



Latimer Trust Reading - Summer 2018

This is a longer review of a book read by Martin Davie.

Reimagining reimagined

A review of Justin Welby *Reimagining Britain*

I. Introduction

'The church was absolutely packed. In all the time I'd lived in Oxford, I'd never seen so many people at a church service. There were a thousand at least. People were crammed into pews, and lined up in the wide windowsills all around the sanctuary. Extra chairs were crowded into the back in every available space. The kneeling-benches had been pulled out and placed in the aisle to accommodate the overflow. When that did not suffice, they opened the doors so the people outside could hear.

'What's going on?' I asked, bewildered by the noise and hubbub. 'What's all this?'

'Just church,' Susannah said, puzzled by my question.¹

The words just quoted come from the end of the *Song of Albion* trilogy by the Christian fantasy writer Stephen Lawhead. He imagines a Britain that has been transformed by a feat of heroic self-sacrifice performed in the parallel dimension of Albion. In that transformed Britain, packed out churches are something that are regarded as completely normal, which is why Susannah is puzzled when asked about it.

Lawhead's picture of what a transformed Britain might look like is one way of imagining the future of this country from a Christian perspective. Another, very famous, Christian attempt to imagine what the future of Britain might look like is Archbishop William Temple's book *Christianity and Social Order*,² which was first published in 1942, and which is widely seen as having contributed to the development of the welfare state in the period immediately after the end of World War II.

This year, the present Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, has followed in Temple's footsteps by giving us his own vision for the future of Britain in his new book *Reimagining Britain*.³

In his Introduction Welby notes that 'For almost every nation on earth this is a time of extraordinary challenge amid rapid change.' 'Our technology,' he says, 'is driving us onwards in ways that would have seemed like science fiction within the last generation.' At the same time 'the planet groans under the weight of the peoples and economies that it sustains. Social tensions grow as traditional societies and structures either resist or seek to adapt to change.' 'For most people,' he declares, 'the impact of these changes will be revolutionary – for jobs, development, life expectancy, as well as for the terrible possibilities of war or the wonderful gifts of peace.'⁴

¹ Stephen Lawhead, *The Endless Knot*, Oxford: Lion, 1993, pp.418–419.

² William Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, London: Shephard-Walwyn/SPCK, 1976.

³ Justin Welby, *Reimagining Britain*, London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2018.

⁴ *Ibid*, p.1.

In his view 'we must find fresh strength and passionate commitment to imagine ourselves afresh in the midst of such change.'⁵ His book is his personal contribution to this process of re-imagining what Britain could and should look like in the twenty-first century. This review of his book will summarise his vision for Britain's future, explain what is helpful and unhelpful in his proposal, and finally sketch out an alternative Christian vision for the future of this country.

II. **Archbishop Welby's vision for Britain's future.**

A society that lives in love

At the centre of Welby's vision for the future of Britain is his belief in the significance of the story of Jesus Christ. He holds that:

At the heart of the story of Jesus Christ are restored relationships, first with God, but also with others. They are summed up in the phrase 'God is love.' The writer of that phrase, the Apostle John, does not use the word 'love' to mean romantic affection, but to denote active pursuit of the well-being of others, without seeking return.⁶

According to Welby:

Good societies reflect this love-in-action. Values in a society that begin with moral exhortation or rules are doomed to failure, even to oppression and cruelty. Values spring from practices of love and love reinforces values. That simple approach is at the heart of this book. In essence it argues that a society that lives in love will flourish and develop, and will liberate the vast majority of its members, whether or not they themselves accept the premises of the Christian faith.⁷

Community, courage and stability

When he moves on to set out his understanding of what a society that lives in love will look like he begins by arguing for the importance of three values.

The first value is community, which he understands in terms of five principles derived from Catholic social teaching.

'Community, made up of the universal destination of goods, gratuity, solidarity, the common good and subsidiarity, enables us to stick together.'⁸

- The universal destination of goods means that 'all that exists is given by God for all' (including generations yet to come).⁹
- Gratuity means 'love given freely, an abundance of generosity without hope of return.'¹⁰
- Solidarity involves 'caring for those with whom we have connections,' potentially any other human being regardless of 'nationality, history, gender, race and sexuality.'¹¹

⁵ Ibid, pp.1–2.

⁶ Ibid, p.4.

⁷ Ibid, pp.4–5.

⁸ Ibid, p.54.

⁹ Ibid, p.35.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.37.

¹¹ Ibid, pp.39–41.

- The common good is concerned with what makes for ‘the totality of flourishing in the group.’¹²
- Subsidiarity is the principle that all ‘actions and decisions in any group or organization should be handled by the smallest, lowest, most local or least centralized level that is practical and efficient.’¹³

The second value is courage.

‘Courage, with aspiration, creativity and competition, gives us strength to move forward.’¹⁴

- Aspiration is ‘the desire to make a mark, to change things, to achieve at some level or another.’¹⁵
- Creativity sits alongside aspiration because ‘If I want to add to the world then something new must appear.’¹⁶
- Competition, whether between individuals or organisations ‘recognises, and seeks to dispel, the natural complacency of human beings’ by encouraging them to strive to do better.¹⁷

The third group is stability.

‘Stability, built on reconciliation, resilience and sustainability, enables us to cope with the chances and changes of a rapidly moving world.’¹⁸

- Reconciliation (which is at the core of Christian faith) is ‘the transformation of destructive conflict into creative and dynamic diversity which encourages growth and development.’¹⁹
- Resilience is the capacity ‘to deal with shocks and traumas’ and to maintain values ‘in times of prosperity and flourishing.’²⁰
- Sustainability means the ability of values to be maintained under pressure ‘whether pressure of fear, of exhaustion, or of the natural human desire to protect oneself and those closest around.’²¹

Intermediate institutions

As well as emphasizing the importance of these values, Welby also emphasizes the importance of ‘intermediate institutions,’ by which he means bodies ranging from households, to faith groups, to companies and trades unions which stand between the individual and the state. As he sees it:

Values are developed and refined above all in intermediate institutions, which is where democracy is founded, and our diversity preserved and nurtured for the common good. Intermediate groups are where we build social capital, integrate, learn loyalties, practices and values, learn to disagree well – to build hope and resilience.²²

¹² Ibid, p.38.

¹³ Ibid, p.41.

¹⁴ Ibid, p.54.

¹⁵ Ibid, p.44.

¹⁶ Ibid, p.45.

¹⁷ Ibid. p.46.

¹⁸ Ibid, p.54.

¹⁹ Ibid, p.48.

²⁰ Ibid, p.51.

²¹ Ibid, p.53.

²² Ibid, p.59.

Having set out the values which he thinks need to underpin Britain's future, Welby then goes on to look at what he calls 'the basic building blocks'²³ of British society. There are five of these, family, education, health, housing and economics and finance.

The family

On the family Welby argues that although families can be the location of much harm, nevertheless families are important because:

The good family is the foundational intermediate institution in society, and one to which every human being necessarily belongs in one way or another. It addresses issues of care, isolation and rootlessness. It is a gift of God in any society, bearing burdens, supporting the vulnerable and stabilizing both those who believe themselves to be autonomous and those who feel themselves to be failures.²⁴

Welby argues that we must acknowledge the variety of forms of marriage and family life that exist in contemporary British society and evaluate them in terms of whether they 'emphasize and incite community, courage and stability' and, from a Christian viewpoint whether they reflect the character of God through possessing 'holiness, fidelity, hospitality and love.'²⁵

In policy terms, Welby argues for greater recognition and state support for extended families and for those caring for family members and for the need to avoid both complacency about the reality of abuse within families and overmuch interference in family life by outside agencies. He rejects the proposal to introduce *Sharia* law into the family law of this country on the grounds that there needs to be 'one legal basis of oversight and one philosophical basis of understanding' for families and households and the 'cultural narrative' underpinning *Sharia* law stands outside this.²⁶

Education

On education Welby declares:

'No society or country can flourish without an education system that is world class, and that offers every person who chooses to take it the possibility of living 'life in all its fullness,' a phrase used by Jesus.'²⁷

He sets out five principles for the development of education.

- First, 'all education must be seen as a principal place confidently to develop values that are widely held.'²⁸
- Secondly, Higher and Further education institutions are important as 'intermediate communities which exist to bring fullness of life and are nurseries of community living.'²⁹ As such, they need to develop stories of the common good, generate inspiration and aspiration and enable the creation of resilience and sustainability.³⁰

²³ Ibid, p.61.

²⁴ Ibid, p.65.

²⁵ Ibid, p.69.

²⁶ Ibid, p.82.

²⁷ Ibid, p.85.

²⁸ Ibid, p.101.

²⁹ Ibid, p.101.

³⁰ Ibid. p.101.

- Thirdly, ‘there cannot be Cinderellas’ (i.e. neglected parts of the education system).³¹ In Welby’s view, Further Education, technical education and frequently adult learning fall into this category today.
- Fourthly, there need to be ‘stronger partnerships’ between educational institutions and both potential employers and other ‘cultural, charitable and social institutions.’³²
- Fifthly, ‘there is profound need for training and development to improve, especially in the areas of anthropological and religious literacy, in history and ethics, so that the indispensability of confident values is recognized and the tools for their development are offered.’³³

Health

On health, Welby contends that ‘Caring equally for the health of all, regardless of perceived economic or societal value, is a clear sign of our values’³⁴ and that ‘A reimagination of Britain as a country in which human beings flourish has to put high-quality social care, public and mental health at the heart of its objectives.’³⁵

In terms of policy he argues for free school meals for all children, greater participation in sport, greater funding for art and music therapy, better support for the mental health of those in prison and the development of proper structures of training and pay for those providing social care.

Housing

On housing, Welby argues that the two problems with housing are its high cost due to the way in which houses are used as a form of investment, and the fact that we too often have the building of new houses rather than the creation of new communities.

He suggests that we need to tackle these problems in two ways.

First, we need to reclaim the idea that:

Housing exists as a basis for community and community exists for human flourishing. Building new housing without clear community values and aims will lead to the same problems being created again in the future. Although there will never be such a thing as a perfect community, and human fallibility and sin will always put paid to utopian schemes, there can be communities which provide incentives and means for gathering people together and for the development of hope and expectations of good behaviour.³⁶

Secondly there need to be fiscal measures to address the use of housing purely for investment and steps need to be taken to ensure that housing associations have an obligation ‘to deliver healthy communities’³⁷ and that ‘all permission or encouragements relevant to housing, and to new building, must include a strong element of community-enhancing aspects.’³⁸ New developments should

³¹ Ibid, p.102.

³² Ibid, p.103.

³³ Ibid, p.104.

³⁴ Ibid, p.107.

³⁵ Ibid. P.114.

³⁶ Ibid, p.139.

³⁷ Ibid, p.144.

³⁸ Ibid, p.147.

include community buildings (including places of worship), have a 'significant proportion of genuinely low-cost housing'³⁹ and should be environmentally friendly.

Economics and finance

On economics and finance Welby maintains that the British economy is too heavily dependent on the London based financial sector. As he sees it, we need to:

...move away from the unnatural domination of financial services, corrupting in their cause of inequality, distorting all possibility of a fair and open economy at a national level and depriving the vast majority of the population and of the economically active of real opportunities for community, courage and stability.⁴⁰

As an alternative, he proposes that:

An economy that represents values embedded in our history and culture will be balanced across the nations and regions, and across income groups. It will provide a wide range of opportunities for all levels of business to realize their potential, with firms and businesses that apply for government contracts being required to sponsor students at university and apprentices in highly skilled jobs. It will be supremely flexible, able to adapt rapidly to the fourth industrial revolution of robotics, driverless vehicles, the development of ever more renewable energy, and a thousand other changes that are as yet unforeseeable.⁴¹

He also proposes that the issue of inequality of income should be addressed:

As in a number of prosperous countries today, inequality is accepted within reasonable limits, but it is expected that the vast majority of people will live in ways that demonstrate the common good and mutual care. There will be justification to the intuitive approach to differentials of reward that says that those who care for other people in their jobs should not be paid vastly less than those who seek to trade in finance and commodities without direct participation in the underlying assets. At the same time, the entrepreneurs who create employment, develop new industries and risk all in their creativity will gain a reward for their skills.⁴²

Having looked at these five building blocks of British society, Welby next looks at how Britain should express its values in its relation to the world of which it is a part, considering British foreign policy, immigration and integration and the challenge posed by climate change.

Foreign policy

In relation to foreign policy Welby writes:

The UK cannot solve every, or even any, global problem, but it is both right and in our interests to have a foreign policy that is committed to peace, stability and development – three essential foundations for giving hope to those affected by poverty and war – and thus reducing the pressure to move or the necessity of armed intervention. In so doing we practice our values of the common good, of courage and of resilience over the long term.⁴³

³⁹ Ibid. p.147.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.166.

⁴¹ Ibid, p.167.

⁴² Ibid. pp.169–170.

⁴³ Ibid, pp.189–190.

He goes on to warn that while tackling instability abroad is in Britain's own interests it is also demanding:

Tackling instability abroad is in the interests of the UK because it is protection against uncontrolled movements of people and it potentially opens up foreign markets and cultures to fair and free trade to the benefit of all. Yet the requirement which follows of a proactive foreign policy is immensely demanding of our own courage and resilience. Reconciliation in areas of war is the work of generations not months. It will involve creating stability, occasionally with the use of armed force – so long as it is capable of achieving its ends, has a clear objective, has a pre-determined exit strategy, and above all is proportionate, legally authorized internationally, and part of a long-term plan for peace and reconciliation.⁴⁴

Immigration and integration

In relation to immigration and integration Welby reminds his readers that 'Immigration has always been part of our country's history, and the granting of asylum one of our most valuable contributions to the world.'⁴⁵

He goes on to argue that immigration is 'inescapably linked to integration'⁴⁶ and that the challenges it poses are greater today because of the increased numbers of people moving around the world and the very large differences of culture between immigrants and host communities.

What is needed for successful integration is support for local communities receiving immigrants so that they do not feel overstretched, immigrants becoming fluent in English and learning about British history and culture, and an acceptance by immigrants of 'an established moral framework with which to understand society and to make essential ethical judgements.'⁴⁷

Finally, Welby declares that 'Integration must be a two-way process in which the richness of other cultures and identities is not lost, but reacts with the host culture for the common good.'⁴⁸

Climate change

In relation to climate change Welby accepts the scientific consensus that man-made climate change is a reality and states:

There is good reason to be nervous about the future of the climate and of our planet. Outcomes may not be certain, but if the predicted negative impacts happen, they will be irreversible for many centuries and will pose a life – and prosperity – threatening danger not only to those being born today but also to those yet to be born.⁴⁹

However, drawing on the work of Nicholas Stern,⁵⁰ he goes on to suggest that there is a good way forward in the face of this threat:

Uncertainty, the current value of human future human beings, a religiously based call for stewardship: all these call for costs to be paid today to ensure that the climate is resilient

⁴⁴ Ibid, pp.191–192.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.213.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.213.

⁴⁷ Ibid, pp.210–211.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.213.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.225.

⁵⁰ Nicholas Stern, *Why Are We Waiting? The Logic, Urgency and Promise of Tackling Climate Change*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2015.

and sustainable, so that we see ourselves in solidarity with the as yet unborn, seeking their good in common with ours. Lord Stern sets out an optimistic and aspirational challenge to be at the forefront of the new economies that are required to express solidarity without kicking away the developmental ladder for the billions alive today. If we respond to that challenge with courage, as well as through community and sustainability, we have a chance almost literally to build a different future.⁵¹

In two further chapters Welby looks at the ‘key actors’ in the shaping of British society and the place of the churches and other faith groups within it.

Key actors

In line with what he said in previous chapters about the importance of intermediate institutions and subsidiarity, Welby declares that these institutions are key actors in British society and that in order for Britain to flourish in the future there needs to be a positive relationship between them and a government committed to subsidiarity:

The basic principle is that intermediate institutions, including business, are essential to a society’s capacity to reinvent itself. They require a benevolent ecosystem of regulation and encouragement. They interact with every level of government, which itself, if it is to be virtuous in its values, must be committed to subsidiarity in ways that strengthen the local, enabling accountability, close relationships with the communities they serve and a sense of the local driving its own agenda.⁵²

The churches and other faith groups

According to Welby, an important function of churches and other faith groups in British society is to challenge the prevailing secular liberal world view with their own alternative narratives. As he sees it:

Counter-narratives, and the challenge to a liberal hegemony that is dominated by the rule that there are no absolutes except for the statement that there are no absolutes, are essential components of the future of Britain. The churches especially, as well as other faith communities, are at the centre of retaining a sense of legitimate diversity of view. The resulting conflict and confusion is healthy for all in society, because it tests assumptions and requires relativism to prove itself against the claims of revelation, and against the demands of a vision of life that has a teleology, a clear destination, and which is accountable not only in this world but thereafter.⁵³

Building on the words written by Jeremiah to the Jewish exiles in Babylon recorded in Jeremiah 29:5–7, Welby further argues that:

‘The role of faith communities should be to bless the society in which they live, not to circle the wagons and seek to retain purity through separation. Their vocation includes supporting a good society, and preserving and developing its character on the basis of incarnational activity that is an outworking of the commands and nature of God. Of course, in return they

⁵¹ Ibid, pp.232–233.

⁵² Welby, op.cit, p.251.

⁵³ Ibid, p.262.

should be able to expect to be treated with justice and fairness, the same rights as, in modern understanding of human rights, are expected for every human being.’⁵⁴

In Welby’s view there are good reasons why British society should provide space for religious bodies to bless society in this way. These reasons are not simply pragmatic, but have to do with the values that British society needs to respect.

Given the intellectual and cultural turbulence of the present, it is very good policy to provide space for the expression of such blessing. That means, for example, within the educational system and subject to the National Curriculum, allowing opportunity for schools of a faith confession. They should be places of lively interaction of beliefs, not of forced observance, nor of sectarian habits and cultures that would subvert a hospitable, generous, sustainable, aspirational society.

Making space for an untidy collection of conflicting worldviews is not merely pragmatic, since the internet and social media (among other things) make the imposition of a single view impossible. It is also an expression of values. Such space demands solidarity without central control, and thus respects subsidiarity. It encourages communities as well as individuals to aspire to have an impact on society through the quality and abundance of the blessing they bring. It provides resilience, natural bulwarks against populist extremism and sectional domination⁵⁵

Conclusion

In the final chapter of his book, ‘Conclusion,’ Welby summarises his argument and suggests five things we need to do now.

First, we need ‘to create a sense of reasonable but positive expectation, and to base it on values, not just self-interest.’⁵⁶

Secondly, ‘there needs to be an exercise, which will be highly political and robustly debated, of defining the kind of education, housing and health system we want, in looking at the values underpinning households and families, the economy and finance, the environment, immigration and integration and so on.’⁵⁷

Thirdly, ‘practices must be related to values and virtues.’⁵⁸

Fourthly, ‘there has to be a constant feeding of intermediate bodies of all sorts and shapes and sizes.’⁵⁹

Fifthly, ‘there has to be some kind of narrative of the UK, and of the way in which values are understood, that captures the imagination and anchors what is said in a coherent pattern.’⁶⁰

Welby thinks that this narrative is best produced through action. ‘Giving space and funding for different groups to work, encouraging a UK equivalent of the US Peace Corps for overseas service,

⁵⁴ Ibid, p.267.

⁵⁵ Ibid, pp.268–269.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p.279.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p.279.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.280.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p.280.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p.281.

advocacy of robust debate and critique of even the most widely accepted of ideas, all these build ways in which a national narrative emerges.⁶¹

Finally, in the closing sentence of the chapter and of his argument Welby writes: 'The UK grew from Christian roots: my hope is that in the future it rediscovers the power of the narrative that has shaped it for so long and set its values so deeply.'⁶²

III. What is helpful and unhelpful in the book.

What is helpful

Contrary to what is said in the blurb on the back cover of the book, the Archbishop is not offering 'a radical vision for 21st-century Britain.' If all that he proposes came to pass, British society would not actually change that much. What he is offering is a modest proposal for the development of existing British society and government policy along lines that have also been put forward by a large number of other writers on this topic.

What is helpful about the Archbishop's proposal is that he identifies a number of key issues which anyone concerned with the development of British society needs to bear in mind.

- Practices must reflect values and virtues.
- In order to flourish Britain needs to be a society marked by the practice of love and by the values of community, courage and stability.
- There need to be Intermediate institutions (including households and religious groups) that exist between the individual and the state.
- Families, education, health, housing, and economics and finance are the basic building blocks of British society and problems in these five areas need to be addressed.
- Britain needs to express its values in relation to immigration and integration, foreign policy and climate change.
- It is important that churches and other religious groups should be given the freedom to challenge a liberal hegemony and be encouraged to bless society through their activities.

The specific policy proposals made by the Archbishop, such as giving greater support to those caring for family members, ensuring that those responsible for new housing encourage the development of community life and rebalancing the British economy so that it is less dependent on the financial sector, are also sensible and would have widespread support.

The Archbishop's policy proposals are lacking in detail. For example, he does not say how those caring for family members should be given additional support, what the requirement for a 'significant proportion of genuinely low cost housing' in private housing developments should mean in practice, or how we should ensure that those who care for others are not paid 'vastly less' than those who 'trade in finance and commodities.' However, to be fair to the Archbishop, it is clear that he is seeking to lay down principles for policy rather than to give detailed policy prescriptions and when judged on this basis the lack of detail in his proposals is not a problem.

⁶¹ Ibid, p.282

⁶² Ibid, p.283.

What is unhelpful

Where the book is unhelpful is that there are a number of very important issues that it does not address at all.

For example, while the book addresses the issue of pay differentials it says nothing at all about the fact that there are many people in this country who lack sufficient income to feed themselves and their families. It says nothing about the problem of the chronic shortage of affordable rental accommodation. It says nothing about the growing problems of pornography or modern day slavery. It says nothing about what would constitute a reasonable level of immigration into this country and how we should decide what categories of people should be admitted. It talks about our responsibility for those as yet unborn in the context of climate change and yet is totally silent about abortion.

Most importantly of all from a Christian perspective, the book does not address the problem of the predominantly secular nature of contemporary British society. Contemporary British society is secular in two ways. It is a society which is focussed on this world (Latin *saeculum*) rather than on the world to come and it is a society which for the most part leaves God out of the picture. The Archbishop's book is likewise largely secular. It is exclusively focused on this world and it says nothing about the need for human beings to live in right relationship with God.

In his book Welby draws on the idea of 'deep magic' from the C S Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* as a way of describing 'what makes for virtue, what is good in absolute and permanent terms.'⁶³ What he fails to reflect, however, is the key piece of teaching C S Lewis puts at the end of the last book of the Chronicles of Narnia, *The Last Battle*. In this book Lewis describes how the world in which Narnia exists comes to an end and how the Pevensie children then go on to a new world in which all that was good both in Narnia and in this world have been perfected and preserved for ever. Lewis comments:

And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.⁶⁴

In ending the Chronicles of Narnia in this way Lewis is expressing the teaching of the Bible, and the Christian tradition building on the Bible, that life in this world is only the preparation for a blessed existence in the world to come which those who are rightly related to God shall enjoy forever. As the 17th-century English theologian John Pearson puts it, Christians believe that at the end of time the just will be raised from the dead and:

...shall as the blessed of the Father obtain the inheritance, as the servants of God enter into the master's joy, freed from all possibility of death, sin and sorrow, filled with all conceivable

⁶³ Ibid, p.15.

⁶⁴ C S Lewis, *The Last Battle*, St Helens, London: Collins, 1997, p.172.

and inconceivable fullness of happiness, confirmed in an absolute security of an eternal enjoyment, and so they shall continue with God and with the Lamb for evermore.⁶⁵

In *The Last Battle*, Lewis also describes how not everyone enters into the joy of the world to come. Some look on the face of Aslan (i.e. God) with 'fear and hatred' and they disappear into darkness.⁶⁶ In saying this Lewis is continuing to express the teaching of the Bible and the Christian tradition, which hold that those who chose to reject a relationship with God shall be eternally excluded from the joy of God's kingdom in the world to come. In the words of the contemporary English theologian J I Packer, they will suffer 'the loss, not merely of God, but of all good, and everything that made life seem worth living.' As he goes on to say: 'The unbeliever has preferred to be by himself, without God, defying God, having God against him, and he shall have his preference.'⁶⁷

If this is true, and as an orthodox Christian Welby must believe that it is true, it follows that the one really big issue facing all people in this world, including those living in Britain, is whether or not they will spend eternity with God enjoying the life of his kingdom. Whatever else someone may do in their life, however successful their life may appear to have been, if they miss out on eternal life with God (what the Bible calls losing one's soul) then their life as whole has been a failure. As Jesus asks, 'For what shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?' (Matthew 16:26).

This understanding of human life is not reflected in *Reimagining Britain*, which contains no reference to the idea that there is life beyond our life in this world. It is true that Welby refers to the description of God's judgement in the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25,⁶⁸ but he uses the parable to illustrate our need to act according to our own British values in the matter of healthcare rather than a warning that we have to shape our lives so as to enter into eternal life. In *Reimagining Britain* as whole both the truth that we are facing God's judgement and the truth that we need to so live that we will enter into eternal life are simply ignored.

As we have noted, in his chapter on education Welby quotes the words of Jesus in John 10:10 about 'life in all its fullness.' However, he interprets these words as referring to a flourishing life in this world achievable through a good education rather than what Jesus is actually talking about, which is eternal life, beginning now, lasting for ever in the world to come, and made possible through a right relationship with God.

Just as he is silent about the existence and importance of the life of the world to come, so also he is silent about the need and possibility of a right relationship with God.

Welby mentions sin four times in his book.⁶⁹ However, he nowhere describes sin in biblical terms as something that cuts us off from God in this world and will bar us from entering into God's kingdom in the next. Welby must be aware that the Anglican tradition, like the Christian tradition as a whole, teaches that sin 'deserveth God's wrath and damnation,'⁷⁰ but this is a consequence of sin about which *Reimagining Britain* says nothing.

⁶⁵ John Pearson, *An Exposition of the Creed*, London: George Bell, 1902, p.601. For the biblical basis for Pearson's words see Matthew 25:31–46, 1 Corinthians 15:35–58, 1 John 3:2, Revelation 21–22.

⁶⁶ Lewis, op.cit, p.144.

⁶⁷ J I Packer, *Knowing God*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973, pp.169–170. For the biblical basis for Packer's words see Matthew 25:31–46, 2 Corinthians 5:10, 2 Thessalonians 1:5–10, Revelation 20:11–15.

⁶⁸ Welby, op.cit. pp.112–16.

⁶⁹ Ibid, pp.155, 162, 236, 280.

⁷⁰ *The Thirty Nine Articles*, Article IX.

Imagine someone writing a book about the challenges facing Britain in which the existence of a disease threatening the lives of the whole British population was never mentioned. Such a book would be judged gravely defective. This is the equivalent to what Welby has done. From a Christian perspective sin is a deadly spiritual disease that threatens all those who live in Britain with the loss of eternal life and yet Welby chooses not to even mention this fact.

Imagine further that the author of the book just mentioned knew not only that the disease existed, but also knew what the cure for the disease was and yet said nothing. This again is the equivalent of what Welby has done. He knows the disease, he knows the cure for it, and yet he remains silent.

In chapter 1 of his book Welby talks about the Christian understanding of reconciliation. He declares:

In Christian understanding, the paradigmatic act of reconciliation is found in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, with the empowering sending of the Holy Spirit. The cost is huge: the life of the Son of God. There is no coercion: the party with all the power, the one offering the means of reconciliation – God the Father, through Jesus Christ – is bound by promise to the offer of reconciliation. The ones to whom it is offered (every single one of us) are free to choose whether to pursue its aims. Its outcomes are new relationships with God, with the community of believers, with the world, even with enemies, all of whom are loved with the overflowing love given by the Father through Jesus in the Holy Spirit.⁷¹

All that is said in this quotation is true, but nowhere in *Reimagining Britain* does Welby build on it. He never explains with whom we need to be reconciled, why we need to be reconciled, how the life of the Son of God achieves reconciliation, or how we can receive reconciliation.

What he should have done was to explain that we all need to be reconciled to God, that the reason we need to be reconciled to God is because of sin, that Jesus Christ makes reconciliation possible by overcoming sin through his death and resurrection, and that we receive reconciliation through faith and baptism.⁷² He should then further have explained that those who have a right relationship with God through the Holy Spirit because they have been reconciled in this are way called to turn away from sin and instead practice love for God and their neighbours.⁷³

If he had done this this it would have fleshed out his otherwise cryptic reference to the Christian belief that ‘At the heart of the story of Jesus Christ are restored relationships, first with God, but also with others.’

What would have made *Reimagining Britain* a far stronger book would have been if Welby had made the theme of reconciliation the book’s overarching theme. He could have started by explaining why we need reconciliation, then looked at how God has made reconciliation possible and how the Christian Church has a unique role in society both in enabling people to understand their need of reconciliation and in enabling them to receive it, and finally he could have then explained how those who have been reconciled to God through Christ are called to respond in particular ways to the political and social problems Britain is facing.

A response to this suggestion might be to say that Welby was not trying to write a book about theology, but a book about the future of British society. However, he declares at the start of the book that it is ‘written from a Christian perspective’⁷⁴ and throughout the book he makes reference

⁷¹ Welby, op.cit. p.49.

⁷² See Romans 5:1–6:4.

⁷³ See Galatians 4:4–6, Romans 6:5–14, Galatians 5:13–15.

⁷⁴ Welby, op.cit, p.4.

to Christian theological ideas and to stories from the Bible. The problem is that these Christian elements in the book are additions to an overall narrative which is, as we have noted, basically secular. A truly Christian perspective on contemporary British society would have challenged this secular narrative by explaining why we need to understand our society and the issues it is facing through the lens provided by the biblical account of human existence.

As we have seen, Welby finishes his book by expressing the hope that the UK will rediscover the power of the Christian narrative. What he could and should have done is attempt to contribute to this rediscovery by using his book to explain this narrative and its relevance for Britain's present and future.

For Welby one of the important functions of religious groups is to produce 'counter narratives' to challenge the hegemony exercised by secular liberal thought. In his book he had a golden opportunity to set out such a counter narrative. Tragically, he failed to take it.

IV. Britain reimagined

If we try to imagine what a Britain shaped once again by the Christian narrative would look like, then we can imagine that it would have the following features. It would be:

- A country which accepted the Christian faith as public truth. That is to say, it would be a country in which the government, the education system and the media all worked together with the Church to promote the understanding and acceptance of the Christian message and to encourage people to live out their faith in their individual and communal lives;
- A country in which it would once again be regarded as normal for people to be brought to baptism as infants, to then be instructed in the faith by their parents and by the Church, to commit themselves to a life of Christian discipleship when old enough to do so and to make that discipleship the basis for how they lived their lives;
- A country in which people were aware of the world to come and strove to live their lives in a way that prepared them for life in God's eternal kingdom;
- A country in which those who were honoured and admired would be those whose lives were most marked by love for God and their neighbours and in which caring for children and other family members was valued as much as paid employment outside the home;
- A country which would fully accept people's right to follow a non-Christian religion, or to be non-religious, and to share their convictions with others, but would also encourage and support Christians sharing the gospel with those who did not yet accept the Christian faith;
- A country where, as Lawhead imagines, the churches were packed out week by week and where abundant resources were made available to build new churches and to train and deploy new clergy;
- A country in which in place of the present confusion about sexual morality and family life (something which Welby notes, but declines to challenge) it was accepted that God created

marriage to be a life-long relationship between a man and a woman and that marriage is the only legitimate place for sexual intercourse and the procreation of children. It would also be a country where intentional singleness was highly regarded as a God given vocation and where those who were single were not lonely because they were given love and support by the family of the Church;

- A country in which action was taken to ensure that everyone had enough to live on and in which affordable housing and decent healthcare were available to all;
- A country in which everyone would have the opportunity to serve God and the community by employing their God given skills for the benefit of others and to earn a sufficient income to provide for the needs of themselves and their families;
- A country in which people used the resources of the earth with care, aware of the need to act as good stewards of God's creation and to ensure the well-being of future generations;
- A country that pursued foreign and aid policies designed to uphold justice, to support those in need and to support the Christian Church in spreading the gospel;
- A country which was as generous as possible in welcoming refugees and migrants and which would intentionally seek to ensure that they had the opportunity to hear and accept the Christian message if they were not Christians already.

Such a country would not be perfect. The continuing presence of sin even in the lives of the most dedicated of Christian disciples would mean that it was always a country that failed to live up to the Christian ideal. However it would arguably be a country that came much closer to the Christian ideal than the Britain we live in at present.

Reimagining Britain in this way is important because it gives us something to hope for, to work for and to pray for. We can and should dare to dream that one day, by the grace of God, this is the sort of country Britain might be and then strive to make this dream a reality.

So, Archbishop Welby is right to say that we need to reimagine Britain, but our imagining needs to be more Christian and more radical than the vision he puts forward.

M B Davie 4.4.18