

Introducing our Theological Thinking around Safeguarding

This piece introduces and accompanies the theological reflection shared with the Cathedral congregation on 23rd March 2025.

Last spring, as Toby's new ministry among us as Dean was approaching, one of the requests he made of me was to think about offering some theological reflections on safeguarding. He was by that stage fully aware of the SCIE report and its impact for us in all sorts of different ways (*recent history*, but now increasingly *history*), as well as the wider climate of the Church of England, the Wilkinson Report, the Jay report and IICSA (The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse) – and the contributions of our well-loved now retired Bishop Peter Hancock. There was a long lead time for my thinking: Toby hoped for something from me by the end of the year that we could circulate early this year.

Then there was the Makin Review in November, and Archbishop Justin's resignation. It became clear that I couldn't just write more of the same kinds of theological materials that the Faith and Order Commission for the Church of England had been publishing over the last ten years, footnoted in my written piece. I needed to have some dialogue with the journalistic voices too with their own power and influence. The Senior Common Room newspaper tables in Cambridge provided me with much food for thought alongside other theological writings, and my reflection began to take shape. You'll recognize it was influenced too by our Christmas worship.

Completed in December, it was shared with my closest colleagues, who contributed to its content and shaping. We then – as you may recall – flagged its existence in the Chapter Letter, to give the heads-up to survivors for whom it might go deep. We were able to identify some survivors whose voices we wanted to hear before circulating it more broadly. As January and February unfolded, with more news about the Diocese of Liverpool and then General Synod, we listened to advice that we should not share it in a potentially febrile context, so we accordingly delayed. We also heard wisdom that it was best shared with a telling of its story: hence what I'm trying to do today. We also listened to those who wanted to have a space for talking about it: hence the two facilitated and supported discussion sessions we've so far diarized, details of which you'll find in the Chapter Letter for 23rd March. (*If you're reading this with the Chapter Letter of 30th March, missed the sessions but wish for another opportunity, please write to one of Toby, Tim, me, our PA, or just the office email address. We will also be glad to receive written comments if that's your preference*).

Because we care about our safeguarding thinking and doing. Because this is how we love God, and love our neighbours as ourselves.

And of course since it was written and pre-circulated, my own thinking has moved on: I've read more, I've thought more, more has happened in the world. We can't put everything into a few words: there will be things missing. But by trying to focus on general themes around power and truth amongst others, we're hoping that we can open up our thinking in the safest possible ways for everyone. Please don't let this be the last word – the Chancellor will never have a monopoly on theology: I believe all Christians are theologians!

Truly, may these my words *not* be the last word.