

The Faithzone : THE CHURCH IN THE LANDSCAPE

This PDF version contains all the material relating to this section of the Video formatted for easy printing and comprising:

- Summary
- Transcript
- All questions/activities listed together
- Each question/activity listed on a separate page with pointers for discussion
- A collective worship

Summary

Presenter: Simon Thurley, Director, Museum of London

Britain from the air: an overview of Christian history.
Pagan worship sites become Christian.
The Normans build churches and cathedrals.
The Reformation destroys monasteries.
Clues from archaeology.
The influence of the Non-Conformists.
Victorian church buildings and social service.
World War II – destruction and reconstruction.
Today's multi-faith landscape.

Discussion

What evidence will we leave behind to enable future generations to discover our beliefs?

How can you track the history of faith communities in your local environment?

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Transcript

Presented by Simon Thurley, Director, Museum of London

Some eighteen hundred years have passed since the message of Jesus first reached the British Isles. In that time, its impact has been enormous, transforming not just how we live but where we live.

Today, whether you look at it from the air or the ground, you'll find the story of Christianity in Britain is all around us. But for the missionary monks of the sixth and seventh centuries it was a very different world. Stone crosses marked their meeting places, often placed near centres of political or religious power.

Like right here, on an ancient pagan site, churches soon replaced crosses and Christians often used traditional sacred places as centres from where to spread their new faith. The success can be seen in the sheer number of communities they founded, indicated in 'llan' 'kirk' 'eccles' and 'minster', all ancient words for 'church' or 'sacred place'.

By the time William the Conqueror landed in Hastings in 1066, Christianity had spread right across the country. Norman Christians sparked a mediaeval building boom that went on to produce many of our great cathedrals and a vast number of churches, ten thousand of which still survive.

Back then, the church would have been the focus of your life. Your day would have been marked by the bell in its tower. A tenth of all your produce would have gone to the church in taxes. It would have been stored in tithe barns – some of the largest buildings to survive from that time. And the priest would have had his own farmland, the glebe, the origin of many village greens.

But in the mid sixteenth century, everything changed. Ruined monasteries, abbeys and priories, once a vital part of medieval life, show how this era came to an abrupt end. Their destruction was a product of the Reformation, when Henry VIII broke the church's traditional ties with the pope and over eight thousand monastic institutions were closed - many plundered, burnt and left in ruins.

But their legacy lives on and not just in street names. Here archaeologists excavating in Spitalfields, in London, are revealing how the layout of a mediaeval monastery buried deep beneath the surface still influences the plan of the streets today.

As the Reformation swept much of the mediaeval world away, a very different landscape emerged, often marked by chapels like these, places of worship for Christian groups like Quakers and Baptists who, from the seventeenth century onwards, split away from the Anglican church. Their buildings reflect a simpler, more bible-focused faith.

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But the established church still had huge influence, even in the towns and cities that grew up in the wake of the industrial revolution. Here's an old nineteenth century water pump. It doesn't only tell you when it was erected, but by whom. Until as recently as 150 years ago, people relied on the church, through its parish structure, for a whole range of amenities from workhouses to almshouses, from drinking troughs to graveyards. And places of worship, of course, like this – built in a slum for the benefit of the new urban poor. Just one of 30,000 churches built during Queen Victoria's reign.

Two world wars took their toll of the landscape of the twentieth century but in their wake the church not only reconstructed old buildings but began to build new ones, structures often reflecting the church applying its ancient faith to a modern world.

More recently, other religions have begun to make their mark on the places where we live and today past and present intermingle in skylines right round the country.

Eighteen hundred years of faith is written across our landscape. But what evidence will we leave behind for future generations to discover our beliefs?

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Activities

1. How has Christianity shaped the area where you live?
2. Is the church a building – or a community of people?
3. What did the Church of England gain – and what did it lose – when it became the religion of the state at the Reformation?
4. Is anything lost when a church building is abandoned – or turned into something else?
5. What evidence will we leave behind about our beliefs?
6. Will there still be churches in the landscape in another 200 (500, 1,000) years?

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Activity 1

How has Christianity shaped the area where you live?

This all depends, of course, on where you live – a small village? An ancient town? A new town? A modern housing estate? A city centre?

Begin with a map of your area. Are there any churches? Where? How old? Are they at the centre of things? Then try to investigate under the surface of things – there's a good chance, even in the most modern housing estate, that the land was once owned by a church institution!

Also, as the video makes clear, the church's influence was more than simply being a place of worship. It provided medical and social welfare, education and housing. Has this been the case in your area? Do you go to a church school? Are there alms houses nearby? Did the local hospital begin as a religious foundation (or as a workhouse?).

And what is the place of the church in your local community today?

If you need a map of your local area/town, try <http://www.streetmap.co.uk/>

Extension

Develop your work to look at the influence of places of worship of all the faiths in your area. How long have they been there? What are their distinguishing features? Who comes to worship at them, from how far away?

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Activity 2

What does 'Church' mean? Is it a building – or a community of people?

Many people refer to a 'church' as if it just means a building. But this was not the case in the New Testament. There references to 'Temple' are as likely to refer to the human body / self as to a physical structure or an institution (see e.g. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 and 6:19-20). The Church is not just the building, but the people that form the community using that building – in fact, the whole Christian community.

The concept of 'landscape' can also be interiorized or made into an allegory. Pupils could reflect on and envisage their own interior landscape. How could inner emotions, e.g. of jealousy, love, anxiety, generosity, guilt, be translated into an inner landscape? Swamps, dark forests, mountains, lakes, pastureland, rivers, caves, inner city ring roads...?

Read Isaiah 11 for a biblical idea of how the literal landscape will change with the coming of the Messiah. Can this vision be translated in inner, personal terms? Alternatively, the 18th century hymn-writer Isaac Watts wrote *There is a Land of Pure Delight*, which envisages a landscape transformed by faith in Jesus. Versions and tunes can be found at <http://www.oremus.org/hymnal/t/t136.html> and <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/t/h/e/threisa.htm> Although the words clearly belong to another age and culture, pupils could write their own version of this hymn, keeping only the first line, but reconfiguring the landscape to fit their own vision.

Extension

Can the Christian Church exist without buildings? Find out how the earliest Christians worshipped.

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Activity 3

What did the Church of England gain – and what did it lose – when it became the religion of the State at the Reformation?

The main gain, of course, was power and influence. But was the cost too great? Long before the Reformation, the institutional church was effectively owned by the rich and powerful in society.

Pupils could approach this subject in a number of ways:

- What kind of things would Jesus say about the institution that claims to represent him, if he returned to earth
 - today
 - at an earlier historical period.

- Debate what the church would lose / gain if every single Christian community in Britain today was evicted from its property? What would be lost might include e.g. a sense of identity, history, conscience ... while the gains might include reorganization of time and effort previously spent on maintaining the property and an opportunity to revise attitudes to life and worship. The example of the church in Soviet Russia might provide some examples of the strength and problems of an evicted church.

Extension

Older pupils might be able to debate specifically the issue of disestablishment of the Church of England. What benefits does 'establishment' give both the church and society? What restrictions or problems does it impose? Is it fair? What would be the gains and losses if the Church of England were no longer legally connected to the State?

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Activity 4

Is anything lost when a church building is abandoned – or turned into something else?

Pupils are probably familiar with examples of church buildings which have been converted for secular use. They could write an effective poem based on the idea of

- “Once the building was filled with song / old ladies wearing outlandish hats / young babies bawling / confetti / fat men snoring during a long sermon / people meeting their friendsetc”
- “Now the building is a supermarket where cash registers jingle and signs saying ‘Buy-One-Get-One-Free’ replace the ten commandments / an art gallery full of people sipping champagne at exhibition openings and worshipping art / a set of luxury theme flats with the graveyard as a garden...”

Or

- Once the building was dark and miserable, attended/visited by few if any people: Just neglected, you couldn’t believe people celebrated anything there...”
- “Now the building is alive and buzzing with light – lively like it was when it was first built/ different groups from the community meet and are happy there/ Sometimes, because of the shapes, lofty spaces and setting, people still make links with what it used to stand for.”

These poems could form the basis for a general discussion about what a ‘consecrated’ building is, and about what appropriate uses might be found for redundant churches.

Extension

Sometimes churches are changed into places of worship for other faiths. What are the potential benefits and problems of this type of re-use?

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Activity 5

What evidence will we leave behind about our beliefs?

In most medieval towns and villages there would have been a grand, well-built, highly-decorated church, cathedral or abbey, while all other buildings would have been less significant. But is that the case today?

If an archaeologist from the year 3,000 AD uncovered your town which say, like Pompeii, had been buried and preserved in an instant, what could s/he deduce about our beliefs? Which buildings dominate? Banks? Shops? Sport centres...? Rather than icons and wayside crucifixes, what would the pervading advertising hoardings have to say about our values?

Extension

Pupils could draw up a list of the buildings and objects that they consider would best describe their beliefs and interests to future generations, with a note on why they are important. This lists could also be the basis for a (sensitively handled) comparison and discussion.

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Activity 6

Will there still be churches in the landscape in another 200 years (or 500 or 1000 years)?

Who knows what will happen? But why might there be some – or none? If there were none, would it necessarily mean that there were no believers?

Extension

Some churches in America operate via electronic means, such as television and the internet. What would be the main differences between this and more traditional ways of worship? Can ‘virtual’ churches be visible in the landscape? What is lost or gained by such churches?

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Collective Worship - YOUR CHURCH IN YOUR LANDSCAPE

Four students move forward to begin the collective worship.

SPEAKER 1: This morning we are going to see a short video.

SPEAKER 2: Then we will ask some questions about it afterwards to find out what you think about what's said in the video.

Show the video which lasts about 4 minutes, then play the music as the four students begin addressing the students.

SPEAKER 3: As you saw in the video, people who converted to Christianity met at places where stone crosses were erected. But they soon moved on from that and started to build churches.

SPEAKER 4: That was probably just to get out of the rain.

SPEAKER 1: That's a good enough reason but there are other reasons why people wanted a building to meet in. Any group of friends want a place to meet.

SPEAKER 2: Meeting together in a building adds to the feeling of being part of a community. The real power of a church is the community of people who belong to it and are ready to support each other.

SPEAKER 3: Some people use their church as a place to go – by themselves - for quiet prayer. They call it God's house after all, so you can get a feeling of being closer to God inside a church.

SPEAKER 4: Many churches have a very good atmosphere - calm and peaceful - in which you can think about how you're feeling. It's a sacred space. A place for talking with God. A place where people can reflect on what's happening in their lives.

SPEAKER 1: But what about those people who never go to church? Do they have a place where they can have a quiet think about everything?

SPEAKER 2: Sometimes people go to the park if they want a bit of peace and quiet. Or, if it's cold, stay at home and go to their room.

SPEAKER 3: A friend of mine... his dad says the only place in their house where he can get any peace is the loo. Maybe that's his church....

Speaker 4 addresses the gathered students directly.

SPEAKER 4: Where do you go when you need some time to yourself? Where is your sacred space where you feel peaceful?

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SPEAKER 1: Of course you can talk to God anywhere and at any time but if you're at home you might try lighting a candle and some people like to light a stick of incense - just like they do in some churches.

SPEAKER 2: You could also listen to music – something that makes you feel calm. Definitely not Led Zeppelin, okay?

SPEAKER 3: Candles... incense... music... you'll find all of these things in churches but the most important thing you'll find is people – people who could be interested in the same things as you.

SPEAKER 4: If you've never been inside a place of worship like a church or a synagogue or a mosque maybe now is the time to check it out. You might like it and you'll never know until you try it.
Think about it.