

BEYOND WORDS: DEVELOPING A FAITH EXPLORATION COURSE TO
ENGAGE PARTICIPANTS WITH A SYMBOL-CENTRED SPIRITUALITY

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A DOCTORAL PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF PITTSBURGH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

2024

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Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.' (Matthew 28:16-20)



Figure 1: Promotional flyer for the adapted Being With faith exploration course.

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PREFACE

The participants I share Crossing Together new worshipping community with and the people of the congregation and parish of Dreghorn and Springside (latterly United Irvine) Church of Scotland have been the inspiration and catalyst for this rich time of faith development, study, and renewal. From the outset of the Doctor of Ministry studies, it has been my aim to explore the fertile ground where the Reformed faith and the contemporary context intersect, and with the spirit of always reforming, the Doctor of Ministry studies have enabled the bringing forth of treasures, old and new. The lecturing staff team gathered by Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and Edinburgh University has been both engaging and relational, enabling me to grow in confidence and skills and to give of my best. The support and guidance given by Reverend Professor Alison Jack, the first Reader of this project, and latterly Dr Steve Aisthorpe, the second Reader, have been invaluable in supporting, challenging, and nurturing me to engage with the material and produce this final piece of research that will give shape to both ministry and life. I am especially thankful for the Church of Scotland's Ascend programme for financially supporting this period of study, enabling time apart from the parish, and for the encouragement given by Ascend staff. I intend now to invest the fruit of this study into further participating with the church locally, at the presbytery level, and nationally, wherever I can best be of service, as we continue through these unprecedented times of challenge and renewal, being much better equipped to do so than I was at the outset of this course three years ago. Finally, a special thank you to my wife, Joanne, and wider family and friends, for whose support I have been consistently grateful.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Does Crossing Together's image-rich and creation-centred development of the Being With faith exploration course enable a deeper engagement by participants with a Symbol-centred approach to spirituality?

I am interested in answering this question because Crossing Together new worshipping community seeks to engage participants in Christian worship and faith exploration based on the individual's dominant spiritual style. Spiritual style is explored in this project through the theology of Joyce E. Bellous and David M. Csinos,¹ who recognise four dominant styles of Word, Emotion, Symbol, and Action. The project develops the Being With faith exploration course,² for the benefit of participants with a Symbol-centred approach to spirituality by adapting the course to include image-rich and creation-centred material and activity, with the hypothesis that this approach will enable deeper engagement with the course for participants with a tendency towards a Symbol-centred spiritual style. It was also speculated that the inclusion of material specifically incorporated for participants with a Symbol-centred spirituality was less likely to enable deeper engagement for participants with other dominant spiritual tendencies. To assess

¹ Joyce E. Bellous and David M. Csinos, "Spiritual styles: creating an environment to nurture spiritual wholeness," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 14:3, (2009) 213-224, DOI:10.1080/13644360903086471.

² Samuel Wells and Sally Hitchener, *Being With Leaders' Guide* (London: Canterbury Press, 2022).

deeper engagement, I have utilised the Oxford English Dictionary definition of the word deeper: “To become more intense or profound; to become greater in measure or degree.”³

In this chapter I will begin to examine the central hypothesis of this project, namely that by adapting the Being With faith exploration course to be image-rich and creation-centred, this will enable a deeper engagement by participants who have a Symbol-centred spirituality. I shall do this by describing the context of Crossing Together, before exploring the foundational theology and ethics that underpin this project, namely the theology and practice of being with, stating why this is important to Crossing Together, and the reasoning behind Crossing Together’s choice of faith exploration around the four spiritual styles of Word, Emotion, Symbol, and Action, briefly exploring the possible overlap between spiritual styles, personality types, and learning styles. Finally, the opening chapter will identify why the Symbol-centred approach to faith exploration was selected and introduce the rationale behind the developments made to the Being With course with a view to enabling a deeper engagement for participants with a Symbol-centred spirituality.

The Context of Crossing Together

Crossing Together is a new worshipping community launched in Bourtreehill, Irvine, in the central belt of the west coast of Scotland in June 2021, intentionally seeking to engage with people, especially those who are Unchurched and Dechurched, through the creation of a habitat “where those unable to thrive in traditional congregations can

³ *Oxford English Dictionary*, “Deepen,” v., accessed March 13, 2024, <https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=deepen>.

flourish.”⁴ Crossing Together formed following a General Assembly of the Church of Scotland decision in May 2019 to “support the formation of 100 new worshipping communities within the Church of Scotland over the next decade.”⁵ In February 2020 the Presbytery of Irvine and Kilmarnock (now a constituent part of the Presbytery of the South West) launched a process leading to the formation of six new pioneer ministries, including Crossing Together.

In June 2023 the Seeds for Growth⁶ presentation to the Presbytery of the South West defined Church of Scotland new worshipping communities as “new forms of church that emerge within contemporary culture and engage primarily with those who don’t go to church,”⁷ continuing to elaborate further that a new worshipping community is intentionally missional, contextually relevant, consistently engages with a core group of participants with the purpose of forming and growing disciples of Jesus Christ, and exists within the polity of the Church of Scotland. Crossing Together seeks to fulfil these criteria, being church in a way that resonates with people outside of the existing church.

Crossing Together formed when two Church of Scotland congregations of Dreghorn and Springside, and Irvine: Mure Relief (now constituent parts of United Irvine

⁴ Steve Aisthorpe, *Rewilding the Church* (Edinburgh: St. Andrews Press, 2020), 131.

⁵ Joint Emerging Church Group, Church of Scotland, Reports, Decisions, Legislation and Minutes, section 22, 1, accessed September 14, 2023, https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/general-assembly/publications#group_one-4.

⁶ Supplementary Report of the Assembly Trustees, Church of Scotland, Reports, Decisions, Legislation and Minutes: The Church of Scotland General Assembly 2022, Seeds for Growth Fund Regulations, Section 23, Appendix 3, 26-27, accessed October 5, 2023, https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/general-assembly/publications#group_one-1.

⁷ Seeds for Growth Presentation to the Church of Scotland Presbytery of the South West, Saturday 10th June 2023.

Church of Scotland), recognised a gap in mission in a local housing area and was supported by Presbytery to plant a new worshipping community there. The identified gap was partly due to the Church of Scotland congregation in the area uniting with another congregation in the town centre and moving there for worship, with the building being maintained for missional purposes. The area experienced further withdrawal of services; with the local library closing, along with Age Concern, the toddlers' group, and most retail units in the shopping precinct being vacant, although there are plans for regeneration.

The most recently reported Scottish census figures from 2011 note that 32.5% of the Bourtreehill population have no academic qualifications, compared to the Scottish national average of 26%, and 12.5% of the Bourtreehill population have a higher education qualification, compared to Scottish national average of 26%. Fifty two percent of the Bourtreehill population own their own home, compared to a national average of 61%, with 38% in social rented property, compared to the national average of 24%. In 2011, 42% of the Bourtreehill population identified as having no religion, with 32% identifying with the Church of Scotland. The number nationally identifying as having no religion at that time was 36%, with the number identifying with the Church of Scotland being 32%.⁸ Recent polls reported by the Scottish Government in 2022 indicate the current number of Scots reporting no religion is 48%, with 20% nationally claiming affiliation to the Church of Scotland.⁹ It is expected that the residents of Bourtreehill will reflect similar changes over this time period in religious faith and denominational affiliation.

⁸ Church of Scotland, Statistics for Mission, Parish: Irvine Relief (no longer published online).

⁹ "Local Government Candidates Survey 2022," The Scottish Government, accessed June 27, 2023, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/local-government-candidates-survey-2022/pages/9/>.

Crossing Together launched during COVID restrictions and members of the Core Team carried out a community audit by engaging local residents through outdoor pop-up days in the shopping precinct, and through discussion with shop keepers, Social Work, Education, Community Link Workers, the local community association, Age Concern, Men's Shed, the local Roman Catholic congregation, and community policing; listening to local stories of hope and concerns from individuals and organisations. From these conversations it was recognised that isolation was the main concern. Local residents voiced a need for new places to gather and form community, and the rising cost of living was also frequently mentioned as a cause of concern.

In preparation for the launch, members of the Crossing Together Core Team participated in the Forge Pioneer Course¹⁰ an element of which included setting goals for our new worshipping community. Crossing Together set the following seven goals,

- Conduct a Mission Audit in the congregations involved in the Crossing Together plant.
- Conduct a Community Audit of the Bourtreehill/Broomlands Area.
- Build relationships with the local people and engage with organisations and businesses.
- Build a Team of Volunteers.
- Support the establishment/re-establishment of Messy Church.
- Enable disciples of Jesus Christ.
- Establish a new Intergenerational Church.

In response to community concerns, Crossing Together launched Tea and Toast (now renamed Monday Hub) on a Monday morning from 9am–11.30am offering an intergenerational space, reaching an average of twenty people per week. With the local Council library closing, Crossing Together offers a library “Click and Collect” service for

¹⁰ “Is God Leading You into Creating New Expressions of Church?” Forge Scotland, accessed September 14, 2023, <https://forgescotland.com/pioneer-course>.

borrowing Council library books. With the cost-of-living crisis and Crossing Together's emphasis on creation-care, the "New 2 Me" clothes bank launched, with several early users of this service becoming participants who now assist in sorting and preparation of clothes.

Why Being With?

Crossing Together is on a trajectory towards reflecting the theology developed by Sam Wells in recognising the importance of "being with" as an alternative to "being for," "working for," or "working with."¹¹ Wells reflects on the incarnation of Jesus¹² focusing on the name prophesied and given to him as Immanuel, meaning "God is with us,"¹³ and highlighting the importance of each of the words of this short phrase. "God" is first, without God there would be no creation, no story, with God there is abundant goodness and grace. This God is present, hence the use of the word "is," not simply a historical was, or a hope filled will be, the resurrection of Jesus assures us of the ongoing presence of God, through all things, including even death. The third word "with" forms the heart of Wells' theology of being with. "With" signifies the relationship of the Trinity, and the extension of this relationship to embrace creation, including humankind. As Wells argues:

God's whole being is shaped to be with. Being with is about presence, about participation, about partnership. It is not about eliding difference, or denying separation, or neglecting otherness. On the contrary it is about being present in such a way as such contrasts and tensions are made visible, recognised, named, and embraced, rather than ignored, suppressed, or exploited.¹⁴

¹¹ Samuel Wells, *A Nazareth Manifesto: Being with God* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 23.

¹² *Ibid.*, 7-9.

¹³ Matthew 1:23 (NRSVA).

¹⁴ Wells, *Nazareth Manifesto*, 8.

And the final word “us” relates to God’s special place for humankind in God’s relationship with creation, a relationship that is not with an individual, or a specific group of people, but inclusive of the whole of humankind.

Wells explores this understanding of “God is with us” in the whole life of Jesus, recognising that the traditional emphasis on Jesus has often focused on the “working for” our salvation that we see in the last week of Jesus’ earthly life in Jerusalem, specifically in his death on the cross and resurrection. The three years of his public ministry in Galilee are understood as “working with,” forming community, teaching, and empowering. And the thirty years of “being with,” are understood as the 90% of Jesus’ life where he was in Nazareth with the ordinary people, sharing everyday life.¹⁵ And while, apart from a few brief snapshots of birth, escape to Egypt, and being lost and found at the Temple, there is little evidence to support what occurred in these thirty years of Jesus’ life, however, the fact that they are is in itself important. They are not years where Jesus is coming to our rescue, nor are they years when Jesus is teaching and performing miracles, they are simply years of abiding with us. This sheer expanse of ordinary time with human community leads Wells to ask the question, “if Jesus was all about working for, how come he spent 90% being with (in Nazareth), 9% working with (in Galilee) – and only 1% working for (in Jerusalem). Are those percentages significant – and do they provide a template for Christian mission?”¹⁶ The Crossing Together Core Team believes they are, and they do,

¹⁵ Samuel Wells, *Incarnational Mission: being with the world* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2018), 13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

recognising the importance of being alongside, interacting, partnering, and enjoying being with one another,¹⁷ where we aim to create an inclusive and supportive community where all are valued by God and one another, responsible to God and one another, and each equally viewed as participants.

It is acknowledged that with this sense of belonging comes the potential for religious socialisation, where participants, through regular participation and closer relationships, develop an affinity for others. Religious socialisation is “an interactive process through which social agents influence individuals’ religious beliefs and understandings.”¹⁸ In the situation of Crossing Together, there is the potential that relationships developed between Alison Muir, the Mission Pioneer and co-lead of the adapted Being With course, me, and other Christians will influence the process where Unchurched and Dechurched participants choose to become Christian or reengage with the Church through Crossing Together because they value and invest in these relationships. The likely impact of religious socialisation will be briefly explored in Chapter 4.

Wells argues, “There is no value in being, unless it is being *with*. There is no value in existence unless it is existence in relationship – with God, one another, and with creation”¹⁹ recognising that humanity struggles most with isolation.²⁰ Simeon Zahl also reaches this conclusion regarding the human predicament, quoting Johnathan Linman,

¹⁷ Ibid., 14, 15.

¹⁸ Darren E Sherkat. “Religious Socialization: Sources of Influence and Influences of Agency,” in *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Michele Dillon, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 151.

¹⁹ Wells, *Nazareth Manifesto*, 44.

²⁰ Ibid., 36-43.

“traditional preoccupation with... the forgiveness of sin no longer speaks with significant intelligibility in our current milieu. The challenge of our age is not individual sin, but isolation, alienation, and broken... community life,”²¹ recognising that communicating the gospel to contemporary society needs to first address isolation as the pressing, central human predicament rather than a generic sense of sinfulness, which is no longer perceived by the general population as damaging.

Wells reflects on the isolation of Jesus on the cross where the crowds are jeering abuse, Jesus is deserted by the male disciples, and separated from his Father in heaven, crying out “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”²² In this instance Jesus is utterly isolated, yet even here he has decided to fulfil scriptural prophesy, and rather than call upon his Father’s assistance²³ he chooses to be with us and die alongside us. At the same time God the Father chooses, by not intervening, to be apart from the Son, enabling the Son to be completely with us, bearing our sin.²⁴ Wells concludes, “the cross is Jesus’ ultimate demonstration of being with us... Jesus experiences the reality of human sin, because sin is fundamentally living without God.”²⁵ In choosing to be with us, Jesus dies with us and overcomes our isolation, opening the way to salvation by removing our

²¹ Jonathan Linman, “Martin Luther: ‘Little Christ’s for the World’: Faith and Sacraments as a Means of Theosis,” in *Partakers of the Divine Nature: the History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, ed. Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008) 197, quoted in Simeon Zahl, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 154.

²² Matthew 27:46.

²³ Matthew 26: 53, 54.

²⁴ Wells, *Nazareth Manifesto*, 82.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

isolation from God.²⁶ This focus on isolation as the central human predicament is a theory of atonement that resonates with Crossing Together's identification of isolation as a significant concern among members of the local community and the lens through which we decided to shape our ministry. It is recognised that there are other theories regarding the way Jesus' death brings God and humanity together; including understanding Jesus' death through the theological lenses of sacrifice,²⁷ as a ransom for sinners,²⁸ as a substitute for humanity,²⁹ and as an expression of the love of God towards humanity,³⁰ of which Wells' theory of atonement is an extension.

An essential element of this ministry is an intentional decision not to consider that the people of Bourtreehill are somehow lacking and Crossing Together is offering the solution, but rather to start from a place of recognising that the community has its own gifts, and that God is, and has been there long before we arrived. Rather, it is the Church who are disconnected, and needing help to overcome our deficit in understanding, living, and sharing the gospel, and we hope to learn from the people of Bourtreehill how we may do this. By taking this approach we seek to uncover and delight in each other's assets and find God doing the new thing in our midst, overcoming isolation, and reconciling us to one another and to God.³¹

²⁶ Ibid., 241.

²⁷ 1 Corinthians 5:7.

²⁸ Mark 10:45.

²⁹ Galatians 1:4.

³⁰ John 15:13.

³¹ Wells, *Nazareth Manifesto*, 29, 30.

Why the Being With Faith Exploration Course?

The Being With faith exploration course recognises that in Jesus, God comes alongside us in our humanity, that God's "grace doesn't eradicate nature, it perfects it,"³² meaning that God has been involved in participants' lives before we became part of Crossing Together, that God has shaped our spiritual styles, and that God will continue to journey with us as we intentionally explore faith through engaging in the course.

In the Spring of 2023 participants at our Tea and Toast group were asked which activities they would appreciate participating in, with the resulting preferences being "art workshops," "forest activities in the park," and "learning more about Jesus." During the summer and early autumn of 2023 Crossing Together addressed the first two expressions of interest through hosting a series of family activity days in the surrounding local parkland, encouraging participants to enjoy being outdoors, recognise and explore God's handiwork in creation, and our shared responsibility for creation-care, and a series of six art and craft sessions entitled, "Art for the Soul" with themes including light, nature, and anxiety and liberation. The uptake and engagement with both these was positive and provided the encouragement to continue with the provision of the third preference, "Learning more about Jesus."

Having substantially realised the first five stated goals, Crossing Together is seeking to achieve goals six and seven:

- Enable disciples of Jesus Christ.
- Establish a new Intergenerational Church.

³² Wells and Hitchener, *Leaders' Guide*, 5.

with the faith exploration course being an important element of this larger process. A section of the text supporting Crossing Together’s goal number seven states, “In the longer term we seek to enable new Christians to take up positions of responsibility and leadership and in time, take on the future direction and mission of the church, so that it becomes truly incarnational.”³³ This goal reflects our commitment to shared participation, being with, and the delight and glory that we foresee when participants recognise themselves within the gospel story and connected in Christ.³⁴

Crossing Together finds our underpinning in the theology of being with, and the Being With course produced by St. Martin-in-the-Fields Church, in Trafalgar Square, London, attempts to enable participants to explore the Christian faith through the lens of this theology. The Being With course is designed to reach people on the edge of the Church, working on the understanding that God is already present in their lives, aiming to enable participants to recognise this, and then exploring the experience through group discussion and teaching sessions. The course’s aim is to encourage participants to recognise “God’s greatest desire is to be with us in Jesus... and to live abundantly with God, with one another and with creation.”³⁵ While Crossing Together wholeheartedly supports this aim, I found that the course in its current format would benefit from adaptation to fit the local context. An example of this is that the producers recommend the Being With talks are delivered “verbatim;”³⁶ however, I consider that the material has been

³³ Crossing Together Core Team, *Crossing Together: Action Plan*, (2021), 4.

³⁴ Philippians 2:1.

³⁵ Wells and Hitchener, *Leaders’ Guide*, rear cover.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

produced for people with a higher education, and as this did not reflect the circumstances of many of our potential participants, the course was not designed to be delivered verbatim. A reviewer of the Being With course comments, “churches thinking of using it will need to consider carefully how well it will travel from Trafalgar Square.”³⁷ With the self-description on the St. Martin-in-the-Fields website as a “unique institution in which cultural, charitable and commercial initiatives are rooted in the life of a vibrant congregation.”³⁸ I understand this to mean that the context and socio-economic profile of those engaging in the course with the distinctive St. Martin-in-the-Fields Church, Trafalgar Square are not necessarily representative of the context and socio-economic profile of those engaging in Bourtreehill. While the Word-centred approach to faith exploration appears to resonate with participants in Trafalgar Square, London, experience with Crossing Together, suggests this approach would be much less effective in Bourtreehill, Irvine. Participants at Crossing Together consistently avoided taking part in Word-centred activities, preferring to focus on activities that involve art, and are creation-centred. This predominant participants’ focus on Symbol-centred activities encouraged me to adapt the Being With faith exploration course to be image-rich and creation-centred with a view to enabling participants experience a deeper engagement with the course than I expected they would have from the published course.

³⁷ Philip Welsh, “Being With Course Participants’ Companion by Samuel Wells and Sally Hitchiner,” *Church Times*, last modified January 20, 2023, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2023/20-january/books-arts/book-reviews/being-with-course-participants-companion-by-samuel-wells-and-sally-hitchiner>.

³⁸ “Congregational Life,” St. Martin-in-the-Fields, accessed October 6, 2023, <https://www.stmartin-in-the-fields.org/life-st-martins/>.

Spirituality

A significant reason for Crossing Together's embrace of worship according to spiritual style is to encourage participants' connection with God in a way that resonates with their spiritual tendencies. In the Doctor of Ministry class, "Reformed Spirituality" we explored the spirituality of John Calvin who understood humankind to be blessed by God with a common grace, and while this differs from the special grace which is given for salvation, common grace is given for all, and evident in the lives of those who do not yet know God through Jesus Christ, writing, "To charge the intellect with perpetual blindness so as to leave it no intelligence of any description whatever, is repugnant not only to the word of God, but to common experience."³⁹ Importantly then, Calvin recognises that even the most uneducated person is still able to draw upon their senses and perceive God through the sciences and creation.⁴⁰

The Reformers shunned the title spirituality with its traditional emphasis on mysticism, paranormal experiences, and elitism, preferring to root expressions of faith in Scripture and the practice of everyday life and using words such as holiness, devotion, or piety in its place.⁴¹ Calvin understood piety as a union with God through Jesus Christ, and with one another by being in Christ together, and the inverse of this a lack of piety, or

³⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 2, trans. Henry Beveridge (London: James Clarke & Co. 1949), Chapter II, 12, 235.

⁴⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book 1, Chapter V, 1, 51.

⁴¹ Sandra M. Schneiders, "The Study of Christian Spirituality," in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*, ed. Arthur Holder, (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 22.

spirituality in contemporary terms, is being isolated from God (as known through Jesus Christ), and one another.⁴²

Contemporary approaches to spirituality have tended to distance themselves from Calvin's Christological framing, adopting a more anthropological approach, where spirituality is recognised as an "anthropological constant, a constitutive dimension"⁴³ of what it is to be human where humanity is "characterised by a capacity for self-transcendence towards ultimate value, whether or not they nurture this capacity or do so in religious or non-religious ways."⁴⁴ In anthropological terms, Christian spirituality is considered a subset of human spirituality.

Bellous affirms Calvin's theology of common grace whereby humanity attains some knowledge of God through the senses. She recognises this common grace as a human spirituality, and that common grace spirituality is a "universal human reality,"⁴⁵ going on to define spirituality as, "*a sense of felt connection* that arises multidimensionally from birth... under favourable conditions human spirituality expresses itself relationally and conversationally"⁴⁶ (italics original), and the inverse of this, that spiritual poverty is an "*inadequate sense of felt connection*"⁴⁷ (italics original). The understanding that spirituality

⁴² Calvin, *Institutes*, Book 3, Chapter I, 1, 463.

⁴³ Schneiders, "The Study of Christian Spirituality," 22.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁵ Joyce E. Bellous, *Educating Faith, An Approach to Christian Formation*, 2nd ed. (Edmonton: Tall Pine Press, 2012), 2.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

is universal to humanity finds support in cross-cultural research recognising spirituality exists in people who are both religious and non-religious.⁴⁸ This understanding of spirituality as a sense of connectedness finds further support in research defining spirituality as “one’s striving for and experience of connection with oneself, connectedness with others and nature and connectedness with the transcendent”⁴⁹ with a meta-analysis of research recognising connectedness as an essential component of human spirituality.⁵⁰

David Hay, in a challenge to what he identifies as the toxic effect of the western notion of individualism writes, “Every entity is only to be understood in terms of the way in which it is interwoven with the rest of the universe. In the accounts of spiritual experience that I have investigated there seems to be a direct, almost perceptual, recognition of that fact.”⁵¹ Rebecca Nye conducted research into spirituality among British school children, identifying spirituality as an inherent human biological shared experience; that there really is “something there”⁵² and describing this as a “relational consciousness” connecting us with self, others, creation, and God.⁵³

⁴⁸ Hamid Sharif-Nia, Erika Sivarajan Froelicher, Sima Hejazi, Mozghan Moshtagh, Amir Hossein Goudarzian, Faezeh Ebrahimi, “Cross-Cultural Evaluation of the Psychometric Properties of the Spiritual Well-Being Scale: A Systematic Review,” *Journal of Religion and Health*, 62, (2023). 2227, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/10.1007/s10943-023-01778-8>.

⁴⁹ Jager Meezenbroek, Eltica de, Bert Garssen, Machteld van den Berg, Dirk van Dierendonck, Adriaan Visser, and Wilmar B. Schaufeli, “Measuring Spirituality as a Universal Human Experience: A Review of Spirituality Questionnaires,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 51, no. 2 (2012): 338, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41653773>.

⁵⁰ Meezenbroek, Garssen, van den Berg, van Dierendonck, Visser, and Schaufeli, “Measuring Spirituality” 338.

⁵¹ David Hay and Rebecca Nye, *The Spirit of the Child*, Rev. ed. (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006), 30, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ed/detail.action?docID=290888>.

⁵² Hay and Nye, *The Spirit of the Child*, 163.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 114.

Bellous, in research also among young people found “Children whose spiritual style differs from the dominant ethos may be marginalised, ignored and seen as difficult or uninteresting.”⁵⁴ The inverse of this, “the opportunity to enjoy a spiritually rich setting, in which children and youth feel included, provides the young with resources to individuate themselves and also to become effective members of healthy communities.”⁵⁵ Therefore, by aiding participants to explore being with God and others within a spiritual style that resonates with them, Crossing Together is seeking to enable participants to engage deeply with God and reduce undesirable experiences of social isolation expressed during the community audit; creating a welcoming, nurturing environment where participants find opportunities for connection within themselves, in community, and with God; and explore their spirituality through the lens of the Christian faith.

Why Spiritual Styles?

The four spiritual styles of Word, Emotion, Symbol, and Action used in the adapted Being With faith exploration course are based on research conducted by Urban T. Holmes

⁵⁴ Joyce E. Bellous, “An inclusive spiritual education,” *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 24:4, (2019) 394, DOI: 10.1080/1364436X.2019.1675603.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*,” 390.

III,⁵⁶ Corinne Ware,⁵⁷ and Joyce E. Bellous with David M. Csinos.⁵⁸ Both Ware⁵⁹ and Bellous, along with Csinos⁶⁰ cite Holmes as the original source from which they have overlaid and developed their respective models of spirituality.

The focus on Word, Emotion, Symbol, and Action spiritual styles is recommended in the book *Being an Intergenerational Church*⁶¹ by Suzi Farrant, Young People and Young Adults Development Worker with Church of Scotland, and the Darren Philip, National Stewardship Consultant with the Church of Scotland, who state,

Spiritual styles can be a useful tool in developing intergenerational worship. Rather than thinking certain practices connect with certain ages (e.g. crafts and games with children, sermons with adults) this model reveals that practices connected with any age according to their spiritual styles.⁶²

These four spiritual styles are also promoted through the all-age lectionary-based worship materials produced by Roots.⁶³ There are other interpretations on spirituality, such as Gary Thomas' *Sacred Pathways*⁶⁴ which offers nine alternative spiritual temperaments.

⁵⁶ Urban T. Holmes III, *A History of Christian Spirituality, An Analytical Introduction* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2002), Kindle edition.

⁵⁷ Corinne Ware, *Discover Your Spiritual Style, A Guide to Individual and Congregational Growth* (1985; repr., Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014).

⁵⁸ Bellous and Csinos "Spiritual styles," 213-224.

⁵⁹ Ware, *Discover Your Spiritual Style*, 7.

⁶⁰ Bellous and Csinos "Spiritual styles," 216, 217, 223.

⁶¹ Farrant and Philip, *Being An Intergenerational Church*.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 138, 139.

⁶³ "Spiritual styles," Roots Resources, accessed August 7, 2023, <https://www.rootsontheweb.com/discover-roots/spiritual-styles>.

⁶⁴ Gary Thomas, *Sacred Pathways, Nine Ways to Connect with God*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020).

However, having been aware of this alternative approach to spiritual styles, I chose not to follow these Sacred Pathways for the pragmatic reason that nine routes would have been more complicated to offer and convey in one intergenerational worship service than four.

The concept of four spiritual styles was developed by Urban T. Holmes III, who considers spirituality to be a universal human trait with each person “capable of possessing the presence of the living God.”⁶⁵

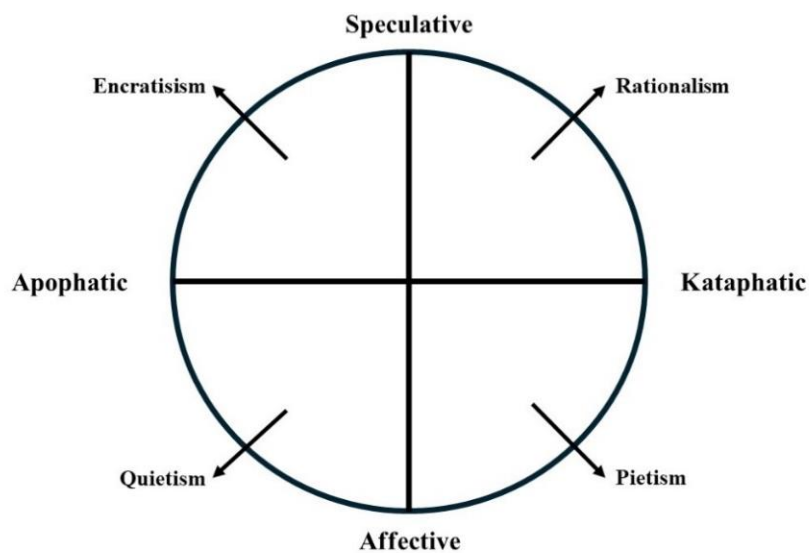


Figure 2. Urban T. Holmes III, Circle of Sensibility⁶⁶

However, being able to receive is only the beginning, with the goal being to know God through a relationship that is made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit,⁶⁷ and that “we are ‘unfinished’ humans until we consent to that power of the Spirit and are drawn

⁶⁵ Holmes, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, 18.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

into a wholeness of being.”⁶⁸ Holmes surveyed the history of the Church exploring the spiritually of individuals and movements within Christianity in a bid to answer the question, “How has Christian humanity throughout its history understood what it is to seek God and to know him?”⁶⁹ Holmes did not value one form or aspect of spiritual practice over another, rather he recognised during investigations that “in all methods the ultimate goal is union with God.”⁷⁰ Having conducted his investigations he developed a Circle of Sensibility,” reaching the conclusion that spiritual practice can be plotted against two axes that dissect one another in the centre forming right angles and four quadrants. (Figure 2.)

At the top of the vertical axis is “Speculative,” which broadly relates to the mind and having a head knowledge of God, which is cerebral and intellectually driven, practised through reason, reading, listening to sermons, and study. At the base of this axis is “Affective,” which relates to having a heart sensitivity, an emotional relationship and knowledge of God based on feelings and sensation. On the horizontal axis, on the left is “Apophatic,” from the Greek word for negation and relates to a spirituality that is drawn towards symbol and quiet, involving a more contemplative and meditative spirituality expressed through the emptying of yourself and resting in the mystery of God who cannot be fathomed. On the right is “Katapathic,” from the Greek word for affirmation which relates to a spirituality dependent on revealed words and ideas of God that are perceptible and reveal what can be known and understood about God.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ibid., 18.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 20.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 21.

⁷¹ Ibid., 20, 21.

Around the two axes Holmes places a circle⁷² recognising the majority of the spiritualities explored in his historical analysis can be plotted within the quadrants of the circle boundary, with individuals and movements tending to one, over the other, rather than extremes of each style,⁷³ and recognising that an individual will maintain a healthy tension that exists predominantly within one quadrant but also find expression in various alternative forms of spirituality.

Ware develops Holmes' model by defining the quadrants in a bid to assist individuals identify, and congregations minister to people with, differing spiritual styles. Reading the four quadrants from top right in a clockwise direction; Ware identifies the quadrant between Speculative and Katapathic as having a Head Spirituality, relating to those who prefer to engage with spirituality through critical engagement with their intellect, with an emphasis on what can be seen, touched, and vividly imagined.⁷⁴ A spirituality in this quadrant will value well-constructed sermons and Bible studies, with a view to using this information to lead a more fruitful Christian life.⁷⁵ A prayer for an

⁷² Ibid., 22.

⁷³ Holmes noted that there are individuals and movements that exhibit extremes of practice, he labels these Rationalism, Pietism, Quietism, and Encratism, placing these outside the circle of what he defines as a healthy spirituality. With rationalism he recognises the excesses of an avoidance of passion, the seeking of perfection, and a removal of the self from the world in a bid to hear the pure word of God. The excess of pietism includes confusing subjective internal feelings with theology, an excess of sentimentality, and anti-intellectualism. The excess of quietism includes possessing an entirely inactive spirituality which turns a blind eye to reality and exhibits indifference at the centre of the Christian life. And the excess of Encratism involves an extreme of self-denial through the wilful practice of extreme poverty, excessive zeal for purity, and an unhealthy eagerness for martyrdom.

⁷⁴ Ware, *Discover Your Spiritual Style*, 37.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 37.

individual with a tendency towards this quadrant would most likely be written, carefully crafted, and spoken aloud.

The quadrant that sits between Affective and Kataphatic moves from the head to the heart but retains the emphasis on the revealed knowledge of God; God can still be known, but in this quadrant, it is not through the intellect, but through the heart. Ware identifies people with this inclination as having a Heart Spirituality, placing an emphasis on personal holiness, and having a more energetic, charismatic spirituality with an emphasis on freedom of expression and appreciation of worship music. The focus of people whose spirituality is predominantly in this quadrant is having a personal experience of the God who is present.⁷⁶ A prayer for an individual with a tendency towards quadrant would most likely be spoken, but less formal and more likely extemporaneous.

Moving to the lower left quadrant, sitting between Affective and Apophatic, Ware identifies people here having a Mystic Spirituality where the tendency is to listen to God, rather than to speak to God. This is a place for searching for the God who dwells in mystery, and experienced through simplicity, an inner journey of intuition, contemplation, introspection, and meditation, with the “inner world as real to them as the exterior one.”⁷⁷ Ware identifies people in this quadrant are more prone to recognise God as a “Creative Force and may be attracted to a creation-type theology.”⁷⁸ Prayer for a person with a

⁷⁶ Ibid., 39, 40.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 41.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 39.

spiritual tendency in this quadrant will be more likely not be expressed in words, but in silence and inner contemplation.

Finally in the upper right quadrant, sitting between the Speculative and the Apophatic, Ware identifies a Kingdom Spirituality; she recognised this as the most difficult quadrant to describe as least people fit within this spirituality. Those who do exhibit this spirituality are recognised as courageously focused, single minded, action orientated, and driven to bring about transformation in society.⁷⁹ Prayer for a person with a spiritual tendency in this quadrant will most likely be enacted. Ware recounts statements made by people with this spiritual tendency as, “My work and my prayer are one,” or “I pray with my hands and my feet.”⁸⁰

Ware understands that people and congregations exhibit a variety of spiritual styles in differing degrees, writing, “Count yourself fortunate if you show some balance among quadrants. This provides a healthy tension that will enrich your connection with God and your appreciation of others.”⁸¹ The composition of an individual’s spiritual style provides an indication of ways of experiencing God and worship that occur most naturally to the individual, while highlighting other potential areas of spiritual development that offer the possibility of enlarging that individual’s experience of God and opportunities for worship.⁸² In this sense an individual’s spiritual style is like their personality type, as

⁷⁹ Ibid., 43, 44.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 43.

⁸¹ Ibid., 92.

⁸² Ibid., 92, 93.

personality type is a natural predisposition that does not change but behavioural change is possible,⁸³ so too with spiritual style. While an individual will have a natural inclination towards a Word, Emotion, Symbol, or Action spiritual style, they may operate outside of this dominant style and develop a more holistic spirituality as a consequence.

Bellous, Csinos, and Denise Peltomaki employed the spirituality models of Holmes and Ware as they conducted research into the spiritual styles of children,⁸⁴ and adults,⁸⁵ identifying spiritualities as (moving from top vertical axis of Holmes' model in a clockwise direction and dividing the model into four quadrants) Word, Emotion, Symbol, and Action, corresponding to Ware's, Head, Heart, Mystic, and Kingdom spiritualities.

Focusing on the Symbol-centred spiritual style, Bellous and Csinos consider that “From religious perspectives, the term apophatic is applied in this style to imply negation or conceiving of God in non-concretised ways as mystery... Mystery is elusive – more sensed than spoken. It is above being captured by words and is existentially unavailable for complete revelation.”⁸⁶ For people with a Symbol-centred spirituality, God is more readily engaged in times of solitude, transcendence, and contemplation and is experienced and knowable in movements and yearnings of the heart more than concepts formed and wrestled with in the mind.

⁸³ Sherrie Haynie, “Are personalities permanent? Can your personality type change?” The Myers-Briggs Company, last modified November 23, 2022, <https://www.themyersbriggs.com/en-US/Connect-With-Us/Blog/2022/November/Can-personality-type-change>.

⁸⁴ Bellous, and Csinos, “Spiritual styles,” 216, 217.

⁸⁵ Joyce E. Bellous, David M Csinos, and Denise A. Peltomaki, *Spiritual Styles: Assessing what really matters*, V.3.0, (www.tallpines.ca, 2009).

⁸⁶ Bellous and Csinos “Spiritual styles,” 217. Apophatic theology is considered further in Chapter 3.

With the emphasis on contemplation found in descriptions of people with a dominant spirituality within this quadrant it is curious that Ware, Bellous, and Csinos have adopted Mystic and Symbol-centred to define the quadrant. As a consequence of conducting this research, my understanding is that the Symbol (whether that be the image, symbolic act, or creation) functions as the vehicle for people with a dominant Symbol-centred spirituality and, as such, is essential for the spiritual journey. However, it is the resultant contemplation that this vehicle enables that defines this spiritual type from the others. The Symbol functions as a bridge, enabling the Symbol-centred person to move from the Symbol towards a deeper revelation of God. While the Symbol is essential in creating the bridge, it tends to focus the enquirer of spiritual styles on the Symbol itself and not the essential contemplative process that follows. Thus, my own research suggests that the term Contemplative or Contemplation-centred spirituality would be a more fitting description. This revision is highlighted in Chapter 4.

The Church of Scotland website Worship Resource section includes a description of worship that engages participants with a dominant Symbol-centred spiritual style, who have a preference to

know God through mystery, symbols and images. They sense God through beauty, awe and wonder, and in the natural world so God can be felt in the mountains or in a stained glass window. For them meditation and chants can be really worthwhile activities and they value times for silent reflection as they like being alone to wonder about God.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ “Spiritual styles,” The Church of Scotland, accessed December 10, 2023, <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/resources/children-and-youth/church/worship/spiritual-styles>.

The webpage also features two hyperlinks; one leads to the All-Age Worship resource Roots, and the other to a video of David M. Csinos speaking at a children's ministry conference. The Roots worship material identifies that a child with a Symbol-centred spirituality will appreciate "Being alone to wonder about God. Going outside to find God in nature. Making or drawing things connected with his faith, and, looking at pictures and objects which represent something about God."⁸⁸ And in the video, Csinos emphasises that people with a Symbol-centred spirituality find God "more sensed than spoken" with a spirituality that engages readily with "symbol, metaphor, and images" through "meditation on icons, or walking along a peaceful river" and valuing "silence and solitude."⁸⁹ He also states that should it not be possible to take children to nature, then "you can get children to bring elements of nature that they see at home to church and share them. If you can't go outside with the kids then help children bring nature inside."⁹⁰ He also reports that children with a tendency towards a Symbol-centred spirituality do not readily engage with images of nature projected onto a screen, rather it was in directly engaging with nature that children with a dominant Symbol-centred spirituality most benefitted.⁹¹ Csinos makes recommendation for nurturing the spirituality of children with a dominant Symbol-centred spirituality which include, "bake bread together, bless it, and

⁸⁸ "Spiritual styles," The Church of Scotland, accessed December 10, 2023, https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/37767/Meet_the_styles.pdf.

⁸⁹ David M. Csinos, "The Spiritual Styles of Children," CECE Conference 2012, accessed December 10, 2023, 10:17, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wva1VkfU9BE&t=623s>.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 10:17.

⁹¹ David M. Csinos, *Children's Ministry That Fits, Beyond One-Size-Fits-All Approaches to Nurturing Children's Spirituality*, (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 81.

eat it together.”⁹² And Suzi Farrant and Darren Philip recognise persons with a Symbol-centred spirituality having a preference for “silence, meditation, contemplative prayer and anything that helps aid these things: artwork, candles, stones, labyrinths, poetry or icons” along with “being alone in nature,” also noting that “the sacraments can be particularly moving.”⁹³ These suggestions are incorporated into the adapted Being With course, for the purpose of engaging participants with a tendency towards a Symbol-centred spirituality.

Bellous, Csinos, and Peltomaki developed a series of questionnaires to assist in identifying differing spiritualities.⁹⁴ The Spiritual Styles questionnaire for adults provides words the authors associate with each spiritual style, as follows:

Word:	Accurate, Precise, Rational, Concrete, Conceptual, Scholarly, Teaching, Proclaiming.
Emotion:	Caring, Connected, Empathetic, Insightful, Warm, Deep, Relational, Intuitive.
Symbol:	Quiet, Reflective, Inward, Mysterious, Poetic, Solitary, Meditative, Mystical.
Action:	Driven, Direct, Focused on Justice, Single-minded, Observant, Urgent, Meets Needs, Get it done. ⁹⁵

⁹² Ibid., 161.

⁹³ Farrant and Philip, *Being An Intergenerational Church*, 137.

⁹⁴ Bellous, and Csinos, “Spiritual styles,” 214.

⁹⁵ Bellous, Csinos, and Peltomaki, *Spiritual Styles, Assessing*, 12.

Bellous and Csinos report, “Based on observation, many adults who take the assessment are surprised to realise their own spiritual style.”⁹⁶ This sentence led to further enquiry into the research conducted in support of the Assessment, and in personal correspondence with me in September 2023, Bellous reassessed this, commenting that since first producing the Spiritual Styles Assessment in 2009, she has conducted hundreds of assessments, and “in terms of the anecdotal evidence from my research, when people do the Assessment, they express comments that convey they feel understood, sometimes for the first time.”⁹⁷ This recognition is further supported by anecdotal evidence provided by Ronni Lamont,⁹⁸ who reports that she has run countless Spiritual Styles Assessment courses and advises of “lots of experiences where folks have been ‘Oh my goodness, now I understand’ all over the place...” Understanding this means that those taking the Assessment have been enlightened by the results, gaining a deeper level of self-understanding and understanding of others.⁹⁹ Csinos used the Spiritual Styles Assessment in his 2008 Masters paper, leading to the publication of his book, *Childrens’ Ministry That Fits: Beyond One Size Fits All Approaches To Nurturing Children’s Spirituality*. The Spiritual Styles Assessment was recently utilised by Bellous in 2022 in First Baptist Church, Edmonton, as recorded in the Journal *Religions*,¹⁰⁰ where it was used to promote

⁹⁶ Bellous, and Csinos, “Spiritual styles,” 215.

⁹⁷ Joyce E. Bellous, email to the author, September 23, 2023.

⁹⁸ “Ronni Lamont,” Transforming Formation, St. Augustine’s College of Theology, accessed March 13, 2024, <https://staugustinescollege.ac.uk/about-us/our-people/ronni-lamont/>.

⁹⁹ Ronni Lamont, email to the author, March 12, 2024.

¹⁰⁰ Joyce E. Bellous, “Congregational Care: Philosophical Reflection on a Case Study,” *Religions*, 14, no. 4: 450. (2023), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14040450>.

conversations in the congregation around spirituality. This anecdotal evidence is significant and finds further support in the research findings of this project; however, I consider that Bellous and Csinos' four spiritual styles would benefit further from the additional integrity I expect would be provided by conducting further empirical research into the robustness of these spiritual styles. The potential this offers is discussed briefly in Chapter 4.

Reflecting on the use of the Assessment, Bellous notes, "Most participants do not express an extreme Style use. Most people convey two or three Styles in their approach."¹⁰¹ Suzi Farrant and Darren Philip reflect on the difference between children and adults' spiritual styles, noting that while children tend to have one dominant style, adults tend to be more diffuse in their spiritual tendencies, writing "If an adult's dominant style is missing from worship, chances are there may still be something through which they can connect with God. If a child's dominant style is missing, however, it is likely that they will struggle to engage."¹⁰²

Crossing Together is an intergenerational community consisting of young and old, a significant element of whom are Unchurched or Dechurched, it is therefore important for Crossing Together to present opportunities for those with all four spiritual tendencies to engage with the Christian faith and worship.

¹⁰¹ Bellous, "Congregational Care," 4.

¹⁰² Farrant and Philip, *Being An Intergenerational Church*, 140.

Spiritual Styles, Personality Types, and Learning Styles

Ware urges caution in associating spiritual styles with personality type, considering that at first glance there are similarities between C.G. Jung's Psychological Types and the Myers-Briggs type indicator and spiritual style, these comparisons eventually breakdown. Ware notes there is a helpful parallel between Jung's Thinking-Feeling cognitive functions and Holmes' vertical Speculative-Affective axis, however, contends that Jung's Intuitive-Sensory cognitive functions do not map as effectively onto the horizontal Apophatic-Kataphatic axis. Ware references research conducted by Professor W. Paul Jones of the Saint Paul School of Theology, Kansa City, who investigated the relationship between Myers-Briggs type and spirituality finding Holme's horizontal Apophatic-Kataphatic axis almost matched the Myers-Briggs Intuitive-Sensory scale, however positing that this was in broad terms and the comparison would distort both if pushed too far.¹⁰³ Leslie J. Francis offers further insight into Myers-Briggs and spiritual type, referencing research that concludes that Intuitives are more open to the mystical elements of religion and "experiential spirituality"¹⁰⁴ than Sensors. As the adapted Being With course emphasises the subjective over the objective, with the intention of enabling gaps for mystery and contemplation, it is reasonable to expect that Intuitives will engage more readily with the course material and delivery than Sensors. This research indicates that there may be a significant correlation between participants who are Intuitives and those who have a

¹⁰³ Ware, *Discover Your Spiritual Style*, 32, 33.

¹⁰⁴ Leslie J. Francis, "Psychological Type Theory and Religious and Spiritual Experiences," in *International Handbook of Education for Spirituality, Care and Wellbeing. International Handbooks of Religion and Education, vol 3*, eds. Marian de Souza, Leslie J. Francis, James O'Higgins-Norman, Daniel Scott, (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), 139, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9018-9_8.

dominant Symbol-centred spirituality. This would be an interesting and potentially informative area for further research; however, it exists outside the scope of this project.

Another potential association is the link between spiritual style and learning style. Young Woon Lee conducted a literature review in this area reporting a high correlation between learning style and spiritual style.¹⁰⁵ With reference to links between Symbol-centred spirituality and learning styles, there are clear parallels between the descriptions given of the preferences of people with a Symbol-centred spirituality and those with a visual learning style. According to Alan Pritchard, a visual learner “Likes to: draw, build, design and create things, daydream, look at pictures and slides, watch films and play with machines,” they are adept at “imagining things, sensing changes, mazes and puzzles, and reading maps and charts,” and most effectively learn when “visualising, dreaming, using the ‘mind’s eye,’ and working with pictures.”¹⁰⁶ It is clear that there is some equivalence between a Symbol-centred spiritual style and a visual learning style, however they are measuring two different attributes; spiritual-style identifies ways by which people engage with God and learning style relates to ways people acquire knowledge and process information. In an email conversation I had with Darren Philip,¹⁰⁷ he reported conducting a comparison of learning styles and spiritual styles with children in his home congregation and found no correlation between the two. Further conclusions on the correlation between learning style and spiritual style will be made in Chapter 4.

¹⁰⁵ Young Woon Lee, “Relationship Between Spirituality Types and Learning Styles,” *Torch Trinity Journal*, 2000, Vol.3, 101. http://www.ttgst.ac.kr/upload/ttgst_resources13/20123-143.pdf.

¹⁰⁶ Alan Pritchard, *Ways of Learning: Learning Theories and Learning Styles in the Classroom* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2013), 57, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ed/detail.action?docID=1576055>.

¹⁰⁷ Darren Philip, email to the author, October 24, 2023.

Why Develop a Symbol-Centred Being With Course and What Does This Entail?

In January 2023 Crossing Together launched a monthly time of intergenerational worship based on the four spiritual styles of Word, Emotion, Symbol, and Action, to meet the anticipated diverse spiritual needs of participants. It quickly became apparent to the Crossing Together Core Team that most participants who were Unchurched or Dechurched chose to engage with activities intended to meet the needs of those who had a tendency towards a Symbol-centred spirituality. With participants frequently favouring Symbol-centred approaches in worship, I designed a course around these Symbol-centred principles, with the expectation that this approach would be more effective in deepening these participants' engagement and experience of the course.

The course was designed following learning and research during the Doctor of Ministry programme, personal reading in support of the setting up of an intergenerational church, and the experience and reflection on intergenerational worship events. The adapted Being With course recognises that participants with a Symbol-centred spirituality may value time away from the spoken and written word, preferring to be immersed in creation or pondering art and other visual images. The course was designed to be less structured and with a more relaxed teaching approach, providing space for contemplation, and without a requirement to find the answers, as mystery is something that Symbol-centred participants were expected to be at ease with. Bible stories were to be shared, with gaps in the commentary, encouraging participants to enter the story, engage with wonder, and quiet reflection. Creating space and encouraging the exploration of faith through imagination, symbolic action, and poetry were also offered to assist participants engage with God.

It is recognised that people with a Symbol-centred spirituality may seem distant, this is not because they are disengaged from the group, rather it takes time for contemplation on what is being presented. Because of this a significant element of faith exploration for participants cannot take place in the group environment, but rather in participants' own time, therefore encouraging participants to find and set aside time within their week for contemplation, being at one with creation, and using their imagination and creativity, (trusting that God is already at work there) was expected to benefit faith exploration. While the design of this adapted course is shaped for those with a dominant Symbol-centred spirituality, it is understood that adults have the potential to effectively engage with two or three spiritual styles, consequently the course was expected, to a lesser degree, to meet needs of those with alternative dominant spiritual tendencies. In addition to the faith exploration course developments specific to those with a tendency towards a Symbol-centred spirituality, the course was further adapted by condensing the recommended ten sessions into four sessions, with a view to the shorter length being more accessible for all participants.

Summary

In this opening chapter I have defined the question for research, namely, "Does Crossing Together's image-rich and creation-centred development of the Being With faith exploration course enable a deeper engagement by participants with a Symbol-centred approach to spirituality?" and my thesis, that the development of the Being With course to be image-rich and creation-centred will enable deeper engagement for participants with a tendency towards a Symbol-centred spirituality with the intent of growing disciples and a

new intergenerational church. This opening chapter has explored and affirmed the theology underpinning the Being With faith exploration course, introduced the theology of spirituality and spiritual styles, briefly explored possible overlap between spiritual styles, personality types, and learning styles, and presented how the theology of spiritual styles can be put into practice through the development of a faith exploration course designed to resonate with participants with a tendency towards a Symbol-centred spirituality.

In Chapter 2 I will provide the theological grounding for the project by noting the place of visual images in the twenty-first century, thereafter, exploring the similarities and differences between visual images and art, before the investigating the reference to image and art found in the Bible. The theology of the visual image will be discussed through the lens of the Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Reformed traditions, with an emphasis throughout on the use, and resistance to the use, of visual images in Christian faith and worship. The chapter will thereafter investigate the revelation of God through creation through the theology of John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards, before considering more recent approaches to the wonder of God and awe experienced in creation. The chapter will thereafter consider Apophatic theology, on which Symbol-centred spirituality significantly rests, considering connections between visual images, creation, and the Apophatic way. I will then outline the developments made to the Being With course to enable those with a tendency towards a Symbol-centred spirituality to experience a deeper engagement with faith exploration. Finally, I shall share the research methods used to ascertain the effectiveness of this approach to faith exploration with the participants at Crossing Together.

In Chapter 3 I will present the research question and describe in detail the completed project. I will explain the project implementation, including the decisions made surrounding the use of the pre-course Spiritual Styles Assessment to ascertain the spiritual tendencies of participants. A pre and post-course questionnaire was also employed to ascertain participants' awareness of the course material, identifying areas of change in understanding, with a follow-on question in the post course questionnaire enquiring about participants' intentions following on from the course. Follow up semi-structured interviews with a spiritually diverse group of participants were also used to gauge whether a participant's dominant spiritual style impacted on the effectiveness of the course in enabling faith exploration. I will also report on my own observations and the process of triangulation used to ensure, as best as possible, that research findings accurately reflected the intention of participants. The Chapter will close with the results of the research project being shared and a summary of the process and outcomes.

In Chapter 4 I will evaluate the project and the results, making observations on the effectiveness of the research methodology and methods, and present findings and observations on the effect of incorporating creation-centred and image-rich developments into the Being With course to deepen the experience of participants with a tendency towards a Symbol-centred spirituality. I will consider these developments alongside the theology explored in Chapter 2, and within the context of Crossing Together new worshipping community's pursuit of intergenerational ministry based on engaging with participants according to their dominant spiritual style. Finally, I will offer conclusions as to whether a spiritual styles approach to faith exploration presents opportunities for further

imaginative and creative routes to faith exploration within Crossing Together, and sharing this contextual research with the wider Church.

CHAPTER 2

Introduction

This chapter provides the theological grounding for the project through a brief investigation into widespread use of visual images in the twenty-first century, comparing visual images and art, and thereafter focusing on image and art in the Bible. This section will thereafter engage with the theology of the visual image as expressed in the Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic Church, and Reformed traditions, with an emphasis throughout on the use, and resistance to the use, of visual images in Christian faith and worship, with the section on visual images culminating in a contemporary Reformed approach to visual images. The chapter will thereafter investigate the revelation of God in creation through the theology of John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards, before considering more recent approaches to the wonder of God and awe experienced in creation. The chapter will then consider Apophatic theology, considering connections between art, artists, visual images, creation, and the Apophatic way. I will then outline the developments made to the Being With course to enable those with a tendency towards a Symbol-centred spirituality to experience a deeper engagement with faith exploration. Finally, I shall share the research methods used to ascertain the effectiveness of this approach to faith exploration with the participants at Crossing Together.

The Visual Image in the 21st Century

Image is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as, “A thing that stands for or is taken to stand for something else; a symbol, emblem.”¹⁰⁸ An image is therefore not that which it symbolises, yet it is intertwined with what it symbolises, pointing beyond itself to that which it is symbolising. We live in a visual image dominated culture.¹⁰⁹ Amy DeFalco Lippert writes, “In the generations since the fifteenth century, the spectacles of the Western world had become increasingly mediated by textual and visual materials, rather than experienced as primarily auditory experiences”¹¹⁰ and with the plethora of digital images on screens via the internet, and social media we now live in an “ocular-centric 21st Century”¹¹¹ with the eye being a dominant means of perceiving the world, both in regard to an emphasis on the visual word over the spoken word, and increasingly with the use of images over text. Kathryn Grushka writes, “Images are increasingly a primary means of communication.”¹¹² This project recognises the value of the visual image, not only as the contemporary communication medium of choice, but most importantly recognises visual

¹⁰⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*, “Image,” n., accessed November 21, 2023, <https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=image>.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas Pfau, Foreword to *Image As Theology, The Power of Art in Shaping Christian Thought, Devotion, and imagination*, eds., C.A. Strine, Mark McInroy, Alexis Torrance (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 10.

¹¹⁰ Amy K. DeFalco Lippert, *Consuming Identities: Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco*, (New York: Oxford Academic, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190268978.003.0001>.

¹¹¹ Kathryn Grushka, Debra Donnelly, and Nicole Goodlad, “Visual Learning and Pre-Service Teachers in the Post-Literate Age,” *Australian Art Education* 36, no. 2 (2014): 40–55, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/visual-learning-pre-service-teachers-post/docview/1970662151/se-2>.

¹¹² Kathryn Grushka, “The “Other” Literacy Narrative: The Body and the Role of Image Production.” *English Teaching* 10, no. 3 (09, 2011): 113-n/a. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/other-literacy-narrative-body-role-image/docview/926187995/se-2>.

images, and creation, are means by which people with a Symbol-centred spirituality can see beyond the view, to catch a glimpse of God.

Visual Image and Art

The adapted Being With course contains visual images, some that may be considered as art, some less so. Art and visual images share similarities, but also differences. Both art and the visual image involve representations, whether that be a scene, a person, or object, an idea, or an emotion. Both art and visual images can be used to communicate ideas, emotions, messages, and stories that have the potential to influence another person. Both art and visual images are open to subjectivity, while the artist or visual image creator may invite the viewer to journey in a certain direction, what the viewer sees or feels cannot be controlled by the artist or visual image creator, and one person's interpretation may differ from another.

When considering the similarities between the artist and the visual image creator; the artist is artistic, while the visual image creator may also be artistic, but not necessarily so. The artist creating art does so with creativity, imagination, and emotion, while the visual image creator may do but need not necessarily do so. The artist creating art invites the viewer on a journey of interpretation and discovery, while the visual image creator may also offer a similar invitation, but this is not necessarily so.

Image and Art in the Bible

Genesis 1:27 states, "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." To be made in the image of God carries

a variety of possibilities; one possibility is that humanity has been gifted by God with specific gifts to carry out the responsibilities that God gives as God's children, representing God, acting as extensions of God's authority on the earth.¹¹³ Another possibility especially connects with spiritual style, is that humanity has been made by God in a way that differs from the rest of creation, with humankind being "unique in their capacity to relate and respond to God, and, unlike the animals can enter into a covenant relationship with God."¹¹⁴ This capacity for relationship is inferred from Genesis 1:26, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness," recognising the perichoresis within the Holy Trinity of intimate union, mutual indwelling, and interpenetration. The human ability to relate and respond to God and one another finds its source in the manner in which God relates within Godself. And by extension of this, a person's spiritual style describes the way that person has been made in the image of God, because it describes the way a person most intimately relates to God.

The Second Commandment states, "You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them."¹¹⁵ Much of the resistance to the use of visual images in worship has stemmed from concern that images become idols. This resistance will be explored further in the following

¹¹³ Catherine McDowell, "In the Image of God He Created Them: How Genesis 1:26-27 Defines the Divine-Human Relationship and Why It Matters," in *The Image of God in an Image Driven Age: Explorations in Theological Anthropology*, eds., Beth Felker Jones, and Jeffrey W. Barbeau, (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 32, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹¹⁴ McDowell, "In the Image of God He Created Them," 26.

¹¹⁵ Exodus 20; 4, 5a.

sections on the Eastern Orthodox and Reformed traditions relationship with visual images. However, it is not the visual image that God prohibits, but the idols, which are false gods or representations of false gods to be worshipped.¹¹⁶ With regards to the making of visual images, it was God who gave gifts to the artists to “devise artistic designs”¹¹⁷ for the tent of meeting, the ark of the covenant, the mercy seat, furnishings, and priestly vestments.¹¹⁸ Following this proscribed decoration God descended and filled the tabernacle with glory.¹¹⁹ The tabernacle therefore was not only a place where God’s word was spoken and enacted in worship and sacrifice, but also the place where the incomprehensible majesty of God could begin to be expressed through artwork which was affirmed by the gift of God, and the glory of God resting there. Similarly, 2 Chronicles 2:13, 14 records that it was God who arranged for a skilled artisan to beautify the interior of Solomon’s Temple.

The Bible express God verbally in a multitude of word images that tumble over one another until the God they are describing becomes both incredible and utterly incomprehensible and words fall short. For example, the Book of Deuteronomy, at Chapter 32 describes God as a rock, an eagle, a father, a mother, a warrior, and a judge. Here the writer creates an abundance of word images each describing God, indeed so many are layered upon one another (as can be seen throughout Scripture) that the reader becomes

¹¹⁶ Donald K. McKim, “Idol,” in *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), accessed February 22, 2024, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.pts.edu:2443/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=780304&site=eds-live>.

¹¹⁷ Exodus 31:4.

¹¹⁸ Exodus 31:1-11.

¹¹⁹ Exodus 40:34.

overwhelmed with the profusion. Brent A. Strawn writes, “It is a case of the finite, a Hebrew poem or book (or Bible), trying to capture the infinite Lord of the Hebrews – an attempt to make manifest what is ultimately beyond manifestation.”¹²⁰ Such a superabundance of metaphors push the reader beyond any one fixed definition of God towards the God who is indescribable and defies form.

A faith exploration course that draws upon an abundance of words or visual images to assist explorers to discern something of God, begins to portray the unportrayable God in ways similar to the superabundance of word images of God that are provided in Bible. As the Crossing Together faith exploration course is designed for participants with a tendency towards a Symbol-centred spirituality both visual images and creation, along with words, will be utilised for this communication purpose.

The Use of Icons in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition

It is because God chose to be with us, revealed corporeally in Jesus Christ that the Eastern Orthodox Church permits the making and use of icons in public worship and personal devotion, depicting Jesus Christ, along with images of Mary the Mother of Jesus, and the saints,¹²¹ and while some innovation by the icon maker is permissible, the style of these icons is defined by tradition as regulated by the Church.¹²² John of Damascus (c.

¹²⁰ Brent A. Strawn, “‘Mischmetaphors’: (Re-) Presenting God in Unusual and Sophisticated Ways*,” in *Image As Theology, The Power of Art in Shaping Christian Thought, Devotion, and Imagination*, eds., C.A. Strine, Mark McInroy, Alexis Torrance (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 43.

¹²¹ Aidan Hart, *Beauty, Spirit, Matter, Icons in the Modern World* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2014), 1.

¹²² Cindy Egly, “Eastern Orthodox Christians and Iconography,” Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, accessed March 16, 2024, <http://ww1.antiochian.org/icons-eastern-orthodoxy>.

675-749 CE) was an iconodule, being a person who venerates the icon, who defended the use of icons against the iconoclasts who sought to destroy them, writing,

Of old, God the incorporeal and uncircumscribed was never depicted. Now, however, when God is seen clothed in flesh, and conversing with men, I make an image of the God whom I see. I do not worship matter, I worship the God of matter, who became matter for my sake, and deigned to inhabit matter, who worked out my salvation through matter.¹²³

The iconoclasts were concerned that people would worship these icons as idols, recognising icons to be a contravention of the Second Commandment.¹²⁴ Emperor Constantine V (718–75 CE) was an iconoclast who argued Christ could not be depicted in his divine nature as only his human nature could be shown in the image, while the divine remained inaccessible, arguing that the icon falls short of a depiction of Christ.¹²⁵ For the iconodules however, the icon offers a doorway leading beyond itself and enabling the worshipper to adore God who existed beyond it. Alexis Torrance states, “The purpose and meaning of the icon, in the end, is never itself but always its personal prototype, to whom it gives way and who in turn draws the viewer and venerator of the icon to a living communion with God. The icon merely witnesses to and facilitates the meeting of

¹²³ John of Damascus, *St John Damascene on Holy Images (πρὸς τοὺς διαβάλλοντας τὰς ἀγίας εἰκόνας)* followed by *three sermons on the Assumption (κοίμησις)*, trans., Mary H. Allies, accessed November 8, 2023, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/49917/49917-h/49917-h.html>, 1.6.

¹²⁴ Shay Eshel, *The Concept of the Elect Nation in Byzantium* (Boston: Brill, 2018), ProQuest Ebook Central, 77.

¹²⁵ Mark McInroy, “Spiritual Perception and Beauty: On Looking and Letting Appear,” in *Perceiving Things Divine: Towards a Constructive Account of Spiritual Perception*, eds. Frederick D. Aquino, and Paul L. Gavriilyuk, (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2022), 212-218, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/10.1093/oso/9780198802594.003.0013>.

persons, the joining of image to the Image.”¹²⁶ Therefore, while icons may be venerated for this characteristic, they are not to be idolised, because they are a means of enabling the worshipper to come closer to God, but they themselves are not the subject of this worship.¹²⁷ To propose that illiterate worshippers believed the icon was in itself God, is to Robin Jensen unlikely, she writes, “I... suggest no one thought the image was sufficient unto itself, rather that a perceptive and attentive viewer would realise that the picture was a representation, a sign or symbol perhaps of a far more complex and even indescribable reality.”¹²⁸ In 787 CE the Seventh Ecumenical Council, refuting the challenge presented by iconoclasts, agreed that the use of visual images to depict Christ and other scenes from the gospels was not only acceptable, but to be promoted as a means of teaching and encouraging devotion. Bellous comments, “In my experience, the Symbol Style user expresses some differences in approach that tend to shift them to the margins of communities that privilege the other three Styles, although Eastern Orthodox Church cultures tend to express the Symbol Style as their dominant approach,”¹²⁹ here recognising that people with a Symbol-centred spirituality tend towards the practices of the more mystical and contemplative practises found in the Eastern Orthodox tradition.

¹²⁶ Alexis Torrance, Person or principles? The meaning of the Byzantine Icon Revisited, in *Image As Theology, The Power of Art in Shaping Christian Thought, Devotion, and imagination*, eds., C.A. Strine, Mark McInroy, Alexis Torrance (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 121.

¹²⁷ Hart, *Beauty, Spirit, Matter*, 48.

¹²⁸ Robin M. Jensen, “Early Christian Visual Theology: Iconography of the Trinity and Christ,” in *Image As Theology, The Power of Art in Shaping Christian Thought, Devotion, and imagination*, eds., C.A. Strine, Mark McInroy, Alexis Torrance (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 84.

¹²⁹ Joyce E. Bellous, email message to the author, September 23, 2023.

The Recognition and Use of Art in the Roman Catholic Tradition

The Roman Catholic Church is less prescriptive than the Eastern Orthodox Church in regarding what forms of art have the potential to form a bridge between God and humanity. In Pope John Paul II's "Letter to the Artists"¹³⁰ (1999) he writes,

Even beyond its typically religious expressions, true art has a close affinity with the world of faith, so that, even in situations where culture and the Church are far apart, art remains a kind of bridge to religious experience. In so far as it seeks the beautiful, fruit of an imagination which rises above the everyday, art is by its nature a kind of appeal to the mystery. Even when they explore the darkest depths of the soul or the most unsettling aspects of evil, artists give voice in a way to the universal desire for redemption.¹³¹

A definition of "true art" is not provided; however, the letter refers to art having the "unique capacity to take one or other facet of the message and translate it into colours, shapes and sounds which nourish the intuition of those who look or listen."¹³² True art need not be sacred art¹³³ and embraces whatever lifts the viewer or listener towards the beauty of God and contains the potential for God to communicate through, as "Art must make perceptible, and as far as possible attractive, the world of the spirit, of the invisible, of God."¹³⁴ From a Roman Catholic perspective, true art is that which draws the viewer or listener towards God and enables an experience of the wonder of the ineffable God.

¹³⁰ Pope John Paul II, "Letter to the Artists," The Holy See, accessed November 14, 2023, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_23041999_artists.html.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

Both Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions affirm within the rigours of their own traditions that art contains the capacity of offering a portal by which humanity may move towards God and through which God may be revealed as God moves towards humanity.

The Visual Image in the Reformed Tradition

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647)¹³⁵ states that God “may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.”¹³⁶ Calvin understood that attempts to visually depict God through art or statues challenged the Second Commandment, as did the worship of these representations.¹³⁷ Calvin insisted that “there must be no pictures used in churches: let nothing which is adored or worshipped be painted on walls.”¹³⁸ And follows this with derision, “The simple reason why those who had the charge of churches resigned to the office of teaching to idols was, because they themselves were dumb.”¹³⁹ In quoting Gregory, “that images are the books of the

¹³⁵ The Westminster Confession of Faith is the principle subordinate standard of the Church of Scotland. “Church Constitution,” Church of Scotland, Articles Declaratory of the Constitution of the Church of Scotland, accessed February 12, 2024, <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/church-law/church-constitution>.

¹³⁶ “The Westminster Confession of Faith,” Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, accessed November 21, 2023, <https://www.fpchurch.org.uk/about-us/important-documents/the-westminster-confession-of-faith/>.

¹³⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book 2, Chapter VIII, 1, 330.

¹³⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book 1, Chapter XI, 6, 95.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, Chapter XI, 7, 96.

unlearned”¹⁴⁰ Calvin considers this was not given to Gregory by the Holy Spirit, but rather is a falsehood.¹⁴¹ And yet, Calvin also recognised the value of visual images, when not abused, are given “for his (God’s) glory and our good.”¹⁴² For Calvin such lawful art and sculpture consists of things that can be “presented to the eye,”¹⁴³ with these falling into two categories, “historical, which give a representation of events, and pictorial, which merely exhibit bodily shapes and figures.”¹⁴⁴ He recognises the former having educational purposes and the latter may bring people some amusement.¹⁴⁵

Calvin believed that in worship, Scripture should be the guide and visual images were a distraction from the preached word. It is the preaching of God’s word that is faithful to Scripture, and specifically “that by the true preaching of the gospel Christ is portrayed and in a manner crucified before our eyes (Gal. iii. 1) ... from this one doctrine the people would learn more than from a thousand crosses of wood or stone.”¹⁴⁶ The role of seeing therefore remains important for Calvin, however in worship this seeing is no longer external with the eyes but internalised in the mental images of the mind.¹⁴⁷ In emphasising the reception of the preached word by hearing and not by sight, I consider Calvin is

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., Chapter X1, 5, 94.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., Chapter X1, 5, 95.

¹⁴² Ibid., Chapter X1,12, 100.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., Chapter X1, 7, 96.

¹⁴⁷ John Calvin, “Theological Treatises,” ed. and trans. by J.K.S Reid, (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1954), quoted in William A. Dryness, *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture, The Protestant Imagination from Calvin to Edward* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 76.

favouring one organ: the ear, over and above another organ, the eye. This is rooted in an understanding that words are more able to communicate than visual images, however, as Jensen writes, “Visioning, like verbalising, is merely part of a process of contemplating something that lies beyond full comprehension or perception and, no more or less than words, are human attempts to express what our limited understanding can grasp.”¹⁴⁸ And with the mind “a perpetual forge of idols,”¹⁴⁹ I argue, is it not equally possible for the ear to hear and the mind to construct idols that ill-define God, just as visual images may?

Calvin recognises the sacraments of the Lord’s Supper and Baptism “direct and almost lead us by the hand to Christ, or rather, were like images to represent him, and hold him forth to our knowledge.”¹⁵⁰ However the image presented by the sacrament is on its own insufficient for salvation, for Calvin, the sacrament is a metaphor leading us to Christ, and the sacrament become efficacious when received by faith. Faith comes through the hearing of the preached word, so preaching precedes the sacrament, and it is therefore the word that gives context and sets the image in its place.¹⁵¹ In the Reformation it is the word that forms the bridge between the recipient and God, enabling the person receiving the word to move towards God, and for God to move through the word influencing the heart, and bring about renewal of the mind.

¹⁴⁸ Jensen, “Early Christian Visual Theology,” 104.

¹⁴⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book 1, Chapter X1,8, 97.

¹⁵⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book 4, Chapter XIV, 1, 507.

¹⁵¹ William A. Dryness, *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture, The Protestant Imagination from Calvin to Edward* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 70, 71.

To conclude, Calvin understood visual images, including statues, and ornaments depicting God, to be expressly prohibited by the Second Commandment. Calvin however did not resist all visual images realising that some were of value in depicting historical events, and others were useful for amusement, although visual images were reckoned as second-rate teaching aides which limited the populaces' faith and learning and were utilised by uneducated priests who did not know the gospel. The closest Calvin comes to acknowledging the power and purpose of the image in worship was in the sacraments, and even here these were dependent on the preached word to set the context and prepare the recipient to receive them. In the Reformation the preached word replaces and exceeds the visual image, with God now predominantly presented through the ear to the mind, instead of through the eye.

Recent theologians in the Reformed tradition have sought a reappraisal and rebalancing of the relationship between the word and visual image in worship citing God's initiative in the Incarnation and the bridge that beauty provides in leading people closer to God. William A. Dryness warns against an either/or approach to word or visual image. He argues that for most of history word and visual image have coexisted, not in competition, but complementary and recognises that we live in a visual culture and this requires a reappraisal of the dominance of the word, to the exclusion of the visual image in worship.¹⁵² Dryness argues that the Church must broaden our repertoire and "this means ... that Christians must discover a renewed vision for the arts, especially the visual arts – a 'renewed vision' because the gifts of imagination and vision are part of the Christian's

¹⁵² William A. Dryness, *Visual Faith, Art, Theology, and Worship in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 156

birthright that is frequently overlooked.”¹⁵³ And reflecting on aesthetics in worship David Fergusson argues that beauty captivates the contemporary world and for many, forms the bridge that leads people to religion, and also acts as a “surrogate for religion.”¹⁵⁴ Fergusson writes, “Art takes us beyond ourselves, necessarily opening onto the transcendent”¹⁵⁵ and reasons for a reappraisal of the place of visual art in Reformed worship, stating that if God chose to be represented in visual form in Jesus, then “why should this not be recalled and celebrated pictorially?”¹⁵⁶ As a practical development of this movement in Reformed theology the visual images employed during the adapted Being With course were presented to lead the viewer beyond the image towards the greater reality that God is, recognising that visual images are not ends in themselves, but rather presented as bridges to lead beyond themselves, and reach for God who is beyond, image, word, and creation, and creating space for contemplation, awe, and spiritual experiences.

Having first considered the prevalence of the visual image in contemporary culture, this section then made comparison between visual images and art, and considered the use of word images and references to artwork in the Bible. The section thereafter explored ways that the Incarnation has influenced the creation of icons in the Orthodox tradition, considering the value placed on icons in this tradition and following this, the Roman Catholic tradition’s use of visual images in worship. We have thereafter explored both the

¹⁵³ Dryness, *Visual Faith, Art*, 155.

¹⁵⁴ David Fergusson, “Aesthetics of the Reformed Tradition,” in *Worship and Liturgy in Context, Studies and Case Studies in Theology and Practice*, ed. Duncan B Forrester and Doug Gay, (London: SCM Press, 2009), 30.

¹⁵⁵ Fergusson, “Aesthetics,” 30.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

resistance to, and perceived benefits of, visual images in the Reformed tradition through the theology of Calvin and contemporary Reformed theologians. This section will now move on to explore the place of creation as an expression of Godself, explored again through the theology of Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards. Following this we shall focus on the Apophatic tradition on which Symbol-centred spirituality is built, enquiring whether visual images and creation are useful vehicles for reaching beyond words towards God.

John Calvin and the Majesty of God Revealed in Creation

During Doctor of Ministry studies in “Reformed Spirituality” I had the opportunity to explore the theology of John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards in relation to creation. This study inspired the inclusion of a creation-centred approach to faith exploration in the development of the Being With faith exploration course. Calvin considered creation to be the theatre of God’s glory.¹⁵⁷ This understanding comes from both his experience and Scripture. The book of Genesis attributes creation to God. Genesis opens with “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth,”¹⁵⁸ and continues through God’s acts of creation, affirming “God saw that it was good.”¹⁵⁹ The Psalms express the praise of God in and through creation, to pause briefly at a handful; Psalm 8 praises God for God’s glory manifest in the heavens and expressed in the creation of humankind; Psalm 19 describing creation revealing God's handiwork in the course of the sun, the moon, and stars

¹⁵⁷ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Vol 5., trans. by James Anderson (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1849), Psalm 135:13-14, <https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom12/calcom12.xix.iv.html>.

¹⁵⁸ Genesis 1:1.

¹⁵⁹ Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31.

across the heavens, and while they are voiceless, they proclaim God's majesty loud and clear. Psalm 104 praising God in the height, breadth, and depth of God's creation, setting creation in time and place, and praising God for the care shown to all creation.¹⁶⁰ The Book of Job, Chapters 38-41 describe a dialogue between God and Job where God's creative power, authority, and wisdom displayed in creation is expressed. In the face of God's majesty revealed through creation, Job responds, "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you."¹⁶¹ Calvin did not write a commentary on Job however, he expresses the wonder of God's revelation through creation, as it appears to the eye of the beholder,

God...has been pleased... to manifest his perfections in the whole structure of the universe, and daily place himself in our view, that we cannot open our eyes without being compelled to behold him. His essence, indeed, is incomprehensible, utterly transcending all human thought; but on each of his works his glory is engraven in characters so bright, so distinct, and so illustrious, that none, however dull and illiterate, can plead ignorance as their excuse.¹⁶²

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans, affirms the perceptibility of God's attributes in creation: "Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse;"¹⁶³ Here Paul asserts that otherwise invisible attributes of God become visible in creation and revelatory of God's character and existence. Calvin, in his commentary on the Letter to the Romans, 1:21 writes, "God is in himself invisible; but as

¹⁶⁰ See further examples in Psalms 50:6, 89:5-14, 95:1-6, 97:6, 148:1-5, 13, 150:6.

¹⁶¹ Job 42:5.

¹⁶² Calvin, *Institutes*, Book 1, Chapter V, 1, 51.

¹⁶³ Romans 1:20.

his majesty shines forth in his works and in his creatures everywhere, men ought in these to acknowledge him, for they clearly set forth their Maker: and for this reason the Apostle in his Epistle to the Hebrews says, that this world is a mirror, or the representation of invisible things.”¹⁶⁴ For Calvin, it is the “invigorating power” of the Holy Spirit that enables the beauty of creation¹⁶⁵ and this was not a once and for all event, but rather sustaining, for “the earth would be swallowed up every moment were it not preserved by the secret power of God.”¹⁶⁶

Benden Lane recognises, “The world for Calvin is permeated with God’s *shechinah* glory.”¹⁶⁷ Holmes defines shechinah as “the dwelling of God with his people, perceived, not in idols but as one would see the sun’s rays coming from behind a dark cloud... it is the provisional presence of God.”¹⁶⁸ In Shechinah, Calvin recognises that it is not God’s actual essence, but rather his glory and majesty that is powerfully present in creation. The manner by which God’s majesty shines through creation is something of a mirror by which we may catch a glimpse of the God, who is otherwise invisible.¹⁶⁹ Randall Zachmann writes, “In other words, when we see the image of God in the world, we are to lift the eyes

¹⁶⁴ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans by John Owen, (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1849), <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom38.v.vi.html>.

¹⁶⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book 1, Chapter XIII, 14, 122.

¹⁶⁶ Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Vol 4., trans. by James Anderson (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1849), Psalm 104:5-9, <https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom11/calcom11.xiii.ii.html>.

¹⁶⁷ Belden C. Lane, *Ravished by Beauty*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 68.

¹⁶⁸ Holmes, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, 32.

¹⁶⁹ Randall, Zachman, “The Universe as Living Image of God: Calvin’s Doctrine of Creation Reconsidered,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, 61:4 (October 1997), 304.

of our minds to God, just as we turn our mind to the one portrayed when we see a portrait of that person.”¹⁷⁰ Here Randall Zachmann is understanding an appreciation of creation to function as a bridge that leads to and from God, in the same manner as Orthodox Christianity views the icon forming a bridge between the viewer and God.

Calvin, in considering the world as a theatre of God, writes “The whole world is a theater for the display of the divine goodness, wisdom, justice, and power, but the Church is the orchestra, as it were — the most conspicuous part of it.”¹⁷¹ For Calvin the role of humanity is to join in with God’s creative handiwork, lead, and amplify the resounding praise that creation sings.¹⁷² This interrelationship between God and creation extends yet further, for Calvin, praise sustains creation, and without praise the very existence of creation is in peril.¹⁷³ Calvin recognises that for creation to lead humanity to an awareness of the person and the works of Jesus Christ, requires revelation from the Bible which acts as a mirror through which God is revealed¹⁷⁴ and through this mirror creation is recognised as revealing God’s majesty.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁰ Zachman, “The Universe as Living Image of God,” 304.

¹⁷¹ Calvin, *Psalms*, Vol 5., Psalm 135:13-14, <https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom12/calcom12.xix.iv.html>.

¹⁷² Lane, *Ravished by Beauty*, 85.

¹⁷³ Calvin, *Psalms*, Vol 4., Psalm 115:16-18.

¹⁷⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book 3, Chapter II, 6, 474.

¹⁷⁵ Cornelius Van Der Kooi, “Calvin's Theology of Creation and Providence: God's Care and Human Fragility.” *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 18 (2016): 49. 47-65. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/10.1111/ijst.12140>.

Jonathan Edwards and the Beauty of God Revealed in Creation

Belden Lane recognises that Edwards was deeply aware of God while outdoors, writing “Throughout his life, his ideas always flowed best as he rode his horse or walked through the New England countryside.”¹⁷⁶ In his early years Edwards built prayer huts in the woods and would lie by the riverside watching the flight of moths and butterflies,¹⁷⁷ imagining “being alone in the mountains, or some solitary wilderness, far from all mankind, sweetly conversing with Christ, and wrapt and swallowed up in God.”¹⁷⁸ From a young man filled with wonder at the leisure time of spiders snipping their webs and taking fanciful flights into the air,¹⁷⁹ Edwards’ spirituality recognised the beauty of God imbued in, and reflected back to God throughout creation, and that God revelled in this relationship.

For Edwards the Holy Spirit is the beauty that communicates and affirms within the Trinity,¹⁸⁰ and joy within Godself cannot be contained within the Trinity; but rather delights in expression, replicating beauty throughout creation.¹⁸¹ Edwards considered that God is wholly sufficient within Godself, not lacking in any way, and nothing could

¹⁷⁶ Lane, *Ravished by Beauty*, 182.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, YE 2:272, quoted in Belden C. Lane, *Ravished by Beauty*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 182.

¹⁷⁹ Jonathan Edwards, *Of Insects*, Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, accessed November 30, 2023, <http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdw aGlsby9nZXRvYmplY3QucGw/Yy41OjMud2plbw==>

¹⁸⁰ Louis J. Mitchell, *Jonathan Edwards on the Experience of Beauty* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 12.

¹⁸¹ Lane, *Ravished by Beauty*, 174.

be added to God to make God more, however, as Belden Lane writes, “Edwards's God is discontent with being beautiful alone. Arrayed in her Shechinah glory, exploding all notions of gender and difference, this God longs to be recognized by others, to be part of a mutual celebration that extends beauty and happiness in every possible direction.”¹⁸² In creation therefore, the love and beauty of God find expression, and God is realised for being yet more wonderful, than God would have been if creation had not existed.¹⁸³ God celebrates when creation rejoices, God finds fulfilment in sharing God’s beauty and love beyond Godself, and having this returned then amplifies that rejoicing in God, spurring on the outpouring of creation moment by moment as God is forever intimately involved.¹⁸⁴

Edwards recognised that creation teaches humanity the beauty and love of God, leading to a greater appreciation of God. Through creation, God is not understood in abstract terms but rather is sensuously experiential, writing that the spiritually trained mind not simply “speculates and beholds, but relishes and feels.”¹⁸⁵ This movement from faith based on reason, to faith experienced through creation, enables a savouring of the sensuousness in creation, and yet at the same time a growth in the awareness that creation is but a mote dancing in the sunbeam of an exuberant God’s divine glory.¹⁸⁶ Therefore, for Edwards we are schooled in the desire to know God through finding

¹⁸² Ibid., 175.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 174, 175.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 176.

¹⁸⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, YE 2:272, 180.

¹⁸⁶ Lane, *Ravished by Beauty*, 179.

wonder, beauty, love, and joy in creation, and being drawn beyond this, seeking to bask yet more fully in the greater light in which we all live, move, and have our being.¹⁸⁷ The encouragement for participants of Being With to take time throughout the week to be outdoors in the midst of creation and pausing long enough to appreciate and enjoy this, together with the poetry reflections in each of the week’s course handouts emphasising the glory of God in the autumntime, (Appendix 4) were given with the hope of drawing participants into the wonder of God, as found abundantly in creation by Edwards.

A Contemporary Approach to the Theology of Creation

The Theological Forum of the Church of Scotland recognise that “Through the action of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God is intimately present to every point of space-time, creating, sustaining and perfecting all things.”¹⁸⁸ Therefore, in being eternally present in Shechinah glory, God is busy sharing revelation of God’s self; the majesty, beauty, and glory of God are there, waiting expectantly. Creation therefore can be understood as the countenance of the glory of God, an expression of God’s love, a means of God’s communication, and the embodiment of God with us, reaching ultimate expression in Jesus Christ. The adapted Being With course is Crossing Together’s attempt to respond to God’s revelation, encouraging and creating opportunities for

¹⁸⁷ Acts 17:28.

¹⁸⁸ Church of Scotland, Reports, Decisions, Legislation, and Minutes: The Church of Scotland General Assembly 2022, *Theological Forum, The Earth is the Lord’s: A Theological Account of Creation Care (2022)*, Report 6, 2.2.1, accessed November 29, 2023, https://churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/93777/reports-blue-book-2022.pdf.

participants to be open, be still, become increasingly aware of God's presence in the whole of creation, and receptive to receiving revelation and the gift of faith through this.

In the Doctor of Ministry class "Science and the Christian Faith" I explored the theology of awe as it related to our experience of creation. Dacher Keltner writes that at the turn of the twenty-first century there were only a few scientific papers written considering awe,¹⁸⁹ and yet it is a common experience that spans humanity.¹⁹⁰ Dacher Keltner defines awe as, "being in the presence of something vast that transcends your current understanding of the world,"¹⁹¹ and through extensive research found examples of awe expressed in relation to star filled night skies, dramatic weather systems, landscapes, the myriad of life, the minute details of a DNA strand, and the wonder of the microscopic world.

A realisation of the vastness and complexity of nature can lead to a sense of humility and insignificance in the face of God's creative greatness. This humility before God provides humankind with perspective and a healthier understanding of the self, which is one of the key benefits of awe recognised in Dacher Keltner's study on this subject; enabling humankind to rise above negative rumination,¹⁹² be kinder to others, and live more readily in community.¹⁹³ This sense of overcoming isolation by engendering

¹⁸⁹ Dacher Keltner, *Awe, The New Science of Everyday Wonder and How It Can Transform Your Life* (New York: Penguin Press, 2023), 7.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 38-41.

community is important to Crossing Together, and to this end, increasing participants' sense of awe and wonder of God through a creation-centred approach to the Being With faith exploration course, assists participants' personal and faith development, and Crossing Together's reaching towards a significant goal.

In the following section I shall explore Apophatic theology, which is the base on which Bellous and Csinos have built their model of Symbol-centred spirituality, as I begin to ascertain whether the base on which this spiritual style is built can bear the weight of the claims made of it.

Apophatic Theology

The word apophatic derives from the Ancient Greek φάσις (phásis) word for speech, with the prefix ἀπό- (apó-) meaning away from; apophatic theology is therefore theology that seeks God by moving away the limitations that ultimately are created by words when we attempt to describe God; it is “Beyond Words” as headlines the title of this research.

Apophatic theology recognises and values divine revelation, with our definitions and doctrines that arise from this¹⁹⁴ and at the same time understands that God is beyond our description. Apophatic theology is neither in favour of words, nor against words, rather it recognises that with the best of intentions, our words about God fall short because we do not have the perspective or knowledge to know God fully.¹⁹⁵ Apophatic theology

¹⁹⁴ Rowan Williams, *Understanding and Misunderstanding 'Negative Theology.'* The Père Marquette Lecture in Theology 2021 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2021), 10.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

is also known as negative theology; as Rowan Williams writes “Negative theology is something to do with learning the paradoxical skill of ‘thinking away’ the various supports that give us confidence in successfully asserting definitions; or perhaps not *thinking* away but assimilating those mental habits... which will keep the mind receptive at the deepest level.”¹⁹⁶ Apophatic or Negative theology therefore contains a recognition that God, who is limitless, can never be defined by finite words, visual images, creation, or anything else, and thus also contains a keen openness to fresh revelation.

Clement of Alexandria (born 150 CE) was one of the first Christian writers to explore Apophatic theology. The story of Moses on Mount Sinai offered Clement an example of relating to the unknowable God. In Exodus chapters 19 and 20 we read that Moses left the people at the base of the mountain and went up alone to meet with God, who had descended to the summit of the mountain and was covered in “thick cloud,”¹⁹⁷ in “smoke,”¹⁹⁸ and in “thick darkness”.¹⁹⁹ This experience of leaving behind what is known and a willingness to step into the gap of the unknown and inexpressible God who is beyond being is an element of the Apophatic journey, where we are willing to lay aside what we think we know about God, which becomes for us a hinderance on the ascent to God, in order to be open to experiencing a deeper revelation.

The Cloud of Unknowing is an anonymous Medieval work (circa late 14th Century) exploring the Apophatic tradition. The anonymous author (hereafter referred to as “the

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 25.

¹⁹⁷ Exodus 19:9.

¹⁹⁸ Exodus 19:18.

¹⁹⁹ Exodus 20:21.

author”) reflects on the darkness that exists between humanity and God, which is beyond our reckoning as we do not possess the perspective or information that enable us to imagine the fullness of God.²⁰⁰ The author considers that reflecting on the attributes of God, or in what God has done for a person, limits the wonder of God, who exceeds human experience, description, or imagination. He identifies two principal faculties understood to be common to all rational beings: the faculty of knowledge and the faculty of love, positing that God is intellectually unknowable, but through love, God is made known to us.²⁰¹ The vertical axis of Holmes’ circle of sensibility is the Speculative/Affective axis, where Speculative relates to a spirituality informed by the mind, while Affective relates to a spirituality illuminated by emotions. The author, in his exploration of the Apophatic way, recognises a dominant role of emotion over intellect in this approach to God.

The author identifies the Bible story of Martha and Mary²⁰² as an example of two Apophatic approaches to God: Martha’s way of loving action; witnessed in her serving, and Mary’s way of loving contemplation; witnessed in her sitting at the feet of Jesus. Both Martha and Mary’s responses to Jesus can be mapped onto the Apophatic side of Holmes’ circle of sensibility; action in the Speculative/Apophatic quadrant²⁰³ and contemplation in the Affective/Apophatic (Symbol-centred) quadrant.²⁰⁴ The author argues that Mary’s

²⁰⁰ Anonymous. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, trans. A.C. Spearing, in *The Cloud of Unknowing And Other Works* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 26.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁰² Luke 10:38-42.

²⁰³ Which corresponds with “Kingdom” in the work of Corinne Ware and “Action-centred” by Joyce E. Bellous and David M. Csinos.

²⁰⁴ Which corresponds with “Mystic” in the work conducted by Corinne Ware and “Symbol-centred” by Joyce E. Bellous and David M. Csinos.

contemplative response to Jesus is the only way that is eternal, positing that in heaven there will be no need for action and service for the poor; in heaven there will only be pure love.²⁰⁵ The author does not claim it is by individual effort that a person experiences a revelation of God through contemplation, but rather any revelation given is because God chooses to gift it, like a shaft of brilliant light coming from God within the dark cloud, to be received as a holy mystery that sets the heart on fire with love.²⁰⁶ This love, being a gift from God, experienced through contemplation, is to be followed and acted upon as a guide for life, giving rich blessing where the recipient revels in the security and adoring love of God towards God's child.²⁰⁷

(i) Apophatic Theology and Art

The German artist Gerhard Richter considers that to convey God by means of visual image requires “A monochrome gray painting, oil on canvas, in any common size, is simply the only possible representation/image of God.”²⁰⁸ While I understand this grey canvas may well represent an impenetrable cloud of unknowing where God is completely hidden, I argue that the indescribable God has not only chosen to express Godself in the grey cloud of Mount Sinai, but has also done so in the brightest shaft of light ever to radiate from God, Jesus Christ, and continues to do so through Scripture and Sacrament, creation,

²⁰⁵ “The Cloud of Unknowing,” 45.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

²⁰⁸ James Elkins, and David Morgan, eds., *Re-Enchantment*, (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), 166, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ed/detail.action?docID=360156>.

and a host of ways should God choose to, including words, art, and visual images. Williams does not offer a definition of art instead he recognises that the artist invites others on a journey extending beyond the realised world, to participate in a new conversation made possible through viewing or listening to the art.²⁰⁹ Williams identifies the role of the artist in enabling the Apophatic process as one that encourages another to embrace the radical and limitless abundance of God,²¹⁰ recognising that the artist dispossesses the viewers assumptions of what is, reinterpreting this, and challenging the viewer's habitus by placing a "question against any idioms that claim a finality for themselves,"²¹¹ thereby enabling creative contemplation within the viewer as they are opened through this process to perceiving new possibilities. Williams considers that the artist "speaks riskily so as to invite others to take a congruent risk in the construction of a new object of thought – that is a new and broader configuring of what it is we encounter."²¹² The artist therefore invites the viewer to cross the metaphorical bridge and contemplate new possibilities, pushing at boundaries of knowledge and finality, letting go of any preexisting assumptions that may now be found to be inadequate, and continuing the journey of exploration into the mysterious, and as yet undiscovered.

²⁰⁹ Williams, *Negative Theology*, ' 30.

²¹⁰ See the previously referred to superabundance of metaphors attributed to God in Deuteronomy 32.

²¹¹ Williams, *Negative Theology*, ' 31.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 32.

(ii) Designing a faith exploration course containing elements of Apophatic theology

Having introduced Apophatic theology, with specific reference to Apophatic theology, art, and the artist, I now turn to exploring ways an Apophatic approach may be taken in designing the adapted Being With faith exploration course. By its nature of information sharing, a faith exploration course utilises visual images, alongside the symbolic, creation, and words to help participants grow in awareness and understanding of God. Attempts were made to ensure the information was not presented as finite descriptions of God, but rather to enable first footsteps on a journey of discovery. It was recognised that simply replacing words and concepts with a like for like use of visual images, symbol, and creation to define God, faced a limitation that word definitions are burdened with in their inability to contextualise, identify, and define the totality of the wonder of God,²¹³ however Jensen writes of visual images, “Visual art, like poetic language that depends on analogies, metaphors, or similes does not aim at delivering accurate information or precise descriptions but rather at presentation, inspiration, and edification.”²¹⁴ So I understand that visual images, symbolic action, creation, and poetry all have potential to act as bridges opening up liminal spaces, often referred to as a thin place in the Celtic tradition,²¹⁵ beckoning participants beyond what is seen, to marvel in the presence of the inexpressible God. Whilst people who have a dominant Word-centred

²¹³ Williams, *Negative Theology*, 19.

²¹⁴ Jensen, “Early Christian Visual Theology, 83.

²¹⁵ Roddy Hamilton, “Thin Places,” in Autumn, Liturgical Resources for August, September, and October including Ordinary Time and Harvest, ed. Ruth Harvey, (Glasgow: Wildgoose Publications, 2021), .31.

spirituality, for example, engage God more readily with concrete, precise, and rational terms, people with a dominant Symbol-centred spirituality are more comfortable reaching for a God hidden, and occasionally glimpsed through the Shekinah glory in creation, the poetic, the numinous, and mysterious, and in the visual image.

Over 50% of the participants at Crossing Together's Being With faith exploration course were either Unchurched or Dechurched, and while it was the intention that participants would come to faith, step out beyond word, visual image, symbol, and creation to a deeper experience of God, expecting participants to do so at this stage is improbable and unrealistic, indeed an unhelpful, expectation. The Cloud of Unknowing author recognises that this is to be a gradual ascent, with "reading, thinking, and prayer" all essential to the beginner²¹⁶ as they set off in the foothills to climbing the mountain towards the cloud of unknowing. JP Williams emphasises that "apophasis isn't opposed to, or competing against kataphasis; kataphasis gives us the mountain we need to climb."²¹⁷ The adapted Being With course therefore starts at the foothills, beginning to share through words, visual image, symbol, and creation, skills that will serve participants who have a tendency towards a Symbol-centred spirituality as they set out and continue on their ascent. However, for participants with a tendency towards a Symbol-centred spirituality, the closer to the summit that person gets, the more willing they will become to move beyond these, recognising them as limiting descriptions and, with God's help moving beyond these to deeper revelation.

²¹⁶ "The Cloud of Unknowing," 58.

²¹⁷ J.P. Williams, *Seeking The God Beyond, A Beginner's Guide to Christian Apophatic Spirituality* (London: SCM Press, 2018), 88.

In this section I have identified that it is not primarily in the words of a faith exploration course, or in the visual image, symbol, or creation that engages an Apophatic spirituality, but in the whispered and barely seen glimpses beyond these, leading the Symbol-centred explorer to push on to the God who cannot be contained by them.

This section has explored Apophatic theology enquiring specifically regarding the relationships between Apophatic theology with art and the visual image, and with the artist and creator of visual images, asking whether Apophatic theology can bear the weight placed upon it most recently by Bellous and Csinos' Symbol-centred spirituality. Having done so, I am content to accept that there is a relationship between Apophatic and Symbol-centred spiritualities, as a Symbol-centred spirituality draws upon symbol, visual image, art, creation, and poetry not as ends in themselves, but because they have the ability to enable a contemplative bridge into the mystery of God. This correlation is further defined and explored, with conclusions in Chapter 4.

This Chapter will now outline the developments made to the Being With course with the intent of enabling those with a tendency towards a Symbol-centred spirituality to experience a deeper engagement with faith exploration. Finally in this Chapter, I shall share the research methods used to ascertain the effectiveness of this approach to faith exploration.

Crossing Together's Being With Faith Exploration Course

The published Being With course consists of ten sessions, as follows: Meaning, Essence, Jesus, Church, Bible, Mission, Cross, Prayer, Suffering, and Resurrection. As the Crossing Together course had been devised as a response to participants seeking to learn

more about Jesus, and with an awareness of the group's preference for shorter courses,²¹⁸ the ten sessions were reduced to four, with an emphasis placed on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. (Participant handouts for all four sessions are contained in Appendix 4). The delivered course's four sessions were based on the published Being With course as follows, Session One: Meaning, Session Two: Jesus (a combination of the Being With Sessions on Essence and Jesus), Session Three: The Cross, Session Four: Resurrection. The content of the delivered course mirrored the published course, however this was communicated with an emphasis on the use of still visual images, video, symbolic activity, an encouragement to engage with creation, and an emphasis on participants actively pursuing a quiet time with God, as this approach was considered a more effective means of sharing the Christian faith with participants with a preference for Symbol-centred spirituality.

When considering the Roman Catholic exploration of what makes true art and including within this concept that which draws the viewer or listener towards God and expresses something of the wonder of our indescribable God, then I recognise the visual images utilised in the adapted Being With course as having the same intention and therefore being offered as true art, as their purpose was to lead the viewer towards God, with the intention of enabling something of our unfathomable God to be revealed. The context in which these visual images were utilised was to assist faith exploration, and while they may not have been originally created with this purpose in mind, they were put to this purpose and, to a greater or lesser degree, fulfilled this purpose.

²¹⁸ As recognised in discussions with Crossing Together's participants and identified in their engagement in previous arts and mental health and wellbeing courses.

While I am immensely thankful for what has been produced by others, I also consider that in this adapted Being With course, I am the artist, as I am inviting viewers of these visual images into a reinterpretation of what is. Using God-given creativity, imagination, and emotional investment, I identified specific images with the intention that they would enable participants, particularly those with a Symbol-centred spirituality, to have a deeper engagement with the course material. Doing so with an understanding that people with a Symbol-centred spirituality particularly benefit from visual images, not because these are in themselves repositories of knowledge or finite definitions, but because they function as metaphorical bridges leading to the other side, to the God who cannot be contained by them. The artistic creativity that I bring to the course is in identifying images with the intention that they both engage participants and then draw them into a deeper revelation of God as we explore faith together.

Research Methodology and Framework

As I am immersed within Crossing Together and the lead participant in the planning, advertising, delivery of the adapted Being With course, and conducting follow up interviews, the principal forms of research are ethnographic and autoethnographic. Before engaging with course material, participants were advised of the research element to the course and informed consent was sought and given (Appendix 1). Participants were invited to complete a Spiritual Styles questionnaire which had minor adaptations from a pre-existing questionnaire.²¹⁹ A second questionnaire was utilised pre-course to gauge a

²¹⁹ Joyce E. Bellous, David M Csinos, Denise A. Peltomaki, and Karen L. Bellous, *Spiritual Styles: Children: How we each make a difference*, V.3.1, (www.tallpines.ca, 2009).

baseline position of participants' sense of self and understanding of Jesus (see Appendix 2). This questionnaire, with an additional question asking participants whether they intend to follow up on anything following the course, was also completed post-course to gauge the effect that a Symbol emphasis had on the participants' engagement with the material.

Following the course, individual semi-structured interviews with seven representative participants were conducted (see Appendix 6). The semi-structured interview questions focused on the participant's experience of the course before engaging specifically with the use of visual images and creation and exploring participant response to this, thereafter, enquiring into any changes in the participants' life, and whether the course has influenced future intentions.

While the course was conducted and during subsequent interview, I observed participant interaction and engagement making fieldnotes, together with journaling my own reflections. These are incorporated as autoethnographic pieces informing the final project findings. I am aware that my participation in research and subsequent reporting is subjective and value laden as I am invested in Crossing Together and the lives of the participants. Furthermore, triangulation is practised through the shared leadership of the course with Alison Muir, who kept a diary of events and recorded her reflections and correlated this with my own notes, and where there was uncertainty regarding what could be inferred by a participant's response, enquiring with the participant into their intention.

Whilst it is an aim of the project that findings be shared with the wider Church to assist with the planting of new worshipping communities, it is recognised that both the setting and research are contextualised to the location and the sample size is small.

Consequently, the outcome of the research cannot be generalised, but rather illuminate the experience in one particular setting that may be of interest to others.²²⁰

²²⁰ John Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design, Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2007), 126.

CHAPTER 3

Introduction

The project is the development of the Being With faith exploration course to be image-rich and creation-centred with the intent of enabling deeper engagement by participants with a Symbol-centred spirituality, with the hypothesis that by making these developments, deeper engagement will occur.

The research methodology used is ethnographic and autoethnographic, utilising qualitative means of data collection through questionnaires and interviews. Part I of this chapter provides a project overview: specifying the setting, stating the components of the research, the choices made, and outlining the research methods employed. Part II outlines the project implementation, sharing an unexpected response to the Spiritual Styles Assessment and highlighting the developments made to the Being With course. The results of the research are reported in Part III; this section provides commentary on participant engagement with the Spiritual Styles Assessment and the adapted Being With course; it also reports the findings of the open-question survey, and post-course interviews, and references the pre-course and post-course quantitative survey. The findings, observations, and conclusions reached through conducting this research are reported in Chapter 4.

Due to the time constraints of the research window²²¹ and given the limited number of participants with Crossing Together, I was unable to run a control group to participate in the Being With course as published. I recognise a control group would have been

²²¹ To enable the potential of graduation in May 2024.

beneficial, as this would provide an indication of the varying levels of engagement experienced by participants of differing spiritual styles between the published and adapted course. As this was not an option, I made use of the following definition of the word deeper: “To become more intense or profound; to become greater in measure or degree,”²²² as a guide for considering participant engagement and responses measured during the pre-course and post-course open-question survey and post-course interviews, along with observations made by Alison Muir and me as lead participants. References to participants’ deeper engagement throughout this research paper are made in accordance with this definition, and the reason for choosing this approach to deeper engagement is reflected on further in Chapter 4.

Part I: Project Overview

My initial interest and research into the use of visual images in worship arose during the Doctor of Ministry class, “Reformed Theology and Worship” with Professor Angela Dienhart Hancock of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and the interest and research into acknowledging and appreciating God’s presence through creation was highlighted and explored during “Reformed Spirituality,” led by the Reverend Professor Susan Hardman Moore of Edinburgh University, and “Science and the Christian Faith,” led by Professor Ron Cole-Turner of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. Awareness of the four Spiritual Styles was raised through the promotion of intergenerational church by the Church of Scotland. The research and practical application of the Spiritual Styles approach

²²² *Oxford English Dictionary*, “Deepen.”

were explored at Crossing Together intergenerational church events. The qualitative research methodology and methods utilised in this project were identified during the class “Introduction to Research Methodology,” led by Doctor Katie Cross of the University of Aberdeen.

The Being With course was advertised as “a safe place to explore faith” to “discover your spiritual pathways” and explore “what’s the Christian faith really about?” A5 flyers were designed, professionally printed, and handed out to Crossing Together participants with an encouragement to come along and join in.²²³ Similar encouragement was also made on Facebook,²²⁴ where the aforesaid flyer was posted online, and by word of mouth. The Being With course immediately followed a six-week “Exploring Recovery” course offered by Crossing Together in conjunction with the North Ayrshire Wellbeing and Recovery College²²⁵ on Wednesday afternoons from 12.30-2.30pm. The 2.30pm end time was essential as children were required to be collected from school. The Exploring Recovery course made use of a discussive groupwork format with the presentation of materials in weekly workbooks that were colourful, used visual images to communicate the topic, and provided spaces for participants to note their own reflections and conclusions. I chose to continue this format for the adapted Being With course as it had engaged the group, and to maintain a sense of continuity. All eleven of the participants on the Exploring Recovery course continued onto the Being With course; there were no other

²²³ Figure 1.

²²⁴ Crossing Together, Being With faith exploration course flyer, accessed November 29, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=675274334689281&set=pcb.675274391355942>.

²²⁵ “Courses,” RAMH (Recovery Across Mental Health), North Ayrshire Wellbeing and Recovery College, accessed December 21, 2023, <https://ramh.org/north-ayrshire-wellbeing-recovery-college/courses/>.

participants. This was not unexpected as the existing group represented the Crossing Together participants who were available on that day and time, and also reflected the strong bond and sense of mutual support and openness that had built up within that group, encouraging them to travel on together into this new course. It is also recognised that an element of religious socialisation may have been occurring throughout the process of sustained interaction between Christian participants of Crossing Together new worshipping community and participants who were either Unchurched or Dechurched.

Of the eleven participants, seven were female and four were male. Five participants completed every session of the course, with the remainder completing three of the four sessions. Five of the participants self-identified as being Churched, two self-identified as being Dechurched, and four self-identified as being Unchurched.

The Being With course consisted of four weekly sessions delivered on consecutive weeks in October and November 2023. The first week of the course began with a broad introduction to the course and the research being conducted during the process. Each participant was presented with a consent form (Appendix 1) outlining the proposed scope of the research and requesting permission for their participation and responses to be anonymised and presented in the research. All forms were signed and returned, giving consent to be included. The first session included a pre-course quantitative survey to give an indication of the participants' sense of well-being and hope for the future, and open-question survey enquiring about and their understanding of Jesus (Appendix 2). The questions relating to self were presented as series of statements to which a Likert scale offered five possible responses, being: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree. The questions relating to Jesus provided an opportunity for

participants to give short written answers relating to their understanding of the person and purpose of Jesus, the cross, and the resurrection. The quantitative survey and open-question survey, with an additional question asking participants whether they intend to follow up on anything following the course, were also completed post-course to gauge changes in participants' responses between the first and final sessions of the course.

The opening session included the completion of the Spiritual Styles Assessment, adapted from an assessment designed by Bellous, Csinos, Peltomaki, and Karen L. Bellous²²⁶ who have produced two assessments, one for adults and another for children. The assessment employed was designed for children (with minor adaptations to allow for participants no longer attending school) and consisted of twenty-eight questions, offering a multiple choice of four answers to each question. My preference for the child assessment was due to my consideration that it offered more accessible concepts and language and contained fewer questions, thus making it more likely to be understood, engaged with, and able to retain participants' focus. Prior to the course, and in an exploration into the veracity of the Spiritual Styles Assessments, members of the Crossing Together Core Team completed both the adult and child versions, with both versions identifying the same dominant spiritual style in Core Team members. When the Core Team members considered the traits that the commentary on the assessment associated with their spiritual style,²²⁷ they considered these to be an accurate reflection of their dominant spirituality. It was for these reasons that the "Spiritual Styles: Children" assessment was utilised. The results of the Spiritual Styles Assessment were shared with participants during the second session,

²²⁶ Bellous, Csinos, Peltomaki, and Bellous, *Spiritual Styles: Children*.

²²⁷ Bellous, Csinos, and Peltomaki, *Spiritual Styles: Assessing*, 12.

and I used this information to gauge participants' engagement with the course according to their dominant spiritual style.

Seven participants were selected for a semi-structured post-course interview (Appendix 6). I had initially intended to interview four participants; however, during the research, I considered this to be an insufficient number to report any significant similarities or differences between individuals of a spiritual style, or differences between the various spiritual styles. Of the seven interviewed, five had completed the entire course, with two completing three of the four sessions. When selecting participants to interview, I first selected those who had attended all four full sessions, which involved two with Emotion-centred tendencies, one with a Symbol-centred tendency, and two with an Action-centred tendency. Of the further two selected, one had a Word-centred tendency and the other had a Symbol-centred tendency. Five of those selected for the post-course interview were female and two were male. Four self-identified as being Churched, two as Unchurched, and one as Dechurched. The post-course interviews were conducted in people's homes and at the Mission Centre in Bourtreehill, Irvine, throughout November 2023. Interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder, and following the interview recorded files were uploaded to the Microsoft Word transcribe function, where transcriptions were automatically generated. Clarification around key points was made by listening to the original recording and amending any inaccuracies in the generated transcription. The transcripts were analysed, and responses were coded highlighting key themes. These responses were then analysed alongside the participant's dominant spiritual styles.

Part II: Project Implementation

Part II opens by reporting an unexpected outcome from the Spiritual Styles Assessment and provides a step-by-step guide to the adaptations made to the Being With course for the purposes of enabling a deeper engagement for those with a dominant Symbol-centred spirituality.

Spiritual Styles Assessment

The eleven participants completed the adapted Spiritual Styles Assessment.²²⁸ The results of the Assessment were unexpected. As Symbol-centred activities represented the most frequently attended option in Crossing Together worship events, and eight of the eleven participants in attendance were regular attenders at these worship events with six of these regularly engaging with Symbol-centred activities, it was anticipated that most participants who attended the faith exploration course would have a tendency towards a Symbol-centred spirituality. However, the Spiritual Styles Assessment indicated that only two of the eleven participants had a Symbol-centred spirituality. The largest group represented were those with an Action-centred spirituality, representing five of eleven participants, three participants registered as Emotion-centred, and one participant as Word-centred, possible explanations for this unexpected outcome are explored in Chapter 4.

²²⁸ Bellous, Csinos, Peltomaki, and Bellous, *Spiritual Styles: Children*.

Adapted Being With Course

Sessions began with a time of gathering around food and a hot drink. After approximately thirty minutes, the session started with the lighting of a candle. This act was included following the recommendation to incorporate candles as a means of engaging with people with a dominant Symbol-centred spirituality²²⁹ and to remind us that “Jesus, light of the world is here.” The delivered course included an adaptation of the published course’s opening Wonderings as a means of leading into the session; the adaptations reflected an awareness of participants’ backgrounds and experiences. The Wonderings led into the subject for the session, which I presented in a short spoken introduction, followed by group discussion and a combination of still images, video, opportunities to engage in a symbolic action, creation themes, times for reflection, and further discussion. Each session closed with an encouragement for participants to continue their reflection on the course content over the following week and with the suggestion that participants “Be Still... Try and find time this week to be ‘present’ with God. Maybe... time without your phone, time surrounded by nature, a moment in quiet.” As the group convened for the beginning of the next session time was set aside to explore participant uptake of this encouragement and the resultant consequences. These elements were repeated in each session. The following section explains each session’s content, focusing on the unique elements of each week’s focus.

²²⁹ Farrant and Philip, *Being An Intergenerational Church*, 137.

Session i: Meaning

The purpose of the published Being With course session 1. is to portray “Christianity as liberation from the prison of the past and the fear of the future. Only in such a way can we genuinely live”²³⁰ and encourages participants to live in the love and safety of God’s present. The Wonderings for the published course for session one included, “I wonder if you’ve known what it feels like to be in prison?”²³¹ and with one of the participants having recently been held in prison, this was adapted to “I wonder if you know what it’s like to be trapped?” This led into a group discussion around the Being With course subject of forgiveness and how forgiving does not change the past, but it does bring freedom from the power of past mistakes and hurt to diminish us. Following this, participants were given the opportunity to take part in a symbolic action utilising individual trays filled with sand, with the suggestion that participants consider something in their life that they felt the need for forgiveness for. Participants were encouraged to consider what they seek forgiveness for, write or draw this in the sand with their finger, then pause and rub it away. Reflecting as they do on that feeling of guilt, and of the power of being released from what they seek forgiveness for, and by extension, on God, who seeks to wipe away any hurt and isolation that we feel and to restore us. The image on the advertising flyer and the front cover of each week’s material of the fingers of two hands forming a heart shape²³² was used to communicate the Being With course’s emphasis on everlasting life as eternal connection with God. Participants stood in a circle, forming a round of hearts between our

²³⁰ Wells and Hitchener, *Leaders’ Guide*, 15.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

²³² See Figure 1.

hands. It was recognised that one hand on its own did not form a heart; it took two hands to make that connection. Thereafter, two participants were asked to break the circle, and I related this to a sense of isolation. The circle was then restored, and this was related to a sense of being united with one another, and also with God. The session also contained a meditative exercise on the theme of letting go of hurts and frustrations and being open to love; however, due to time constraints, participants were encouraged to try this in their own time. The first session closed by emphasising the Being With course's insistence that having been freed from the power of past guilt and having hope for the future, we are now able to live with God in the present. This was illustrated with a video clip from *Kung Fu Panda* featuring the quote, "Yesterday is history, tomorrow a mystery, but today is a gift; that's why it's called the present."²³³ As a takeaway, participants were given a card with the text, "God Says, '*participant's handwritten name inserted here*' I have loved you with a love that lasts forever. I have kept on loving you with a kindness that never fails. The Bible: Jeremiah 31:3" and an encouragement to affix this to their mirror and contemplate this as they looked upon their own reflection.

Session ii: Jesus

The adapted Being With course session 2 contained aspects of the published course sessions 2. Essence, and 3. Jesus. The published course relates that the purpose of the session on Essence is to enable participants to consider the difference between the essence of God, which is eternal, and existence, which is what we know, and consider that God chose to enter into our existence as Jesus Christ, so that God could be with us, and because

²³³ Kung Fu Panda, "Today is a Gift," directed by John Stevenson and Mark Osborne, YouTube video 1:58, accessed October 10, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BwqSraJpqfs>.

of this we can now be eternally in God's essence.²³⁴ The session on Jesus recognised three C's in his life, Jesus creating a new **Community** of disciples and followers, his ministry and mission to the **Crowd**, and his **Challenge** to the religious leaders and those who sought to oppress the poor. The course then explored what it is to be a disciple in connection to our own Crossing Together community, the wider crowd among whom we live, and our challenge to those who seek to oppress today.

As participants gathered before the session, the book "Finding Jesus"²³⁵ was on the table. Finding Jesus is a book similar in style to the "Where's Wally,"²³⁶ book series, and its purpose in being there was a light-hearted introduction expressing that for much of Jesus life he did not stand out, but rather was one of the crowd, and also that as Jesus said, he would be with us always,²³⁷ so Jesus is also in the midst of our everyday. This opening led into a focus central to the theme of Being With: the existence of Jesus in the ordinary life lived among the crowd for thirty years in Nazareth, followed by growing a community and his ministry to the crowd for three years in Galilee, and finally his challenging the religious authorities, facing their and the crowd's wrath in his last week in Jerusalem. This focus was communicated using thirteen pictures scattered across the table, depicting visual images that may be associated with Jesus. The pictures followed the pattern of Being With and represented Jesus as part of the Community, the Crowd, and Challenging unjust authority. The pictures are contained in Appendix 5 and relate to Jesus' life as follows:

²³⁴ Wells and Hitchener, *Leaders' Guide*, 27.

²³⁵ Winston Rowntree, *Finding Jesus* (London: Square Peg, 2014).

²³⁶ Martin Hanford, *Where's Wally* (London: Walker Books).

²³⁷ Matthew 28:20.

Community

Helping Hands
Making a New Family
Leader and Teacher

Crowd

Homeless
Refugee
Crowded Street

Challenging Unjust Authority

Cross
Freedom
Against the Oppressor

The images also represented two aspects of Jesus: the essence of Jesus, being the transcendent God, expressed in visual images of:

Essence

Trinity
Bread and Wine
Resurrection

And of the existence of God with us in the Incarnation expressed in visual images of:

Existence

Christmas Manger
Crowded Street
Cross

The visual images used in this session are publicly available; however, due to copyright, not all are available for reproduction. The visual image used to depict Jesus as a Refugee, was downloaded from Kelly Latimore Icons²³⁸ and used for both the quality of the image

²³⁸ Kelly Latimer, "The Holy Family- A Stranger and You Welcomed Me," accessed January 3, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1028038681779711&set=pb.100037207672982.-2207520000>.

to convey the message and for its icon-like style. The visual images used to depict Jesus as Leader and Teacher, and Cross, are available for teaching purposes on the Free Bible Images website.²³⁹ The remainder are accessible without restriction. Two copies of each of the thirteen pictures were made available, and participants were asked to choose one image that expressed Jesus to them and then share with the group why they had chosen that image. As this conversation took place, I took the opportunity to share different aspects of Jesus, filling in any identified gaps in the course material where pictures had not been selected. The group then reflected on where Crossing Together was called into community, where we can help the crowd who are isolated and struggling, and where we can challenge unjust authority to help shape a fairer, more equitable place for all, with the understanding that maintaining all three in balance keeps Crossing Together healthy, walking with Jesus and our neighbour. Participants were encouraged to take the picture that they had chosen away with them as a reminder of the session.

Session iii: The Cross

The published course gives the purpose of session 7. The Cross, as being to enable participants to recognise that what happened at the cross as “the epicentre of the Christian faith, and our very definition of love.”²⁴⁰ Where for a moment, in a cry of abandonment “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me”²⁴¹ Jesus is separated from the Father, with

²³⁹ “The Word in Pictures,” Free Bible Images, accessed October 10, 2023, <https://www.freebibleimages.org/>.

²⁴⁰ Wells and Hitchener, *Leaders’ Guide*, 69.

²⁴¹ Matthew 26:46.

the Father choosing to lose the Son and the Son choosing to lose the Father, all so that God can be with us in Jesus.²⁴²

The session started with the previously lit candle being extinguished as a symbolic act to describe Jesus, light of the world, dying on the cross. The theme of the cross was first explored using the animated video story of the “Three Trees”²⁴³ to reinforce the previous session’s themes of the existence of Jesus found in his Incarnation, life, and death. The visual images of the Christmas Manger and the Cross were shared again to reinforce the Being With theme of Jesus being present with us through every aspect of life and death. The visual image of Against the Oppressor was used to explain that the religious authority Jesus had challenged now conspired to have Jesus arrested and killed. Visual images of the Crowded Street and Leader and Teacher from the previous week were presented to represent the crowds and the friends of Jesus turning against him, and finally, the image of the Trinity from the previous week was depicted as now torn into pieces (Appendix 5), conveying the Being With course emphasis of the utter abandonment sensed by Jesus, who at the time of his death was separated from the rest of the Trinity, and that God wilfully broke God’s self in order to be with us in life and also in death.

The image of the hearts formed by two hands was again utilised, with a break in the heart expressing the brokenness of the Trinity and the perceived sense of isolation felt there. Finally, a selection of stones were laid out on the table and a driftwood cross set up in the room. Participants were encouraged to consider their own cry of abandonment,

²⁴² Wells and Hitchener, *Leaders’ Guide*, 69.

²⁴³ “The Three Trees,” YouTube video, accessed October 10, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5qRzTOpOnk>.

remembering a time when they too had felt isolated, ponder these feelings, reflect that Jesus also felt them with us, and trust that God wills to carry our burdens so we no longer have to. Participants were each given a small wooden holding cross to take away at the end of the session.

Session iv: Resurrection

Session four did not proceed as anticipated. This presented the most complex session to translate into a Symbol-centred approach. The published session on the Resurrection leads participants on a journey through Creation, Exodus, Covenant, Christmas, Good Friday, the Last Day, culminating in what the course identifies as the best day; being the day of the Resurrection, and leads participants through the Bible, recognising the significance of each one of these events in the story of God being with us. It was my intention to walk participants through this, visiting the local parkland adjacent to the church building and using elements of the environment to uncover and share the biblical narrative (the proposed course material for this plan is found in Appendix 4). However, the limited mobility of three of the participants and inclement weather conditions caused this session to be conducted indoors, with visual images of creation and elements of nature being brought into the building.²⁴⁴

With an understanding that awe in relation to creation is experienced in both immensity and the intricacy, an attempt was made to convey the wonder of the vastness of creation through a video of recent discoveries made by the James Webb telescope,²⁴⁵ and

²⁴⁴ Csinos, "The Spiritual Styles of Children," 22:42.

²⁴⁵ Space.com, "Wow! James Webb Space Telescope delivers breathtaking view of Rho Ophiuchi for anniversary - 4K," accessed January 3, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OatRyUZQJ3k&t=6s>.

the intricacy of creation by passing a mushroom around the group to explore the fine design of the gills on the underside. The story of Israel's Exodus from Egypt was told by one of the participants bringing along his pet rabbit, which would readily escape if the opportunity arose, relating to the escape of the people of Israel from Egypt. The giving of the Covenant to Moses was expressed through a borrowed ant farm, emphasising ants work together with social structure and a unified purpose, in a way similar to the Covenant that brought structure and a unified purpose to Israel's community. The Incarnation of Jesus was told through two babies who were with us throughout the course. Good Friday was referenced through a pile of decaying leaves brought into the room to talk about death, but also the new life that arises in Spring from the decaying compost of the leaves. And the Last Day, the day of the resurrection of the dead, was told with reference to yearnings expressed by course participants to be reunited with loved ones in heaven. The story of Jesus' Resurrection was told through a loaf of bread that had been baking throughout the final session, as had been suggested by Csinos as a means of engaging people with a tendency towards a Symbol-centred spirituality.²⁴⁶ The bread rising was given as an analogy for Jesus rising to new life, and the session closed with an agape meal of bread, broken and passed around, and blackcurrant juice shared as we remembered Jesus gathering community around the meal and the instruction for his followers to continue to break bread and drink wine in remembrance of him. I decided that while it would have been permissible to share the sacrament of Communion this may have imposed on participants who were not comfortable doing so. Participants were given a small token of "Jars of Treasure,"

²⁴⁶ Csinos, *Children's Ministry That Fits*, 161.

consisting of small, coloured plastic “jewels” in a miniature corked jar with a label attached, “You are God’s Treasure” to take away with them.

Part III: Project Results

Part III provides analysis of the Spiritual Styles Assessment, evaluation of the adapted Being With course through autoethnographic reflection, results from the pre-course and post-course open-question surveys, and findings from the post-course qualitative interviews. The results of this research will serve as the base from which the rest of the paper will build, highlighting the main findings and observations identified in the data, how effective the project was in answering the research question, and what this revealed about developing a course intended to enable deeper engagement for people with a tendency towards a Symbol-centred spirituality.

Report and Analysis of the Spiritual Styles Assessment

One participant, Iona, was found to have a dominant Word-centred spirituality, Iona is Churched and frequently attends a Church of Scotland congregation in Irvine, supplementing this with participation in other independent congregations. Three participants; Adele, Gail, and Vanessa were found to have a dominant Emotion-centred spirituality; both Adele and Vanessa are Unchurched, and Gail is Dechurched. Two participants were found to have a dominant Symbol-centred spirituality; they are Hazel and Tom. Both are churched and frequently attend a Church of Scotland congregation in Irvine. Five participants were found to have a dominant Action-centred spirituality; these

were Elizabeth and Andy who are both Unchurched, David who is Dechurched, and Ollie and Amanda who are Churched. Ollie has only recently reengaged with a church, and Amanda took part in the course because she decided it was the right time in her life to join the church (Amanda is in her seventies) and was completing the course as part of the joining process. A pictorial representation of the composition of each participant's spiritual styles can be found in Appendix 3.

The Spiritual Styles Assessment contained twenty-eight questions, offering the option to select one of the four options offered for each question. However, there were a small but significant number of occasions when participants did not choose one of the multiple-choice answers provided, instead choosing to add an additional response. Out of a total of 308 questions, there were only fourteen alternative answers given; six of these alternative answers were with regards to schoolwork, reflecting participants' struggles and disregard for schoolwork. Of note is Tom's (Symbol-centred) response, "I hated schoolwork." Another set of questions to elicit alternative responses from participants were those relating to God and prayer. Both Vanessa (Emotion-centred), and Andy (Action-centred) did not select from the available options, with Andy responding to a question on prayer, writing, "I don't pray," and Vanessa writing, "I don't really pray." Vanessa also responded to a question that asked, "I feel close to God when I..." with the words "I don't." These responses from two Unchurched participants highlight that the original intended target group for the Spiritual Style Assessments are people who believe in a god and that the Spiritual Styles Assessment would benefit from further adaptation for use with participants who are not theists. However, it is also of interest that the other two Unchurched participants, Elizabeth (Action-centred) and Adele (Emotion-centred) did

select one of the four available options provided for each of these questions regarding God and prayer.

The Adapted Being With Course

In this section, I will examine the course on a session-by-session basis using personal reflection and field notes made immediately following each session and evaluated alongside the field notes taken by Alison, the other lead participant. It was noted throughout all sessions that Tom and Hazel, both participants with a tendency towards a Symbol-centred spirituality, were often quieter in group discussions than the other spiritual styles present. I relate this to the contemplative nature generally associated with a Symbol-centred spiritual style.

Session i: Meaning

Ten participants took part in the first session, with one participant, Gail (Emotion-centred), giving apologies and expressing her intention to participate in the remainder of the course. There was a comfortable and natural feel to the group, who by this time knew each other well. I am indebted to Alison, the co-lead participant, whose enthusiasm was able to keep the group buoyant as participants completed the pre-course forms. One participant, Tom (Symbol-centred) has impaired vision, and Alison assisted him to read but not to answer the questions. First, the consent form was explained, completed, and returned by all participants, giving their permission for their involvement to be anonymised and reported in the research. This was followed by the pre-course questionnaire (Appendix 2) which included both the quantitative survey and open-question survey enquiring regarding the participants knowledge of Jesus. The quantitative survey was found to be

overly taxing for participants who were confused by the variations in the manner in which questions were presented; for some questions, an improvement would be represented by selecting an answer with a higher position on the Likert scale, and for other questions, an improvement would be registered by selecting a lower position on the Likert scale. Several of the group also found completing the Spiritual Styles Assessment to be challenging, including Ollie (Action-centred) as he expressed that he was experiencing an overload of paperwork, and others due to the nature of the questions, as reported in the preceding section. On reflection the pre-course paperwork was burdensome and would have benefited from being reduced. Insights gained from this process are shared in Chapter 4.

The course opened with a light-hearted visual image of a cat with a facial expression as if it is daunted, with the accompanying text, “That moment when... you realise you sent a text message to the wrong person.” The participants warmed to this, with several recalling stories of times when they had done the same, expressing guilt and shame, with one participant saying that after doing so they “wished the ground would swallow me up” and others giving verbal and non-verbal signs of general agreement. Seven participants took part in the symbolic action of the sand-filled trays as a way of exploring forgiveness. The three who did not engage with the sand were Vanessa (Emotion-centred), who was occupied feeding her child, Andy (Action-centred) and David (Action-centred). Conversation was muted following this exercise; however, the time taken, and concentration shown suggested those who had engaged appreciated doing so. One participant with an Emotion-centred tendency shared that she found the exercise difficult as a previous struggle with cancer had made it tough to leave the past behind. The use of the symbolic action image of the fingers of two hands forming a heart shape was one that

participants readily warmed to and appeared to enjoy participating in, with positive comments regarding the acting out of this assisting in understanding the theme of forgiveness and reconciliation. The video from *Kung Fu Panda*²⁴⁷ clearly engaged participants in the concept of living in the present. As the session closed participants were made aware of the nature-focused poem “Geese” contained in the handout. During this conversation, Hazel (Symbol-centred), commented that she had recently joined a poetry group and was really enjoying the experience. Following this session three participants, David (Action-centred), Adele, and Elizabeth (both Emotion-centred) expressed their appreciation of the course to Alison on Facebook Messenger.

Session ii: Jesus

Seven participants attended the second session. Andy (Action-centred) was unwell, Elizabeth (Action-centred) had a child at home who was unwell, Ollie (Action-centred) was assisting in packing containers for a Christmas charity appeal, and Iona (Word-centred) had another appointment to attend. Gail (Emotion-centred) attended this as her first session and completed the pre-course questionnaires and paperwork, including the consent form giving permission for her involvement to be anonymised and used in research. The main element of the session emphasised that for most of Jesus’ life, he was one of the crowd, and also that he is still among us in the ordinariness of life today. Participants were asked whether they had sought out time to “Be still.” This led Hazel (Symbol-centred) to talk about her experience of a solar eclipse on Merseyside, where there was a hush across the countryside and even the birds went quiet, reflecting on this as

²⁴⁷ *Kung Fu Panda*, 1:58.

“such a beautiful experience of calm.” David (Action-centred) also reflected that he had found the experience of being present to be peaceful, and he had then used the opportunity to order his thoughts. There were no other reports of participants taking the opportunity to “Be Still,” with Vanessa (Emotion-centred) commenting that it is difficult to find time to do so amidst the busyness of family life.

The participants engaged with the Wonderings with a consistent reply to “I wonder where you find most meaning in life?” as being found in family. While the Churched participants were content to consider themselves as “Jesus’ people,” others were not so, with Vanessa (Emotion-centred) commenting that she would never have thought of herself as a Jesus person and that her impression of the Church was boring and out-of-touch with reality. The thirteen photographs depicting something of the nature of Jesus and different aspects of his life were shared across the table, and participants were invited to view them and then pick one or more that spoke most to them about Jesus. Tom (Symbol-centred) chose “Freedom” and “Against the Oppressor” but did not remain for the rest of this conversation, preferring to make a coffee. Hazel (Symbol-centred) chose “Risen,” commenting that she chose it because “I think that the greatest thing is that Jesus rose again; Jesus will come back again.” Vanessa (Emotion-centred) selected two pictures of Jesus as “Risen” and “Making a New Family,” reporting that her experience of participating in Crossing Together was like joining a new family. She related that she had never intended having anything to do with a church as she wasn’t a Jesus person but had come into Crossing Together’s “New 2 Me” clothes bank for a winter jacket to cover her maternity bump and been welcomed, and since then she has come to know Crossing Together as family. Adele (Emotion-centred) also selected “Making a New Family” citing

similar experiences of family with Crossing Together. Gail (Emotion-centred) selected “Helping Hands” because she reported, that is what Jesus had. Amanda (Action-centred) selected “Homeless” reporting that Jesus wants us to help people who are homeless and vulnerable, and later in a one-to-one conversation with me, disclosing that for a period she too had been homeless, and the picture resonated deeply. David (Action-centred) chose “Leader and Teacher” and “One of Us” as they spoke of the person of Jesus, and in this way, he could recognise Jesus was like him. The session closed with participants considering where Crossing Together is engaging with the Community, Crowd, and Challenging Authority; of significance to participants was the regular involvement of the charity Christians Against Poverty with Crossing Together. Participants were invited to take the picture(s) they had selected home with them; it was noted that Tom (Symbol-centred) chose not to do so.

Session iii: The Cross

Eleven participants attended the third session, although Tom (Symbol-centred) was required to leave after lunch for another appointment. Before leaving, Tom expressed, “I don’t like groups, but I like this one.” Prior to the session starting, the candle signifying “Jesus, light of the world” which was already lit, was blown out to signify Jesus’ death. I found extinguishing the candle to be an upsetting action, for while I considered it to be a potent image for the death of Jesus on the cross, it did not sit easily with me to extinguish the light that each previous week we had lit to celebrate his presence. As we entered the session, Elizabeth (Action-centred) shared that she had sat with her daughter for a quiet time and really valued the moment together. Iona (Word-centred) also advised that she

starts every day with God, reading her Bible and “Daily Bread” Bible reading notes.²⁴⁸ Amanda (Action-centred) offered to the group the impact that the previous week’s session had on her, commenting, “I’ve been smiling ever since last week.” The Wondering “What it’s like when friends fall out?” led to beneficial conversations on both the value of friendship and the lengths participants go to in order to avoid bumping into former friends in the supermarket. This sense of awkwardness and problem of broken relationships was carried into this session, where the focus was on our awkwardness with God caused by our isolation from God and the brokenness in the relationship of the Trinity caused by Jesus’ death on the cross. The “Three Trees”²⁴⁹ video particularly engaged Elizabeth (Action-centred) and Adele (Emotion-centred) who were relating the trees to one another and inviting Vanessa (Emotion-centred) to be the third tree. This is of note as the three are Unchurched friends, with two engaging the third one in a story that was told to explain something about Christianity. Participants readily engaged with the symbolic activity of forming hearts with fingers and then breaking them as a visual representation of broken relationships in our own lives and in God’s person.

The activity “Laying Down Your Let Downs” invited participants to choose a stone and, once reflecting as directed, lay that stone at the foot of the cross. All the participants took part in this exercise, Andy (Action-centred) who had participated in the activities but had not spoken much during the previous weeks, expressed his appreciation for this

²⁴⁸ “Our Daily Bread,” Our Daily Bread Publishing, accessed January 9, 2024, <https://ourdailybreadpublishing.org.uk>.

²⁴⁹ “The Three Trees,” YouTube video, accessed October 10, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5qRzTOPonk>.

session. Elizabeth (Action-centred) drew the Crossing Together cross logo on her stone before laying it at the foot of the cross. (Figure 3.)



Figure 3. Stone with Crossing Together logo at the base of the cross

After the session, and as an aside to the planned led material, I was compelled to relight the extinguished candle. I was determined beforehand not to, but experienced such an overwhelming need within to finish on a note of hope for me and the participants that even in the darkest hour, God still finds a way through, and the light of Jesus remains with us.

Session iv: Resurrection

Ten participants took part in the final session, with Andy (Action-centred) unable to attend due to another appointment. Before the session, I had prepared a bread-making machine in the room to bake a loaf to coincide with the Resurrection story and provide a

symbolic act for the closing of the course. The main session started later than expected as Ollie (Action-centred) had been held up packing containers, which led to my having a rushed sense and experience of the session. Attempting to focus on seven distinct but related elements within the Biblical narrative and Christian hope all during the one session felt forced, and consequently, I perceived the usual sense of easy, flowing discussion was missing.

The opening focus on Creation attempted to evoke a sense of awe, however the video of the cosmos appeared not to create a sense of awe (as was also the findings of Csinos on showing project images of creation on a screen),²⁵⁰ although it did lead David (Action-centred) to relate a story of seeing the arm of the Milky Way recently on a clear night and being held in wonder of this. The mushroom was passed around the group to encourage participants to consider a sense of awe in the fine detail of the gills on the underside of the head, this was met with a general surprise by Elizabeth (Action-centred), but not a significant reaction of wonder. Tom (Symbol-centred) brought along his pet rabbit to help to tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt, but I this felt this had the impact of a misconstrued “Show and Tell” talk where the rabbit became the focus of attention, rather than the point being made through it. The ant farm caused a similar reaction among participants and did not appear to assist in the retelling of God’s giving of the Covenant to unite Israel, although we did learn more from participants about the life and caste system of ants. The creation-based prop that appeared most effective were the two babies who were with us throughout the course, who by their presence assisted to depict the

²⁵⁰ Csinos, *Children’s Ministry That Fits*, 81.

Incarnation. Both Elizabeth (Action-centred) and Adele (Emotion-centred) readily engaged with the total dependency and love that a baby had and gave, as we reflected on the wonder of God being born as a baby. The Good Friday related pile of decaying leaves did not appear to engage participants, although the Last Day hope of meeting with loved ones who have died, led to an expressed sense of hope from Adele (Emotion-centred) that she would meet again with her aunt and uncle, who had recently died. The final focus on the day of Resurrection expressed through the loaf of bread that had been baking and rising throughout the session again did not appear to capture imagination or stimulate discussion. The course culminated in an agape meal, where I broke the bread and related this to the Last Supper that Jesus shared with the disciples. I then served the group with the bread asking each participant to break of a piece to eat, this was accompanied with blackcurrant juice served in plastic cups and the retelling of the events of the Last Supper.

The session and course closed with participants completing the post-course questionnaire, which is a repeat of the pre-course questionnaire with one additional question enquiring, “Now that you have completed the course, is there anything you would like to do to follow up on this?” Again, Tom (Symbol-centred) appreciated Alison’s assistance in reading, but not answering the questions.

In this section I have described the outcomes of the course from the perspective of lead participant and observer. In the following section, I shall present the results from the pre-course and post-course open-question survey, noting any changes in participant response occurring as a consequence of completing the course, and comment on use of the quantitative survey in this setting. In this section, particular focus will be given to the two

participants with a dominant Symbol-centred spirituality, noting whether the changes made in the adapted Being With course enabled them to experience a deeper engagement.

Results from the Open-Question Survey

The first session included a pre-course open-question survey (Appendix 2) giving participants an opportunity to give short written answers relating to their understanding of Jesus: who he was, what his purpose was, the story of the cross, and his rising from the dead. This questionnaire was also completed post-course to gauge whether the adapted course has facilitated participants' engagement with the material. The post-course questionnaire contained an additional question asking participants whether they intended to follow up on anything after the course.

The following section includes each response made by Tom and Hazel (both Symbol-centred) to the open-question survey. This section also includes responses of note from other participants. Readers will recognise similarities between some of the participant responses in their pre-course and post-course answers; participants did not have their pre-course questionnaire to hand when completing the post-course questionnaire.

Participants were asked, **“What is your understanding about who Jesus was?** Of significance were Tom's (Symbol-centred) replies; to the pre-course questionnaire he stated, “Carpenter, came into the world to make it a better place. Had people around him and made a difference even in death,” and his post-course response, “The guy who changed everything.” In this statement, it may be inferred that the course has enabled a deeper engagement with the material, enabling Tom to gain a wider recognition of the universal

scope of Jesus. Hazel (Symbol-centred) however, did not show the same deeper engagement in response to this question; she noted in her first response, “Jesus was God’s Son,” and repeated a variation of this in the second with “Jesus is the Son of God, born to the virgin Mary.” Gail (Emotion-centred) also reflected elements of having a deep engagement with the course in her response, moving from a pre-course response of “Lay preacher, the Son of God” to a post-course response that recognised the struggles in Jesus’ life: “He challenged people and because of that he died.” Elizabeth (Action-centred) also showed a movement in her understanding; her pre-course response was “Only what I learned at school, that he was God’s Son, Saviour, and other Bible stories I heard.” And her post-course response read very similarly, “Jesus was the Son of God, and he was born to save us. He died and came back to life.” Of note, however, is the post-course response no longer includes the words “Only what I learned at school” and now includes “he died and came back to life.” In a subsequent conversation for the purposes of triangulation, Elizabeth affirmed the prior school learning for herself, stating that this was something that she now believed, which is evidence of a deeper engagement.

Participants were asked, “**What is your own understanding of the purpose of Jesus?**” Again, Tom (Symbol-centred) gave an answer to his post-course questionnaire, showing an increase in his awareness of the universal scope and purpose of Jesus. Tom’s pre-course response stated, “Lived a hard life. Brought peace and support,” and post-course, “Came to change life for everyone.” Hazel (Symbol-centred) responded pre-course, “Jesus was sent to save the world, to die for us and to rise again,” and a similar response post-course, “He was sent by God the Father to save the world.” The sessions covering the struggles against the injustice of the oppressor were again featured in Gail’s

(Emotion-centred) responses; from pre-course, “To get followers to follow him,” to her post-course response, “To challenge bad people and to lift up the good.”

Participants were asked, **“What is your own understanding of the story of the cross where Jesus died?”** Tom (Symbol-centred) considered in his pre-course questionnaire that Jesus, “Had to go through it to make the world a better place,” revising this post-course to “He didn’t want to, but it was his role to die, to take the pain of the world on his shoulders,” again showing that he was deeply engaged with the course. Hazel (Symbol-centred) gave a pre-course response as “Jesus was crucified on the cross, died and rose again” however, an oversight (as confirmed through triangulation) led her to leave this section uncompleted post-course. Elizabeth (Action-centred) showed clear engagement with the Being With emphasis found in the course material, pre-course replying, “That Jesus died to save us,” and post-course replying, “He died so that everyone could be brought together again, and we can be with God and our loved ones,” this reply shows a deep engagement with the course. Gail, (Emotion-centred) asked in her pre-course response, “I don’t understand why they had to kill him, he was a peaceful man,” and answered herself in the post-course response, “To save everyone,” showing that as a consequence of participating in the course Gail had come to a deeper understanding of the significance of Jesus’ death.

Participants were asked, **“What is your own understanding of the story of Jesus rising from the dead?”** Tom (Symbol-centred) responded pre-course, “Sins were taken away when he rose. New beginnings,” and again showing a deep engagement and developing understanding of the universal change brought about by Jesus’ resurrection, with a post-course reply, “It was to show everyone that there was new life ahead.” Hazel

(Symbol-centred) again succinctly mirrored the essence of her pre-course response to her post-course response, with “He rose again on the third day. He will return again although we don’t know exactly when,” to “He rose from the dead to return again – date of his return unknown.” The theme of Being With featured in the answers of both Elizabeth (Action-centred) and Gail (Emotion-centred), with Elizabeth replying pre-course, “That Jesus was resurrected,” and post-course, “Miracles can happen. Things are possible. Bring people back together again.” Again, showing her deep engagement with the course content and her openness to unexpected possibilities. And Gail, pre-course, “That people would believe in what he said,” and again showing a deep engagement, writing post-course, “To put everything back together again.” And David (Action-centred) gave some indication on why he had joined the course in his pre-course response, “Not sure. Need help with this answer!” and continued to have unanswered questions at the close of the course, with a post-course response of “Still not sure.”

The post-course open-question survey contained the additional question, “**Now that you have completed the course is there anything you would like to do to follow up on this?**” Four participants did not answer this question. Of the six that did, Tom (Symbol-centred) recorded, “No ideas, but up for more courses,” and Hazel (Symbol-centred), “Would like to continue with Jesus works and how we can adapt his life to present day events.” Gail (Emotion-centred) responded that she would “Keep coming to Crossing Together.” Amanda (Action-centred) affirmed what she had set out to do: “Join the church.” Vanessa (Emotion-centred) noted, “I’m not sure. I have a million questions on things that I am unsure of. I am not 100% certain on all aspects of God/Jesus and the story

we have been told.” and Adele (Emotion-centred) replied in a way that expressed deep and life-changing engagement, “Myself and (*child’s name*) being baptised in the sea.”

Pre-Course and Post-Course Quantitative Survey

The purpose of the pre-course quantitative survey was to gauge participants’ sense of well-being and hope for the future, to then compare with the responses to the same questions asked post-course for the purposes of gauging the impact the course had on participants’ views of their personal situations. This exercise provided me with an indication of how participants were feeling at that time, and may also have been of value in assisting participants consider their current circumstances. However, the population sizes of each sample were small. Word had a population of one; Emotion a population of three; Symbol a population of two; and Action a population of three²⁵¹ and with such limited sample sizes, the information gathered was interesting but not sufficient in statistical power to build research outcomes around. Should I utilise quantitative research methods again I shall endeavour to ensure that the sample size is sufficient to produce results that have statistical power.

In this section, I have presented the results of the open-question survey, noting changes in participant responses as a consequence of completing the course, and referred to the quantitative survey highlighting the low statistical power associated with this. I shall now present the qualitative results from the one-to-one semi-structured interviews conducted post-course.

²⁵¹ Andy (Action-centred) was not present for Session 4 and did not complete the post-course quantitative questionnaire, and thus reduced the Action-centred population to three.

Post-Course Interviews

Seven participants were selected for a semi-structured post-course interview (Appendix 7). This sample size was chosen to allow for comparison between differing spiritual style tendencies: Iona (Word-centred), Vanessa and Adele (Emotion-centred), Hazel and Tom (Symbol-centred), and David and Amanda (Action-centred). Of the seven interviewed, Vanessa, Adele, Hazel, and David completed the entire course, with Iona and Tom completing three of the four sessions. Four of the interviewees were Churched, two were Unchurched, and one was Dechurched. In this section, I shall again focus on the responses made by Hazel and Tom, the two participants with dominant Symbol-centred tendencies, along with other responses of note.

Interviewees were first asked, **“Why did you do the course?”** Both Hazel and Tom (Symbol-centred) related to the importance of belonging, with Hazel responding, “I’m very interested in being part of the group up here, I just love it.” and Tom, “At Crossing Together I feel part of the family, and I feel that I could trust the people that were doing it... and try to understand my faith a bit more.” Adele (Emotion-centred) reflected on the recent death of her aunt and uncle, stating that an important question for her was whether they were “in a safe place; are they being looked after?” and completing her statement with, “Yeah, I was looking for some, not closure I would say, but something to fulfil.”

The validity of the Spiritual Styles Assessment remained an area of concern for me, and the second question focused on the perceptions of interviewees regarding their results. Interviewees were asked, **“Did you find your Spiritual pathways assessment to be an accurate description of yourself? Why/why not?”** I was reassured to learn that each of the interviewees found the Spiritual Style Assessment to be an accurate reflection of

themselves. Tom (Symbol-centred) asked first for a resume of key words to describe a Symbol-centred style. When I reached the word “Solitary” he replied, “Yeah, because I do tend to spend a lot of time on my own.” Again, with the word “Mystical” he laughed and reported that “things like Kennedy’s assassination and all these conspiracy theories, I don’t believe in them, but I find them fascinating.” Hazel (Symbol-centred) did not appreciate the word “Mystical,” stating, “Mystical I’m not.” However, she did associate with the Symbol-centred spiritual type in general, stating, “I was the symbol one; I think it fitted, along with another area, I think it was emotion” (which is her secondary style), going on, “Doing the questionnaire and seeing the results was really very enlightening... I felt it was terribly accurate, really. You know, it was amazing.” Adele and Vanessa (both Emotion-centred) respectively, responded, “Emotional. Yeah, that’s definitely me,” and “I was emotion, and it was spot on; anything other than emotion would not have been right!” Amanda (Action-centred) considered, “Everything was correct, I think when I was younger, things had to be done urgently, but now not so much.” And David (Action-centred) replied, “Bingo. You’ve got me correct. You know, just by asking those questions.”

Participants were asked “**How useful did you find the wonderings at the start of each session?**” This question did not receive any replies of consequence or highlight differentiation between the spiritual styles, and consequently, they are not reported here.

The following set of questions asked whether the course had assisted in enabling interviewees to understand more about Jesus and of themselves. The interviewees were asked, “**Did the course help you to understand more about Jesus? Tell me more?**” Hazel (Symbol-centred) replied, “Yes, it did; I think it confirmed a lot of what I felt about

Jesus in the first place. I wish I had done this earlier on my Christian journey.” And Tom (Symbol-centred) also considered that he had learned more about Jesus, contemplating,

it makes me think of what Jesus was thinking, and like when did he realise who he was? And the thoughts that he must have been going through leading up to his crucifixion, the fear he might have had. As well as the joy once he knows it's done and the thoughts that he would have had then. How scary it must have been for him, but joyful at the same time.

And while Tom was reticent to participate in group discussions, it is clear from this response that Tom had a deep engagement with the content of the course. It is also worth noting that Tom's response is not regarding an increase in knowledge but rather that he empathises with Jesus; empathy is a spiritual trait associated with Emotion (his secondary spiritual style) and highlights the way the course materials assisted him enter into the story of Jesus. Iona (Word-centred) did not find the course so useful, stating, “I've got Jesus in my life; I do know what it's all about.” However, Adele (Emotion-centred) did learn more about Jesus, “that he looked after everybody,” and in direct relation to her recently deceased aunt and uncle, “I like to think that they are at peace now.” David (Action-centred) found the course useful because “it touched on parts of his (Jesus) life,” and following the course he continued investigation into the resurrection, stating, “I actually ended up going on Google and trying to learn what Google would come up with the answer and tell me.”

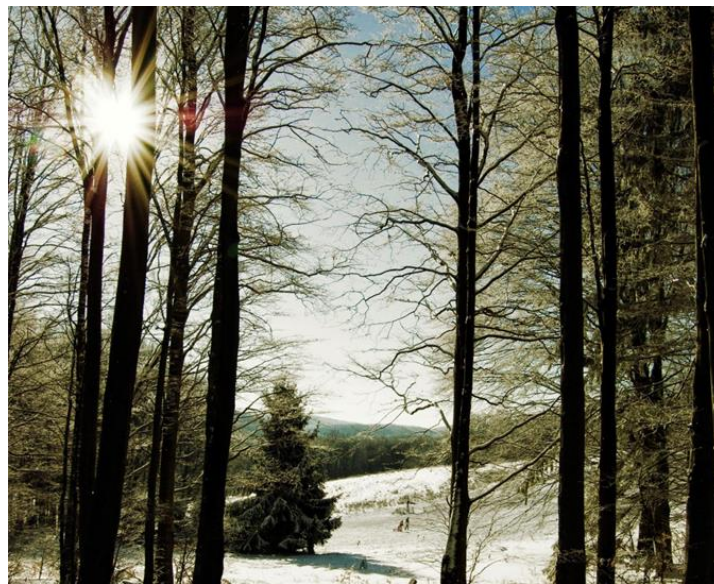
Interviewees were asked, “**Has taking part in the course affected the way you understand yourself? Tell me more?**” Hazel (Symbol-centred) related back to the Spiritual Styles Assessment, affirming her previous statements, as did Adele and Vanessa (both Emotion-centred). Tom (Symbol-centred) related this question to his self-

understanding and recognised needs, stating, “I do enjoy my own company, but I also need to be loved and for people to care about me as well ... having people here that care about me makes it feel a bit better.” In this response, we find Tom understanding his needs and a recognition that being with Crossing Together means being with people who care for him and who emotionally lift him. Iona (Word-centred) did not find the course affected her understanding of herself, whilst David (Action-centred) did. Amanda (Action-centred) found the course especially helpful, noting positively that “It helped me to reaffirm my beliefs that I shouldn’t just accept everything that happened in the past” and “I’m not so much under other people’s influence and control anymore; I’m more self-assured and in control.”

The next set of questions inquired into the inclusion of visual Images, symbols, and creation in the course. The first question in this section is, **“Was the use of images during the course helpful? Which images worked/did not work? Why do you think this?”** Tom (Symbol-centred) found the pictures useful for two reasons; his first was “Because my visual impairment, I can only see with the one eye.” The second reason given was, “With the pictures, that you can actually visualise what’s happening, as words it’s just describing them, but with pictures, you can actually see the situation and can visualise that time and what’s happened, like you can actually picture yourself being there and watching it all.” In Tom’s second response, I recognise that the use of visual images significantly enabled a deeper engagement with the course.

Hazel (Symbol-centred) initially replied, “I didn’t find that terribly useful. I wasn’t quite sure what they were for?” However, in a subsequent conversation for the purposes of triangulation, she explained this further, adding that it wasn’t the pictures that were the

issue, but rather the brevity of time she had to process them, stating, “I didn’t have enough time to look at them all properly,” reinforcing that Symbol-centred people prefer time to contemplate. Hazel also stated that the image of a fir tree standing alone, accompanying the nature poem in session 4. (Figure 4.), had profoundly spoken to her about Jesus being abandoned, alone, and “hanging on a tree”²⁵² This observation was one that Hazel arrived at independently, it was not intended with the original inclusion of this visual image in the materials, nor was it mentioned during the course. The use of visual images did enable Hazel to experience a deeper engagement with the course material; however, this was experienced subsequent to the course and not during it.



*Figure 4. Fir tree standing alone.*²⁵³

²⁵² Referencing Acts 5:30, 10:39, 13:29.

²⁵³ Zoltán Takács, unnamed picture Pixabay, accessed October 10, 2024, edited from original image by author, <https://pixabay.com/photos/trees-snow-sun-winter-nature-6916988/>.

Iona (Word-centred) did not find the visual images useful, stating, “To be honest, no they didn’t help me... I’ve seen all that like, because I’ve come through the church, I’ve got my Bible and done lots of things.” Vanessa (Emotion-centred) appreciated the images, stating, “I’m quite a visual learner, so seeing a picture and then having the story as well, I can collaborate the two and remember it better.” David (Action-centred) found the visual images to be “very helpful to have as a visual aid... I’m dyslexic, so having more of a visual things and verbal things can be more easy to understand, less daunting.” Of note is the way that for some, due to their learning preferences, visual images enabled a deeper engagement with the adapted Being With course, this finding is highlighted in Chapter 4. Amanda (Action-centred) having previously disclosed that for a period of time she had been homeless and found the picture of the Homeless Jesus had resonated with her, replied on this occasion, “Touching things and having things doesn’t really matter to me. It’s people that matter to me and what you can do in relation to helping those who don’t have what I have.”

Interviewees were asked, **“During the course we used different symbols, such as the lighting and blowing out of the candle, the sand for writing in, the cross to lay stones at, and the breaking of bread and drinking of the wine. Did these rituals and symbols work for you or not? Which ones worked/did not work? Why do you think this?”** Hazel (Symbol-centred) commented on the sand, stone, and bread. With regards to the sand, she replied, “Not really, no, not really. I tried to make some attachment, but it didn’t really.” She found the stone and cross to be more effective, stating, “I’m more of an Easter person... for me, the Easter side of things is everything, because he rose again.” And of the bread, “I thought that was absolutely excellent, but I wondered, did it go far

enough? We drank the wine, and we ate the bread, but would have needed further prompting.” Tom (Symbol-centred) commented on the bread and the sand; however, he was not present for the session including the stone and cross. With regards to the sand, Tom explained, “I loved writing in the sand, it’s therapeutic. And I like the feel of the sand. It was like you could escape and just not think about anything, just concentrating on what you’re doing.” And of the bread, “it’s like when Jesus died on the cross, that was when his body was broken, and what it means to me when he was going through that to give us a better life, and it made me think about that.” Tom is articulating his preference for contemplation and the way that Symbol elements of the course enabled a deeper engagement.

With regards to the symbolic acts, we find a difference in response between Hazel and Tom to the sand, with Tom experiencing a deeper engagement and responding positively, whereas Hazel did not. Hazel expressed an appreciation for the stone and cross, and both appreciated the breaking of the bread, with Hazel suggesting that she sought deeper engagement with the bread and wine but expressing being short-changed by not having the opportunity to share the Lord’s Supper.

Iona (Word-centred) spoke of her experience of the bread, commenting that “I’ve took it in the church. Breaking the bread and wine represents Jesus. I’ve done all that.” Vanessa (Emotion-centred) responded, “I don’t think that it made anything stick in my mind more that I didn’t already know. I did like the symbolism, but I’d say yeah, the pictures and the talking and things were probably more.”

Interviewees were asked, **“Was the final session when we thought about the resurrection by using examples from nature helpful? What worked/did not work for**

you? Why do you think this?" In Hazel's reply, she reflects the limited value she found in bringing examples of nature into the course setting: "No not really. I thought it was lovely. But standing on its own I'm not sure." Tom (Symbol-centred) had a different view; he shared his pet rabbit as a prop for the final session, and his reply reflects this, stating, "It makes me think about Jesus. When he was growing up, what life was like for him? If he was normal, and had animals, especially being born in the manger, would he have had animals?" Bringing nature physically into the session did not engage Hazel; however, for Tom, it did. A notable difference between these two participants is that Tom brought an example of nature into the session and Hazel did not. This supports Csinos' encouragement that if going outside is not possible, then ask children to bring examples of nature in²⁵⁴ and reasons for the Symbol-centred participants' differing reactions to nature being brought indoors will be considered in Chapter 4.

Hazel and Tom did share a deep appreciation for creation, Tom is quoted later in this section explaining contemplation and appreciation of nature, Hazel reflects on being amidst nature here.

I do love nature and all these all these things. Nature always means a lot to me. Nature just gives me this feeling... It's not the actual beauty of nature itself, it's where it has come from... God brought the feeling to me, this feeling couldn't have come in its own. I've always felt that way... it's a great, overwhelming gratitude for this, for being able to see this. And it's just an eye opener; the beauty of it... I think a lot of this course is doing that... These are all very precious, I think people need to start to realise and feel, although it's not really realising; it's feeling, feeling the true beauty.

²⁵⁴ Csinos, "The Spiritual Styles of Children," 22:42.

Vanessa (Emotion-centred) found the inclusion of aspects from nature helpful, responding, “Yes, it did, because again, it’s visual, and I found it quite interesting.” David (Action-centred) had a similar response: “Again, it’s a visual thing; I think it probably helped... It’s just not something that’s written on a piece of paper; it’s something visual that people can look at.” For similar reasons to the benefit found in the use of visual images, aspects of nature brought into the session enabled a deeper engagement for those who did not have a dominant Symbol-centred spirituality but benefitted because of their learning preferences.

Interviewees were asked, **“Did you read any of the nature poems that were included in the course pack? Were they helpful, or unhelpful?”** As I was asking Hazel (Symbol-centred) this question, she interjected enthusiastically, “I love them. I just thought they were so descriptive, so beautifully rich, and gave me the feeling of nature and made me want to buy that Wild Goose book.” Tom (Symbol-centred), possibly because of his sight impairment and resultant difficulty in reading standard-sized text stated, “I can’t remember them.” Otherwise, the remainder of the interviewees paid little, or no attention to them. The nature poems clearly enabled a deeper engagement with the Being With course for Hazel than they did for the other interviewees.

The Importance of time for reflection for people with a tendency towards a Symbol-centred spirituality was recognised in the construction of the course material and it was stressed weekly that participants attempt to take advantage of quiet time. The following question inquired into the practice of this; **“Did you take the opportunity to “Be still: try and find time this week to be ‘present’ with God. Maybe time without your phone,**

time surrounded by nature, a moment in quiet.” Why not? If you did was this helpful?” Hazel (Symbol-centred) responded,

Yes, I’m quite reflective anyway and do reflect a lot. The way the world is... there just doesn’t seem to be very much peace anywhere... I think Christianity is a way through to this, so I think I really appreciate this part of the course as a reminder of this. I think it all ties in with mental health issues... I think people are not going to be able to do that lovely exercise of slowing down during the day if they don’t acknowledge the pace of life is just too fast.

And Tom (Symbol-centred) equally appreciated the opportunity for quiet time, stating,

I actually do that on the train to Carlisle... I watch the scenery going by on the train even though I’ve seen it that many times. It’s still amazing, especially when there’s snow on the hills and stuff, it’s like the most incredible journey I can take, I think. If I could, I’d walk a lot more, but it’s just, it’s difficult... It’s a nice kind of thing because it makes you appreciate nature and the wonders of the world. And I think, how did they manage to get so good, what was he (God) thinking?

Adele (Emotion-centred) spoke of the led-meditation at her weekly strength-and-stretch class, where she has tried to still her mind, stating, “Some weeks were harder than other weeks just because of the going on to life and things... It slips through under the radar... but I’ve got to step back and say, ‘No, this time is for me’.” Vanessa (Emotion-centred) also struggled with this but found the time a couple of days before the interview and reported, “I sat in the living room with the telly off. My phone was away, and I just sat there... it was just really nice to have ‘me’ time.” David (Action-centred) stated that, as suggested he had “Deliberately said ‘right, I’m going to stop and put my phone away; make sure I don’t respond to it’” and found it of value in “bringing things into perspective in your life in general, if lots of things are going on. Instead of doing the negative, it can help you do the positive thing.” While being still comes naturally to both interviewees with a tendency towards a Symbol-centred spirituality who experienced a deeper engagement

with God through times of quiet contemplation, it was not so for the others; however, in practising something of what was suggested, the benefits were appreciated.

Finally, interviewees were asked, **“Would you recommend this course to others? Why/Why not?”** All the interviewees stated that they would recommend the course. Of note is Hazel’s (Symbol-centred) reply: “I think it’s a wonderful opening to Christianity. I just thought it was a beautiful course.” And Tom’s (Symbol-centred) who spoke more about how much he appreciated the other participants, replying, “Because people accept you for who you are, and don’t judge you and they’re some of the best people I know. So, it’s really good.” Adele (Emotion-centred) stated, “The course really did give me a new lease of life, to see different things as well, faith and what not,” and confirmed that she and her child were both seeking to be baptised. Both Vanessa (Emotion-centred) and David (Action-centred) expressed that they have more questions as a consequence of completing the course, with Vanessa stating, “I’ve still got a million and one questions, I learned something, and then there’s more questions... I really love to learn. I just enjoyed the course and am glad I’ve done it,” and David stated, “Yeah, I think the course did give that taste and spark you into thinking... I want to do something extra, like another course.”

In summary, the pre-course and post-course open-question surveys, Spiritual Style Assessments, participation in the sessions, and the semi-structured post-course interviews all produced a considerable quantity of data. The research gives insight into spiritual styles and other influences that led those with a dominant Symbol-centred spirituality, and other participants, for a variety of reasons, to experience a deeper engagement with the materials. From this research, a number of significant findings and observations have emerged, and these are summarised in Part IV.

Part IV: Summary

This summary condenses the research findings and observations that are of consequence in identifying whether the course met its objectives, namely that by developing an image-rich and creation-centred Being With course, participants with a tendency towards a Symbol-centred spirituality will engage more deeply with the content. This information will be used to refine and further adapt the course and assist Crossing Together to reach our goal of planting an intergenerational church that will eventually be led by participants who have grown in faith in and through Crossing Together.

The results of the project can be summarised as follows:

- (i) There is correlation between the Affective/Apophatic quadrant of Holmes' circle of sensibility and Symbol-centred spirituality as defined by Bellous and Csinos.
- (ii) The use of the term "Symbol-centred" to describe participants expressing spirituality that correlates with this quadrant does not adequately convey the experience of these participants.
- (iii) The project design created challenges.
- (iv) Love, care, and the sense of family engendered by Crossing Together's emphasis on being with are significant factors in encouraging participants to feel that they belong, participate in the course, and for some, engage in further exploration, affirmation of the Christian faith, and reengagement with Church.

- (v) Participants considered the Spiritual Styles Assessment to be accurate, and the resultant research indicates that participants, more frequently than not, engaged with the course in a manner associated with their dominant spiritual style.
- (vi) Participation on the course did not correspond to the expected spiritual styles; with those with a dominant Symbol-centred style being lower in representation than previous participation in Crossing Together worship events suggested, and those with a dominant Action-centred spirituality having a considerably higher representation than was expected from the previously consulted research.
- (vii) As anticipated, the inclusion of image-rich and creation-centred materials in the development of the Being With faith exploration course did enable a deeper engagement with the course for participants with a Symbol-centred spirituality.
- (viii) The inclusion of image-rich and creation-centred materials in the development of the Being With faith exploration course also enabled a deeper engagement with the course for participants who did not possess a dominant Symbol-centred spiritual style.

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of the adapted Being With course, the research methodology and methods used in the research, and the conduct and outcomes of

this research. The research has been condensed into eight findings and observations to be explored in Chapter 4, with consideration given to the context of Crossing Together, the theology of Being With, and spiritual styles that determine our approach to intergenerational church. Chapter 4 will highlight the degree by which the research question has been answered, provide a general evaluation of the project, and state what these reveal about Crossing Together's approach to faith exploration.

The chapter includes a personal reflection, followed by a paragraph stating where insights gained from this contextual research will be shared with others. The project concludes with plans for the further development and delivery of Crossing Together's faith exploration course.

CHAPTER 4:

Conclusions

The chapter reaches a conclusion on whether Crossing Together's image-rich and creation-centred development of the Being With faith exploration course enabled a deeper engagement by participants with a Symbol-centred spirituality through discussing the main findings and observations that arose from the project. The chapter will highlight some of the unexpected insights gained through the research and envision ways that this study and research may be developed in the furtherance of faith exploration for people with a tendency towards Symbol-centred spirituality both within Crossing Together and beyond, including the sharing of this contextual study with others involved in researching spiritual styles, enabling faith exploration, and resourcing intergenerational churches. The eight significant findings and observations that arose from this research are as follows:

- (i) There is correlation between the Affective/Apophatic quadrant of Holmes' circle of sensibility and Symbol-centred spirituality as defined by Bellous and Csinos.

A matter of concern during research was whether Holmes' Affective/Apophatic quadrant was sufficiently robust to support the Symbol-centred spirituality that Bellous and Csinos had constructed upon it. In considering this I shall first review Apophatic theology, which recognises the value of words, visual images, creation etc. as partial revealers of God, and also their incompleteness due to the limits our human perspective and intellect place on receiving a fuller revelation of the unfathomable God.

Instead of falling into a minimalistic silence where all utterance is deemed insignificant, Apophatic theology instead recognises the place of divine revelation in our definitions and doctrines of God, yet at the same time hold lightly to these, more comfortable contemplating the unknown than those possessing a Kataphatic spirituality. The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* places emphasis not only in the inability of humanity to fully know God, but also in the way the emotion of love enables a revelation of God that cannot be captured by the intellect alone. This emphasis on a willingness to enter mystery and contemplation, along with the emphasis on an emotional (rather than intellectual) response to God that is found in Apophatic spirituality transposes onto Holmes' Affective/Apophatic quadrant and Bellous and Csinos' Symbol-centred spirituality.

Williams argues that the role of the artist in the Apophatic tradition is to invite the viewer on a journey where the artist invites another beyond their existing habitus to an alternative revelation formed by the artist's interpretation and revelation. This transaction creates uncertainty and in turn brings fresh insight to the viewer. In this sense, the artists art creates art, their contemplation enables further contemplation, revelation brings about further revelation, and new possibilities are found.²⁵⁵

I understand creation to have the inherent ability to lead humanity beyond ourselves to a greater revelation, wonder, and awe of God, and to a greater or lesser extent visual images, poetry and symbolic acts also contain the possibility of doing so, as they

²⁵⁵ Williams, *Negative Theology*, 29-38.

enable the viewer/listener to step onto the metaphorical bridge, alighting from the known towards the unknown, and yet to be revealed.

This correlation between Holmes' Affective/Apophatic quadrant, and Symbol-centred spirituality is supported by the research conducted during this project which indicates that it is not the visual image or creation in itself that assisted those with a tendency towards a Symbol-centred spirituality to engage with God, but rather it is in the way that the visual image or creation enabled contemplation and wonder.

- (ii) The use of the term "Symbol-centred" to describe participants expressing spirituality that correlates with this quadrant does not adequately convey the experience of these participants.

Ware first renamed the Affective/Apophatic quadrant of Holmes' Circle of Sensibility as a Mystic Spirituality. I consider the word Mystical to have supernatural connotations that are unhelpful. Bellous and Csinos developed Ware's approach and referred to those in this quadrant as having a Symbol-centred spirituality. A finding of this research project is that Symbol-centred offers only a partial description. My resistance to the word Symbol arises from a concern that the symbol itself may be inferred by this title as being the object of interest, whereas this is not the case, it is the process of contemplation that the Symbol enables that encourages people with an Apophatic tendency to spiritually engage with God. It is therefore not the visual image, creation, and symbolic act, which is the goal for participants with a dominant Symbol-centred spirituality, but the opportunity these provide to enter a contemplative process that seeks beyond these. As an observation from this research, I humbly suggest that a more accurate word would be Contemplative,

or Contemplation-centred spirituality. This suggestion arises from the emphasis placed by the Symbol-centred course participants, not on the visual image or creation, etc. but on the bridge the Symbol created, inviting them on a journey towards a deeper revelation of God, and affirming it was not the Symbol itself, but the contemplation enabled by that Symbol that drew them deeper into the story and appreciation of God. The term Contemplation-centred spirituality also draws upon the work of the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* who emphasises Martha's sister Mary's love for Jesus, shown in her attentive contemplation on his words. The title Contemplation-centred spirituality also creates space for poetry, which, through artistic expression and ambiguity, also encourages the reader into deeper interpretation, to delve beyond the words, and thus offers the same potential for contemplation.

(iii) The project design created challenges.

The question seeking an answer is, "Does Crossing Together's image-rich and creation-centred development of the Being With faith exploration course enable a deeper engagement by participants with a Symbol-centred approach to spirituality?" To measure "deeper engagement," I made use of the Oxford English Dictionary definition of the word deeper: "To become more intense or profound; to become greater in measure or degree,"²⁵⁶ to assist in identifying movement towards deeper engagement, assessing this through a combination of participant responses to the pre-course and post-course open-question survey, the post-course interviews, and my own and Alison's (co-lead participant's) observations. Should time and sufficient participants have enabled the delivery of the

²⁵⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary*, "Deepen."

Being With course without the image-rich and creation-centred material, this would have provided a control group to measure differing levels of engagement between both the published and adapted course. Through observation and interview, I would have had the opportunity to assess whether or not the adapted course enabled deeper engagement for the Symbol-centred participant group. However, the restrictions on time and the limited number of Crossing Together participants did not permit this approach, and I therefore understand that the most effective approach to measuring deeper engagement, given these circumstances, was the subjective approach followed in this research project.

On reflection I consider that the opening session had a significant amount of pre-course paperwork to be completed before participants engaged with course content. This led to the planned meditation not being led as was intended, with participants asked to do this in their own time. While the subject of the meditation was a reinforcer of the previously delivered material, in passing over this I missed the opportunity to lead an example of meditation, and with a significant focus of the course being an encouragement for participants to practice quiet times with God; this overlooking of meditative material missed a valuable teaching opportunity. Less time spent on the pre-course paperwork would have enabled more time to lead course content and created a more effective first session. My reasoning for not arranging for the pre-course paperwork to be completed at an earlier opportunity was based on a concern that the burden of the paperwork would be objectionable, and participants having experienced this would not return for the first session. On reflection I consider that it was appropriate to lead the opening session with the pre-course paperwork included, however this should have been reduced to a minimum with the quantitative Likert scale survey not being included as it was time consuming, the

design of the survey was overly taxing for participants and of relatively limited value. With populations of only one and two participants representing two of the spiritual styles, there is also low statistical power. Should I utilise quantitative methods again in research, I shall endeavour to ensure that the sample size is sufficient to produce results that are of statistical significance.

The design and scope of the qualitative elements of the research were subject to two changes. I recognised mid-research that an increase in the overall population size for post-course interview would improve the quality of the research, with the resultant number of post-course interviews rising from four to seven participants. And while my original intention was to have follow-up interviews with more Unchurched and Dechurched participants than Churched, the reality of maximising those who had attended all the sessions and ensuring the research contained a combination of the four spiritual styles led to more of the interviewees been Churched, than Dechurched and Unchurched. This weighting was unfortunate; however, this does not impact the measurement of deep engagement depending on the participant's spiritual style and is thus acceptable.

- (iv) Love, care, and the sense of family engendered by Crossing Together's emphasis on being with are significant factors in encouraging participants to feel that they belong, participate in the course, and for some, engage in further exploration, affirmation of the Christian faith, and reengagement with Church.

The emphasis on Jesus overcoming our isolation is central to the Being With course and offers an ideal means to address the experience of social isolation that was evident in

the community audit conducted by Crossing Together. However, the course would not have been possible if it were not for this theology being put into practice, though gathering alongside the community, listening, valuing God already being there before we arrived, learning from the community, loving and recognising one another as valued participants, and partnering in finding where God is moving today, were all essential precursors to enabling participants to engage with this faith exploration course. The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* recognises that we cannot define God, but rather that it is through love that God becomes known to us, positing that God is intellectually unknowable, but through love, God is made known to us. Crossing Together's emphasis on being with is therefore a conduit for that love that emanates from God. The relationships built through Crossing Together have created a real sense of belonging to a family; the references made to family and care expressed by participants during the course and subsequent research are testimony to the validity of this theological approach to investing in community, growing, and being church.

It is recognised that through regular involvement with the lead participants and other Christians associated with Crossing Together new worshipping community's Monday Hub, "New 2 Me" clothes bank, monthly worship and meal, social events, "Art for the Soul" and "Exploring Recovery" courses, and social media interactions, participants may experience a degree of religious socialisation, where there is a likelihood that the relationships built and sustained with the Christian participants may encourage the Unchurched and Dechurched participants to take steps towards belonging by professing the Christian faith or recommitting to Church with Crossing Together. However, the adapted Being With faith exploration course is the first intentional and structured faith

sharing endeavour of Crossing Together, and without the course, I consider it less likely that this socialisation would lead Unchurched participants into further exploration and affirmation of the Christian faith or Dechurched participants to come to a decision about the importance of reconnecting with Church again.

- (v) Participants considered the Spiritual Styles Assessment to be accurate, and the resultant research indicates that participants, more frequently than not, engaged with the course in a manner associated with their dominant spiritual style.

Participants recognised themselves in the descriptions that accompany each spiritual style within the Assessment. This was further corroborated by my experience of watching the behaviour of participants in their participation and conversation, and in the results of the open-question survey and post-course semi-structured interviews, where it was revelatory and affirming to experience participants engaging according to their dominant spiritual style. Of note for this project were the Symbol-centred participants Hazel and Tom's love for creation, and that creation led them to look beyond the immediate view to the God who created.

- (vi) Participation on the course did not correspond to the expected spiritual styles; with those with a dominant Symbol-centred style being lower in representation than previous participation in Crossing Together worship events suggested, and those with a dominant Action-centred spirituality having a considerably higher representation than was expected from the previously consulted research.

Symbol-centred worship activities are led by Alison, the Mission Pioneer. It may be that participants attend Alison's worship activities due to the close relationship that they have with Alison, which participants may consider more important than engaging in accordance with their dominant spiritual style. Crossing Together is also intergenerational, with as many children as adults attending worship events. It may also be that adults assume children enjoy the art-based activities and direct their children to those, and then attend alongside their children.

With five of the eleven participants on the course having a tendency towards an Action-centred spirituality, this did not correlate with the findings of both Ware²⁵⁷ and Csinos²⁵⁸ who report that those with a dominant Action-centred spirituality are the least well represented group within congregations. It may however be that there are more people with a dominant Action-centred spirituality in the general population, but church is not a place to which they are drawn, and so they are underrepresented in congregations.

When considering the Church status of the Action-centred participants, both Elizabeth and Andy are Unchurched, David is Dechurched, Ollie is Churched, but sporadic, having only recently reengaged through charity work, and Amanda is in her seventies and only now decided it's time to join the church. According to evidence gathered from the Action-centred participants engaging with the Being With course, settled Church membership is not the norm. It may be that the being with form of ministry practised at Crossing Together, and the opportunities afforded there, encourage people

²⁵⁷ Ware, *Discover Your Spiritual Style*, 43.

²⁵⁸ Csinos, *Children's Ministry That Fits*, 65.

with a tendency towards Action-centred spirituality to participate. There was insufficient scope within this project to explore the questions raised here; however, they are worthy of further inquiry.

- (vii) As anticipated, the inclusion of image-rich and creation-centred materials in the development of the Being With faith exploration course did enable a deeper engagement with the course for participants with a Symbol-centred spirituality.

The hypothesis that underlies this research is that the inclusion of image-rich and creation-centred material would enable participants with a Symbol-centred spirituality to experience a deeper engagement with the adapted Being With course, with the word deeper defined as “To become more intense or profound; to become greater in measure or degree.”²⁵⁹ The research has proven this hypothesis to be accurate, as both Tom and Hazel showed clear signs of deeper engagement through the adaptations made to the course. This section considers Hazel and Tom’s responses to visual images, followed by symbolic actions, then creation-rich elements, and finally their response to the opportunities for quiet contemplation.

Hazel and Tom did experience a deeper engagement with the course due to the inclusion of visual images. Hazel, however, did not appreciate the exercise of being asked to select a picture that expressed something of Jesus to her (Session 2.). Her reasoning for disliking this exercise was that she was given insufficient time to contemplate the visual

²⁵⁹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, “Deepen.”

image. However, when she had the opportunity for contemplation following the course, she was gripped by the lone fir tree, which spoke to her of the abandonment of Jesus, a theme that was central to the course. In presenting the visual images to Hazel in the manner employed during the course, there was little opportunity for the visual images to act as a contemplative bridge. This reasoning correlates with the description of someone with a tendency for Symbol-centred spirituality being more contemplative than other spiritual types and shows the importance of time for contemplation being built into future courses and events for Symbol-centred participants. For Tom, the use of visual images led him into a deeper engagement with the story, stating, “like you can actually picture yourself being there and watching it all.” In these situations, the visual image fulfils the same function as an icon in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, and true art in the Roman Catholic tradition, forming a contemplative bridge over which the viewer crosses into a more profound experience of God and affirming my role as the artist creating the opportunity for this contemplation to arise. This level of deep engagement with visual images by Symbol-centred participants was not expressed by the other participants on the course.

Both Hazel and Tom experienced a deeper engagement with the course through the inclusion of symbolic acts. Hazel particularly appreciated the bread broken, symbolising the breaking of the body of Christ, but was disappointed that it did not carry the full experience of the sacrament. Tom was the only participant to highlight a deep appreciation for the writing in the sand, expressing his experience in language corresponding to the Symbol-centred spirituality as he removed himself from the environment and was silent, introspective, and contemplative, “It was like you could escape and just not think about anything, just concentrating on what you're doing.”

For Tom, bringing creation, in the form of his pet rabbit, into the session enabled him to consider the animals around the manger. His reflection was deep and very meaningful for him, enabling him to reflect further on the early life of Jesus in a way that I suspect would bypass many others. Bringing creation into the course did not cause deeper engagement for Hazel. The difference between both Symbol-centred participants' appreciation of the inclusion of aspects of nature in the final session is explained by Csinos' encouragement that if you are unable to get outside, then ask Symbol-centred children to bring nature in.²⁶⁰ My inference from research evidence and this statement is that by asking participants to bring something meaningful into the session, they will first have had the opportunity to contemplate, explore the story of God through it, and come prepared to share.

Hazel was the only participant to express her appreciation for the nature poems. Hazel expressed that nature leads her into a deeper relationship with God, stating, "Nature just gives me this feeling... It's not the actual beauty of nature itself, it's where it has come from... God brought the feeling to me, this feeling couldn't have come in its own." And Tom's reference to train journeys through the countryside, where "it makes you appreciate nature and the wonders of the world. And I think, how did they manage to get so good, what was he (God) thinking?" Research indicates that both Hazel and Tom look beyond the view presented by creation to appreciate and inquire about God, who created the view.

Both Hazel and Tom placed a high value on time for quiet reflection. Six of the eleven participants reported attempting the "Be still" exercise; the only two who reported

²⁶⁰ Csinos, "The Spiritual Styles of Children," 10:17.

that this came naturally to them were those with a dominant Symbol-centred spirituality, again affirming the descriptions of persons associated with this spiritual style.

- (viii) The inclusion of image-rich and creation-centred materials in the development of the Being With faith exploration course also enabled a deeper engagement with the course for participants who did not possess a dominant Symbol-centred spiritual style.

At the outset of this research, it had been speculated that the inclusion of image-rich and creation-centred material was less likely to enable a deeper engagement with the course for participants with other dominant spiritual tendencies. It was therefore both unexpected and encouraging to discover that the course adaptations also enabled deeper engagement for other participants, specifically those with tendencies towards Action-centred and Emotion-centred spiritualities. Venessa (Emotion-centred) appreciated the use of visual images because she was a “visual learner” and found these helped her remember. During the research, it was recognised that there are definite parallels between the definitions given for a visual learner and a person with a Symbol-centred spirituality; however, it is also noted that this does not necessarily equate to visual learners automatically having a Symbol-centred spirituality. Learning types are about how people acquire skills and knowledge, comprehend, and process information, and spirituality involves relating to self, others, and to God. There was insufficient scope within this project to explore this further, but this is worthy of further inquiry.

Alongside the benefits for people who are visual learners, David (Action-centred) also appreciated the inclusion of visual images, symbolic acts, and aspects of creation in

the course, as he identified as dyslexic and found that words, supplemented with visual images assisted in his understanding.

During research it was noted that children tend to exhibit a strong preference to one dominant spiritual style, however, adults are more capable of holding a number of spiritual styles in balance,²⁶¹ and while Symbol-centred spirituality may be a participant's subordinate spiritual style, those same participants may still engage fruitfully with adaptations made to the course that were specifically for dominant Symbol-centred spiritualities.

Of interest, however, is Iona's (Word-centred) engagement with the course, as she did not appear to experience a deeper engagement with the image-rich and creation-centred adaptations. With a sample size of only one participant, generalisations cannot be made; however, with the Affective/Apophatic (Symbol-centred) quadrant being diametrically opposite to the Speculative/Kataphatic (Word-centred) quadrant on Holmes' Circle of Sensibility, it would be reasonable to infer that individuals with a dominant Word-centred spirituality would be least likely to experience a deeper engagement with adaptations made to the course for the benefit of those with a dominant Symbol-centred spirituality. Should a control group have been used to measure engagement with the published course, it would have been possible to observe whether Word-centred participants experienced a deeper engagement with the published course than with the adapted course.

This research has shown that the inclusion of visual images, symbolic acts, and creation-rich elements may also assist participants with a range of spiritual styles, learning

²⁶¹ Farrant and Philip, *Being An Intergenerational Church*, 140.

styles, and learning difficulties²⁶² to experience a deeper engagement with the adapted Being With course. There is also potential that personality type may have influenced a participant's engagement with the Symbol-centred adaptations. This potential was established in the literature consulted but not explored during the ethnographic elements of the research. This too, would be a valuable piece of further research.

The anecdotal evidence supporting Bellous and Csinos' four spiritual styles is significant, and finds further support in this research, I expect additional empirical research into these spiritual styles would enhance and add support to this approach to understanding spirituality. The recognition such empirical enhancement brings would enable spiritual styles to be more readily compared with theories of learning styles and personality types. This integration of research into learning styles, personality types, and spiritual styles would lead to further insight into what it is to be human, human spirituality, worship, and faith exploration.

Following participation in the adapted Being With course, Amanda (Action-centred) joined the church, as was her intention. Adele (Emotion-centred) and her child were baptised, with Adele then attending an Alpha course, and David (Action-centred) also followed up with his intentions by attending an Alpha course. Adele and Elizabeth (Action-centred) launched and are leading the Crossing Together Toddlers group with a faith component built into the programme, taking up roles in leadership as Crossing Together begins to realise our goal of "enabling new Christians to take up positions of responsibility and leadership and, in time, take on the future direction and mission of the

²⁶² "About Dyslexia," British Dyslexia Association, accessed January 17, 2024, <https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/dyslexia/about-dyslexia/what-is-dyslexia>.

church, so that it becomes truly incarnational.” The remaining participants continue to participate in Crossing Together.

A Personal Reflection

In completing the Spiritual Styles Assessment, I confirmed what I already expected: that I have a tendency towards a Symbol-centred spirituality. The reading and research led to greater self-understanding, and a course that I found to be life-giving to prepare, as it resonated deeply with me. Of note, was the intensity of feeling I experienced in blowing out the candle at the beginning of Session 3, signifying the death of Jesus. This had initially occurred to me as a vivid way of expressing the death of Jesus, in practice however, I experienced pain, remorse at doing so, and a sense of isolation from Jesus. Reflecting on this later, I understood that in the candle I had sensed the real presence of Jesus, and in snuffing it out was abandoning and crucifying him again. The irresistible urge to light the candle following the session was in two parts, a resistance to the darkness that cannot overcome Jesus, the light of the world, and secondly a need to be back in his company.

I have had a similar experience while sharing the Lord’s Supper, particularly when I’ve been in times of personal struggle, when Christ has been very present to me in the elements broken and shed before me, and I have struggled to leave him there on the table to go to the door of the church building and shake the hands of worshippers leaving. On reflection, I recognise these senses as constituent to the Symbol-centred spiritual style, in

my approach to the candle, bread, and wine, where Christ is present to me behind what is seen, and beyond what is known.

This research has also assisted me to reflect on what I find life-giving and, inversely, the experiences that buckle me out of shape. In conducting this research, I now understand myself better and intend to use this greater understanding to shape both life and ministry.

What Next?

The findings of this project will be shared with Joyce E. Bellous, Darren Philip, the Children and Young People's team of the Church of Scotland, and James Fawcett who has recently been appointed by St. Martin-in-the-Fields as the Head of Being With.

As part of this research, I visited the Bro Celynnin Ministry area based around St. Mary's Church in Wales, Conwy, north-west Wales. Bro Celynnin is home to several new worshipping communities, including Worship in the Wild,²⁶³ Celtic Praise, and the Studio,²⁶⁴ which is a ministry among artists. During the visit, I met Eryl Parry, Pioneer Priest; Terry Mart, leader of Studio; and members of the Studio group over morning coffee and lunch. Eryl Parry has found that offering creation-centred opportunities for walking has grown a new community of people (with approximately eighty names on the mailing list) who otherwise would most likely not have worshipped in the wild, if at all. The

²⁶³ "Worship in the Wild," Ardal Weinidogaeth Bro Celynnin Ministry area, accessed January 17, 2024, <https://caruconwy.com/worship/worship-in-the-wild/>.

²⁶⁴ "Art," Bro Celynnin Ministry accessed January 17, 2024, <https://caruconwy.com/outreach/art-group/>.

monthly walks begin with the “call to worship,” including encouragement to recognise that “God speaks through the landscape he created,” to become aware of God, the “third person in our gentle conversations with one another,” and to recognise “God speaks when we are still,” intentionally pausing to contemplate, and to walk stretches of the route in silence. Worship may also include travelling questions, such as “Why do people walk to this waterfall?” Followed by a subsequent question, “What can the Church learn from this?” When I asked Eryl how she planned to explore faith and discipleship with this group, the response was that it would be highly relational, one step at a time, literally as they walked, listened, and shared. Similarly, the Studio group has grown steadily over the years and is now producing art pieces that form a central part of the focus and reflection during the monthly Celtic praise service.

The visit was inspirational, and part of the legacy of this project will be exploring the intersection of where the Bro Celynnin ministries meet with Crossing Together’s context. A next step in engaging people with a Symbol-centred spirituality in faith exploration will be by continuing this conversation with a new worshipping community in our neighbouring town of Stewarton where they have recently launched a Forest Church.²⁶⁵

The adapted Being With course will be further developed, retaining the four sessions as an introduction to the Christian faith, with the remaining five Being With course sessions further adapted into a follow-on Discipleship course. The final session of the faith exploration course will now include time in advance for participants to reflect on each of the headings contained in this session: Creation, Exodus, Covenant, Christmas,

²⁶⁵ “Thive Stewarton,” Facebook page, accessed January 17, 2024, https://www.facebook.com/thrivestewarton/?locale=en_GB.

Good Friday, Last Day, Resurrection (with further explanations given for each) and bring to this session their chosen visual image, poem, item, or aspect of creation that has resonated with them as they contemplated the theme, and share these and their reason for choosing them with the group. The four initial faith exploration sessions will be offered fortnightly (instead of weekly) to enable additional time for participants to engage with creation and focus on contemplation between the sessions. The sessions will also contain an increased amount of time for quiet contemplation.

On the alternate week when the sessions are not offered, participants will be given the opportunity to engage with Crossing Together's version of Worship in the Wild. For those for whom this would be an overly strenuous activity, an opportunity will be made to visit a picturesque location with the encouragement for participants to appreciate the view and reflect on the awe and glory of God in creation. Our experience and learning from Forest Church will also be woven into these outdoor sessions.

The timing of the course delivered in this research reflected the period of study required to meet requirements for graduation in 2024. Future courses will take place in the late spring and early summer to enable participants to take advantage of longer days and potentially better weather, reflect on the new life and growth of that time of year, and be encouraged to contemplate the new life Jesus Christ offers.

APPENDIX 1



INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Doctor of Ministry Degree
Pittsburgh Theological Seminary**

INTRODUCTION:

My name is Jamie Milliken, and I am a student in the Doctor of Ministry program at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

My phone number is 07929349045. My email is: jmilliken@churchofscotland.org.uk. My research advisor is Professor Alison Jack. Their phone number is 0131 650 8959. Their email is: A.Jack@ed.ac.uk. The study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary chaired by Professor Angela Dienhart Hancock. Their phone number is 00 412 924-1451. Their email is: ahancock@pts.edu. Feel free to contact any of us at any time if you have questions at any point about this project.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this research is to study whether developing the Being With faith exploration course with image-rich and creation-centred material enables participants with a symbol centred spirituality to engage with the course. This will take place throughout the Being With sessions at Crossing Together, and also in a follow up interview with four participants who took part in the course.

The first part of the research is to help find out what participants main spiritual style is. We are working with our four spiritual styles of Word, Emotion, Symbol, and Action. After this I will try and learn more about the way that using images and creation can help participants with a symbol centred spiritual style understand more about themselves, and about Jesus. I intend to compare this with other participants who have a different spirituality, to see what affect using images and creation also has on their understandings.

The anticipated title of the study will be “Beyond Words: developing a faith exploration course to engage participants with a symbol centred spirituality.”

PROCEDURE:

If you consent to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in the following ways and make the following commitments. There will be three confidential questionnaires. The first one will help to identify your main spiritual style. The second will ask you about your understandings of yourself and of Jesus, the cross, and resurrection. The course will then run over four weeks and each session will be 1 ½ hours. After the course you will be asked to fill in a similar questionnaire to the first, asking again your understanding of yourself, Jesus, the cross, and resurrection, and also asking about anything you intend to do as a consequence of participating in the course. The purpose of asking these questions before and after the course is to see whether the course, and particularly use of images and creation, have enabled the development of your

understanding in these areas. Also, after the course I intend to interview four participants to ask more about the experience and any changes in understanding.

I will also make written notes of the group sessions, and an audio recording of your participation in any follow up interview. After the project is completed, I will destroy all audio recordings.

TIME REQUIRED:

The Being With course will begin at 12.30pm on Wednesday 25th October and conclude on Wednesday 15th November. You are being asked to commit to 1 ½ hours of your time to each of the four weekly sessions. If you are also involved in a follow up interview the interview will take approximately 1 hour of your time.

VOLUNTARINESS:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may still decline to be part of any session or answer any question that you do not wish to engage. You are completely free to withdraw from the study at any time.

RISKS:

I do not anticipate any risks associated with this study. In any human subject research involving self-disclosure, there is always the possibility that you may feel discomfort or distress in the course of the research. If this happens, please inform me immediately and decline to participate if you wish.

BENEFITS:

I anticipate the following possible benefits to you and Crossing Together.

- the course has been developed especially for participants with a symbol centred spirituality.
- by participating you will be able to shape the content and delivery of future courses.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY:

I will be the only researcher present during the study. I will be the only person who listens to any of its recordings. I will not share personal information that you tell me you have decided you do not wish to disclose. When I write the final paper, I will use pseudonyms (made-up names) for all participants and/or code the data I have received in such a way that your name will not be associated with it.

SHARING THE RESULTS:

I anticipate that the results of this research will be shared in the following ways: The final project will be published by Pittsburgh Theological seminary and accessible in their library. I also intend sharing my research with other similar church projects in Scotland to assist them to develop faith exploration courses. As part of the process, I will share my findings from your own (but not anyone else's) questionnaires and any follow up interviews with you in an attempt to accurately represent you. You can receive my final research findings by email.

There is the possibility that I may publish this study or refer to it in published writing in the future. In this event, I will continue to use pseudonyms (as described above) and I may alter some identifying details in order to further protect your anonymity.

BEFORE YOU SIGN:

By signing below, you are agreeing to participate in this project with the possibility of being audio-taped, and your words being written in a final paper. Be sure that you are fully satisfied with the answers to any questions you may have before signing. If you agree to participate in this study, you will receive a copy of this document. I will keep a copy, and the original will be kept in print form for three years in the Office of the Associate Dean of Academic Programs and Assessment.

Participant's printed name: _____

Participant's signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Researcher's printed name: _____

Researcher's signature: _____ **Date:** _____

APPENDIX 2.

This appendix contains the pre-course and post-course questionnaire (the final question in this section appeared in the post-course questionnaire only).



I FEEL GOOD ABOUT MYSELF

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

I FEEL MY PAST EXPERIENCES HAVE LIMITED ME

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

I AM OFTEN ANXIOUS

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

I WORRY ABOUT WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

I BELIEVE THAT GOD HAS GOOD PLANS FOR MY FUTURE

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

ALL ABOUT JESUS!

This bit is...



Please read the following questions and then give your answer in the space below each question.

Please resist looking up answers on your phone, or asking a friend what they think 😊

These are questions about our own understanding. If you don't wish to give an answer, then please leave that section blank and move on to the next question.

WHAT IS YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING ABOUT WHO JESUS WAS?

Please give your answer here:

WHAT IS YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING OF THE PURPOSE OF JESUS?

Please give your answer here:

WHAT IS YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING OF THE STORY OF THE CROSS
WHERE JESUS DIED?

Please give your answer here:

WHAT IS YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING OF THE STORY OF JESUS RISING
FROM THE DEAD?

Please give your answer here:

NOW THAT YOU HAVE COMPLETED THE COURSE IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WOULD LIKE TO DO TO FOLLOW UP ON THIS?

Please give your answer here:

ALL ABOUT YOU
AGAIN!

This bit is...



Your Name:

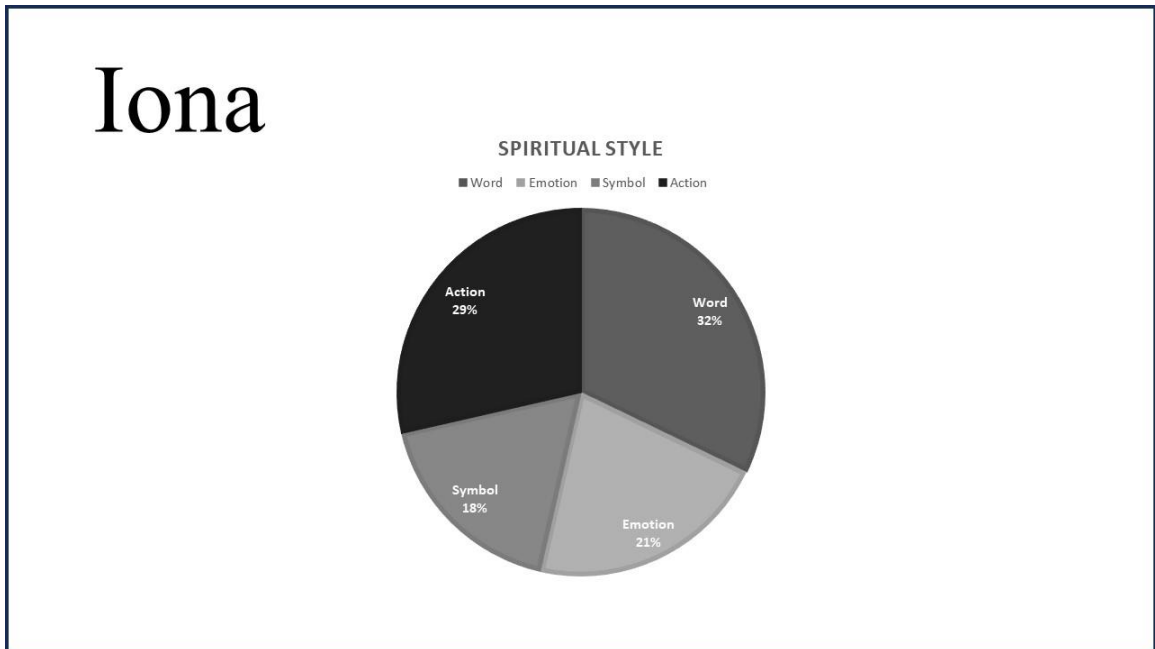
You do not have to give your name, however giving your name will help us to understand how effective the course has been.

APPENDIX 3

Participant Spiritual Styles

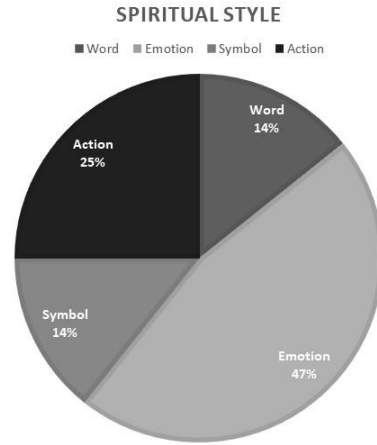
This appendix contains the results of the Spiritual Styles Assessment for each participant. Participant spiritual styles are represented in a piechart with each segment representing the prevalence of the spiritual styles in a participant. Participants are grouped according to their dominant spiritual style.

Word

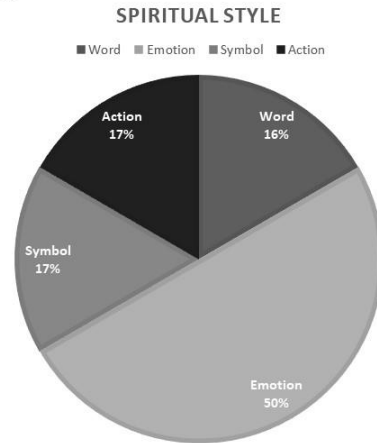


Emotion

Adele

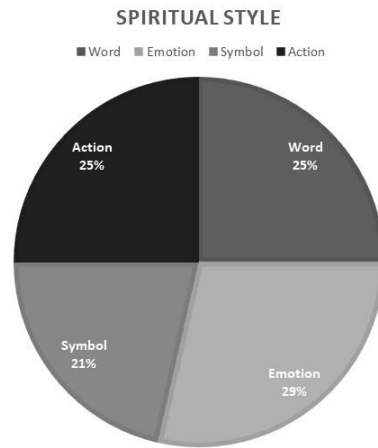


Vanessa



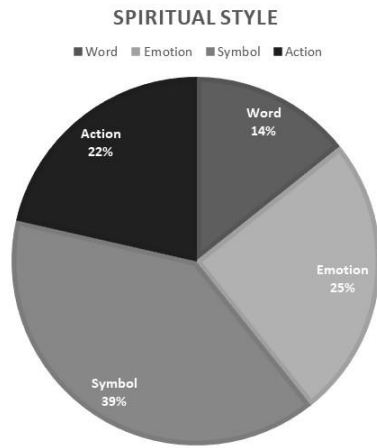
Emotion (cont.)

Gail

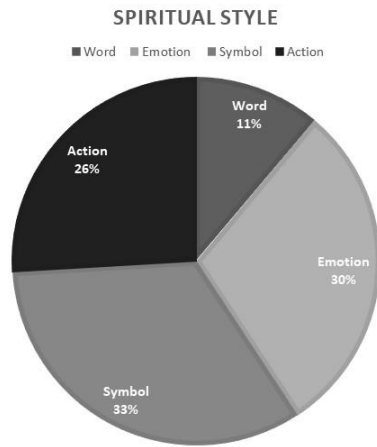


Symbol

Hazel

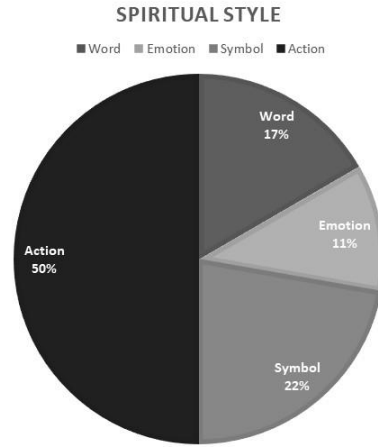


Tom

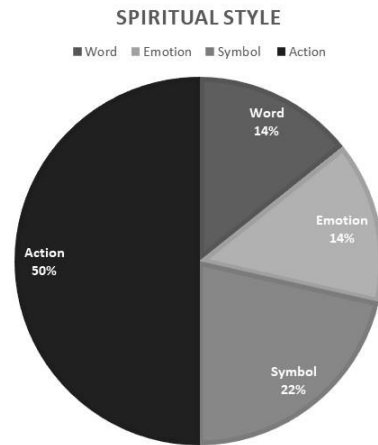


Action

Andy

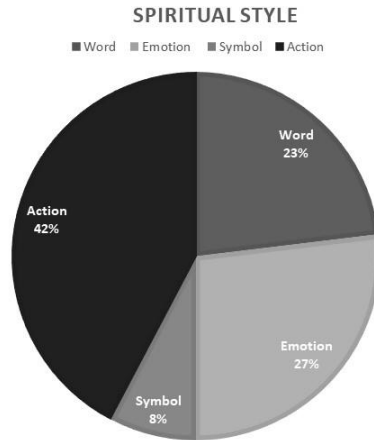


David

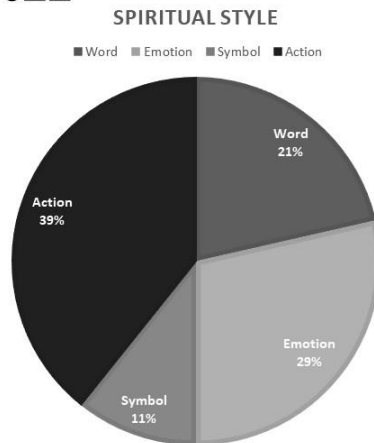


Action (cont.)

Amanda



Elizabeth

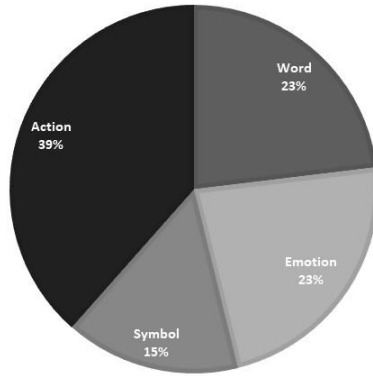


Action (cont.)

Ollie

SPIRITUAL STYLE

■ Word ■ Emotion ■ Symbol ■ Action



APPENDIX 4

This appendix contains the handouts provided for participants for each of the four Being With sessions. The planned session 4 handout that was not used is also included for information.

Week 1: Meaning



YOU KNOW THAT
FEELING...



I WONDER...

if you've known what it's like to be set free!?

what it's like to know that something's in the past and you don't have to worry about it?

if you know what it's like to be trapped?

what it would be like to know the future isn't going to hurt you?

FORGIVENESS



Use this space to note down
any thoughts

IF YOU MUST SPEAK
ILL OF ANOTHER, DO
NOT SPEAK IT, WRITE
IT IN THE SAND NEAR
THE WATER'S EDGE.

*(NAPOLEON HILL,
US AUTHOR)*

EVERLASTING LIFE



Use this space to note down
any thoughts

This slide contained an adaptation of the Meditation “Hands” that was unused due to time restraints in the first session.

For copyright purposes the Meditation has not been included in this project.

Rob Frost, *Essence, Exploring Spirituality*, (Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 2002), 31.

CHRISTIANITY IS...

Past forgiveness

Future hope

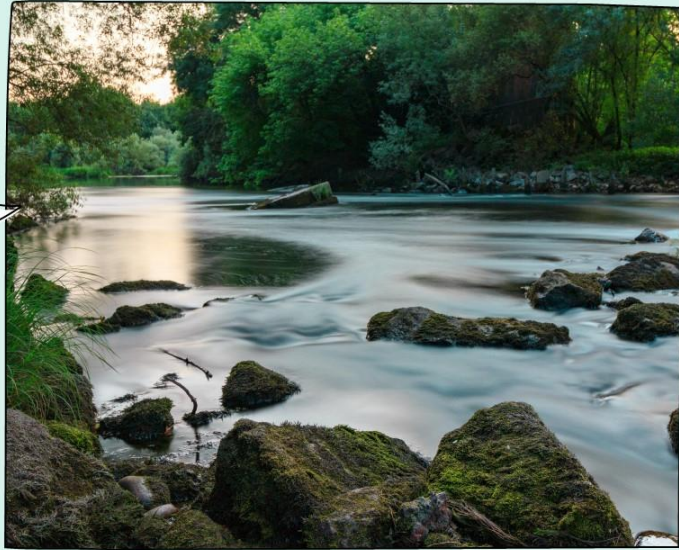
Present love

Video clip from Kung Foo Panda, "Today is a Gift," accessed November 29, 2023,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BwqSraJpqs>

BE STILL...

Try and find time this week to be
'present' with God.

Maybe... time without your phone,
time surrounded by nature,
a moment in quiet.



GEESE



This space contained a copyrighted refecton,

"Geese"

By

Avis Palmer, "Geese" in *Autumn, Liturgical resources for August, September and October including Ordinary Time and Harvest*, ed. Ruth Harvey, (Glasgow: Wildgoose Publications, 2021), 206.

NEXT WEEK'S WONDERINGS - I WONDER...

where you find most meaning in life?

who would you say "Jesus' people" are?

who would you say "your people" are?

if there's any way you feel Jesus was like you?

RESPONSE

What's your response to this week? Here's some space to note down anything you don't want to forget and any thoughts of questions you would like to bring to the group next week.

Week 2: Jesus

BEING
WITH...
A SAFE PLACE TO EXPLORE FAITH

Week 2. Jesus



I WONDER...

where you find most meaning in life?

who would you say "Jesus' people" are?

who would you say "your people" are?

if there's any way you feel Jesus was like you?

WHERE'S JESUS?

30 years in Nazareth
3 years in Galilee
1 week in Jerusalem...



This space contained a copyright image of "Jesus as Leader and Teacher," image 9, accessed January 4, 2024, <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/lumo-lazarus3/>.

This space contained a copyright image of "Jesus is crucified," image 7, accessed January 4, 2024, <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/jesus-crucified/>.



This space contained a copyrighted image of "Jesus as Refugee," found at Kelly Latimore Icons, accessed November 29, 2023, https://www.facebook.com/kellylatimoreicons/posts/1074237802968520/?paipv=0&eav=AfbZ6R2Z15oXH3bSSPSz-utPawnaMXqtUgCq0DS_pegu1sk9hTfC5_rkT9UsdLMDGw&_rd_.

This space contained a copyright image of "Jesus is crucified," image 7, accessed January 4, 2024, <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/jesus-crucified/>.

This space contained a copyright image of "Jesus as Leader and Teacher," image 9, accessed January 4, 2024, <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/lumo-lazarus3/>.

Images of Jesus



WHICH PICTURE(S) MEANT MOST TO YOU?



This space contained a copyrighted image of "Jesus as Leader and Teacher," image 9, accessed January 4, 2024, <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/lazarus3/>.



This space contained a copyrighted image of "Jesus as Refugee," found at Kelly Latimore Icons, accessed November 29, 2023, https://www.facebook.com/kellylatimoreicons/posts/1074237812965210/?page=0&as=Ah26RZZL60X8BSP8-uPannaMX4UcQjDS_pem1a9h1TC1_rkTVUdLMDGm&_rte.



This space contained a copyrighted image of "Jesus is crucified," image 7, accessed January 4, 2024, <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/jesus-crucified/>.



Use this space to write your answer and note down your thoughts

COMMUNITY, CROWD, AND AUTHORITY

This space contained a copyrighted image of "Jesus as Leader and Teacher," image 9, accessed January 4, 2024, <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/lazarus3/>.



This space contained a copyrighted image of "Jesus as Refugee," found at Kelly Latimore Icons, accessed November 29, 2023, https://www.facebook.com/kellylatimoreicons/posts/1074237812965210/?page=0&as=Ah26RZZL60X8BSP8-uPannaMX4UcQjDS_pem1a9h1TC1_rkTVUdLMDGm&_rte.



This space contained a copyrighted image of "Jesus is crucified," image 7, accessed January 4, 2024, <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/jesus-crucified/>.



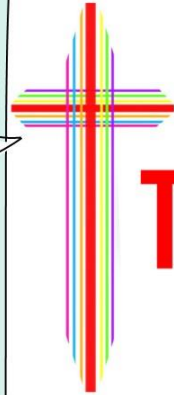
Use this space to note down your thoughts

WHAT ABOUT US?

Community

Crowd

Authority



**CROSSING
TOGETHER**

BE STILL...

Try and find time this week to be
'present' with God.

Maybe... time without your phone,
time surrounded by nature,
a moment in quiet.



SEASON OF REFLECTION



This space contained a copyrighted reflection adapted from,
"This Season of Reflection"
By
Ruth Bowden, "This Season of Reflection" in *Autumn, Liturgical resources for August, September and October including Ordinary Time and Harvest*, ed. Ruth Harvey, (Glasgow: Wildgoose Publications, 2021), 229.

NEXT WEEK'S WONDERINGS - I WONDER...

have you ever had to give up something good,
to keep hold of something else that is good?

what it's like when friends fall out?

what's it like to feel you've lost everything?

when there has been something, or someone you
thought you could rely on - but you couldn't?

RESPONSE

What's your response to this week? Here's some space to note down anything you don't want to forget and any thoughts or questions you would like to bring to the group next week.

Week 3: The Cross

BEING
WITH...
A SAFE PLACE TO EXPLORE FAITH



Week 3. The cross

WONDERINGS - I WONDER...

have you ever had to give up something good,
to keep hold of something else that is good?

what it's like when friends fall out?

what's it like to feel you've lost everything?

when there has been something, or someone you
thought you could rely on - but you couldn't?

Video “the Three Tress,” accessed November 29, 2023,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5qRzTOpOnk>



Christmas manger

This space contained a copyright image of “Jesus is crucified,” image 7, accessed January 4, 2024,
<https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/jesus-crucified/>.

GOD WITH US

BUT HE WAS ABANDONED...



one of us



against the oppressor

This space contained a copyright image of "Jesus as Leader and Teacher." image 9, accessed January 4, 2024, <http://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/lumo-lazarus3/>.



Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

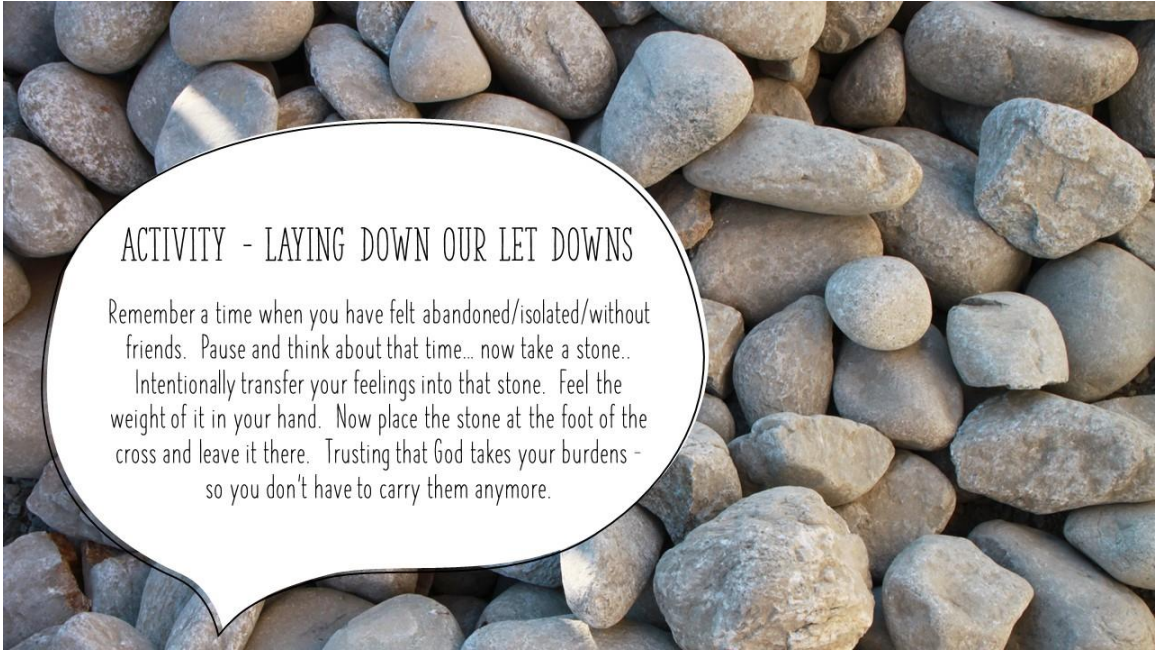
Use this space to write your thoughts

"MY GOD, MY GOD,
WHY HAVE YOU
FORSAKEN ME?"

The Bible:
Matthew 26:46




Father, Son, and Holy Spirit



ACTIVITY - LAYING DOWN OUR LET DOWNS

Remember a time when you have felt abandoned/isolated/without friends. Pause and think about that time... now take a stone..

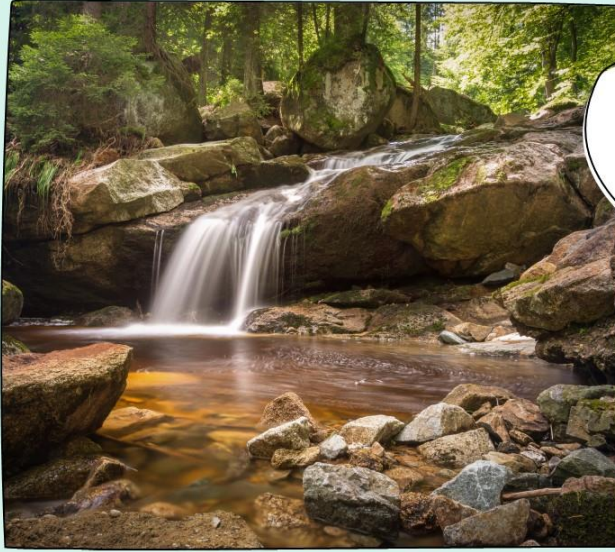
Intentionally transfer your feelings into that stone. Feel the weight of it in your hand. Now place the stone at the foot of the cross and leave it there. Trusting that God takes your burdens - so you don't have to carry them anymore.



**CROSSING
TOGETHER**

WHERE DO YOU FIND COMMUNITY?

Use this space to write
your thoughts



BE STILL...

Try and find time this week to be 'present' with God.

Maybe... time without your phone,
time surrounded by nature,
a moment in quiet.

NATURE'S WAY



This space contained a copyrighted reflection,
"Nature's Way"
By
Paul Heppleston, "Nature's Way" in *Autumn, Liturgical resources for August, September and October including
Ordinary time and Harvest*, ed. Ruth Harvey, (Glasgow: Wildgoose Publications, 2021), 196.

NEXT WEEK'S WONDERINGS - I WONDER...

what's the very best ever day you've had?

if you could change one thing in the world, what would it be?

when has something that seemed difficult to you worked out to be something really good?

what makes you laugh out loud?

RESPONSE

What's your response to this week? Here's some space to note down anything you don't want to forget and any thoughts of questions you would like to bring to the group next week.

Week 4: Resurrection (as delivered)

BEING
WITH...
A SAFE PLACE TO EXPLORE FAITH

Week 4. Resurrection



WONDERINGS - I WONDER...

what's the very best ever day you've had?

if you could change one thing in the world, what would it be?

when has something that seemed difficult to you worked out to be something really good?

what makes you laugh out loud?

THE BEST EVER DAY!

creation



Where's the awe?

This space contained an image from Space.com, "Wow! James Webb Space Telescope delivers breathtaking view of Rho Ophiuchi for anniversary - 4K," accessed January 3, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OatRyUZQJ3k&t=6s>.

This space contained a video from Space.com, "Wow! James Webb Space Telescope delivers breathtaking view of Rho Ophiuchi for anniversary - 4K," accessed January 3, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OatRyUZQJ3k&t=6s>.

THE BEST EVER DAY!

creation



exodus



THE BEST EVER DAY!

covenant



Christmas



THE BEST EVER DAY!

Good Friday



last day



THE BEST EVER DAY!



All the
best of
everything!



JESUS SAID,

Add your name here...

This is my body broken for you

&

This my blood shed for you

BE STILL...

Try and find time this week to be
'present' with God.

Maybe... time without your phone,
time surrounded by nature,
a moment in quiet.



THE SPACE BETWEEN

This space contained a copyrighted reflection,
"The Space Between"

By

Fiona van Wissen, "The Space Between" in *Autumn, Liturgical resources for August, September and October including Ordinary, Time and Harvest*, ed. Ruth Harvey, (Glasgow: Wildgoose Publications, 2021), 232.



Week 4: Resurrection (as intended)

BEING
WITH...
A SAFE PLACE TO EXPLORE FAITH

Week 4. Resurrection



WONDERINGS - I WONDER...

what's the very best ever day you've had?

if you could change one thing in the world, what would it be?

when has something that seemed difficult to you worked out to be something really good?

what makes you laugh out loud?

THE BEST EVER DAY!

creation



exodus



THE BEST EVER DAY!

covenant



Christmas



THE BEST EVER DAY!

Good Friday



last day



THE BEST EVER DAY!



All the
best of
everything!



JESUS SAID,

Add your name here...

This is my body broken for you

&

This my blood shed for you

BE STILL...

Try and find time this week to be
'present' with God.

Maybe... time without your phone,
time surrounded by nature,
a moment in quiet.



THE SPACE BETWEEN

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"The Space Between"

By

Fiona van Wissen, "The Space Between" in *Autumn, Liturgical resources for August, September and October including Ordinary, Time and Harvest*, ed. Ruth Harvey, (Glasgow: Wildgoose Publications, 2021), 232.



APPENDIX 5

This appendix contained the visual images featured in sessions 2 and 3 of the adapted Being With course.

Community

Helping Hands



Original image by [Jeff Kingma](#) from [Pixabay](#), accessed January 4, 2024, <https://pixabay.com/photos/assist-assistance-blue-care-child-4582129/>.

Making a New Family



Original image by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay, accessed January 4, 2024,
<https://pixabay.com/illustrations/crucifixion-christianity-pray-7205351/>.

Leader and Teacher

This space represents a copyright image of “Jesus as
Leader and Teacher,” image 9, found at
www.freebibleimages.org.

www.freebibleimages.org, accessed January 4, 2024,
<https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/lumo-lazarus3/>.

Crowd

Homeless



Original Image by New Laigh Kirk, Kilmarnock, accessed January 4, 2024,
<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=3765135863601091&set=pcb.3765136950267649>

Refugee

This space represents a copyright image of “Jesus as Refugee” found at Kelly Latimer Icons accessed November 29, 2023.

https://www.facebook.com/kellylatimoreicons/posts/1074237802968520/?paipv=0&eav=AfbZ6R2Z15oXH3bSSPSz--utPawnaMXqtUgCq0DS_pegulsk9hTfC5_rkT9UsdLMDGw&_rdr

Crowded Street



Original image by Brian Merrill from Pixabay, accessed January 4, 2024,
<https://pixabay.com/photos/pedestrians-people-busy-movement-400811/>

Challenging Unjust Authority

Cross

This space represents a copyright image of “Jesus is crucified,” image 7, found at www.freebibleimages.org.

www.freebibleimages.org, accessed January 4, 2024,
<https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/jesus-crucified/>.

Freedom



freedom

Original image by Image by Elias from Pixabay, accessed January 4, 2024,
<https://pixabay.com/illustrations/freedom-silhouette-woman-2053281/>.

Against the Oppressor



against the oppressor

Original image by Patrick Behn from Pixabay, accessed January 4, 2024,
<https://pixabay.com/photos/blm-black-lives-matter-protest-5267765/>.

Essence

Trinity



Original image by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay, accessed January 4, 2024,
<https://pixabay.com/illustrations/trinitatis-trinity-dove-cross-7244297/>.

Bread and Wine



Original image by Deborah Hudson from Pixabay, accessed January 4, 2024,
<https://pixabay.com/photos/bread-communion-eucharist-church-3935952/>.

Resurrection



Original image by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay, accessed January 4, 2024,
<https://pixabay.com/illustrations/christ-faith-god-jesus-clouds-sun-4852588/>

Existence

Christmas Manger



Christmas manger

Original image by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay, accessed January 4, 2024,
<https://pixabay.com/illustrations/christmas-crib-barn-bethlehem-1010749/>
Crowded Street



Original image by Brian Merrill from Pixabay, accessed January 4, 2024,
<https://pixabay.com/photos/pedestrians-people-busy-movement-400811/>

Cross

This space represents a copyright image of “Jesus is crucified,” image 7, found at www.freebibleimages.org.

www.freebibleimages.org, accessed January 4, 2024,
<https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/jesus-crucified/>.

The Divided Trinity



Original image by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay, accessed January 4, 2024,
<https://pixabay.com/illustrations/trinitatis-trinity-dove-cross-7244297/>.

APPENDIX 6

Post Course Qualitative Interview

This appendix contains the questions asked in the semi-structured post course interview.

1. Why did you do the course?

Spiritual Styles

2. Did you find your Spiritual pathways assessment to be an accurate description of yourself? Why/why not?

Wonderings

3. How useful did you find the wonderings at the start of each session?

Understanding

4. Did the course help you to understand more about Jesus? Tell me more?
5. Has taking part in the course affected the way you understand yourself?

Tell me more?

Images, symbols, and creation

6. Was the use of images during the course helpful? Which images worked/did not work? Why do you think this?
7. During the course we used different symbols, such as the lighting and blowing out of the candle, the sand for writing in, the cross to lay stones at, and the breaking of

bread and drinking of the wine. Did these rituals and symbols work for you or not?
Which ones worked/did not work? Why do you think this?

8. Was the final session when we thought about the resurrection by using examples from nature helpful? What worked/did not work for you? Why do you think this?
9. Did you read any of the nature poems that were included in the course pack? Were they helpful, or unhelpful?

Be still

10. Did you take the opportunity to “Be still: try and find time this week to be ‘present’ with God. Maybe... time without your phone, time surrounded by nature, a moment in quiet.” Why not? If you did was this helpful?

General

11. Would you recommend this course to others? Why/Why not?

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