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ARTICLE

Creation Stories: What Were the First Resource Churches?

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Abstract

This article builds on the first in the trilogy, 'What's in a Name? An Examination of Current Definitions of Resource Churches', by evaluating narratives in current literature about the origins of resource churches. These will be assessed according to the criteria, highlighted through the perspective of Foucault and Arendt on origin stories, of believability in their depiction of historical events, application to the manifest properties of contemporary resource churches, teleological purpose, and attentiveness to conflict. The origin, or creation, stories to be examined particularly consider the formation and development of resource churches in relation to the first century and Anglo-Saxon England, as well as following the start of the parish system.

Keywords: Acts; Anglo-Saxon England; church planting; minster churches; monastic communities; origin stories; parish system; resource churches

Introduction

> An origin story [a narrative that explains how a culture came into being] ... infuses everyday life and relations with significance by explaining why things are as they are and by providing guidance for how things should evolve based on what we already understand about our world.[1]

Fascination with origin stories, or 'creation stories', is demonstrated by the way that Genesis has been described as the most controversial book in the Bible.[2] Origin stories exist not only for the cosmos, or the earth, but for cities[3] and

[1]Jessica Silbey, 'Origin Stories and Other Tales: Mythical Beginnings of Intellectual Property', Abstract for Intellectual Property Scholars Conference (2006), p. 320.

[2]Peter Enns and Jared Byas, *Genesis for Normal People: A Guide to the Most Controversial, Misunderstood, and Abused Book of the Bible* (Englewood, Chicago: Patheos Press, 2012).

[3]For example, David Adams Leeming says 'of more concern to the Romans than the universal creation was the subject of the creation of Rome, and two primary stories emerged to describe that founding'. David Adams Leeming, *Creation Myths of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 233.

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states,[4] medical science,[5] and in the form of pourquoi – or fictional origin stories – for animals[6] and superheroes.[7] In an article about how patent, copyright and trademark laws in the United States are rooted in narrative theory, Silbey draws on the work of Michel Foucault to criticize origin stories as essentialist narratives that attempt to justify solutions by capturing the 'exact essence of things'.[8] The first article in this trilogy attempted to recognize the 'properties the manifestation of which are necessary … to be correctly identified as'[9] a resource church, thereby relying on a critical realist epistemological framework, which Joe O'Mahoney shows to support forms of essentialism. Therefore, while, as O'Mahoney points out, 'the identification of essences and generative processes may be erroneous',[10] not all nominal essences and origin stories need to be rejected. This resonates with Paul Avis's understanding of Anglicanism, in which he demonstrates that it is anachronistic to talk about Anglican ecclesiology before the seventeenth century but defends the concept of 'a core Anglican ecclesiology and one that is by no means negligible'.[11]

The widespread proliferation of resource churches in the UK, as part of a mixed ecology in the Church of England, was noted in my previous article, which attempted to define the concept. The following definition by Ric Thorpe was adopted as 'the best existing definition of the term "resource church" in current literature'.[12]:

> A resource church is designated by its bishop to be a church-planting church which trains its leaders to resource and support mission across a diocese.
>
> This consists of five core elements:
>
> 1. Authorized by the diocesan bishop
> 2. Part of a diocesan strategy to evangelize a city or town and transform society
> 3. Intentionally resourced to plant and revitalize churches
> 4. Actively develops a pipeline of leaders for further planting
> 5. Provides other resources for mission across their city or town.[13]

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[4] Venkataraghavan Subha Srinivasan, *The Origin Story of India's States* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2021).

[5] Richard Horton, 'The Paris Commune and the Birth of American Medicine', *The Lancet*, 397.10270 (2021), p. 181.

[6] Rudyard Kipling, *Just So Stories* (New York: Macmillan, 1902).

[7] Alex Romagnoli and Gian S. Pagnucci, *Enter the Superheroes: American Values, Culture, and the Canon of Superhero Literature* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Books, 2013).

[8] Michael Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', in D.F. Bouchard (ed.), *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), pp. 139-64.

[9] Roy Bhaskar, *Realist Theory of Science* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 279.

[10] Joe O'Mahoney, 'Embracing Essentialism: A Realist Critique of Resistance to Discursive Power', *Organization*, 19.6 (2012), pp. 723-41.

[11] Paul Avis, 'Anglican Ecclesiology', in idem. (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Ecclesiology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 239-62.

[12] Jack Shepherd, 'What's in a Name? An Examination of Current Definitions of Resource Churches', *Journal of Anglican Studies* (2023), p. 16.

[13] Ric Thorpe, *Resource Churches: A Story of Church Planting and Revitalization across the Nation* (London: The Gregory Centre for Church Multiplication, 2021), pp. 24-27.

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The first article identified problems with Thorpe's definition, namely that it 'restricts the concept of a resource church to the context of current legislative practice within the Church of England by referring to episcopal authorization and dioceses'.[14] This is in contrast with Matthew Porter's definition that 'describes creative partnership in much broader terms than authorization by diocesan bishops', reflecting that resource churches exist beyond the context of the Church of England, for instance the Fountain Vineyard Christian Fellowship[15] and Life Church Southampton.[16]

The term 'resource church' was distinguished from the following associated words:

- 'Hub churches', which the Diocese of Coventry says 'offer a gathering point and a focus where people can come from local churches that the hub is seeking to enable and support';[17]
- 'Megachurches', for which the standard definition is 'Protestant churches where more than 2000 people attend for the purposes of worship per week';[18]
- 'Resourcing churches', concerning which 'the fundamental difference seems to be … a caution, hesitancy and fear about how the concept of "resource churches" has been developed and implemented';[19] and
- 'Minster churches', which 'reflects a historical model with which resource churches have become associated'.[20]

In a recent debate at General Synod, I urged that a further review of Strategic Development Funding should be 'more theological in its scope'.[21] Martyn Percy had criticized the Renewal and Reform programme underpinning these projects as lacking 'a theological point of origin'.[22] This article will explore the origin stories that surround the recent reconfiguration of existing church practice to incorporate the resource church model. This is necessary in order for their theological foundation to be rigorously scrutinized in future research. Building on this framework, the final piece in this trilogy will investigate criticisms of the resource church model of church planting. The literature surrounding resource churches, including that relating to origin stories, is limited because, with the first church to be identified as a resource church in 2009, it is still an emerging area of research. This makes the evaluation of origin stories a matter of paramount importance for establishing foundations for the ensuing discussion about resource churches.

[14]Shepherd, 'What's in a Name?', p. 16.

[15]https://www.fvcf.co.za/about (accessed April 2023).

[16]https://www.lifesouthampton.org/ (accessed April 2023).

[17]https://d3hgrlq6yacptf.cloudfront.net/5f3ffda5728e0/content/pages/documents/diocesan-growth-strategy-faqs27323018284.pdf (accessed April 2023).

[18]Mark Cartledge, Sarah Dunlop, Heather Buckingham and Sophie Bremner, *Megachurches and Social Engagement: Public Theology in Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), p. 43.

[19]Shepherd, 'What's in a Name?, p. 11.

[20]Shepherd, 'What's in a Name?, p. 11.

[21]https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tE3y7BYRJzQ&t=32078s (accessed April 2023, 8:53:41-8:54:39).

[22]Martyn Percy, *The Future Shapes of Anglicanism: Currents, Contours, Charts* (New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 121.

This article will focus on the contemporary origin stories for resource churches. These primary texts will be explored with reference to literature ranging from the New Testament to the Venerable Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, as well as some more recent works. Four criteria can be identified by which to assess the virtues of an origin story:

1. Believability in its depiction of historical events: This is ripe for evaluation within the epistemological standpoint of critical realism and serves to prevent radical disjuncture being introduced between the perception of past and present.[23]
2. Application to the manifest properties of the contemporary phenomenon: This emerges as a characteristic of origin stories from Foucault's criticism of these as 'dissolving the singular event into an ideal continuity',[24] and completes the bridge in the gap between perception of past and present.
3. Teleological purpose: Foucault's anti-teleological view of history[25] highlights that origin stories are permeated by teleological movement that endorses the direction of manifest properties, in this case of resource churches, towards end goals.
4. Attentive to conflict: This responds to Hannah Arendt's observation that 'the phrase "state of nature" is only a theoretically purified paraphrase' for the conviction that 'in the beginning was a crime' because 'no beginning could be made without using violence'.[26] Joanne Wright warns on this basis that we must be 'attentive to the ways in which origin stories may suppress the violence of beginnings or evade politics altogether'.[27]

All origin stories must be open to ongoing refinement with these criteria providing a standard for origin stories that are reliable and constructive. It will be demonstrated that each of the narratives fulfil the criteria sufficiently to be called 'origin stories' but need refinement in key areas.

The previous article referred to the origin stories that exist for resource churches. These are Mike Breen's description of St Thomas' Crookes, Sheffield, as something akin to a new Ephesus;[28] Matthew Porter's reference to 'the inspirational resource church of Antioch in the book of Acts';[29] and the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby's claim that 'resource churches are not a new thing, but part of an ancient

[23]David M. Engel says that origin stories 'are a distinctive form of narrative [that] in their account of how something "began to be" ... connect past and present'. David M. Engel, 'Origin Myths: Narratives of Authority, Resistance, Disability, and Law', *Law & Society Review*, 27.4 (1993), pp. 785-826.

[24]Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History'.

[25]David Carr, 'Husserl and Foucault on the Historical a priori: Teleological and Anti-teleological Views of History', *Continental Philosophy Review*, 49 (2016), pp. 127-37.

[26]Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1963), p. 20.

[27]Joanne H. Wright, *Origin Stories in Political Thought: Discourses on Gender, Power, and Citizenship* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2004), p. 11.

[28]Mike Breen, *The Body Beautiful: Check-lists to Improve your Spiritual Health and Fitness from the Letters to the Seven Churches* (Crowborough: Monarch Publishing, 1997), p. 25.

[29]Matthew Porter, *Overflow: Learning from the Inspirational Resource Church of Antioch in the Book of Acts* (Milton Keynes: Authentic Media Limited, 2020).

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ecclesiology and practice'.[30] The most extensive origin story for resource churches is provided by Thorpe. This article will start with the first century, which is the earliest chronological point in Thorpe's account, and will culminate with more recent configurations. In addition, it will evaluate the merits of the other origin stories for resource churches at the points where they intersect with the historical periods that Thorpe considers.

Resource Churches in the First Century

In his origin story for resource churches, Thorpe recognizes that 'resource churches today find their biblical roots in the great sending churches of the early church' in Jerusalem, Antioch and Ephesus, and explores how these were created, developed and grew.[31]

The apostolic leadership of the church in Jerusalem is associated by Thorpe with episcopal authorization, the first core element in his definition of resource churches. In relation to his emphasis that 'authority is required to appoint people into positions of authority', he notices that 'from the earliest years of the church, apostles and overseers were involved in appointing church planters and elders'. This is seen as a characteristic of the church in Jerusalem, which 'sent out many apostolic leaders like Philip and Barnabas across the region to evangelise, preach and heal the sick'.[32] Thorpe then suggests that the third core element was evident in the church at Jerusalem, saying 'they developed a pipeline of missionally minded, servant-hearted, culturally diverse leaders who were appointed as deacons in serving roles as well as going out to preach the gospel'.[33] To describe what happened on the day of Pentecost, Thorpe incorporates the concept of being 'launched', which he identifies as part of the third stage of creating a resource church.[34] After the members of the church in Jerusalem were scattered across Judea and Samaria through persecution, the church in Jerusalem related to aspects of the second, third and fifth core element because 'it became an apostolic mission base, as the apostles went on evangelistic trips and church-planting missions to the neighbouring regions'.[35]

Problematically, this assumes that from the earliest years the role of apostle involved church planting, whereas this continues to a point of debate. For example, Benjamin Merkle believes that apostles were not 'necessarily sent out as a missionary or as a church planter' but 'filled a supracongregational role … to teach and to discipline'.[36] Stefan Paas suggests that further steps, which did not begin until the medieval period, were required to provide roots for church planting language. The text in 1 Cor. 3.6, which Thorpe uses to support the case for church planting, is regarded by Paas not to 'support the claim that the Bible speaks about church planting' because the object of planting in this passage is not the church but the

[30]Justin Welby, 'Foreword', in Thorpe, *Resource Churches*, p. 15.

[31]Thorpe, *Resource Churches*, p. 55.

[32]Thorpe, *Resource Churches*, p. 53.

[33]Thorpe, *Resource Churches*, p. 54.

[34]Thorpe, *Resource Churches*, p. 107.

[35]Thorpe, *Resource Churches*, p. 55.

[36]Benjamin L. Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2008), p. 49.

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gospel.[37] Furthermore, because the assembly of new believers in Jerusalem did not have the sufficient formation period to operate as a resource church or megachurch (with distinction between definitions clarified in the introduction) it seems more reasonable to agree with Brandon J. O'Brien that 'Pentecost may have been the first mass revival in history, but it did not create the first megachurch' and instead 'the rest of Acts repeats this theme' of 'the birth of many small – even micro – congregations'.[38]

Nevertheless, the wide range of ecclesiological paradigms that have sought to reapply the Lukan Pentecost narrative[39] can be accounted for using the hermeneutic Loveday Alexander proposes on the basis of Peter's speech. This is rooted in the process of 'contemporization' in rabbinic midrashic techniques, which Alexander points out were 'teasing meaning out of the same scriptures, but coming up with very different interpretations'. She notices that in Acts 2.16 'God's self-revelation in the present ("this") is interpreted in light of God's self-revelation in the past ("that" = Scripture), which then provides the framework for interpreting where God is leading in the future ("What then shall we do?").'[40] This means that it is not necessary to identify the churches in the New Testament as resource churches, or the early apostles as missionaries or church planters, in order to interpret the practice of contemporary resource churches in light of these narratives including about the day of Pentecost itself. In doing so, this can provide a framework that is foundational for developing the idea of resource churches today.

Subsequent to this, the main development Thorpe observes is that 'the church at Antioch was distinct from the church in Jerusalem in its sending of missionaries and church planters further afield, developing links with churches all over the known world as leaders came back and forth, and as a result being very international and intercultural'.[41]

Porter develops the idea that there is 'a clear biblical example' of a resource church in Antioch according to Acts.[42] In contrast with Thorpe, who in his book never actually labels any of the New Testament churches as resource churches, Porter is much more direct in his description of the church in Antioch as a 'resource church'. Whereas Thorpe's primer on the concept of resource churches is a popularization of his PhD, based on mixed-mode research, Porter describes his book as a prophetic offering. The prophetic voice is anticipated to awaken consciousness by imagery of hope making it possible to envision an alternative way.[43] Porter believes that the seven characteristics shared by resource churches in the UK, compared in the previous article to the core elements in Thorpe's definition,

[37]Stefan Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West: Learning from the European Experience* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2016), pp. 11-16.

[38]Brandon J. O'Brien, *The Strategically Small Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2010), p. 29.

[39]Craig S. Keener acknowledges that 'in terms of reception history, many have applied Luke's description as a model'. Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Volume 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), p. 782.

[40]Loveday Alexander, '"This Is That": The Authority of Scripture in the Acts of the Apostles', *Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, 25.2 (2004), pp. 189-204.

[41]Thorpe, *Resource Churches*, p. 57.

[42]Porter, *Overflow*, p. 11.

[43]Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1978).

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are all seen in the church in Antioch. First, 'like the church in Antioch, such churches hold lightly to what God has given, wanting to steward well all that's been placed in their hands'. He says 'the Antioch church knew that nothing of lasting significance happens without prayer', and as a result of embodying the values of generosity, unity, audacity, and humility, 'are, like the church in Antioch, normally growing churches which become large'. The development of a leadership pipeline is evidenced by the description in Acts 15.35 of many others teaching and preaching the word of the Lord in Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. He recognizes that from Antioch, Barnabas and Saul were 'sent to preach the gospel and start new churches in all sorts of towns and cities'. Finally, he suggests that 'creative partnership … between the local church and those in central authority' takes place when Barnabas 'is sent to Antioch by the senior leaders in Jerusalem and then becomes the church leader'.[44]

Porter also identifies four distinct phases in this large, multicultural church becoming a resource church. Generously making their resources available to others, the first of Porter's seven characteristics of resource churches is a thread that holds these phases together. He notices that when Barnabas became the leader of the church he saw a great number of people coming to faith (Acts 11.22-24). After this, he says, it became 'an apostolic community that created further apostolic communities' through responding with a gift to a severe famine in Judea (Acts 11.27-30) and sending Paul and Barnabas with support on a series of three missionary journeys (Acts 13.1-3;15.36; 18.23).[45]

Porter reaches many of these conclusions by reading the story of the church in Antioch through the lens of his own experience as the Vicar of a resource church in York, St Michael-le-Belfrey. This is demonstrated by the regular interposition of his own stories in a description of these chapters. There is no obvious reason to believe, for example, that from early on Barnabas 'would have known this work of God was for a purpose and that the Lord has greater plans for the city and region' other than Porter's own feelings and convictions in a similar situation. Like Thorpe, Porter applies several terms anachronistically, such as 'leadership pipeline', which, as mentioned in the previous article, has only entered common parlance in the past half a century as a consequence of innovations in the commercial world. It has even been argued, based on literary criticism, that 'while Paul's mission to the Gentiles certainly occupies a central place in the second half of Luke's narrative', the concept of Paul's three missionary journeys was invented by mission societies in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to provide 'a biblical pattern for missionaries going out from a central location to the "ends of the earth" and then returning periodically for spiritual renewal, administrative guidance, and financial support'.[46] Nevertheless, these concerns can be resolved by utilizing the hermeneutical principles that are introduced to us by these chapters in Acts. Alexander highlights that Luke's account of the Council of Jerusalem, which took place to resolve disagreements emerging as a result of the growth of the church in

[44]Porter, *Overflow*, pp. 127-32.

[45]Porter, *Overflow*, pp. 4-23.

[46]Heidi J. Hornik and Mikeal C. Parsons, *The Acts of the Apostles through the Centuries* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2020), p. 142.

Antioch, 'is about the centre being prepared to listen to the margins, slowly and cautiously taking on board the Word that God is speaking "out there", on the periphery'.[47]

In contrast with Porter's stance that the church in Antioch provides an early example of an inspirational resource church, C. Peter Wagner argues that a network of house churches existed in Antioch with no overall structure of authorization. Wagner expands upon 'The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission'[48] by Ralph P. Winter, a fellow faculty member at Fuller Theological Seminary, to draw a distinction between the neighbourhood house churches in Antioch and Paul's missionary band known as the 'Cyprus and Cyrene Mission' (CCM). Based on this, Wagner says that since 'in Antioch the Holy Spirit evidently spoke to the sodality (the CCM) instead of the modality (the Antioch church) . . . it is inaccurate to say, as many do, that Paul and Barnabas were sent out by the church at Antioch'.[49]

Wagner distinguishes between 'modality' as local church congregations, which include whole families and have a broad range of responsibilities, and 'sodality' as distinct mission-oriented subcommunities. The terms 'sodality', drawn from the tradition of confraternities of prayer, and 'modality', for which Winter recognizes he was responsible, were paired for the first time in the chapter 'The Warp and Woof of the Christian Movement'.[50] These enabled Winter to develop the concepts of the vertical and horizontal structures, which he borrowed from political discourse in the 1970s about labour governance. It has been observed that by attributing the role of outreach exclusively to sodalities, Winter obscures the missional focus of the church.[51] The New Testament justifications he relies upon have been perceived as at times too simplistic.[52] Wagner asserts that the reason Acts 13.1 describes members from the CCM as being 'in the church that was at Antioch' is based purely upon their presence within it and not their explicit role in its hierarchy. In other commentaries about the book of Acts, Wagner's premise has not even merited exploration. Instead, it is assumed that the leaders referred to in Acts 13.1 were part of the Antiochene congregation. This can be confirmed because the Greek word used here is not 'ἐν', which can denote being among, but 'κατὰ', which can refer to joining or belonging to something, such as a church. Instead, in other research, there has been a focus on diversity within the church in Antioch. Ajith Fernando maintains that because Luke would not 'distort facts simply in order to present an ideal church', it is evident that in Antioch 'the early believers remained as a single church'.[53]

For Porter, it is the church of Antioch that stands out 'as an exciting example of a community that has an overflowing impact in its region'[54] and the church in

[47]Alexander, 'This Is That', p. 199.

[48]Ralph D. Winter, 'The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission', *Missiology*, 2.1 (1974), pp. 121-34.

[49]C. Peter Wagner, *Acts of the Holy Spirit: A Modern Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2000), p. 288.

[50]Ralph D. Winter and R. Pierce Beaver, *The Warp and Woof: Organizing for Christian Missions* (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1970).

[51]Bruce Camp, 'A Theological Examination of the Two-Structure Theory', *Missiology*, 23.2 (1995), pp. 197-209.

[52]Harald Hegstad, *The Real Church: An Ecclesiology of the Visible* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), p. 222.

[53]Ajith Fernando, *Acts: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), p. 230.

[54]Porter, *Overflow*, p. 15.

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Ephesus is viewed as a 'decentralised network of missional communities, committed to growth and expansion'.[55] In Thorpe's narrative, however, the church in Ephesus is recognized as the place where Paul began to apply the principle of multiplication. Likewise, in Breen's account of the origins of resource churches, the church in Ephesus plays a prominent role. He explains that in two years, through 'an incredible explosion of spiritual power ... the Ephesian church had become a resource church to the region, sending out missionaries and church planters and offering a teaching and training base that touched all of Asia Minor'.[56] It seems reasonable to agree with Thorpe that the theology underpinning resource churches developed from the church in Jerusalem to the church in Ephesus because, in contrast with Porter's claim that 'it is a little unclear from Acts 19 how this church began',[57] other parts of the New Testament bear light on the growth of the church in Ephesus.

The five core elements from Thorpe's definition are seen in the church in Ephesus to an unprecedented level. Firstly, at Ephesus, Paul 'increased his spiritual and relational authority' as an apostle. Secondly, the church in Ephesus grew 'to impact the whole city, drawing large numbers of new believers and changing the local economy and the spiritual atmosphere', resulting in riots among local business leaders. Thirdly, the letters at the start of Revelation indicate that churches were planted from Ephesus across the whole Lycus valley including, as F.F. Bruce observes, the cities of Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis.[58] Fourthly, this rapid impact occurred 'through the training and multiplication of indigenous church planters', including Epaphras who Darrell Bock says was 'key in this expanding church work' as evidenced by Col. 1.7.[59] Finally, Thorpe comments, 'there is no question that the church in Ephesus influenced the whole region'.[60] In Acts 19.9-10, it is said that the gospel was heard throughout the province of Asia as a result of Paul's work in Ephesus. It should not be surprising that this is where the most believable signs for a resource church in the first century can be found because, as Ben Witherington III points out, 'it is here in Ephesus that Paul has the longest stable period of ministry without trial or expulsion, here that he most fully carries out his commission to be a witness to all persons, both Jew and Gentile'.[61] There is little exploration in Thorpe's origin story of the implications of expulsion from the synagogue for the first-century church as an emerging sect from Judaism, which as we will see in the next section receives more focus by Breen. As Porter recognizes, even the description of the church in Ephesus as a decentralized network of missional communities does not exclude the possibility that it was a resource church. There are examples today of resource churches that consist of what could be described as a network of micro-churches. For example, 'families on mission' known

[55]Porter, *Overflow*, p. 148.

[56]Mike Breen, *The Seven Churches: Being the Church in a Time of Crisis* (Pawleys Island, SC: 3DM Publishing, 2020), pp. 22-23.

[57]Porter, *Overflow*, p. 148.

[58]F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), p. 258.

[59]Darrell Bock, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2007), p. 601.

[60]Thorpe, *Resource Churches*, pp. 57-60.

[61]Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), p. 572.

as 'Missional Communities' are at the heart of the framework developed by Breen.[62] Further research is needed about how networks of house churches in the first century inspire the contemporary theology and practice of these models.

This section has examined Porter's origin story concerning 'the inspirational resource church of Antioch', as well as the first part of Thorpe's account of the roots of resource churches, and has referred to Breen's narrative, which will be explored further in the subsequent section. The manifest properties of resource churches can be seen most clearly in the church in Ephesus. The hermeneutical principles implemented by Alexander provide a foundation for believing in these origin stories, without which it seems unreasonable to draw a direct path from first-century churches to the contemporary phenomenon of resource churches. These illuminate the teleological purpose of these origin stories by providing a framework for asking -what then shall we do?' In contrast with Thorpe who establishes no thread between the opposition he briefly refers to as part of his descriptive summary of the book of Acts and the objections outlined later in his book to the contemporary phenomenon of resource churches, these also provide an instrument for arbitrating between different interpretations of the Scriptures. Alexander calls for attention to the role of tradition in biblical interpretation and this comes to the fore as Thorpe, and Breen, cast a lens on developments in the concept of resource churches through the centuries.

Anglo-Saxon Resource Churches

Building on his exploration of the biblical roots of resource churches in the churches of Jerusalem, Antioch and Ephesus, Thorpe posits that the elements of resource churches 'run through all the major periods of the Church through the centuries'.[63] The first period of history in which Thorpe finds the elements of resource churches in the following three ecclesiastical developments in Anglo-Saxon England: the 'base' built by Augustine in Canterbury from 597 AD; Lindisfarne Priory and other Celtic monasteries started from there, after Aidan was invited by the King of Northumbria, Oswald, in 634 AD; and semi-monastic minsters subsequent to the Synod of Whitby in 663 AD. In his origin story, Breen also perceives Anglo-Saxon minsters as examples of early resource churches.

First, Thorpe asks if the base founded by Augustine in Canterbury was the first resource church because 'from there, missionaries and mission bishops evangelised London, Northumbria and East Anglia'. Unfortunately, Thorpe does not clarify which of the following he is referring to as, or including as elements of, a possible resource church: Christ Church, which Augustine intended to be a cathedral; the monastery of St Peter and St Paul; the number of churches Augustine is regarded to have planted around Kent; or St Martin's Church restored by Queen Bertha, which Nicholas Orme says provided 'a foothold [that] enabled the sending of the mission of Augustine'.[64] The significance of this period for Thorpe's origin story is

[62]Mike Breen, *Leading Missional Communities: Rediscovering the Power of Living on Mission Together* (Greenville, SC: 3DM Publishing, 2013).

[63]Thorpe, *Resource Churches*, pp. 75-76.

[64]Nicholas Orme, *Going to Church in Medieval England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), p. 6.

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highlighted by the naming of 'The Gregory Centre', which Thorpe leads as part of a national church multiplication initiative, after Pope Gregory I in acknowledgement of his pivotal role in sending Augustine to England.[65] Similarly, St Mellitus College, with which Thorpe has worked to develop pathways of training for church planting, was named after the first bishop of London in the Anglo-Saxon period. Mellitus was consecrated by Augustine in 604 AD after being sent by Gregory to help in his mission for temples to 'be converted from the worship of devils to the service of the true God'.[66]

The eighth-century work, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, by the Venerable Bede, provides a large portion of the information we have about Pope Gregory I and Augustine of Canterbury. This has already been a favourable source for origin stories due to his creation of an English national identity as the new Israel and introduction of the designation of dates before the Incarnation as BC. The conclusion, however, that Gregory or Augustine were masterminds behind a deliberate strategy to establish a hub of church-planting is a point of dispute. Michael Stroope argues that the use of the term 'mission' began with the founding of the Jesuits in the sixteenth century and seeks a return to the older concept of 'pilgrim witnesses'. He finds in Gregory's letters and pronouncements no reference to the task as 'mission' or Augustine as a 'missionary', and in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* no description of this as the start of a 'Roman mission'. From this, he maintains that 'the language of the primary actors and chroniclers at the scene casts the story as one of papal authority, political conversion, monastic duties, and Catholic dominance. And yet, these dynamics become skewed, or are neglected and even lost, when cast in the language of mission.'[67] In contrast, Sarah Foot, who is currently working on a major study of the life and work of Bede, described in a recent podcast with Zondervan Academic that Pope Gregory I 'sent missionaries from his own monastery in Rome on the Caelian Hill to England' and 'the Roman mission that worked its way up the eastern seaboard' after the conversion of the people of Kent.[68] The emerging discussion about the missiology of Gregory, Augustine and Bede, is highly pertinent in determining the believability of this aspect of origin stories for resource churches, particularly because the language of 'mission' is embedded in Thorpe's definition. Origin stories should remain attentive to the political and religious conflicts around this time.

Secondly, Thorpe explains that meanwhile from Lindisfarne, as Aidan 'began to evangelise the North of England … monasteries were established' which 'became resource bases from which missionaries and church planters were sent to establish the Church in new places'.[69] Utilizing George G. Hunter's book, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, Thorpe demonstrates that, like the Roman model, the Celtic monasteries reflected the traits of contemporary resource churches. From these 'evangelistic mission hubs', which Hunter calls 'mission stations', he describes that

[65]https://ccx.org.uk/about/

[66]Letter by Pope Gregory I (July 18, 601), cited by Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (translated by A.M. Sellar; Mineola, NY: Dover, 2011), p. 67.

[67]Michael W. Stroope, *Transcending Mission: The Eclipse of a Modern Tradition* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), p. 122.

[68]https://undeceptions.com/podcast/venerable-bede/ (accessed April 2023).

[69]Thorpe, *Resource Churches*, p. 76.

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'bishops led teams of evangelists to witness to new people and places'.[70] In relation to the transformation of society, Hunter points out that 'their Christian faith and community addressed life as a whole [and] helped common people live and cope as Christians day by day in the face of poverty, enemies, evil forces, nature's uncertainties, and frequent threats from many quarters'.[71] He says that 'the monastic communities sent apostolic teams to reach settlements within the region' on sustained group visits 'where they would minister with the people, interpret the gospel in indigenous ways, and plant churches'. This was enabled to take place through the monastic communities 'preparing people for ministry to pre-Christian populations'.[72] Wider resources were provided for mission including 'illuminations' such as the Lindisfarne Gospels.

The premise that the monastic communities associated with Aidan were mission hubs or stations from bishops led teams to spread the gospel is believable because Bede describes that 'from [Lindisfarne], and the fraternity of these monks, Aidan was sent to instruct the English nation in Christ, having received the dignity of a bishop'.[73] On the other hand, since 'The Myth of the Celtic Church' by Wendy Davies in 1992,[74] the concept of a monolithic entity called the 'Celtic church' has lost currency because it can be thought of as a romanticization.[75] While Dorothy Ann Bray acknowledges that '"Celtic Church" is a very generalized term which has led to the misconception of a unified body distinct from the early Roman Church', she believes it is still 'apt to speak of the Celtic churches' because there are features of a distinguishable spirituality.[76] Similarly, Corning recognizes that 'there were at least four practices used in the Celtic tradition in the late sixth century that diverged from those that followed at Rome', and identifies the monasteries established by Aidan as part of the Celtic tradition.[77] The problem with this aspect of Thorpe's origin story is with application to the manifest properties of the contemporary phenomenon rather than believability. Thorpe does not clearly delineate between the Celtic monasteries and the Celtic churches or the Celtic Church, resulting in imprecision about the way this applies distinctively to resource churches. Our understanding of the application to resource churches would be enriched by comparison to other models that attest to be inspired by ancient monasticism, such as the renewal of religious and praying communities, which Justin Welby has affirmed as 'the highest priority of [his] ministry',[78] and new monasticism,

[70]Thorpe, *Resource Churches*, p. 76.

[71]George G. Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West … Again* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), pp. 19-20.

[72]Hunter, *The Celtic Way*, pp. 31-42.

[73]Bede, *Ecclesiastical History,* p. 144.

[74]Wendy Davies, 'The Myth of the Celtic Church', in Nancy Edwards and Alan Lane (eds.), *The Early Church in Wales and the West* (Oxford: Oxbow Press, 1992), pp. 12-21.

[75]Ian Bradley, *Celtic Christianity: Making Myths and Chasing Dreams* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

[76]Dorothy Ann Bray, 'Celtic Spirituality: Its Origins and Interpretations', *Churchman*, 114.3 (2000), pp. 250-61.

[77]Caitlin Corning, *The Celtic and Roman Traditions: Conflict and Consensus in the Early Medieval Church* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 18.

[78]https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/prayer-partnership-god (accessed April 2023).

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including the 24/7 prayer movement[79] and Ian Mobsby's applications as part of fresh expressions.[80]

Thirdly, Thorpe highlights that around the time of the Synod of Whitby in 663 AD, 'a new kind of semi-monastic, "minster" church began to emerge, led by a bishop, close to a local ruler and urban centre, with an emphasis of planting churches in the surrounding area'.[81] These 'minster' churches are considered as a core part of the origin stories provided for resource churches by Breen.

To advocate for a model that integrates large public celebrations and mid-sized Missional Communities, Breen describes that 'in European history, we see [the] question [attractional vs. missional] being raised and answered in Minster churches (or monastic mission centres), which we have come to call "resourcing churches"'.[82] He attests that at the Synod of Whitby, the Celtic emphasis on mission and the Roman emphasis on invitation were combined, which 'proved to be a killer combination for the evangelizing of Europe'.[83] Breen's origin story succumbs to the popular portrayal that 'the Celts created a "pure" Church in opposition to the more authoritarian Rome', which Corning remarks has been abandoned by scholars.[84] However, the believability of its historical conclusions is defended by the employment of Edward T. Hall's theory of proxemics,[85] which has become a robust area of research[86] with relevance for the church.[87] It is also more attentive than other origin stories to the conflicts experienced by Christians in the first century, including with the Roman state, which resulted in them 'declaring that "Jesus is Lord" ... from the margins of society, operating as yeast'. He describes that large public celebrations and mid-sized communities were part of ancient Judaism and that 'for the early church, the answer to the challenge of being excluded from Temple worship was to draw from the synagogue – or 'oikos' – life and do what the people experienced there'.[88] Additionally, Breen's origin story is permeated with teleological vision, with an insistence that the purpose of mid-sized gatherings is to advance the Kingdom of God.[89] Breen's understanding of the relationship

[79]Andy Freeman and Pete Greig, *Punk Monk: New Monasticism and the Ancient Art of Breathing* (Ventura, CA: Zondervan, 2007).

[80]Ian Mobsby, 'The Importance of New Monasticism as a Model for Building Ecclesial Communities out of Contextual Mission', in Graham Cray, Ian Mobsby and Aaron Kennedy (eds.), *New Monasticism as Fresh Expression of Church* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2010), pp. 12-18.

[81]Thorpe, *Resource Churches*, p. 76.

[82]Mike Breen and Alex Absalom, *Launching Missional Communities: A Field Guide* (Greenville, SC: 3DM Publishing, 2010), p. 53.

[83]Breen, *Launching Missional Communities*, p. 54.

[84]Corning, *Celtic and Roman*, p. 18.

[85]Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 1990).

[86]Since the introduction of proxemics by Hall in the 1960s, Marcel Danesi, Professor of Semiotics and Linguistic Anthropology at the University of Toronto, affirms it has become 'a robust area of research pursued by all kinds of social scientists'. Marcel Danesi, 'Proxemics', in Keith Brown (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Language and Linguistics* (London: Elsevier, 2006), pp. 241-43.

[87]Nicholas Allan recognizes that structuring churches around multiple spaces has been supported by a number of scholars including Abraham Malherbe and Miroslav Volf. Nicholas R. Allen, 'A Theological Critique of the Models of Ecclesiology and Missiology of St Thomas' Church, Philadelphia, Sheffield', dissertation for MA in Ministry and Theology at the University of Sheffield (2012), p. 61.

[88]Breen and Absalom, *Launching Missional Communities*, pp. 46-47.

[89]Breen and Absalom, *Launching Missional Communities*, p. 27.

between the Kingdom and the church is explored more fully in *Covenant and Kingdom*[90] and *Leading Kingdom Movements*.[91] As considered in the previous section in relation to Ephesus, it should be a priority to analyse the relationship between contemporary resource churches and micro-churches or Missional Communities.

Like Breen, Alan Bing holds that 'resourcing churches have their antecedents in the minster church'.[92] He bases this on the historical evidence provided by Nick Spencer's book *Parochial Vision*, in which he argues that before the parish system, minsters were the main ecclesiastical network in England, and now that the parish system is in decline, we should see their renewal.[93] However, Spencer only uses the term 'resource centre' to describe the contemporary minsters he envisions, and the characteristics that Spencer associates with these are rather different to the core elements of resource churches today. He stresses that this is 'not intended to be a prescriptive programme for the Church of England in the twenty-first century'.[94] Spencer was writing around the time of the first documented reference to resource churches. In the intervening years, the title 'minster' has been bestowed upon churches in as divergent categories as parish churches with a civic role, such as Cheltenham Minster, parish churches that are also identified as resource churches, such as Rotherham Minster, and new churches, such as Latimer Minster. The terms 'resourcing church' and 'minster church' have been differentiated from 'resource church' in the previous article. In contrast with Bing, Breen uses the term 'resource church' elsewhere, as we have seen in relation to Ephesus in this article, and appears to use these terms interchangeably.

In conclusion, it is believable that ecclesiastical structures in the Anglo-Saxon period demonstrated traits of contemporary resource churches. Breen's origin story is the most attentive to dynamics of conflict in this period and clearest in its teleological vision. To assess the applicability in these origin stories to the manifest properties of the contemporary phenomenon, three essential pieces of research are needed. These are: further discussion about the missiology of Gregory, Augustine and Bede, which is already an emerging area of scholarship; comparison of resource churches to other contemporary approaches that draw inspiration from ancient monasticism; and analysis of the relationship between contemporary resource churches and micro-churches or Missional Communities.

Resource Churches after the Start of the Parish System

In all five major periods of church history, Thorpe demonstrates that the core elements of contemporary resource churches can be traced. The exploration of early beginnings in Anglo-Saxon England ended with a description of the dawn of the parochial system in the latter half of the twelfth century. The subsequent periods of

[90]Mike Breen, *Covenant and Kingdom: The DNA of the Bible* (Pawleys Island, SC: 3DM Publishing, 2010).

[91]Mike Breen, *Leading Kingdom Movements: The 'Everyman' Notebook on How to Change the World* (Pawleys Island, SC: 3DM Publishing, 2010).

[92]Alan Bing, *Reimagining Resourcing Churches: A Minster Model* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2018), p.

[93]Nick Spencer, *Parochial Vision: The Future of the English Parish* (Carlisle: Authentic Media, 2004).

[94]Spencer, *Parochial Vision*, p. 146.

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history, which will be explored in this section of the article, are the Middle Ages, the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, the Victorian era, and the twentieth century.

During the Middle Ages, Thorpe perceives the monastic mission movements of the Dominican and Franciscan orders as bringing 'a whole new energy into the Church as the gospel was preached afresh'.[95] As evidence for this, he refers to the rapid growth of monasteries across England in the thirteenth century and Bishop Robert Grosseteste who, inspired by the Franciscans, encouraged numerical and spiritual growth across the Diocese of Lincoln. Minimal research has been carried out to demonstrate a link between these monastic orders and contemporary resource churches, so it is difficult to justify a coherent link between resource churches and this period. Even though the development of these monastic orders has been analysed in depth,[96] there is a need for further historiographical research to consider these in relation to recent questions about church growth, which has the potential to bear insights regarding the resource church model. This relates to the observation in the last section that investigation is needed regarding the influence of monasticism on current models of church.

In the eighteenth century, believable examples of early resource churches are provided by the Methodist bands and classes. The purpose of these was not to establish a new denomination but to bring spiritual awakening or 'revitalization' through the synthesis of Anglican and Moravian piety[97] to the Church of England, which Thorpe describes 'had "slumbered" after the turmoils of the previous two centuries'.[98] Thorpe points out that these developed lay leaders 'to form an apostolic movement that sought to empower and release every person in the church', with the formation of over 10,000 class and band leaders by the late eighteenth century. Consequently, he asks 'what might have happened if this extraordinary multiplying discipling movement had taken root in the Church of England?'[99]

However, Thorpe does not refer to these bands and classes as 'resource churches' because of his identification of episcopal authorization as one of their core elements. In spite of the fact that the Methodist Conference in 2005 considered introducing the role of bishop within their structures, episcopacy has never been a part of British Methodism.[100] The previous article recognized that 'although permission from a bishop is currently required in the Church of England for any church planting across parish boundaries, this does not entail that episcopal authorization should be intrinsic to the definition for all resource churches'.[101] The term 'resource church' was first introduced around twenty years before Thorpe's definition was created, indicating that it is not the only available understanding of this concept. The replacement of this core element in Thorpe's definition, in which focus is narrowed

[95]Thorpe, *Resource Churches*, p. 78.

[96]William Campbell, *The Landscape of Pastoral Care in 13th-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 61-80.

[97]Kevin M. Watson, *Pursuing Social Holiness: The Band Meeting in Wesley's Thought and Popular Methodist Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 87.

[98]Thorpe, *Resource Churches*, p. 80.

[99]Thorpe, *Resource Churches*, p. 85.

[100]https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-conference/conference-reports/conference-reports-2005/#:~:text=What%20Sort%20of%20Bishops%3F (accessed April 2023).

[101]Shepherd, 'What's in a Name?, p. 12.

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on resource churches in the Church of England, with Porter's broader emphasis that 'resource churches work strategically with church authorities'[102] removes the obstacles to the Methodist bands and classes being regarded as resource churches.

In the following century, Thorpe points out that there was 'a boom in church planting'.[103] Keith Snell estimates that between 1835 and 1875, one new Anglican church was started every four days.[104] Charles Blomfield, whose goal of building fifty churches was criticized as overly ambitious, built 200 churches in 1828–56 as Bishop of London. Thorpe understands Blomfield's vision for 'a centre from which would radiate all around the light of the Gospel'[105] to have been renewed in the resumption of church planting in London during the 1990s. As a result of this, Ric Thorpe became the Bishop of Islington, as only the second person to have held this office. Charles Turner was appointed in 1898 after the success of the Islington Churches Extension Society. From St Mary's Church in Islington, the College of the Church Missionary Society was started in 1825 as the Church of England's first missionary seminary and 38 churches were planted in 1855–95. It is certainly believable that innovative 'Victorian models' of church building were developed in the Church of England that 'highlighted different responses to shifting demographics'.[106] However, rapid church building in the nineteenth century does not demonstrate conclusively that, as Winfield Bevins suggests, 'Victorian church planters [found] the places where the church [was] not working for the sake of the gospel through church planting'.[107] Robin Gill challenges as 'myths' the perception that 'the Victorians built extra churches because they needed them to meet the demands of rapidly expanding urban and rural populations', which 'raised the general level of churchgoing throughout the nineteenth century', and 'before the First World War a majority of churches in Britain were full'. He shows that although there are examples from the Victorian period of growing churches, the Victorians built churches for a variety of reasons and there has been decline in church-going since 1851.[108] Further reflection is needed on the distinction between the concepts of 'church building' and 'church planting'.

A further weakness with this aspect of the origin story is that despite mentioning the Tractarians' support for a church-building project in Bethnal Green, Thorpe does not attend to the significant historical tensions in the nineteenth century between Tractarianism, or the Oxford Movement, and Methodism. Dale A. Johnson emphasizes that 'the difficult but carefully considered position of Wesleyan Methodism as an independent religious movement between the established church and dissent crumbled in the face of Tractarian activities within the church and the attendant unchurching of Methodism, its work, and its ministry'.[109] This was

[102]Porter, *Overflow*, p. 131.

[103]Thorpe, *Resource Churches*, p. 82.

[104]Keith Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 409-14.

[105]Thorpe, *Resource Churches*, p. 82.

[106]Thorpe, *Resource Churches*, p. 82.

[107]Winfield Bevins, 'Victorian Church Planting: A Contemporary Inquiry into a Nineteenth-Century Movement', *The Asbury Journal*, 75.1 (2020), pp. 8-22.

[108]Robin Gill, *The 'Empty' Church Revisited* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 2-7.

[109]Dale A. Johnson, 'The Oxford Movement and English Nonconformity', *Anglican and Episcopal History*, 59.1 (1990), p. 82.

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reflected in contrasting approaches to building churches, with concerns raised in 1885 about the Oxford Movement that 'there underlies all their architectural enthusiasm a notion which we, as Nonconformist Protestants, conceive to be radically erroneous'.[110] Central to this difference was the Tractarians' belief that because Christ entrusted ecclesiastical authority to the apostles and their successors, episcopacy is of the constitutive essence of the church.[111] This is a contrast with those who regard episcopacy as simply beneficial for the life of the church,[112] as well as those who ascribe a functional rather than ontological role to bishops, with recent criticisms surfacing that episcopacy has become steeped in managerialism due to functionalism.[113]

In a section about 'models in the 20th century', after considering the 'daughter church' movement after the Second World War as a 'pale reflection of Victorian ambitions', Thorpe mentions five churches that are involved in church planting around the UK today: Holy Trinity Brompton, St Mark's Haydock, St Helen's Bishopsgate, St Michael le Belfrey and St Paul's Shadwell.[114] Their role in the origins of the concept of resource churches has already been considered in the previous article, which refers to Holy Trinity Brompton as having 'planted seven churches within the Diocese of London and two churches at the invitation of the Bishop of Southwark' prior to the publication of *Mission-Shaped Church* in 2004, St Paul's Shadwell as 'a plant from Holy Trinity Brompton', and St Michael le Belfrey as having 'recently been designated as a resource church in the Diocese of York'.[115] Origin stories that appear to focus as their starting point on large contemporary evangelical churches in the twentieth century will be explored as criticisms of the resource church programme in the subsequent article. These are in peril of ignoring earlier periods on history that have resulted in the formation of the concept of resource churches, as it seems fair to agree with Welby that 'resource churches are not a new thing, but part of an ancient ecclesiology and practice'.[116]

Thorpe provides the only origin story to describe the development of resource churches after the Anglo-Saxon period. Thorpe's narrative does not identify resource churches in eighteenth-century Methodism due to the absence of episcopal authorization. It is argued in the previous article, however, that a problem with Thorpe's core elements of resource churches is that there are examples of

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[110]Johnson, 'The Oxford Movement and English Nonconformity', p. 87.

[111]Edward Meyrick Goulburn wrote: 'There is, and can be, no real and true Church apart from the one Society which the Apostles founded, and which has been propagated only in the line of the Episcopal Succession' in *The Holy Catholic Church: Its Divine Ideal, Ministry, and Institutions* (New York: Pott, Young, 1873), p. 83.

[112]Peter Toon delineates between the 'esse', 'bene esse' and 'plene esse' approaches in *The Anglican Way: Evangelical and Catholic* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), p. 77.

[113]Based on the observation that 'there is an underlying functionalism that may be doing significant damage to the organic nature of ecclesial polity and its grounded, local life', Martyn Percy concludes 'All Bishops are now "on message", signed up to the Maoist-Capitalist vision of the Great Leap Forward with the mixed, fluid economy of the church giving free rein to those with the power and wealth to make the changes they want.' https://modernchurch.org.uk/martyn-percy-the-great-leap-forward-part-one-the-new-politics-of-ecclesionomics-for-the-church-of-england (accessed May 2023).

[114]Thorpe, *Resource Churches*, pp. 84-85.

[115]Shepherd, 'What's in a Name?, pp. 3-8.

[116]Welby, in Thorpe, *Resource Churches*, p. 15.

contemporary resource churches that do not share episcopalian ecclesiology or legislative practices with the Church of England. It is believable, therefore, to recognize the Methodist bands and classes as resource churches. There is also still a need for substantial analysis of the influence of thirteenth-century monastic orders on resource churches, the distinction between 'church building' and 'church planting', and disagreements about ecclesiology in the nineteenth century between the Methodists and the Tractarians.

Conclusion

This article has evaluated the dominant origin stories for resource churches, including the origin story by Thorpe. In contrast with other origin stories, which are more restrictive in their focus, this comprehends developments all the way from the earliest churches to twenty-first century church planting. In the assessment of these stories, this article has supported Welby's claim in the foreword to Thorpe's book that 'resource churches are not a new thing, but part of an ancient ecclesiology and practice'.[117]

There are significant obstacles to the believability of Porter's perspective that there was an 'inspirational resource church' in Antioch. For example, the use of terms such as 'leadership pipeline' seems anachronistic, and some of his conclusions seem to be based on his personal experience as a vicar rather than on rigorous exegetical insight. These concerns can, however, through the practice of discernment, be overcome by implementing the hermeneutical framework described by Alexander. This provides a basis for interpreting contemporary phenomena ('this'), such as resource churches, as in some sense the same as phenomena in the Scriptures ('that'), such as the churches in Jerusalem, Antioch and Ephesus, with teleological vision ('what then shall we do?'). By logical extension, this also has benefits for aspects of Thorpe's origin story, namely the claim that 'resource churches today find their biblical roots in the great sending churches of the early church',[118] as well as Breen's description of St Thomas's as similar to the church in Ephesus.

The believability of Breen's origin story is weakened by the stark contrast between Roman and Celtic models of church, which has been regarded by scholars as a later romanticization, but this is salvaged by its use of sociological analysis. It is distinguished from other origin stories by its attention to conflict experienced in the first century with civic and religious authorities as a sect emerging from Judaism, as well as its teleological emphasis on the relationship between churches and the Kingdom.

Thorpe's account is distinctive because he sees the creation of the resource church model as a developmental process, involving all major historical periods, rather than as a singular moment in history. This is an important benefit of Thorpe's description, enabling him to highlight key aspects of the formation of the resource church model. It is certainly believable that traits of resource churches that were first seen at the church in Jerusalem have developed throughout the centuries, resulting in this expression of church planting in the twenty-first century. There is, however, a disappointing lack of attention to the dynamics of conflict in this process, particularly in relation to the parting of the ways between Christianity and Judaism,

[117] Welby, in Thorpe, *Resource Churches*, p. 15.

[118] Thorpe, *Resource Churches*, p. 55.

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the 'Gregorian mission', and differences between the Methodists and the Tractarians. Furthermore, his emphasis on episcopal authorization as a core element of resource churches, which was challenged in the previous article, prevents him from acknowledging the eighteenth-century Methodist bands and classes as resource churches.

As resource churches are a rapidly growing phenomenon, with an emerging body of literature surrounding this concept, the previous article concluded that '"resource church" is still a term in search of a precise meaning'.[119] At the same time, origin stories are being formulated, meaning that a precise origin for resource churches cannot be located in history, as these narratives are directly contributing to how resource churches are understood and their future shape. As Foucault realizes, and for this reason is suspicious of origin stories, the purpose of origin stories is not primarily to construct an accurate account of the past but to direct how we live in the present including providing authority for innovation. The critical realist standpoint, in which the previous article is already embedded, enables us to appreciate whilst seeking refinement to origin stories. This is aided by Alexander's hermeneutical lens, which encourages us, with teleological vision, to interpret our contemporary situation in light of God's self-revelation in the past. Due to our active participation in narratives about the formation and development of resource churches, rather than 'origin stories', these would seem to be better described as 'creation stories', a term which points us to the agency of personhood in bringing about states of being.

As our understanding, and the practice, of resource churches continues to develop, this article has highlighted the need for further research in the following areas:

- Analysis of the relationship between contemporary resource churches and micro-churches or Missional Communities;
- Examination of the contributions to missiology of Gregory, Augustine and Bede;
- Empirical study of resource churches in relation to other contemporary approaches inspired by ancient monasticism;
- Historiographical analysis of religious orders in the Middle Ages, including the Dominicans and Franciscans, in relation to the topic of church growth.

This may also be enabled by gaining greater clarity about the definition of the term 'resource church' by carrying out research in the four areas identified in the previous article. Building on the premise in these first two articles that definitions and origin stories from current literature can be revised to provide a solid foundation of knowledge about resource churches, the final article in this trilogy will evaluate criticisms of this model of church planting.

[119] Shepherd, 'What's in a Name?, p. 16.

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