

Science and Religion Forum Conference 2017

Mental Wellbeing, Neuroscience and Religion

Bishop Grosseteste University, Longdales Road, Lincoln, UK

Report From First Plenary Session

Our first plenary paper was given by Ben Ryan from the theological/political think-tank Theos, based in Westminster. His title was:

The Church and Mental Health: Theological and Practical Responses



Ben Ryan from Theos

He has recently authored a scoping paper, 'Christianity and Mental Health: Theology, Activities and Potential'. More details of this can be found here:

<http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/publications/2017/07/03/christianity-and-mental-health-theology-activities-potential>

Ben opened his paper by outlining the growth of awareness around mental health, particularly under Cameron's Conservative government. The question of growth in mental health diagnosis was dwelt upon interestingly: is this an increase in awareness of mental health, or are more people getting ill? In response, the faith charity sector is growing faster than the non-faith charity sector, with a large growth in general Christian social action, not least in mental health.

Measurement is a perennial issue, being able to define mental health and to measure what is counted as a response to mental health problems. But without a doubt the involvement of Christian organisations in this is commendable. But Ben sees a gap in the faith response: a theology for this fervent activity. Why are we doing so much social care around mental health as a church? What language do we use? How do we undergird our work which is meeting the needs of many with mental health issues. How do we use the Bible to respond?

These are not small problems if we take the mission of the church to speak about redemption and relationship with God seriously when mental health conditions might affect self identity, thought processes and, indeed, brain structure.

Encouragingly, Ben sees the current situation as an enormous opportunity for the church. People come to the faith and see in what it represents as an authentic place for healing; we need to underwrite the work with theology. The good work of the academy needs to get to the people on the ground – this is The Great Challenge that we face. We need bravery to do this work and confidence in our tradition.

Ben has opened our conference with strong questions and challenges and we look forward to seeing what follows.