



MISSION

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CATALYST

Intelligent comment on faith and culture



Ceci n'est pas la liberté

Freedom: what does it look like?

**Q&A: PAULA
GOODER**

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DO WE EVEN LIKE FREEDOM?



THE TREACHERY OF IMAGES OF FREEDOM IS THAT THEY SKIRT THE HARDER TRUTHS.

A revolutionary holding a book by Donald Trump, riding an eagle and raining money may not be your idea of what freedom looks like – but it is someone's. Probably a lot of people's, if democratic votes are to be believed. For some of us, freedom finds its perfect expression in untrammelled capitalism. For others in an absence of restrictions on what they might do with their bodies. Interestingly, proponents of these two views of freedom tend to find themselves on opposite sides of the political divide. Like those who think of freedom as liberation from a hegemonic power and those who see it as a value to be exported at gunpoint.

Competing rights claims in a society that has failed to address the individual-group dynamic mean that freedom for some is a limitation on the freedom of others. Trans-rights advocates and their opponents know this from their 'bathroom wars' in the States. Freedom to evangelise on the street may impinge on the freedom to buy a bagel in peace. The freedom of gay couples to marry occasionally comes into conflict with, of all things, the sacred freedom of bakers.

Questions of freedom are seldom as simple as the slogans, patriotic songs and political rhetoric would have us believe. Freedom rarely comes without cost and danger. Freedom of speech doesn't just carry the risk of unpleasant things being



Alternative cover, in the interests of balance

said – it guarantees it, because popular speech needs no protection. Freedom of conscience and assembly mean that sometimes people will mount protests on our streets (or vote in referendums) in support of views we despise. The freedom from guilt and retribution inherent in God's grace brings with it more than the danger that we will continue to sin, but the assurance that we will – though hopefully less, or differently. Freedom is hard. And, as the jingoistic songs say, it isn't free.

Perhaps this is why we've lost our taste for it. Not the shallow, fluffy concept, of course – we love to invoke that particular F-word – but the sacrifice that freedom almost always requires of us, usually that of laying down power and control. I find this a comforting correlation: freedom with sacrifice. It confirms, at a deep level, the reasonableness of many Christian convictions. And so, the opposition freedom faces currently should not

surprise me. Fascist and quasi-fascist governments taking ever more control; identity politics movements demanding, from the best motives, the power to define who may speak and who should be heard; Baptists no longer concerned with freedom for all and retreating to the enclave of historic privilege and power.

Freedom is perhaps always under threat and, while we should avoid the reactionary assumption of every generation that the values we hold dear are being eroded and attacked, vigilance is still required. If we truly still believe, as Thomas Helwys (invoked at least twice in this issue of *Catalyst*) that freedom is important, we must be willing to defend those who differ from us, to speak out for freedoms we ourselves may never exercise. It's an ethos we try to express by having a multiplicity of views in the magazine (there are several opinions in this issue, as in every one, that I myself don't share). It's an approach we encourage at its incarnation **Catalyst Live** (from which event you may recognise some of the names contributing to this issue). And it is a truth we all, Baptists and other Christians, believers and unbelievers, need to understand.

Freedom doesn't mean being comfortable. But the discomfort it breeds is vital, fertile and worth preserving.

Jonathan Langley

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All letters to Mission Catalyst at PO Box 49, 129 Broadway, Didcot, OX11 8XA and emails to catalyst@bmsworldmission.org will be considered for publication and may be edited for length and style if selected. Many letters are invited. Not all are chosen.

Our cover art this issue references René Magritte's *The Treachery of Images*. Put that in your pipe and smoke it.



Do you like this magazine?

We don't charge for *Mission Catalyst*. Deepening theological insight in the UK is part of our strategy to transform one million lives around the world by 2020 and, as such, is its own reward. But if you enjoy *Catalyst*, and if you would like to contribute to BMS World Mission's work around the world, even in a small way, please visit www.bmsworldmission.org/give and contribute (or commit to contribute regularly) as you feel led.

David Bebbington

Professor of History at the University of Stirling and originator of the 'Bebbington Quadrilateral' defining evangelicalism as being defined by biblicism, crucicentricism, conversionism and activism.

THE BAPTIST HERITAGE OF FREEDOM

CAMPAIGNING FOR FREEDOM (FOR OURSELVES AND FOR OTHERS) IS EMBEDDED IN BAPTIST DNA. A HISTORICAL TOUR OF SIGNIFICANT MOMENTS.

At midnight on 31 July, 1838 in the Baptist church at Falmouth on the island of Jamaica, its minister, William Knibb, an Englishman who served with the Baptist Missionary Society, cried out, "The monster is dead: the negro is free." He was celebrating, on behalf of his black congregation ("negro" then had no unfavourable connotations), the end of slavery in British dominions. Six years earlier, at the British general election of 1832, Knibb himself had toured the country, brandishing the manacles of a slave from Jamaica on public platforms, to rouse the country to return Members of Parliament who would vote for the abolition of slavery. His efforts helped ensure that in 1833 Parliament enacted that all slaves would lose their shackles. Knibb's achievement was part of a commitment to freedom that runs through Baptist history.

In the earliest years of the movement, at the opening of the 17th century, General Baptists elaborated a theory of religious liberty. Its most celebrated expression was the protest by Thomas Helwys in 1612 against any role for the state in the regulation of conscience. Whereas, since the time of Constantine in the fourth century, it had been generally assumed that Christian rulers should enforce true religion, Helwys contended that even heretics, Muslims and Jews should not be punished by the king, who should confine himself to running earthly affairs. Likewise, Particular Baptists of the 17th century called for freedom of conscience for themselves, and it has recently been



shown that their demands contributed to the turning of national opinion in favour of religious toleration, which was enacted in England in 1689.

During the 18th century, Baptists,

Religious Freedom which established the liberty to worship as a fundamental right. During the next century, the Baptists of Britain aspired to follow the example of the United States in adopting the principle of the separation of Church and State and were among the most outspoken leaders of a powerful campaign to disestablish the Church of England.

Baptist communities also supported the rights of Christian believers abroad. Edward Steane, the secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and also of the Evangelical Alliance, frequently intervened in the mid 19th century to call attention to the closure of churches by unfriendly authorities on the European continent. When in the early 1960s the people of Angola first started an agitation for the independence of their African nation from Portugal, Baptist missionaries who worked in the country alerted their supporters at home to the cruelty of its suppression by the Portuguese authorities. The outcome was a largely Baptist

“ Helwys contended that even heretics, Muslims and Jews should not be punished by the king ”

whether in Britain or in America, were champions of what was generally known as 'civil and religious liberty'. They believed that the freedoms they wanted for themselves, such as the right to participate in municipal government without potential penalties, should also be extended to the whole community. In the newly independent United States, Baptists were vocal champions of the limitation of secular authority in the religious sphere. Baptist pressure was a main reason for the passing in 1786 of the Virginia Statute for

campaign not only for an end to brutal repression but also for the fulfilment of the political aspirations of the people of Angola.

To this day, Baptist agencies, particularly the Baptist World Alliance, continue to monitor issues of freedom of conscience. They are maintaining a noble denominational tradition of being concerned with freedom in the secular as well as the religious field, for others as well as for Baptists and abroad as well as at home.

Canon Dr Paula Gooder is an author, speaker, theologian and Director of Mission Learning and Development for the Diocese of Birmingham. She is a former Theologian in Residence for the Bible Society and is one of the select group of speakers who can speak as easily at Greenbelt as at Spring Harvest. She was Keynote speaker at **Catalyst Live 2018**



Q&A

PAULA GOODER

FREEDOM IN CHRIST, LIBERATION STRUGGLES AND THE FREEDOM OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH. CATALYST LIVE 2018 SPEAKER PAULA GOODER SHARES HER THOUGHTS.

When we talk about the freedom that we have in Christ, what are we free from?

Allow me to talk like I'm Paul, because I am a Pauline scholar after all. What Paul would say is that you are free from

the old way of being. And everything that comes with the old way of being. So, the old creation, being locked into sinful relationships, being unable to transcend. Because one of the great frustrations about

being Christian is you can see a better way of being and so often we slide back into the old way of being. And what Jesus frees us from is that old way of being, the sin and selfishness, and mortality and the fact

“ *The really important thing is that freedom is both from and for* ”

that we will ultimately die. All of that stuff is kind of Paul's category of what we are freed from. But he also, and I think really importantly, talks about we are freed *for*. And the 'freed for' is a new way of being. Life in the new creation, resurrection, hope, joy and all of the language that Paul uses. For me, the really important thing is that freedom is both from and for. If we focus too much on what we're freed *from* it becomes quite a negative narrative. But if you concentrate too much on what we're freed *for*, then it becomes a bit fluffy and kind of vague. You need the from and the for in order for it to begin to make sense.

Do you think that, generally speaking, we get that balance right?

No. I think what is quite interesting is that different sections of the Church are better at different parts for it. So, some are much better at talking about what we're freed from and some are better about talking about what we're freed for. And if only we could have a conversation across the divides then we'd learn so much from each other. You need that balance relationship, I think, of the vision of the old creation to the new creation and how that can function.

As a female biblical scholar, how much progress are we making towards freedom for women and recognition of women as genuinely equal within the Church?

Who knows? I am an old feminist, rather than the new wave, so I was a feminist in the 80s. I saw what happened in the 90s and the 2000s to the feminist movement and I thought for a bit that it was gone completely. It's now on the rise again. And I think it is the natural state of things, a natural part of human nature, that we make progress in some areas and then it's lost. It's never lost completely, but you kind of take your two steps forward, one step back. I think we're in another phase in which women are beginning to find their voices within the churches, beginning to be recognised as leaders, and I sincerely hope that it stays, and we continue onwards. But I also know that in various ways we will slip back again, back to what human nature is like. So yes, we're making progress, and we've

certainly made progress in the last ten years over how it was in say the 90s, but it's a constant issue and I think we need to be ever vigilant about it. But I'd also want to say that we need to be really careful. As a woman I feel very uncomfortable simply talking about how hard it is to be a woman in the Church. I think there are many ways in which it is increasingly hard to be a man in the Church and I think unless we start having that conversation then we will swing a pendulum in completely the wrong direction, and that will be really unfortunate I think.

In what ways is it hard to be a man in the Church?

I make a sweeping generalised statement and there'll be loads of people who disagree with me. But simply being a male member of a congregation is. There are disproportionate numbers of women who attend church as opposed to men,

“ *It is increasingly hard to be a man in the Church* ”

and I know what it's like to be a woman in an all-male gathering – it can't be a whole load of fun to be a man in an all-female gathering. It has its complexities. I think women, because we have had to fight to find a voice about what it means to be a woman and why it's difficult, have become more adept at talking about what it means to be a woman. I think men haven't had to, and therefore as a result are slightly on the back foot when we're talking about gender, because, actually, what does it mean to be male? What is important about being male? And what kind of gift is that? It hasn't been talked about a lot. So, I think there are quite a lot of issues, kind of bubbling around which do need addressing. And I do talk to a number of men who say, “Well we're just middle aged, white men and actually we just feel that we're overlooked the whole time now because actually other people's voices are

more strongly heard.” To which I want to go: “Oh, you've done well for the last 2,000 years, you can live with a few years of not,” but we need to make sure it doesn't go too far.

We are seeing an increase in fundamentalism in the USA, reacting to the increasing marginalisation of Christianity, even in a country as hyper-Christianised as America. How should we be dealing with our fall from power and our freedom from privilege as Christians in western society?

I think we should celebrate it. Because Jesus never expected us to live in a powerful position within society. Paul never did, he might have liked it, but he never expected it to happen. Christianity is about how you live with the least and the lost and the marginalised. And it has been really hard for us, I think, to find a proper Christian voice, while we have had power within society, so I think it's great.

BMS is grappling, as a mission agency with 226 years of history, with how to free churches we helped establish from dependence on us. Occasionally from dependence on the theology we gave them. How should we be navigating that?

Do we have anything to offer, or is it time to just be silent?

The thing that we need to do is get over our post-colonial guilt. It kind of locks you in. It's not that we shouldn't feel guilty, we ought to feel guilty. But, actually, if we can only feel guilty, then we've got no way forward. For me, one of the really important things about the relationship with the global Church is that it has been a one directional relationship: *we are the brilliant ones, we've got the theology we've got all the money we'll give it to you, and you'll be grateful, and all will be well.* Actually, the way to move forward is when we can see the gift of the global Church to us. It doesn't mean we have to agree, but we do need to see that they have a vast amount to give and we are poorer because they aren't giving it to us. The way, I think, to get over this is to begin to have that conversation much more confidently,



“ We don’t have to think they’re right, but we do have to listen ”

about what is their gift and what do we need to receive from them and then actually the relationship slowly, it will take a long time, but slowly it will begin to right itself, I think.

Is there a danger that we’re only going to listen to the bits that we already want to hear, and is that really listening? I can foresee resistance to listening to parts of the World Church about no women in leadership, executing homosexuals, etc. How do you avoid neo-colonialism in this and the temptation only to hear what you already want to hear?

Well, I think there’s a distinction between listening and accepting. I think what we often will do is just go: “No, we’re not going there, we’re not doing that, we’re not having this.” After what has happened through hundreds of years of oppression, actually we’ve made them listen to a whole lot of things they didn’t want to hear either, so it’s our turn. We have to sit there

and have our toes curl. That’s our calling, I think. We don’t have to think they’re right, but we do have to listen.

We did this a little bit when we were talking about women bishops in the Church of England, and after some very, very rocky places, we got to the stage of listening really carefully. And I will never agree with the people who don’t think women should be in leadership in the Church, but actually I learnt vast amounts when I was prepared to listen, to hear them saying the things I really didn’t want them to say. It’s not easy and it takes a vast amount of courage, but there is something about the listening which is really, really important, so we’ve got to listen to it all, whether we like it or not. Like I say, we don’t have to agree, but we do have to listen.

Arguing as equals as a post-colonial discipline?

Absolutely, yes.

Often the people most fond of talking about Christian distinctiveness are very rarely talking about being publicly gracious and forgiving in a way that gives up power. But I have heard in progressive rather than fundamentalist Christian circles over the last few years, the idea that you can’t recommend forgiveness for crimes if you’ve never suffered oppression yourself. Is there a Christian distinctive in grace and forgiveness that needs to be, using the term cautiously, fought for?

Yes, but, back to the theme of freedom: within Christianity, those of us who are in Christ are called and have a vocation into freedom. And it’s our freedom from all the past hurt, from all of the oppression, and freedom for a new way of being. I think the really difficult thing is that as Christians we’re really good with ‘ought’s’ – a friend of mine calls it ‘the hardening of the oughteries’: *I will tell you how you ought to react*. I have no right to tell you how you ought to react, what I can tell you is how I feel I ought to react and leave you to draw your conclusions about how you ought to react. That, for me, is kind of the message.

Interview: Jonathan Langley

Photos: David Dunham, BMS World Mission

Baroness Elizabeth Berridge

Conservative peeress of the Vale of Catmose, Chair of the All Party Group on International Religious Freedom and founding and steering committee member of the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief.

Baptists & RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

*BAPTISTS MUST BE AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE FIGHT
FOR ALL RELIGIOUS GROUPS' LIBERTIES.*

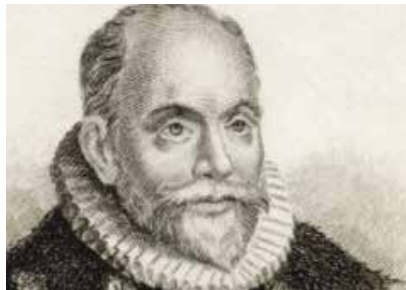
Religious freedom is the DNA of Baptists, your foundation stone and a heritage that Baptists the world over need to promote today. Non-conformity essentially means exercising your freedoms, either alone or in community, to hold your faith or belief, your brand of Protestant Christianity, without being penalised by the state or other branches of Christianity who might object to your beliefs. It is for this freedom that many fled and founded the USA, declaring this to be the 'First Freedom'. But where can one flee today if under religious persecution when the world is allocated into nation states?

For this freedom one of the earliest Baptists, Thomas Helwys, died in Newgate Prison after informing King James that, "For men's religion to God is between God and themselves. The king shall not answer for it. Neither may the king be judge between God and man. Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews or whatsoever it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure. This is made evident by our lord the king by the scriptures." The scriptures, of course, that this king had put his name to a version of.

Helwys was the first person recorded in the English Language to state what was to become part of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, written 70 years ago, in the aftermath of the Holocaust:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion

“ Freedom to preach the message of Jesus means freedom for others to communicate their message ”



Thomas Helwys

or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

Giving to each person the freedom to believe what they want to believe regarding their religion, or the freedom to choose to have none, and giving the duty to the state to protect this freedom for its citizens is far from a reality today. But Baptists saw that their freedoms meant a nation and communities which allowed everyone their freedom to choose. That the tree in the Garden of Eden was, inter alia, to teach us that human beings can choose, in this life, to follow God or not to. Freedom to preach the message

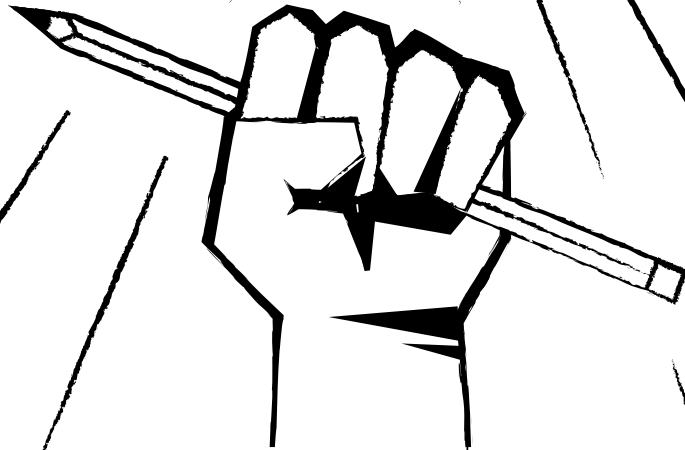
of Jesus means freedom for others to communicate their message and it is the role of Christians to defend the right of others to hear their own messages too. Indeed, the Jerusalem written of in the New Testament seems like a place of much debate, a market place of ideas and teaching.

But today sometimes Christians seem to want only to protect their own freedom to preach and protect their own from persecution. This is an anathema to Baptist theology and tradition. Whether it be the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, Bhai and Sunni Muslims in Iran, Hindus, Shia Muslims and Christians in Pakistan, Jehovah's Witnesses, Protestants and Muslims in Russia, Christians and Muslims in India and Yazidis and Christians in Syria and Iraq, they are all humans, all uniquely valuable to God and need Baptists to speak up and defend their freedoms.

As one of the largest denominations in the world today, from such humble beginnings in 17th century England and looking at the world crisis for 'non conformity', I cannot help but think that your religious freedom DNA, your leadership, will be part of realising religious freedom for all.

Ruth Gledhill

Former religious affair correspondent at The Times and Multi-Media Editor at The Tablet.



THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE

A FREE PRESS MUST BE CONCERNED WITH TRUTH, BUT THAT'S
AN INCREASINGLY COMPLICATED IDEA IN A POSTMODERN
SOCIETY. AND IT HAS IMPLICATIONS FOR FREEDOM.

The history of censorship in Christianity, including burnings of books and people for heresy, is long and makes uncomfortable reading. For many centuries, the churches could not be said to be on the side of a free press.

Blasphemy only ceased to be an offence in the UK in 2008. The UK has no First Amendment guaranteeing free speech, or even a constitution to contain it. Instead our country is known as the libel capital of the world, although recent changes to the law of defamation have improved matters.

There are many reasons the press

must be free, and chief among these is the importance that the truth be known, however uncomfortable that truth might turn out to be.

In spite of the fact that every journalist goes into the business wanting to find out and tell the truth, still people fear the media can have a tendency to obscure,

or distort, rather than reveal. People also fear equally that the media actually want nothing more than to tell the truth, because the truth about corruption and other misdeeds can too often threaten those who gain from such wrongs.

In the Bible, Pilate examines Christ with the question, “What is truth?” We are asking that same question two millennia later of the material that is supplied to those of us who work in journalism – and then mediated by us through the media to the world – as fact.

It is in fact a philosophical question: what is truth?

Francis Bacon, father of empiricism, spoke of a “natural though corrupt love of the lie itself,” which militates in our nature against truth. “Truth may perhaps come to the price of a pearl, that showeth best by day; but it will not rise to the price of a diamond or carbuncle, that showeth best in varied lights.” Men use lies within vanity and flattery to ease the pain of their own undistinguished existence. He was referencing Matthew 13, the parable of the pearl of great price. Pearls of wisdom, pearls of truth. That is what we all seek, and like real pearls, truth is often to be found in the very grit of the oyster.

Bacon continues: “To pass from theological and philosophical truth to the truth of civil business; it will be acknowledged even by those that practise it not, that clear and round dealing is the honour of man’s nature; and that mixture of falsehood is like alloy in coin of gold and silver, which may make the metal work the better, but it embaseth it.”

In journalism, especially religious journalism, we are at the juncture of that passing from theological and philosophical truth to the truth of civil business.

The Catholic Church holds that there is such a thing as objective truth. St John Paul II’s encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* – the splendour of truth – opens: “The splendour of truth shines forth in all the works of the Creator and, in a special way, in man, created in the image and likeness of God. Truth enlightens man’s intelligence and shapes his freedom, leading him to know and love the Lord. Hence the Psalmist prays: ‘Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord’.”

Ken Wilber in his book last year, *Trump and a Post-Truth World*, argues that the loss of truth has become the defining issue of our century because “not a single other issue can be directly and effectively addressed if there is no compass point of

accessible truth to guide action in the first place. In this catastrophic wasteland, the world is now suspended.”

George Orwell, that tremendous seeker after the truth, predicted in one of his famous dystopias an alternative deity whose authority was entirely vested in the ownership of facts – Big Brother had what you might call a secular omniscience. He knew everything about everyone. In one sense he was right about Big Brother in that we have technological entities

anyone growing up in a western society had believed it was necessary to have facts. Without facts, societies could be extremely dark places. Facts were essential to informed debates, to progress, to coherence, to justice.” He says we took it for granted that “facts were reasonably easy to obtain; and that over time we’d developed pretty effective methods of distinguishing truth from falsehood.”

Suddenly, though, it became difficult to agree on truths. This coincided with

“Journalism and faith in the age of alternative facts”

that are able to acquire a seemingly infinite amount of knowledge, of facts and therefore one might say, of truth, about the minutiae of our outward and our inner lives.

A journalist is still, in our postmodern world, a secular version of a seeker after truth. Through the phenomenon of social media, ownership of this thing, the truth, is passing from control of proprietors into myriad of individual hands. And in the modern era, for all our faults, we have unprecedented freedom to publish. There has been such a process of refraction through social media that what we have arrived in is a strange new world of an infinite number of these little brothers, all looking at one another and tipping out their own apparent or alleged truths into the virtual public torrent.

So where does that leave truth? And are we more free as a result, or are we actually imprisoned by new norms imposed by what is said, or ‘liked’, on social media? If it is indeed the case that we are all journalists now – that we are all taking part in it, the telling of truth – the role of messenger has been democratised beyond people’s wildest nightmares or dreams. The people are the media now, or at the very least they are the message. What price the truth of all those testimonies? What price the freedom that the social communications have to publish?

In his new book, *Breaking News*, former *Guardian* editor Alan Rusbridger writes: “Throughout recent centuries

the collapse of the economic model for journalism. In a world of too much news, people just stopped noticing, he writes. At first, people failed to notice. They skipped the story. Then they noticed, and 1984 went briefly to the top of the bestseller list in January last year. Rusbridger calls it “this new world of information chaos”. He sees a bleak possible future. “We are for the first time in modern history facing the prospect of how societies would exist without reliable news, at least as it used to be understood.”

But I am more hopeful. As *Veritatis Splendor* concludes: “At times, in the discussions about new and complex moral problems, it can seem that Christian morality is in itself too demanding, difficult to understand and almost impossible to practise. This is untrue, since Christian morality consists, in the simplicity of the gospel, in following Jesus Christ, in abandoning oneself to him, in letting oneself be transformed by his grace and renewed by his mercy, gifts which come to us in the living communion of his Church... The one who loves Christ keeps his commandments.” That’s a truth to which we can all return. From there we can discern how best to navigate this new world with its new freedoms, and its new fears, from a position of faith that has the power to set us free.

This is an edited version of a lecture for the Sherborne Abbey Insight Programme 2018 and the talk Ruth Gledhill gave at Catalyst Live 2018.

Beth Allison-Glenny

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FREE MARKETS, NEOLIBERALISM & UNFREEDOM

IS THE FREE MARKET SOMETHING CHRISTIANS CAN BUY INTO?

Freedom is a key theme in our current political climate; it is used synonymously with ideas like democracy, and if you spend any time listening to politicians you will quickly come across the term ‘free market economy’. But what is the freedom that our politicians and economists are proposing?

In order to unpack the meaning of freedom embedded in our society, it is worth identifying that there is a tension between individual human rights and collective rights. Our present society favours the individual, so that each person gets the freedom to consume what they want and to earn a wage. In recent decades, our economy has been based around this theory of ‘neoliberalism’, which means there should be the privatisation of state resources and assets. It also argues there should be less state regulation of financial and other institutions. The hope is that this will produce the conditions under which the market can operate most efficiently, which in turn will ultimately enable a better standard of living for everyone. So this philosophy believes there should be some state control, but the state’s role is to protect those individual (private) rights to buy and sell, or as it is also called ‘the free market’.

This contains a sense of moving forward to a utopian future, and the critique of anything that prevents freedom. Initially, this seems to fit

alongside a Christian worldview, seeking the coming of heaven on earth, and in the valuing of each human being as deserving of freedom.

So what makes a market free? Mostly that individuals are free to trade; to consume and own what they want and to earn a wage. The challenge, of course, is that how free you are is dependent upon many other factors. There is a great difference in freedom for the coffee grower who earns £1 a day, the coffee seller who earns £10 per hour, and the coffee drinking corporate lawyer who takes home £1,000 per hour. We know that our geography, education, class, gender and race, amongst other things, affect how much we earn and therefore what and how much we can consume. Those who are economically deprived cannot always access the freedoms offered under this philosophy.

The philosophy of neoliberalism and the free market is culturally located in two important ways: firstly, it has been defined

in contrast to the other philosophies of the 20th century: other states have emphasised the state’s collective rights over individual human rights, or they have restricted trade with outside countries in order to be self-sufficient. Wendy Brown describes freedom in this setting therefore not as an absolute or tangible entity, but a relational and contextual practice that is shaped in opposition to ‘unfreedom’.

Secondly, neoliberalism has developed alongside globalisation and the rise of international corporations. This raises challenges when the free market is ‘exported’ to other countries. Viewing the law as an instrument for enabling private transactions and property ownership is based on a British set of cultural values, which is applied to other states even when they have different historical systems of law. Even though this is often described as being intrinsically connected with democracy, there is a rise in global corporations, financial experts and bureaucrats making policy decisions.

“Christians should be wary of anything that suggests our freedom can be purchasable”

“ Those who are economically deprived cannot always access the freedoms offered under this philosophy ”

People who are not elected and whom it can be difficult to hold accountable.

What we see in neoliberalism is therefore the suggestion that freedom is about what we can purchase. Freedom is the right to have choice in what we want to buy, which when it works well means that people can afford to buy competitively low cost products they need. However, consumerism often encourages us to buy more than we need, which develops a cycle of greed, potential debt and increasingly, the unchecked destruction of our planet. As Protestant Christians we should be wary of anything that suggests our freedom can be purchasable, rather than a gift we can never earn.

Society also tells us that freedom is proportional to our means; the more you have and own, the more freedom you are able to buy. This creates a drastic inequality across our world, which stands out against Christ’s assertions that it is those who are last who are first, the poor who are blessed, and that the kingdom of God is often in the smallest of mustard seeds. God’s economy privileges a different group of people and invites those in the Church to offer a gift economy, sharing with others and generously blessing people in an attitude of trust rather than the expectation of transaction.

We should also be aware of the individualism that supports the philosophy of neoliberalism. Whilst we always want to affirm the flourishing of each human being and our unique response to Christ, as Christians we are always called to live in community. This means we should not act selfishly, but with a view to enabling the other. Christian service also offers a deep paradox: it is in losing our lives that we gain a new one. The discipline of following Christ is ‘perfect freedom’, because it

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£1
per day



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£10
per hour



COFFEE drinking lawyer:
£1,000
per hour



also saves us from ourselves and our own rampant desires.

However, this is not to say that there are not parts of this economy that can be redeemed and transformed. Christians have the free agency in this model to use their investing and purchasing power to work for the good of others, whether it is in the supermarket or the boardroom.

The practice of locally working against ‘unfreedom’ is the call of the Church in each time and place. Brown is correct in her assertion that freedom is relational, but that does not mean it is intangible. For us that is the relationship we have with Christ – something that has been freely given to us, which we could never earn and which saves us from our consumeristic selves.

Canon Rosie Harper

Vicar of Great Missenden and Chaplain to the Bishop of Buckingham. She is a Canon of Christ Church, Oxford, and a member of the General Synod of the Church of England.

INTO YOUR HANDS, O LORD

THE FREEDOM TO DIE

AN ARGUMENT FOR GIVING PEOPLE THE FREEDOM TO CHOOSE THE TIME AND MANNER OF THEIR DEATH AS A REFLECTION OF GOD'S COMPASSION AND LOVE.

Most of the stories told about assisted dying are horror stories. They tell of protracted suffering, of begging to be helped out of misery, of an extreme degree of anguish. A more compassionate law would, it is argued, spare some people the pain and indignity of being compelled to live when they would choose to die.

There is also a way of looking at this from the other end. Since 1940, Switzerland has had legislation allowing someone to choose the time of their death. I am Swiss and much of my family live there. A few years ago I got that phone call that none of us want. Susi told me that her beloved husband Otto had terminal cancer. He had decided not to have treatment, and in fact they had three rather wonderful years travelling and enjoying their family. His health for a long time was much better than it might

have been if he'd opted for chemotherapy. He had been warned however that his last days with his particular type of brain tumor would not be good. He would lose control of his body and might be fitting much of the time. He had open and honest discussions with his wife and his family and told them that he wished to spare them and himself that final agony.

As expected the time came. The fact of his death was not in question, simply the manner. He was bed-ridden by now, and his family gathered round the bedside. They put on beautiful music and opened a bottle of something superb. They expressed all the love and good-byes they wanted to, and he took the pills. Gently he died – like falling asleep they said.

Speaking to Susi at the funeral a few days later she said how profoundly grateful she was that she lived in a country

where Otto was able to choose a dignified death. She felt it was an act of great love towards the family. Her heart was broken. It didn't lessen her grief, but the images that so many people tell me about, those images of pain filled death, were not with her. Her final memories are gentle and loving ones.

None of us have any choice about the fact of our death. Once we fully grasp that, in a strange way it frees us. We don't spend all our energy running away from it: plastic surgery, miracle cures, hair transplants! As if we could be the one who tricks the Grim Reaper.

As the law stands in this country at the moment, we do not have any choice over the manner and time of our death either. In the face of a close relative or your patient begging you to make it all stop you are unable to help. Of course there are drugs, which often but by no means always work, and there are cases where someone is so sedated they are not in effect still alive, but we are still left with the scenario that we have to stand at the end of the bed, knowing that a person wants to die, telling them that the law knows better and they MUST live.

Is that how God wants it to be?



Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Death of the Virgin*, 1564

We spend the whole of our Christian lives experiencing God as loving and compassionate. So often in the gospels Jesus sees a person in need, and before he heals them we are told he has compassion. What makes us imagine that, just when we need his love and compassion the most, God turns into a tyrant who requires of us the most extreme suffering in order to shore up his own sovereignty?

What sort of a God is that?

According to Christian belief, human life is ultimately a gift from God. We can choose to live it according to his guidance, but the life is actually ours and we have moral responsibility for the choices we make.

Freedom is built into our relationship with God. We are not very good at believing that. 'In Christ is perfect freedom' usually carries in parenthesis: 'so long as you work out how to do it God's way... and if not he'll be very cross.' What if freedom actually means what it says on the tin? We are invited shape our lives in collaboration, but not with a mechanistic God – rather one who encourages and allows us to work out our own path. A very grown up theology which looks at

“Jesus sees a person in need, and before he heals them we are told he has compassion”

our responsibility in tandem with divine guidance.

If you can get past a command and control image of God then there is no transgression in finding yourself at a moment when with thankfulness and hopeful expectation you can give your life back to your maker. That is faith not fear.

The truth is that for many Christians their image of God is not at all like that. The response I get most often when I speak is: “I can see what you mean, and it all sounds very compassionate, but it is ultimately only God who can decide that moment of your death.”

This is, alas, a God made in the image of Man. Indeed, it is the ultimate ‘Daddy knows best’ type of God which is the product of a male dominated and

controlling society. It's a sort of God that Church leaders are tempted to imitate, which is why 80 per cent of people in the pews think we need to consider reform of the law about dying, but none of the leaders. It's about control, not compassion.

So let's not blame God. Bad things, cruelty and indifference to suffering do not, cannot come from her. It simply isn't possible that she would stand at your bed and demand further suffering when there is a different, better way.

There is no condemnation in the Bible for someone who is too compassionate. What there is is a simple invitation to love God and to love our neighbour. Allowing someone the freedom to choose the manner and time of their death is exactly that: loving.

Mark Ord

Director for Mission Training and Hospitality at BMS World Mission.

FREE WILL ≠ CHOICE

THE BIOLOGICAL AND
THEOLOGICAL QUESTIONS AROUND
FREE WILL MAKE OUR FREEDOM
TO CHOOSE TO DO GOOD MORE
COMPLICATED THAN WE PRETEND.



Free will has in recent years been complexified. It is, on the face of it, a straightforward notion; if someone – say, God – says, “don’t eat the fruit,” then there is a choice to do the right thing which is accompanied by the binary option to mess things up. It doesn’t take long to realise that our situation is more complex than the presentation allows. We have ample vulgar evidence, in our lives, politics and economics, of a consistent inability to

“Free will gets God off the hook”

choose what is right. From Paul the apostle onwards, there has been a suspicion that we are playing with loaded dice when it comes to free will. And the stakes are high. If we need grace to make the crucial decision, why don’t we all get it? If we don’t all get it in the same way, who is to blame?

A welcome spin-off for much of the Christians tradition has been that the story of free will can be told to clear up where to lay the blame for the state we’re in. Free will gets God off the hook. It is part of a perfect plan, the only way to freedom and to avoid divine determinism and human

“

Free will as more than conscious choice does not rid us of agency

”

automation. That this resource has been invested badly is our fault. The drawback is that we hear of the gift when it has already been broken and, more crucially, it comes at the cost of God's freedom. Having created a 'Hercules at the crossroads' (Karl Barth), God is now stuck on the side-lines while the real actors make a mess and take the blame.

For all this complexity when it comes to lived experience of free will, it has long been part of a compelling image of what it is to be human, that is a rational individual. It's a deduction we make about ourselves (not necessarily from all the evidence) that, despite all the forces that push and pull at us, the will has a property of freedom – freedom to choose what we will be and do. This is obvious to us.

Rabbi Jeffrey Myers, speaking after nine congregants were murdered in his Pittsburgh Synagogue, pointed to the story of Noah and God's depressing observation that the human heart was prone to evil. He then counted that we can also be prone to good, if we decide to take that good path. The solution lies in what we decide to do. Press repeat on centuries of debate about free will and wait for the next shooting.

It is not the theologians or the philosophers that have brought the next layer of complexity to the question of free will. It's the neurologists. And they are questioning what really happens when we make decisions. Benjamin Libet's experimental work in the eighties suggested that the brain was preparing the body for movement before any conscious awareness of a decision to move. A matter of milliseconds, but enough to cast doubt on cherished notions of ourselves as agents of change, who consciously decide and then act. Iain McGilchrist in his wonderful

book, *The Master and His Emissary*, on left and right brain functions, notes: "this is only a problem if one imagines that, for me to decide something, I have to have willed it with the conscious part of my mind. Perhaps my unconscious is every bit as much 'me'. In fact it had better be, because so little of life is conscious at all." This is not to say that that we don't choose to act, that we are not agents. It is to suggest that there are secrets to agency that are submerged in the unconscious. McGilchrist's argument is that we do not only or often sit over the world and sift through evidence, identifying the critical issues before making informed and conscious decisions on how to act and who to be. We are, instead, immersed in the world, not observers but actors, coping, muddling through and making the best. Decision-making looks different when you can't inhabit the view from nowhere. It is a more complex business and, fortunately, our brains come at it with a more complex matrix.

Like Paul, we are surely all depressingly aware that what we think we are choosing regularly sprouts into something quite different. More than that, we have all been baffled, looking back, at what we thought were the options at the time, only to become aware of how our choices have been conditioned by circumstances, compulsions, complexes and other factors we didn't even know were in play. Or is that just me?

The muddle around free will and moral responsibility was played out publicly and distastefully in the process of Brett Kavanaugh confirmation to the Supreme Court of the United States last year. Leaving aside the question of sexual harassment and assault, the judge didn't want to be assessed on certain decisions and actions he'd taken when he was a

young frat-boy, but was keen to be judged, or allowed to judge, supremely, by the best decisions and actions of his past. He had moved on from drunken parties, was now a different person, but felt it was still pertinent that he had worked his "tail off" at Yale, without help or connection.

The whole process was haunted by an uncertainty and obliviousness concerning the role or weight of 'outside' factors on the life and character of Brett Kavanaugh: hormones, friendships, gender, privilege, the circumstances of life.

Iain McGilchrist points out that the unconscious, which he associates with the left hemisphere of the brain, is attentive to the big picture, the embodied nature of being; to metaphors, narratives and to receptivity. Attention to this part of moral agency reminds us that we are not the originators of our lives and choices but are always decisively in receipt of something from elsewhere, from others, from God. We are actors and we are acted upon. The contention that free will is more than conscious choice does not rid us of agency, it tells us that it is more complicated than we think. We do not float above the world making ideal decisions. We are actors, we live from metaphors and stories that have lodged in us; we aim at desires that can rock us and anchor us. We live particularly from the gifts we receive from others.

This cannot easily be made sense of, but freedom, more than the ability to make isolated decisions, may be more to do with the complex, sideways-on capacity to recognise gifts, respond to others and to inhabit a story and live out of it in a way that is coherent. More than anything, there is space here for the hopeful confession that whatever freedom or agency we have does not compromise or shackle God's freedom to be God.

FREEDOM AND MUCH MORE

Some further reading from our contributors, and an opportunity to go deeper into the theme of freedom.



BOOKS

EVANGELICALISM IN MODERN BRITAIN A History from the 1730s to the 1980s

David W. Bebbington

The definitive work. A historical study of evangelical religion in its British cultural setting, focusing on patterns of change affecting all churches and how the movement has been shaped by British culture.

PHOEBE A Story

Paula Gooder

Who was the remarkable woman that the apostle Paul entrusted his letter to the Church in Rome with? Biblical scholar and **Catalyst Live** speaker Paula Gooder tells Phoebe's story, opening up Paul's theology and giving a sense of the pressures that shaped his thinking.

AFTER CHRISTENDOM? How the Church Is to Behave If Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas

Stanley Hauerwas

Catalyst Live contributor Stanley Hauerwas challenges liberal notions of justice and freedom in his 1991 book that we suggest should be read again (along with his other work). Hauerwas captivated us at **Catalyst Live**. To hear his talk, visit www.bmscatalystlive.com

WEB

A TIME TO DIE? Why I believe in the right to choose

Rev Rosie Harper

Personal and professional reasons for assisted dying are tackled by Rev Rosie Harper, the chaplain to the Bishop of Buckingham. Her

article is challenging and presents a different view on a very sensitive topic. Her talk at **Catalyst Live** also made strong arguments. <http://bit.ly/2RS06fD>

HOW TO MAKE FREEDOM OF RELIGION A REALITY

Baroness Elizabeth Berridge

"It is crucial that we try to see the world as others see it," writes Baroness Berridge on her website. In this blog, she argues how statements on freedom of religion need to be turned into a political and policy reality. www.baronessberridge.com/category/blog

MODERN SLAVERY AND THE HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT

What can you do to tackle modern slavery? The Joint Public Issues Team offer effective ways that include prayer and how to exercise your purchasing power. <http://bit.ly/2QzMXnZ>

WHY ARE SO MANY PEOPLE STILL LOSING THEIR LIVES FOR RELIGIOUS BELIEF?

Ruth Gledhill

Revisit the day when churches and cathedrals were turned red to remember those persecuted for their faith. The persecution remains, which is why it's important to consider how it has been confronted in more recent times. <http://bit.ly/2QwqM22>

FILM

THE BATTLE FOR ALGIERS

Gillo Pontecorvo

The classic 1966 film about Algeria's struggle for political freedom and the complex questions such as insurgencies raise is still essential viewing for anyone interested in liberation and its moral compromises.

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