

Abstract

What happens to our faith when we approach it open to the possibility of humour? The impetus to explore this question arose from the conviction that, for many of us, our lives of faith and our sense of humour are separate phenomena. If we take our faith seriously, there should be no room for laughter, perhaps. This disconnect is particularly conspicuous in corners of the Church of Ireland, a denomination which witnesses to the love of Christ on an island notorious for its distinctive light-heartedness.

This project aims to stimulate thought around the rehabilitation of humour within the life of the Church of Ireland by examining and redressing several preconceptions and presuppositions. First, we retrace the historical encounter between Christianity and humour, arguing that its negative associations—the faith of the Early Church apparently being the target of humour in the context of the ancient Mediterranean world—was part of a much wider tradition of getting your point across in order to correct some perceived moral misalignment in the thinking of your opponent. Similarly, we note some counter-positions to the caricature of the church of the Patristic period and the Middle Ages being humourless, and establish the philosophical basis for the church's encounter with humour in the present day.

Chapter Two argues that humour is a divine attribute, a facet of the character of God which became incarnate in Jesus Christ. We explore humour as revealed in the tradition of Christian scripture, arguing that humour is a useful and hitherto undervalued interpretive tool, before anticipating the full recovery of humour's epistemological value into the life of the church.

As a way forward, we conclude by considering what a 'Theology of Humour' for the Church of Ireland might look like, exploring how this divine attribute might advance the church's pastoral ministry, inform its preaching, leadership, and its ability to share the faith.