Gender-Inclusive Language and Worship

Adrian Thatcher

A Modern Church *Forewords* publication

Gender Inclusive Language and Worship

by Adrian Thatcher

ISBN: 978-0-9521948-7-3

Published by Modern Church

UK Registered Charity No 281573

modernchurch.org.uk

0845 345 1909

Prof. Adrian Thatcher is Honorary Professor in the Department of Theology and Religion at the University of Exeter, and Honorary Fellow in Medical Humanities in the Plymouth University Peninsula Schools of Medicine & Dentistry.

Website: adrianthatcher.org

Contents

1. What is ‘gender-inclusive language’?

Gender-inclusive language, in Christian theology, hymnody, liturgy and prayer, is language which does not privilege men over women. It is language which recognizes God is beyond the distinctions of sex. It differs from ‘gender-neutral’ language. Gender-inclusive language is personal language drawn from the whole range of human experience. Gender-neutral language avoids personal terms. Language about or addressed to God should be derived from *human* experience, not just from men’s experience.

Within a single generation the meaning of the term ‘inclusive language’ has changed completely. People generally assumed that to speak of ‘men’ or ‘man’ was to speak *inclusively*, for women (and children) were included, silently and invisibly, in the generalization ‘men’.

There is a surprising reason, rarely noted or understood, for the incorporation of women as honorary men in the old ‘inclusive’ language. The reason is that, from Aristotle onwards, women were regarded as deficient men. Instead of two opposite sexes, there was a single continuum, ‘man’, running from more perfect to less perfect, from active to passive, from masculine to feminine, from rational to irrational. When theologians (and doctors, philosophers and lawyers) spoke of ‘man’ or ‘men’, they included women, but only as lesser versions of themselves.

But now inclusive language means something completely different. Since the late 70s, feminist criticism of sexism has also been directed at the churches. Sexism is the privileging of one sex and its interests over another sex (or sexes) and its interests. Any assumption that one sex is more perfect, or more valuable, or cleverer, or more like God, or better able to represent Christ, is sexist. Liberal-minded Christians agree with feminists about sexism. They have been generally happy to accept the modern idea that there are two sexes, and the still later idea that these two sexes are ‘equal’. An advantage of the modern view is that it removes the demeaning implication that women are in any sense inferior to men.

2. Why is gender-inclusive language a problem for the churches?

The problem is much greater than avoiding ‘men’ and substituting ‘humankind’ or ‘men and women’. First, many of God’s names are masculine. Jesus taught us to pray ‘Our Father’, not ‘Our Mother’. Jesus is the ‘Son of God’ and the ‘Son of Man’. Are these names non-negotiable, derived from revelation, or substitutable by less masculine terms, like ‘Creator’, ‘Redeemer’, ‘the Human One’? What about the scores of male pronouns, pervading scripture and liturgy? Do they not presume divine male subjects, even as they express deep personal-ness, intimacy and devotion? ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son…’

Second, Christian feminists have raised the problem of the gender of Jesus. ‘Can a male Saviour save women?’ The problem seems to be not so much the biological maleness of Jesus, but the complacent sexist assumptions that are made to arise from it. In the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches, the maleness of Jesus and the twelve disciples has been emphasized to the point that ministers and priests are thought to be unable to represent the male Jesus without being male themselves. The maleness of Jesus fits like a glove over the hand of a male God.

Third, sociologists speak of the way institutions shape the way their members perceive themselves as male and female.

They call this ‘gendering’. Churches are hugely influential institutions in ‘gendering’ us, in shaping us as men and women by mediating to us beliefs and practices about ourselves in relation to people of the ‘other’ sex. Some of these beliefs and practices are so deeply embedded in ourselves and our churches that, without prophetic insight, we may never question them.

For example, if a man, and only a man, invariably appears at the altar or in the pulpit, the exclusion of women becomes the silent norm, assuming unconscious acceptance by its failure to be noticed. It is very clear that the language of liturgy and worship plays a crucial role in the gendering function of churches. If the language used to address God is almost exclusively masculine, and mainly spoken by men, then it amounts to a gendered practice that speaks volumes about the place of women in the traditions of worship and so in the churches themselves.

The Catholic Church has an ancient principle, *lex orandi lex credendi*, which roughly means ‘the law of praying is the law of believing’. As the Church prays, so the Church believes. The principle was intended to demonstrate that the liturgies of the church ought always to reflect the beliefs of the Church. Few Christians are likely to object to this principle, but perhaps many of us have yet to recognize that the same principle applies to the negative factors in the language of worship as well as the positive ones. Endless repetition of masculine language, about or addressed to God, or thought to be coming from God, truthfully

conveys what the Church believes about God. The language is the key to the belief, and the language is consistently sexist.

Fourth, language is implicated in gender violence. Language is the carrier of a near universal system or systems of patriarchy which control the place and status of women. Of course, the association between liturgical language and violence against women and children is indirect. But when combined with a variety of gendered exclusions and practices, it can provide the religious legitimation of a world-view that is harmful to women and demeaning to them as co-equal children of God.

Finally, feminist scholarship has shown that the symbol of God the Father has underwritten and legitimized a patriarchal masculine order which, until recently, pervaded all social institutions – universities, all the professions, and of course the churches. Because of the masculine symbols at the root of the doctrine of God, women have no divine feminine symbols to legitimize and affirm them. What then can be done?

There are two main theological approaches to this lack of feminine representation in God. One is to recover the sense of Mary the mother of Jesus as the new Eve, and to revere her as the Mother of God from whom the flesh of God the Son was taken. The birth of Jesus to a virgin bypasses the patriarchal order and its controlling, inseminating function, and so offers an escape from it. The other approach is to examine the masculine names for God, to set them in their ancient context, and to seek to revise and supplement them. This second approach is attempted here.

3. Does God have a sex?

The question whether God has a sex is an odd one. It must be pressed however, in order to undermine the widespread and idolatrous assumption, whether tacit or explicit, that God is male. There is a clear answer to the question of the sex of God. God is beyond the distinction between male and female. There are four possibilities regarding the sex of God:

1. God is female.
2. God is male.
3. God is male and female. S/he is androgynous.
4. God is neither male nor female.

No Christian is likely to opt for 1). Perhaps a majority would opt for 2) while feeling a little uneasy about it. The case for 3) might be based on Gen.1:27: God is imaged in men and women alike, and so within God there must be male and female elements. A strong case can be made that 4) gets closest to being true.

That is because in all Christian thought there is a basic distinction between the Creator and what is created (creation, creatures). God's being is eternal, ours is temporal; God's being is infinite; ours is finite, relative and contingent (it might not have been; it will soon cease to be). A basic characteristic of living beings is that they are capable of reproducing themselves. For this all but the simplest organisms need to be sexed. They will

usually be recognizable as either male or female. But God does not need to reproduce, so God does not need to be sexed. Being sexed is part of what it means to be *created.* God is *not* created. Instead God is the supreme creative power, and the reason why anything that is capable of reproducing itself exists at all.

Words like ‘suprasexual’ or ‘genderful’ are sometimes used in connection with the character of God. The intention is to say that God is beyond the distinction between male and female but may be ‘imaged’ by both. There is a danger, however, that if male language is used of God at all (however carefully it is qualified), then it will be thought that God must be male. That is a mistake.

4. How does language about God work?

The character of human language about God is metaphorical and analogical. In Latin and Greek *metaphora* means a transfer. In metaphor, meaning is transferred from one term to another. In analogy one thing is inferred to be similar to another thing in a certain respect, on the basis of the known similarity between the things in other respects. So when we pray 'Our Father' we transfer certain elements of our experience of being or having a father, to God, emphasizing, say, a father's care for his children and his provision for them. An earthly father and the heavenly Father are similar in certain respects, and dissimilar in certain other respects. That is how metaphor and analogy work. To understand literally the names given to God in the Bible and in Tradition is to risk identifying the *bearer* of the name with the name itself, and that comes perilously close to idolatry.

5. God the Father

Thinking of God the Father as somehow divinely masculine, makes the mistake of transferring from human fathers to God an element of dissimilarity instead of an element of similarity. It is to ignore the metaphorical character of our language about God. God's names are symbols which can express something of God's reality but don't ever reveal God's nature more than partially. That is why the Eastern theologian Gregory of Nyssa (*d.* 395) insisted that the term 'Mother' may be applied to the Person of the Father, because, as he says, 'Both terms mean the same, because the divine is neither male nor female'. He thought that being sexed was a temporary feature of humankind, a feature of the body but not the soul.

We might want to think of God as 'Father' in four related but distinguishable ways:

1. as a name
2. as a Person
3. as a Relation
4. as the Cosmic Parent.

'Father' as a name

'Father' is a name for God, albeit one of many. The first petition in the Lord's Prayer is that God's name be hallowed. God

is to be named and addressed as Father in personal and intimate terms. Remembering that we use metaphor and analogy when we speak about God, the issue is not whether God is our Father but what we are doing with language when God is so named. What meanings are selected from the experience of earthly fathers and then attached to the heavenly Father?

It seems certain that a cluster of ideas has become historically attached to the metaphor of heavenly Father that has become counterproductive. That cluster consists of elements of male parenting like distance and detachment from the hands-on caring for children; the need for discipline and chastisement for wrong-doing; the presence of an unchallengeable authority-figure in the household, and so on. Some fathers are abusive and absent. There is a real danger that some of these elements then get transferred to the divine Father. It can be deeply upsetting for some people to channel their searching, or their love, for God through their experience of their human fathers.

There are plenty of other positive possibilities which emerge from the continuing application of the metaphor 'Father' to God. Here are two examples. The Lord's Prayer teaches us to ask the Father for daily bread. (Mt.6:11) This seems an odd petition because three verses earlier Jesus has said '…your Father knows what you need before you ask him.' (Mt.6:8) So why ask? A good answer might be to learn that for the very gift of life itself, and the daily calories required to sustain it, God's name is to be praised. God's children depend on God's provision, as surely as children depend on their parents' provision.

Another example is the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk.15:11-24). On the one hand, the parable worryingly reflects the erasure, the invisibility, of women. There is no mention of how the son's mother felt, or whether his sisters were more pleased to see him return than his mean-minded brother. On the other hand, the parable illustrates the virtues, or character traits, of a human parent, which best resemble the actions of the heavenly Father. The parable illustrates compassion, joy, forgiveness and mercy. One deals with the gendered character of the parable by insisting that the qualities the father demonstrates are *human* qualities, not gendered ones. Men don't have a monopoly on compassion! Quite the reverse. Undoubtedly the parable is about men – a father, two sons, and their servants – but women characters could have served equally well. Masculinity or fatherhood isn't necessary for parent-metaphors to work - it may actually impede them.

Father as a 'person', a 'relation', as the 'cosmic parent'

The name 'Father' names God in at least two quite distinct ways. 'Father' is a name for the One God, as Jesus clearly taught. But 'Father' is also the name for one of the three Persons who are together the one God. A divine Person is what God is three of. The one God is a personal God, and the personal God comprises the three Persons of Father, Son and Spirit.

The crucial feature of God's being called 'Father' is not masculinity but the Father's intimate relation to the Son, and also to God's own children. The word 'father', like the word 'mother', builds into itself the relationship to children, because you can't be a mother or father without them. To pray to God as Father is to express our child-like relatedness to God. As we shall see in a moment, one of the reasons why Jesus is called 'the Son of God' is to stress the unique relatedness of Jesus the human being to God, and God's unique relatedness to Jesus. The letter to the Ephesians speaks of 'the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name' (3:14-15). God is the cosmic Parent, in intimate relation to all families that come into being.

In the classical and biblical worlds of the first century, there is no avoiding the fact that men were regarded as superior to women, and this fact is embedded in the language that was used about God. That includes the language Jesus himself used and the language the Church used to express its faith in Jesus as God's Messiah. In the twenty-first century, we see many advantages and no disadvantages in also calling God 'Our Mother', since human fathers have no monopoly on the parental qualities which we find in our relation to God and God's relation to us. As we shall shortly see, this is a step that can only gradually and gently be taken.

6. God the Son

There are several reasons why Jesus may have been called ‘Son of God’ or ‘God the Son’. The hated Roman emperor was revered as a son of god or the gods. Perhaps the confession of Jesus as the real Son of God was to make a daring political statement. Perhaps the name had a colloquial character. There are ‘sons of Belial’ in the Gospels, and ‘sons of men’, while the Devil is said to be the father of others. This is a colloquial way of speaking of people as wicked, or heretical, or just human.

That Jesus is ‘Son of God’ may originally have been a colloquial way of saying that, to the eyes of faith, there was so much of God to be found in Jesus that he was, in a figure of speech, a ‘son of God’, then ‘Son of God’, then ‘the Son of God’, and then the second Person of the Trinity. ‘Son of God’ represents the highest possible human estimate of who Jesus was and is. The relation between father and son in the Hebrew Bible is well attested. Just as the eldest son receives his father’s blessing, his estate, so Jesus receives all that God has and is, in his life and ministry, death and resurrection.

These are some of the reasons why Jesus may have been called ‘Son of God’. But in our time there is a crass literalism which does not understand the complex, subtle and symbolic meanings of deep religious language, and consequently reduces and distorts it. This literalism sees ‘Son’ and thinks maleness, or the incarnation of a male ‘Father-God’. A moment’s reflection

shows that this is a bizarre pattern of thought. If literalness is to be the way we think and speak about Jesus, then God has a wife, or had sex with the mother of Jesus, in order for a son to be produced. Jesus is symbolically God's Son, and that has little to do with his maleness.

We have seen that one of the meanings of father-son language is to express relation between children and parents, with all the suggestions of dependability and dependence included. Nevertheless, Jesus was born as a son of Mary and Joseph. Does Jesus' maleness matter at all anymore? The answer here can be found in the biblical text that 'the Word became flesh' (Jn. 1:14). The Word became human flesh, not 'male flesh'. Jesus shared the same flesh and blood that all human beings have and are (and why indeed restrict his solidarity with flesh to *human* flesh?). The Word in John's Gospel has two forms. It is the *general* presence and activity of God in the world, and it is the *particular* presence and activity of God in Christ. For the Word to have a particular presence, the Word had to be incarnate in a particular human being, and that human being was Jesus. The maleness of Jesus is significant only because it was necessary for Jesus to be incarnate in a particular human being. In his time, it would have been impossible to imagine a divine incarnation in a woman. Thankfully in our time, it is both imaginable and desirable.

It is important to recall that Christians from the earliest times have confessed Jesus as truly human, truly divine. Liberal Christians in the last 75 years have found it necessary to defend the real humanity of Jesus against unwelcome emphases on the

divinity, leading to a remoteness from the messiness of humanity, and subsequent irrelevance. But the divinity of Christ is most important within the new theological topic of gender, for to say that Jesus is God is to say that the whole Christ is beyond the distinctions between male and female, for these distinctions, as we have seen, belong to the created order. The Christ of the creeds has a *human* nature, not a male nature, and the divine nature of Christ, because it is divine, is neither male nor female.

7. Being the Body of Christ

All Christians know that, by their faith and their baptism they are incorporated into the Body of Christ. But they are less familiar with the different meanings given to the body of Christ in the New Testament. Depending on context the body of Christ is:

- the physical body that suffered on the cross;
- the transformed body that was resurrected and ascended into heaven;
- the sacramental body of bread and wine;
- the ecclesial body or church into which Christians are incorporated;
- the ethical body as it performs Christ-like activities;
- and the mystical body (if it differs from the ecclesial body) which exists partly beyond space and time.

So the question arises regarding this body: *why should it be thought to be masculine, or to give priority to the masculine, in any sense at all?* Why should it incorporate the subjugations of the old order, since it exists to replace that order? What room is there in it for the power differences which have always been associated with gender difference in a 'fallen' world? Of the different meanings of 'body of Christ', only one of these, the crucified body of Christ is noticeably male, and we have just seen why that body was male and why the whole Christ is neither male nor female. The risen body of Christ is a transformed body; the sacramental body, being bread and wine,

is genderless; the ecclesial body cannot be male because it comprises men and women; the mystical body, while partially instantiated in worship and prayer, exists beyond even space and time; and the ethical body is known by its practice, not by its gender. If it helps to call this rich diversity of body language ‘queer’, let’s do it. The body of Christ we may safely conclude has many forms (that is, it is ‘polymorphic’). The body of Christ is both ineffably mystical and factically material, as it oscillates between the agony and ecstasy of flesh and the timeless purity of eternity. Always given, always broken, always inclusive, it is also our triumphant destiny, that on which, in this life, we feed in our hearts ‘by faith with thanksgiving’.

8. What practical steps can churches take?

The topic of inclusive language has inevitably moved to the character of the God to whom language is addressed, who addresses us, and whose character is manifested in the Word made flesh. These considerations make the need for inclusive language more important than ever since, on these accounts of the doctrines of God and of Christ, no priority at all can be found for masculinity in these divine subjects. The mainstream within the churches may be perpetuating models of divinity which are seen to be inadequate theologically and offensive morally. Language is a principal means for their continuation. So the question 'What is to be done?' becomes an acute and urgent one. Here are some suggestions.

We need to recognize that the move to inclusive language is a long-term shift that will not be accomplished quickly. Any issue involving sex or gender triggers visceral conservative reactions, and inclusive language is no exception. We are in for a long haul, probably equivalent in time to the struggle to ordain women.

We must re-vision our theological tradition and not rely on secular understandings of the equality of the sexes. We belong to a renewed humanity, the body of Christ, where 'there is no longer male and female' (Gal. 3:28), where gender difference should be a source of love and joy instead of a site of conflict and domination. The new life in Christ, like life in God, rescues

us alike from domination and subjugation. That said, we recognize that feminist and secular campaigners, using the language of human rights, equality and justice have achieved much, while the Church has languished in its ancient patriarchal assumptions.

Many Christians value particularly the name of God the Father. That is because it lies at the root of the experience of being a child of God, being loved by the One who brought us into being, and with whom we have an intimate and devotional relationship. It is important not to appear to dismiss or downgrade these elements of the experience of God. It is better to *supplement* them instead. One of the ways this can be done is to teach that in being loved, nurtured, and cared for by God, God acts just as much as a human mother as a human father. When God is sometimes addressed as 'Our father and mother', the seed is sown that paternity by itself limits the characterization of God's goodness towards us.

That said, it is important not to be deterred by worry over causing offence. Clergy and worship leaders report that whenever they refer to God as 'She' or in any other way as female, what people hear is too often perceived as so disruptive that it becomes all they can hear. That may mean that the main content of the prayer or sermon is 'lost'. Because clergy don't want this to happen, they shy away from using female language at all. This has been going for years. It is a 'catch 22' situation that has to be confronted. Nothing will change until people are more familiar with female language for God. So it must be used!

Patient teaching and explanation will also be needed to accompany it.

It is probably necessary to avoid the religious equivalent of political correctness. For example, while it is always appropriate to pray to God the Trinity as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer/Sanctifier, it is probably better over time to mix names which are gender-explicit, including feminine names, along with names that are chosen for their obvious gender-neutrality.

Use female images for God. There are undoubtedly female images of God in the Bible. The authors of Deutero-Isaiah (Isaiah 40 – 66) liken God to a woman giving birth. God says 'now I will cry out like a woman in labour, I will gasp and pant'. (Is.42:14; see also Is.46:3). God tells the Jewish people 'As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you' (Is.66:13; see also Is.49:15). Admittedly these are weak similes, and while they appear to authorize feminine language to speak of God and God's action, they are rare in the Bible, and are generally connected with highly maternal roles.

If you lead worship or teach, avoid using 'He', 'His', 'Him', when addressing God or speaking about God. It is a habit that can and should be broken. Encourage the use of a translation like *The Inclusive Bible* or *Good as New*, or translations which modify exclusive language like the New Revised Standard Version.

Amend or avoid hymns with sexist expressions or oppressive male imagery. A creative, enjoyable, even devotional

group activity might be to select some troublesome hymns, prayers and readings, and re-write them. Revised, they could then be used in worship (acknowledging original authorship and copyright where it exists).

9. Some questions for discussion

1. ‘The emphasis on the male gender and masculine language in worship is a major problem that is endlessly deferred, instead of being directly addressed’. Do you agree? What would you do about it?

2. When you pray ‘Our Father’, what images, if any, come to mind?

3. Does the gender of Jesus get in the way of women’s full identity with Jesus, and of Jesus’ identity with them?

4. Think of ways the churches may ‘gender’ us, even without our noticing.

5. Does thinking of God as ‘Our Mother’, draw you closer to Her?

6. Which of the four possibilities regarding the sex of God makes most sense to you, and why?

7. When you pray the Lord’s Prayer, which of the four ways of thinking about God as Father is foremost in your mind (if any), and why? What other ways of thinking about God do you use, or have you tried?

8. Make a list of names for God which are ungendered, e.g. Rock, Vine, Bread of Life, The Living One. What can you do to make greater use of your list in worship?

9. Do you agree that the main obstacle against more inclusive language in worship is *psychological* (i.e. fear of change, loss of familiarity, suspicion of novelty) rather than *theological*? If so, how is this obstacle to be removed?

10. 'The problem with masculine imagery for God is not that it is masculine, but that there is no comparable feminine imagery.' Discuss.

11. Is the name 'Son of God' any longer helpful in acknowledging and proclaiming who Jesus is? If so, why?

12. 'The maleness of Jesus is significant only because it was necessary for Jesus to be incarnate in a particular human being.' Is that right?

13. Is the Parable of the Prodigal Son sexist? Could you re-write it in a non-sexist way?

10. Further reading

Don't be surprised that some of these entries look a little old. Much good work was done in the 1980s and 1990s to address the problem of exclusive language. Progress slowed as the focus of attention moved in the churches from gender to sexuality.

Theology

Christian Aid (2014, July), *Of the Same Flesh: exploring a theology of gender*: christianaid.org.uk/images/of-the-same-flesh-gender-theology-report.pdf

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (1987), *Guidelines for Inclusive Language*: www.elcic.ca/Resources/Inclusive-Language.cfm

Junia Project: juniaproject.com

Pacific Women (2016), *Theology of Gender Equality*: pacificwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/Theology-of-Gender-Equality.pdf

Ramshaw, Gail (1995), *God beyond Gender: Feminist Christian God-Language,* Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Soskice, Janet Martin (2007), *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thatcher, Adrian (2011), *God, Sex and Gender: An Introduction,* Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Unitarian Universalist Association, *Inclusive Language Guidance:* uua.org/lgbtq/welcoming/ways/200008.shtml

Wren, Brian (2009[1989]), *What Language Shall I Borrow? God Talk in Worship: A Male Response to Feminist Theology*, Eugene, Or: Wipf and Stock.

Resources for worship

Boyce-Tillman, June (2006), *A Rainbow to Heaven*, Stainer and Bell. See further list at impulse-music.co.uk/juneboyce-tillman/books-lectures

Henson, John (2004), *Good as New: A Radical Retelling of the Scriptures*, Alresford: O Books.

Henson, John (2010), *Wide Awake Worship: Hymns and Prayers Renewed for the 21st Century,* Alresford: O Books.

Iona Books: ionabooks.com

Modern Church (resources for worship): modernchurch.org.uk/worship

Morley, Janet (2006), *All Desires Known* (new edition), Morehouse Publishing.

Murray, Shirley Erena, see Hope Publishing Company: hopepublishing.com/html/main.isx?sub=27&search=64.

New Century Hymnal (1995), Pilgrim Press, Cleveland (hymn book of the United Church of Christ).

Priests for Equality (2007), *The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation,* Sheed & Ward.

Schaffran, Janet and Pat Kozak (1988-2004), *More Than Words: Prayer and Ritual for Inclusive Communities*, Meyer Stone & Co.

Stainer and Bell: stainer.co.uk/shop/hymn_authors.html

Wild Goose Resource Group (Iona Community): ionabooks.com

Wootton, Janet: Various resources, including *Eagles' Wings and Lesser Things*: *Hymns, prayers, drama and other resources for worship* (2003), Stainer and Bell 2003).
See stainer.co.uk/wootton.html

Notes

Modern Church *Forewords* booklets

Modern Church *Forewords* booklets are designed to illustrate liberal approaches to theological issues.

Modern Church is a membership organisation that promotes liberal theology. It encourages open, respectful debate and discussion of matters relating to Christian faith. It was founded at the end of the 19th century as a Church of England society. Now it welcomes all who share its ethos.

We take an open-minded and thoughtful approach to Christian faith.

We understand that:

- genuine faith is committed to the search for truth, wherever it comes from
- it is possible to think and talk about God in ways that make sense in our time and culture
- we never have absolute certainty.

We expect our theology to be:

- **public:** using the language of ordinary people, not that of a religious club
- **relevant:** engaging with what is going on in society, informing our faith and how we live
- **respectful:** willing to learn from others, since we accept that we don't have all the answers.

When Modern Church began it was part of a movement that defended new scientific findings and biblical scholarship against fundamentalism. We believe, though the specific issues may change, that our approach is needed today as much as ever.

If you enjoy being challenged, Modern Church is for you. For more details:

web: modernchurch.org.uk
email: office@modernchurch.org.uk
phone: 0845 345 1909

Price: £3.50