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Introduction to the special issue on cathedral studies (part 3)

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This is the third special issue of *Journal of Beliefs and Values* dedicated to advance the field of cathedral studies. Cathedrals play a distinctive part in the natural landscape of England and Wales, shaping the contours of the city in which they are located. Cathedrals play a distinctive part in the cultural and heritage landscape, drawing in tourists and visitors from across the globe. Cathedrals play a distinctive part in the religious landscape, resisting the decline in attendance experienced by parish churches. Cathedral studies is concerned with all three of these areas.

During the past decade new energy has been brought to the field of cathedral studies through the publication of four books. In *Anglican Cathedrals in modern life: the science of cathedral studies*, Francis (2015) drew together ten empirically-driven studies on diverse aspects of contemporary cathedral life. Three studies focused on the experience of cathedral visitors: Burton (2015) explored the insights captured by the comments placed in cathedral visitors' books; Francis, Annis, and Robbins (2015) explored the spiritual quest of cathedral visitors by means of a survey; and Francis, Robbins, and Annis (2015) employed a survey to explore the psychological type profile of cathedral visitors. Three studies focused on the people who attend the Sunday services in cathedrals: Francis and Williams (2015a) drew on sociological theory to assess the social capital generated within these services; Francis and Williams (2015b) drew on psychological theory to assess the motivational styles of cathedral congregations; and Lankshear, Francis, and Ipgrave (2015) compared the congregational profile of one cathedral with the congregational profile of parish churches within the same episcopal area. The other four studies examined other ways in which people engage with

cathedrals: Walker (2015) explored those who attend cathedral carol services; ap Siôn (2015) explored what she has come to describe as ‘the hidden congregation’, the voices of those anonymous people who post their prayers on the cathedral prayer board; Muskett (2015) explored the profile and the motivation of people who join Cathedral Friends Associations; and Edwards and ap Siôn (2015) explored ways in which cathedrals engage with young people. Those ten empirical studies were nested within two conceptual chapters: one concerned with ‘shaping cathedral studies: a scientific approach’ (Francis & Muskett, 2015), and the other with ‘the science of cathedral studies: present and future’ (Muskett & Francis, 2015).

In *Shop windows, flagships, common ground: metaphor in cathedral and congregation studies*, Muskett (2019) analysed the wide range of metaphors (both positive and negative) that have been applied to cathedrals. Metaphors may both capture the lived experience of cathedrals and shape the way in which cathedrals are perceived (again positively and negatively). From the vast range of metaphors analysed, Muskett privileged five that illustrate the capacity of cathedrals for engaging their local communities: *Shop windows* arouse curiosity and enhance footfall in the marketplace; *flagships* indicate the serious intention of their operators to be effective in their mission; *beacons* shine out in darkness, symbolise timeless stability, and serve as a secure reference point; *magnets* draw people in, generate tourism, and bring economic prosperity; *sacred space and common ground* finely capture ‘the vocation of cathedrals to be both a spiritual and community utility’ (Muskett, 2019, p. 86). Of these five metaphors, the notion of cathedrals as sacred space *and* common ground has emerged as the most powerful for exploring the capacity of cathedrals to engage the wider community in the sense of connecting the Christian presence with those who may be less inclined to engage with, or to cross the threshold into, parish churches.

In *Holy ground: cathedrals in the twenty-first century*, Platten (2017a) drew together ten conceptual pieces addressing a range of key issues raised by cathedral studies. In the opening chapter Platten (2017b) examined the key question, ‘What is the point of cathedrals?’ Oliver (2017) explored the factors that underpin growth in cathedrals. Page (2017) discussed ways in which excellence is encouraged in cathedrals. Hoyle (2017) emphasised the importance of taking time to recall the historic contexts that have shaped cathedrals. Platten (2017c) discussed cathedral-shaped worship as liturgy informed by the distinctive architecture and by the distinctive communities that inhabit these buildings. Kennedy (2017) focused specifically on cathedral furnishings, Shepherd (2017) focused specifically on cathedral music, and Irvine (2017) focused specifically on the place of art in cathedrals. In two further papers, Atkinson (2017) discussed cathedrals as places of prayer, and Henshall (2017) discussed cathedrals as places for prophecy.

In *Religion in cathedrals: pilgrimage, place, heritage, and the politics of replication*, Coleman and Bowman (2022a) drew together six papers that emerged from or were stimulated by an AHRC-funded project (grant number AH/L015005/1). Some may read the funding of this project by a major research council as confirmation that the field of cathedral studies was now receiving proper academic recognition. Within this collection, Coleman and Bowman (2022b) set the scene by exploring possibilities of developing what they call ‘a new subfield oriented around exploring the shaping of belief and practice in and by cathedrals’ (p. 1). In this context they saw cathedrals as juxtaposing sacred space and common ground. Jenkins (2022) examined the significance of the historic developing pilgrimage cult in Canterbury Cathedral around the shrine of Archbishop Thomas Becket for the development of similar pilgrimage sites within and beyond English cathedrals. Jenkins and Harris (2022) focused attention on Westminster Cathedral, the Metropolitan church of English Roman Catholicism since 1903. They examined how successive cardinals of Westminster steered a

difficult and often contentious course between loyalties to Rome and to England. Bowman and Sepp (2022) examined the growth and variety of pilgrimage activities in Canterbury Cathedral, York Minster, and Durham Cathedral after the Reformation. Coleman (2022) explored the double identities of English cathedrals as places of religious engagement and as locations of heritage. Mikaelsson (2022) took the collection of papers in a new direction by examining how a recreated pilgrim church emerged in Nidaros Cathedral in the Norwegian city of Trondheim.

Against this background, *Journal of Beliefs and Values* set out to stimulate further advances in cathedral studies by dedicating two special issues to this theme in 2023 and 2024. Each of these two special issues drew together 12 original papers. In the first special issue on cathedral studies, Francis (2023) positioned Anglican cathedrals as ‘episcopal theological resource churches’, as institutions mandated to do what bishops are ordained to be, taking Anglican ecclesiology seriously. McKenna, Francis, and Stewart (2023) examined how cathedrals responded to the coronation of King Charles III, and did so through a lens provided by Edward Bailey’s (1997) distinction among signs of explicit religion, civic religion, and implicit religion. Dong and Ward (2023) drew on interviews with ex-choristers to explore the influence of cathedral music on their spiritual and religious trajectory. Pike (2023) drew on qualitative data from a survey to examine the responses of participants to preaching during the Christmas Eve Carol Services. Also focusing on the theme of cathedral carol services, Robinson (2023) analysed the ways in which four cathedrals had developed distinctive variants from the model set by King’s College Cambridge. Krüger Bridge (2023) reported on how Liverpool Cathedral’s music outreach programme enhanced people’s sense of social connectedness and belonging, as well as their general health and wellbeing. In an historical piece, Watts (2023) focused on the early distinctive ministry of the ‘new’ post-war cathedral in Coventry that attempted to reconnect church life with urban society. In a

conceptual piece, Beaudoin (2023) brought cathedral studies, practical theology, and Pantheon research into dialogue, drawing on his own distinctive strand of research at the Pantheon in Rome.

Three papers focused on the experience of cathedral visitors. Ellis (2023) explored the priority of place among those who give themselves time to become immersed. Taking the Memorial Chapel in Liverpool Cathedral as his case study, Ellis argues that ‘place has priority as an inexhaustible source within which a person, who having placed themselves in the way of whatever place has to give, may be enabled to receive what has become hidden’ (p. 597). Kirby, Francis, and Village (2023) examined the responses of visitors to a *son et lumiere* dealing with the connection between science and religion. Francis, Mansfield, McKenna, and Jones (2023) examined how the Brecon Jazz Festival brought into the cathedral people with a psychological profile less frequent among general cathedral visitors: intuitive types and perceiving types as assessed by the Francis Psychological Type Scales (Francis, 2005). Also drawing on psychological type theory, Village (2023) compared cathedral worshippers with parish church congregations, those worshipping in cathedrals shared a significantly higher preference for thinking over feeling compared with those from parish churches.

In the second special issue on cathedral studies there were three papers that focused on the educational role of cathedrals. McKenna, Francis, and Jones (2024) examined the educational provision made by Anglican cathedrals specifically for schools: all 43 cathedrals in England and the Isle of Man were involved in this area of ministry and mission. In a parallel study, Francis, McKenna, and Jones (2024) examined the educational provision made by Anglican cathedrals beyond their work with schools. In this study they identified ways in which cathedrals offer education provision that exemplifies a theology of nurture (concerned with the formation of Christian disciples) and educational provision that exemplifies a

theology of service (concerned with supporting and serving the wider community). These two studies were based on assessing cathedral websites. In a third paper, using a case-study approach, McKenna and Francis (2024) examined the potential for cathedral online educational provision to resource the wider constituency of people attending services as part of small rural congregations when cathedral and parish churches were united in following the same lectionary.

Two studies focused on the distinctive ministry of cathedral carol services. Williams (2024) drew on the success of cathedral carol services to suggest that a rethinking of Benedictine identity offers a key for shaping the place of cathedrals in a post-Covid world of rapid change. She argues that these ‘traditional’ services in the cathedral setting serve as an indicator of how the search for Benedictine *stabilitas* becomes a positive movement in a time of uncertainty. Employing an empirical approach, Pike (2024) identifies six themes behind the motivation to attend such services: cathedral choir and music, cathedral liturgical context, cathedral as place, cathedral as local engagement, cathedral as a place of welcome, and cathedral as source of positive affect.

Two studies focused on examining the response of visitors to cathedral installations. Village and Francis (2024) explored ways of engaging with a pre-Christmas *son et lumiere*. Two core findings from the quantitative data were that the Luxmuralis installation, *The light before Christmas* exerted its greatest impact on young people and on those who did not attend church services. These data demonstrated that, not only was the Cathedral extending its reach among young people, but delivering an experience that enticed them to want to return. In their analysis of the qualitative data from the same survey, McKenna, Francis, and Village (2024) identified nine themes arising from the prompt ‘What most touched your heart?’ including being moved by visual images of the nativity, and valuing the opportunity to light a candle. From the prompt ‘What big issues were raised in your mind?’ they identified eight

themes, including reflecting on the meaning of Christmas and reflecting on the big questions of life.

Three studies focused on the capacity of cathedrals to engage with wider publics. Richards (2024) advanced the theological concept of ‘ark’ as a metaphor for assessing the potential of cathedrals for effective mission and social action. Analysis of this metaphor was set alongside stories obtained from talking with people seeking different forms of help from cathedrals, showing diverse ways in which the cathedral served as ‘ark’ for them. Budhi-Thornton (2024) examined the connection between cathedral studies and public theology. Applying an ethnographic approach within Manchester Cathedral, he distilled three key findings concerning: public theologies of inclusion at the cathedral, the location of theology in the public work of the cathedral, and an understanding of cathedrals as hosts of subaltern counter-publics. Drawing on her wider field of research into the ways in which people use the opportunity to leave written prayers in cathedrals, ap Siôn (2024) analysed a sample of prayer requests posted on Liverpool Cathedral’s online ‘prayer wall’, giving specific attention to the conceptions, concerns, and aspirations of these online visitors in relation to ‘peace’.

Within the context of cathedral studies, Doll (2024) tackled the two contemporary pressing issues of ‘contested heritage’ and ‘cancel culture’. Taking Norwich Cathedral as his case study, he considered the cases of two figures locally revered as martyrs, William of Norwich (23 March 1144) and Edith Cavell (12 October 1915). He argues that their lives and witness have been causes of international controversy and yet they still merit commemoration by Christians today. While much of the current research within cathedral studies has been conducted among Anglican cathedrals, Davis (2024) extended an invitation to the Catholic Church to contribute to this field. Employing data gathered from the websites of the 22 Catholic cathedrals in England and Wales, alongside diocesan reports submitted to the

Charity Commission, he demonstrated the distinctiveness of the ministry and mission of Catholic cathedrals compared with Anglican cathedrals.

This third special issue of *Journal of Beliefs and Values* offers a further 12 original papers. These 12 papers embrace six main themes. Two papers explore aspects of the role of music within cathedrals. In her paper, ‘Between worship, learning and musical practice: Mapping the shifting functions of the contemporary cathedral’, Krüger Bridge (2025) offers a critical comparative analysis of three musical contexts at Liverpool Cathedral: liturgical services, educational programmes and wider choral outreach. She reflects on the shifting functions of the contemporary cathedral, showing how musical affect, cultural capital and evolving forms of belonging reshape the role of Anglican cathedrals in twenty-first century public life. Liverpool Cathedral emerges as a multifunctional institution in which worship, learning and musical practice are refocused as sites of civic engagement, cultural inclusion and religious adaptation. In his paper, ‘Spirituality of singers: Contrasting approaches to the making of meaning’, Brown (2025) explores the spiritual experiences and theological understanding of lay singers within cathedral choirs. Using Stringer’s classification of individual, communal and official narratives of meaning, the data also revealed a variety of individual interpretations of the spiritual or theological content of musical performances, and a far greater coherence at a communal level. However, the data also revealed a pattern of meaning-making that did not easily fit within a single category, leading to a proposed extension to Stringer’s categories to include a ‘cooperative’ meaning – where the activity of one individual is given its full meaning by the interpretative activity of a second person.

Two papers, written as a pair by Francis and McKenna (2025) and McKenna and Francis (2025), adapt the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics, as proposed by Francis and Village (2008), for eliciting visitor responses to an immersive cathedral experience among 545 visitors. One paper focuses on the perceiving process ‘Assessing visitor perception of an

immersive cathedral experience: Applying the Jungian lenses of sensing and intuition and Bailey's theory of implicit religion'. Analysis of qualitative responses to the sensing prompt, 'What details, factors and features of the installation caught your attention and have stayed with you?' identified six main themes. Analysis of qualitative responses to the intuitive prompt, 'What big ideas, themes, dreams or possibilities inspired your imagination during the installation?' identified five main themes. These two prompts generated quite different responses, suggesting that a complementary and richer perception of the total experience could be accessed by engaging both the sensing function and the intuitive function. The other paper focuses on the judging process 'Assessing visitor evaluation of an immersive cathedral experience: Applying the Jungian lenses of feeling and thinking and Bailey's theory of implicit religion'. Analysis of qualitative responses to the feeling prompt, 'What touched your heart during the installation or connected with your values?' identified ten main themes. Analysis of qualitative responses to the thinking prompt, 'What big questions were raised in your mind during the installation or connected with your interests?' identified seven main themes. These two prompts generated quite different responses, suggesting a complementary and richer evaluation of the total experience could be accessed by engaging both the feeling function and the thinking function.

Two papers examine the place of art and poetry within cathedrals. In his paper, 'Art as theological fusion: The Cathedral's role in lighting the creative fuse', Mart (2025) explores how cathedrals can foster intersection of art and theology. He argues that traditionally places of cultural and spiritual convergence, these publicly facing reimagined spaces potentially serve as late-modern neutral grounds for dialogue between the sacred and secular. Such spaces welcome multiple voices and create opportunities for transformation, both personal and social. Taking a specific example from Liverpool Cathedral, he uses Tracey Emin's artwork to demonstrate how contemporary art tests, and redefines age-old theological

boundaries, positioning cathedrals as those spaces that connect tradition and modernity. In her paper, ‘Finally shall come the poet, worthy that name’: Exploring the role of a Cathedral Poet-in-Residence’, Harper (2025) examines the role of a cathedral poet-in-residence since the time when the first cathedral poet came to Worcester Cathedral. She notes considerable diversity in this development. Some poets come as unpaid volunteers to reflect primarily on the varied aspects of cathedral life, and to offer creative workshops; others may receive external funding to work on a cathedral outreach programme, sometimes in partnership with another institution. The outcome of a residency may be equally varied, ranging from a traditional volume of ‘cathedral poems’ to spontaneous ‘spoken word’ poetry, emphasising performance and community interaction. She argues that the capacity of poetry to help us ‘see differently’ suggests increasingly creative ways in which a poet may transform our encounter with a cathedral and all that it stands for.

Two papers explore different contributions that can be made to cathedral studies by psychological type theory. In their paper, ‘Who books the tickets for visitors to innovative installations and events in cathedrals? Exploring the psychological type profile of the gatekeepers’, Francis and Village (2025) build on previous research concerned with the psychographic segmentation of cathedral visitors. Previous research employing psychological type theory has drawn attention both to the psychological types under-represented among cathedral visitors and to the capacity of an innovative event to widen the psychographic appeal of cathedrals. Against this background, Francis and Village (2025) test the thesis that the requirement for advanced online booking to attend an innovative installation may further delimit the psychographic appeal. This thesis was supported by 778 individuals booking online to attend a Luxmuralis installation in Liverpool Cathedral who completed the Francis Psychological Type Scales. Among this constituency there was under-representation of perceiving types and over-representation of the SJ temperament. In their paper, ‘Drawing on

the concept of implicit religion and psychological type theory: Shaping a cathedral congregation survey and listening to diverse voices', Francis, McKenna, Casson, Eccles, and Stewart (2025) tested the thesis that a rich account of participants' experience of a cathedral Sunday Choral Eucharist can be facilitated by intentionally engaging each of the four psychological functions identified by psychological type theory: sensing, intuition, feeling, and thinking. Drawing on the qualitative responses given by 81 members of the congregation at the Sunday Choral Eucharist they reported that: the sensing function provided rich description, the intuitive function forged links and insights, the feeling function engaged the human heart, and the thinking function analysed the implications and voiced the criticisms.

Two papers employ different research methods to evaluate how cathedrals are fulfilling their ministry and mission. In her paper, 'The beauty of the place and the beauty of the liturgy': Exploring the mission and ministry of Christ Church Cathedral Dublin', Lodge (2025) reports on an assessment of Christ Church Cathedral Dublin from a range of perspectives. Participants in the study included senior leaders, clergy, canons, staff, volunteers, and members of the congregation, who engaged in in-depth interviews. The study also evaluated cathedral policy documents. This paper explores similarities and differences between the cathedral's intended and experienced ministry and mission using an evaluation tool to map the inductively coded themes emergent from the interview data onto the Five Marks of Mission of the Anglican Communion to identify gaps between intended and experienced mission. It concludes that the excellence of cathedral worship provides opportunities for liminal spiritual experiences for engaged laity but does not necessarily enable the *communitas* they then seek. In his paper, 'Between the Drums and the Silence: A Ghanaian Anglican's Liturgical Encounter in Liverpool Cathedral', Annan-Forson (2025) offers an assessment of Liverpool Cathedral from the perspective of a Ghanaian visitor who, adopting an anthropological lens, immersed himself for almost a year within the life of the

Diocese of Liverpool and Liverpool Cathedral. Having been shaped within the Diocese of Kumasi, a community, he argues, that has learned to carry the cross of colonial liturgy while infusing it with the soul of the homeland, he reflects on the Liverpool experience, analysed within seven themes: vestments, authority, and the symbolic tensions of reverence; silence, sound, and the cultural politics of worship; the eucharist as ritual and relational space; theological conflict and ecclesial identity in debates on human sexuality; clothing identity and Sunday culture; post-service culture and what happens after the Amen; and sacred space and commercial function – the Cathedral as venue and vessel.

Two papers assess visitor responses to cathedral installations employing different research methods. In their paper, ‘Assessing visitor responses to Luke Jerram’s *Gaia* installation in Lincoln Cathedral: Prayers and well wishes for the world’, Brown, Neil, and Francis (2025) employ a qualitative approach during Luke Jerram’s installation, *Gaia*, in Lincoln Cathedral. Visitors were invited to reflect on the world and to write on postcards prayers and well wishes for the world. Analysis of the content of 112 postcards demonstrated that the installation stirred people to reflect on things that really mattered to them. Seven main themes are identified, four concerning vulnerability and three concerning faith and values. The world is vulnerable to conflict and war, vulnerable to degradation, vulnerable to loss of biodiversity, and vulnerable to unhappiness. Faith and values were reflected in awareness of the ephemeral nature of human life, a reminder of God’s presence, and a call for respectful living. In their paper, ‘Assessing the impact of a cathedral pre-Christmas *son et lumiere* on participants’ psychological wellbeing and spiritual health’, Francis, Casson, McKenna, Village, and Jones (2025) employ a quantitative approach during the Luxmuralis *son et lumiere* in Liverpool Cathedral, *Starlight*, to measure impact on psychological wellbeing and spiritual health. The Index of Balanced Affect Change (TIBACH) demonstrates that up to two-thirds of the participants went away feeling more positive about life. The

greater impact on psychological wellbeing is among those without connections with a religious worldview. The Francis Index of Spiritual Health Change (FISH) demonstrates that the greater impact on existential spiritual health is among younger people. In other words, the installation is enabling the cathedral to extend the Church's reach among the young and among the unchurched.

Cumulatively the 36 papers published across the three special issues of *Journal of Beliefs and Values* have provided both evidence of vitality within the emerging field of cathedral studies and a solid foundation on which future research can build. As joint editors of these three special issues, we offer them both to the academic community, in the hope that they stimulate further useful research, and to the cathedral community, in the hope that sound research may invigorate and help to ensure the sustainability of the important and distinctive contribution that cathedrals make to the natural landscape, the cultural and heritage landscape, and the religious landscape in which they are located.

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