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'The shock of the new':¹ a theological reflection on art, the Incarnation and doctrine within contemporary Higher Education Chaplaincy

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a theological reflection utilizing the Killen and de Beer method, on an 'art installation' at King's College London Chaplaincy in which a jar of Marmite, labelled 'Lord Jesus' was placed in a manger, causing some controversy. Instead of the usual progression in this method, beginning with experience and the feelings it provokes, to lead to an image, I begin with the image itself and explore it as a feeling-producing experience, which leads to a further image, to insight and action. Themes in this exploration include the nature of art in a Christian context (is this art?), and its missional role; the doctrine of the Incarnation, including the extent to which it is/was shocking and how anthropological ideas of sacred and profane can assist us in understanding this; how we present and understand doctrine in Higher Education Chaplaincy and in our postmodern context.

KEYWORDS

Incarnation; art; doctrine;
University Chaplaincy;
Marmite

Introduction

The issue

I encountered a controversial art 'installation' on placement as part of my ordination training at King's College London Chaplaincy in December 2016: a jar of Marmite (a common British foodstuff known as a 'love-it or hate-it' product) was labelled "Lord Jesus" and placed in the centre of a Nativity scene. I will use Killen and de Beer's (2006) method to reflect on the shock this caused, and how it relates to the doctrine of the Incarnation. The Incarnation was a shocking event, yet I will argue that doctrine functions to minimise this shock by producing a unified interpretation, minimising any sense of chaos or disruption, while art, by contrast, is a useful vehicle for foregrounding it. Is "Marmite Lord Jesus" art or gimmick, however? I suggest that it shares some of the qualities of art, and succeeds in reflecting something of the essence of the doctrine, while harmonising with its historical and geographical context. I then reflect on how dynamic we allow our responses to doctrine to be.

Method

Killen and de Beer's method of theological reflection contends that "the events of our lives ... can be parables for us". (2006, x) They model the reflection process on the five

constituent steps of the human drive for meaning: experience, feelings, images, insight and action. (2006, 20) The first step is to narrate our *experience*, (2006, 25) then observe its saturation with *feeling* (this step unites body and mind and is essential to yield “transformative insight”), (2006, 27) then allow this to yield an *image* which goes to the heart of the matter, which, by its journey through the emotions, helps us to transcend the purely rational or rationalised. (2006, 37) This, in dialogue with the Christian heritage, leads to *insight*, an insight which is transformative and thus produces *action*. One can begin from a range of starting points, including the Christian tradition, a religious experience, cultural text, or theme, or, as I have done, a personal experience. Although apparently linear, the stages are more accurately understood as “a circular spiral” (2006, 20) and my presentation incorporates something of this.

I chose this method specifically because it highlighted experience as a source of insight on a par with tradition, and because it validated the feeling element of experience as not just inevitable, but meaningful and transformative. This seemed a perfect match for my experience, which was indeed “saturated with feeling” (2006, 27).

Unusually, the *image* initiated my *experience*, rather than emerging from it, and my *feelings* were integral to both experience and image, so I have a three-fold starting point: experience, image and feelings. The experience cannot be understood without situating it within the broader context of the University setting and of my own personal story, so these are woven into this section. The reflection proceeds with *insight*, a further *image*, and finally *action*, where I will consider the implications for mission of how we understand and present doctrine in Higher Education Chaplaincy.

Experience, image, feelings

Experience context: University Chaplaincy and King's

Legood (1999, 132–134) notes that, since 1985, chaplaincies have been established “in every university, polytechnic and church college in the country”, increasing from eight university chaplains outside Oxbridge in 1952, to over 400 in 1999, matching the post-war expansion in Higher Education.

King's, an Anglican foundation, with Dean and Chaplain, was founded in 1829 for the study of Theology. It saw itself “in direct opposition to ‘the godless institution of Gower Street’”, (Legood 1999, 133 quoting Thompson 1990) that is, University College, London, set up in 1826 to dispense with the need for students or staff to have any religious affiliation. Its original discipline of Theology, Philosophy and Ethics, leading to the title “Associate of King's College” (A.K.C.) remains available to staff and students of all disciplines, and 12,000 students accessed this in 2017.

The College's founding Anglican values remain enshrined in their statutes, with “service to society” accompanying the standard college purposes of “education” and “research”. The Chaplaincy is supported by history, statute, culture and, indeed, at the time of my placement, by a vigorous Dean, who ensured that any creeping secularisms were rebutted, and chaplains retained full access throughout the college. In line with the college's founding ethos, most chaplains are Anglican, but a Roman Catholic and two Muslim chaplains also form part of the staff team.

The central Chaplaincy office is located in the Strand campus, with additional chaplains serving Waterloo, Guy's Hospital, St Thomas' Hospital and Denmark Hill campuses, each of

which I visited. The context of this paper is a visit to the Chaplain at Guy's Hospital, Jim, in December 2016.² Possessing a degree in Fine Art, Jim had been a Community Arts Chaplain and continued to use art in his ministry at King's. It was one of his installations which provides the starting point of this reflection.

Experience: the image, the feelings

In response to an advertising promotion, Jim commissioned a personalized label for a Marmite jar: "Lord Jesus". He placed the jar, thus labelled, in shredded paper, to imitate straw in a manger. In his absence, a tutor at King's visited and found the 'installation' offensive, and a Chaplaincy colleague concurred that it was in bad taste. I looked with interest at the scene. To my surprise, it made me uncomfortable.





Experience: my context, my feelings

I am a Northern Irish woman, resident in England, and at the time, was an ordinand at an Anglican theological college. I have always disliked Marmite, but at the point of writing, have discovered a taste for it, mixed with peanut butter. As an Irish migrant, I have also had something of a 'Marmite'like journey, experiencing considerable antagonism on

first arrival, during the Irish bombings in Britain, and seen this develop into a warm tolerance following peace.

At the time of my placement, I had just had the dismaying discovery, on the last day of term, of an unexpected Doctrine assignment, which revealed that my work of the previous term had been, effectively, on the wrong subject. I responded to this news by falling off my bicycle on the way back to college. Three days later, I began my placement, at King's, wounded and limping, and required to walk a considerable distance between centres, as well as up and down stairs. I was staying with three different friends over the week, necessitating carrying my luggage around London through the rush-hour, and in the course of the week I also had to find the energy for a meeting with the Bishop, who would interview me about my potential curacy, i.e., my church employment after ordination.

Somewhat overwhelmed, I left my suitcase on the train on my way to meet Jim. As a result, I had half an hour, a cup of tea and a chat with Jim, while filling in two online forms and making three fruitless phone calls about my missing luggage, before deciding to return to the station.

While travelling there, I pondered how much I had learned from Jim in our short time together, and considered Marmite Lord Jesus. It came to me, as a kind of revelation, that here was an image that represented a doctrine (the Incarnation), with which I could work. Not only had it been personally stimulating encountering Jim's work, but it would save me from my impossible task. I returned, with suitcase and fresh vigour, plying him with questions about why he had done it and what he was trying to achieve. Firstly, I apologised for having made such a mess of our time together. "We must welcome the chaos" he said. And indeed, it was in the space carved out by the chaos that I had the insight which directed our continuing conversation.

In the ensuing dialogue, we conducted a two-person theological reflection, which I will use as the basis of my reflection here. This takes us into the *insight* component of the Killen and de Beer process, where we analyse the experience, feelings, and the image, within the context of the Christian tradition, here, the doctrine of the Incarnation. I will begin with a brief overview of the doctrine.

Insight: Marmite Lord Jesus and the Doctrine of the Incarnation

Doctrine of the Incarnation

Incarnation comes from the Latin verb *incarnere*, meaning to "change to flesh": (Sigurdson 2016, 5.) The doctrine was established in two key Church Councils, Nicaea in 325 C.E. and Chalcedon in 451 C.E. At Nicaea, it was established that Christ was *homoousios toi patri*, of the same substance of the Father, and at Chalcedon, that he was also *homoousios* with humanity, in other words, fully divine and fully human. (Hick 1993, 44–45) He was thus understood as, "a divine person in whom are perfectly conjoined, without either mixture or separation, a complete divine nature and a complete human nature, so that he is both truly God and truly man". (Macquarrie 1990, 24, 165) The classical doctrine is enshrined in the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed, which form an integral part of Anglican worship today.

Yet, if we look at this doctrine through the lens of my selected methodology, we are enabled to see that the path from fear to clarity was not linear, but made step by step

through a plethora of conflicting views. Bernard Lonergan notes the “multiplicity of symbols, titles and predicates” in the Biblical record, and Macquarrie the “enormous diversity of the testimony given”. (Macquarrie 1990, 142,150) What is revealed is not unity, but variety, and a ‘back story’ in which chaos and shock are very much present, but suppressed.

Thus, Luke presents us with a servant Christ, Matthew, a righteous sufferer, Hebrews, Jesus as high priest and ‘mediator’, Revelation, the lamb or ram who will triumph. Mark exhibits a Spirit Christology, in the sense that the Spirit of God rests on him, and presents Jesus as a kind of divine man and miracle worker. (Den Heyer 1998, 82,88,119,128–9; Macquarrie 1990, 136, 81,78,142) Jesus is also presented in 1 Peter as a shepherd, guardian, bishop, and Hebrews may be rejecting an Angel Christology. (Macquarrie 1990, 136,128) Titles for Jesus include Messiah, Son of Man, Son of God, Christ, *Kyrios* as well as *Logos*.

The debate about Jesus’ exact significance raged among the Church Fathers and Christian apologists in the early centuries of the Church. They turned to the New Testament but also to the Hebrew Scriptures, finding there the notion of pre-existent wisdom (Proverbs 8.22).

Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen and Dionysius of Alexandria (Young and Dunn in Coggins & Houlden 1990, 520–521; 115) favoured the idea of Jesus as *Logos*, present in the fourth gospel. It was this pre-existent *logos*, present at creation with God, who became human,³ then returned to be with God, which became dominant:⁴ “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”. (John 1.14) (Lonergan in Macquarrie 1990, 150)

This led to further disagreement, however. Arius suggested that the *Logos* was the instrument of creation, a kind of demi-God, and not part of the mind of God and this was rejected as the Arian heresy. Apollinaris, in the opposite direction, suggested that Jesus had a divine mind rather than a human soul, and thus only one nature (*monophysitism*) and was likewise rejected, and *adoptionism*, the idea that Jesus became God rather than originating in God, suffered the same fate. (Young 1990, 521) Theories which emphasized Jesus’ divinity or humanity but not both, became characterised as the heresies of *Docetism* and *Ebionism*, respectively. Disagreement was not just between individuals but also between Antioch, Alexandria and Rome. (Sigurdson 2016, 80).

The Creeds were developed in these crucibles of conflict, as an attempt to restore unity. Thus, the 325 Council of Nicaea was summoned by Constantine to end the Arian crisis and consolidate the church, “the spiritual dimension of his empire” through establishing “the widest possible doctrinal unity”. (Sigurdson 2016, 77) Other interpretations became anathematized, declared heresy, and one clear interpretation was established as doctrine, in a move to clear away the chaos of proliferating views on the exact nature of the relationship between Christ’s humanity and divinity.

The desire to remove any degree of shock is also evident. Pelikan (2003, 18–19) spells out how the developing Christian faith has emphasised Jesus’ continuity with Moses, the prophets and the old Covenant, emphasized in Scripture (Luke 16.16; Matt 5.17; Acts 28.23; Romans 9–11), affirmed by the Church Fathers and preserved in the Creeds. The unity has been built on a sense of the new being very much in keeping with the old.

In this process, those who stress “novelty” are deemed heretical. For example, Marcion states “wonder of wonders ... that one cannot compare the gospel with anything else!” and suffers the consequences, in 144, of expulsion from the church, his doctrines anathematized. (Pelikan 2003, 20; Kaiser 2003, 60) Eusebius complains of the agitation in the church caused by “novelty” and Schaff notes “no reproach was greater than the reproach of novelty”. (1890, 356, 88) Those who described the Incarnation as novel, shocking, were, to use Mary Douglas’ terminology (below), cast out of the Sacred and into the Profane.

Yet, this was a case of espoused rather than operant theology. (Cameron et al. 2010, 53) The subsequent five ecumenical councils claim “an unchanged and unchangeable continuity”, yet, Pelikan notes that they “repeatedly manifest ... a remarkable capacity for change”. Thus the second Council of Nicaea in 787 asserted, “we defend free from any innovations ... all the written and unwritten ecclesiastical traditions that have been entrusted to us”, while legitimating sacred images, following the iconoclasm controversy, an entirely new development. The 431 Council of Ephesus declared, “It is not permitted to produce or write or compose any other creed except the one which was defined by the holy fathers who were gathered together in the Holy Spirit at Nicaea,” and to do so would mean “to be anathematized”. (Pelikan 2003, 16–18, 12–13) Yet, this council is best known for a change described by John Henry Newman as “an addition, greater perhaps than any before or since, to the letter of the primitive faith”, namely the identification of the Virgin Mary as Mother of God or *Theotokos*. (Cameron 1974, 319) Change was not absent, but it was unacknowledged because it discredited Christianity, in a culture in which antiquity carried authenticity.

I contend that this is because the function of doctrine is to remove shock, render plausible, persuasive, clear, that which has been implausible and disputed. If we continue to consider shock (an emotional, physiological reaction) as a possible response to chaos (a potentially chronic context of disorder), then the desire to remove chaos and restore control is apparent in the development of this doctrine.

So, doctrine created order out of disorder, by selecting one explanation of the Incarnation as orthodox, reducing chaos, and additionally, focused on continuity rather than novelty, aiming for recognition rather than shock.

Post-Enlightenment, this carefully constructed doctrine came to be vigorously challenged for the first time since the first century (a challenge usually traced to Schleiermacher).⁵ To the moderns, the notion of the divine entering a human body was, indeed, shocking. Yet, once again, we find a move to reduce shock, with the development of a Christology ‘from below’, emphasizing the human Jesus as the starting point.

Marmite Lord Jesus: Jim’s intentions

“What are you hoping to achieve?” I asked Jim. He explained how he wished to stimulate people to think: to differentiate the commercial Jesus and the “real” Jesus, to connect the “idealised, romanticised baby” (as false an image, he suggested, as the Marmite jar) with the suffering and death which came later (thus linking ontology with the salvific function of the death). “Yes, Jesus looks lovely in the manger”, he said, “but after Christmas, what does Jesus mean in a post-Brexit world, and in a world of pain? Christmas offers an idealised picture of childhood, but how does it help us in our actual suffering and real world problems?”

Art and chaos as mission

Jim believed in art's missional value. The arts exist, he suggested, "to call the self into being out of the many mundane duties we find ourselves doing". Artists, he continued, wish to stimulate dialogue, much as Jesus' parables stimulated people to think for themselves, giving a new perspective on the familiar. They,

generate a little pocket of chaos that allow people to be attracted and confused in one moment, an enigmatic environment ... that ... becomes a liminal space ... where God is more likely to ... infiltrate our armoury.

This recalls Killen and de Beer's sense of the events of our lives containing parabolic content. And indeed, I had experienced something of insight in the midst of my own personal chaos that very morning. I had encountered the image within a chaotic moment in my life, but the image itself generated a discomfort, a sense of chaos.

Sacred, profane, shock

I suggest that the image shocked because it created a sense of chaos, by bringing together sacred (Lord Jesus) and profane (Marmite). The anthropologist, Mary Douglas would recognise this discomfort as a sign that a taboo had been broken. Ritual ensures "[h]oliness and impurity are at opposite poles" and utilises pollution ideas and taboo to maintain this separation and render experience manageable (1984, 5, 128, 7). Indeed, the separation of sacred and profane has a long human history.

The shock of the Incarnation

The Incarnation, however, shatters this opposition. We are so habituated to the "normal" scene of a divine baby in a stable, as Jim noted, that it no longer shocks, and yet it is appropriate to be shocked. An image which evokes discomfort supports this end.

Why is shock appropriate? The gods taking human form, while "widespread in the history of religions", (Hebblethwaite in Richardson & Bowden 1983, 89) was unprecedented for the Hebrews. Furthermore, Jesus' humble origins and birth – the illegitimate son of a carpenter, not of the priestly line – disrupted expectations. It enabled a new intimacy with God and a new understanding of God's nature, generated new creeds, a new religion, a new kind of authority and brought a new anthropology – the lowliest humanity was good enough for God to dwell in.

Shock, chaos and salvation

Encountering Marmite Lord Jesus shocked, by juxtaposing sacred and profane. Yet, it also gave me a homoeopathic dose of salvation – its chaos penetrated my chaos, and the result was a creative solution to my moment of need. This strikes me as a microcosm of the salvation that Jesus brought – salvation from all that oppresses and prevents flourishing. The content of this differs in every age, and potentially, as my example shows, from moment to moment.

Rosemary Radcliffe Ruether's suggestion, that salvation was modelled by Jesus, for us to emulate, is helpful here. Thus, "Christ as redemptive person and Word of God, is not to be

encapsulated ‘once-for-all’ in the historical Jesus”. Rather, “[t]he reality of Christ is not completed in the past but continues to be disclosed in the present” and “[t]hose who have been liberated can, in turn, become paradigmatic, liberating persons for others.” (1983, 110–111, 116) Salvation is, thus, for her, a process not an event, continued throughout our lives, and to which we materially contribute.

A further question emerges: do we need saving from the chaos, or is the chaos itself salvific, as Jim hints? Does it generate salvation or is it salvation? Mary Douglas acknowledges that the pollution barrier is a powerful, liminal place and that religion can sacralise the unclean and harness this power. (1984, 159) Angela Tilby suggests that it is “the non-pious” who know “instinctively” that God is to be found “in the collisions, disruptions, calamities and catastrophes of life” (1985, 32).

Killen and de Beer’s method, enabling my own chaos to be meaningful, facilitates the recognition that salvation is always potentially present in the chaos. God created life out of chaos, and God hanging on a cross is the ultimately chaotic image of a world turned upside down. Chaos saves us by overturning the everyday, the controlled, the *banal*. Charles Taylor suggests this is a characteristic of modern time. We have reduced time, he suggests, to a resource we must use efficiently, rendering it incapable of meeting our emotional and spiritual needs. (2007, 59, 719; also South 2016) Overturning this banality creates space for something new to emerge, something creative and transcendent.

In the face of this, I suggest that art facilitates shock more than doctrine. Loverance notes the capacity of religious art to shock, and we can see this in Stanley Spencer’s Cookham Resurrection scene, Salvador Dali’s “Christ of St John of the Cross” and more recently, Andres Serrano’s “Piss Christ” (1987) and the Holy Virgin Mary (Chris Ofili) covered in elephant dung (1996). (2007, 49, 97, 231; Beth Williamson 2004, 112–116) Is Marmite Lord Jesus, however, art, or is it a gimmick?

Marmite Lord Jesus: is it art?

While Marmite is neither beautiful, crafted with exceptional skill, nor unique, I suggest that its use in this case does share three characteristics of art: it is educational, it reflects the social condition of the day, and it is fitting. I shall deal with these in turn.

Art has, historically, been used to educate, helping “illiterate worshippers to visualize the words of the creeds”, for example, the fourteenth century Thessaloniki icon *The Icon of Four Festivals*, which Loverance describes as “the artistic equivalent of the Nicene creed”. (2007, 26, 93) Pope Gregory the Great (590–604) suggested that images function as ‘books of the illiterate’. (Williamson 2004, 66) Art can also refresh, and illustrate existing knowledge, and represent the essence of its subject. (Williamson 2004, 2, 67; Loverance 2007, 240) This is particularly useful in relation to the Incarnation where, Williamson suggests, “[b]linded by years of Christmas card images, it is difficult to see much new meaning in scenes of Jesus’ birth” (Williamson 67, 2).

How does Marmite Lord Jesus educate? I suggest it condenses the essence of the Chacedonian formula of Incarnation – truly human, truly divine – by expressing it, as I have indicated above, as sacred (Lord Jesus) and profane (Marmite). It is the visual juxtaposition of these which shocks in a way that reasonable words do not. Marmite, a common, far from gourmet foodstuff, which satisfies a basic need, also draws attention to how the commoner, Jesus, satisfies our basic needs.

It is also, I suggest, educative by provoking questions rather than providing answers: Why do I find this uncomfortable? Why has he done that? What does it mean? These are, indeed, appropriate questions to pose to the Incarnation itself. Adult education emphasizes the importance of incorporating new learning into the existing experience of the learner, (Rogers & Horrocks [2010, 158]) rendering a question-provoking installation appropriate for a higher education facility.

Secondly, Pattison suggests that art is well placed to convey the social condition of its day. (1998, 57,89) Marmite is a typical British food, symbolising the everyday succinctly. One could speculate further that it represents our current existential condition, where, adapting Taylor, we have emptied our lives of the transcendent, and, discovering we are hungry, find that all we have left to fill our need is material, unimaginative food, recalling his notion of how we have, similarly, flattened time.

Thirdly, Pattison references Wolterstorff on the need for “fittingness”: “The matter of art itself matters.” (1998, 135–6). Thus, the intention of the artist is not sufficient if s/he has failed to get the right fit between the matter and the subject it represents. Is Marmite fitting? All that must be excluded, Pattison continues, is “triviality, cynicism and the ... careless exercise of the creative gift.” (1998, 154) Surely Marmite Lord Jesus is trivial, cynical and careless in the extreme?

Jim’s intentions are far from this, but does the use of Marmite render his intentions absurd? If we recall critical reaction to Serrano and Ofili’s use of urine and dung to represent Christ and the Virgin Mary, we see that on the contrary, common or despised material can be regarded as very effective.

This suggests that Marmite is, indeed fitting. It is an excellent example of “profane”, everyday, human life. In addition, it is suggestive of a number of gospel resonances. Marmite, as I have noted, is a foodstuff, which is spread on toast; Jesus said in the fourth gospel, “I am the bread of life” (John 6.35) and was born in Beth-lehem, the House of Bread (בֵּית לֶחֶם). Yet, it is not a main meal, it is on the fringes, a snack, spread on bread, not bread itself. Further resonances emerge from this: Jesus came to those on the fringes of society, those who had not made it into the main meal of acceptability and he made them his friends, dwelt among them. Marmite is salty, and Jesus said “you are the salt of the earth”, and, “if salt has lost its taste ... It is no longer good for anything” (Matt.5.13, Luke 14.34–35).

Marmite is also known in Britain as a love/hate product, and Jesus, too, prompted extremes of reaction – profound commitment and a wish to kill him. This love/hate response continues today, and may be particularly strongly expressed in a Higher Education setting where received ideas are interrogated and challenged as part of the educative process. Lastly, it is also worth noting (as my fourteen year old son pointed out to me) that it is the same stuff inside, whether one calls it Marmite or Lord Jesus. This might lead us to consider our ‘packaging’ of Jesus and attachment to particular articulations of faith, rejecting others which ‘market’ the same Jesus differently.

Sigurdson suggests doctrine and life are “intimately intertwined in the Christian tradition”. (2016, 4) While it is common to interpret doctrine as made concrete in life, he suggests that life can also be interpreted as though it implies a doctrine. I suggest that Marmite Lord Jesus does just this: it starts with experience (almost everyone in Britain has an opinion of Marmite) and incorporates doctrine. It offers a truth on the human condition, a Christian perspective, redeeming our material lives by making life better, imbuing

it with a spiritual dimension. It reflects the social condition of the day and something of our cultural (material) identity. It campaigns, it calls out to be heard – do not stop at Marmite, take it a step further. All of these are qualities, following Williamson, Loverance and Patti-son, that we can associate with Art.

In conclusion, while Marmite Lord Jesus is opportunistic, passing, does not show great skill in mastery of material or beauty, it does share some of the qualities of modern art. Marmite Lord Jesus is perhaps a ‘fresh expression’ of art, in the sense that Sally Gaze suggests that we plant primroses rather than oaks – something ephemeral, rather than lasting and awesome. (2006, 33) This is appropriate to art in the postmodern setting, where questioning of metanarratives is the new status quo.

Context revisited

Chaplaincies occupy a liminal place between institutions (here, Church and University), which Moody characterises as “wilderness”. (Legood 1999, 17) They are also liminal in the sense of being in the world (which to be effective, chaplaincies must be good at mirroring, Paul Avis suggests [Legood 1999, 12]) and being outside it, between being occupied with the immanent and with the transcendent. They are, Legood suggests, incarnational by their very nature (Legood 1999, 134,136).

How is it appropriate to operate in this liminal space? Christopher Moody suggests, “[f]inding the right rituals for the right occasions in a context that is always changing is part of the sector minister’s art” and requires the ability to “seize the initiative”. (1999, 15–24,17) We could also describe the Chaplain as a local theologian, to use Graham et al.’s concept. (2005, 200–229) The Chaplain’s challenge is thus to find the local, contextual language which can yet encourage deeper reflection. (Moody in Legood 1999, 20)

I suggest Jim has seized the initiative in this context, selecting a medium of communication that will engage his constituency, provoke reflection on its central Doctrine yet sit light to the institutional Church and its dogma.

This raises questions about how we treat Doctrine, however, as something living, or as a beautiful artefact, and it is to this I turn next.

Doctrine revisited: image two

On further reflection, an image came to my mind of Doctrine as *amber*, beautiful, solid, static, made by the solidifying of once dynamic, living tree sap. It is perfectly preserved, but lifeless. This is, indeed, closely connected to Marmite itself, a yeast product whose characteristic flavour obtains from salt, which kills the live yeast.

Jim observed,

I see doctrine as a wide highway ... on the left you might have a hard and fast statement like Jesus was divine and on the hard right you might have but he’s also fully man, fully human and in the middle there’s this broad space where you might explore ... I don’t quite know how Jesus could be fully man and fully divine but I’d like to wrestle with it for the rest of my life.

This recalls Barth’s suggestion that contemplating the Incarnation required walking on “a narrow ridge of rock ... looking from one side to the other”, not standing still or one will fall (Barth 1957, 206–7). Jim was, however, inspired by Simone Weil, and it happened I had

been reading Weil as I travelled to Guy's. Jim described how she favoured remaining between affirmation and rejection of doctrine, both of which gave one the illusion of being in control of the doctrine, and instead, waiting for inspiration, to see "how does it spark with you, sharpen your blade?" Reading Weil, *Letter to a Priest*, on his recommendation, I found:

The dogmas of the faith are not things to be affirmed. They are things to be regarded from a certain distance, with attention, respect and love. This attentive and loving gaze ... causes a source of light to flash in the soul which illuminates all aspects of human life. (2002, 30)

Jim suggested that art was particularly conducive to this kind of waiting appreciation. One could gaze, and wait, and "at some point you will get a revelation."

Many modern theologians endorse the idea of dogma as approximation, journey. "The church never reaches final truth", Macquarrie reminds us; Rahner asserts, dogma is "not the end but the beginning, not the goal but the means"; (Macquarrie 1990, 166) Tillich also warns us of the danger of turning our symbols into idols. (Macquarrie 1990, 166,301,306) Modern theology can be attuned to the value of yeast above Marmite, sap above amber. Yet, in our worship and our Church teaching, we continue to revere the fossilised and dead product.

Action and Conclusion

The image at the heart of this reflection, a jar of Marmite at King's, provoked a degree of shock and chaos in those who observed it, including me. Exploring this with Killen and de Beer's method has enabled me to consider the emotional charge that chaos can contain, and relate this to my own experience as well as to the Church's history. For me, this shock resonated with a moment of chaos in my life when I was trying to juggle many things at once. It also resonated with Jim's artistic appreciation of chaos as productive and creative. Using this method enabled me to value my personal moment of chaos, not as a side-issue to be overcome, but a meaning-producing datum worthy of notice.

The method enabled me to recognize that the early Church also had an experience of chaos in the multiple readings of the Incarnation available and responded, not by valuing them, but by narrowing down into Doctrine, which emphasized continuity and coherence. I suggest that the dynamism and fluidity of multiple interpretations can be imaged as living, travelling sap, held in different parts of a tree – branches, leaves, trunk – and thus appearing differently in each. The Church, choosing one Doctrine, favoured greater solidity and uniformity, more akin to fossilised amber, beautiful, fixed and dead.

I suggest that this Killen and de Beer-inspired reflection also reveals two simple actions we can take (or primroses we can plant): one pastoral, one pedagogical.

Chaos can characterise the life of students, who, as I did, find themselves juggling many new things, in a place which has not yet become home. To claim the liminal and uncertain as salvific, to reclaim the chaos as a place of dark treasure, transforms it from a catastrophe to a resource, and to do it as a two-person reflection returns a sense of power to the student.

There is also a pedagogic component. How can we show doctrine as fluid, lively, life-giving in an institution such as King's? Marmite Lord Jesus is one such way. It is, however, ephemeral, and needs to be followed by other, grasping-of-the-moment,

improvisational initiatives. Despite the shock of its presentation, Marmite Lord Jesus has remained faithful to two-natures orthodoxy. I suggest that we also need to experiment with the content. So, we might produce other 'art', or reflect, as I have, on moments of chaos in our lives, which show us the divine incarnated in the confusing midst of everyday life, which render our stories living parables, or create new metaphors that express what it is about Jesus that is life-giving for us. As Jesus used the leavening activity of yeast as a metaphor for the Kingdom, (Matt. 13.33, Luke 13.21) so, I suggest, may we, allowing new thinking to infuse the old categories. Perhaps it is uncomfortable and controversial, Marmite-ish thinking, that, like Jesus' stories, can point the way to the Kingdom.

Notes

1. This phrase was coined by Ian Dunlop in relation to modern art in 1972 but popularised by art critic Robert Hughes. (Rees 2004, 601-602.)
2. Identified with permission.
3. The Antiochene school's focus. The Alexandrian school favoured "flesh".
4. See also Prov.8.2; Phil.2.6-11; Col.1.15; Heb.1.3f.
5. Space does not permit an investigation of this but see Macquarrie (1990) and McGrath (1996).

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