between Baldwin's use of the term 'witness' and that of Jesus in Acts 1:8?
- Be a witness to someone else's story this week. Engage with a neighbour, an acquaintance, or work colleague who might have a different narrative to your own. Take a walk together, meet up for 'coffee', visit a gallery together, actively seeking to listen to them as they share parts of their story in their own words.

Conversation Three: Who is God?

Key Thought: *"God is a storytelling God. Deeper than this, God is the creator of story, and it is in the context of story that God calls us into mission. God bids us follow his footprints"*
–*Engen, Thomas & Gallagher*

In preparation:
- Watch the Film, "The Shack" (132 minutes)
  Available from Amazon:
  https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/video/detail/B071JCMC12/ref=atv_dp_share_cu_r
- Read and consider the following Scriptures, making some notes as to the 'picture' of God that is painted in each:
  Genesis 1–5
  Genesis 18 & 32; Joshua 5; Daniel 3
  Exodus 25:8; 33:7–11
  John 1:14; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Philippians 2:5–11; Colossians 1:19,20
  Revelation 7:9 & 21:1–14, 22–27

ReThink:
- When you draw on your mental picture of God, what do you see?
- Do you have any thoughts as to why your picture is shaped that way?
- What gives you certainty about your mental picture? How open are you to that picture being challenged?
- How has your concept of God shifted over your life? Could you colour that in a little more? Are there specific transitions that you are able to notice?

ReFrame:
- How is the film depiction of God different from your concept of God?
- Which parts of this portrayal resonated with you?
- Which parts were challenging or jarring for you?
- In the film, Mack's encounter with God took place at 'the shack'. If God were to invite you somewhere, where would it be? (In other words, where is the centre of your doubt and pain)?

ReTell:
- Using the scriptures discussed, summarise the story of God into a couple of sentences.
- Where would you locate your story in those sentences?
- Where would you locate the Other in those sentences?
- To what extent have you been able to interact with different concepts/understandings of God?
- How might different readings of the Scriptures above guide us in mission understanding and activity?
- Actively engage opportunities to listen to an Other describe their picture of God. Listen and learn. This is not an opportunity for commentary or teaching.

Conversation Four: God and Me

Key Thought: "God's chosen ones live out the drama and destiny of God himself. *It is a fearful thing to be chosen*. It is as though God enters history through his chosen ones." –Richard John Neuhaus

In preparation:
- Set aside some time to reflect on your faith journey (PDF)
- Take a Spiritual Gifts Inventory. An online version is available here https://spiritual-gift.org
- Engage with one/both of the following:
  "A story of perseverance" (30 minutes) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uoG29UlDXnQ
  "Becoming European" (60 minutes) by David Trim (2019)
  https://youtu.be/cwHW78pfFQE.
- Reflect on the following scriptures: Genesis 12:3, 18:18, 22:18; Exodus 19:3–6; Jeremiah 29:1–14; 1 Corinthians 12:27; 1 Peter 2:5–9; Revelation 1:6, 5:10, 20:6

ReThink:
- What was most meaningful for you in the documenting of your faith journey?
- Describe the ways in which your story and personality influence how you engage with God.
- What does it mean for you that God interacts on a personal level?
- What does it mean for you that God interacts on a larger scale (national, denominational, ethnic group etc.)?

ReFrame:
- What is the story of Adventist faith where you are? Where do you locate yourself in that narrative?
- In which ways might that Adventist story intersect with national or other identity narratives? Where would you locate yourself in those narratives?
- Journeying with God on mission is often a dance between (at least) two narratives: Who God is, and who we are. What would it mean to unpack the dynamics of that dance? What would be the value in doing so? If it should/could be done, who should do it?

ReTell:
- Ask a trusted individual who knows you well to reflect on your Spiritual Gifts Survey results with you. You may also wish to dialogue over aspects of your faith journey. Allow this to be an opportunity to hear how another person experiences God through you.
- What might it mean to imitate God's incarnational presence in my place?
- Which aspects of who I am might prove helpful, challenging, become bridges or obstacles?
- Where is God challenging you in your personal/collective story? Who might you need to engage with to explore that further?
- What could I be intentionally praying about as I work through and work out this conversation, both on an individual level and in community with others?

Conversation Five: God and the Other

Key Thought: *"We easily forget that Scripture is a foreign land and that reading the Bible is a cross-cultural experience." –Richards & O'Brien*

In preparation:
- Watch any episode(s) from Season 1 of "The Chosen" (available on YouTube).
- Read and consider the following Scriptures. Make some notes about the activity of God in each pericope:
  Genesis 14:18; Joshua 2; Ruth; 1 Kings 17:7–16; 2 Chronicles 26 & Isaiah 45:1;
  2 Chronicles 35:20–24; Jonah; Daniel 2; Matthew 1, 2:1, 21:28–32; Luke 2:8; John 4;
  Mark 7:24–30, 9:38; Acts 1:8, 10, 15:19,20; Revelation 7:9

ReThink:
- Was there anything in the assigned scriptures that surprised you? Elaborate.
- Where did you become uncomfortable? Excited?
- Where did your story begin to intersect with the any of the scriptures above?
- With whom did you identify in the scripture narratives above?
- Where might you have been frustrated or annoyed with God in the assigned scripture passages?
- Reflect on the episode(s) you watched from The Chosen, asking yourself about 'in/out' groups. Who were the insiders? The outsiders? Us? Them?

ReFrame:
- It appears that God works in multiple places and with people outside of our field of vision and beyond our relational streams. Where do you locate yourself in relation to that idea?
- What is your experience of being "outside" and "inside" the faith narrative?
- Describe your ability to navigate 'mystery' or uncertainty. Where might this impact your missional lenses?
- Can you think of an experience where you/we might have misunderstood or missed what God was doing?
- Return to your reflections on The Chosen and the various 'in/out' groups. What would it/did it take for the Gospel to dawn in their stories?

ReTell:
- Take another look at your earlier notes on 'us/them' from Session 3. What, if anything, has shifted in the way you view your relationship to them?
- Seek out and intentionally spend some quality time with someone in, or close to, one of the 'out/them' groups you have identified.

Explore conversation around the following concepts:
- What sorts of group-serving biases might you or others be falling prey to?
- In what ways might you be a privileged/powerful person in your group(s)?
- In what ways might you lack privilege or power in your group(s)?
- What might a bridge into this community look/feel like?

Conversation Six: **God, the Other and Me**

Key Thought: "*God narrows his redemptive focus to one man, one nation. But his ultimate purpose is to bring redemptive blessing to the whole creation. God's promise to Abraham is God's answer to sin, which has corrupted the whole creation: God will restore his world. From the beginning, God's people are to be 'missionary', chosen to be a channel of blessing to others.*" –Bartholomew & Goheen

In preparation:
- Watch the Film, "Of Gods and Men" (122 minutes) available from Amazon
  https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/video/detail/B00HOCJJUY/ref=atv_dp_share_cu_r
- Read and consider the following Scriptures in various Bible translations. Notice the posture of God toward humankind:
  Genesis 1:26, 3:8; Exodus 25:8, 29:42–46, 33:7–11; Isaiah 7:14, 40:5; Matthew 1:20–23; John 1:1–18, 3:16,17; Colossians 1:19,20; 1 John 4:19; Hebrews 1:1–3; Revelation 21:1–3,22.
- Consider the following scriptures from the perspective of mission and ministry. Especially notice relational elements:
  Acts 1:8, 13:13–43, 14:6–16, 15:19,20, 17:16–34, 20; 1 Corinthians 1:22–25, 8, 9:22, 10:32–11:1; Romans 14

ReThink:
- The assigned scriptures are likely familiar to you. What did you expect to hear from them? What have you heard from them through this current reading?
- Based on your reading and reflecting on the scriptures above, write a few sentences about the heart of God for humanity.
- Add a few more sentences about what it might mean to mirror God's heart.
- In which ways might the Incarnation of Christ be side-lined as simply a means to the cross?

ReFrame:
- "Of Gods and Men" is a true story. What makes it powerful?
- What resonated with you? What made you uncomfortable? What would you like to have seen happen in the story?
- Reflect on this quote from the film: "*We* are the birds; you are the branch. If you leave, we lose our footing." How does that 'land and locate' into your life and calling?
- Think about the personal intersection of Christ's incarnation with your life and ministry. In which ways, times, places have you followed his incarnational lead?
- What would it mean for you to follow a more 'incarnational' approach to mission and ministry where you are located?

ReTell:
- The work of God in our world brings 3 stories into dynamic interaction with one another: God's Story, My Story and the Other's Story. How might becoming more aware of this dynamic impact your current approach to mission and ministry?
- What will you do with this perspective? What are you moved toward? Away from?
- With whom will you share your experience and perspective? What will you say?

MY FAITH JOURNEY

God's Story—Our Story

Each of us has a faith story—a story of how God is active in our lives, and what a difference that makes for us and for the world. Each story is unique, and each story is sacred. In our living as people of faith our story blends with God's story—the story of how God is at work in the world in and through each of us. As we engage with, and through our stories, we recognise the ways through which God has been at work in our lives.

There is no 'one way' to tell a faith story, but some of the questions that follow might help you think about your story. Use these questions, initially for yourself, to think about your faith story and secondly, to aid you in the retelling of that story.

Through the sharing of our stories, we see how God's story blends with our own stories and also with the stories of God's people. In the telling our stories God's message of love and salvation is shared. As we entrust one another with our stories, our voices join with voices of God's people through the ages witnessing to the hope that lies within us.

1.   How did you first come to faith?

2.   Who are some of the people who had the most significant influence on you along your faith journey?

3.   When do you feel closest to God? Where do you feel closest to God?

4.   What are some of the questions or doubts you have wrestled with?

5.   Which experiences have deepened your faith? Or tested it?

6.   What have you learned about faith as you've lived your faith?

7.   Where do you see God at work? In your life? In the world?

8.   How has being part of a church community affected your faith?

9.   What does your baptism mean to you?

10.   How are you fed and nourished in faith? What sustains you?

11.   God gives all of us gifts to build up the body of Christ. What are your gifts?

12.   How has being a Christian changed your life?

*Modified and used, with permission, from work done by Marla Amborn.
https://immanuelalmelund.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Mapping-My-Faith-Journey-Booklet.pdf*

Revisit your Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory. Make a note of your type _____

Figure 1

What's Your Personality Type?

Use the questions on the outside of the chart to determine the four letters of your Myers-Briggs type.
For each pair of letters, choose the side that seems most natural to you, even if you don't agree with every description.

1. Are you outwardly or inwardly focused? If you:

- Could be described as talkative, outgoing
- Like to be in a fast-paced environment
- Tend to work out ideas with others, think out loud
- Enjoy being the center of attention

then you prefer

E
Extraversion

- Could be described as reserved, private
- Prefer a slower pace with time for contemplation
- Tend to think things through inside your head
- Would rather observe than be the center of attention

then you prefer

I
Introversion

2. How do you prefer to take in information? If you:

- Focus on the reality of how things are
- Pay attention to concrete facts and details
- Prefer ideas that have practical applications
- Like to describe things in a specific, literal way

then you prefer

S
Sensing

- Imagine the possibilities of how things could be
- Notice the big picture, see how everything connects
- Enjoy ideas and concepts for their own sake
- Like to describe things in a figurative, poetic way

then you prefer

N
Intuition

ISTJ Responsible, sincere, analytical, reserved, realistic, systematic. Hardworking and trustworthy with sound practical judgment.

ISFJ Warm, considerate, gentle, responsible, pragmatic, thorough. Devoted caretakers who enjoy being helpful to others.

INFJ Idealistic, organized, insightful, dependable, compassionate, gentle. Seek harmony and cooperation, enjoy intellectual stimulation.

INTJ Innovative, independent, strategic, logical, reserved, insightful. Driven by their own original ideas to achieve improvements.

ISTP Action-oriented, logical, analytical, spontaneous, reserved, independent. Enjoy adventure, skilled at understanding how mechanical things work.

ISFP Gentle, sensitive, nurturing, helpful, flexible, realistic. Seek to create a personal environment that is both beautiful and practical.

INFP Sensitive, creative, idealistic, perceptive, caring, loyal. Value inner harmony and personal growth, focus on dreams and possibilities.

INTP Intellectual, logical, precise, reserved, flexible, imaginative. Original thinkers who enjoy speculation and creative problem solving.

ESTP Outgoing, realistic, action-oriented, curious, versatile, spontaneous. Pragmatic problem solvers and skillful negotiators.

ESFP Playful, enthusiastic, friendly, spontaneous, tactful, flexible. Have strong common sense, enjoy helping people in tangible ways.

ENFP Enthusiastic, creative, spontaneous, optimistic, supportive, playful. Value inspiration, enjoy starting new projects, see potential in others.

ENTP Inventive, enthusiastic, strategic, enterprising, inquisitive, versatile. Enjoy new ideas and challenges, value inspiration.

ESTJ Efficient, outgoing, analytical, systematic, dependable, realistic. Like to run the show and get things done in an orderly fashion.

ESFJ Friendly, outgoing, reliable, conscientious, organized, practical. Seek to be helpful and please others, enjoy being active and productive.

ENFJ Caring, enthusiastic, idealistic, organized, diplomatic, responsible. Skilled communicators who value connection with people.

ENTJ Strategic, logical, efficient, outgoing, ambitious, independent. Effective organizers of people and long-range planners.

3. How do you prefer to make decisions? If you:

- Make decisions in an impersonal way, using logical reasoning
- Value justice, fairness
- Enjoy finding the flaws in an argument
- Could be described as reasonable, level-headed

then you prefer

T
Thinking

- Base your decisions on personal values and how your actions affect others
- Value harmony, forgiveness
- Like to please others and point out the best in people
- Could be described as warm, empathetic

then you prefer

F
Feeling

4. How do you prefer to live your outer life? If you:

- Prefer to have matters settled
- Think rules and deadlines should be respected
- Prefer to have detailed, step-by-step instructions
- Make plans, want to know what you're getting into

then you prefer

J
Judging

- Prefer to leave your options open
- See rules and deadlines as flexible
- Like to improvise and make things up as you go
- Are spontaneous, enjoy surprises and new situations

then you prefer

P
Perceiving

https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/573003/myers-briggs-type-indicator-facts

Spirituality Types

THINKING
Speculative

Extremes:
Encratism
Moralism

Extremes:
Rationalism
Head-trip

Sensing Spirituality
Life is to Live

Thinking Spirituality
Life is a Question

Type 4
Crusader

Type 1
Theologian

ABSTRACT
Apophatic

DOING

LEARNING

CONCRETE
Kataphatic

drawn to that which is unknowable, receptive, unstructured, alone

BEING

GATHERING

drawn to that which is revealed, acting, defined, gathered

Type 3
Mystic

Type 2
Charismatic

Intuitive Spirituality
Life as a Quest

Feeling Spirituality
Life is Fellowship

Extremes:
Escapism
Reclusivity

Extremes:
Pietism
Emotionalism

Affective
FEELING

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Modified from the 'Spirituality Types' diagram available here
https://www.calvarypresbyterian.org/cpt_news/whose-experience-is-more-valid/

Reflection Questions:
- Your personality type leads you toward engaging with God in particular ways. What response/reaction does that draw from you?
- Think about the people you have engaged with as part of this course and in your assignments; what have you noticed about their manner of connecting with God? How do they think about spiritual things?
- Relating this experience and knowledge to your mission context, what implications for mission practice do you see? Name a couple of action or revision points for your ministry.

self-assessment of CQ

The Self-Assessment of CQ[1] is intended primarily to enhance your understanding of cultural intelligence. Assessments like this one are limited without also including the feedback of others who observe you in cross-cultural contexts. Information about a multirater assessment can be found at http://www.culturalq.com. The Self-Assessment of CQ was developed by Linn Van Dyne and Soon Ang and originally appeared in *CQ: Developing Cultural Intelligence at Work*, permission granted by Van Dyne and Ang for use in this book.

A Self-Assessment of CQ

The following questions are about dealing with diverse cultures. There are no right or wrong answers. Instead, the questions simply allow you to express your preferences, desires, and habits. Thinking about these questions can help you understand your unique strengths and how you relate to people you meet in your own country and those from other societies. *In order to gain the most benefit from this assessment, be as honest and realistic as possible about what truly reflects who you are and how you think and feel.*

Read each question carefully and choose either A or B. Do not think too long about any question. If you cannot decide on a particular answer, skip the question and come back to it at the end.

Section A

Instructions

Which of the following choices *best* describes you *when you are in situations characterized by cultural diversity*? Circle either A or B (*not both*) for each question to indicate which better describes you as you are most of the time.

1. Would you rather work with someone who is from
   A the same or a similar culture, or
   B a very different culture?

2. When you are with a person from a different culture, do you
   A plan what you say, or
   B act spontaneously?

3. Do you like to
   A travel in your home country, or
   B travel to faraway places?

4. When you know you will be meeting someone from a different culture, do you
   A script what you want to say before you start, or
   B treat him or her as you would any other person from your own culture?

5. Do you typically
   A assume many roles, or
   B adopt one primary role?

6. At parties with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, do you
   A mimic other people, or
   B maintain your own style?

7. In your daily work, would you prefer a job in a culture that is
   A similar to your own, or
   B different from your own?

8. When thinking about understanding people from different cultures, are you
   A an expert, or
   B a novice?

9. Do you view yourself as
   A beginning to learn more about culture, or
   B having lots of cultural expertise?

10. When speaking to people from diverse cultures, do you use
    A a consistent speaking style, or
    B a variety of accents?

11. Would you say you are
    A not really aware when people are from other cultures, or
    B very aware when people are from other cultures?

12. Which best describes you?
    A I can read more than two languages.
    B I can read one or two languages.

13. Are you
    A alert to the possibility that someone might be from a different culture, or
    B indifferent that someone might be from a different culture?

14. When you are in groups of people who have diverse backgrounds, do you
    A usually stick to your normal way of speaking, or
    B change the way you speak depending on the group?

15. When you work on a project, do you find you prefer to work with
    A people from similar cultures, or
    B those from different cultures?

16. When you are with people who have a different cultural background, do you
    A think about the differences, or
    B forget they are different?

17. In getting a job done, which describes you better?
    A I am indifferent to working with people from other cultures.
    B I celebrate cultural differences.

18. When it comes to knowing how to cope with cultural diversity, would others say you are
    A very knowledgeable, or
    B a neophyte?

19. In your spare time, would you choose to
    A upgrade your technical skills, or
    B learn about cultural differences?

20. Given the choice, would you select working with people who are
    A not that competent technically, but from similar cultures, or
    B technically very competent, but from very different cultures?

21. In knowing how to navigate new cultures, do you see yourself as
    A highly experienced, or
    B at the entry level?

22. Do you tend to
    A be aware that people from another culture are different, or
    B pay very little attention to their difference?

23. Is it your habit
    A not to plan in advance when interacting with those from different cultures, or
    B to take charge of your interactions when you're with others from different cultures?

24. Do you typically
    A stick to your own mannerisms, or
    B modify your mannerisms when you talk with people from different cultures?

25. Would you rank working with people from different cultures as
    A one of your many interests, or
    B a top interest?

26. Do you
    A eat what is familiar to you, or
    B try what others eat when having meals with people from other cultures?

27. Are you more likely to
    A set clear goals before you start working with others from different cultures, or
    B work with them as if they were your regular colleagues?

28. When you have to meet strangers from another culture, do you
    A go with the flow and according to the situation, or
    B carefully plan your conversation in advance?

29. Would you say that you enjoy
    A striking up conversations with culturally diverse people, or
    B having conversations with those who are more similar to you?

30. In your work, do you
    A use a uniform style of interacting with everyone in the group, or
    B change the way you interact depending on the cultural backgrounds of those in the group?

31. In ministry situations that require cross-cultural negotiations, do you have
    A deep knowledge, or
    B little knowledge?

Section B

Instructions

Imagine that you are in a situation where you are interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. Circle the answer (A or B) that best describes you. Don't overthink your response.

35. In cross-cultural situations, you are
    A spontaneous.
    B careful to plan.

36. In cross-cultural situations, you are
    A predictable.
    B flexible.

32. When visiting different cultures, do you
    A modify the way you dress, or
    B dress the way you do in your home country?

33. When conflicts arise with those from other cultures, do you
    A try to learn from failures and build on successes, or
    B pay little attention to cultural reasons for failures and successes?

34. In keeping a conversation going with someone from another culture, do you
    A find it difficult to deal with ambiguity and differences, or
    B deal successfully with ambiguity and differences?

37. In cross-cultural situations, you are
    A attracted.
    B indifferent.

38. In cross-cultural situations, you are
    A systematic.
    B casual.

39. In cross-cultural situations, you are
    A neutral.
    B engaged.

40. In cross-cultural situations, you have
    A cultural knowledge.
    B technical knowledge.

41. In cross-cultural situations, you
    A anticipate.
    B react.

42. In cross-cultural situations, you are
    A a learner.
    B a professional.

43. In cross-cultural situations, you are
    A highly interested.
    B somewhat interested.

44. In cross-cultural situations, you
    A go with the flow.
    B prepare in advance.

45. In cross-cultural situations, you are
    A reserved.
    B a good actor.

46. In cross-cultural situations, you are
    A broad.
    B narrow.

47. In cross-cultural situations, you are
    A excited.
    B neutral.

48. In cross-cultural situations, you are
    A current.
    B dated.

49. In cross-cultural situations, you are
    A unsure.
    B energized.

50. In cross-cultural situations, you are
    A confident.
    B uncertain.

51. In cross-cultural situations, you
    A speak one language.
    B speak many languages.

52. In cross-cultural situations, you are
    A experienced.
    B a novice.

53. You view cross-cultural situations as
    A an activity.
    B a priority.

54. In cross-cultural situations, you are
    A conscious.
    B unaware.

Scoring Instructions

Section A

For each question, score a 3 in the box to the right of the item if your answer corresponds to the letter shown in the answer column.

Add up the columns at the bottom of the page for your Cultural Strategic Thinking—Knowledge and Interpretive CQ (CST), Perseverance CQ (PSV), and Behavioral CQ (BEH) Scores.

Question	Answer	CST	PSV	BEH
1	B			
2	A			
3	B			
4	A			
5	A			
6	A			
7	B			
8	A			
9	B			
10	B			
11	B			
12	A			
13	A			
14	B			
15	B			
16	A			
17	B			
18	A			
19	B			
20	B			
21	A			
22	A			
23	B			
24	B			
25	A			
26	B			
27	A			
28	B			

Question	Answer	CST	PSV	BEH
29	A			
30	B			
31	A			
32	A			
33	A			
34	B			
Section A Subtotal for		CST	PSV	BEH

Section B

For each question, score a 3 in the box to the right of the item if your answer corresponds to the letter in the answer column.

Add up the columns at the bottom of the page for your Cultural Strategic Thinking—Knowledge and Interpretive CQ (CST), Perseverance CQ (PSV), and Behavioral CQ (BEH) Scores.

Question	Answer	CST	PSV	BEH
35	B			
36	B			
37	A			
38	A			
39	B			
40	A			
41	A			
42	B			
43	A			
44	B			
45	B			
46	A			
47	A			
48	A			
49	B			
50	A			
51	B			

Question	Answer	CST	PSV	BEH
52	A			
53	B			
54	A			
Section B Subtotal for		CST	PSV	BEH

Work Sheet

	Cultural Strategic Thinking (CST)/Knowledge and Interpretive CQ	Perseverance CQ (PSV)	Behavioral CQ (BEH)
Subtotal from Section A			
Subtotal from Section B			
Total (Sections A + B)			

Overall Cultural Intelligence

Overall Cultural Intelligence = Total CST + Total PSV + Total BEH

Write your overall cultural intelligence score here: _____

Interpretation of Your Overall CQ Score

Your Score	Interpretation
126 and above	You perceive yourself as having *excellent* overall CQ in your ability to work in diverse cultural settings (domestic and/or international).
95–125	You perceive yourself as having *average* overall CQ in your ability to work in diverse cultural settings (domestic and/or international).
94 and below	You perceive yourself as needing to develop your overall CQ to be able to work more effectively in diverse cultural settings (domestic and/or international).

Interpretation of Your Score for Knowledge and Interpretive CQ (Cultural Strategic Thinking)

Your Score	Interpretation
51 and above	You are *excellent* in your cultural strategic thinking.
38–50	You are *moderate* in your cultural strategic thinking.
37 and below	Your cultural strategic thinking indicates a red alert, which means that you need to work on your knowledge and interpretive CQ.

Interpretation of Your Score for Perseverance CQ

Your Score	Interpretation
45 and above	You are *excellent* in your cultural motivation.
38–44	You are *moderate* in your cultural motivation.
37 and below	Your cultural motivation indicates a red alert, which means that you need to work on your cultural motivation.

Interpretation of Your Score for Behavioral CQ

Your Score	Interpretation
30 and above	You are *excellent* in your cultural behavior.
21–29	You are *moderate* in your cultural behavior.
20 and below	Your cultural behavior indicates a red alert, which means that you need to work on your cultural behavior.

Variability in Your Scores
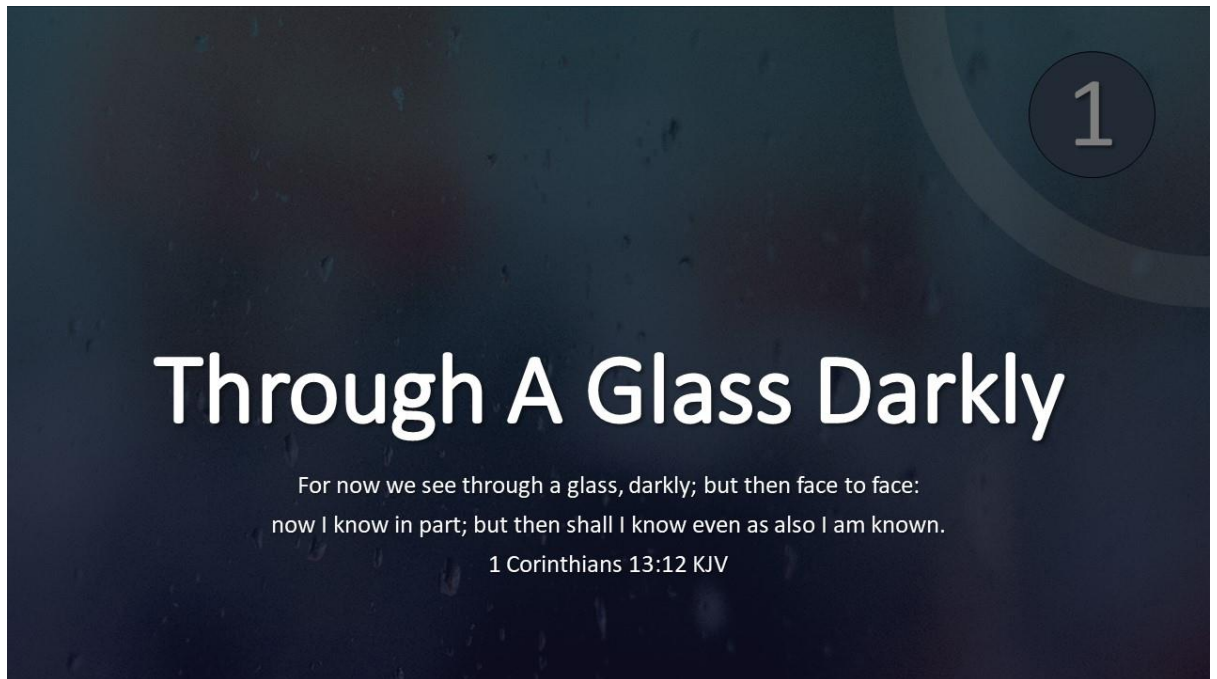
If your scores vary across the three facets of cultural intelligence, you should think of ways that you can leverage your strong areas (high scores) and ways that you can improve in areas where your scores are lower.

Given that this is a self-assessment, keep in mind that these scores simply indicate your self-perception of your cultural intelligence in these various areas. Many individuals under- or overestimate themselves; therefore, a multirater assessment has much greater validity.

Visit http://www.davidlivermore.com for more information on how to obtain CQ-related assessment, consulting, or training for you and your ministry.

APPENDIX D

SIX CONVERSATION PRESENTATIONS
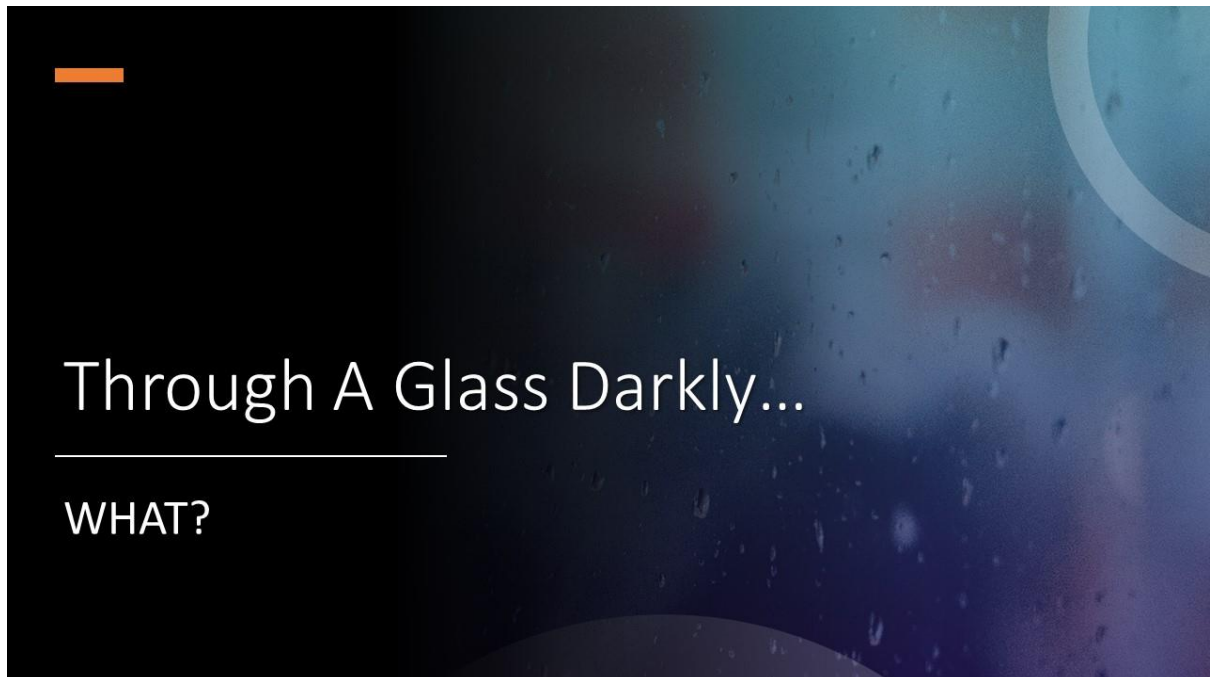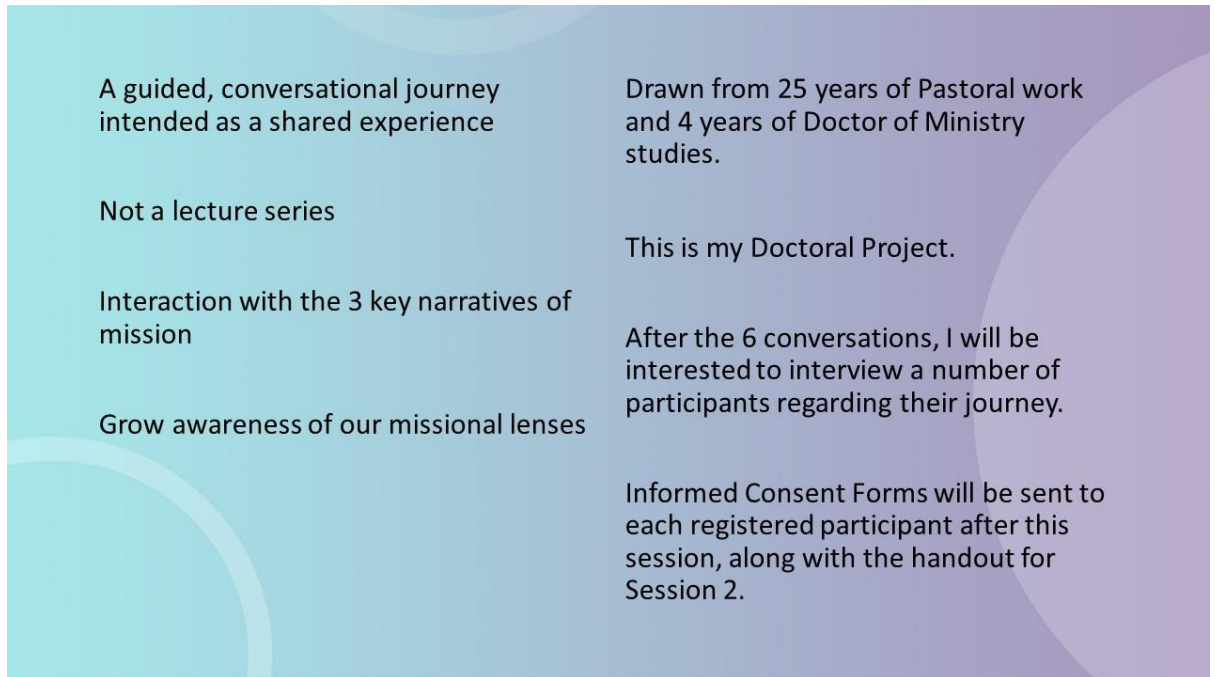
Slide 1

Slide 2

Slide 3

A guided, conversational journey
intended as a shared experience

Not a lecture series

Interaction with the 3 key narratives of
mission

Grow awareness of our missional lenses
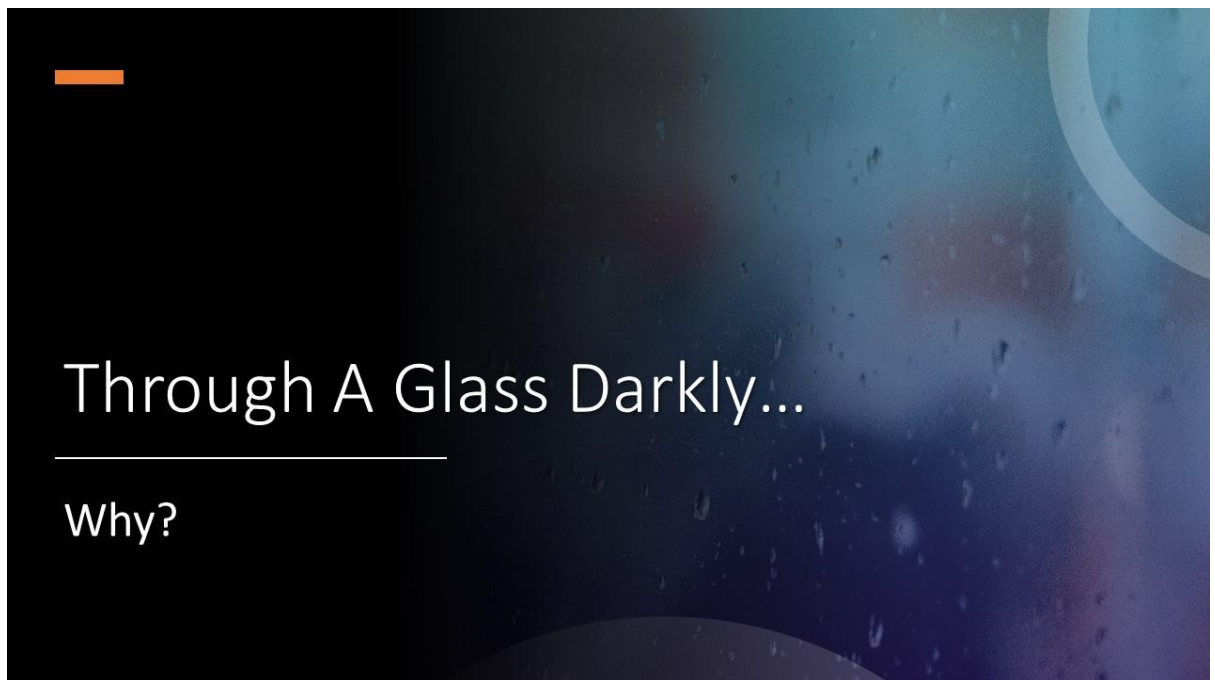
Drawn from 25 years of Pastoral work
and 4 years of Doctor of Ministry
studies.

This is my Doctoral Project.

After the 6 conversations, I will be
interested to interview a number of
participants regarding their journey.

Informed Consent Forms will be sent to
each registered participant after this
session, along with the handout for
Session 2.

Slide 4

Through A Glass Darkly...

Why?

Slide 5
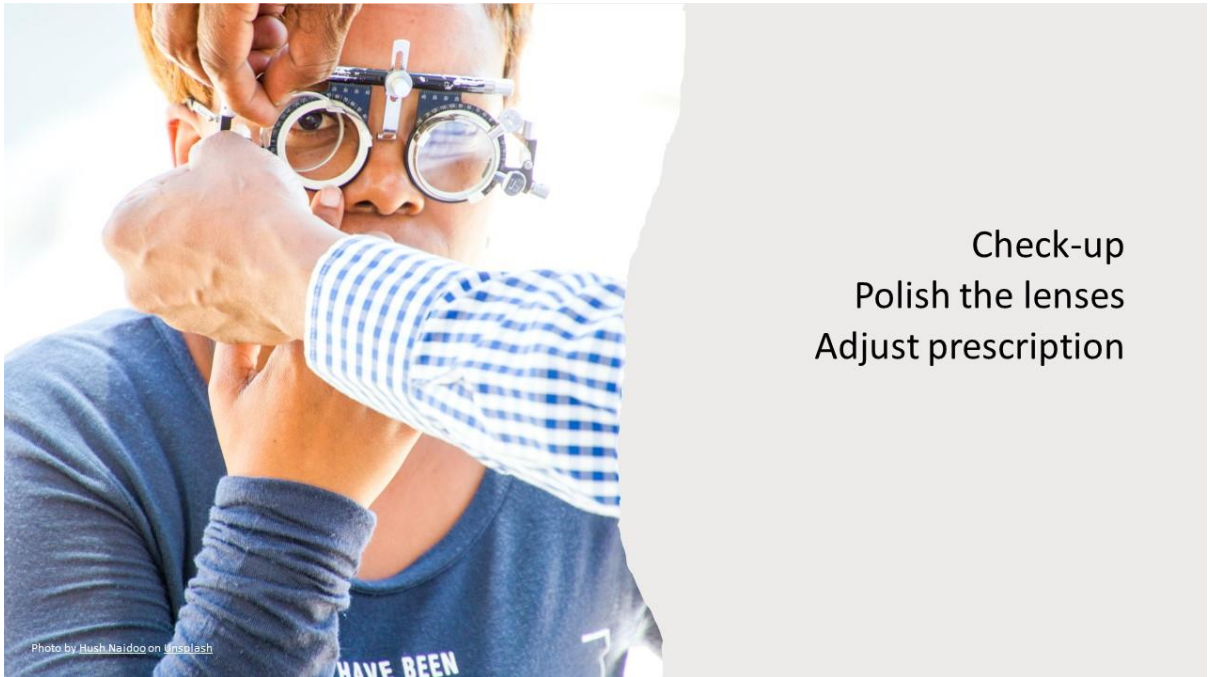
Check-up
Polish the lenses
Adjust prescription

Photo by Hush Naidoo on Unsplash

Our 6 weeks together is not about me giving you loads of new information or arming you with strategies. I hope that I will provide you with space and time to re-examine your perspectives and positions – a kind of mission vision "check-up"; an opportunity to polish the missional lenses set within the structural frames that bring boundaries to such work; and, if needed, the chance to re-evaluate and perhaps adjust or change your prescription.

You are always free to make your own choices in the course. You may choose to see and embrace some perspectives, and you may also choose to put some on hold for further consideration. You may decide that, after all, this isn't what you thought it would be and that it is not for you. Fair enough. But let's stay friends!

Slide 6

"Culture has been changing at [an] exponential rate. For thousands of years, culture reinvented itself around the rate of each new generation, which is roughly every 20 to 30 years... People now experience the same quantity of significant generational events, that used to occur over a period of thirty years, every 18 months."

– Doug Paul
(Ready or Not: Kingdom innovation for a brave new world, xxxiv)

Photo by Djim Loic on Unsplash

Slide 7

2011 Census for SEC Territory	UK Faith Statistics	2018 British Attitudes Survey
52	Christian	38
26	No Religion	52
8	None Indicated	
5	Muslim	6

Slide 8

Pandemic
Opportunity to Pause (if not stop)
Ask questions – ourselves, others and God

Who are we? As individuals? As Groups?
What are our narratives, our stories that tell us who we are? And who the other is?

Who are our neighbours? As individuals? As Groups?
What are their narratives, their stories that tell them who they are? Who we are?

What is God's story? How have I come to hear that story? What meanings do I make and take from it? What are the realities of God's story in the present?

Slide 9

Through A Glass Darkly...

HOW?

Slide 10

The Conversation is comprised of 6 Sessions

The conversation continues outside of our 90 minutes on this platform as you engage with the handouts, the recommended material and practical assignments.

The quality and depth of your journey will hinge on individual engagement.
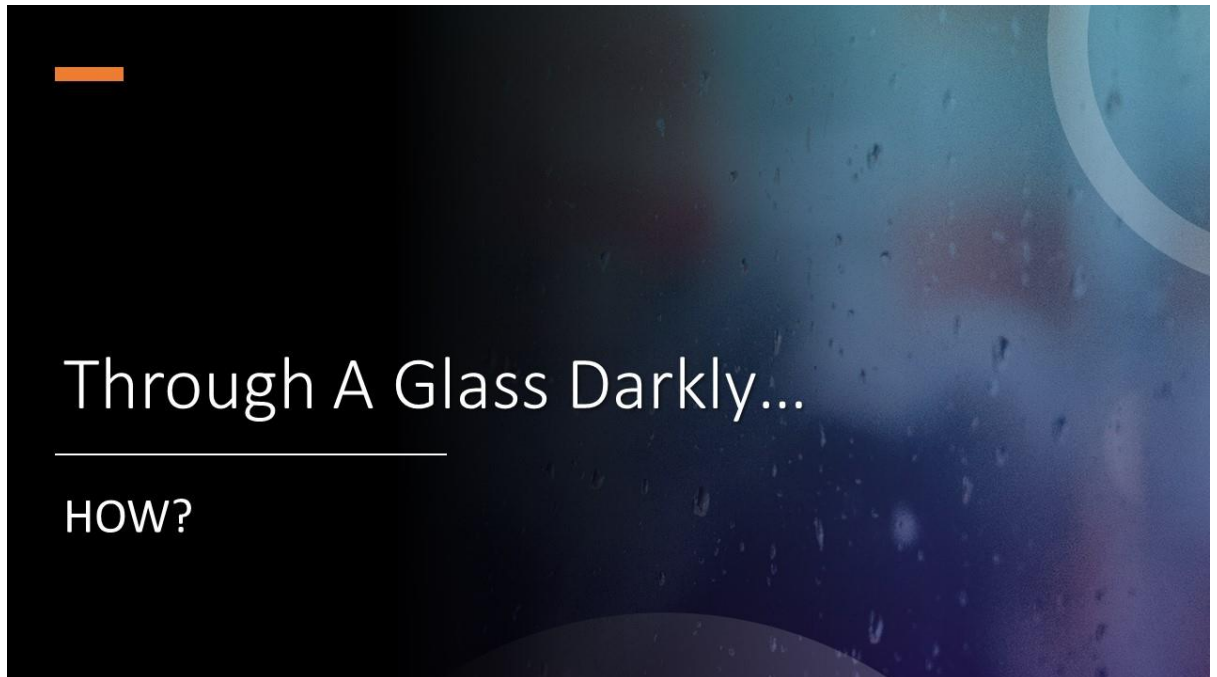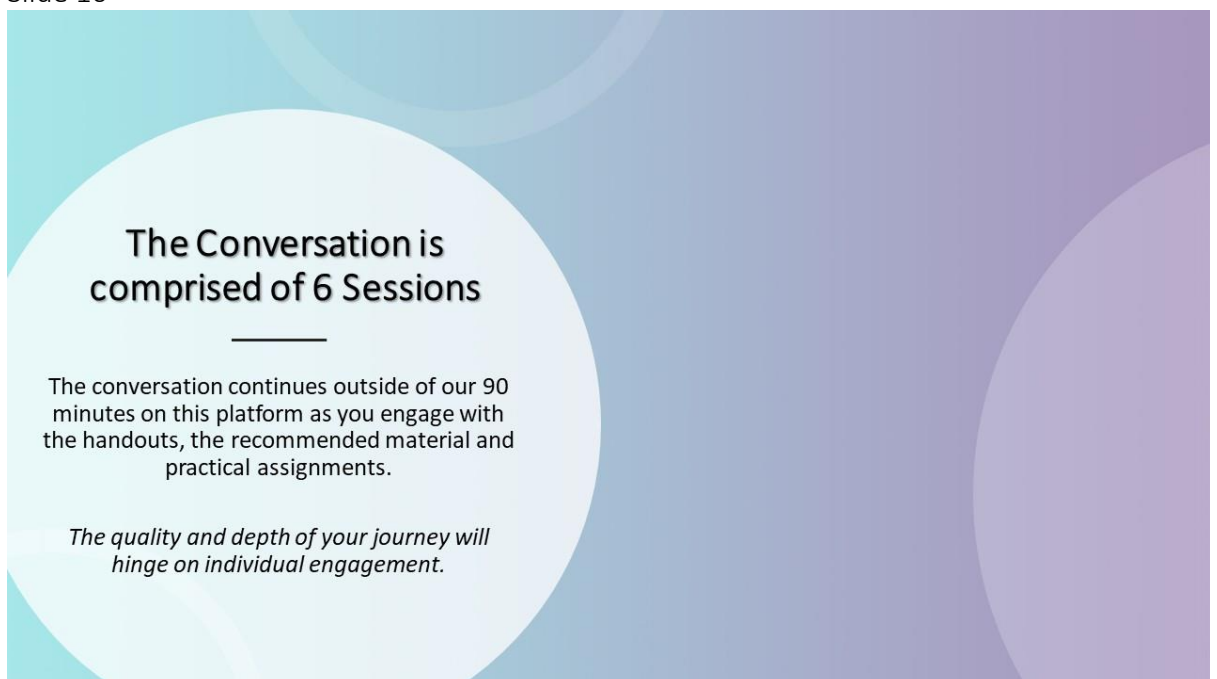
Slide 11

- ✓ We want to keep this as a safe space
- ✓ Respect and honour what others share – even if (and especially if) it cuts across your story.
- ✓ Your story is yours to share as you choose.
- ✓ We do not have the right to share others' stories without their permission.
- ✓ Practice listening well.

- ✓ Remember that your story and its interaction with the stories gathered here is valuable.
- ✓ Please do not deprive the group of that added dimension by dipping in and out of the 6 sessions.

Slide 12

"A journey is called that because you cannot know what you will discover on the journey, what you will do with what you find, or what you find will do to you"

James Baldwin, (I am not your Negro)

Slide 13
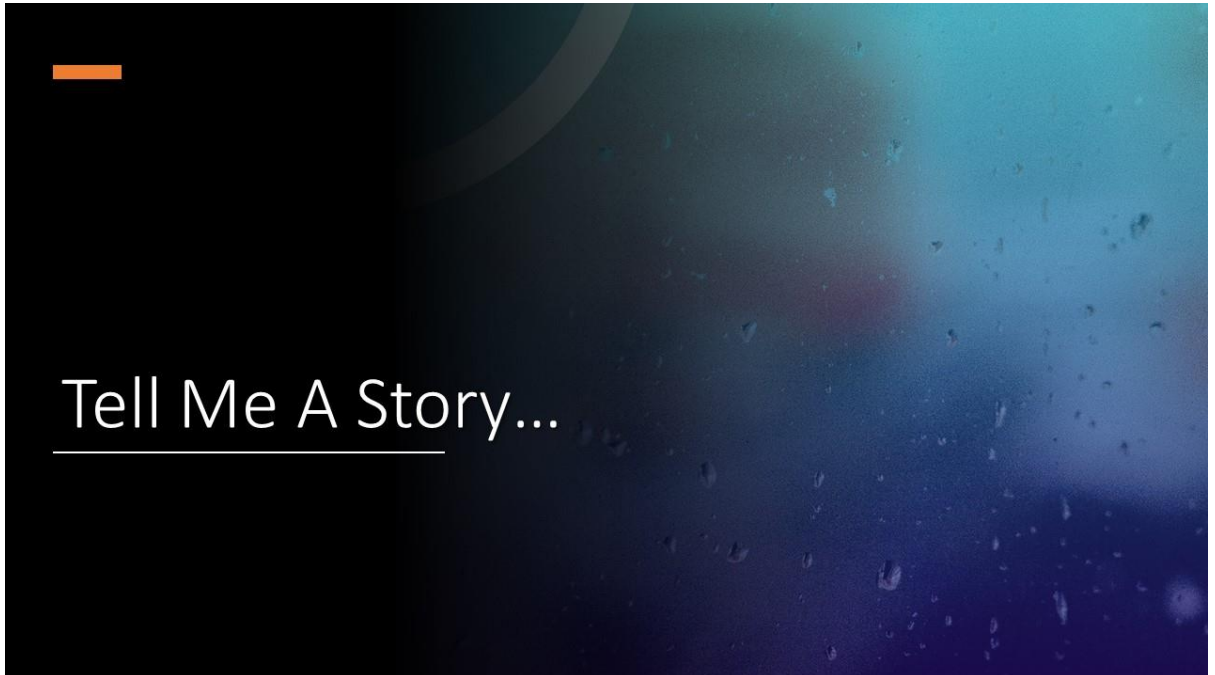
Humanity has used story/narrative since (at least) the first time we had to give meaning to our actions (Genesis 3).
Narrative has the ability to tell our stories back to ourselves.
We use it to tell us who we are and whom we wish to be.

Slide 14

Photo by Stephanie Klepacki on Unsplash

Begin on something we can all agree on: The sky is "blue". Of course it is. People have always known this.
William Gladstone (later MP of Britain) noticed that Homer used strange colour designations in the Odyssey. Counted the colour references. Balck x200, white x100,

red x15, yellow and green x 10. Blue is not mentioned. Sky is described in terms of weather or feeling – serene (galano)

Icelandic Sagas, the Koran, ancient Chinese stories, ancient Hebrew scriptures, Hindu hymns – they sky is never blue.

Ancient Egyptians were the first to have a word for blue – and the first to have a blue dye.

Himba (Namibia) have more words for Green than we do. But they have the same word for blue/green. Most cannot tell the difference. But can tell the difference between more shades of green than most of us can.

Industrialisation seems to account for more developed language for culture.

According to NASA, the sky is actually violet – but the shorter blue waves and the limitations of our eyes present it as blue.

Slide 15

"Sometimes reality is too complex. Stories give it form."
– Jean Luc Godard, film director, screen writer, film critic

"It's like everyone tells a story about themselves inside their own head. Always. All the time. That story makes you what you are. We build ourselves out of that story."
- Patrick Rothfuss, author

"Stories create community, enable us to see through the eyes of other people, and open us to the claims of others."
– Peter Forbes, photographer and author

Slide 16

Slide 17

Slide 18

Slide 19

Break Out Rooms

Share: Meet and greet, introducing yourselves to your group using your name and by sharing one thing that you would like others to know about you.

Discuss: What did you notice about yourself through the online inventories? What reactions did the inventories elicit from you?

(15 minutes)

Slide 20
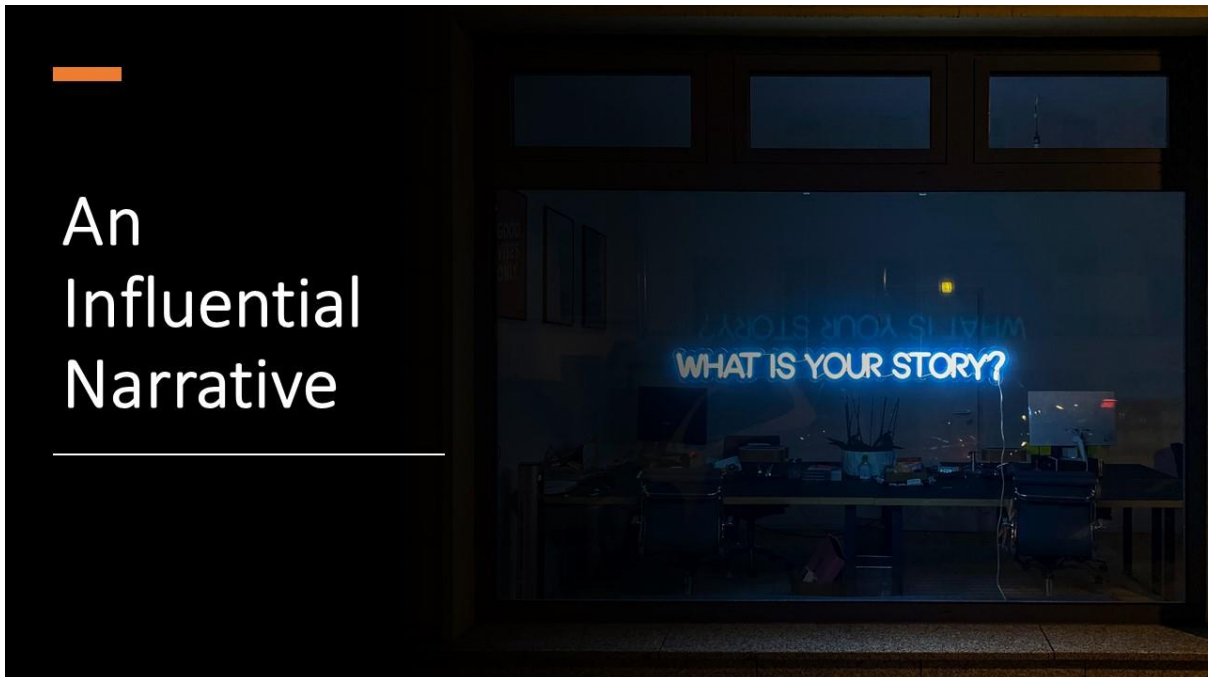
My story is deeply impactful and directive (actively/passively) for the way I navigate through the world, live in relationship with others and with God

Slide 21
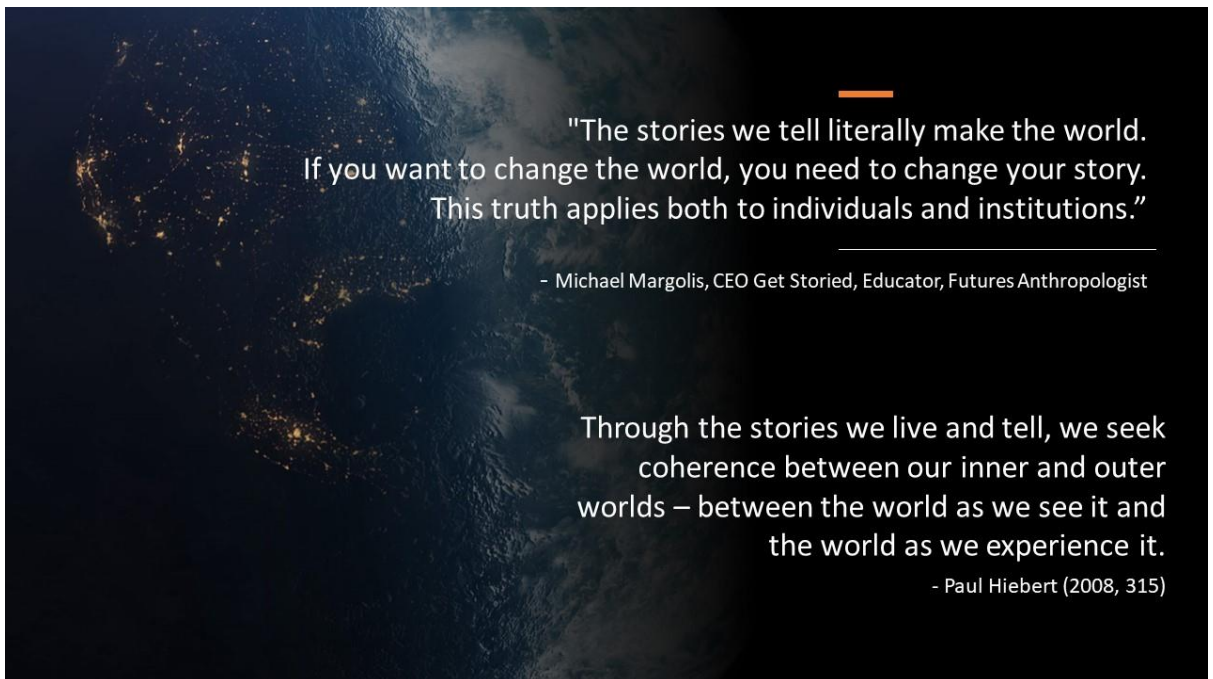
"The stories we tell literally make the world. If you want to change the world, you need to change your story. This truth applies both to individuals and institutions."

- Michael Margolis, CEO Get Storied, Educator, Futures Anthropologist

Through the stories we live and tell, we seek coherence between our inner and outer worlds – between the world as we see it and the world as we experience it.

- Paul Hiebert (2008, 315)

Slide 22
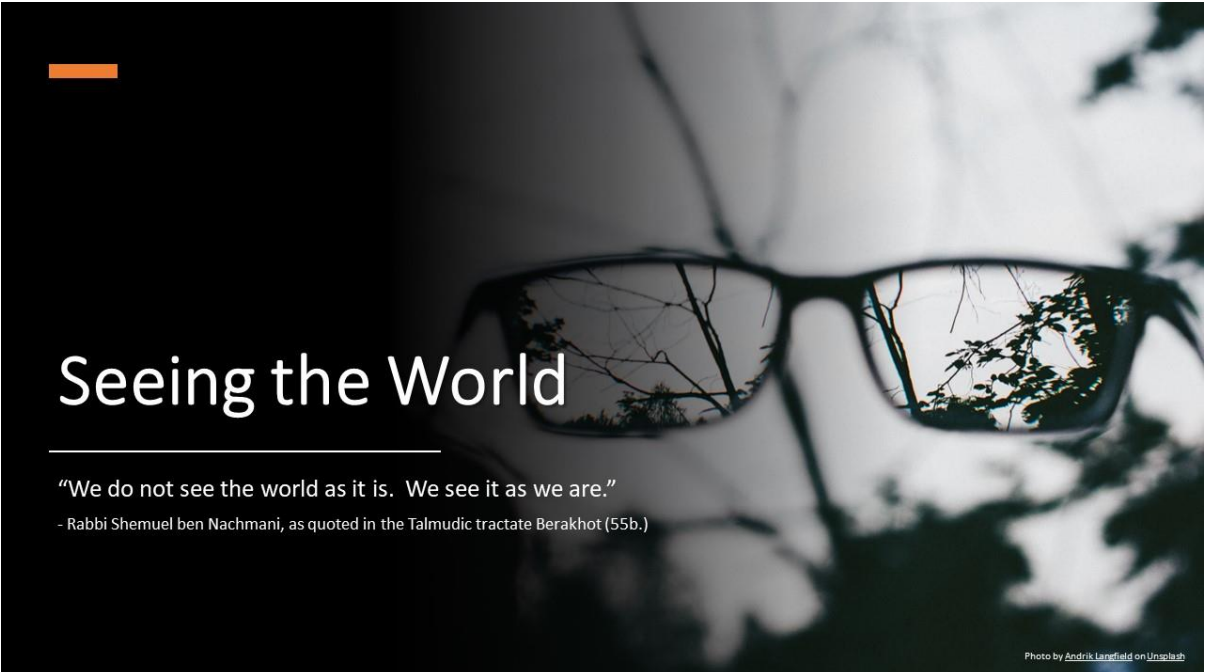
Break Out Rooms

Share: Ways in which my story is positively framed.
                Ways in which my story is negatively framed.

Discuss: What did you notice about yourself through the online inventories?
                What reactions did the inventories elicit from you?

                (15 Minutes)

Slide 23

Seeing the World

"We do not see the world as it is. We see it as we are."
- Rabbi Shemuel ben Nachmani, as quoted in the Talmudic tractate Berakhot (55b.)

Photo by Andrik Langfield on Unsplash

Taking note of my lenses
We begin with "my story" because it is the lens through which we see and understand ourselves, others and yes, even God.

Slide 24
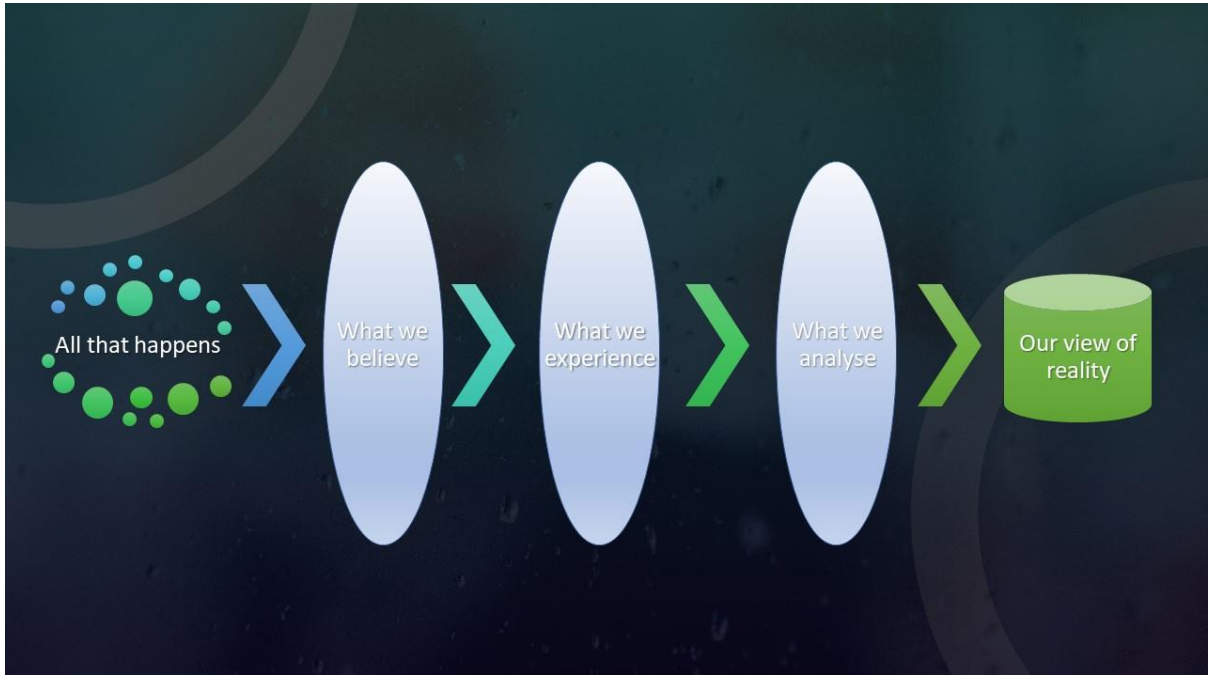
Slide 25

> A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.
>
> - James Sire (2015, 141)

Your worldview – and mine – happen to us, more than they are chosen by us. Certainly, our views of the world – our meaning making – is given to us by our guardians and other authority figures. Trauma, abuse, deprivation, conflict, privilege and power all serve to shape our worldview lenses as do protection, peace, provision, kindness and comfort. What this means is that all views of the world are inherently subjective in some way. But we don't experience the subjectivity – especially when the groups we are part of, and the narratives they tell, support and reinforce our worldview. To put that differently…

Slide 26

Charles Kraft, Worldview for Christian Witness, 2008, p.14-23

1. Our journey through life begins with many assumptions that are not challenged until later in life, and sometimes, not even then, and often, not fully.
2. Think of an iceberg – the bits that you become aware of and see are only about a third of what is going on beneath
3. In "As you like it", Shakespeare said that, "All the worlds a stage, and all the men and women merely players…". To extend that metaphor, in life, people are the actors, culture is the script. When we speak of activity/behaviours this relates to people. When we speak of patterns/habits we are referring to culture. Worldview is part of the patterns – the script – which provides the basic assumptions on which we as people act.
4. We are fiercely loyal to the way that we have always seen the world. Even when faced with evidence that challenges our basic assumptions. But we are able to make changes – to sometimes step off the paths/script and write new lines and create new narratives. Worldviews can change by virtue of accommodation, adaptation and paradigm shift.
5. Since worldview is so powerful and influential in our lives, it operates as the subscript to just about every human interaction. This includes our inner worlds and our outer ones; our physical worlds and our spiritual ones.

"A worldview is such a complex thing and so deeply engrained in its adherents that I strongly doubt the possibility that a person can completely escape from the one s/he learned as a child"
Kraft (2013, 347)

Slide 27
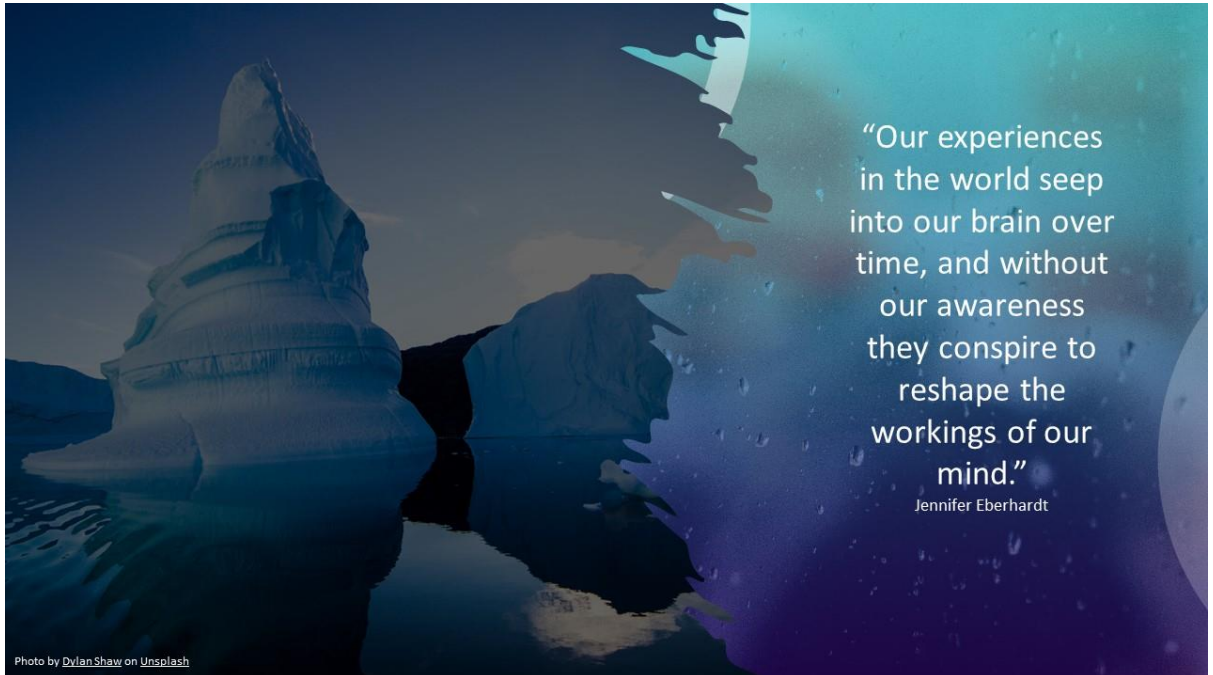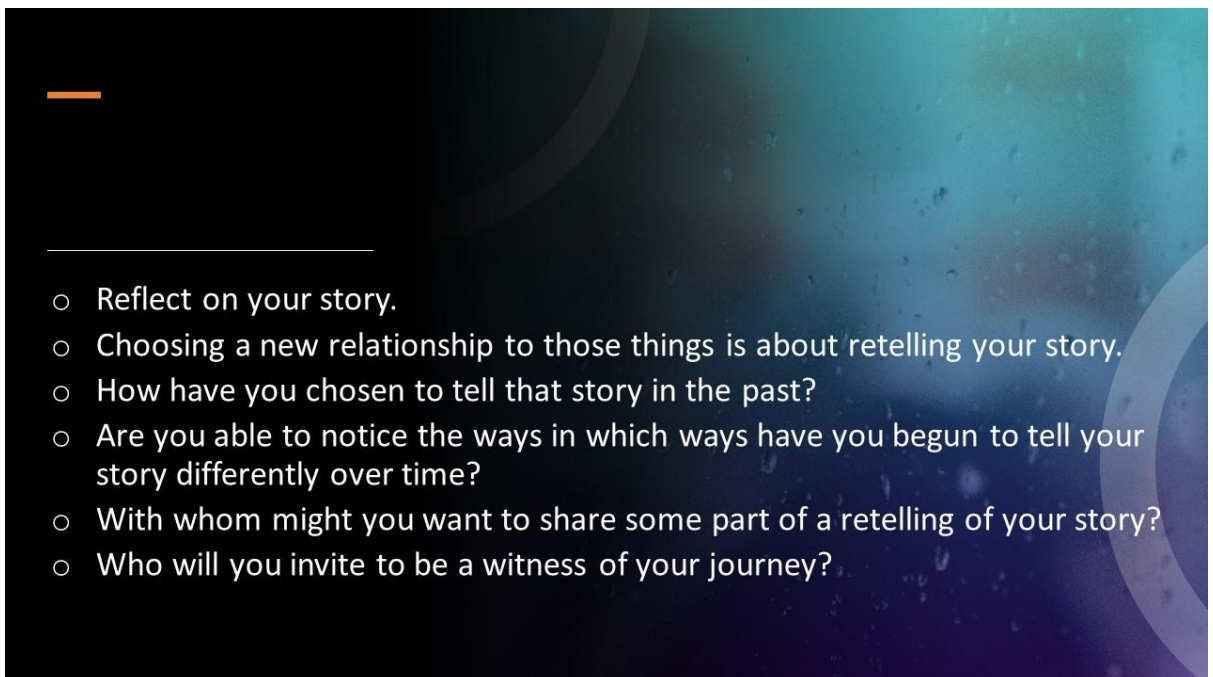
"Our experiences in the world seep into our brain over time, and without our awareness they conspire to reshape the workings of our mind."
Jennifer Eberhardt

Photo by Dylan Shaw on Unsplash

Slide 28

o Reflect on your story.
o Choosing a new relationship to those things is about retelling your story.
o How have you chosen to tell that story in the past?
o Are you able to notice the ways in which ways have you begun to tell your story differently over time?
o With whom might you want to share some part of a retelling of your story?
o Who will you invite to be a witness of your journey?

Reflect on your story – it may contain the full range of human experience from agonising darkness to overwhelming light. Aim simply to 'hold' your story. Note any strong emotions, when and where they arise, without getting overly engaged with them. It is true that these things have happened. Choosing a new relationship to those things is about retelling your story. How have you chosen to tell that story in the past? In which ways have you begun to tell your story differently over time? With whom might you want to share some part of a retelling of your story? Who will be a witness of your journey?

CONVERSATION 2
Slide 1

Slide 2

Slide 3

"A journey is called that because you cannot know what you will discover on the journey, what you will do with what you find, or what you find will do to you"

James Baldwin, (I am not your Negro)

We remind ourselves that we have embarked on a journey together.
This is not a series of lectures from which we take information grabs.
Instead we are engaging a progression of thoughts and perspectives that build on one another. What we engage in one session, informs what we pick up and look at in the next. How has your journey begun?

Slide 4

Session 1 Recap

Slide 5

Each has a personal 'story'

Forms part of the script from which we live our lives

The script tells us who we are and who we are not.

Our script takes the form of a story that we tell from within ourselves.

Under constant revision.

The stories we tell are powerful – they create our realities – individually and collectively.

Slide 6

Worldview

Largely taught/given to us and accepted in an uncritical way

Maturity includes:

a. Awareness that the way I navigated the world is not the only way to do so;

b. Willingness to meaningfully assess my uncritiqued worldview assumptions.

Slide 7

Slide 8

Breakout Room Activity #1

Share with your group your experience of the past week as you engaged the ReTell activities from Session 1:

o Reflect on your story.
o Choosing a new relationship to those things is about retelling your story.
o How have you chosen to tell that story in the past?
o Are you able to notice the ways in which ways have you begun to tell your story differently over time?
o With whom might you want to share some part of a retelling of your story?
o Who will you invite to be a witness of your journey?

(15 Minutes)

Slide 9

Through the stories we live and tell,
we seek coherence between our
inner and outer worlds – between
the world as we see it and the world
as we experience it.
- Paul Hiebert (2008, 315)
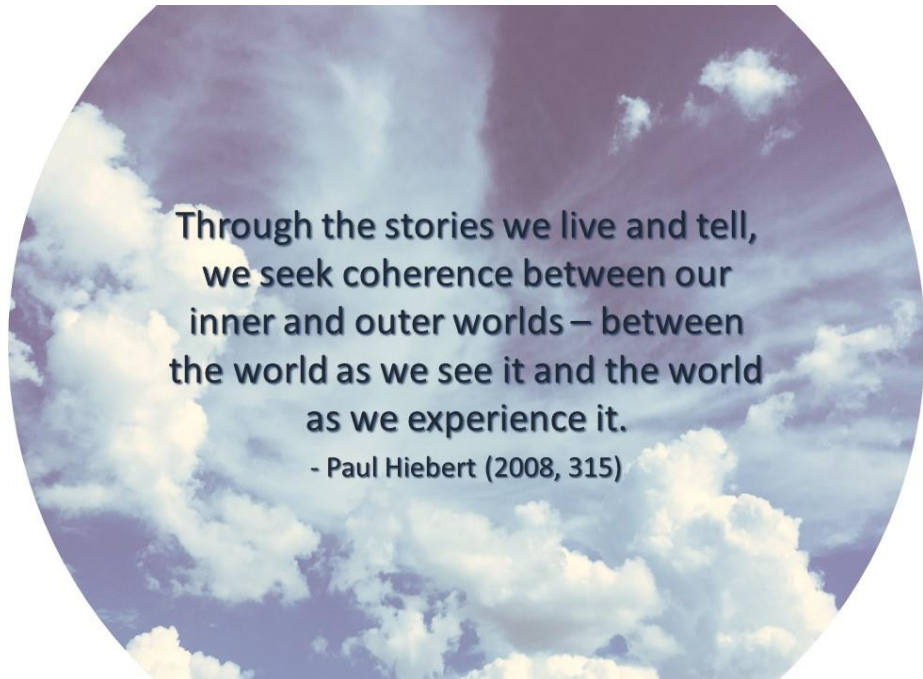
Slide 10

Who is
the
'Other?'

"Our lives are stories, and the stories we have to give to each other are the most
important. No one has a story too small and all are of equal stature. We each tell them
in different ways, through different mediums – and if we care about each other, we'll take
the time to listen."

- Charles de Lint (author)

Slide 11

Photo by Dominik Vanyi on Unsplash

"Otherness is a fundamental
category of human
thought. Thus it is that no
group ever sets itself up as
the One without at once
setting up the Other over
against itself."

Simone de Beauvoir

Simone de Beauvoir describes happens in the big narratives of culture and national/ethnic identity.
Also with the "In and Out Groups" that are created within those larger narratives.
We might refer to those "In and Out Groups" as social identities.

Slide 12

Social identities are relational; groups typically define themselves in relation to others. This is because identity has little meaning without the "other".

So, by defining itself a group defines others.

Identity is rarely claimed or assigned for its own sake. These definitions of self and others have purposes and consequences. They are tied to rewards and punishment, which may be material or symbolic. There is usually an expectation of gain or loss as a consequence of identity claims. This is why identities are contested. Power is implicated here, and because groups do not have equal powers to define both *self* and the *other*, the consequences reflect these power differentials. Often notions of superiority and inferiority are embedded in particular identities.

Andrew Okolie

- Think of a group that you belong to. Have a go at thinking about how it defines itself, and how that definition also assigns an identity to others.
- E.g. Choral Society. Formal. Mozarts Requiem Mass. Vivaldi Gloria. Suggestion that we join with another music group – Worle Wind (a brass band group) met with a multitude of reasons why not. We (Choral Society) are not "them".

Implicit in the dynamic was a hierarchy of music and therefore of musicians, audiences, etc.

Slide 13
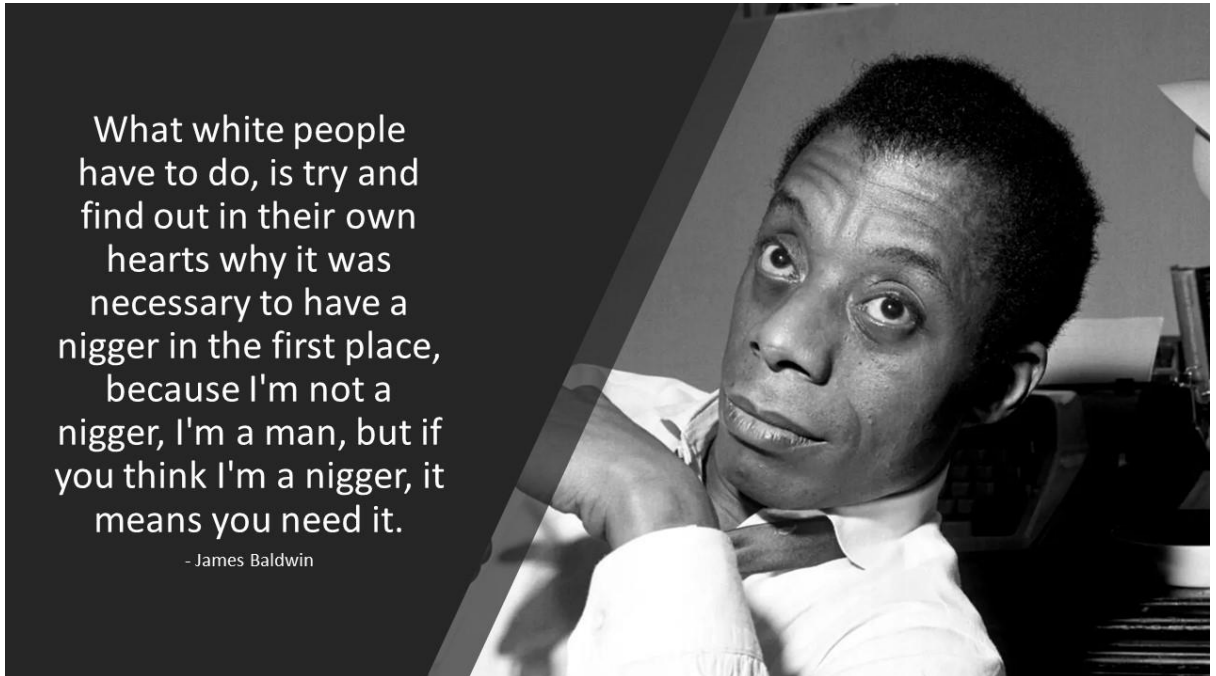
This quote from "I am not your Negro" illustrates the points we have made.

In order to know who I am, I also have to tell you who I am not. Who I am not is therefor "Other".

But that "other" is also a function of my identity, of my story. The very fact that I have othered someone binds our stories together. Dominance and power become part of that story. And we begin to live those dynamics out in ways we may not even understand well.

The uncomfortable truth we face is that this is not only a race dynamic. It exists around gender, class, sexuality, national identity, and ethnicity to name a few of the big hitters.

James Baldwin also lived his life as a gay man – not openly so, but he also did not hide it. His sexuality was a problem for many in the Civil Rights movement who felt that his voice did the cause a disservice. Despite his enormous efforts within the movement, due to his sexuality, Baldwin was excluded from the inner circles of the civil rights movement and was conspicuously uninvited to speak at the end of the March on Washington.

It would appear that Baldwin knew the pain of being excluded within a larger group with whom he shared a powerful narrative.

Slide 14

Since I have asked you to share parts of your stories with the Group, it seems only fair that I share some of mine.

But before we get there, I wonder if you might be willing to tell me something about myself. Who am I as an "Other" that you see? How do you experience me? What do you see?

Slide 15

To tell the story of someone else is also to tell part of our own story. In order to have someone as "Other" a distinction has to be drawn – there is something about them that is not "me/we" – and we cannot share a story/identity. In order to have an "Other" a story of difference must be told. Not only difference, but also of power and privilege. When we tell stories of the Other, we will need to begin to confront our narratives of power and of privilege.

When we use these narratives they tend to tell us that we are "unique" – special in some way; certainly not ordinary or plain. We stand out, have a great story. Our positive characteristics are emphasised and our negative ones seem to disappear. This is one reason why many Christians object to certain relational and behavioural truths about the Church coming into the open. Those realities make it more difficult to stand on our special unique platform.

On the other hand: "they" are all the same. And "their" negative characteristics eclipse any positive ones they may have (and we strongly suspect they have very few). And if "they" do something good and notable, it is the exception rather than the rule.

We categorise in order to save mental energy. Language helps us with this. E.g. Chair/Stool/Table

We use the same strategy for dealing with the world around us.

There is always more information coming at us than we can process. To cope, we become **Cognitive Misers** – meaning we conserve our mental energy by using mental shortcuts.

We do a similar thing with our human interactions. When we are with people who are like us, and whose behaviours etc we are able to predict, we conserve our cognitive energy to use on other things.

Conversely, interactions with people who are different from us (in/out narratives) or who transgress our expectations become cognitively taxing.

Slide 18

Categorising is helpful in many ways:
- It helps me to predict and anticipate actions and reactions based on the category I have put something or someone in.
- Reduces stress and anxiety – once I see patterns and create categories for things.

Categorising is hurtful too:
- In our desire to simplify the world around us, we group people into smaller homogenous units or categories.
- By dividing larger categories that are diverse (e.g. The Body of Christ – Church) into smaller, less diverse subcategories we are better able to make assumptions and predictions in order to conserve mental energy.
- We then tend to see the smaller groups before we see the larger one. The subcategories become more important than the larger group.
- Distinctions are guarded at all costs as they provide clear information about how a person should be categorised.

Slide 19

Slide 20

Categorisation:
Cognitive Generosity

Photo by Joel Muniz on Unsplash

The vagaries of Categorisation are strong and powerful. You may have already begun to identity how it works in your mind and heart.

However, these cognitive processes are not invincible. They are most powerful when hidden from our view – when we operate within them and don't notice them. In this state we can even consider ourselves experts on the Other – metaperceptions "What we think they think about us". In our various groups, "what we think about them" is as important as "what we think they think about us". It is the latter that has a huge influence on how we understand interactions with the Other.

But once we become more aware – we are able to challenge our categories. And any assumed perceptions about "the Other".

We all suffer from polluted perceptions of others – other nationalities, other ethnicities, denominations, language groups, interest groups etc.

If you are brave enough – write down a list of various groups that orbit around your life. And then next to each one write what you actually think about them (not what you would like to think about them, or like others to think you think about them).

When we do this, we begin to name our biases. And when something has a name. It can be actively confronted and challenged. And we can become more Cognitively Generous.

When it comes to mission – going with God into the world – my biases/prejudices will get in the way. Unless I engage them, name them, call them out; I will assume that God sees things as I do. We cannot meaningfully minister with anyone or any group when we hold prejudice against them in our hearts. Now, I can ask God never to invite me to go with him on mission to any groups that fall into those categories. And perhaps that would be fair enough. But I cannot object if God goes there because of who God is and what John 3:16,17 tell us. Another option is to engage God about my prejudices and biases – working with God toward healing my heart in those matters.

Slide 22

Breakout Room Activity #3

Share: What are the narratives around the 'Other' in your context?
Who tells these narratives?
In which ways/times/telling of the narrative, do you function as "they"/Other?

Discuss: What we think "they" think of us.
Be specific about which groups and which thoughts.

(15 minutes)

Slide 23

BRIDGE
Beliefs Rituals Idols Dreams God Experiences

Matthew Kim, Preaching with Cultural Intelligence (2017)

Interactions with those who are "Other" to our identities, groups and worldviews are opportunities to build bridges.
Bridges have 2 ends. They can be accessed from both ends.
In mission we often think of bridges as a way for "them" to get to "us". It is only part of the truth, and a small one at that. The more significant truth is that a bridge allows "us" to get to the "them". This is always the posture of a missionary. We are the sent ones. The ones who negotiate the obstacles. Cross the divide. In this we follow the example of Christ and we go in His Name and in His Way.

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Matthew Kim uses BRIDGE as an acronym to think about the areas of culture/worldview that a preacher interacts with during the preaching event. It is also a helpful mnemonic for modern missionaries who wish to be culturally intelligent.

Beliefs: confessional/convictional/cultural (cognitive beliefs/value beliefs/what my group believes)

Rituals: habits, practices or routines with associated meaning. E.g. rites of passage; celebrations, meals etc

Idols: What are the ultimate things for this group? "What people revere, they resemble, either for ruin or restoration" Gregory K Beale.

Dreams: Aspirations. These are the possible selves that exist alongside the present self.

God: How is God viewed? Which aspects of God are emphasised? Punishing? Lavishly generous?

Experiences: what happens to people in their life – their story! Listening and learning the stories of those we are ministering with allows the bridge to land in their lived reality as well as mine.

Slide 24

Slide 25

Post Session Activity

○ Baldwin speaks of being a witness. What does it mean to be a witness? Ho is the role of a witness in history different from the roles of others – such as perpetrators, victims, bystanders, or allies? What are the responsibilities of a witness, and why is it important that there be witnesses?

○ Do you find any resonance between Baldwin's use of the term 'witness' and that of Jesus in Acts 1:8?

○ Seek to be a witness to someone else's story this week. Engage with a neighbour, an acquaintance, or work colleague who might have a different narrative to your own. Take a walk together, meet up for 'coffee', visit a gallery together, taking an interest in their story and actively seeking to listen to them as they share parts of their story in their own words.

Slide 26

CONVERSATION 3

Slide 1

Slide 2

Darkly = our ability to perceive clearly is diminished. This is a human condition. But it can be compensated for. I can admit that I don't see clearly. I can acknowledge that the lenses through which I look are coloured and shaped by my personal story, along with my collective story. And even when I have come to faith, those two stories remain significant in the way that I perceive myself, others and God. When I lose sight of that reality, I am prone to dogmatism, prejudicial approaches and the possibility of only seeing God in what looks like me.

Slide 3

"A journey is called that because you cannot know what you will discover on the journey, what you will do with what you find, or what you find will do to you"

James Baldwin, (I am not your Negro)

We remind ourselves that we have embarked on a journey together.
This is not a series of lectures from which we take information grabs.
Instead we are engaging a progression of thoughts and perspectives that build on one another. What we engage in one session, informs what we pick up and look at in the next. How has your journey begun? Have you begun to identify the lenses through which you view and experience yourself and the world around you?

Slide 4

The Journey so far...

Slide 5

Our personal stories – our identity narratives – form the lens through which we see and understand the world around us.

Through these narratives we learn who we are and who we are not. There are relative values/worth attached to these narratives. In these narratives we learn about our worth as part of family and group. We learn our place in the pecking order and we internalise those messages making them part of who we are. And we assume that all of these things are somehow "how the world is". It is all normalised. The interacting of these narratives with other human beings may result in funny anecdotes to tell our grandchildren, but they may also result in the kinds of events that history books record.

Slide 6

To tell the story of someone else is also to tell part of our own story. In order to have someone as "Other" a distinction has to be drawn – there is something about them that is not "me/we" – and we cannot share a story/identity. In order to have an "Other" a story of difference must be told. Not only difference, but also of power and privilege. When we tell stories of the Other, we will need to begin to confront our own narratives of power and of privilege.

We are accustomed to hearing these words in relation to race relationships and identity politics. But they influence how we think about and engage Mission too. We become oblivious to the possibility of "blind spots"

They have sins that must be confronted.
We have sins that will be dealt with when "we shall all be changed"

Slide 7

Slide 8

Story is integral to the interaction of God with humanity. We know of it through story. We make meaning of it through story. And it is lived out through story. Story is the way that we contain and express our relationship with God and to the way that God interacts with us and with others. It is also the way that we describe the activity of God in the world. It is all contained in narrative. We have a tendency to become more propositional in our approach to God. Propositional means that our perspective, position or understanding is asserted as clearly delineated statements with which one might either agree or disagree. Story offers different options: engagement,

journeying, exploring, and an opportunity to look for resonance more meaningful than simple agreement/disagreement.

Slide 9

Photo by Timothy Eberly on Unsplash

Recognising that we each come to Scripture with our own personal narratives – our life experiences, assumptions and uncritiqued "truths".

Along with that, we also come from within collective narratives which serve to tell us who we are and who we are not. Often these designations are more than simply descriptive (I am a boy, you are a girl; I am Black, you are White; We are Indigenous, you are Foreign; We are Adventist, you are Pentecostal.) Such designations also come with a significant amount of subtext – the stuff that exists between the lines of any story. To be a boy also means to have certain advantages that are not afforded to girls. To be Black or White also means to have to contend with different obstacles, or more obstacles in life. It relates to defaults and functions of privilege or power lived out in various complex ways within community, To be Indigenous in one context is to be the default; in another context, the same word conveys marginalisation, oppression and disenfranchisement. To be Adventist may carry with it narratives of superiority – we are special, God might love us more because we are more faithful, Or, we might be the only faithful ones left on the face of the earth and like the notional 10 righteous in Sodom and Gomorrah, we are effectively holding back the winds of destruction by our presence.

When we speak about "reading it as it reads" conveniently skips over all of that and takes the position that we are neutral when we come to the text, and that the text itself is culturally neutral – without it's own contextual narratives, dynamics of power and privilege, in and out groups, and all the convolutions and complications that come with being human.

Richards & O'Brien

"…Scripture is a foreign land and reading the Bible is a cross-cultural experience."

Photo by Andrew Neel on Unsplash

What do Richards and O' Brien mean?

Is Scripture unknowable? Incomprehensible? No! They simple mean that we bring with us to the reading of Scripture all of our stuff, and that intersecting point between our life narratives and those of the Scriptures can be a point where we are most unaware of ourselves.

If we are not careful, we may "read" ourselves into the text in ways that affirm some of our worst character traits - and fundamentally, our need to be special. To some degree, every child wants to be the favourite.

e.g. Dutch/French Huguenot settlers to Southern Africa earnestly read the scriptures and readily saw themselves as Israel being taken from a spiritual Egypt (Europe) and being led by God into a new land – flowing with milk and honey. It had to be occupied and tamed. And they read the words of Scripture as being spoken to them – drive out the inhabitants before you; purify the land. This narrative was not only embraced by these settlers, but also by many who went to the Americas and elsewhere.

e.g. It is not surprising that theological notions that demean and diminish Judaism and provide a Christian only understanding of Scripture have been used to oppress and impugn whole groups of people because we are able to read ourselves into Scripture and read others out of it.

And we do this especially when we choose to assume that both we and the text are neutral in matters of context, culture and narrative.

When you think of God – or create a picture in your mind, envisage a story, or picture Jesus with his disciples – what do you see?

The Chinese-born artist James He Qi's "Peace, Be Still" (1998) depicts Christ stilling the waters in bold colours that recall stained-glass window. He blends Chinese folk customs and modern western art. Credit...James He Qi

The inked strip of parchment from Ethiopia features a black Jesus at the Last Supper, an image ubiquitous in the country.

Greg Weatherby, "Crucifixion" (2006), absorbs Jesus into Aboriginal storytelling.

In the mid-1930s, students at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago voted a black and white sketch titled "Son of Man," by the illustrator Warner Sallman, the most accurate portrayal of Jesus. Kriebel & Bates, a publisher of religious material in Indianapolis, bought the rights to the image and, in 1940, the copyright to Sallman's color painting, "Head of Christ." An industry was born.

"Wallet-sized versions were distributed to soldiers and sailors during World War II," said Mr. Johnson, of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity. "It made its way to church bulletins, calendars, posters, bookmarks — literally hundreds of millions of them."
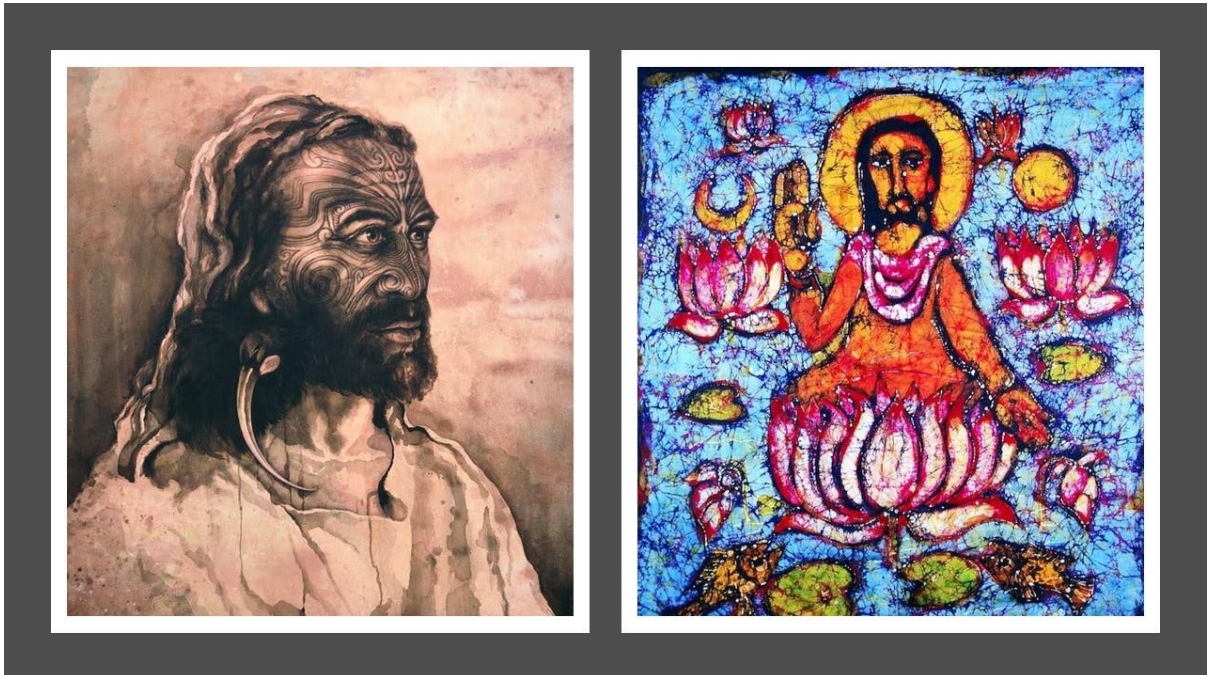
Sofia Minson, "Maori Jesus" (2014).Credit...

While Christian artists typically depict Jesus's suffering, in Indian art he is often seen as peaceful. Dr. P. Solomon Raj, an artist and theologian, shows Jesus "as teacher, sitting on a lotus flower much like the Buddha, the lotus being a symbol of purity," Ms. Jones said. He raises his right hand in a gesture of reassurance and blessing "whose Sanskrit name literally means 'Do not fear' — something Jesus said many times."

The particularity of Jesus – meaning, that he came at a specific time and into a specific place; is male, of a particular ethnic group, with eye and hair colour etc., speaking a particular language and using a specific frame of reference does not mean that those particulars are normative. They are not the default simply because they are part of the particularity of Jesus. The fullness of time, does not mean the most normative time.

Slide 13

○ In your Group, share your reaction to watching the film, "The Shack"

○ How is the film depiction of God different from your concept of God?

○ Which parts of this portrayal resonated with you?

○ Which parts were challenging or jarring for you?

**Breakout Room Activity #2
(15 minutes)**

Slide 14

The Scriptures give us the story of God framed within our human narrative. In a sense, we know what we know because of God's interaction with our human narrative and the recording of that narrative over time. We are given only small snippets from before our story, and these are pieced together from various parts of Scripture. The revelation of God comes within the story of humanity. The backbone of that interaction is the movement of God toward us.

Genesis 1-5

The story is good. (That is really what Gospel is – the good story)

God freely chooses to create, to being into being somethings and someones who have not existed before. And as God looks at everything and everyone the pronouncement is that it is all good.

Genesis 3 things go wrong and God steps down into Eden to talk about it with Adam and Eve.

Description is that God walks in the garden in the cool of the day – this is not something new, but rather a continuation of what God has already been doing. In order to be among humanity – even before the fall – God accommodated himself to the created order. And he continued to do so after the fall.

Slide 15
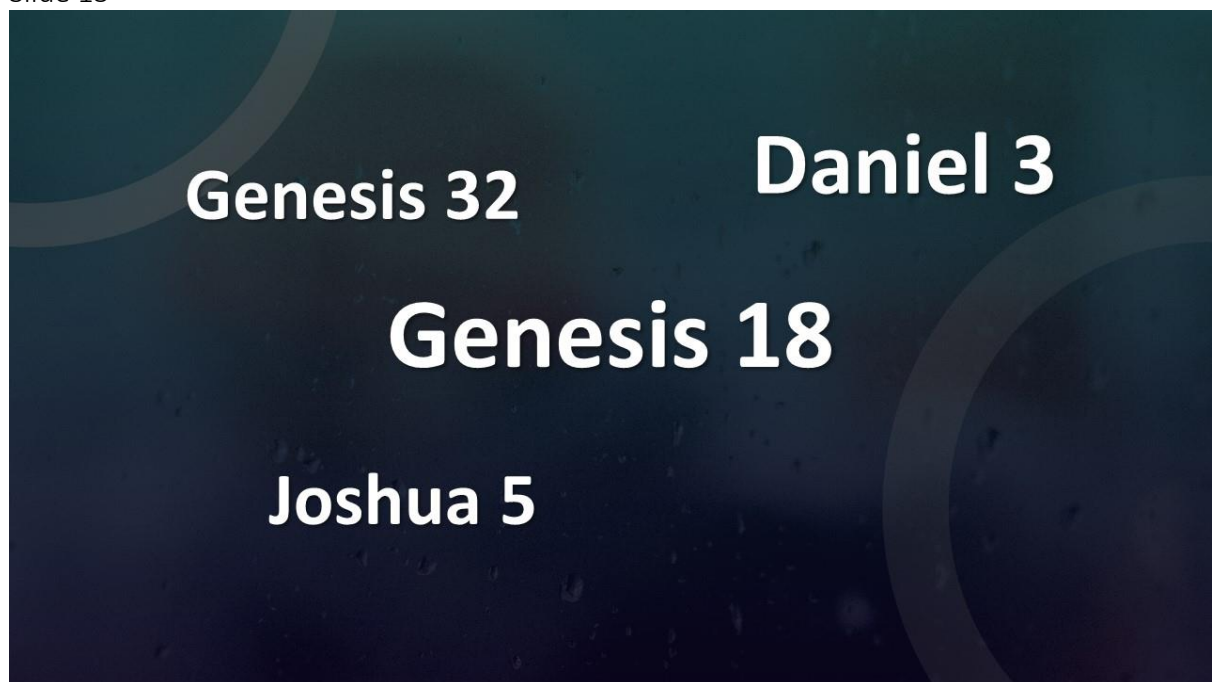
Genesis 18: Three men meet with Abram at his tent, breaks bread with him and promises him a future beyond what he can currently see. Abram understands this to be the person of God.

Genesis 32: Jacob wrestles with a man in the Jabbok and later declares, I have seen the face of God and live.

Joshua 5: Joshua is confronted by a man with a drawn sword whom he esteems as God and worships.

Daniel 3: the 4th man in the fire, of whom no comment is made by Daniel or his friends, but whom Nebuchadnezzar declares appears as a son of the gods.

We recognise all 4 instances as theophanies – moments in time when God steps into the human story and interacts with us in time and in place.

"And have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them."

Exodus 25:8

Exodus 25:8 sparks much of the activity that continues through the book of Exodus. The details of the building are interesting and distracting even, but if we get lost in them before understanding the WHY then we risk misunderstanding a great deal. The WHY was about being present with these people in a continual and identifiable way. It is a key indicator of where the heart and desire of God is located. In a tent, among the people. Among a people who are having to process what it means to leave Egypt and their identity there (there is a story) and move into a new story with a changed identity. The 40 years between leaving Egypt and Entering Canaan are a threshold time – something is ending and another is not fully formed.

Slide 17

"⁷ Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp; he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. ⁸ Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise and stand, each of them, at the entrance of their tents and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. ⁹ When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the Lord would speak with Moses. ¹⁰ When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise and bow down, all of them, at the entrance of their tent. ¹¹ Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then he would return to the camp; but his young assistant, Joshua son of Nun, would not leave the tent."

Exodus 33:7-11
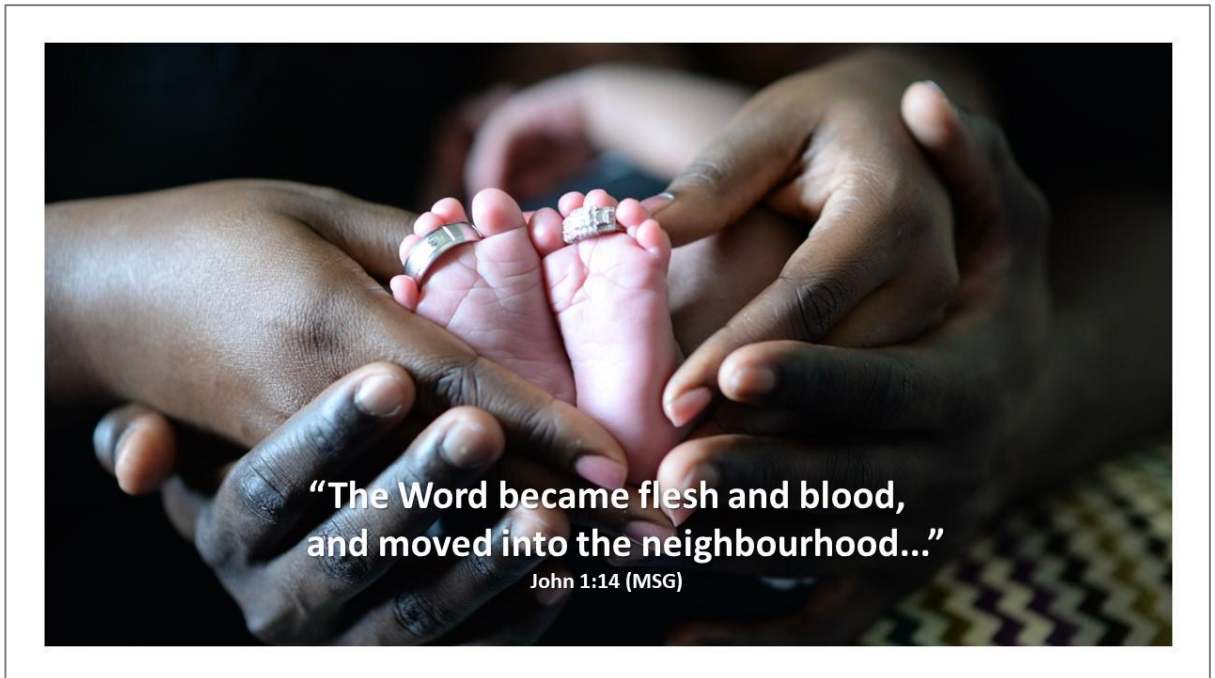
"tabernacled" KJV, "pitched his tent among us" REV

2 Corinthians 5:19 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself,[a] not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

Philippians 2 – the emptying passage – Christ embraces the human experience even entering death; he does not stand on his power or privilege.

9 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.
Colossians 1:19,20

⁹ After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands.

Revelation 7:9

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

"See, the home[a] of God is among mortals.

He will dwell[b] with them;

they will be his peoples,[c]

and God himself will be with them;[d]

⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away."

Revelation 21:3,4

Once again, God sets up residence among humanity – this time, without a temple/tabernacle – the human story is redeemed. The story that took a hard right toward death and mourning and crying and pain has a satisfying culmination and a new chapter. And God has been present through it all. Choosing to be present in both observable and invisible ways. Pitching his tent among us in metaphor, object lesson, and in the person of Jesus Christ. And when the time comes – like with Enoch – we will walk together once more, and his tent will be once more pitched among us.

The heart of God is ever toward humanity – in all of its variety, and convoluted, complicated story.

Slide 20
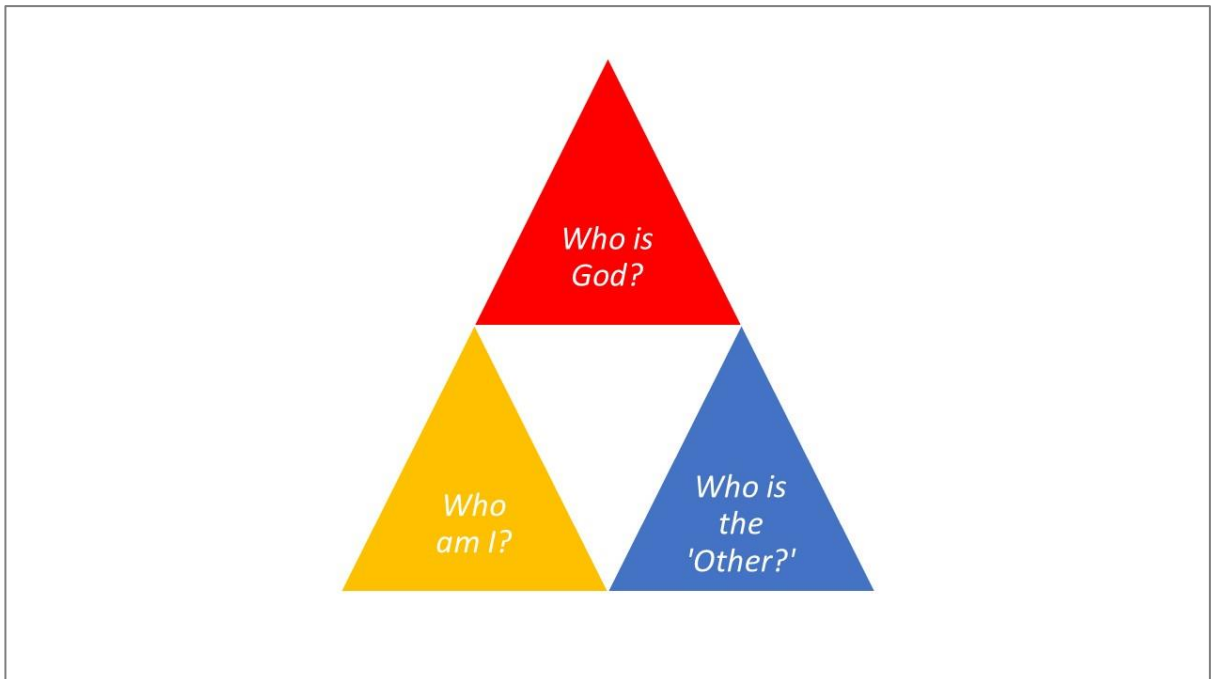
Our Story, "their story", God Story take us to the mid point of our journey together. From here we will begin to look at the interplay between these three stories. What happens when they bump up against one another? The whole of the human story is held within the reach and embrace of God.

Slide 21

Post Session Activity

o Using the scriptures discussed, summarise the story of God into a couple of sentences.
o Where would you locate your story in those sentences?
o Where would you locate the Other in those sentences?
o To what extend have you been able to connect with different concepts/understandings of God?
o How might different readings of the Scriptures above guide us in mission understanding and activity?
o Actively engage opportunities to listen to an Other describe their picture of God. Listen and Learn. This is not an opportunity for commentary or teaching.

Slide 22

Slide 23

https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/10/arts/design/jesus-christ-image-easter.html

Slide 1

Thank-you to those who have returned Informed Consent Forms! Very much appreciated! The deadline is still a few weeks away, but if you are able to get your Consent Form completed and returned to me, that would be superb!

Slide 2

Darkly = our ability to perceive clearly is diminished. This is a human condition. But it can be compensated for. I can admit that I don't see clearly. I can acknowledge that the lenses through which I look are coloured and shaped by my personal story, along with my collective story. And even when I have come to faith, those two stories remain significant in the way that I perceive myself, others and God. When I lose sight

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Slide 3

Slide 4

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Slide 6

"Human beings are not there simply to do the bidding of God. Quite the opposite—rather it is God who is at the service of the humans whom he has created. And to achieve this, nothing works better than living side by side with them" (Verrecchia 2015, 4, 5). This growing picture of God stand in contrast to the narratives of the surrounding nations. We are not the playthings of the gods – the object of their sport, their savagery or their sorcery. Humanity is profoundly regarded by God and it is God's desire to remain in restoring relationship with us - even when the circumstances drastically change. Is it any wonder that in the NT Jesus observes, "for even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many". The Gospels of Matthew (20:28) and Mark (10:45) use the same words to state this saying of Jesus. John's Gospel does not use the words but offers an action in the washing of feet (13:1-17) closing with the invitation to imitate that action of Jesus. We often read the imitation as that of washing feet – certainly an example of service – but we should also be careful not to assume that Jesus meant simply that we should wash one another's feet in order to enter into that invitation. The way of Jesus includes the feet, but it so much more than feet.

We might be surprised to see Jesus represented in ways that don't fit our cultural narratives. And we might even be correct to assert that Jesus was a 1st Century Jew and should be represented as such. But that is a somewhat recent concern. It has not been the concern of Christianity for many centuries. Instead Jesus has usually been portrayed in the likeness of those who have held power, who have asserted cultural and political dominance. It is right for us to see Jesus represented in ways that don't fit our cultural narratives because our culture does not own him. He was incarnated as a 1st Century Jewish peasant – in so doing, he was for everyone. The particularities of incarnation mean only on option at a time, but it does not raise one way of being human above another. When God pitched his 1st Century tent among us, he pitched it among ALL of us. And that is the picture that Revelation paints – that once more God will make his tabernacle among men and we shall be his people – ALL of us.

"Christ, as Martin Luther expressed it, is never God 'in himself'. He is always God 'for us' and 'with us'. He is Emmanuel, meaning the God of relation" (Raschke 2008, 19). Thus it is He who "first loved us" (1 John 4:19 KJV). He is the one who accommodates himself to the limitations of humanity in order to restore communion and community to have, once more, eternal dimensions.

Slide 7

If you refer to your 16 personalities quiz taken prior to the first conversation, you will be able to pick your personality type out from one of the 16 boxes. I am an ENFP
Outwardly/Inwardly focused? E/I
How do you prefer to take in information? S/N
How do you prefer to make decisions? T/F
How do you prefer to live your outer life? J/P

Figure 2

Spirituality Types
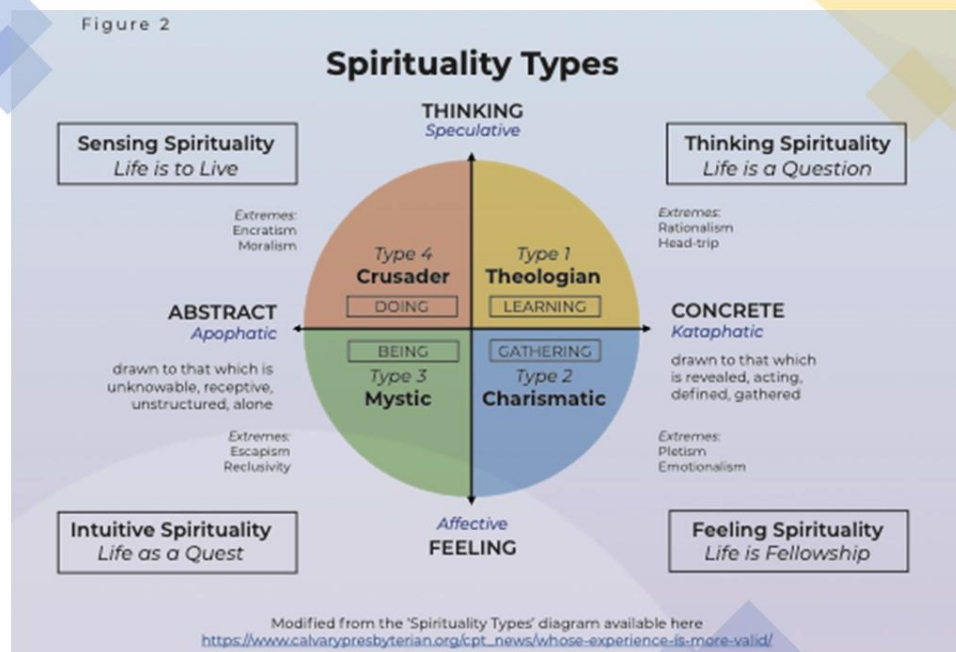
How do you know God? Exploring your faith journey will perhaps have brought some insights to your story. Looking back on your MBTI report may also have given you a way of understanding how you approach the relational or coming to know God dynamics in your life. While not exhaustive or proscriptive, the Spirituality Types diagram (emphasising S/N and T/F: How we prefer to take in information and how we prefer to make decisions) may give some insight into the way you lean in your connect to God and how you explore that. I am an "N" and an "F" meaning I tend toward an affective spirituality that emphasises being and gathering as key ways for me to know God. Of course I have doing and learning aspects too, these are not exclusive either/or, only an expression of where one tends to sit most of the time. You may have a different combination that perhaps raises questions for you; or maybe helps you understand an aspect of who you are, in a way that makes sense.

Every person you meet navigates spiritual things in much the same framework. Whether a person of faith or not, they tend toward 2 of these quadrants as a way of connecting with the metaphysical aspects of being.
Again, this is simply a bouncing off point for your own discovery. But it helps to realise that there is not only one way to know God, nor is there only one way to be an Adventist/Baptist/Methodist Christian.
Being aware of types and listening for cues as you engage with the stories of others will help in understanding the pathway they are most likely to find attractive.

Slide 9

Slide 10
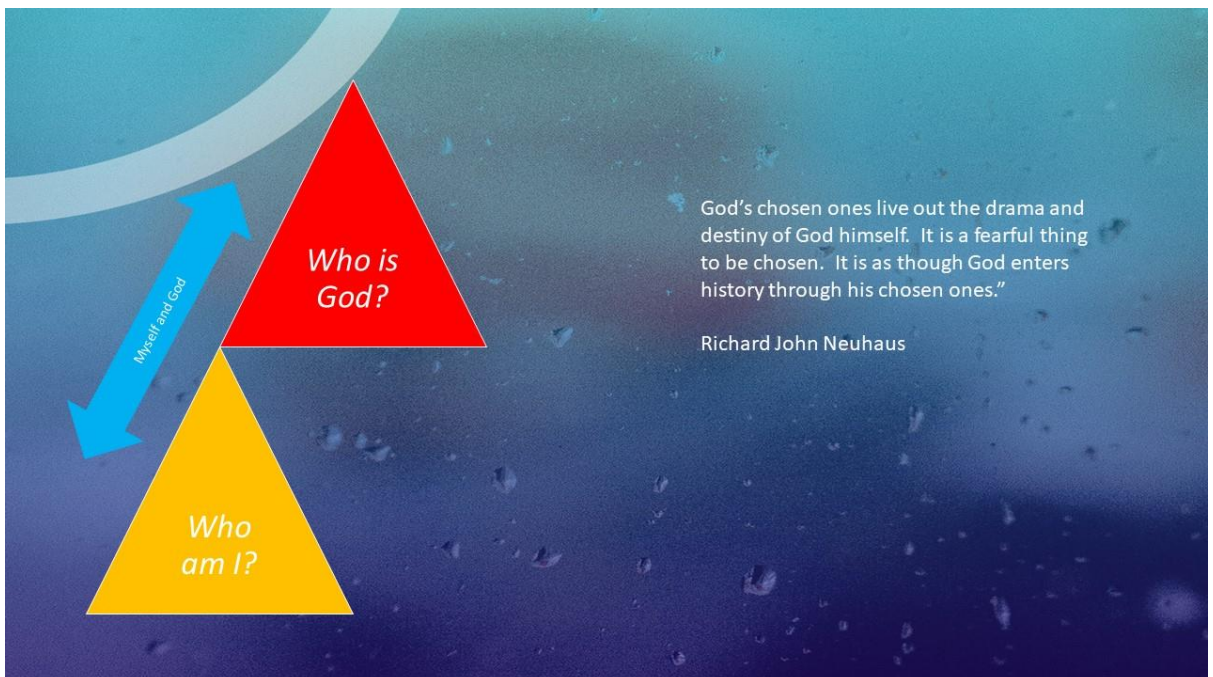
In a way, we are revisiting our first conversation this evening.

We have identified that Story is integral to the interaction of God with humanity. Our understanding of God, how God interacts and works in the world is all understood through Gods interaction with personal and collective narratives – through the stories of people and peoples long past. We may call the Patriarchs, Judges, Prophets and Nations, but they are still human beings who come to know God because God first moves toward them. 1 John 4 reminds us that "we love because He first loved us," a love revealed through God's Son who came into our world. All this we know through

story and the meanings we make from it are made by bringing our personal and collective stories into conversation with those older narratives. And we create new scripts based on how we have understood those interactions.

In the time of the Old Testament Patriarchs, God seeks out those who are attuned and attentive to His overtures with humanity. In specific incidents, God breaks into their world and speaks to them in culturally appropriate, but direct ways. Noah, Abraham, Joseph and Moses all experience God through dreams and voice. God literally "speaks" to them. In order to do so, God must use their language, idiom and context in order to frame those interactions in understandable, yet unique events. God's people are not separate from their context, rather they are situated within their milieu in every discernible way. The reality that God uses our language, idiom and context does not make it normative. It simply means that God comes to us in ways we can make sense of.

Time and History do not stand still. Meanings are made and remade. God interacts and persists in interaction. For some, all this meaning-making is too much – too much self-reflection, too many variables, too many undefined options. God should be more rigid, less flexible and more exacting. And for many, the Codebook approach to the Scriptures is preferred. But there is also the Casebook, when we live and we learn and we grow and we know by interacting deeply and meaningfully with narrative. That allows God to continue to speak with our language, our idiom and our context.

Richards & O'Brien

"…Scripture is a foreign land and reading the Bible is a cross-cultural experience."

Photo by Andrew Neel on Unsplash

It seems that throughout the Scripture Narrative God keeps coming to humanity. There is that profound recognition that once the guardian with the flaming sword was stationed at Eden, there was no way for humanity to return. That our hearts and our lives would lead us in many varied directions as we began to figure out life on the other side of Eden. And though the cool of the evening may still have been a poignant time for Adam and Eve, future generations would know of its intimacy only through story. Communities would grow and form ways of thinking and being. Culture grows in time and part of culture is the developing of scripts, patterns and habits of being that inform inter-personal interactions, manners, etiquette, life transitions, while at the same time telling us who we are and what we are not. And how people come to know things, or have certainty about matters, begins to shift. Adam and Eve, certainly, could speak for all their lives about their personal interactions with God. They might describe the sound of Gods voice, the rhythm of his footsteps or the look on his face. They reminisce over particular conversations or evening meals, or tear up when speaking of hiding in the bushes wearing leaves. That is how they came to know God. But for subsequent generations, knowing God took on a different form and dynamic.

Slide 12

While God does ask these Patriarchs to geographically relocate (they too must navigate cross-cultural experiences), they do not therefore find themselves isolated or separated to some uninhabited corner of the earth, but rather are in constant interaction with other tribes, clans and people groups. God's word to Abraham is that "the whole earth will be blessed through you" (Gen 12:3, 18:18, 22:18 KJV). There is a wider impact for the interactions of God with an individual:

God narrows his redemptive focus to one man, one nation. But his ultimate purpose is to bring redemptive blessing to the whole creation. God's promise to Abraham is God's answer to sin, which has corrupted the whole creation: God will restore his world. From the beginning, God's people are to be 'missionary', chosen to be a channel of blessing to others. (Bartholomew and Goheen 2006, 36, 37). Turner notes that the scripture contains an imperative: "Be a Blessing"

Genesis 12:3 expresses Gods blessing and intent for Abram, "all the peoples of the earth will be blessed" through/in – some versions suggest another angle – would wish they would be as blessed as you. Note the death of Sarah, Gen 23 and the deference with which Abraham is treated. "Then Abraham rose from beside his dead wife and spoke to the Hittites. He said, "I am an alien and a stranger among you. Sell me some property for a burial site here so I can bury my dead." (23:3). "The Hittites replied to Abraham, "Sir, Listen to us. You are a might prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will refuse you his tomb for burying your dead." (23:5). – The dynamics of negotiation are present, that is true, but most commentators view the interaction as respectful and the opening words as sincere. As a result of this negotiation, Abraham owns the first portion of the land later known as Canaan.

18:18 & 22:18 repeat the blessing with slightly different emphasis.

Acts 3:25 and Galatians 3:8 reference this blessing that is not only bestowed on Abraham but is given through him. Through the sermon of Peter (Acts 3) and the letter to the church in Galatia, there is the early Christian reading of the text that sees fulfilment in Jesus. Paul extends the reading of the text, being sure to emphasise that even in Genesis, God had the Gentiles in mind – even if that might not have been fully appreciated in the intervening time period.

Slide 13
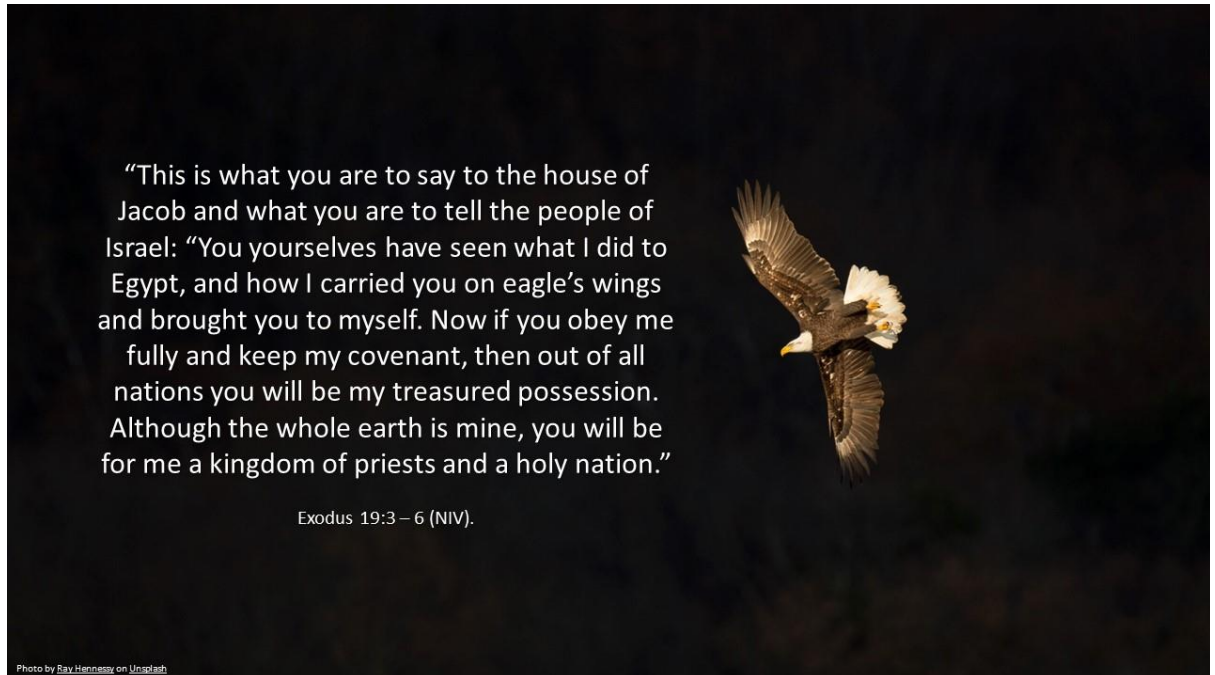
"This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Exodus 19:3 – 6 (NIV).

Photo by Ray Hennessy on Unsplash

In line with the promise to Abraham that "all the nations of the earth were to be blessed" the divine plan for Israel included their proposed acceptance of a priestly calling in which they would live out a universal priesthood akin to that of Abraham their ancestor and father in faith. The horizons of God take in both the universal and the specific, or particular. God is concerned for all the people of the earth and all of the created order. To this end he chooses agents, mediators, channels of redemptive blessing through whom the breadth of his vision is served, and through whom we begin to understand what it might mean to be the people of God (Goheen 2011, 192, 193).

Following the captivity in Egypt, God moves His people toward a new land. This is about rooting them—not in isolation—but in the centre of the ancient world. Here they are not so much called to live sequestered lives away from the nations and kingdoms of their time. Instead, they are very much within the scope and reach of those very nations and kingdoms. It could be argued that their role on the global stage was to be one of "light" to the surrounding nations (Isa 42:6, 49:6, 52:10, 60:3) whom Israel would serve in a mediatorial role – a priestly function.

Consider the various permutations of Israel—loose confederation of tribes, united kingdom, and diaspora— Goheen (2011) notes the need in each context was to "forge new ways to bear God's promise of renewal for the sake of the nations" (194). "Such a people," he continues, "must find new forms to embody and nurture its identity in

the new cultural setting, not allowing itself to privatise its faith, to withdraw and separate itself from its cultural setting" (194). This emphasis on the nations is noted by C. Wright (2006) as relating to the mission of God working out between the scattering of the nations in Genesis 11 and the healing of the nations in Revelation 22 (455). Privatising faith and withdrawal were, and remain, temptations for Gods people across time. The broad, or universal view of God is for the nations and to that end he works in and through his mediators—his people.

Slide 14

Slide 15

"This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon...

[4] This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: [5] 'Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. [6] Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. [7] Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.' ... [10] This is what the Lord says: 'When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfil my good promise to bring you back to this place. [11] For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. [12] Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. [13] You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. [14] I will be found by you,' declares the Lord, 'and will bring you back from captivity.[a] I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,' declares the Lord, 'and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.'"

Jeremiah 29:1-14 (NIVUK)

Photo by Frederik Löwer on Unsplash

Exile came to them as a shock, discontinuous with their narrative of being 'Gods people' among all the people of the world. It was "the end of privilege, the end of certitude, the end of domination, the end of viable political institutions, and the end of a sustaining social fabric... not to overstate, it was the end of the life with God, which Israel had taken for granted" (Brueggemann 2000, 60).

A simple survey of human history would predict that Israel would disappear from the nations of the world, swallowed up in more dominant cultural and religious narratives, their gene-pool diluted to oblivion, their names erased and forgotten. Instead, "in exile Israel arrived at a new faith in God, building on its ancient traditions, but full of new discoveries. The people demonstrated the power of a good story; and its capability of keeping defeated exiles together and to give them a new perspective" (Paas 2019, 126).

Exile was almost exclusively understood as punishment for abandoning covenantal living. Yet it also brought an added dimension to what it meant to live as God's people. If the longing for the ways of surrounding nations was strong from a safe distance, then surely placing Israel within the control of powerful pagan nations would ensure the destruction of their identity? Instead, we see the growing image of living as "salt"—as a minority within a foreign context in which they have little or no control of their circumstances. It is in exile—those places where faith is not in the position of power, control and influence—that we find a credible perspective on mission as 'salt'. Frost (2006) argues:
This is the work of the exile—not the discovery of a new gospel, or a new Christ, or a new Bible, as some more liberal thinkers have suggested, but the rediscovery of the original genius of the teaching of Jesus and the missional practice of the earliest Christians, all lived out boldly on the soil of a post-Christian empire. (26)

If we are to learn anything from the exile experiences and literature (e.g. Lamentations, Psalms, Ezekiel, Daniel), it is in the invitation to learn to understand God with fresh perspective. To discover that God does not belong to us alone, but that his reach is much broader than our history, culture, and identity (Halik 2009, 49). Paas (2019) comments, "In exile we can learn that God is not ours, but that we are his—wherever we are. In this way exile can become an adventure, in invitation to a life with God outside the gates, and to rediscover your own tradition in Babylon" (137). In exile, we are no longer able to speak from the "high pulpits [from which we] tell how the world is, what the truth is, and how nations should behave. But for a church that is expelled from the centre it is no longer possible to 'speak from the clouds'… instead she will have to assume a testimonial voice" (139).

Exile holds the potential to offer us an experience, an insight, and a way of being that we cannot have when we occupy the places of power and the voice of authority. It is in exile that we discover that "this Lord can come to us in the most unexpected ways, [even] through pagan 'servants'. God is always greater than we think. He is also the God of the others, the seekers, the outsiders, the critics… [It is] precisely in exile [that] the Church receives the freedom and relaxation to face this, without feeling threatened" (140). It is in exile that we learn to "sing the Lord's song in a strange land" (Ps 137:4 KJV).

Slide 16

"Now you are the body of Christ [collective] and individually members of it."
1 Corinthians 12:27 (NRSV)

"… you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood… But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."
1 Peter 2:5,9 (NIVUK)

Slide 17

"To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, [6] and has made us to be a kingdom and <u>priests</u> to serve his God and Father..."
Revelation 1:5b,6 (NIVUK)

You have made them to be a kingdom and <u>priests</u> to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.'
Revelation 5:10 (NIVUK)

Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, <u>but they will be priests of God</u> and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.
Revelation 20:6 (NIVUK)
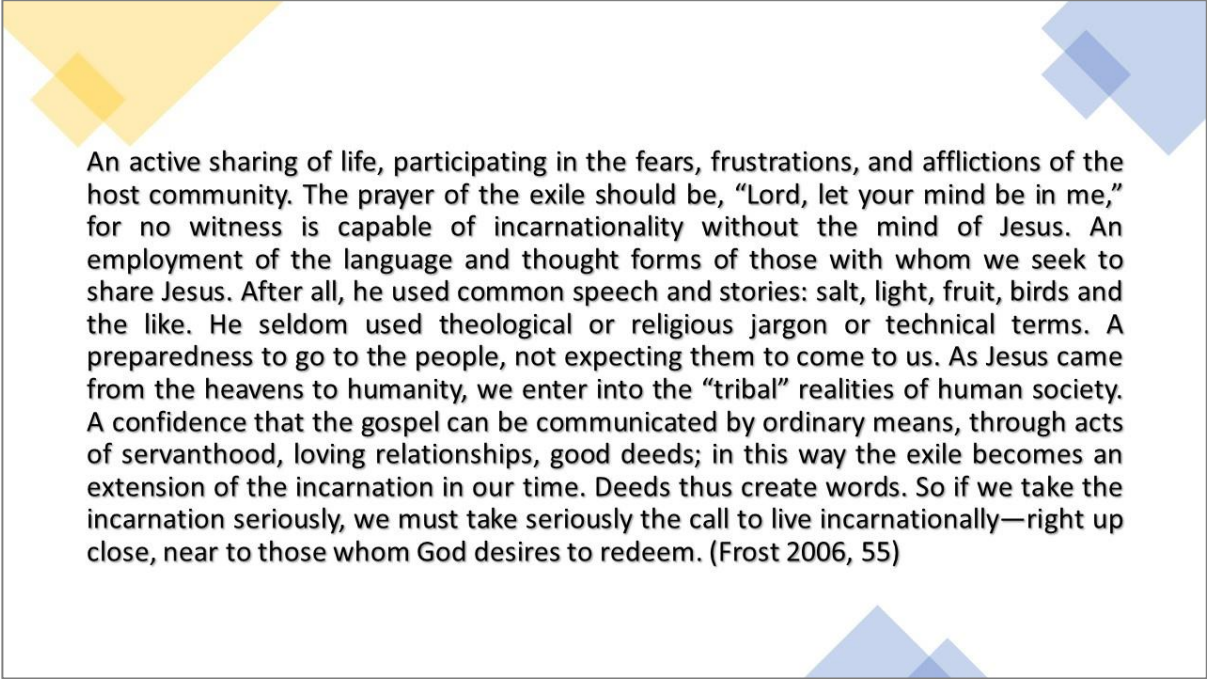
Throughout the narrative of Scripture there is a sense in which God's people are to be a foretaste of the Kingdom of God. This might be in their living as Nation among the nations; as a "kingdom of priests" (Exod 19:6; Isa 61:6; 1 Pet 2:5,9; Rev 1:6, 5:10, 20:6); as a community in which race, gender or class (Gal 3:28 - 29) are not divisive because the embrace of God diminishes their importance; where people of "every nation, tongue and people" (Rev 7:9) might find a place and a welcome—not because their identities are demolished—but because they are valued as Kingdom agents with purpose and mission. This is a community that is growing in their understanding of servanthood, taking the words of Christ that certain ways of being should "not be so among you" (Matt 20:26).

God embraces humanity with all of the variations and differences it contains not to build a community of cultural "sameness" but in order to show the breadth and the depth of His Kingdom and its ability to make brothers of all the nations (Acts 17). Together these brothers from all nations find collective calling to a priesthood of believers (1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1:6; 5:10) that is an expression of Gods intended desire for Israel (Exod 19:3 – 6 NIV). Kaiser (2000) affirms that this New Testament expansion of missionary and mediatory purpose was not a recent change of plan on the part of God, instead, Gentiles had always been part of his long-term plan and redeeming commitment (2000, 82).

When Constantine (who was declared Emperor of the Western Roman Empire in York, 306) he embarked on a campaign to claim power and make the claim of his generals true. He converted to Christianity in 312 as a result of a vision at the Milvian Bridge on the Tiber river. After being declared Emperor of the Western Roman Emperor, he brought the persecution of Christians within the Empire to an end through the Edict of Milan in 313. For almost 300 years, Christianity had been a persecuted and underground faith; living in the liminal spaces of society, often subversive and countercultural. Constantine gave Christianity a seat at the "top table", a voice in the echelons of power, and a means to conquer the world. The entanglements of Christian faith with political power provides much historical drama. In this drama, Gods plans start sounding very much like our own; God's ideals give way to our ambition and before long, God's ways are synonymous with our own. We have not become like Him. Instead, we have made Him like ourselves, and he serves our purposes and ends. As Christians, we have become accustomed to speaking from a position of power and we cannot remember a time (at least in the West) when we have not done so.

Our living – as individuals and as collectives – says something about God. And it says something about Gods Kingdom. Another way to think of "priests" is to speak of "agents" or "representatives" or perhaps even, "ambassadors" of God's Kingdom. When the Church becomes overly concerned with, or intimately connected with the old realities of certitude, privilege, power and dominion, it shares a common jeopardy with other old institutional patterns and structures (paraphrased from Brueggemann 2008, 59). We must also own our fascination with those things, and even our participation in them. We cannot simply pretend that they have nothing to do with us. We live in a time when many are disenchanted with the old realities. With the old institutions that have told us how the world is and have keep the world that way. And while we may not readily identify with those old institutions, let us also be mindful how much we long for a time when we enjoyed their effects.

> An active sharing of life, participating in the fears, frustrations, and afflictions of the host community. The prayer of the exile should be, "Lord, let your mind be in me," for no witness is capable of incarnationality without the mind of Jesus. An employment of the language and thought forms of those with whom we seek to share Jesus. After all, he used common speech and stories: salt, light, fruit, birds and the like. He seldom used theological or religious jargon or technical terms. A preparedness to go to the people, not expecting them to come to us. As Jesus came from the heavens to humanity, we enter into the "tribal" realities of human society. A confidence that the gospel can be communicated by ordinary means, through acts of servanthood, loving relationships, good deeds; in this way the exile becomes an extension of the incarnation in our time. Deeds thus create words. So if we take the incarnation seriously, we must take seriously the call to live incarnationally—right up close, near to those whom God desires to redeem. (Frost 2006, 55)

Beginning with the Incarnation of Christ, there is a growing emphasis on contextual presence, influence and activity in the New Testament. Within a few years of the death of Christ, the Jewish State would be obliterated, and the early Christian Church would be spread across the Roman Empire. It would be forced to find its way in any number of new cultures and contexts; contextual expression would be imperative. They would be a new kind of exile, driven to new places through economic needs and in search of security: Refugees from a nation and foretastes of a Kingdom living in the world as salt and light (Matt 5:13 NIV).

In this new, post-covid experience where several landmarks have shifted; where for more than a year we have lived more locally than before; when our buildings have been closed – not only Churches, but all religious buildings; social buildings and even shops. We have had to find other ways of connecting, of finding community and recovering simpler ways of living and being. There are many stories to tell from this time. Personal ones and collective ones. For some, this past year has crushed them and they want "normal" back again. For others, "normal" seems somewhat over-rated and they are not so keen to return to whatever life and faith looked like pre-pandemic. Allow me to suggest that the shifts we have experienced these past 18 months will be with us for some time. Some things have shifted and will not return or at least not fully return to their former place. Our experience of "exile" continues and the challenge for Faith is to find itself in the liminal spaces of society. On the margins, perhaps in the gaps "inbetween" where shafts of light and gritty salt particles do their best work. Our place in the "new normal": a local, incarnational, blessing presence that speaks of a Kingdom already with us but still to come, and where we live as agents of that Kingdom that refuses to be contained, managed or manipulated to serve our need for certitude, power, privilege and dominion.

Post Session Activity

o Ask a trusted individual who knows you well to reflect on your Spiritual Gifts Survey results with you. You may wish to dialogue over aspects of your faith journey. Allow this to be an opportunity to hear how another person experiences God through you.

o What might it mean to imitate God's incarnational presence in your place?

o What aspects of who I am might prove helpful? Challenging? Become bridges? Or obstacles?

o Where is God challenging you in your personal/collective story? Who might you need to engage with to explore that further?

o What could you be intentionally praying about as you work through and work out this conversation, both on an individual level and in community with others?

CONVERSATION 5

Slide 1

Slide 2

Darkly = our ability to perceive clearly is diminished. This is a human condition. But it can be compensated for. I can admit that I don't see clearly. I can acknowledge that the lenses through which I look are coloured and shaped by my personal story, along with my collective story. And even when I have come to faith, those two stories remain significant in the way that I perceive myself, others and God. When I lose sight of that reality, I am prone to dogmatism, prejudicial approaches and the possibility of only seeing God in what looks like me.

Slide 3

Slide 4

Slide 5

In our reading of the scriptures, we may become so familiar with the narratives that they no longer appear strange to us. The narratives have taken on a sense in which we feel comfortable with them – we identify with them, with the characters (usually the main characters) and we are well versed in identifying the heroes and villains. We identify with Moses, never with Pharaoh. We identify with the oppressed Israelites and not with the Egyptians. Joseph is our hero, his brothers the villains. In a choice between Jacob and Esau, we choose Jacob despite his reputation as a trickster, a cheater, and a liar. Esau does not pretend to be anything other than what he is – in that sense he is honest, uncomplicated and straightforward.

There is a certain comfort to a story in which things are clearly one way and not another; when people are good or bad; when things are right or wrong. When we know whom to love and whom to loathe. These are the keys to good sitcoms and Greek theatre alike. Now common place to us through film and screen theatre, identifying the hero and villain with music (leitmotif) was employed by Wagner. A leitmotif was associated with a particular person, place or idea and each time that musical theme occurred it was an audio cue as to how to interpret the narrative. For an obvious, more modern example, think of JAWS in which the ominous "doodoodoodoodoo" plays to alert the audience that the great white shark is in the vicinity and disaster is about to strike.

We are so familiar with the Bible narratives that we usually don't notice these dynamics until someone points them out. And even then, we may object to the assertion.

As Richards and O'Brien remind us, "Scripture is a foreign land and reading the Bible is a cross-cultural experience." When we approach scripture, there are things that "went without being said" – that the writers assumed would be known to the listeners (since much of Scripture was heard more often than it was read). The

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listeners would supply the stuff that didn't require ink and vellum to make clear. And so we have to be detectives to figure that out, or, we simply fill it in from our own frame of reference.

Slide 6
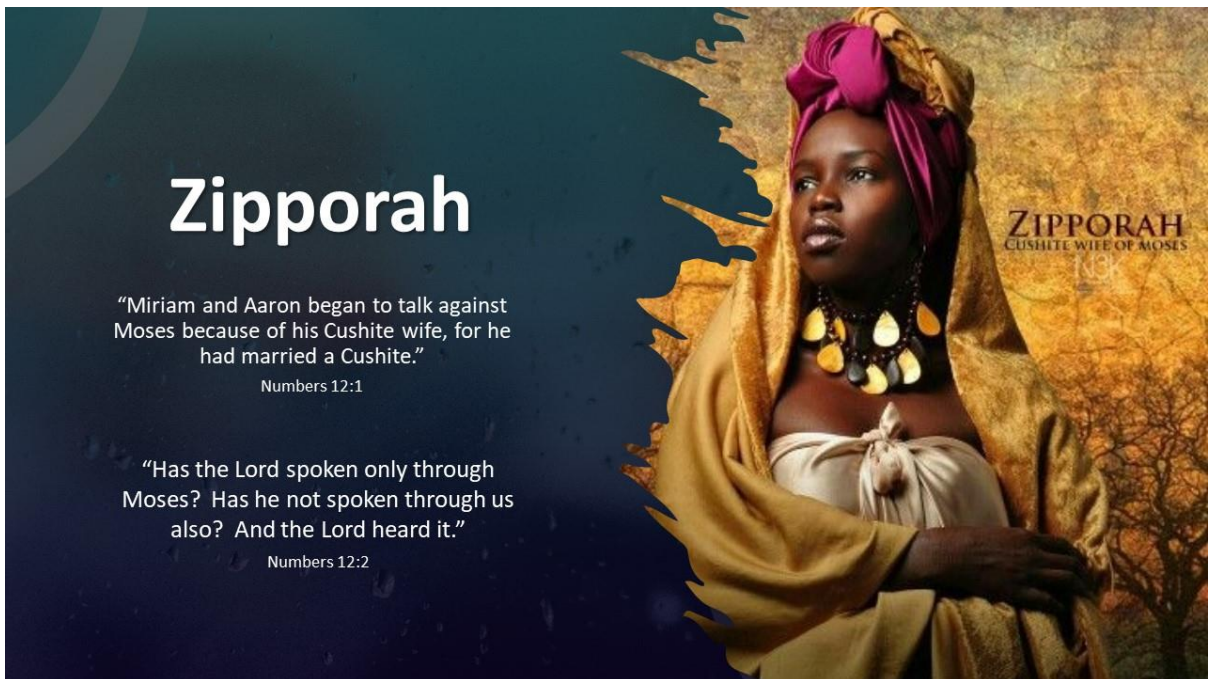
(notes here from Richards & O'Brien, p59 -61)

The problem. Here, with Zipporah (I am going with calling her Zipporah since we are not told that Moses married another wife, although it is possible) is her ethnicity.
She is a Cushite.
How do we know this? The author tells us. Repeatedly.
What does it mean? What did it mean for the original audience? Why was Zipporah's 'Cushiteness' a problem for the siblings of Moses? We aren't told. But the incident affirms that she was "other". She was not "us" in some meaningful or important way.

We know that the Cushites were dark skinned. And we know that Cush was in the southern Nile River valley.
Our medium distant and immediate history may inform our reading of this family quarrel. Clearly, Miriam and Aaron are offended, probably prejudiced against Zipporah. Is it that they view her dark skin, her African heritage and ethnicity as being problematic? Is it their position that their baby brother has married below his station, taking a woman from a slave nation as his bride?

Probably not.

Zipporah's ethnicity is a problem – that is clear and undisputed. But the reasons are less clear. It is possible that Miriam and Aaron are offended by her dark skin – but we should be careful not to assume that they were white or to immediately use our

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history with slavery and ethnic superiority to fill in what has gone without being said. After all, in this narrative, who are the people who were most recently a slave nation?

The Cushites – within the ancient world – were not demeaned as a slave race; they were respected as highly skilled and adept soldiers. They had military prowess and were known to be formidable on the field of battle and in the world of war.

It is probable that Miriam and Aaron are not so offended by the idea that their baby brother has married beneath himself, but that he has married above his station. That his star has ascended greatly and theirs has paled in comparison. They are concerned that their standing is diminished and they wish to reassert their position within the family and within the community.

"Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also? And the Lord heard it." (Numbers 12:2)

In other words, Moses is not the only prophet here. Who does he think he is?

Slide 7

Having mentioned JAWS a short while ago, let's take a little look at the story told in the book of Jonah.
(Picture is from the MET – Islamic Art)

Notes on historical background: Jonah is a contemporary of Amos and possibly Hosea. The prophet Jonah is mentioned in 2 Kings and we usually understand him to be the same as the one after whom the short book is named. His ministry takes place at a time after the 10 Northern Tribes have split from the Southern Kingdom. Israel (the northern kingdom) was looking quite strong and had asserted its strength by restoring its northern borders with Assyria. As a nation she felt powerful, confident that God

was on her side and that the light of Gods favour would so shine upon her as to leave all other nations in comparative darkness.

Amos & Hosea were already warning that the status quo would not serve them well and that an exile "beyond Damascus" was a potential outcome. (Amos 5:27)

Story is briefly told in what are 4 Chapters in our Bibles:

Jonah receives an invitation to minister in Nineveh – the capital of the Assyrian Kingdom. Their neighbours to the north of Israel and from whom they had won back land. The Assyrians are definitely "other". They do not share faith or heritage with Israel. And from that perspective, they must also be "other" for God since God is clearly on the side of Israel. Jonah strongly objects to the idea of taking a message of warning to Nineveh and its inhabitants. From his perspective, and from the perspective of Israel, it would be better for the city to burn – the sooner the better actually. Why would they have an interest in the saving of the Ninevites? Especially if those are the same people that might invade them? Which brings a more pressing question: "Why is God even interested in this place and its people?"

Perhaps the most surprising – shocking – part of the Jonah story is that God is engaged with the Assyrians – that there is a story of God being active outside of the way we have seen things.

Jonah is so averse to the invitation that he twice seeks to evade going. Initially by boarding a ship headed for Spain, and then secondly by asking the sailors to throw him overboard. Jonah would rather die than go to Nineveh and be part of a redemption narrative there. God doesn't allow Jonah the satisfaction.

Slide 8

Breakout Room Activity #1

In your Group, reflect on the Jonah narrative:
o Where do you locate yourself in the story? With whom do you identify?
o Which aspect of that character resonates with you most? How does that intersect with your own story?
o What makes you uncomfortable in the Jonah narrative?
o What makes you excited in the Jonah narrative?
o Where might you be frustrated (or annoyed) with God in the Jonah narrative?

(15 Minutes)

Slide 9
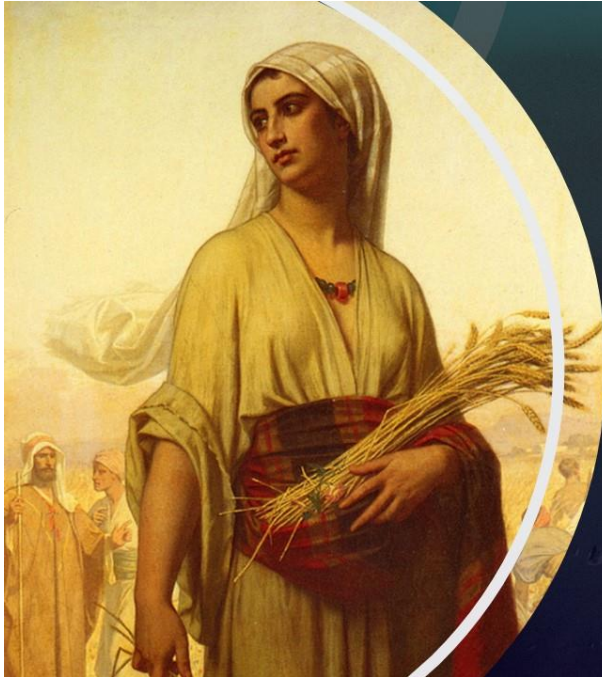
The story of Ruth, told in the book of the Bible that carries her name – one of only two that carry the name of a woman – takes place during the time of the Judges. This was a 300 year period of time during which the nation was lead by prophets and numerous more local leaders commonly known as "judges" who arbitrated for the people. Joshua, Deborah, Barak, Samson and Gideon are among such leaders. Her story and that of Jonah are told in very similar ways. In both narratives, the authors use a structural symmetry as an effective storytelling technique. Ruth also has 4 Chapters in our Bibles.

Through the narrative Ruth is consistently referred to as "Ruth the Moabite". As a result we are able to conclude that her ethnicity and the geography of her origin is important and the story cannot be properly told without it. We are sometimes tempted to "flatten" the Scripture narratives, and our own, but minimising these details. There are many reasons for this tendency – not least our painful experience of magnifying these details in order to show priority, privilege or power. Nevertheless these details are important.

As the story builds toward it's resolution Boaz engages with the kinsman to ask if that man is planning to purchase Naomi's land (Ruth 4:1-6). The response comes in the affirmative. "I will redeem it" the man states. Boaz then, almost as a side note, adds one more piece of information: "On the day you buy the land from Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite…" As the narrator tells it, the kinsman suddenly remembers an inheritance rule that would complicate his life and he defers to Boaz, who then proceeds to secure the transaction through which Naomi's land become his property and Ruth the Moabite becomes his wife.

Why does the narrator remind us so often that Ruth is a Moabite?

The Moabites, along with the Ammonites originated from the incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughters (Genesis 19:36-38)
The Moabites hired Balaam to pronounce a curse on Israel (Numbers 22)
The Moabite women were used to entice Israelite men away from their wives and from their faith (Numbers 25)

Deut 23:3 "No Ammonite or Moabite or any of their descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, not even in the tenth generation"

Some notes drawn from Richards & O'Brien p.67 - 68

Slide 10

... Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth...
Matthew 1:5b
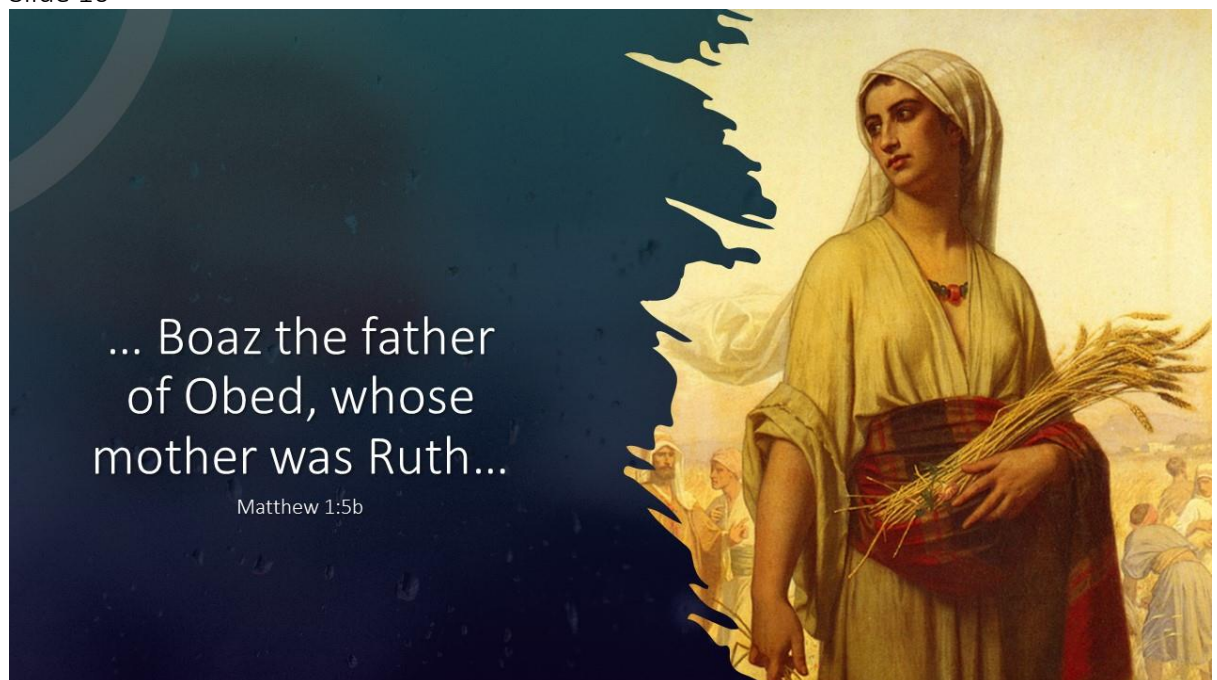
I am tempted to leave the story of Ruth the Moabite there... except, I can't.

Matthew's Genealogy reminds us of the story of Ruth the Moabite. Here she is not called "the Moabite", only Ruth. It is assumed that the readers/hearers will know what goes without saying. (Matt 1:5).

It seems that somewhere between Deut 23:3 and Ruth, something happens. And a Moabite enters salvation history – not as a background character – but as a progenitor of not only King David, but of Jesus the Messiah.

Of course, the story of the Birth of Christ includes other outsiders: Shepherds and the Magi are among those integral to the narrative – persons entrusted with announcing and attending in worship and support for Joseph, Mary and the baby.

At the birth of Christ there is already an indication that his ministry will include those on the margins and those outside the community of the faithful. He is not only for one people group, but for all.

Note that the early life of Jesus is spent in Egypt too.

Ruth's name, though, is not the only foreign one in those opening verses of Matthew's Gospel. Tamar and Rahab are also mentioned – both potentially Gentile women.
The Midrash and Aggadah are relatively silent on Tamar's origins. She may have been Canaanite; there is a suggestion that she was an orphan, while another strand of thought sees her as the daughter of Melchizedek – King of Salem.
https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/tamar-midrash-and-aggadah

Rahab is regarded within Judaism as one of the 4 most beautiful women of the Scriptures (the others being, Sarah, Abigail and Esther). But an outsider nonetheless. However, she is also a symbol of the influence of Israel and the reach of God beyond the borders of a nation or people. https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/rahab-midrash-and-aggadah#pid-16543

Bathsheba, though not mentioned by name, is likely an Israelite, but also closely aligned to the Hittites because of her husband Uriah. It is likely that David is more able to dispense with Uriah because of his heritage

Slide 11

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, **17** and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

20 And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. **21** Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." **22** All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?"

Luke 4:16 – 22 (NRSV)

Matthew (13:53-58),Mark (6:1-6) and Luke (4:16–30) tell us about Jesus in the Synagogue in Nazareth near the start of his ministry. Matthew & Mark are quite economical in their telling, while Luke gives a longer, more detailed version. We will look at Luke's version.

Split into two sections: The people love the message

Jesus is quoting from the great prophet Isaiah and there is great expectation for what might happen in Nazareth given what has already happened in Capernaum.

In these opening phrases of his Nazareth sermon, Jesus identifies himself with the fulfilment of Messianic expectation.

Where are you in this story? How often are you that character? If I never hear the narrative from the perspective of the congregation, then I have not yet been confronted by the Gospel. And I have likely not yet begun to unpack the ways in which I reject "God and the Other" narratives.

Slide 12

> **23** He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'" **24** And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. **25** But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; **26** yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. **27** There were also many lepers[a] in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." **28** When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. **29** They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. **30** But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.
> Luke 4:23 – 30 (NRSV)

In the second part of the sermon, the mood begins to change. The people hate the message and want to kill the messenger.

What makes the difference?

It could be anger at the implication that Jesus is going to withhold blessings from his hometown.
It could be his verbalising that there had been talk about him and their expectations – when he says "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb…" is simply repeating back to them what was already being expressed in doorways and street corners.
It could also be that Jesus references two narratives from the time between Ruth and Jonah – things that happened during the ministry of Elijah and Elisha, both large historic and spiritual figures within the Community. The widow of Zarephath (Sarepta in what is now Lebanon) and Naaman of Syria. We have not spent time discussing their stories, but perhaps you may have read them this past week. There is some resonance in these stories to incidents which will occur later in the Gospel narratives: The healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter; and the healing of the 10 lepers, of which only the Samaritan returned to express thanks.

Jesus reveals that his messianic calling extends beyond this group of people – and God's interest has always included those who are "other" to us.

At the end of the day, the local congregation was ready to end that calling.

Slide 13

Question 4 taken from Richards and O'Brien pg.69

Slide 14

The interactions of God with ancient Israel are a reminder for all believers, and because I am one, I would add, particularly for Adventists, that we cannot become so settled in our 'light' identity that we assume there is no darkness within us on which it too must shine. Failure to understand that 'light' and 'dark' are not absolute categories that fall neatly into "us" and "them" caricatures is an Achilles heel for God's people of any time or era. The infamous "cows of Bashan" expression of the prophet Amos (4:1 – 3) is part of a prophetic reminder to Israel that they were losing

their way; that their way of being was becoming inconsistent with their calling to be a mediating and ministering presence in their time and place.

Accustomed to being the channel through which God spoke, it was difficult for Israel to grasp that at times God would speak to people outside of their communion and at times bring a word of warning or rebuke from pagan sources. In 2 Chr 35:21, Pharaoh Neco sends a message to King Josiah warning him not to join a battle that is not his concern. Not only should Josiah stay clear, Neco states that God is with his cause and requires Josiah to remain outside of the conflict. Josiah refuses to heed the message and dies in battle largely because he failed to identify the 'word of the Lord' when it was spoken by someone outside of the community (Winkle 2020).

As the sermon of Jesus in Nazareth's Synagogue reveals; it can be difficult to hear God's word to us when it does not affirm our expectations or confirm our perspectives. Like Peter on the rooftop we are consistently in need of the reminder not to call anything unclean or profane that God has made clean (Acts 10:15,28). It is also the reminder of Jesus (Matt 21:28-32) to those who were quite certain of their alignment with God that "the tax collectors and prostitutes were entering the Kingdom ahead of them." Sometimes it is in the "out groups" where the Gospel gains traction – out groups that most were not willing to engage.

There remains a story between God and the Other that I am not often privy to. But we can be sure that when God invites us to engage outside of what is familiar to us – he never invites us to go where he has not already been at work.

Slide 15

Post Session Activity

o Take another look at your earlier notes on 'us/them' from Session 3. What, if anything, has shifted in the way you view your relationship to 'them'?
o Seek out and intentionally spend some quality time with someone in, or close to, one of the 'out/them' groups you have identified.
o Explore conversation around the follow concepts:
    o What sorts of group-serving biases might you or others be falling prey to?
    o In what ways might you be a privileged/powerful person in your group(s)?
    o In what ways might you lack privilege/power in your group(s)?
    o What might a bridge into this community look/feel like?
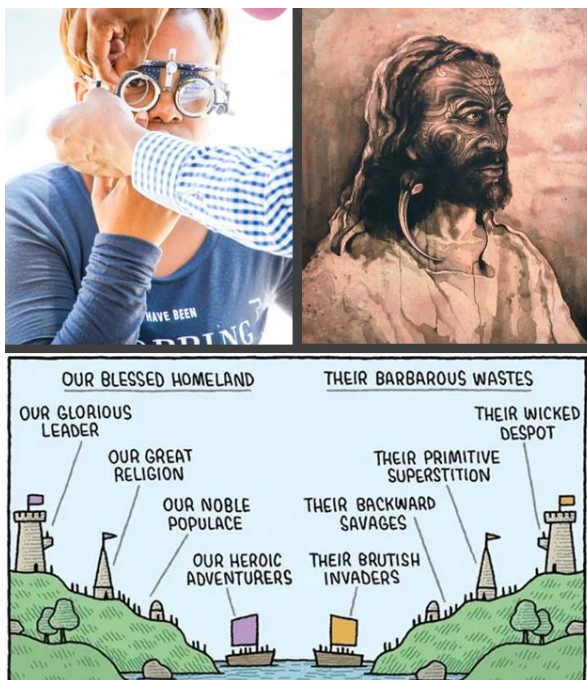
CONVERSATION 6

Slide 1

Slide 2

Darkly = our ability to perceive clearly is diminished. This is a human condition. But it can be compensated for. I can admit that I don't see clearly. I can acknowledge that the lenses through which I look are coloured and shaped by my personal story, along with my collective story. And even when I have come to faith, those two stories remain significant in the way that I perceive myself, others and God. When I lose sight of that reality, I am prone to dogmatism, prejudicial approaches and the possibility of only seeing God in what looks like me.

Slide 3

The Journey so far…

"A journey is called that because you cannot know what you will discover on the journey, what you will do with what you find, or what you find will do to you"

James Baldwin, (I am not your Negro)

Slide 4

Lenses
We all have them. We all use them.
They can be adjusted but cannot be removed.
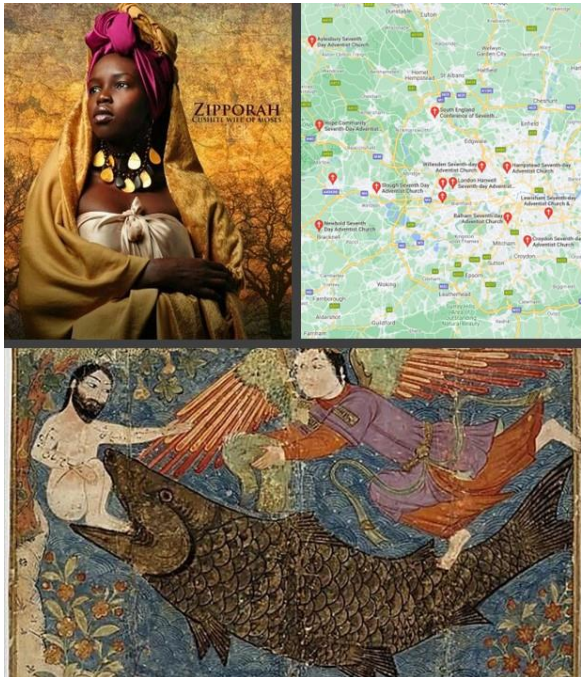We see ourselves, others and God through these lenses.
We are not neutral.

Others
When we speak of Others, we also speak of ourselves.
Identity does not exist on its own, it always exists alongside, over and against another.
Identity is not neutral.

God
We all read God into our narratives.
God, to some extent, looks like "us" not "them"
It can be unsettling to see God represented differently.

Slide 5

Slide 6

A great quote from Lesslie Newbigin, distilling the essence of missional positioning –
to be with Jesus where he is.

That is actually a promise of Scripture: John 14:3 "I go to prepare a place for you…
that where I am there you may be also". Or how about, Matthew 28:20, "remember, I
am with you always, even to the very end of the age."

Our desire is more often overwhelmingly to be "where he is" in the eternal sense; but
we are challenged to be "where he is" in a local, contemporary sense. Inevitably, we

separate the two. Since Jesus is "there" he is not "here" – except in a personal sense. When he is "with us".

When we read that "he is with us" there is an unspoken implication that "he is not with them".

The dualism with which we (particularly, but not exclusively) in the West tend to view Scripture and the world around us pushes us toward these conclusions. We divide our world and our lives into "sacred" and "secular" – those things that are spiritual and those things that are earthly. Those people who are faithful and those who are faithless. And yet it seems that God is interested in all of our lives, not just the parts we designate as spiritual. God cares about the means as well as the end.

To be with Jesus where he is – on the frontier – is no easy or comfortable thing. There are not quick fixes, easy answers, or fool-proof methods.

Slide 7

o As you engaged with the Scriptures (assigned and in our discussions), what did you expect to hear from them? What have you heard from them through your current reading and listening?
o In which ways might the Incarnation of Christ be side-lined as simply a means to the cross?

**Breakout Room Activity #1
(15 minutes)**

Slide 8
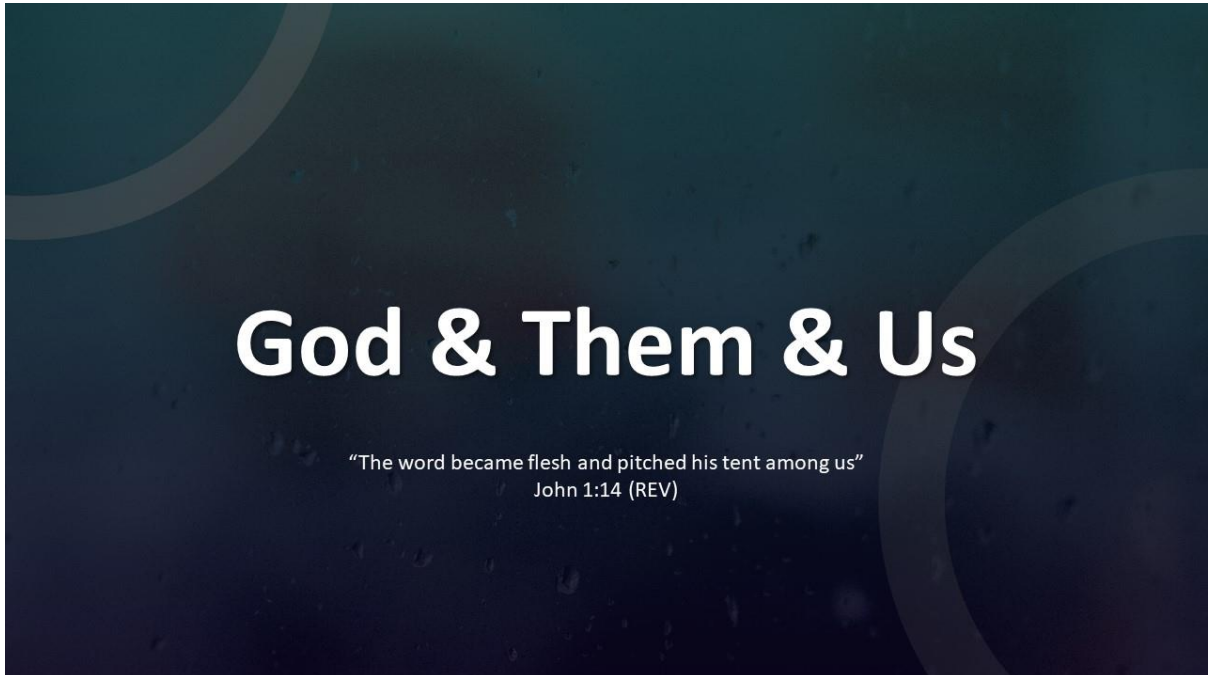
To follow Christ is also to embrace his method – the way in which he embraces and lives among his people.
NT examples:
Paul

Slide 9

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28 NIV)

Acts 1:8 – you will be my witnesses (martus = usually translated witness, sometimes martyr) to the ends of the earth. What follows in Acts and the NT is a description of how that begins to happen.

Galatians 3:28 - "in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile; Slave nor Free; Male nor Female" is sometimes an apt description of the struggles the Christian Church has had with identity narratives and identity politics. The first issue to confront the early Church was that of Jew and Gentile.

Acts 15:19, 20 (As part of his discourse, James quotes from Amos 9 as a way to understand what was happening in their experience)
9 Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, 20 but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled[e] and from blood.
The purpose is to enable table fellowship within the community between Christians from Judaism and Christians from Gentile backgrounds.

Paul reflects this as he plants churches across Asia Minor. 1 Cor 9:22 "all things to all people" speaks to the need to work within human contexts in order to win some.

Slide 11

"Give no offense to Jew or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ"
1 Cor 10:32 – 11:1 (NRSV)

Paul is mindful, not only of those with whom he is in relationship and of their differing expectations and understandings of faith, but also of how his actions have the ability to impact relationships in ways that might become obstacles to those for whom Christ is not yet clearly visible.

When we read 1 Corinthians 11:1 as part of the larger narrative instead of treating it as a stand-alone verse – the beginning of a new chapter, we cam see that Paul understands his course of action to be an extension of his discipleship: he is imitating Christ in his 'incarnation' and understands his actions to be consistent with the ministry and person of Christ. It is a model for others to follow in their discipling relationships.

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Slide 12

> We must avoid turning off listeners because *we* are culturally offensive rather than the gospel... sound contextualisation is an expression of unselfishness. It is choosing in love not to privilege yourself or to exercise your full freedom as a Christian so people can hear and follow Christ's call... Proper contextualisation means causing the *right* scandal—the one the gospel poses to all sinners—and removing all unnecessary ones (Keller, 110).
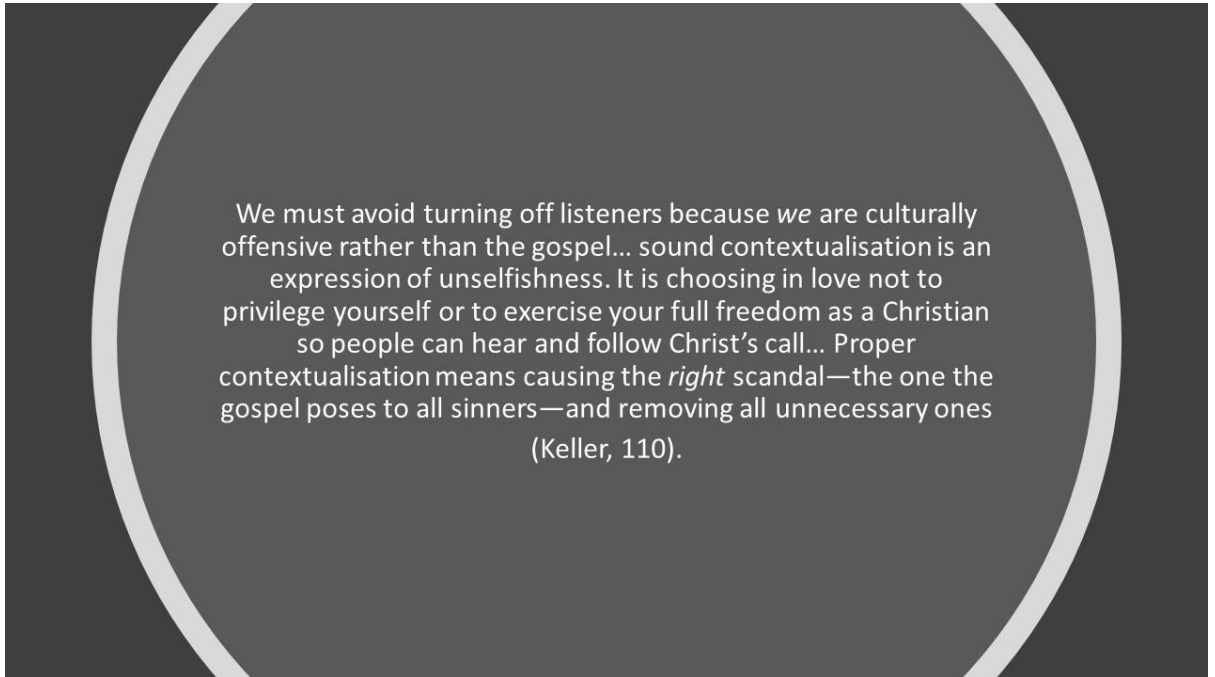
Paul challenges both Greek and Jewish cultures as he addresses the things they epitomise within their separate contexts.

To their differences he says:
Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified; a stumbling block (skandalon) to Jew and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. (1 Cor 1:22-25 NIV).

In order to speak meaningfully into a Greek or a Jewish context, Paul needed to understand the key drivers within each. He does not simply 'proclaim the gospel' but seeks to incarnate himself to the mind of each and so helps Greeks to see the cross as ultimate wisdom and Jews to see it as true power. "He confronts each culture for its idols, yet he positively highlights their aspirations and ultimate values" (Keller 2012, 112)

Slide 13

Through Paul's speeches in Acts we are able to discern that while he holds the Gospel in high esteem, his ministry among different groups begins with the people - in that he recognizes that one formulaic presentation will not be effective across all audiences.

Paul begins where the people are and builds from there.

Where he begins and how he builds are driven by culture, context, and exposure (on the part of those he is engaging with) to the things of God.
He seldom gives a full presentation of the Gospel all at once, being willing to take the time to gradually build the picture and grow the understanding over various interactions.
A simple reading of Paul's various speeches in Acts reveals that he is willing to change the order in which he presents gospel truths, often using common ground as the raft on which to float another truth.

Where people are, what they believe, their 'idols'—those ideals most cherished in their culture—are integral to sharing the gospel in such a way as to make it possible for some to believe. This is the foundation of Paul's claim to become 'all things to all people' (1 Cor 9:22) and a picture of what his invitation for others to imitate him, even as he imitates Christ in these things (1 Cor 11:1).

"In identifying with context to be distinctive within it, Paul was imitating Jesus and he expected the small congregations he founded to do the same" (Moynagh 2012, 33).

Slide 14

An [incarnational presence means an] active sharing of life, participating in the fears, frustrations, and afflictions of the host community. The prayer of the exile should be, "Lord, let your mind be in me," for no witness is capable of incarnationality without the mind of Jesus. An employment of the language and thought forms of those with whom we seek to share Jesus. After all, he used common speech and stories: salt, light, fruit, birds and the like. He seldom used theological or religious jargon or technical terms. A preparedness to go to the people, not expecting them to come to us. As Jesus came from the heavens to humanity, we enter into the "tribal" realities of human society. A confidence that the gospel can be communicated by ordinary means, through acts of servanthood, loving relationships, good deeds; in this way the exile becomes an extension of the incarnation in our time. Deeds thus create words. So if we take the incarnation seriously, we must take seriously the call to live incarnationally—right up close, near to those whom God desires to redeem.

(Frost 2006, 55)

Our calling as Christ followers is a reflection of profound revelation: we are those who are called to reveal who Christ is—through our witness (Acts 1:8); our imitation of Christ (Phil 2:1-11); and, our sense of connectedness to one another (1 Cor 12:27). In every day and every way, the Christian life amounts to a radical relationality, a readiness to reveal who God is while "being Jesus" to other when the occasion arises. "As Christians we are always Christs to one another" (119).

Incarnation in ministry is the implied outworking of connection with Christ and would therefore become central in discipling. "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, so you should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34, 35 NRSV). In the light of these words of Jesus, we might also find new meaning in Matt 28:19 (KJV) to "go therefore and make disciples" as something that could be understood as an incarnational enactment. Love and discipleship are linked together through claim, but ultimately through demonstration. Claims to love the other are hollow without some form of tangible or physical expression, they ought to be enacted in some way. The words of Jesus expressed in John 13:34,35 are part of the narrative in which he washes the feet of his disciples (John 13:1-17). John 13:1 is rendered "loved them to the end" in several contemporary translations, however the NLT carries a footnote that suggests "he showed them the full extent of his love" as alternative wording.

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Slide 15

Photo by Federico Di Dio photography on Unsplash

The interactions of God with humanity through Old and New Testaments reveal that God approaches humanity within time and space and within the specificity of local contexts, adapting himself to where they are so as best to speak and to influence them. To this end God uses presence, power and proximity as approaches through which to engage humanity. Viewed in this way, all divine interactions with his creatures are entirely, and unavoidably, an act of personal accommodation—and accommodation necessitated by the human condition and consistent throughout the scriptural narrative.

A visit to the British Museum will perhaps be helpful to get a sense of this.

Photo by Tim Swaan on Unsplash
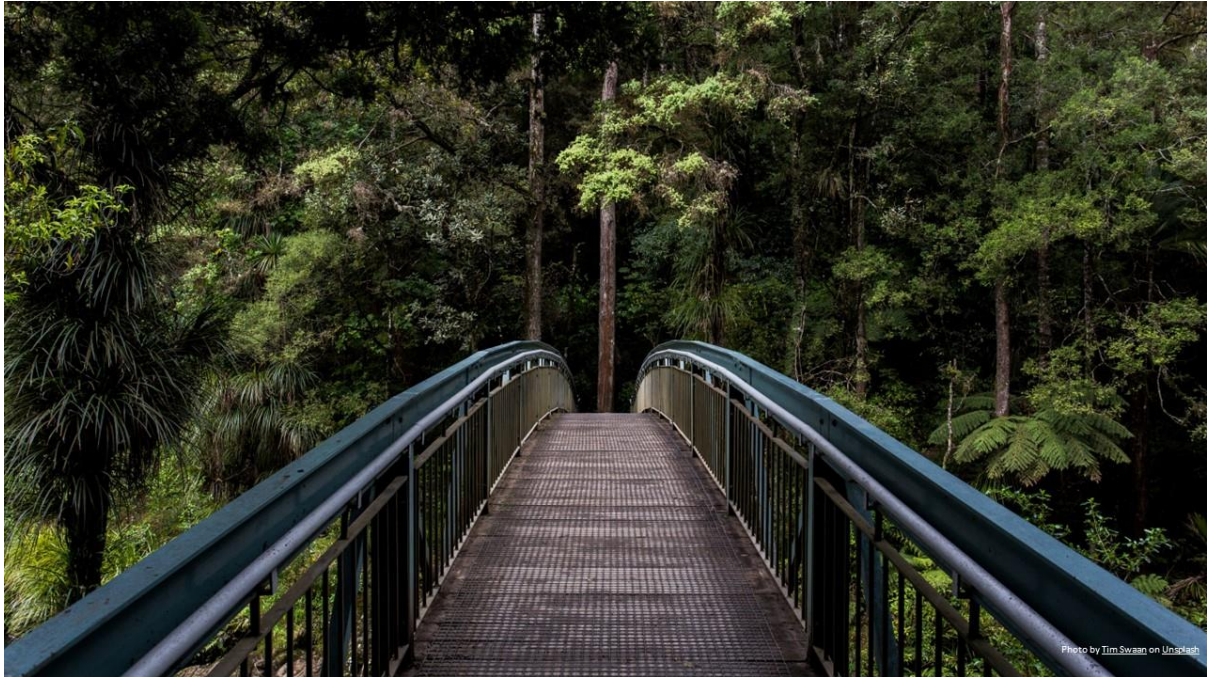
God's interactions with humankind are characterised by revelatory, relational and restorative qualities that show the desires and intentions of God for humanity. To this end human culture, language and faith serve as bridges for Divine overtures across time. Through the creation, patriarchal, exodus and exile narratives we are drawn to the conclusion that our placement in foreign contexts becomes an invitation to pursue gospel connections with the 'other' for whom we willingly make adaptations and accommodations because we go in the name of the One who first came to us. "Like Joseph in Egypt, Esther in Persia, or Daniel in Babylon, we are called to the ongoing and risky negotiation of engagement and resistance" (Frost 2006, 82).
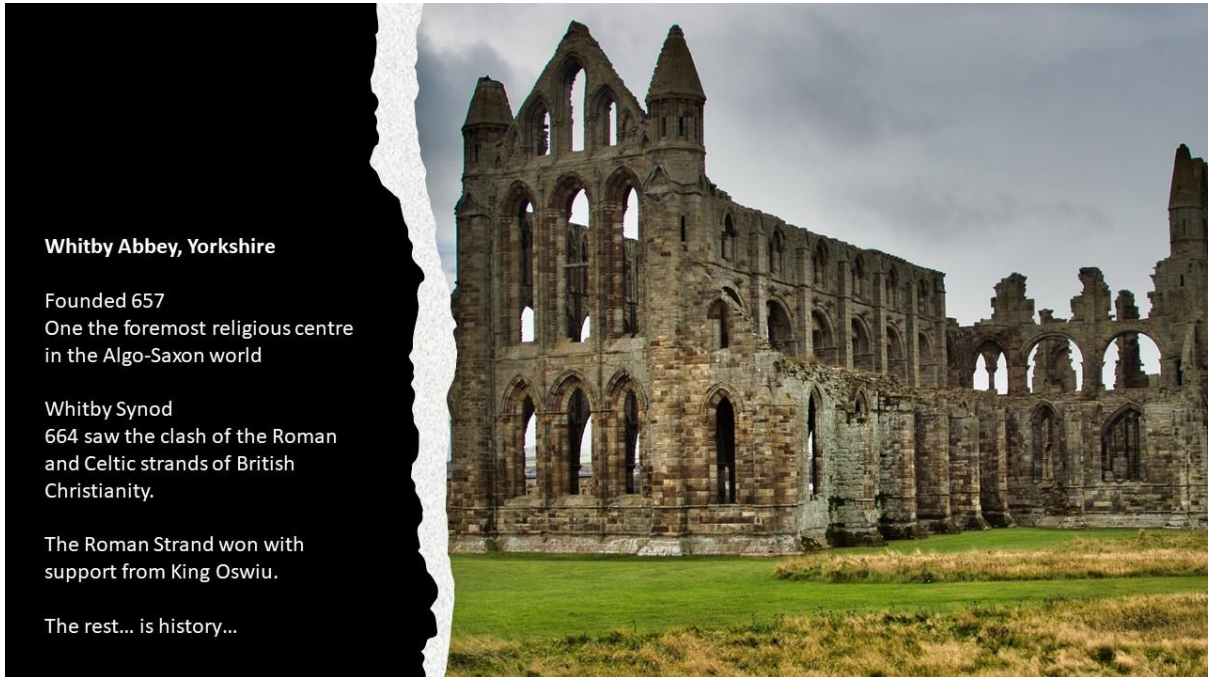
Whitby Abbey, Yorkshire

Founded 657
One the foremost religious centre
in the Algo-Saxon world

Whitby Synod
664 saw the clash of the Roman
and Celtic strands of British
Christianity.

The Roman Strand won with
support from King Oswiu.

The rest… is history…

As modern exiles in the West, 'relics' of a colonial and Christian past from which distance is desired, we must find ways to speak to a society that is barely listening. We "seek to thrive within [our] host culture without becoming slaves to it, forever seeking to forge another way forward in which we neither hide from the values of our contemporary society, nor do we embrace them uncritically" (Frost 2006, 82). Like Christ and like Paul we begin where the audience 'is' in their own context. We understand that diverse contexts require us to start with particular aspects of the gospel story, and that the emphasis may need to be placed differently. We seek to avoid formulaic presentations of the gospel while at the same time seeking to speak to the 'idols' and ideals of each people group so as to share the gospel in a way that makes it possible for some to believe.

This kind of story is rooted in our British history. Christianity came to these Isles, not through the Roman Missions, but through the Celtic Missions of St Patrick, St Columba and their base on Iona.

Photo by Birmingham Museums Trust on Unsplash

The Incarnation of Christ is perhaps the deepest and strongest expression of the desire of God to be with humanity, of radical embrace and profound accommodation. God and humanity are bound together through creation, through redemption, and through incarnation, and yet—while giving himself to us—God maintains all his divine properties and attributes. Christ is the Embodied Word of God made such that the human creation might have a sturdier grasp of God. It is in the form of embodiment that God calls his people to reflect him: in how he comes to us and how he works among us as a redeeming presence.

Slide 19
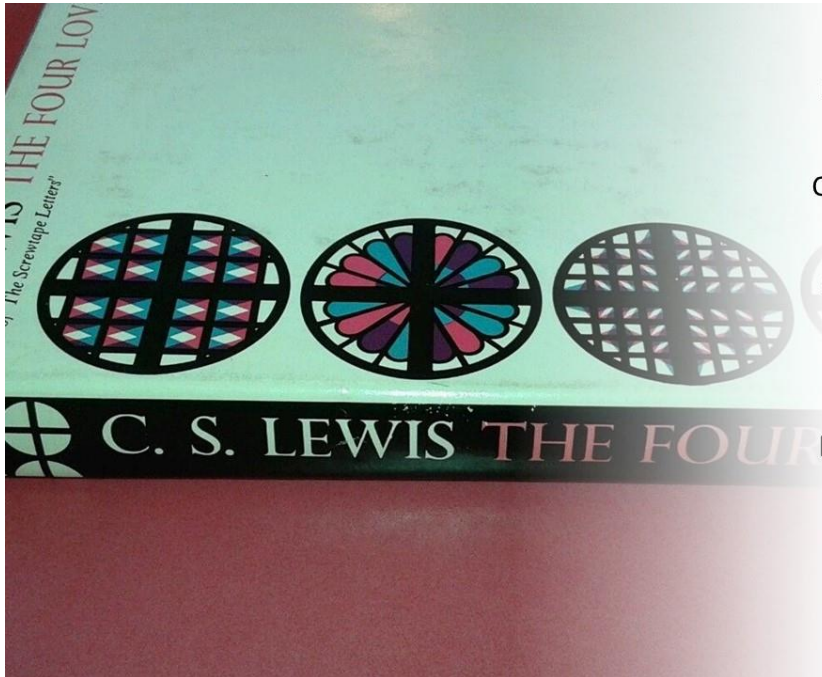
Our imitation of God in this life… must be an imitation of God incarnate: our model is the Jesus, not only of Calvary, but of the workshop, the roads, the crowds, the clamorous demands and surly oppositions, the lack of all peace and privacy, the interruptions. For this, so strangely unlike anything we can attribute to the Divine life in itself, is apparently not only like, but is, the Divine life operating under human conditions.

(C.S. Lewis, Four Loves, 17)

God calls his people to ideals, ways of living and being that extend beyond time and space. While our call is specific to context, it also extends beyond each individual time-bound context speaking to a unifying Gospel identity across time. The gospel must speak directly and insightfully to a particular time and place, but must never be limited only to that time and place.
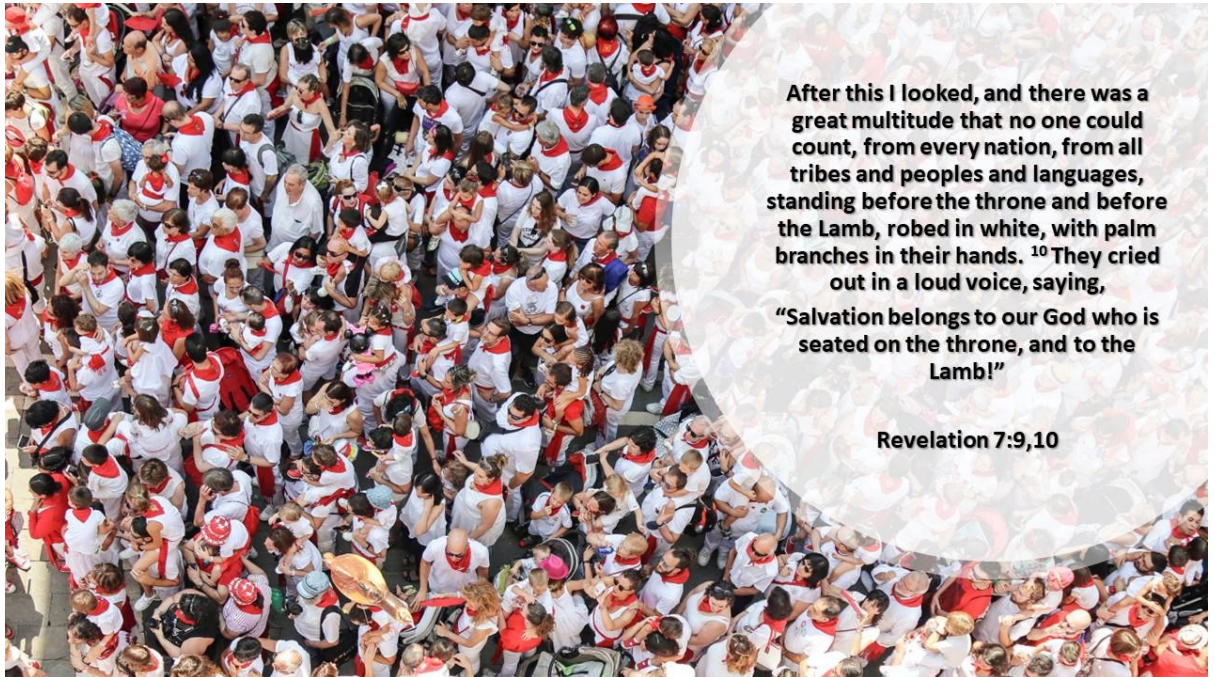
> It follows quite naturally that if [the] message, through our agency, is to continue to touch people, we have somehow ourselves to continue the incarnation process. Through us God must become Asian or African, black or brown, poor or sophisticated. Christians must be able to speak to inhabitants of twenty-first-century secular suburban Lima, Peru, or to the Tondo slum dweller in Manilla, or to the ill-gotten affluence of a Brazilian rancher. Christianity, if it is to be faithful to its deepest roots and to its most basic insight, must continue God's incarnation in Jesus by becoming contextual.
>
> (Bevans 2002, 12)

Determining the nature, scope and extent of divine accommodation requires one to differentiate the essential (the permanent/timeless) and non-essential (transient/temporary/culturally conditioned) aspects of one's perception of reality. Both the gospel and the human context must be taken equally seriously, therefore we cannot approach any culture simplistically. For the sake of the gospel we cannot afford uncritical assumptions about our own cultures of origin or of those that we seek to minister in and through. "Our stance toward every human culture should be one of critical enjoyment and an appropriate wariness" (Keller 2012, 109).

At the same time we may need to be alert to the possibility that God may also speak through persons outside of our circle (Pharaoh Neco) or that he may have been working in Athens unseen and unnoticed. And it will demand that we expand our vocabulary beyond that of our church, cultural, or ethnic contexts in order to speak and live in ways that offend because of the Gospel and not because of our preferences.

> After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. [10] They cried out in a loud voice, saying,
>
> "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!"
>
> Revelation 7:9,10

The nature of the Gospel as told through scripture and modelled through the life and Incarnation of Christ is that there are no irredeemable people and no verboten places.

All may be impacted, even changed, by an incarnational gospel presence. It is the image of Revelation 7:9 expressed in seminal form within our own time and context.

To this end "we are, as it were, borrowing from God's future, planting seeds of hope, raising the flag of the yet-to-be-consummated kingdom [of which] the church… is to be the advance guard of what is still to come" (N. Tom Wright and Bird 2019, 884, 885).

Slide 22
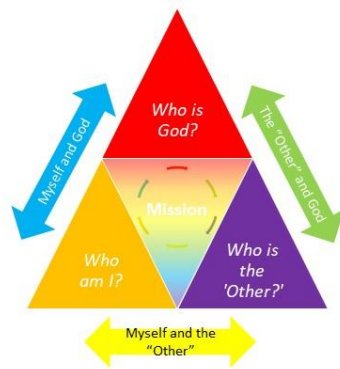
The work of God in our world brings 3 stories into dynamic interaction with one another: God's story, My Story and the Other's story.

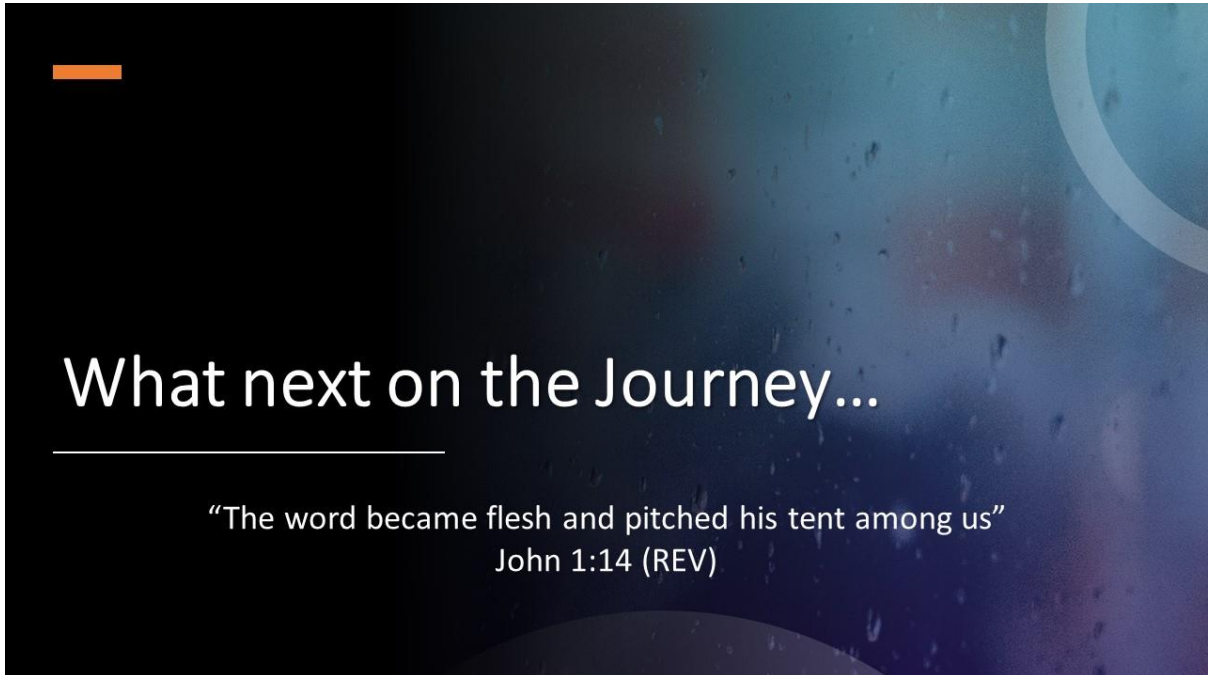o How might becoming more aware of this dynamic impact your current approach to mission and ministry?

o What will you do with this perspective? What are you moved toward? Or away from?

Breakout Room Activity #2
(15 minutes)

Slide 23

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You were promised that on this course you would be helped to discover your mission in the new-normal. I wonder if you have begun to experience or sense a shift in the way you see yourself and your connection to mission where you are?

As you read and mediated on the Scriptures, wrote the reflections, watched the films – did something stir within you? If so, "What do you understand that stirring to mean?"

Perhaps you have just not had the bandwidth to manage everything between sessions – take the time to go back over the handouts. This is a journey, not a destination. A marathon, not a sprint. Mission is a dynamic action in which 3 narratives converge and remain in dialogue with one another. Our voice may have been too strong. We may not have listened appropriately – to God or Others. We may be missing pieces of the puzzle and filling them in from our cultural perspective. Nevertheless, we are in the conversation, on the journey. Where will you pitch your tent?

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Through a Glass Darkly Interview Questions:

Interview questions are based on the Missional Lens as a means by which to assess integration of concepts by an interviewee. The interviewer is also listening for Levels 3 (changed behaviours as a result of engagement) and 4 (results and desired outcomes) of the Kirkpatrick model. Level 1 and 2 outcomes are expected as the minimum standard for the success of the intervention.

Level 4 (Results):

Might include movement toward the formation of/participation in an incarnational and contextual Adventist missionary presence; participation in less propositional and more relational mission engagement in the participants local context.

Level 3 (Behaviour):

Participants reflect greater sensitivity and curiosity regarding perceived and experienced difference with others; are beginning to read and apply scripture with a more rounded, 3-dimensional approach.

Level 2 (Learning):

Participants gained a broader knowledge; a deeper self-awareness was built and express greater confidence in relating the narrative of an immanent God.

Level 1 (Reaction):

Participants engaged in the conversation as the themes intersected with their lived experience of faith and mission.

Questions are drawn from the three aspects of the lens and may include, but are not limited to the following:

General:

Which aspects of 'Through a Glass Darkly' intersected most with your life?

What was your experience of that intersection?

Do you sense that you have formed new meanings around any of the themes?

Or around the experience in general?

1.   Who am I?

Level 1:   What did you learn about your story? Could you share your experience of telling that story?

Level 2:   Where is your story rooted?

What does UK residence and life bring to your story?

What does it mean to you?

What underlying worldview assumptions have you become aware of?

Level 3:   Which dimensions of your story might require further exploration?

Level 4:   Could you share about any obstacles and/or bridges in your story that present themselves in relation to the story of God and of Others?

2.   Who is God?

Level 1:   In a couple of sentences, describe God's story as you understand it?

Where have you heard that story, and how has it been told?

Level 2:   What is your take-away perspective/understandings from that story?

How might you have come to these conclusions?

Level 3:   Upon reflection, have you been/are you willing to reassess your relationship with any of those conclusions?

Are you noticing any shifts in the way you live with God?

What, if anything, has helped you to locate yourself in God's story?

What, if anything, has helped you to locate the 'Other' in God's story?

Level 4: What implications do you see in the story of God coming to humanity?

Where might there be obstacles and bridges in your story, were the

Incarnation to become your way of mission?

3. Who is 'Other'?

Level 1: Who are the people/groups around you that are 'Other'?

Level 2: What is their story?

How do you know/have come to know that story?

What significant factors/events have impacted the story of the 'Other'?

What underlying worldview assumptions might there be?

Level 3: What is it like for you to hear a different story?

Are there areas/aspects of the narrative that you may need to explore in

greater depth? If so, how will you do that?

Level 4: In your listening/observing the stories of an "other", have you noticed or

become aware of, the activity of God in that story?

Concluding Questions:

What has been most challenging/rewarding for you?

Is there anything you feel the need to explore further?

If so, how might you engage with that?

What do you sense is "next" for you on your missional journey?

If the researcher were to offer the 6 conversations again, would you have any

observations/recommendations for changes or improvements?

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