

Perceptions of the Church of England Among Clergy and Laity Three Years After the COVID-19 Lockdowns

Abstract

A convenience sample of 2,874 clergy and lay people from the Church of England was asked about the state of their congregation in 2024, some 3 years after the end of lockdown restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Perceptions of the state of the Church could be assessed by three distinct but correlated scales. The first related to perceived changes in numbers, the second to the fragility of churches, and the third to the general state of churches in terms numbers, mood, and finances. Scores on these scales were partly related to personal or psychological factors. In particular, emotional volatility, a measure of trait neuroticism, was associated with more pessimistic scores on both scales. The two main ecclesial predictors of scale scores were church tradition and congregation size. Evangelicals were generally more optimistic compared with those from Anglo-Catholic or Broad-Church traditions. Optimism declined as congregation size increased, up to about 150, when it remained constant.

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Social Impact of Liverpool Cathedral Friends Association

Abstract

This paper examines the impact of the Liverpool Cathedral Friends Association, building on Muskett's work to explore motivations for joining and the benefits of membership of Liverpool Cathedral's Friends Association. Conducted as part of a Knowledge Transfer Partnership between Liverpool Cathedral, Innovate UK, and Lincoln Bishop University, the study draws on survey data from 134 members (around 25% of the total). Findings identified that members' connections to the Association and Cathedral are shaped by a strong sense of belonging and community, along with historical, local, and family ties. Key motivations include supporting preservation of the building, engaging with cultural and musical activities, and valuing opportunities for peace, reflection, and awe. Using Fisher's spiritual health framework, the study highlights how participation contributes to personal wellbeing, social connection, attachment to place and heritage, and, for some, experiences of spiritual growth and transcendence.

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The Roles of Religious Education in Five Asian Societies: A Critical Comparison

Abstract

Religious Education (RE) in public schools reflects society's values and culture, serving as a window into norms and a mirror of identity. This study compares RE's role in five Asian societies: Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Japan, and the Philippines, using two explorations. The first exploration examines how globalisation (migration), local socio-political contexts (pluralism), government policies (religion-state relations), and cultural heritage influence the placement of RE within the curricula. The second exploration contrasts RE arrangements across these societies. This study concludes that, influenced by globalisation, pragmatism, and nationalism, knowledge of religions is key for informed citizenship, social stability, and nation-building, though to varying degrees. Paradoxically, pluralism and the separation of church and state can marginalise RE in some educational systems. When RE and related topics are included, they mainly follow approaches centred on learning about and from religion, often integrated with Moral Education and Citizenship Education.

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Epistemological Reflections on Interdisciplinary Studies

Abstract

This paper reflects on the role in which different academic disciplines can inform and shape studies which are grounded in an interdisciplinary context. Focusing on experiences of worshipping participants, this paper focused specifically on the philosophical writings of Hegel and Noel Carroll and their implications for reflecting on the aesthetic experience, alongside contemporary thinking surrounding musicking and the subjective turn which influence current sociological research of music and religion. These ideas were written at different points in conceptual history and therefore are grounded in meaningfully distinct epistemological frameworks, this makes it challenging to construct a consistent and useful conceptual framework based on these ideas. Despite these challenges, this paper argues that through embracing the challenges interdisciplinary research has the capacity to inspire creative and highly innovative approaches to research in complex contexts and that doing so can develop ideas that research only exploring one academic discipline would fail to achieve.

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Resourcing a Paradigm Shift in Youth Ministry

Abstract

Andrew Root outlines the shift of paradigms in youth ministry from the educational era of the early Sunday school movement, through the missional era of Young Life, Crusaders, and Youth for Christ, and now the emerging 'interspace' paradigm. This paradigm is defined by the interspace between young person and youth leader in an increasingly more relational and dialogical kind of youth ministry. In this presentation I will show how to resource this new paradigm in Bible reading groups, encouraging open dialogue between leaders, young people and the text through intertextual comparison and theological wiggle room.

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How Children Work Out Whether God is Real

Abstract

This is a ten-year longitudinal research project that sets out to listen to children's voices in their original context as they work out whether God is real. Five children are consulted as they grow from age five to ten, as they learn to distinguish fantasy from what they believe to be true. Their insights are gathered from a time when they believe that Father Christmas visits their homes at Christmas, when puppets can talk and when God is prayed to at night. Working from the assumption that the child's early interpretative thinking is highly influenced on whether they perceive God to be real, a method has been identified that records the children's evolving perceptions on an annual basis, alongside the narrative of their life.

These thoughts are mapped against the theological insights of the Christian tradition, whereby the insights of early childhood are seen to offer both correction and new insight.

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Defining Anglicanism: Is it possible?

Abstract

The Anglican Church has individual characteristics which allow it to claim to be both Catholic and Reformed. At the time of the Continental Reformation, it did not secede on doctrinal grounds prompted by the work of a theologian such as Luther or Calvin, who in consequence gave their names to their Churches. Rather its move from the authority of Rome was political, and it continued life in all respects with the marks of the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. It is not confessional. Its later participation in 'the English Reformation' resulted in the three-fold guiding principle of scripture, reason and tradition. Its subsequent history has demonstrated how the inclusive and tolerant diversity thus realised, has led to difficulties in definition, and the maintenance of unity. Six characteristics are described, with an admission that Anglicanism is something felt and understood that cannot easily be classified.

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Invitations to Christian Commitment: The Distinctive Voice of Anglican Cathedrals

Abstract

This paper draws on the developing science of cathedral studies to profile the distinctive voice of Anglican cathedrals in the call to Christian commitment. The argument progresses in three steps. Step one draws on theology and ecclesiology to frame a vision. Step two draws on sociological theory to frame a perspective. Step three draws on empirical research to test that perspective.

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The English Choral Tradition: Receptive Ecumenism in practice?

Abstract

This presentation outlines the emphasis that the process of 'receptive ecumenism' places on learning across traditions so that there is mutual enrichment (over the search of institutional and organic unity that was the stated aim of some earlier programmes of ecumenical activity). Exploring some of the ways in which Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions have worked together and learnt from each other, the presentation looks at the ways that there has been a process of liturgical convergence and musical exchange between these parallel traditions – highlighting this as a potential area for more focused study. By way of case studies, this is illustrated through the lens of the liturgical and musical practice of two Anglican cathedrals in the East Midlands, and the results of a short field visit to continental Roman Catholic cathedrals on the continent. This opens up the possibility that the spirituality of the Anglican choral tradition in English cathedrals, which have been described as a 'fifth column of Catholic spirituality within the Church of England', might be the locus for the process of receptive ecumenism, and a fruitful focus for further study into this present for potential inter-ecclesial learning.

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Choral Scholar Faith Development Part 1

Abstract

This presentation evaluates the Choral Scholar model for establishing faith development through Choral music rehearsals for singing Evensong Services as implemented over a 18month period at Lancaster Priory, through the lens of a reflective journal kept by the director of music operating as ethnographer and written interviews. The reflective journal was resourced by 45 weeks of Choral Scholar rehearsals in preparation for 45 weeks of Choral Evensongs attended by the public, worshipping community, parents and university community. Insights from the reflective journal are set alongside key themes from the written interviews. This reflective piece challenges the role of director of music and the choral scholar experience being primarily musical rather than spiritual.

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Refining Personality Type Analysis in RSEs through Inter-Rater Reliability: Uncovering Messy Research

Abstract

This study examines the role of inter-rater reliability (IRR) in refining the analysis of personality type within narratives of Religious and Spiritual Experiences (RSEs) drawn from the Alister Hardy Database. Situated within a methodological framework, the research employs Jungian typology as an interpretative lens, operationalised through a structured codebook based on the four psychological dichotomies. An initial IRR test, using a sample of approximately one hundred coded text fragments, revealed agreement levels below acceptable thresholds, exposing ambiguities in the code definitions. These findings prompted a systematic revision of the codebook, emphasising clearer operational criteria and greater reliance on explicit textual evidence. Particular challenges emerged in the coding of iNtuition and the Judging–Perceiving dimension, highlighting the risk of interpretative bias. The study demonstrates how IRR functions not merely as a statistical measure, but as a critical methodological tool for enhancing transparency, consistency, and replicability in qualitative research.

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Does Contact Moderate Attitudes in the Elim Movement Towards Homosexual People?

Abstract

Since the early 2000's significant changes in the UK have led to homosexual people experiencing greater acceptance and inclusion throughout the various strata of British society. Among Christian denominations, inclusion varies and continues to be contended. Some denominations have moved to full inclusion or degrees of inclusion, while others have not yet come to a settled position. The Elim Pentecostal Movement is a biblically conservative Spirit-led denomination that does not allow same sex marriage in its churches. How do Elim leaders feel about homosexual people, and what might predict the degree of inclusion a homosexual person might experience in an Elim church?

Allports Contact Theory (The Nature of Prejudice, 1954), suggests that interpersonal contact between diverse groups is an effective method of reducing prejudice. The literature confirms Allport's hypothesis across a range of contexts and contact theory in its various iterations has become established in prejudice studies as a mechanism for reducing prejudice and discrimination. This research tests the contact hypothesis in Elim by comparing the effect varying degrees of contact Elim leaders have with homosexual people on a series of theological, moral, ontological, and ecclesial attitudinal constructs to discover if contact might moderate attitude thus predicting the degree of inclusion a homosexual person might experience in the Elim Pentecostal Movement.

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