

In their own words: what are the grand theological challenges of the next 100 years?

Brian Maclaren (writer) *Grappling with Jesus' good news of the kingdom of God, realizing how it differs from the popular Western gospel of "how to go to heaven after you die and be happy and successful until then. Grappling with Jesus' good news of the kingdom of God, realizing how it differs from the popular Western gospel of "how to go to heaven after you die and be happy and successful until then," and working out new understandings and practices of evangelism, discipleship, ministry, and mission in light of this more biblical and dynamic understanding of the gospel.*

Nic Hughes (designer) *One big caveat, I not a theologian, I'm a designer. So here's a wish, not an insight. I wish that someone, some group, something, somewhere would develop a theological project that captured the imagination. All the good ideas are elsewhere. Cross-discipline theological labs please*

Vanessa Elston (teacher) *In very basic terms how do we move from a reformation/protestant/enlightenment emphasis on the salvation of the individual to one of communal participation in salvation/shalom.*

I think it is as much about a theological emphasis (shaped by the times we are in) as an 'improvement'.

What is coming to the foreground in our concerns and thinking? One of the significant ones for me (and western culture) is a shift in emphasis from individual to communal, particularly in relation to our understanding of 'salvation'. "Christ existing as community" (Bonhoeffer) = the ecclesiological challenge of the 21st century. (Linked also to sustainable/environmental challenge)

In very basic terms how do we move from a reformation/protestant/enlightenment emphasis on the salvation of the individual to one of communal participation in salvation/shalom. It is exploring a more 'catholic' understanding and how this emphasis on communal participation might be a development of Catholic theology on the relationship between salvation and the church in the context of an hierarchical establishment?.

God sees me as part of a whole, not as a Western concept of 'an individual' and I am only whole (salved) when a part of this whole. To 'be saved' is to stop seeing myself/ living for myself as 'an individual', to begin to live Christ's life for others.

I have been thinking about the word 'participation' and wonder about the need for a 'theology of participation'. Salvation as participation in Christ. Is this the counter culture reality we are called to live – that we are all invited to participate (regardless of means, status, looks, age, race, education) in Christ? That Christ's death alone equalizes us all, and invites us to participate in the life of God together on a totally new basis. Participation as against our culture's primary discourse of production and consumption and exclusion from both of these processes. Participation as against meritocracy.

Participation as against the individual as a private and disconnected consumer - a disconnection that has penetrated deeply into the way we perceive ourselves and act, one of the root causes of the ecological crisis we are in. Likewise the producer equally struggles to connect, both in copyright, fair trade or artistic/design/ethical integrity terms, with those who might consume the product.

The issue is equally one for church and society.

Participation perhaps does not sound so earth shattering but how do we do it and on what grounds? (and how is it the participation of all – not just those with means – educational and financial?).

The kind of participation I am thinking of - means both to do - play an active role - as well as simply to

be a part of something - as you are part of a family by reason of birth but cannot help but shape that family by being part of it.

What is feasible, practical, manageable in the huge anonymous urban conurbations and global networks in which we live? Where is the familial blueprint of belonging and participation?

How do we participate (in an active and relational sense) in the body of Christ? (touches into issues of leadership/structure/organisation as well as worship/word/sacrament).

How do we do this post denominationally? (which is where many of us feel ourselves to be). What kind of ecclesiology will best support the familial blueprint of belonging to and participation in the body of Christ on earth?

This also touches on issues of authority in a more liquid/open source/emerging church - In what form is the truth/authority of the apostolic tradition legitimated and made accessible to the next generation beyond the understandings of each community (again in a post denominational sense?).

How do we understand that to participate in Christ is to participate in Christ in this world?

Another strand = (Theology) of simplicity – we can't have it all, we have to choose to have less (when we share what we have is more).

Anyway I am sure others have expressed this better in books I have not yet read.

Peter Rollins (writer) *The task of developing concrete faith collectives which are freed from foundationalism and evidentialism - collectives which are founded on something other than shared doctrinal belief.*

Greg Russinger (church leader) *The ongoing challenge of communal theology among cultural difference or indifference.*

Becky Garrison (writer / satirist) *The challenge is finding ways to communicate theological change without becoming yet another crass Christian marketing machine.*

Richard Sudworth (PhD student) *A theology of political engagement that speaks into every area of the public sphere without resorting to domination and privilege.*

Naz Georgis (alt.worship legend) *A theology of synthesis.*

Don Brewin (Anglican Vicar and top dad) *I think the key issue for theology in the next generation is the theology of religion. What is our attitude to people of other faiths? Although European Christians have encountered people of other faiths for centuries, this has historically been THERE rather than HERE - and in the context of British colonialists and missionaries, setting out explicitly to change the place where they go . The relatively new phenomenon is of significant numbers of Moslem & Hindu believers (typically) living amongst us and - understandably - wanting not only to practise their faith, but to promote it (Islam is an evangelising religion).*

Obviously the matter has been raised in prominence because of the radicalisation of Islam, and its consequent politicisation - leading to terrorist attacks by a few, and negative attitudes to other Moslems who reject that violent route.

In traditional Christian theology one key issue is "The Finality of Christ" - is there only one way to salvation? If so, what about sincere believers in other religions who have never had the chance to hear the Christian Gospel? If not, are all "ways to God" of equal validity? Is sincerity the primary virtue, even if most people would regard you as sincerely WRONG?

The whole subject of inter-faith dialogue needs to be thought through here. Paul Tillich set out years ago some preconditions for genuine dialogue, which paraphrased include a personal conviction about your own faith; but at the same time a willingness to listen, with the possibility that you might change your mind!

The British concept of tolerance is relevant here. If we believe in a diversity of cultures in our society, what are the limits? Our history in Britain has been changed by those who have come to live here (bearing in mind that, in contrast to mainland Europe, we have not been invaded for nearly 1000 years!). But to what extent do those who want to join our society have to adapt themselves to the existing mores here?

David Townsend (member of emergent group) *A GayLesbianBiTranssexual theology (as opposed to the polarised entrenchments that exist currently).*

Sue Wallace (Visions, York) *There is a sense in which the biggest theological challenges will always be the ones of cultural communication, and the frustrating thing is that as soon as we have sussed out how to speak one language, the world has moved on, and we have to learn another if we are to engage in serious dialogue, and offer true hope rather than incomprehensible poetry.*

And yet within that there are big issues, divisive issues, and as soon as we patch up one argument, another breaks out. I am both filled with hope and deeply saddened by the state of the Church today. What fills me with hope, is that many have discovered the power of symbol and the senses, whereas in the past these would have seemed like huge issues of division, and yet we cannot seem to hold ourselves together on issues of sexual ethics.

Hazarding a guess at the future, science will pose ever greater dilemmas as we continue to wonder what constitutes the beginning and end of life, as the boundaries are stretched in both directions, and technology invades our bodies in order to save us, and yet when is it simply time to let go?

Luke Bretherton (lecturer) *Same as ever - 'Who is Jesus Christ?' And we have to ask it in relation to various contexts perhaps most importantly, relations with Islam, the environmental crises and the implications of peak oil for social and political life, genetic engineering and lastly the upholding of human flourishing against processes of commodification, instrumentalisation and totalising forms of modern power, whether economic, political, religious or technological.*

Jonny Baker (Grace) *Good idea but I am on a few days off so unlikely to contribute – sorry!*