

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Gloucestershire		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA 31 Theology and Religious Studies		
<b>Title of case study:</b> The Gospels and Increasing Moral and Cultural Capital in Modern Britain		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2007-2017		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b> Philip F. Esler	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Portland Chair in New Testament Studies	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> September 2013 to date
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> From November 2016 to December 2019 and thereafter.		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>The impact consisted of moral and cultural enlargement among members of parishes in England and Scotland producing benefits for themselves and others. Consideration of ethnic identity issues and refugees in Matthew's Gospel led to parishioners joining and supporting 'Cheltenham Welcomes Refugees', for example by teaching Syrian refugees English and learning Arabic from them, and by equipping them with homeware and children's toys. Members of another parish exposed to the Samaritan Woman (John 4) wrote poems connecting her experience with theirs, and produced dramatic pieces or works of art and craft. In Scotland a parish priest used insights from the project in sermons. The impact has been an increase in Gospel-inspired moral and cultural capital in modern Britain.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>The research was conducted into the Gospels of Matthew and John from a social-scientific point of view, especially involving social identity theory, which focuses on the ways in which group and individual identities, often in conflict with one another, can be understood. A dominant theme of the research was how, in both the Gospels of Matthew and John, Christ-movement identity developed in contrast to Judean ethnic identity, a major issue in recent Gospels research.</p> <p>This development was tracked against passages in these Gospels showing areas of powerful conflict (e.g. Matthew 23 and John 8:30-59). One aspect of this was Herod's antipathy to another 'king of the Jews' that led to the family of Joseph, Mary and Jesus becoming early refugees from the Holy Land to Egypt, a narrative consonant with the flight of refugees from Syria during the course of the project.</p> <p>Another theme was the way in which Jesus himself, in Matt 8:5-13 and 15:21-28, learned to suppress initial Jewish ethnocentric dislike of non-Jews by actually encountering some of them, an early emic example of the 'contact hypothesis' in the resolution of inter-group conflict, especially as developed in social identity theory. Jesus' encounters with women in Matthew 15 and John 4 also indicate surprising and liberating perspectives on the way women were accommodated within Christ-group identity. Within the new Christ-group, identity was also fostered by the development of shared norms and prototypes. Because the theoretical perspectives underlying this research originate in the analysis of inter- and intra-group phenomena in modern society, they allow the research results to be brought relatively easily into contact with contemporary life, especially in its moral and cultural dimensions. The evolving openness of the Matthean Jesus to non-Jews (men and women) proves to be a valuable stimulus to reflection on attitudes and actions that are today directed towards refugees and migrants. The provocative encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman provides an immediate stimulus to the creation of poetic, dramatic and artistic</p>		

works relating her experience to that of people in our setting, not least liberative narratives concerning women.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. (With Steve Mason) 'Judean and Christ-Movement Identities: Grounds for a Distinction', *New Testament Studies* 63 (2017): 493-515. (*Evidence of quality*: peer-reviewed-article in journal ranked very highly among in the biblical field).
2. 'Giving the Kingdom to an *Ethnos* that Will Bear Its Fruit: Ethnic and Christ-Movement Identities in Matthew', in Daniel M. Gurtner, Grant Macaskill and Jonathan T. Pennington (eds), *In the Fulness of Time: Essays on Christology, Creation, and Eschatology in Honor of Richard Bauckham*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016, 177-196. (*Evidence of quality*: substantial essay in collection edited by world-leading scholars and with contributions by same).
3. 'Intergroup Conflict and Matthew 23: Towards Responsible Historical Interpretation of a Challenging Text', *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 45 (2015): 38-59. (*Evidence of quality*: peer-reviewed article in US-based journal with a strong international reputation).
4. 'Group Norms and Prototypes in Matt 5:3-12: A Social Identity Interpretation of the Matthean Beatitudes', in J. Brian Tucker and A. Baker Coleman (eds), *T & T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament*. London: Bloomsbury/T & T Clark, 2014, 147-172. (*Evidence of quality*: substantial essay first publishing edited version of 1994 presentation that inaugurated social identity approaches to biblical interpretation in a collection edited by and featuring an international group of researchers, many of them world-leading).
5. 'Judean Ethnic Identity and the Matthean Jesus', in *Jesus— Gestalt und Gestaltungen: Rezeptionen des Galiläers in Wissenschaft, Kirche und Gesellschaft: FS Für Gerd Theissen*, in Petra von Gemünden, David G. Horrell, and Max Küchler (eds), NTOA. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013, 193-210. (*Evidence of quality*: substantial essay in a collection edited by world-leading researchers and with contributions by same).
6. 'From *Ioudaioi* to Children of God: The Development of a Non-Ethnic Group Identity in the Gospel of John', in Anselm C. Hagedorn, Zeba A. Crook and Eric Stewart (eds), *In Other Words: Essays on Social Science Methods and the New Testament in Honor of Jerome H. Neyrey*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007, 106-37. (*Evidence of quality*: substantial essay in a collection edited by and featuring an international group of researchers, many of them world-leading).

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The impact consisted of benefits obtained by members of three Christian parishes, in England and Scotland, through involvement in a structured process of exploring issues of pressing social importance and of cultural significance in modern Britain in the light of recent social-scientific interpretation of Matthew, Mark and John. The core of the benefit entailed an expansion of the resources of moral and cultural capital available to the participants as they lived their lives in modern Britain.

The project embraced a period of activity in four parishes:

- A. *Meeting Matthew in Multi-Ethnic Britain*, four Advent sessions of ninety minutes each in 2016 (1, 8, 15 and 22 December) for parishioners of St Gregory the Great's RC Parish Cheltenham (the central Cheltenham church), coordinated with Professor Hazel Bryan, then Professor of Education at the University of Gloucestershire. Some fifty people participated at the sessions.
- B. *The Gospel of Mark and the Christian Life*, four Advent sessions of ninety minutes each in 2017 (29 November, 6, 13 and 20 December) for parishioners of St Gregory the Great's RC

Parish Cheltenham (the outer Cheltenham church), coordinated with Hazel Bryan, then Professor of Education at the University of Gloucestershire. Some thirty people participated at the sessions.

- C. *John 4: Jesus' Encounter with the Woman at the Well*, a weekend retreat for parishioners of Christ Church Anglican Parish, Cheltenham in 2018 (Friday 16 - Sunday 18 September) coordinated by Professor Esler where he gave three all-group presentations (with general discussion) and generally interacted with the participants. About 120 people attended this weekend.
- D. *Matthew's Gospel for Living a Christian Life*, four Advent sessions of ninety minutes each for parishioners of St James' RC Church in St Andrews in 2019 (28 November, 5, 12 and 19 December), coordinated by Professor Esler. Some twenty people participated at the sessions.

In each case the procedure was strongly dialogical, with input from Esler on both relevant social-scientific perspectives relating to social identity, especially with respect to Jewish ethnic identity and Christ-movement identity, and recent scholarship on the Gospels of Matthew, Mark or John, followed by general group responses or break-out sessions into groups followed by an all-group feedback session. The Matthew sessions involved some redactional work vis-à-vis Mark by the participants in groups. The use of the social-scientific perspectives allowed the participants to draw their own parallels between the biblical texts and issues in our contemporary society and politics. Participants were regularly given the opportunity to relate the Gospel passages being studied to their own lives and experience. Generally, the parishioner responses were discursive, but at the Christ Church parish away weekend a whole morning was also devoted to groups working on poetic, dramatic and artistic responses.

The impacts produced by these knowledge exchange activities encompassed beneficial behaviour change, the creation of artistic outputs (poetic, dramatic and artistic), enhanced understanding of the Gospels and how they relate to contemporary moral and cultural issues, and expanded knowledge of and appreciation for Jewish religion and culture.

As a direct result of the Cheltenham programme at St Gregory's in 2016 (which had ended with a session on Syrian refugees), a group of parishioners set up links with the organisation *Cheltenham Welcomes Refugees* and there after supported it whenever they could. Activities undertaken by the parishioners included organising a trip to the seaside for Syrian families and providing them with homeware and toys, and having language exchange with some parishioners teaching refugees English and some refugees teaching parishioners Arabic.

During the 2017 weekend on John 4, members of the Christ Church parish created numerous artistic works focused on the Samaritan women, taking the form of poetry, drama and art. One poem, 'Photini's Well', spoke to the experience of an African woman who had settled in the UK. Another, 'The Thirsty Opportunist', melded aspects of the author's life with that of the Samaritan Woman. During the closing worship, a group of parishioners performed a play they had written based on John 4.

Numerous participants at the sessions reported enhanced understanding of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and John (both in themselves and in how they differ from one another [a point often made] and how they need to be contextualised) in general and social-scientific terms, resulting in an increased capacity to relate Gospel passages to contemporary moral and cultural

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issues. Also reported was enhanced understanding of and appreciation for Jewish religion and culture.

The parish priest from the St Andrews parish on subsequent occasions preached to the congregation based on knowledge gained in the sessions, so that even wider circles of new understanding and awareness were generated.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Testimonial from Sue Holbrook, parishioner of St Gregory the Great Roman Catholic Church, Cheltenham, 17<sup>th</sup> November 2018.
2. Testimonial from Rev Tim Mayfield, Minister of Christ Church Anglican Parish, Cheltenham 18<sup>th</sup> September 2018.
3. Poem by Rev Tim Mayfield, entitled 'Thirsty Opportunist' of 15<sup>th</sup> September 2018.
4. Testimonial from Fr M. J. Galbraith, Parish Priest of St James Roman Catholic Church, St Andrews, 13<sup>th</sup> January 2020.