

Hope and Love – Diocesan Synod 14 November

We are delighted that [Krish Kandiah](#) will be opening a conversation about the rise of Christian Nationalism and the challenges that presents for us as a Diocese. As part of that session, we will be engaging with the paper that the Discipleship Team have produced and compiled.

The paper is intended to help church leaders, PCCs, and in turn their congregations to have courageous conversations about the current context of division and hate in which we find ourselves.

Fundamental to our calling as followers of Christ is that we are people of love and hope. This is writ large throughout scripture; from before Lamentations 3¹ to after Romans 15². This inescapable, wonderful truth will be explored from different perspectives throughout the paper.

Here, we offer some of our collective learning through scripture, theology, experience and relationship with others. We have set out to give a brief insight in each of our areas of work, with some questions for further thinking in your context.

For the purposes of our time together at Diocesan Synod, groups in breakout rooms will be given a section of the paper, which we hope will have been read ahead of time, to use the content and questions to reflect on the groups' experience and observations. The facilitator in each group will feed back the efficacy of the content in resourcing good conversations, challenging thinking, and discerning what action they might take to speak hope and love into a climate of hate and fear.

We offer this, not as a definitive 'answer' on *anything*, but as some good questions that we pray will equip church leaders, PCCs, and their congregations to be faithful disciples of Christ, continuing to live lives of abundance and counter cultural acceptance of all, in response to the Creator of the Universe accepting us.

Synod is asked to contribute to group discussions in breakout rooms on sections of the accompanying paper, Hope and Love, with the outcome of helping to develop this resource further.

Hope and love as disciples

Questions for further reflection:

1. When did you last engage with news from a different source, be that print or digital?
2. What opportunities do you have to converse with someone with a different world view to you?
3. When you speak to someone who disagrees with you, how are you hoping they will treat you?
4. What can you learn from that reflection as you consider talking to someone who disagrees with you?

Written by Kate Stacey, Head of Discipleship

Hope and love

St Paul himself commands us not to 'be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds' (Romans 12:2).

1. So how do we do this?
2. How can we open ourselves up to the renewal of our minds?

¹ The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." Lamentations 3:22-24

² May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:23

Written by Joshua Townson, Generous Giving Adviser

Hope and love in social justice

Questions for further reflection:

1. What does this reflection teach us about God's vision of justice, compassion, and love?
2. Jesus repeatedly drew alongside people who were overlooked, excluded, or vulnerable. Whose experiences or perspectives do we find easiest to hear? Whose do we find more difficult, and why?
3. Different groups often understand justice, fairness, or exclusion in different ways. How can Christians listen carefully to these experiences whilst remaining rooted in the example and teaching of Jesus?
4. Marginalised perspectives and experiences are at the heart of the Gospel. Those with exclusionary or hateful views may claim their voices are marginalised and disenfranchised, and therefore where the Gospel lies. As Christians, how might we respond to this claim?

Written by Hannah Ling, Social Justice Adviser

Hope and love in the world

Questions for further reflection:

1. Who do you love?
2. Where do you find hope?
3. What can our place be in bringing love and hope to a struggling world?

Written by Hannah Mann, Environment Programme Manager

Hope and love: a money thing

Questions for further reflection:

1. How does this reflection challenge your own ideas of Christian attitudes to money?
2. Imagine you were talking to Jesus, and he asked you to justify your approach to money.
3. What would your response be and what do you think Jesus would say to that?

Written by Joshua Townson, Generous Giving Adviser

Hope and love in young adults

Questions for further reflection:

1. How do we tell the difference between Christian conviction and fear dressed up as faith?
2. What might resilient faith look like in the everyday lives of young adults?

Written by James Wood, CYPF Enabler

Hope and love in interfaith relations

Questions for further reflection:

1. Do you have neighbours, colleagues or friends of another faith? Have you ever spoken to them about it?

2. Have you ever visited an other's place of worship or listened to someone talking about their non-Christian faith?
3. To what extent have you considered how national or local events have impacted on minority communities?

Written by Jane Clements, co-chair of the Forum for Discussion of Israel Palestine (FoDIP)

Revd Kate Stacey

Head of Discipleship

October 2026

Hope and Love

Theological reflections on our Christian response to increasing tensions in our socio-political landscape

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1 Hope and love as disciples: prologue

This document is to help church leaders and in turn their congregations to have courageous conversations about the current context of division and hate in which we find ourselves.

As our political landscape shifts, both here in the UK and across the world; as polarisation increases, suspicion of the other is encouraged, and ‘post truth’ settles in as the new normal, we, as Christians, need to speak into this with bold kindness. We have a vital, hopeful, love filled message to share in a world that so desperately needs love and hope, those things that will always be stronger than hate and fear.

So often we can feel like Moses, as he responds to God’s call to go and speak truth to power, to fight for freedom for the captives¹. ‘But what will I say? Are you sure you have the right person?!’²

Fundamental to our calling as followers of Christ is that we are people of love and hope. This is writ large throughout scripture; from before Lamentations 3³ to after Romans 15⁴. This inescapable, wonderful truth will be explored from different perspectives throughout this paper.

As disciples of Christ, we are called to care for creation and one another, to live out of God’s abundance, and to accompany others on The Way. We are not called to do this alone but enabled by the Holy Spirit and together as the Church. When we remember this, what feels too hard becomes possible.

As disciples of Christ, we are called to live out our faith in the public sphere, not to keep it as a private matter. ‘Don’t talk about politics, sex or religion’ is nowhere to be found in the Bible!

As disciples of Christ, we are called to embed what we know of God in our minds into each decision we make, the words we speak, the ups and downs of daily life. To move from knowing *about* Jesus, to *knowing* Jesus.

¹ Exodus 3

² KS paraphrase!

³ The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.” Lamentations 3:22-24

⁴ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:23

Here, we offer some of our collective learning through scripture, theology, experience and relationship with others. We have set out to give a brief insight in each of our areas of work, with some questions for further thinking in your context, so that we might be resourced to have good conversations, challenge our own thinking, discern what action we might take to speak love and hope into a climate of hate and fear. We offer this, not as a definitive 'answer' on *anything*, but as some good questions that we pray will equip you to be faithful disciples of Christ, continuing to live lives of abundance and counter cultural acceptance of all, in response to the Creator of the Universe accepting us.

Questions for further reflection:

1. When did you last engage with news from a different source, be that print or digital?
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Written by Kate Stacey, Head of Discipleship

2 Hope and love: introduction

In this, as in every generation, Christians will read the Gospel through the lens of their own cultural context and social worldview. This is only natural, but it does make us vulnerable to unwittingly hearing Jesus' message in a way that reinforces our own cultural biases instead of letting the words of Christ change how we see and relate to the world around us. Such is this tendency that even St Paul himself, right in the very earliest church, commands us not to 'be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds' (Romans 12:2). Allowing the Gospel to affect our relationship with the worlds and cultures we inhabit is a Christian imperative!

So how do we do this? If it's such a natural tendency for humans to look for ways to reinforce our existing thinking rather than letting faith truly challenge our unconscious beliefs about the world, how can we open ourselves up to the renewal of our minds?

For Christians, there are four key ways to do this:

1. Reading Scripture, especially the Gospels.
The more we read the words of our Lord, the more we allow them to saturate our minds and begin to see the world as Jesus does
2. Attending church.
Worshipping together and sharing faith with one-another in a diverse, universal community of Christians is essential to beginning the journey of seeing the world through the eyes of others as we become the one Body of Christ
3. Prayer.
Speaking to God and asking for their help to think as they think and will as they will is so foundational to Christian faith that in the words of the Lord's Prayer, given directly to us by Jesus, we implore God: "your Kingdom come, your will be done"
4. Open, honest debate.
It is easy to forget this last one but how can we ever learn new concepts or discover fresh ways of thinking if we don't allow ourselves to engage with those who don't already think like we do? Debate has always been a part of the church going back to Ss Peter and Paul who debated whether Gentile Christians needed to be circumcised. So long as we remain open to the idea that our preconceived notions might be wrong, and there is always more of God to discover through

continuing revelation, debate allows Christians the opportunity to work together to discern God's will, even when we disagree.

And it is in the spirit of this last point that the current document has been created. It contains short passages on various topics from specialists at the Diocese of Oxford, sharing their personal thoughts on the particular 21st century social and political issues about which they have special knowledge. These passages are not intended to be doctrinal nor definitive statements but the beginnings of an open and honest dialogue where those who disagree are able to see our perspectives and provide their own, reasoned responses.

Our hope is that this can enable a space where those of us who may profoundly disagree are able to debate with each other with the self-awareness that we might be wrong and a willingness to change where our shared discussions discern God's will to be other than our natural cultural preconceptions.

Written by Joshua Townson, Generous Giving Adviser

3 Hope and love in social justice

The Bible and our Christian heritage have love, hope, and justice woven throughout: with the character of God centred on love for humanity, care for our wellbeing, anger at injustice; the prophets calling for justice in every part of life⁵; the life of Jesus embodying God's heart; and the call for us build a fairer world⁶.

The Bible repeatedly emphasises God's heart for the vulnerable, and the expectation that we care for the poor and those in distress⁷, treat strangers and travellers with generous hospitality and kindness ('love the stranger as yourself'⁸), and defend the marginalised and oppressed⁹. The words 'justice' and 'righteousness' appear in the Bible over 1,000 times, with the concept referenced many more times throughout scripture.

And of our Christian heritage, Tommy Sharpe (Better Story) writes how "From Archbishop Desmond Tutu's fight against apartheid, to Martin Luther King's fight for civil rights, to the activism and service of Dorothy Day, to the many Catholic saints who chose lives of poverty to stand alongside the poor, Christians have often found their faith propelling them to the forefront of social justice movements.¹⁰" This is also true in the British slave trade abolition movement which was led by Christians such as William Wilberforce.

Jesus describes his earthly mission in Luke 4:18 as to bring freedom and hope for those experiencing poverty and injustice¹¹. He also talks about having come to earth so that all people may have life in all its fullness¹², not a material wealth, but an abundance that embodies the goodness of God. There is a duty that this 'fullness of life' overflows from us, towards others: we must respond to human need with loving kindness, and we must transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation¹³. We must act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God¹⁴ and

⁵ E.g. Amos 5:24; Isaiah 1:17; Micah 6:8

⁶ E.g. Matthew 6:10; Psalm 82:3; Proverbs 14:31

⁷ James 1:27

⁸ Leviticus 19:33

⁹ Isaiah 1:16-17

¹⁰ [Nicky Gumbel is not woke or a community. The fight for equality is biblical](#), Tommy Sharpe

¹¹ Luke 4:18

¹² John 10:10

¹³ [The Five Marks of Mission](#)

¹⁴ Micah 6:8

should follow the example of the early Christians in Acts 4 to ensure that no person goes without the essentials, such as shelter, food, and community.

The Greek word 'philoxenia' used in the New Testament (e.g. Hebrews 13:2) is often translated as showing 'hospitality' to strangers, but the original word holds a deeper, counter-cultural meaning, directly challenging xenophobia (a fear of strangers), urging Christians to welcome the vulnerable and marginalised and invite them in as one of the family.

There's a call for Christians to share in the suffering of others, standing in solidarity with others experiencing hardship¹⁵. The Old Testament Israelites are directly instructed to remember their own experience of marginalisation and as vulnerably displayed immigrants, alongside the command to extend empathy and solidarity to others¹⁶.

Overarching all we do is the 'greatest commandment', to love our neighbours as we love ourselves¹⁷, or the even more demanding expectation that we seek to love others as Jesus loves us¹⁸. Indeed, the story of the Good Samaritan tells us who our neighbour is, with Jesus challenging us that this is whoever we encounter that needs our help and is inclusive of anyone regardless of race or nationality. The Christian faith asserts the equal dignity and worth of every human being¹⁹.

Within these commands, there's a responsibility to pay special attention to power. Mary's song, the Magnificat²⁰, talks of God scattering the proud, pulling the mighty from their seats, and sending the rich away empty. Comparatively, Mary professes God has raised the humble and meek and given the hungry good things. Selina Stone talks how we should consider who bears the heaviest burden inflicted by the powerful retaining the status quo²¹.

Christianity holds a communal, rather than an individualistic, view on how we approach society and live well together. The Bible holds a radical valuing of diversity, with the church described as 'one body' in Christ, made up of different and interdependent parts, with those often devalued being honoured²². Each individual holds inherent value and dignity (the idea of 'Imago Dei'), having been made by God and in God's image²³ regardless of the race, gender, sexuality, or social status.

The ultimate 'Imago Dei' is seen through God taking on human form in the person of Jesus; the incarnation. Even Jesus, took on humility, set aside reputation and divine privileges (often called 'Kenosis' or 'self-emptying') to walk alongside and identify with humanity²⁴. Jesus' own death is not simply a message of individual forgiveness or atonement of sins, but casts judgement on structural sin and the powers of injustice.

¹⁵ Romans 12:15 – 'Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep'; Galatians 6:2 – 'Bear each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.'

¹⁶ Exodus 23:9

¹⁷ Matthew 22:39

¹⁸ John 13:34-35

¹⁹ All human beings were 'equally... created in the image of God.' – Genesis 1:27; 'Rich and poor have this in common: The Lord is the Maker of them all.' – Proverbs 22:2

²⁰ Luke 1:46-55

²¹ A Heavy Yoke, Selina Stone (SCM, 2025) – see chapter 4.

²² 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

²³ Genesis 1:27

²⁴ Philippians 2:7

Through taking on the pain and humiliation of execution, Jesus stands in compassionate solidarity with victims of injustice and oppression²⁵. Deitrich Bonhoeffer describes this as ‘costly grace’.

Jesus asks us too to take up our cross and follow him – to forfeit earthly gains and power, for the sake of holiness²⁶. As Christians we must therefore consider what embodying ‘costly grace’ looks like²⁷.

Questions for further reflection:

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2. Jesus repeatedly drew alongside people who were overlooked, excluded, or vulnerable. Whose experiences or perspectives do we find easiest to hear? Whose do we find more difficult, and why?
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Written by Hannah Ling, Social Justice Adviser

4 Hope and love in the world

On the day I'm writing this, 24th June 2026, over one thousand schools in the UK will be partially or fully closed in order to safeguard children and young people from dangerous temperatures, which have broken all previous records for June. This is the least extreme our weather will ever be. And it is impacting our children's health, education and safety already. Now. Today.

Our access to nature and wildlife is diminishing, as nature is on the retreat across the UK – a decline of 73% in the last fifty years.²⁸ Our health is at risk as we breathe polluted air in our urban centres; up to 30,000 premature deaths in the UK are linked to air pollution.²⁹ Our access to good, healthy and diverse food is under threat, as farmers the world-over struggle to cope with changing weather patterns; UK food prices are projected to rise by 34% by 2050 as a result of climate impacts.³⁰ Our expectation of water at the turn of the tap becomes uncertain, as water levels struggle under the strain of drier weather.³¹

All of us want a world where those we love are safe. Where we and they can flourish and thrive. Where we can all find a haven for play, respite and connection in lush green spaces, teeming with wildlife. Where we can all breathe clean air, live in fit-for-purpose homes, access good jobs and eat healthy food. This vision has been painted for us before. Except it wasn't a vision, but a taste of God's hopes for humanity in and with his creation. It is there, in the beginning, in the garden of Eden (Gen 2:10-22). A garden that is cared for, where people live among and alongside all God's creatures, where food is forthcoming from the land, and where people have a relationship both with God, and with God's creation. It is a creation of which people are a part, not apart. This was and is God's vision for his world.

²⁵ [Uniform Churches and Diverse Christians](#), Carolyn Whitnall

²⁶ Matthew 16:24-36

²⁷ The Crucifixion, Fleming Rutledge

²⁸ [WWF's Living Planet Report shows 73% decline | WWF](#)

²⁹ [Air pollution | Friends of the Earth](#)

³⁰ [On-the-horizon-climate-induced-inflation-and-the-price-of-food.pdf](#)

³¹ [England faces 5 billion litre public water shortage by 2055 without urgent action - GOV.UK](#)

What is your vision for a better world? What is your neighbour's vision? What do you find you have in common? When we imagine a better world, we might find that we are actually imagining our local community. It can feel hard to 'think big' – whether national or even global. Especially when the challenge of just making it through the day and putting food on the table is about all we can manage.

Thinking 'big' is powerful, but it is in community where we can connect with our world. Where we form relationships with people perhaps very different to ourselves, but whom we live near and among. It is in community where small change can become transformational change. It is community that drives local farmer, Henry Astor, to grow better quality food and to look after the wildlife that he knows local people love. (You can [listen to him talk about it](#) in a conversation with Bishop Mary.) It is community that has spurred the uplift in local Repair Cafes, offering free services to folk with things needing a fix. It is community that is built around allotments, where food is grown, rarely wasted, and most often shared. It is community that has driven a new movement of locally grown energy, to help those struggling to access fair prices for clean energy. And it was in community that the early church began; sharing what they had, gathering together, and serving the people they were amongst.

What do you see in your community? What do you care about most in your community? For in all this, at the very heart, is the transforming power of love. The kind of love Jesus commands of us in the Bible, where we love our neighbour as ourselves. It is this kind of love that invites us to imagine a better community, a better world – and to strive for it. And if we are to love our neighbour, then this world matters – and what is happening to it matters. The loss of nature and green spaces, the danger-to-life heat waves and floods, the school closures, the food shortages... It matters to all, whether we are urban or rural, whether we are young or old, whether we are rich or poor, whether we are right or left or anything in between. This beautiful world that God created, upon which we are intricately dependent upon in so many ways³², is struggling. This struggle is going to hurt those we love, whether now or in the future. So now is the time for transformational love.

And in that love, we find the most incredible hope for this world. Hope in small ways and in extraordinary ways. Hope in the millions growing balcony gardens, wildlife spaces and planting trees for nature. Hope in the phenomenal take-up of low-carbon transport and technology all over the UK and the world, cleaning up communities and reducing energy costs. Hope in the growing trend for second-hand and preloved garments and items, helping low-income families while caring for the earth's finite resources. Love and hope are alive and well, if we look for them. And where we find them, perhaps we might join in...

Questions for further reflection:

1. Who do you love?
2. Where do you find hope?
3. What can our place be in bringing love and hope to a struggling world?

[Beauty for brokenness, based on Psalm 107:1-43, Graham Kendrick](#)

Written by Hannah Mann, Environment Programme Manager

³² Read more about the theme of interconnectedness and interdependence in creation in the new theology paper from the Faith and Order Commission, '[Hope for all Creation](#)'.

5 Hope and love: a money thing

Christianity benefitted greatly from being the dominant religion in Europe for a little over a thousand years, allowing it to spread over the continent and, from there, around the globe. This is a cause for great celebration because the Good News was allowed to reach into the societies we live in and begin to transform them into the now-and-not-yet of the Kingdom of God. The problem, though, with now-and-not-yet is that we still live in the world dominated by the Evil One and as much as believers throughout the centuries have fought to Christianise society, society has fought back to sanitise Christianity. This means that we in 21st century Britain (myself included) have benefitted from a society that has built itself around a comfortable version of Christianity that asks little of its believers other than to (occasionally) show up on a Sunday morning and maybe throw some spare change into the collection plate.

Taking a fresh look at Scripture can be a bit of a shock to the system. The approach to money is not only radical, it's almost the complete opposite to many of the assumptions we make about how we approach the concept of private property. For example, in the Gospels we read that:

- the widow who gave her two mites to the temple 'put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on' (Luke 21:3b-4);
- the workers in the vineyard who only worked one hour were paid the same as those who'd worked all day (Matthew 21:1-16);
- the rich man who ignored Lazarus at his gate was condemned to punishment whilst Lazarus rose to Heaven (Luke 16:19-end);
- we are told that 'it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God' (Matthew 19:24)
- and Jesus himself tells us 'if you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me (Matthew 19:21).

Beyond the Gospels we read that:

- 'No one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common' (Acts 4:32);
- And St James warns us: 'come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you. Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire' (James 5:1-3c).

And even in the history of the Church we can be taken aback by the attitudes we find:

- During an early period of persecution, in 258AD, St Laurence was told by Pope Sixtus to sell all the treasures of the papacy and give the proceeds poor members of the Church. When the Emperor found out about this he 'ordered him to reveal where the treasures were, and the Archdeacon asked for three days in order to collect them. Then Saint Laurence gathered all the poor and the needy, and brought them to the Prefect, saying, "Behold the treasures of the Church." ([Source](#)).
- Later the Archbishop of Constantinople, St John Chrysostom, preached 'that God does not want gold vessels but gold hearts. I am not trying to prevent you from using gorgeous vestments but only asking you also, and first, to give alms. The Lord accepts the ornaments, but he is much more eager for the alms. Only the offerer profits by the adornments; both the giver and the receiver profit by the alms' (Sermon 50 on Matthew).

- And finally, St Thomas Becket famously underwent a conversion experience when made Archbishop of Canterbury and gave away all his wealth to the poor.

Of course, we live in a different context to all of these examples from Scripture and church history nevertheless the church always looks to Scripture and the history of its holy ones (the saints) to guide our interpretation of faith today. 21st century Christians do not stand outside of our tradition but are part of it as we head together towards the eternal life to which we have been called and for which we were made (1 Timothy 6:12).

I'm not suggesting, reader, that you should immediately go and sell all your goods and give them away, not least because I myself have no intention of doing this. And yet, we are set a great example by our Christian ancestors and we must at least allow ourselves to be challenged in our daily lives not to take our assumptions from what society tells us is the right way to handle money but to constantly remind ourselves that as Christians we are called to take our view of the world and how we behave within it from a very different source.

Questions for further reflection:

1. How does this reflection challenge your own ideas of Christian attitudes to money?
2. Imagine you were talking to Jesus, and he asked you to justify your approach to money. What would your response be and what do you think Jesus would say to that?
3. I have heard people say that "Jesus is perfect, we can't be like him" as a way to justify not trying to live up to his example of how to live one's life but my challenge to this, and my question to you is, where in the New Testament can one find the idea that we are not supposed to at least try to be as perfect as our Lord?

Written by Joshua Townson, Generous Giving Adviser

6 Hope and love in young adults

Young adulthood has always been a time of working out who you are, what you believe and where you belong. But today's young adults are doing that in a world of extraordinary uncertainty. They are constantly connected, yet often deeply isolated. They are surrounded by information while finding it increasingly difficult to know what is true, false, real or manipulated. Alongside this, they face economic uncertainty, declining trust in institutions, political division, rapid technological change, AI and the relentless pressure of social media. The digital world offers genuine opportunities for connection, creativity and learning, but it also shapes how young adults understand themselves, other people and the world around them.

[Ofcom's 2025 Online Nation report](#) found that UK adults spend an average of four and a half hours online each day. Among 18–24-year-olds, that rises to more than six hours. Meanwhile, the [John Smith Centre's UK Youth Poll](#) found that young people are far from politically apathetic. They are worried about money, work, housing and the future, while 63% believe democracy in the UK is in trouble. Barna and World Vision's [Open Generation research](#) also presents a wider picture of an emerging generation that cares deeply about injustice and its ability to make a difference. This generation is not empty, uninterested or waiting for the Church to rescue it. Young adults are already asking serious questions about justice, peace, identity, belonging and the kind of world they want to live in.

There is, however, a real danger that this search for belonging and certainty can be exploited. When people feel anxious, isolated or unheard, clear answers and strong identities can be deeply attractive.

Genuine concerns can be redirected into blame. Fear can be weaponised, and complex problems can be reduced to slogans about who belongs, who is responsible and who should be feared. That does not mean every young adult asking questions about nation, culture, migration or identity should be labelled or dismissed. If the Church shuts down those conversations, others will be more than willing to provide the answers. We need spaces where difficult questions can be brought into the open and explored honestly.

But we must also recognise the danger of Christian nationalism. Its danger is not simply that it is political. It is that fear, power and exclusion can be dressed in the language of Christian faith. Scripture can be used selectively to defend suspicion and division rather than calling us towards love of God and neighbour. Young adults may be offered identity, certainty and purpose while being quietly formed away from the grace and truth we see in the person of Jesus. The question is not whether young adults are being formed. They are. The question is who or what is forming them, and what kind of people they are becoming.

Deep discipleship must involve more than giving young adults better information or telling them what to think. It means coming alongside them as they learn to discern truth, recognise manipulation, resist fear and live the Jesus way. It means creating communities where questions are welcomed, disagreement is handled well and people can encounter others whose lives and experiences are different from their own. Dialogue does not mean pretending that every idea is equally true or harmless. It means listening carefully enough to understand what sits beneath someone's anger, fear or certainty, while still being willing to challenge what is false, unjust or dehumanising. It is possible to speak truth without treating people as enemies.

The Church also needs to notice the good already growing among young adults: where faith is deepening, courage is growing, and young adults are praying, questioning, serving and leading. Their longing for justice, peace, authenticity and care for creation can become places of genuine encounter with Christ. When they seek peace, can we help them encounter the Prince of Peace? When they long for justice, can we introduce them to the righteous judge who hears the cry of the oppressed? When they care for creation, can we help them know the Creator? When they search for truth, can they encounter Christ, who says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6)?

The Church must speak a word of love and hope over this generation, rather than adding to the noise of fear. We need to help young adults speak truth against falsehood, confront injustice without losing compassion and resist hatred without becoming hateful themselves. We must be careful that, in opposing fear and division, the Church does not simply become a mirror image of what it opposes. If we answer fear with fear, contempt with contempt or slogans with counter-slogans, we allow the same forces to shape us. Our calling is harder and more hopeful. We are called to name what is false without dehumanising those caught within it, to remain in conversation across real difference, and to tell a better story about identity and belonging rooted in Christ. The aim is not to make young adults think exactly like us. It is to help them become so deeply rooted in Christ that they can discern truth, resist fear, love their neighbour and remain hopeful in a divided world.

Questions for further reflection:

1. How do we tell the difference between Christian conviction and fear dressed up as faith?
2. What might resilient faith look like in the everyday lives of young adults?

Written by James Wood, CYPF Enabler

7 Hope and love in interfaith relations

Interfaith engagement in the Diocese of Oxford is underpinned by the recognition of our common humanity: 'In the image of God he created them...'.³³ Throughout scripture, we find the command to love our neighbour, but we are also asked to love the stranger.³⁴ Our calling to share the Gospel of Christ through our words and lives demands that we know our neighbours, and the strangers within our midst, and are willing to listen to their needs and concerns, to share in something of their own experiences of life.

In the Church of England, we have the unique privilege of spiritual responsibility for all within our parishes, acknowledged through our 'Presence and Engagement' remit, and we can be a voice for other faith communities in the public sphere. In the last Census in 2021, 24 parishes in our Diocese were recorded as having almost 25% of residents as members of other faiths. Over 90 parishes had at least 10% other faiths' membership; the number will almost certainly be higher today. Minority communities face growing pressures, often trying to maintain a 'low profile'. The words and actions of Jesus throughout the gospels command us to reach out and befriend the marginalised and the powerless. Where their presence is apparent, such as through places of worship or religious dress, members of other faiths are often subject to harassment and intimidation, vandalism or worse. The onus is on us, in the privileged position we hold in public life, and through our Christian values, to support and minister to them.

In the Diocese of Oxford, we are blessed with a solid foundation in interfaith engagement. The involvement of senior figures, such as the Diocesan and Area Bishops, together with Imam Monawar Hussain of the Oxford Foundation, has provided a strong model for building relationships. The annual Interfaith Friendship Walk through Oxford is a product of this; the walk is well supported by members of all faith communities and provides a visible example of a healthy community at its best. In addition, the Diocesan Committee for Interfaith Relations organises conference days for clergy and has run a number of very successful 'Eco-Schools' events, focusing on our mutual concerns of caring for our world, with more planned. Relationship building and education are key components in building community cohesion. When tragedy strikes or civil unrest occurs, it sends a powerful message if leaders of churches and other faiths can stand publicly together, especially if one particular community is under attack. The ability to provide a united front depends on good, well-established relationships, in which the Church is best placed to lead.

Questions for further reflection:

1. Do you have neighbours, colleagues or friends of another faith? Have you ever spoken to them about it?
2. Have you ever visited an other's place of worship or listened to someone talking about their non-Christian faith?
3. To what extent have you considered how national or local events have impacted on minority communities?

Written by Jane Clements, co-chair of the Forum for Discussion of Israel Palestine (FoDIP)

³³ Genesis 1:27

³⁴ Deuteronomy 10: 18-19; Exodus 22:21

Conclusion

Our hope in writing this paper remains to open, not close, dialogue. We have each shared our views on our specialist topics in the hope that those who disagree will have something concrete they can respond to. Let us pray that this will be the beginning of a way forward in a highly charged political climate and that the church can remain what it is called to be: a lamp set on a lampstand which shines the light of Christ into the world.

We end with the words of our great teacher St Paul explaining what he means by the transformation and renewal of our minds:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Romans 12:9-end

Further reading:

- [The Bright Side and the Rise of the Far Right](#), by Carolyn Whitnall from the Centre for the Study of Bible and Violence, blog on the William Temple Foundation website.
- [Uniform Churches and Diverse Christians](#), intro by John Heathershaw and main essay by Carolyn Whitnall
- [The Far Right, Christian Unity, and the Need for Better Answers to "Why Jesus?"](#), Carolyn Whitnall, blog on This Estate We're In
- [Justice in the Bible](#), Tim Keller
- Faithful Presence in a Fractured World: A Church Toolkit for Far-Right Resistance, edited by Helen Paynter
- The Church, The Far Right, and The Claim to Christianity, Helen Paynter and Maria Power
- [Kingdom over Nation](#), Churches Together in England
- [England United: Pride not Prejudice](#), British Futures
- [Faith in the Public Square](#), Bishop Martin Snow and Florence Gildea
- [How big is Christian Nationalism in the UK?](#), preliminary research from Theos
- [Beyond "Christian nationalism": Measuring attitudes to Christianity and Britishness today](#), Theos