

Is God A Lib Dem?

An Investigation into the Synergy Between Theological and Political Liberalism; Focussing on the Reflections of Members within the Liberal Democrat Christian Forum.



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*To the 74,000 defenders of liberalism in the United Kingdom;
Keep fighting.*

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

It is no greatly guarded secret that politics and religion spark the most heated of debates; Helen Cameron comments that around a dinner table, the rule ‘no politics, no religion’ is often enforced to ensure that conversation remains civil (Cameron 2010:7). This animosity is perhaps not a new phenomenon, but as Elizabeth Phillips highlights, it is an animosity undoubtedly made greater since the September 11th attacks in New York as she makes reference to a number of instances which show the interaction between theology and politics in a very negative way: Christian fundamentalists attacking abortion clinics in America; the troubles of Northern Ireland; the Israel/Palestine conflict; the 2003 invasion of Iraq and of course, the aforementioned terrorist attacks against the World Trade Centre buildings and the Pentagon in 2001 (Phillips 2012:2). Given what history tells us of these events, surely it is reasonable to conclude that theology and politics should have little or even no relation or dialogue at all?

The British government of the 1990s and 2000s certainly shared this sentiment, despite the Prime Minister at the time, Tony Blair being a practising Christian. Blair’s senior advisor, Alistair Campbell, famously interrupted an interview with the former Prime Minister when he was asked a question about his faith: ‘We don’t do God’ (Brown 2003). What this perhaps demonstrates, is an inherent caution amongst politicians to openly entertain the idea that their policies and politics are somehow linked to, or influenced by religious belief.

Tim Farron is the leader of the Liberal Democrats, and openly a Christian. He has contributed to the publication *Liberal Democrats Do God* (2013) and is one of the Vice Presidents of the Liberal Democrat Christian Forum (LDCF) (Liberal Democrat Christian Forum 2015a). On why he is a Christian, Farron writes: ‘I became a Christian because the evidence for Christianity is staggeringly compelling.’ (Farron 2013:15). Farron’s first

television interview as leader of the party sparked controversy, after he failed to answer a question about same-sex marriage. When asked whether or not he [Farron] thought homosexuality was a sin, he replied ‘...to understand Christianity is to understand that we are all sinners’ (Perraudin 2015). Farron defended himself during another interview, by claiming that his faith was private and that it did not influence his role as an MP, or as leader of the party (Perraudin 2015).

Liberal Democrats Do God contains contributions from a number of key people from within the party and deals with the active relationship between Christianity and politics. Steve Webb outlines the contents of the book and states that as well as philosophical reflections on the concept of liberalism, the book also features ‘practical examples of how Christianity makes a real difference’ (Webb 2013:2).

This research is focussed on the Liberal Democrats not only because I am an active member within the party and a theologian, but also because at the party’s helm, is a practising Christian. This research draws upon interviews conducted with Liberal Democrats themselves, the results of which aim to show theology and politics in a new light. How can theology and politics influence each other? Is someone who identifies themselves as politically liberal, also theologically liberal? Is there a way for theology to help shape Liberal Democrat party policy? Is God, as Steve Webb (2013:1) suggests, really a Lib Dem? This research aims to demonstrate that theology can enjoy a positive and fruitful relationship with politics, through careful analysis of ordinary believers’ reflections on their faith and political beliefs. It also aims to demonstrate that there is a link between theological liberalism and political liberalism; those who are members of a politically liberal party are, it is hypothesised, more likely to be of a theologically liberal persuasion, even if the participants of this research do not explicitly classify themselves in this way.

Methodology

Political theology has, traditionally, been conducted by academics with a social scientific emphasis. Where this research differs is its focus on the reflections of ordinary believers. Based on this, it is fair to assert that this research falls within the framework of ordinary theology: considering the theological reflections of people with little or no formal theological education (Astley 2002:1). The study of ordinary theology is largely based on empirical research, which in the case of this investigation, will be informed by questionnaires and interviews.

Selecting a Sample

The scope of this research is immediately defined by its title; Christian members of the Liberal Democrats, specifically the Liberal Democrat Christian Forum, form the basis of the empirical data collection of this investigation. My sample selection technique is based on purposive (Mowat and Swinton 2006:69, 235) and voluntary (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight 2010:163) sampling. Purposive sampling chooses participants based on their suitability to provide useful information for the research; voluntary sampling bases the participants on those who are willing to get involved. Through the use of an initial enquiry on the Facebook group for the LDCF, I was able to determine the level of interest from members in taking part in my research. The questionnaire I developed for use in this investigation was distributed to members a couple of months later, giving members the opportunity to take part. Through answering the survey, participants were able to put themselves forward to be considered for interview; this allowed LDCF members to volunteer their participation but also allowed me to be selective in which participants I nominated to carry through to the interviewing stage of the investigation.

Questionnaires

The questionnaire for my study was designed using an interface that linked directly to my personal weblog and website (www.clarkeroberths.co.uk), the link for which was shared on

the Facebook page for the LDCF. Despite Lorraine Blaxter's reservations of questionnaires distributed online – as she claims it can often yield poorer data than those completed in a face-to-face setting, as the participant is unable to ask the researcher any queries about the questionnaire and/or the research (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight 2010:179) – I found this to be the easiest and most efficient way of collecting my data. Collecting initial data through face-to-face methods would have been extremely time consuming and, given the fact that LDCF members are spread across the country, it would have been logistically impossible given the time restraints in which to complete this study.

It was important to consider the many different categories of question that could be used to collect my data. Based on Blaxter, Hughes and Tight's list (see 2010:181), I chose to make use of the following:

- 1) Quantity of information.
- 2) List or multiple choice.
- 3) Scale.
- 4) Open-ended.

It was not conducive to the success of the questionnaire that a query from each category be put to the research sample, instead the importance as Jeff Astley highlights, was that the questions themselves were relevant and successful. By referencing Blaxter's list of criteria for successful survey questions, I ensured that the questions put to the participants were unambiguous and simple to understand, whilst still guaranteeing their effectiveness at yielding the data I required (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight 2010:182).

Interviews

I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews as opposed to using, for example, a telephone interview as, when discussing with someone face-to-face, the listener is able to determine meaning in the interviewees' responses (Cameron and Duce 2013:82). In addition to this, the semi-structured interview allows for questions to be much more open-ended and grants

the interviewee a certain amount of freedom, allowing them to discuss their ideas, beliefs and feelings in greater detail (Cameron and Duce 2013:83). This method also allows for the researcher to ask focussed questions that it is hoped, will yield answers relevant to the study. Semi-structured or unstructured interviews allow the interview to feel more like a conversation, making the interviewee feel more relaxed and thus more likely to give open and honest responses to questions that otherwise, might be quite sensitive to discuss openly with a stranger (Holland & Ramazanoglu cit. Blaxter, Hughes and Tight 2010:181)

The interviews were recorded using a mobile telephone as this allowed for the recordings to be easily accessed whilst being held securely, ensuring confidentiality. Recording long conversations meant that I could concentrate on what the participant was saying, and could engage with the interviewee as though it were a normal conversation (see Blaxter, Hughes and Tight 2010:172).

Ethical Considerations

To remain consistent with the ethical guidelines of York St John University, any responses to either the questionnaire or the interviews were kept entirely anonymous unless permission was given from the participant to identify them. Once the recordings of the interviews had been used, they were deleted from my mobile telephone to ensure that the participants' anonymity was upheld. All participants in this research are aged 18 and over and have given written consent to take part.

Chapter One

Setting the Scene

Both theological and political liberalism have long-standing histories; both have enjoyed periods of success and significant following and have enjoyed making positive contributions to theology and politics, respectively. Perhaps it is mere coincidence that within more recent years the attention paid to, and support for liberal movements in theological and political circles appears to have waned somewhat, nevertheless it is of interest to this research to understand the contexts from which theological and political liberalism emerged.

The Liberal Democrats

The Liberal Democrats are the fourth largest political party within the United Kingdom, holding eight parliamentary seats in the House of Commons. The period between the years 2010 and 2015 was the first since the 1920s that a liberal party had been in office, when a coalition was formed between the Liberal Democrats and the Conservative Party (UK Parliament 2015); David Lloyd George (1893-1945) had led the Liberal Party¹ in government during the First World War but subsequently lost the election held in 1922 (UK Government 2015).

The Liberal Democrats came into existence in 1988, when a formal merger took place between the Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party (The Liberal Democrat History Group 2015). Despite not being in office since the 1920s and being reduced to eight MPs in 2015, it has not always the case that political liberalism appeared to be a minority movement. Prior to the 1922 election, the Liberal Party along with the Conservatives, were the two major forces in Westminster.

¹ A distinction must be made between the Liberal Democrats (1988-) and the Liberal Party (1860s – 1980s). Although the former emerged from the latter, they are two distinct political parties whose names are not used interchangeably.

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The Liberal Party exists to build a liberal society in which every citizen shall possess liberty, property, and security and none shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity. Its chief care is for the rights and opportunities of the individual and in all spheres sets freedom first. (Watts 1995:1)

The introduction to the constitution of the Liberal Party sets out the core values and principles for which its parliamentarians and activists stood for. The modern Liberal Democrat constitution echoes talk of 'liberty, equality and community' as well as building a 'free, fair and open society' (The Liberal Democrats 2015a).

These constitutions appear to embody the meaning of liberalism² by suggesting both individual liberty, and a sense of tolerance and acceptance in a wider understanding (see Watts 1995:1). The emergence of the liberal political movement during the 18th and 19th centuries could be argued to have been in response to oppression suffered by those who were not of the aristocracy, or of affluent background or of significant standing in society. The liberalism of this time focussed on allowing people control 'of their own destiny' (Watts 1995:1), rather than being complacent in permitting the government to dictate what people could be capable of and what they should aspire to achieve.

Duncan Watts (1995) highlights three groups within Parliament that contributed to the eventual establishment of a liberal party:

- 1) The Whigs were members of the aristocracy who, despite often being described as 'undistinguishable from the Tories'³ due to their reluctance to change and reform, understood when such changes were needed (Watts 1995:2-3).
- 2) The Radicals sought to remove the aristocratic privileges and make education widely available to the population (Watts 1995:3). Many Radicals could be identified as utilitarian⁴; indeed both Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-

² Liberal derives from the Latin term 'liber' meaning 'free' or 'generous'.

³ Tory refers to the political party that existed during the 17th and 19th Centuries, rather than the term used to describe members of the modern Conservative Party; although the former did eventually give way to the latter (see BBC 2010a).

⁴ The philosophical school of thought that places emphasis on the 'greatest happiness for the greatest number' principle.

1873), two philosophers most commonly associated with utilitarianism, are also credited as being amongst the founding fathers of liberalism (Marshall 2004:1).

- 3) The Peelites, like the Radicals and Whigs, desired to see more social freedom and civil liberty (Watts 1995:5).

It was not until William Gladstone's (1809-1898) premiership in the 1860s that the political organisation known as the Liberal Party came into existence (Watts 1995:6). Whilst the Liberal Party gained support from those who appeared to be against social injustices, they also gained support from Non-Conformist⁵ Christian groups. Many supporters of the Liberal Party came from within denominations that opposed the social privilege and aristocracy that was apparent within the Church of England; these 'dissenters', like their Liberal contemporaries, wanted social equality for all and freedom from the dogma and doctrinal assertions of the Anglican tradition: 'Where dissent was strong, so was the Liberal Party' (Watts 1995:7). These Non-Conformists were prejudiced against, one example of which is that until 1871, non-Anglican Christians were barred from graduating from Oxford, Cambridge or Durham universities (Bebbington 1993:152). Gladstone's liberalism sought to rethink the power that the state had over the individual and to remove the Church from the influence of government, which would lead to religious freedom (Parry 1986:150). Gladstone acknowledged the importance for religious liberty, which continues to serve as one of the key political campaigns of the Liberal Democrat Christian Forum (Liberal Democrat Christian Forum 2015b).

The Liberal Democrat Christian Forum

The Liberal Democrat Christian Forum (LDCF) exists to provide a Christian voice within the party, but also to provide Christianity with a liberal voice (Latham and Mathys 2013:xi). The

⁵ Non-Conformist refers to Christian groups who existed outside the Church of England (Watts 1995:7)

preface to the LDCF's 2013 publication *Liberal Democrats Do God* outlines four main aims of the group⁶:

- 1) To support and encourage Christians within the Liberal Democrats in living out their faith at any level of politics within the United Kingdom;
- 2) To act as an arbiter between Christian communities and the party whilst building relationships with Christian organisations, charities, churches and the media;
- 3) To encourage Christians to become more politically engaged and to see politics as a mission;
- 4) To underpin everything the group does with prayer, and to offer regular prayer for the government and nation.

From these aims, in particular 1) and 3), it is evident to see how the LDCF recognises the relationship between theology and politics; politics is seen to be a means through which Christians may 'live out' their Christian faith. It also shows that politically active Christians should not hide their faith convictions, as seen with the Tony Blair incident⁷, but rather embrace them and use them to a positive end.

Steve Webb (2013) discusses the idea that the gospel demonstrates how God gave humanity the freedom to reject and crucify Jesus and as with the party constitutions seen above, implores the idea of freedom as being a core liberal value. Webb further exemplifies this point by suggesting that God does not impose His will or coerce people into a relationship with Him, more it is left to humanity's freedom to choose such a relationship (Webb 2013:2). When applied to political discussion, Webb makes clear that despite the need for social boundaries, it must be left to the individual to self-determine one's own destiny. Linking this back to the Gospel, he writes:

'Those who recognise in the Gospel a deep reverence for human freedom and self-determination will find a natural home in the Liberal Democrats.'
(Webb 2013:2)

⁶ See (Latham and Mathys 2013:xi)

The importance of social and political boundaries whilst maintaining individual freedom is a concept set out by liberal philosopher John Locke (1632-1704). Watts cites Locke and claims that liberalism accepts that total and complete freedom is unobtainable as “no government allows total freedom” (Locke cit. Watts 1995:1); instead, liberalism ‘settles’ for the maximum amount of liberty consistent with stability and order. Where the Liberal Party sought to increase individual liberty and remove social privileges, so too do the Liberal Democrats fight for social justice and fairness. The headlines from their 2015 General Election manifesto feature terms such as ‘Prosperity for All’, ‘Opportunity for Every Child’, ‘Fair Taxes’ and ‘Quality Health Care for All’ (The Liberal Democrats 2015b). This demonstrates the continuing aim of liberals to deliver equality for every British citizen, regardless of their socio-economic background. It is clear that individual and religious liberty and freedom are at the heart of what those who identify as politically liberal believe; does this have any bearing on the values that those who identify as theologically liberal maintain?

Liberal Theology Defined

Alister McGrath describes liberal theology as a framework which seeks to ‘[bridge] the gap between Christian faith and modern knowledge’ (McGrath 2011:82), often by reinterpreting Christian doctrine in a way that appears coherent with what is now known about the natural world⁸. If this cannot be achieved in certain cases, doctrines are abandoned altogether. John P. Crossley (2007) discusses the relationship between political and theological liberalism and outlines two characteristics unique to liberal theology: the first being the recognition that the quest for knowledge of the transcendent is indicative of being human, and the second accepts that:

[any] conceptualisation[s] of the transcendent...are human artefacts...and are subject to all the same biological and social influences and limitations characteristic of any human quest.’ (Crossley 2007:213).

⁸ Through science, philosophy and social scientific study.

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To put this into context, theologian John Hick (1922-2012) was dissatisfied with traditional Christological⁹ assertions and so constructed a liberal interpretation of the Incarnation, which dramatically altered his understanding of the Christian faith overall (1993). In the case of Hick, he felt that the orthodox understanding of Jesus' two-natures and oneness with God was illogical and incapable of being made sense of in the contemporary context; he argued that this idea of Jesus had led to Christian Exclusivity¹⁰, which has 'exacerbated human conflicts' (Hick 1993:134). Hick's metaphorical interpretation of the Incarnation leads to a religious pluralism that can allow for all of the world's faiths to maintain the integrity of their 'truth' claims (see Hick 1993:149); furthering the cause for religious liberty.

The liberal theological movement has its foundation in the thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), whose theology emerged during the European Enlightenment. The Enlightenment saw advances in scientific and philosophical discovery and the increasing desire from people to speak out against religious authority and effectively 'think for themselves' (see Hart 1995:171). It was inevitable that Schleiermacher's thinking would draw upon these themes and he aimed to 'renew' the theology of his day (Clements 1987:35).

Much like the politics of the Liberal Democrats, the aim of liberal theology can be seen as to challenge the status quo and offer a sense of equality to both Christians and others from outside the faith. Liberal theology can be seen to offer a way of understanding Christian doctrine that aligns with other personally held views that may often stand in contention with orthodoxy. It may be fair to comment that there are similarities between theological and political liberalism. Both appear to seek change to the establishment in their respective area and both appear keen to offer fairness and openness, where traditionally held values either politically or theologically, appear incapable of providing diversity and equality.

⁹ The Doctrine of the Person of Christ.

¹⁰ See Chapters 13 and 14 of *The Metaphor of God Incarnate* (Hick 1993).

Political Theology

Duncan Forrester (1988) exemplifies the importance of political theology by asserting that 'every religion and every political system must generate a political theology of some kind' (1988:vii). Forrester was writing during the 1980s, a time which enjoyed a relative period of peace concerning religious involvement with the affairs of government. It is irrefutable to say that the opinions of many since then, may have changed in light of the dramatic increase of religiously inspired terrorism and extremism. It would not be incorrect to assess this change in attitude as being one that now views the relationship between faith in any form and politics as something that should be treated with extreme caution and suspicion. However it is difficult to ignore the fact that many religious people are still compelled to become politically involved because of their faith¹¹.

Political theology is not one singular theology: it should be understood as a complex mix of different theologies that relate to different contexts. This variety of contexts ultimately results in a wide spectrum of aims and agendas to which the many political theologies belong, but it is the attempt to articulate the Christian narrative in a way that is conducive in encouraging social action, that binds these theologies together. Franklin Gamwell suggests that theology and politics share a common platform in the desire to address issues of ethical importance: abortion, euthanasia and wealth distribution are but a few examples (Gamwell 2005:1). Whilst theology has provided a perspective on issues such as these, it may be conceded that it is not always a positive contribution; one particular example of this may be demonstrated by the case of Savita Halappanavar in the Republic of Ireland, who was refused an abortion due to the country's strong affiliation with the Catholic Church, who died as a result (see Harrison 2010).

Perhaps the easiest articulation of how Christians understand their faith and its relationship with the political sphere, is by suggesting that civic involvement is in some way a 'Christian

¹¹ In the context of this research, the Christian faith is the main focus.

Vocation' (Gamwell 2005). Gamwell discusses the etymology of 'vocation' and explains how its original usage was linked to religiously motivated actions that were viewed to have had a positive impact on society, which people felt compelled to undertake. A study conducted in 2005 (Loveland et al.) investigated the relationship between religiosity and political activism in the United States, with a particular focus on aspects of prayer. Although this study relates to Christians in the US, preliminary data collected for this research indicates trends that are consistent with the findings in Loveland's paper.

Loveland's research highlights examples of active involvement between religion and public life and discusses the concept of prayer as being a 'cultural tool for social change' (2004:2).

The research maintains that:

'...private religious experiences, measured by frequency and types of prayer, motivate some people to mix religion and politics.' (Loveland et al. 2004:2)

By reflecting on issues of social and/or ethical importance from a Christian perspective, it is entirely possible and expected that those Christians, who have a strong sense of religiosity and an awareness of the political sphere, foster their actions into political engagement (Loveland et al. 2004:2).

A helpful artistic demonstration of this interplay between one's religious beliefs and their political involvement comes from the film *Amazing Grace* (Michael Apted 2006), which documents the work of British politician William Wilberforce. Wilberforce is famous for being instrumental in the abolition of the slave trade during the 19th Century and the film depicts his struggle to reconcile his religious and political lives. There are a number of scenes in the film that show Wilberforce's (Ioan Gruffudd) inability to accept that he can act politically whilst observing his religious conviction. One scene sees Wilberforce hosting a dinner with a number of activists fighting to abolish the slave trade, among them is Thomas Clarkson (Rufus Sewell) and Hannah Moore (Georgie Glen). As the conversation progresses, Clarkson attempts to convince Wilberforce to join the activists' cause:

'Mr Wilberforce, we understand you're having problems choosing whether to do the work of God, or the work of a political activist.'

Moore continues:

‘We humbly suggest that you can do both.’

A later scene shows Wilberforce with Pit the Younger (Benedict Cumberbatch). Pit the Younger says to Wilberforce:

‘Surely the principles of Christianity demand action as well as meditation?’

Although it is possible the conversations between Wilberforce and other abolitionists were depicted merely for dramatic effect, it is interesting to consider an historical example of when one’s religiosity affected their political involvement and further demonstrates the active relationship between theological reflections, and political activism. It also highlights the fact that some of the key precepts of Christianity are innately related to social action, whether this manifests itself in the realm of charity work or politics.

As this research develops, this inherent relationship between activism and the Christian faith will become clearer, as the reflections of those who are both politically and theologically active are examined. Furthermore, as has been discussed above, the synergy between theologically liberal and politically liberal ideas will also become apparent as we have seen; there are stark similarities in the history and aims of liberalism in both of these ideologies.

Chapter Two

Preliminary Findings

The Sample Demographics

The Questionnaire

The preliminary stage of this research was informed by the findings of a questionnaire distributed to members of the Facebook group for the Liberal Democrat Christian Forum, the results of which informed the subsequent interviews. The first thing to consider is the sample's demographics: a study into religiosity amongst 'American Elite Women' (Hastings and Lindsay 2013) suggests that women are more likely to be religious than men. In the case of this research, in spite of the fact of it being carried out on a British sample, 66.7% of those who responded were male¹². This could be an anomaly or, more realistically, could be due to the fact that men are the predominant gender which makes up the LDCF membership.

The ages of the respondents varied greatly, with the modal classes being 18-24 and 50-59¹³. For the purposes of this research it was greatly advantageous to have a wide spectrum of respondents from varying age ranges. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the scope of this research, 97%¹⁴ of respondents were members of the Liberal Democrats although only 55%¹⁵ were members of LDCF. The results of this particular question did not appear to skew the data from the questionnaire and did not have an effect on the data obtained from the research interviews carried out later in the process. In terms of denominational membership, the majority of respondents identified with one of the main Christian denominations including Anglicanism, Catholicism, Episcopalian, Methodism and Baptism; 27% of respondents did

¹² See Table i.

¹³ See Table ii.

¹⁴ See Table iii.

¹⁵ See Table iv.

not identify with any Christian denomination¹⁶. The variance in denominational membership within LDCF is expected as it is a non-denominational group. The preface to *Liberal Democrats Do God* (Latham and Mathys 2013:xi) makes continuous use of the term 'Christian' and 'Christians', rather than identifying one particular denomination.

The Christians who responded to the questionnaire can be seen as actively involved with their faith: over 80% of those surveyed stated that they attend a church service with more than half stating they attended a service at least once a week¹⁷. 58% of those surveyed said they were actively involved with their church in some capacity and more than 50% are active within the Liberal Democrats, which alludes to one of the hypotheses of this research: those who are actively involved with their church are also actively involved in politics¹⁸.

As this research falls within some of the remits of ordinary theology, it was important to establish as to whether or not the respondents had had any significant theological education or training¹⁹. As can be seen with Figure 1, the majority of respondents received theological education either from primary/secondary education or from church courses. A small minority of those surveyed stated they had had a higher level of education (i.e. university level).

The Interviewees

As has already been explained above, the questionnaire allowed willing participants to identify themselves for consideration to take part in the interviews which form the main focus of this research. From the questionnaire respondents, 11 people identified themselves as being willing to participate in the research interviews. After initial correspondence with the 11 potential interviewees, five were eliminated from the selection process due to geographical and logistical constraints, leaving a relatively small interview sample of six people. The six

¹⁶ See Table v.

¹⁷ See Table vi.

¹⁸ See appendices vii and viii.

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interviewees were chosen due to their willingness to participate and their suitability; they are²⁰:

Bryan – falls into the 18-29 age group and identifies as male. He has been a member of the Liberal Democrats for between five and nine years and is also a member of the Liberal Democrat Christian Forum; he is an active member within the party. He identifies as a Methodist and attends a church service once a week. He is studying for a master's degree but has never received any formal theological education or training.

Alison – falls into the 18-29 age group and identifies as female. She has been a member of the Liberal Democrats for less than a year and is also a member of the Liberal Democrat Christian Forum; she is an active member within the party. She does not identify with any Christian denomination but attends a church service once a week. She is actively involved with her local church whilst studying for her A Levels and has received a theological education through church or diocesan courses.

Greg – falls into the 50-59 age group and identifies as male. He has been a member of the Liberal Democrats for less than a year and is also a member of the Liberal Democrat Christian Forum; he is not active within the party. He identifies as being a member of the Free Church of Scotland and attends a church service more than once a week; he is actively involved with his local church. He has a doctoral degree and has received a theological education through church or diocesan courses.

Sally – falls into the 18-29 age group and identifies as female. She is a member of the Liberal Democrats and the Liberal Democrat Christian Forum. She belongs to a 'non-denominational evangelical network of churches'²¹ and is actively involved both politically and religiously. She has a Bachelor's degree but has received no formal theological education or training.

²⁰ All names of interviewees have been changed to protect their anonymity.

²¹ Quoted from the interview with Sally as her questionnaire data was unavailable.

Nigel – falls into to 50-59 age group and identifies as male. He has been a member of the Liberal Democrats for less than a year and is a member of the Liberal Democrat Christian Forum. He does not identify with any Christian denomination but attends a church service once a week; he is actively involved with his local church. He has a Bachelor's degree and has received a theological education through a university certificate/diploma.

Jerry – falls into the 40-49 age group and identifies as male. He has been a member of the Liberal Democrats for less than a year but is not a member of the Liberal Democrat Christian Forum; Jerry is not active within the party. Jerry identifies as an Anglican and hardly ever attends a church service; he is not active in his local church. He has a Bachelor's degree in theology & religious studies.

Upon reflection, the sample that was eventually taken through to interview may not have been the most representative group, given that there were more males involved than females and that the majority of the interviewees fell into the younger age group. However, for the purposes of this research and due to the size and scope of the potential research sample, it was not felt that any overrepresentation or underrepresentation would skew the results of the data in any way.

Theologically Liberal?

The initial questionnaire served several purposes: the main one being to identify potential candidates to take through to the interviewing stage of this research, but more interestingly it gave an insight into the attitudes of Christian Liberal Democrats more broadly. The second section of the survey dealt with respondents' attitudes theologically and based on their responses, it became easier to assess whether Liberal Democrats also demonstrated attitudes consistent with those of Liberal Protestants²². The questions focussed on how respondents viewed scripture; those who appeared to be more open to biblical interpretation and possible inaccuracies with the scripture were deemed more likely to be theologically

²² The name given to adherents of liberal theology by Alister McGrath see 2011:82.

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liberal, as one of the key themes within liberal theology is an openness to reinterpretation of scripture and seeing it as a less important source for doing theology than reason and experience. Attitudes towards science and religion more generally were also investigated in order to determine whether or not respondents were open to scientific influence in theology – a trait common amongst Liberal Protestants – or not, which would have indicated a stronger leaning to a conservative theological position.

The results of this section of the survey were varied and could be considered to be inconsistent. On biblical attitudes, the respondents demonstrated a varied opinion towards the Bible. The results show an equal split between those who disagreed strongly and those who agreed with the statement ‘I think that if something is said to have happened in the Bible, then it happened’²³. This question was designed to understand whether or not those people surveyed viewed the Bible more liberally than those who maintain the absolute truth of the Scripture. Although more of the sample disagreed that something claimed to have happened in the Bible must have actually happened, it was surprising to see that a relatively large number of those who were surveyed appeared to agree with a seemingly theologically conservative view. A similar story can be seen with the responses to a question designed to explore people’s thoughts about the Bible’s significance²⁴. It is presumed those who agree with the idea that the Bible consists of some stories written by people to explain things that, contextually, they did not understand are more disposed to be Liberal Protestants. Accepting the Bible as it is written is something that Enlightenment philosophers and theologians challenged, which eventually led to the emergence of the liberal movement in theology (see Migliore 2004:44-45).

Once again opinion is completely split on the statement in this question, which may lead one to suspect that there is in fact no direct correlation to one’s political and theological positions. It was surprising to observe how people who were members of a politically liberal party also

²³ See Figure 2.

²⁴ See Figure 3.

demonstrated theological beliefs that appeared to stand in contention with what is usually expected of Liberal Protestants.

When questioned about Christian doctrine, once again there was a split response between those who saw the reinterpretation of doctrine as a positive thing and those who appeared concerned with non-theological sources affecting how Christian belief is established²⁵. The majority of those surveyed appeared to display attitudes towards Christian doctrine most commonly associated with Liberal Protestantism; the reinterpretation of doctrine and allowing the influence of scientific knowledge to affect theological thought are two of the key aspects of theological liberalism. Supporting this was the overwhelming response of those surveyed who strongly disagreed with the notion that Christianity needs 'protecting' from philosophy and science²⁶. Contrarily to what was shown by respondents' attitudes towards the Bible, it can be seen that Christians within the Liberal Democrats do display traits of theological liberalism when it relates to doctrine. However on matters concerning scripture, there tends to be a stronger conservative voice amongst those surveyed as part of this research. As the interviewees' responses are analysed later, the reason for this may become clearer but at this point, it may be fair to speculate that despite there existing clear definitions of what constitutes a Liberal Protestant in the academic world, in reality, boundaries are much less defined and Christians much harder to categorise. It may also be true that differences in theological attitudes may also be down to denominational belonging; as has already been stated above, the LDCF is an inter-denominational platform and this must be taken account of when looking at the large variances in these results.

Politically Liberal?

Questions surrounding the electoral system, the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union, the state of mental health provision amongst others, were asked in an attempt to determine whether or not those being surveyed were consistent with what are

²⁵ See Figures 4 and 5.

²⁶ See Figure 6.

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commonly accepted as liberal views, by virtue of the fact that they are high priorities for the Liberal Democrats²⁷.

As Figures 7 and 8 show, those surveyed showed an overwhelming sympathy with the Liberal Democrat policy areas highlighted in this survey. Only four instances of disagreement were recorded and 15 instances of uncertainty²⁸ Based on these statistics, it is fair to state that those taking part in this research either at a preliminary level or at interview stage can be classed as being politically liberal.

Faith Inspired Politics?

The final section of the survey involved respondents answering questions regarding their reflections on how they saw the relationship between their Christian faith, and their political views and/or activity. A key component of the political theology conversation centres on the issue of how one's faith can be put into practice by engaging in public service. As has been discussed above, other research conducted in this field (namely Loveland et al. 2004:1-14) has demonstrated that people with strong religious convictions and who are astute to political issues, are more likely to become actively engaged in civic life. The questions posed to the respondents of this research's survey, attempted to discover whether or not this hypothesis was in fact accurate. The results were as follows:

Of those surveyed, almost 50% agreed with the notion that they were actively involved in politics because of their religious views as opposed to 28% who did not feel that there was as direct a link as suggested by the survey question²⁹. On the topic of church involvement being influenced by political views, only one respondent agreed that they were active within

²⁷ Both commitments to reforming the electoral system from First-Past-the-Post to a method of Proportional Representation and improving provision for mental health patients appear in the party's 2015 General Election Manifesto (pages 132 and 64-69 respectively). (See: The Liberal Democrats 2015)

The UK's continued EU membership was pledged by party leader Tim Farron, in wake of the vote to leave the European Union in the referendum held on 23rd June 2016. (See Stone 2016)

²⁸ Those surveyed who returned a "not certain" response are not included in figures 7 and 8.

²⁹ See Table x.

their church because of their political views³⁰; the overwhelming picture shown by the responses to this question show that, amongst those surveyed, political views do not translate into activity within the church, as 75% disagreed with the statement posed in the question³¹. Despite the fact that figures obtained from questions concerning *active involvement* both politically and in a church environment suggest a tenuous link between political and theological beliefs, responses to the statement 'I feel that my religious views have nothing to do with my political views' demonstrate a contrasting picture. 78% of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement³². Although these results do not support an overwhelming link between religious belief and political activism, it must be acknowledged that the term 'political activism' may mean certain things for different people; activism for one may mean taking an active interest, whereas for another it may mean campaigning in support of a particular issue or politician. The respondents in this survey may have had differing understandings of what it means to be politically active and is perhaps a flaw of the wording of the question. Nonetheless, the figures show a positive lean towards affirming the hypothesis that those who have relatively strong religious beliefs are perhaps more inclined to become politically active, especially when one considers the response to the statement 'I feel that my political views are shaped by my religious views'. 66.6% of those surveyed agreed with this statement as opposed to 14% who did not³³: this again demonstrates the case for faith inspired politics.

The Liberal Democrats' leader, Tim Farron, suggests that to be a Christian and politically active are 'entirely consistent' (2013:18). In a chapter in which he writes about the legitimacy of being both a Christian and a Liberal Democrat, he cites biblical passages from both Ecclesiastes and the Book of Amos to affirm this point. Farron argues that as Christians, people are called to be involved with the world, 'to act with kindness, honesty and gentleness' and to be 'strident when it comes to the injustices suffered by others' (2013:18).

³⁰ Church activity, in this case, is not to be confused with church attendance.

³¹ See Table xi.

³² See Table xii.

³³ See Table xiii.

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It is clear that Farron is advocating the argument that one's political involvement and activism can be influenced by one's Christianity; the mere fact alone, that Farron is a politician and openly discusses how his political views and actions are shaped by his faith, is a clear demonstration of this point. Farron also alludes to a link between Liberal Democrat policy and the main task of Liberation theology:

Liberal Democrats stand alone as the defender of all human beings, especially those we might refer to as 'outside' and oppressed groups. (Farron 2013:19)

During the coalition government between 2010 and 2015, the Liberal Democrats implemented two areas of policy specifically focussed on protecting the rights of oppressed groups: namely sex-sex marriage and the increase of the personal income tax threshold, meaning that those on salaries of less than £10,000 per year are exempt from paying the 20% tax rate on earnings. The legalisation of same-sex marriage was a fundamental part of the Liberal Democrats' position during the coalition government and faced scepticism from their Conservative Party colleagues, until the law was introduced in 2014 with the backing of the Prime Minister, David Cameron (Stamp 2010; Black 2014). The introduction of the increased income tax threshold for lower earners was a unique policy area for the Liberal Democrats, which those within the Conservative and Labour Parties did not think possible (BBC News 2010b), although the legislation was eventually introduced. Protecting and championing the interests of oppressed and underprivileged groups in society is something which has long underpinned the liberal movement within politics: 'our history is also based on championing the rights of all oppressed and under-represented groups' (Farron 2013:19); it is also something that is the fundamental concept within liberation theology.

There are close ties between political theologies and theologies of liberation. Liberation theologies, especially those that originated within Latin America, seek to put action ahead of theory (Davis 1980:9-10), in the same way that political theologies seek to interpret the Christian narrative in a way that can be applied to civic life. Citing Alfredo Fierro, Davis makes the argument that political theology is the natural progression of how theologians ought to think about their faith, as it is no longer about the theoretical question concerning

the relation between science and faith or dogmatic claims and historical knowledge, 'but between faith and social practice' (Davis 1980:10). It may be argued that Davis' work is now over three decades old and the society in which the theology-politics conversation finds itself has changed dramatically, meaning that the importance of 'faith and social practice' may no longer be relevant, but studies cited in this research that have been conducted since Davis' writing indicate that there is still a need to explore how faith and social action relate to one another.

The importance of acknowledging the practical aspect 'versus' the theoretical element of theology will be examined again in relation to the reflections of those interviewed as part of this research, but at this stage both from what Tim Farron and Charles Davis have written, the idea of faith inspired politics is a theme hugely prevalent in the discourse not only of this research, but of politically active Christians across the world.

Concluding Comments

Further analysis of the topics discussed above will take shape when the responses to the interviews are analysed, but at this preliminary stage it is possible to begin to make observations pertaining to the accuracy of this research's hypotheses. On the topic of a 'liberal synergy' between theology and politics, whilst it was evident from the responses to the survey questions that Christians within the Liberal Democrats do in fact appear to be politically liberal (based on their overall agreement with Liberal Democrat policies), the extent to which the Christians surveyed as part of this research can be classified as Liberal Protestants is still ambiguous. Although attitudes towards science and philosophy appeared positive and thus consistent with theological liberalism, the responses to biblical interpretation appeared mixed, with an even split of respondents demonstrating both liberal and conservative attitudes. One factor to consider from these findings is that 'liberalism' as a concept may not translate seamlessly between politics and theology. As Elizabeth Phillips (2012:107) suggests, the term 'liberalism' 'does not refer to liberal versus conservative

politics such as Labour versus Tory...’ meaning that a disparity between liberal politics and liberal theology can be explained. However the results of this survey do not rule out a link entirely and it will be after careful analysis of the interview responses, that a conclusion as to this question will be available.

What the preliminary findings show conclusively is that there is link between theological belief and political views. As suggested in previously mentioned studies (Gamwell 2005; Loveland et al. 2004:1-14), this may well be down to a sense that politics is an effective way of articulating theological beliefs: putting faith into practice. The Bible contains many parables and teachings thought to have derived from Jesus himself and it is entirely possible that the Christians surveyed as part of this research see these principles as best being expressed through political means (Storkey 2005:133). As the responses from our³⁴ Christian Liberal Democrats are analysed, the theories regarding a synergy between political and theological liberalism and faith inspired politics will become.

³⁴ Stylistic note: ‘our’ refers to the interviewees whose reflections are the main focus of this research.

Chapter Three

Reflections of Christian Liberal Democrats

The reflections from our Christian Liberal Democrats have been separated into three distinct categories, each relating to the questions that form the basis of this research. The first section attempts to understand the relationship between faith and politics, by discussing the interviewees' responses to questions regarding the task of theology and the key political issues they feel most passionately about. The second sections details whether or not there is a link between political and theological liberalism, by discussing their reflections on a specific topic that may be seen to cause tension between liberal politics and traditional Christian belief. The third and final section outlines whether or not our Christian Liberal Democrats feel that theology should play an active role in political policy formation.

Politics – Faith in Practice?

The Task of Theology – Practical or Academic?

Given the context of this research, the nature and task of theology is important to establish. As Daniel Migliore (2004:1) suggests, theology has many faces, each assuming a different role: the main distinction being predominantly between as an academic discipline, and as a framework upon which to base practical actions. In the context of political theology, it has already been suggested that many view civic involvement as an active way to put into practice, many of the main tenants of the Christian faith. Political theology may reside within the larger frameworks of either public theology or practical theology, by virtue of the fact it is a clear demonstration of Christians '[participating] in the public domain' (Kim 2011:3). The difference between an academic approach and a practical one, is that the practical theologian will not 'gloss' the issue with 'platitudes about the goodness of God', more they 'seek better ways of thinking and responding to situations' (Pattinson and Woodward

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2000:14). The first question asked of our Christian Liberal Democrats was what *they* saw the task of theology as being, in an attempt to establish whether or not they viewed their political beliefs and involvement as being influenced and motivated by their Christian faith.

Bryan

'For me I think theology is trying to understand religion as a concept...what it means, its heritage and traditions...'

Alison

'I guess it's the study of Christianity...it's important to study...'

Greg

'It's fundamental...you couldn't exist without it in a religious context. You can't have religious talk without having theology. The more you wish to be able to say, the more you wish to be able to apply, the more you wish to be able to do...you need theology.'

'I don't think it's an either or [between academic and practical theology]...theology is about the living God in terms of practical Christian living.'

'If you believe something then that belief will manifest itself in your life...it's a false dichotomy...it's all part of the Christian life.'

Sally

'[at church] we often spoke about theology: 'what's the theology behind climate change?' [for example]. Doing that changed how I viewed it because I always just saw it, almost like an academic discipline...this is for academics to think through and then for us to read. But anyone can have theology...'

Jerry

'At its worst it can be no more than working out how many angels can dance on the head of a pin...at its best it can ask very deep and probing questions.'

Nigel

'It's more than just a subject. I can remember when I was London...when I started to get involved in the community; I had to think through why I was doing it...'

The reflections from our Christian Liberal Democrats highlight the dichotomy in approaches to theology. Both Bryan and Alison's reflections on the task of theology appear to indicate that they view theology as an endeavour through which to gain knowledge and

understanding, as opposed to recognising a practical approach as suggested by the other responses. Whilst the mention of theology as an academic discipline is not explicit in Bryan and Alison's responses, their mention of 'studying' and 'understanding concepts' are representative of the task of academic theology.

What the views of Nigel, Sally and Greg show is an astute awareness of how theology can be viewed in practical terms and an acknowledgement that theology can have an impact on how they live their life both perhaps on a day-to-day basis and in terms of their political involvement. Specific political issues and how the respondents relate those to their faith will be discussed at a later stage, but we already have an indication from the reflections above that there does appear to be a link between Christian theology and political involvement; Sally's mention of 'the theology behind climate change' and Greg's assertion that 'the more [one] wants to do, the more [they] need theology' are clear demonstrations of this.

Jerry's response to the task of theology, it could be argued, appears somewhat cynical by his use of the 'dancing angels' metaphor. However, his acknowledgment of the ability of theology to ask 'deep and probing questions' satisfies this line of enquiry and demonstrates a sympathy with the task of academic theology, although perhaps not exclusively. The latter point is one that is important to raise at this stage: one task of theology is not more or less valid or meaningful than the other, as highlighted by Migliore (2004): these 'central questions of systematic theology must be asked not once but continuously'. The fact that three of our Christian Liberal Democrats made no explicit mention of the practical element of theology, cannot at this early point signal for them, that their faith has no impact on their political views and/or action.

Is Politics 'Faith in Action'?

The focus of this section is to determine whether or not one's political views and/or actions can be seen to be influenced by their faith convictions. An explicit indication of a potential relationship can be explored through our Christian Liberal Democrats' reflections on how

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their political views are influenced by what they believe theologically. They were asked firstly whether or not they thought there was a link between their politics and religion and secondly to elaborate further on how, if they felt there was a link, their politics were informed by their faith.

Bryan

'I think so, yeah. Certainly in terms of fairness...the element of social justice which comes from the Gospel, I think very much influences my politics.'

Alison

'Absolutely. I think there's lots of crossover. For one, everyone is made in God's image and is therefore deserving of dignity and respect.'

Greg

'Yes. It's the individual that stands before God; and the community; and society; and the Church – they're all made up of individuals. It's my relationship as an individual with God [that will stand me in good stead on the Day of Judgement].

'I stand in society as an individual, no man is an island but I have the responsibility to live my life in a Christian way, to show compassion...'

Sally

'I think my political interests are inspired by my religious beliefs, because my belief in God and my view of Him as this [entity] who cares about everyone no matter who they are, all across the world, came before my knowledge of the Liberal Democrats.'

Nigel

'Yes [my faith inspires my politics]. My faith comes first and politics flows out of that.

'[when I was part of a very diverse church group], we considered that to be bigger than Church, to be 'Kingdom of God' people, we have to be engaged with the world and we had to be engaged with politics.'

As seen with the data collected from the survey questionnaire, our Christian Liberal Democrats demonstrated a belief that their political interest and activity, is indeed inspired by their religious beliefs. The common theme was that their faith came first and their activity was motivated either by explicit theological ideas – namely the notion that humans were made in God's image or the idea of being part of the Kingdom of God – or by inherent

Christian ideals such as faith, justice and equality. There was one exception amongst our Christian Liberal Democrats:

Jerry

'I'm not sure to be honest. I think that as a Christian I believe that every single human being is of infinite worth and that you cannot treat people differently because they happen to belong to your country, or your race, or your gender [etc.]...

*'Perhaps I would see my faith as being more about how I should behave towards other people, rather than how **they** should behave...*

Upon hearing Jerry's reflections on the relationship between his faith and his politics, I probed deeper in an attempt to clarify his position. From his reflections above, it is suggested that he sees his faith as a personal tool from which to base his attitudes and behaviours towards others, rather than something upon which to base thoughts and ideas on a larger scale. I asked him whether or not his career as a mental health nurse had been inspired by his faith:

'If I was an atheist, I'd probably still be able to justify being a mental health nurse [for the same reasons that I am currently]. When I give people a diagnosis of dementia, the fact that [I have faith] is a comfort to me or a context for me, but I would sure as hell never [explain their illness in terms of my faith] to them.'

Jerry's admission that his faith is a personal comfort or context through which to understand mental illnesses, confirms the above point that he does not see his faith as an entity through which to act publicly. From this, it is safe to assert that Jerry's politics are not influenced by his faith in the same explicit ways as our other Christian Liberal Democrats.

Our Christian Liberal Democrats have reflected upon how they are influenced by what they believe theologically. Through contact with the director of the Liberal Democrat Christian Forum, Sarah Dickson, it became clear from our correspondence that many of the members of LDCF, whilst being both Christians and Liberal Democrats, felt that they were unaware of the theology behind their political views. Although our Christian Liberal Democrats have made some allusion to their understanding of the theological concepts and themes that underpin their political views, it is important to further acknowledge how the political issues

discussed by them in their respective interviews, relate to Christian theology, in an attempt to fully understand the concept of faith inspired politics.

Key Political Issues

On equality. One of the main political issues raised by our Christian Liberal Democrats is the idea of equality. It may seem obvious to suggest that every government in the United Kingdom³⁵ should seek to implement policies that do not discriminate against particular groups of people based on their socio-economic background, however the issues raised by those at the focus of this research highlight areas where there is still progress to be made.

Bryan spoke at length about the need for constitutional reform, something which the Liberal Democrats in his view, champion more clearly than any other party. He spoke about the need for electoral reform and his strong belief in this issue motivated him to support the ‘Yes to AV’³⁶ referendum campaign in 2011. For Bryan, implementing Proportional Representation – a method of voting which gives equal weighting to every vote cast (Moser and Scheiner 2012:xviii) – is a matter of fairness and equality of votes cast. It is often cited that the current voting system used in the United Kingdom, First-Past-the-Post, is undemocratic as the number of votes cast for a particular party are not reflected in the number of seats won in the House of Commons (see McKernen 2015). Bryan argues the case for implementing Proportional Representation by suggesting that more people would be likely to vote if they thought their vote could make a difference:

‘...it would get more people engaged and involved...there are some underlying reasons as to why some people don’t vote and I think one of them is because people think ‘it’s not going to count’ and it’s true! Where I stood, if you didn’t vote Tory then there was almost no point.’

The recent referendum in the United Kingdom on its membership of the European Union saw a turnout of 72.2%, which was hailed as the highest turnout at any UK vote since the General Election in 1992. As the result of the referendum was determined by the total

³⁵ In the context of this research.

³⁶ The AV Referendum was held in 2011 as part of the coalition agreement between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, in an attempt to change the voting system from First-Past-the-Post to the Alternative Vote. The referendum result rejected the change.

number of votes cast in favour of 'REMAIN' and 'LEAVE', rather than being decided by the number of parliamentary constituencies that voted in favour or against, it could be argued that the high turnout was because the electorate saw that their vote would have a direct impact on the result. Bryan's point that the equal value of votes could motivate more to people to vote in elections is demonstrated by this point and the need for what some see as a fairer voting system, could be seen to provide the country with a more democratic approach to politics, giving each individual an equal say on the outcome of any election.

Alison by her own admission is strongly left-wing, which indicates something of her political views, as those who identify as being on the left of the political spectrum are often in favour of social reform, social equality and opposed to social hierarchy (Bobbio and Cameron 1997:37). Social equality and human rights were the two biggest political issues that Alison reflected upon during her interview and claimed that the Liberal Democrats' position on these issues and the policies they implemented during the coalition government were what prompted her to join the party:

'...between Lib Dem and Labour, I looked at their beliefs on human rights because that's my biggest thing...and the preamble of the Lib Dem manifesto...just summed up my beliefs perfectly...they were more prominent than I felt in the Labour Party.'

Investigating her beliefs in equality and human rights further, Alison too made reference to the need for electoral reform, in order to make the UK's political system fairer and more democratic. In conjunction with this, she was of the belief that schools should offer compulsory citizenship and political education to all students, so that not only those with an inherent interest in current affairs would have a clearer understanding of British politics. Along with her belief in compulsory voting, Alison's views on electoral reform and political education suggest that she believes strongly in equality; ensuring that everyone's vote has an equal part to play in an election outcome and making sure that school students are imparted with the knowledge they need to make an informed political decision later in their lives, demonstrate this fact. It is commonly argued that a lack of political education can lead to disenfranchisement of people who do not understand basic political ideas (see Fyfe

2007:110-111). By providing a political education from a young age, it may be possible to bridge the gap between the politically literate and the disenfranchised.

She also mentions the need for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) to receive more specialised teaching, so as to make sure that they continue to have equal access to school curriculums. One of the policies implemented by the Liberal Democrats during the coalition government was the introduction of the Pupil Premium, an extra £2.5 billion of funding awarded to schools in order to help children from underprivileged backgrounds (The Liberal Democrats 2015c).

Related to closing gaps between two social groups, Alison stressed her passion for the improvement of mental health services across the UK's National Health Service. A long-standing commitment of the Liberal Democrats, it is recognised by Alison and the wider party that there is a disparity in the way that patients are treated differently depending on whether their condition is physical or mental; Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May also acknowledged the existing deficit in mental health care: 'If you suffer from mental health problems, there's not enough help to hand' (May cit. Perkins 2016). On the disparity between mental and physical health treatment, Alison said:

'Mental health parity with physical health is...it just should be. It shouldn't be a controversial thing people have to wait around for...it just should be.'

Although Alison did not reflect on her beliefs on human rights in any great depth, her reflections on issues surrounding social inequality are certainly linked.

Before Sally's interview began, she spoke at great length about her time spent working for Christian charities both at home and abroad, her experiences of which have influenced the areas of political interest she reflected on. Sally reflected on her passion for international politics and diplomacy, saying that she felt it was vital to understand how the United Kingdom could help improve the lives of those across the world, 'enabling them to have equal opportunities'. The Liberal Democrats are known as being an 'internationalist' party, which was demonstrated through the party's strong 'remain' position during the referendum

on the UK's membership of the European Union. Party spokesperson for the EU, Nick Clegg, spent much of his early political life both working in and supporting the European Union; writing in 2004, Clegg argued that a reformed EU could lead to a 'more open, decentralised and accountable' system, which 'the Liberal Democrats have always advocated' (2004:72).

The UK's membership of the European Union could be seen as an effective medium through which international cooperation is achieved; the freedom of movement of people and labour, the Paris Agreement to tackle climate change, the protection of human rights by the European Court and the handling of the Syrian refugee crisis are but just some examples of how the European Union has helped progress international cooperation³⁷.

Another key area of political interest for Sally is the current housing crisis in the UK:

'...there are a lot of church projects that work with the homeless...so I've been exposed to that...'

It is common knowledge that there is currently, an insufficient number of houses in the UK in order to provide shelter and accommodation for all those in need; whether it is through the lack of affordable housing, poor standards in rental properties or through a lack of social housing. The Liberal Democrat Christian Forum organised an online petition in an attempt to put a halt to government plans to sell social housing, which it is argued, would exacerbate the issue. The right to decent accommodation, according to the LDCF, would bring 'dignity, hope and protection to those who suffer a life of fear and uncertainty' (Liberal Democrat Christian Forum 2015c).

Concerns regarding electoral reform, mental health parity and housing demonstrate a clear view from Liberal Democrats that more must be done to promote equality in the United Kingdom, whether the equality of the impact of a single person's vote or the equality between social groups. But what is the theological basis surrounding equality and how may this influence our Christian Liberal Democrats' views on it?

³⁷ This of course is not so say that the UK will cease to cooperate internationally once it has left the European Union, more it highlights how the EU relates to international relations.

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Firstly, an important distinction must be made between whether we are discussing the concept of the equality of opportunity or the equality of outcome. According to the Liberal Democrats' website, the party strongly supports the notion of equality of opportunity, stating that no person should have opportunities denied to them because of their race, gender or sexuality etc. (see The Liberal Democrats 2015). The concept of the equality of outcome leans more towards socialism, which is to distribute all wealth equally irrespective of any circumstances (cf. Forrester 2001:63). One of the fundamental principles of liberalism is the encouragement of the individual; this could be taken to mean that individuals are encouraged to better their lives by performing well at school, attending university and obtaining a well-paid job. In conjunction with this, there is the acknowledgement, based on former Business Secretary Vince Cable's words, that those who have great personal wealth should help to support the closing of the gap between the wealthy and the poor: 'richer people should, in principle, pay a higher proportion of their income in tax to correct...the often extreme inequalities thrown up by earnings from employment...' (2004:169).

The concept of the equality of opportunity is something that the Liberal Democrats clearly advocate, as is demonstrated by their commitment to introducing the higher threshold at which people begin to pay income tax and enforcing stricter rules on those who avoid paying tax altogether. From a socialist perspective, attempting to achieve the equality of outcome through wealth redistribution, the Labour Party proposed to introduce a 50 pence tax rate for the highest earner, meaning that for every pound one earned above a certain amount, half would be collected in income taxes (see Wilkinson 2015).

Alan Storkey (2005) begins outlining his principle of respect by asserting that for the majority of human history, it is only the wealthy and privileged who have had the power and influence in the way government is conducted (2005:134). Storkey makes reference to the treatment of soldiers as 'cannon fodder'; by this he is seen to imply that the lives of those who are subordinate to the government are in some way less important and expendable, highlighting a lack of care and compassion for those who do not hold power and/or influence (2005:135).

This example may be extended to refer to those groups within society – the unemployed or those on low incomes, members of the LGBT+ community, and ethnic minorities amongst others – who are seen in some way to be oppressed by some of the current legislation in the United Kingdom.

Storkey goes on to explain that the principle of respect for all people regardless of differences in social standing, is rooted deeply first in the Old Testament and is later emphasised by Jesus in the New Testament. He argues that God created all people and does not give higher status to one than another, a notion that in the Gospel of Luke, is reiterated by Mary's reflections on her son's teaching and ministry:

...he has brought down monarchs from their thrones, and raised on high the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.
(Luke 1:52-53 REB)

Storkey continues to make the case for the principle of respect by suggesting that, like Alison, all humans are created in God's image and so therefore are all equal. He argues that God is not concerned with the wealth and importance of select individuals, but moreover He is 'obsessed' with bringing all people together in His love and care and God's government is 'not exclusive or status bound' (Storkey 2005:136, 138). This is a clear demonstration of how the idea of privilege and bestowed power appear contradictory to the biblical narrative; Mary's reference to 'monarchs' can be taken to refer to those of great social standing and power and the 'lowly' to refer to those groups who are seemingly oppressed by the government.

What Storkey's principle of respect and the biblical narratives that support it highlight, is the importance to acknowledge that 'the lowly' *do* in fact exist and that they should be treated with the same care, respect and dignity as 'the monarchs' and awarded equal opportunities as those of their wealthy counterparts. The need to acknowledge that we are all part of God's creation and made in His image is the underpinning case for the equality of opportunity, and is the real argument supporting Storkey's principle of respect.

Storkey's argument finds sympathy in the work of theologian Richard Tawney (1880-1962). Tawney was a strong advocate of the Christian case for equality and argued that in order to believe in equality, one too must also believe in God (Forrester 2001: 137). This assertion was made based on the principle that to consider God's greatness and infiniteness is to recognise that the differences between humans are 'negligible' (Tawney cit. Forrester 2001:139). According to Duncan Forrester, Tawney was not a huge advocate of the principle of equality of opportunity alone, instead he advocated 'collective movements to narrow the space' between for example, the wealthy and the poor. This is clearly demonstrated by the words of Vince Cable above, as his assertion that the wealthy should pay more tax than the poor is an example of a 'movement to narrow the space', without entirely infringing on one's personal freedom to earn higher amounts.

When considering the issue of reforming the voting system as highlighted by the majority of those with whom I spoke, there is a strong Christian case to be made. As already discussed above, the current First-Past-the-Post system favours the Conservative Party and the Labour Party as it is the number of parliamentary seats won, rather than actual number of votes cast, that determines the outcome of an election. The General Election in 2015 saw the Scottish National Party (SNP) receiving 4.7% of the national vote share in return for 56 parliamentary seats³⁸; the Liberal Democrats, the Green Party and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) received 7.9%, 3.8% and 12.6% of the vote share respectively, in return for a total of ten parliamentary seats³⁹. The Conservative Party won a small majority of 12 seats, despite securing less than 50% of the national vote; whatever one's views of the voting system are, it cannot be denied that the results of the 2015 election appear disproportionate and to some extent, unfair.

³⁸ See Figure 9.

³⁹ The Liberal Democrats (8), The Green Party (1), UKIP (1).

If we apply the principle of respect and the idea of equality as set out by the biblical narrative, every person's vote should carry an equal weight and should be seen to have an effect on the outcome of an election result. As Robert Song argues:

...people receive from God, the right to self-government...while God is the ultimate source of political authority, the people are granted the right to be the proximate source of authority. As such, they are entitled to confer authority on the ruler or ruling regime... (1997:197)

What this shows is a belief that people are given the right to determine how they should be governed, by granting the government their permission to assume authority over their lives. It must be argued that in order for that authority to be genuine and authentic, it must come from every person's vote, regardless of which political party they support. In the example of the 2015 UK General Election, the regime upon which authority was granted, was done so only by 37% of the population, meaning that 63% of people did not confer their authority upon the Conservative Party. If one is to accept the principle as suggested by Song, it must be conceded that the current voting system in the UK needs to be reformed so that all votes are counted equally, so as to ensure that the party who has the people's authority conferred upon them, is supported by the majority.

As Jerry explained, despite the fact that replacing the voting system with a more proportional method could lead to parties with whom the Liberal Democrats share very little in terms of ideology and policy gaining more influence in Parliament, the belief in electoral reform is centred on the idea that no matter people's differences, they are of equal worth and value and should not have their voice seemingly silenced by a current system that favours only two of the many political parties in the UK:

'It's a bit like believing in freedom of speech. If you only believe in free speech when people are saying things you agree with, you don't really believe in free speech. If you only believe in electoral reform, when [the current voting system] is disadvantaging you...you don't really believe in electoral reform.'

On the issue of mental health parity, a post made to the Liberal Democrats' Facebook page in August 2016, highlighted a recent survey that showed waiting times for young people to access mental health services in England and Wales was, on average, up to three years

(The Liberal Democrats 2016a). This is a figure greatly different from that of patients waiting to access physical treatments which, in NHS guidelines, is stated should be no longer than 18 weeks from a patient's first referral to receive the care required (*The National Health Service Commissioning Board and Clinical Commissioning Groups (Responsibilities and Standing Rules) Regulations 2012* 2012). Former coalition government minister David Laws, sets out eight key areas in which the Liberal Democrats seek to reform the health service (2004); it is points 2 and 3 that are of interest in this context:

2. *Access for all.* There must be access for everyone in the population to the high standard – high quality – health service...
3. *Fairness.* Financial contributions to our health services should be clearly related to ability to pay...

Although Laws deals with economic issues regarding the equality of access to health services in the UK, the principles of equality and fairness of access can extend to those with mental illnesses. The point made by both Alison and Jerry during their interviews is that both patients with mental illnesses and physical illnesses should have equal access to the care needed, without exception. Once again, the issue of equality of opportunity comes to light when it is considered that those with mental health issues do not have equal access to the level of care as seen with those with physical ailments. It can be argued that Storkey's principle of respect also supports the need for mental health parity: categorising people based on the nature of their illness appears to stand in contention with the notion that from God's perspective, there are no groups to differentiate between humans (Storkey 2005:137).

The issue of housing may also be supported when considering the notion of equality of opportunity and the principle of respect as iterated by Storkey. Questions must be asked as to why certain groups of people feel unable to access decent standards of housing across the country. In an article written for the Liberal Democrat Christian Forum, I outlined how by interpreting the Trinity as Leonardo Boff suggests, it creates a clear case for campaigning on the housing crisis (see Roberts 2015).

Boff places the emphasis of his Trinitarian thought on the equality of the constituent persons as no one part is more or less important than another. In a review of Boff's theology, Hans Harmakaputra (2013) emphasises that the current failure of societies to recognise the disparity amongst social groups is because of the tendency amongst Christians to focus on the 'faulty concept of the solitary God' (2013:3). What is needed instead, is an acknowledgement that the three constituent Persons of the Trinity work in community with one another and with the absence of one (either the Father, Son of Holy Spirit), the whole (God) fails to function properly (2013:3). When applied to society, Boff argues that the current failure lies with people's tendency to view different groups as apart from one another, as opposed to having equal worth contributing to the wider concept of society. If we apply this logic to the housing crisis or indeed any of the issues as discussed above, it may be suggested that just as Christians should view each of the Persons of the Trinity of having equal value, so too should society view all of its constituent groups as having equal worth and value. This may lead political activists arguing the case for the government to tackle the housing crisis on the basis that, no one group should more or less able or entitled to a decent quality home than another. Once again, we can see how Boff's theological thought may relate to the principle of respect and the idea of the equality of opportunity.

It is the value of the individual, rather than the status of social groups as Storkey has mentioned, that former Liberal Democrat MP Sarah Teather exemplifies when considering the Christian case for equality:

Christianity, with its clear teaching on the value of each human being...has an authority to speak by virtue of its consistency. (Teather 2013:76)

Here, Teather makes reference to the notion of equality as a key Christian principle. Her emphasis of the value of each human being is something discussed through the theological considerations above. As each human being is made in God's image, they should be awarded equal opportunities regardless of any factor; social exclusion, defined by Forrester as factors imposed on people that render them incapable of participating fully in society, contradicts the notion of the equality of opportunity (2001:224). Christians and Liberal

Democrats must therefore seek to include every person in society, so that they might enjoy full social participation whether through providing them with a decent standard of accommodation, treating their mental health ailments with the same speed and vigour as those with physical illnesses or providing them with the chance to cast a vote in an election, that has equal worth and merit as those who cast their votes for political parties that benefit from the current electoral system.

On individual liberty. Sarah Teather's comments highlight the importance of the individual when considering the need for equality; in his interview, Greg made reference to the importance of individual liberty as one of his main political concerns. He cited the party's commitment to individual liberty as the main reason for his joining the party, saying:

'One of the things that made me join...Nick Clegg had written somewhere a succinct description which showed the differences between socialism, conservatism and liberalism. So it was the just society, the just organisation and the just individual. To me, it is the just individual that matters whether it's individual freedoms, individual responsibilities...you can't have societies without individuals nor organisations without individuals. Organisations don't make individuals nor do societies; it is individuals that make them.'

When asked to reflect on this issue, he mentioned his concern for the increasing presence of what he termed the 'police state'. From his elaboration on this, he made reference to the importance of the freedom of speech and how he felt it was 'under attack', given recent news stories of certain public figures being banned from university campuses for having controversial views. He made it clear that nobody should be discriminated against, but the freedoms of the individual, for Greg, should take priority. Although Greg did not make reference to it, one particular area of recent political debate to which the Liberal Democrats offered opposition is the so-called 'Snoopers' Charter'⁴⁰. The 'Snoopers' Charter' is a bill proposed by the government to grant security forces in the UK greater freedom to access private information from internet searches and electronic communications, in order to further protect the country against crime (see Carr 2015). The Liberal Democrats, whilst supporting the need for increased security across the country, are vehemently opposed to the

⁴⁰ The "Snoopers' Charter" is a colloquial name given to the Communications Data Bill.

parliamentary bill, claiming that it is also hugely important to protect the privacy of individuals (The Liberal Democrats 2015d).

The protection of individual liberty is something that has been at the heart of the liberal movement in British politics since Gladstone's leadership of the Liberal Party. To discuss individual liberty in terms of politics, it can be suggested that it is aligned with the concept of the equality of opportunity; providing each person with, to quote Watts, the ability to 'shape their own destiny', by creating a society that does not discriminate against individuals based on their socio-economic status. In contrast, the equality of outcome supports the redistribution wealth as the final objective, whereby all people have an equal standing in society, irrespective of their socio-economic background; any concept of a socio-economic status would seemingly be redundant in a socialist regime. The promotion of the individual appears to be stagnated under the equality of outcome, as it could be argued there is no motivation to pursue one's individual goals and aims, as the outcome of their 'destiny' will be the same no matter what one's path is.

Greg made constant reference to the idea that it is individuals that underpin society and without individuals, communities and organisations would not exist. He also made the interesting point that it is the individual person who will be judged by God, as opposed to the group in which one finds themselves. How can theology help us understand this further? Is there a theological case to be made for the promotion of the individual as supported by Liberal Democrats?

Charles Davis (1980:178) makes the claim that the 'Christian acknowledgement of the individual' was a worthwhile 'contribution to the emergence of human freedom', based on the emphasis placed upon the personal, individual relationship with God (158). This acknowledgement of the individual relates to a theme explored in our previous discussion of equality; the theme of 'being created'. Whatever interpretation one may infer from being

made in God's image⁴¹, the fact that Christian theology presides over the concept of humanity being created as individuals can provide us with an understanding of how one may understand supporting individual liberty politically, from a theological perspective. Migliore (2004) highlights in his 'three theses regarding human life created by God' (142-149), that 'human beings, created in God's image, are freely addressed by God and free to respond to God'. The point here is that there is no compulsion in creation; humans are not compelled to live or act in a certain way, instead they are granted the freedom to choose how to live their lives, although there is the hope – from God's perspective – that they will choose *freely* to turn to Him.

Not all political theologians are sympathetic with liberalism's support of individualism. Stanley Hauerwas is cited by Elizabeth Phillips (2012) as being opposed to political liberalism, based on its promotion of individual liberty. Hauerwas appears dissatisfied with liberalism's apparent failure to recognise that humans are bound and shaped by their history and communities, instead focussing purely on the idea that people are self-driven, autonomous entities (Phillips 2012:114). He also appears to reject the absence of any concept of an end or *telos* within the liberal model; Hauerwas is concerned that by focussing on the individual, it is only the interests of the self that are driven, rather than striving to achieve a common good:

...We have made 'freedom of the individual' an end in itself and have ignored the fact that most of us do not have the slightest idea of what we should do with our freedom. (Hauerwas cit. Phillips 2012:114)

The failure, as Hauerwas argues, of liberalism to provide an end purpose for people's individualism, could be seen to support the equality of outcome, a concept already seen to stand in contention with political liberalism and the aims of the Liberal Democrats. From a theological perspective Hauerwas argues that the Church should act as the alternative political establishment from other polities, as the Church appears to be the only polity that accepts humanity's historical and cultural moulding and is free from the deceptions of

⁴¹ Daniel Migliore explores some of the interpretations of this theological concept. See Migliore 2004:139-142.

modern liberal democracies (see Hauerwas cit. Phillips 2012:115). From this, Hauerwas stringently defends the involvement of the Church in politics, stating that the Church must 'exhibit...the kind of community possible when, trust, and not fear, rules our lives' (Hauerwas cit. Phillips 2012:116).

Hauerwas appears to suggest that political liberalism fails to accept any notion of community or common good, based on its commitment to the promotion of the individual. In a defence of the promotion of the individual, Davis appears to refute the argument made by Hauerwas, instead suggesting that it is exactly because of the liberty enjoyed by individuals that free participation in politics (and wider society) may take place: 'there is no politics without individuated persons or interior selves...' (Davis 1980:178). Davis rightly distinguishes between the acknowledgements of the worth of the individual as opposed to the individualism perpetuated by 'bourgeois society'. He states that individualism seen in bourgeois society leads to competition between people based on their economic worth and ignores any other factor separating societies, apart from a 'quantitative variation in the amount of property' (Davis 1980:178). The individualism supported by Davis forms part of a process of liberation as it celebrates the uniqueness of every individual and is a transformative process, standing in contention with the 'sombre, humourless seriousness of much Marxism' which, it could be argued, perpetuates conformity, as opposed to individuality (Davis 1980:179); a view it could be seen as suggested by Hauerwas.

Putting this into a context within the Liberal Democrats, we have already seen that the commitment to the equality of opportunity is at the heart of the party's ethos and the rejection of boundaries created by wealth or any other cultural or social factor are firmly rejected. From this, it could be deduced that the Liberal Democrats appear to support the individualism discussed by Davis – recognition of all humans as unique individuals each having an equal part to play in society and being motivated by self-interest to, it is hoped, better society in the process.

The environment. Jerry and Nigel made reference to the importance of mental health parity and constitutional reform as discussed above; they were however unique in that they both mentioned the issue of the environment. After the resignation of Nick Clegg in the wake of the 2015 General Election, there was a leadership contest, which Tim Farron and Norman Lamb contested. There were a number of hustings events where the leadership hopefuls would debate key issues and answer questions from the party's membership in an attempt to win over voters. Jerry attended one of these hustings events and cited Tim Farron's environmental views as the main reason why he voted for him to become the leader of the party. Nigel's concern for the environment comes in the form of opposition to fracking, a controversial method of extracting shale gas from rocks embedded deep in the ground (see BBC News 2015). Many environmentalists are opposed to this method of gas extraction over concerns it may lead to carcinogenic chemicals being released during the process, as well as the secondary effects caused by transporting huge volumes of water to fracking sites. In March 2016 at the Liberal Democrats' Spring Conference, the party and its membership voted to enact a policy motion that calls for the prohibition of fracking in the UK, in favour of 'long term sustainable [environmental] goals...[rather than] carving up the countryside for short term gains' (Featherstone cit. The Liberal Democrats 2016b).

Scientific evidence throughout the last two decades has shown a compelling link between pollution caused by humanity, and a rise in global temperatures. This rise in global temperature has been shown to have potentially disastrous consequences for the planet, causing rising sea levels and more severe climate patterns, which will have potentially disastrous consequences for all life on the planet. Christianity has a long tradition of offering a framework through which adherents of the faith may understand their commitment to protecting the environment – the concept of stewardship.

Former Liberal Democrat MP, Duncan Hames in a chapter entitled *It's Good to be Green* (2013), details how the party's commitment to environmental protection can be shown to have theological roots. Through an interpretation of Genesis 1:28, Hames reads the term

'dominion' as suggesting 'responsible stewardship rather than exploitative tyranny' (2013:63). This stewardship of the earth requires care to be taken to reduce pollutants and consumption of natural resources in order to minimise the negative effect on the natural world. Hames explores this idea further and suggests that the consequences of global warming (famines, droughts and extreme climate patterns) have the most severe impact on the poorest and most vulnerable 'members of God's family' (Tutu cit. Hames 2013:64). Taking this point into account, it can be suggested that protecting the environment links back to our issue of equality: neglect for the environment and exploitation of the earth's resources leads to 'spiralling poverty and mortality' for some of the poorest regions in the world, but also 'brutal and uncontainable conflict' in order to obtain increasingly scarce resources (Williams cit. Hames 2013:64).

It is not only certain aspects of the human community that can be seen to suffer injustices through careless neglect of the environment, but as Sebastian Kim suggests, nature itself requires liberation from the harm inflicted upon it by humankind: 'Our ecological crisis should be seen as a justice issue' (Abraham cit. Kim 2011:62). Former MP Susan Kramer also exemplifies this point by highlighting the commitment to protecting the environment found at the heart of the Liberal Democrat manifesto: '...safeguarding the balance of nature and the environment, for the long-term continuity of life in all its forms' (2004:174). Here Kramer can be seen to acknowledge the importance of not only human life but that of the natural world too and uses this as a basis upon which to argue the case for the protection of the environment. Kim argues that the ecosystem is deeply related to human society and that through liberating nature, injustices seen in the human situation may too be eradicated:

The ecosystem is seen as intimately related to the social system but the problem of injustice is situated in the human systems. Therefore, social ecology seeks social change to achieve justice towards the creation. (Kim 2011:62)

This point is made by emphasising humanity's place within creation as a whole, rather than being superior to it. It must be acknowledged in order for humanity to flourish, nature must also have the opportunity to flourish; as seen in the discussion of equality, it can be argued

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no one part of creation should be seen as being more privileged than another. It is God who created the natural world and all life that resides within it; the responsibility to care for the creation was bestowed upon humans. This notion of stewardship is a common Christian theme but in order to fully protect the environment, it must go further than advocating wise use of the earth's resources, it must provide a framework for action to improve not only the ecological situation, but the condition of society too (Kim 2011:63).

Hames echoes Kim's suggestion that stewardship demands a practical response in order to combat the injustices faced by the environment and the human community. By accepting Jesus' teaching to 'love your neighbour as yourself', Hames argues that the Christian approach to the environment should entail an acknowledgment of the impact damaging it has on the poorest regions on the planet. By acknowledging that in order to tackle poverty and injustice, the prevention of the most severe effects of climate change must be challenged, Christian charities have been able to successfully alleviate the plight of many African communities whilst also fighting against some of the causes of the ecological crisis (Hames 2013:65).

As a Liberal Democrat, Hames makes the point that they are the only party 'to take the environment seriously in [their] campaigning and policy development' (Hames 2013:61), leading to policies that secure funding for environmentally-friendly ways of generating power (see above and Kramer 2004), as well as other initiatives such as the obligatory five pence charge for plastic carrier bags, introduced by the Liberal Democrats in England, during the coalition government. This policy has seen the use of plastic carrier bags fall by over 80%, leading to a reduction in damage to the environment and the wildlife that populates it (The Liberal Democrats 2016c), once again demonstrating how care for the environment is not only paramount to the success of humanity, but also nature itself.

Concluding Comments

The above discussion has detailed how one may view the relationship between theology and politics. Through the reflections of our Christian Liberal Democrats, we saw how the majority of them identified a link between their faith and political views, stating that one was undeniably influenced by the other. A discussion of the key political issues expressed by our Christian Liberal Democrats highlighted the topics of equality, individual liberty and the environment all of which have been shown to have some form of theological basis to underpin them.

Although not all of our Christian Liberal Democrats identified specific theological themes that supported their views on a particular issue, it must be acknowledged that from the discussion above, it has been shown how there can be a link between one's theology and their political views. Whether trying to understand the issues surrounding the 'snoopers' charter', the disparity between mental and physical health treatments or why the environmental crisis must be challenged, one prevalent theme became apparent throughout the analysis. All of the topics discussed point to the notion of equality; whether this refers to equality amongst people or the environment, it has been shown how there is a strong affinity between the Liberal Democrats and Christianity in terms of equality. Whether or not our Christian Liberal Democrats know of and actively apply the theological concepts that deal with equality, it must be argued that as Christians, there is an intrinsic awareness of the values of the faith, the most prominent of which is equality. This awareness has led the participants of this research to join and become actively involved with a political party in order to have an impact on the implementation of this Christian ideal. Our Christians have chosen the Liberal Democrats as the organisation through which to promote the value of equality and fairness, but is there anything to be said of the relationship between liberal politics and in particular, liberal theology?

Liberal Synergy

We have already discussed how the roots of theological liberalism with Schleiermacher can be seen to closely relate to those of the liberal movement within UK politics, in terms of their focus on individuality. It was precisely because of Liberal Protestantism's focus on the individual that it received much criticism from conservative theologians and perhaps led to the emergence of neo-orthodox theology; a framework which sought to reaffirm the uniqueness of Christianity through Jesus Christ (Gilkey 1987:38; Hebblethwaite 2005). The concepts of liberal and conservative leaning theology may only be recognised amongst academics and so in order to understand whether there is in fact a synergy between theological and political liberalism, we must turn to the reflections of our Christian Liberal Democrats.

Based on the understanding of liberal theology as detailed earlier, the participants of this research were asked about an area of political concern that may be seen to cause conflict between one's liberal political views and their Christian faith. The question was on the topic of same-sex marriage: as was highlighted at the beginning, Tim Farron was unable to provide a clear clarification of his position on the issue in terms of his Christianity. Politically speaking, considering the liberal position is to offer equal opportunities for all people irrespective of any factor determining their person, the legalisation of same-sex marriage is a politically liberal view to hold. However, conservative Christianity has long been seen as an opponent of same-sex marriage for a variety of reasons. How do our Christian Liberal Democrats reflect on this issue in terms of their politics and theology?

Bryan

'I'm far more relaxed about than a lot of Christians are. As it stands, churches aren't forced to carry out services, so for me that's a liberal position...if [the law] were to force them then I wouldn't agree with it at all.'

Bryan expressed that he was comfortable with the idea of same-sex marriage being classed as a state-recognised partnership; when asked what his thoughts were on a same-sex marriage being conducted in a church, he was less clear on his position:

'That's something I would have to reflect on a lot more. This comes back to accepting scripture and that's not something I would just dismiss.'

Greg

'I'm not in favour of it because I don't think it's well-grounded, I don't believe it is theologically correct and whilst I stand as an individual before God, I do not have the right to judge someone else as an individual...I don't think the case for same-sex marriage has been made from a biblical point-of-view. I do not condemn individuals, it's not something I dislike or hate, I just don't agree that it is correct theologically or philosophically.'

Sally

'I think it's difficult. Personally, I always put the commandment of 'love your neighbour as ourselves' first, so for me, that's how this should be viewed. So are we loving people of different sexualities as we love ourselves? I think people should be given the option to marry, but there's no way I think churches should be forced to same-sex couples.'

Jerry

'Well I'm pro [same-sex marriage]. I don't find the scriptural arguments very convincing, simply because we're not quite sure what Paul meant...we're back to this linguistic problem. You have to take into account the views of the time [that the scripture was written].'

What is demonstrated by the reflections above is a variety of positions on the issue of same-sex marriage. Alison, Sally and Jerry appeared to be in favour of same-sex marriage and gave justifications as to how they reconciled their Christian faith with their liberal view on the issue. Alison and Sally both made reference to the idea of 'loving one's neighbour as yourself' in order to exemplify the point that all people should be treated equally and should be given equal opportunities. Jerry made the interesting point that a theological position on same-sex marriage is difficult to reach because of potential issues with translating specific biblical passages that deal with this very topic. These three Christian Liberal Democrats appeared comfortable with accepting that the scripture may be read in a variety of ways, rather than prescribing themselves to a more traditional understanding of the Bible that can be seen as clearly opposed to same-sex marriage. This fact can lead to a conclusion that there is an element of theological liberalism present in the reflections of Alison, Sally and Jerry.

Bryan and Greg appeared to have an opposing view on this topic, instead erring on the side of caution in relation to biblical interpretation. Greg was more profound in his defence of the biblical narrative and emphasised how, in his view, there was no justification for same-sex marriage to be found in the Bible. This suggests an unwillingness on Greg's part to think about different interpretations of the scripture, standing him in contention with the premises of theological liberalism. Bryan on the other hand, whilst appearing to want to defend a traditional reading of the Bible, did not reach a definitive conclusion as to his thoughts on the issue. What is clear from his reflections is that he views the Bible with great authority, again something which appears to contradict the basis of theological liberalism. A similar view was taken by Nigel, who appeared unsure as to whether or not he agreed with the idea of same-sex marriage, instead choosing to accept the law as what it is, rather than, in his words, 'fighting a pointless battle'.

The differences in view on the topic of same-sex marriage from within the Liberal Democrat Christian Forum can be explained by the group's multid denominational nature. Despite Greg, Bryan and Nigel seemingly being on the theologically conservative side of the question, they shared something in common with Alison, Sally and Jerry in that they expressed a view that it is the right of the individual to choose how they should be able to live their life, rather than having it dictated by either the Church or the State. All of our Christian Liberal Democrats expressed the view that churches should not be forced into conducting same-sex marriages as such a position would be illiberal.

These reflections cannot provide a definitive answer to the enquiry into a synergy between political and theological liberalism. It certainly appears as though many Christians who are politically liberal are also theologically liberal. Conversely, as we have seen, there are those who are politically liberal yet demonstrate characteristics that are consonant with theological conservatism. The reconciliation for those who are of a conservative disposition theologically with their liberal views, appears to rest in the acceptance of the rights of the individual, in that their conservative views should not be forced upon the state nor should, in this case,

homosexuals be discriminated against for the nature of their individual character. In this sense, it could be suggested that the commitment to equality and fairness takes precedent over matters of concern for the Christian faith. Their belief in politically liberal ideals serves the interests of the many, whilst their conservative Christian views are for the privacy of their own reflection.

If we look at the issue of a relationship between theological and political liberalism, it may be more accurate to say that those who are of a theologically liberal persuasion are more likely to be politically liberal, as opposed to those of a politically liberal persuasion being more likely to be theologically liberal. John P. Crossley argues for a synergy between political and theological liberalism and states that:

A liberal theologian would find it inconceivable to accept any political arrangement as absolute when no set of theological beliefs or doctrines themselves could be conceived as absolute... (Crossley 2007:218)

He goes on to state:

...and a liberal politician could not possibly embrace a theology that considered itself capable of dictating an unchangeable set of beliefs and doctrines to the political community. (Crossley 2007:218)

Crossley's second point is a pertinent one in terms of the reflections discussed above and in fact an accurate one. Although he appears to suggest that no one who is theologically conservative could be politically liberal, his comment on the dictating of doctrines to the political community appears to be consistent with the views of our conservative Christian Liberal Democrats. Bryan, Greg and Nigel did not express any wish to dictate their views to the political community and as argued above, appeared committed to the overall principle of equality and fairness, something strongly advocated by political liberalism.

From this it may be deduced that the synergy between political and theological liberalism lies in its commitment to protecting the rights of the individual, rather than in the complex question of how a wide variety theological interpretations, as demonstrated by the reflections of some of our Christian Liberal Democrats, can be seen to be consistent with political beliefs. There is definitely something to be said of the synergy between political and

theological liberalism, but it must be stressed that it is not an exclusive relationship; one does not have to place belief in one, in order to subscribe to the other.

Theology Shaping Policy?

We have already discussed how theological beliefs can be seen to influence peoples' political views, which in turn may have an effect on particular policies they support. In the case of political leaders such as Tim Farron, the question is not whether one's theological beliefs influence their political views, but whether or not theology can and should influence policy-making within political parties. Should one's theological beliefs regarding equality influence policies promoting social mobility, civil rights and welfare? Should one's theological beliefs regarding protection of the environment influence policies that lead to greater investment in so-called 'green' energy schemes? Or can certain theological beliefs, like those relating to same-sex marriage, lead to policies that could be seen as discriminatory and potentially, illiberal?

The Bible says many things that society will feel uncomfortable about with regards to personal morality...I also believe that we must never seek to legislate to force people who are not Christians to live as if they were. (Farron 2013:19)

Tim Farron appears to answer the question posed in this section; he accepts that aspects of Christian theology are potentially controversial to non-Christians and so makes the point that those of a faith persuasion should not seek to impose Christian beliefs on society as a whole. Farron, as mentioned previously, also made the point that his religious convictions were a private matter and so would not influence his role as an MP. Bryan agreed with this sentiment when discussing the issue of same-sex marriage:

'...we shouldn't force people who aren't Christian, to act as if they are.'

He also went on to mention that the idea of a party that sought to embody only Christian values would be an unwise task, as it would stray into the realms of theocracy, which contradicts the ideals of liberalism. He stressed the importance of a Christian voice within politics but only for the purposes of 'influence and debate as part of it'. Sally expressed her views on this topic in a similar way to Bryan, stating that theology can be hugely beneficial to

political discussion, in that people of faith have a 'people-centred' view of the world, putting the interests of individuals first. She suggested that the influence of this people-centred view helps to shape policy that is not solely economically driven; seeing the needs of individual people first in order to create a 'loving society' which embraces all people.

Both Bryan and Sally express a view that theology should serve only as an influence in politics, rather than a principle basis upon which to create policies. Jerry and Nigel help expand on this idea by making the point that it is people of faith, rather than faith itself that is important in political discourse. Jerry said:

'People of faith should have a part to play in politics. I think what people like Rabbi Sachs and Rowan Williams say can be quite interesting and thought-provoking. I think it's important to have thinking people of any faith in dialogue with thinking people of no faith...to offer alternative perspectives.'

Again, Jerry is seen to defend the idea that theology can be influential by offering different perspective on political issues. Where he differs from Bryan and Sally is that he makes the distinction between theology as a concept and people who are themselves theologically influenced. It is the religious individuals who Jerry advocates for; theology as a whole, influencing political discussion may lead to as Bryan suggested, an all-Christian party and perhaps ultimately, a theocratic regime.

Nigel said of theology shaping policy:

'That's an artificial separation. People of faith will do their politics from the perspective of people of faith; people without it will do their politics without it. Sometimes they'll reach the same conclusion about something and sometimes they won't. That's the nature of the democracy we live in'.

What he suggests is that people of faith will be involved in politics and will have valuable contributions to make on particular issues, but the same can be said of those without faith. In this sense, the application of theology in political discourse is not fundamental to the success of any governing regime, rather it is seen as an additional voice through which to contribute an alternative perspective, often for a common aim.

What can be deduced from both Tim Farron's comments and the reflections of our Christian Liberal Democrats is that Christians who are politically active should not seek to impose their

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ways of thinking on those who are of other faiths or non-religious, meaning that theology should not be the sole basis upon which political policy is formed. However, what is supported by our Christian Liberal Democrats is the idea that people who are of faith have a valuable contribution to make to the political discussion, and that contribution can be seen in issues pertaining to equality, individual liberty and the environment.

Conclusion

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To argue that God is a member of a political party within a small country in Europe was never quite the aim of this research. Instead, it sought to discuss how Christians view the relationship between their faith and politics, if theology should shape political policy and whether or not there is an interaction between political and theological liberalism. This investigation has shown how theology and politics can influence each other to a positive end, by encouraging Christians to become politically active, to put their faith into action.

What has been demonstrated by this research, is an overwhelming sense that Christians within the Liberal Democrats are motivated to become politically active because of their faith convictions. It has also been shown how the aims of liberal theology appear consistent with those of liberal politics in that they both share a commitment to the individual; what came as a surprise however, is that some within the Liberal Democrats are in fact of a theologically conservative persuasion. This being said, the reflections offered by those interviewed showed how despite possible contradictions between conservative theological ideas and liberal political values, Christians are able to see the bigger aim of equality and individual liberty, providing individuals with the same rights and opportunities regardless of their socio-economic background and/or status. The discussion relating to whether theology should shape political policy revealed how it was religious *people*, rather than religion itself that should be involved in political discussion. Perhaps the important aspect of the question posed in the title of this section is not whether theology should shape policy, but whether theology should inspire believers to become politically active in order to influence political conversation and to embody the ideals of Christianity. It has already been shown that this is the case and that politically active Christians *are* influenced by their faith and *are* passionate about a variety of issues, all of which relate to an overall concept of equality and fairness. A

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quote from children's book *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (Rowling 2000) can be seen to summarise the case for equality made by both Christians and indeed the Liberal Democrats. The character of Dumbledore says:

'Differences of habit and language are nothing at all if our aims are identical and our hearts are open.' (Rowling 2000:608)

Tables and Figures

Table i – Data showing gender identification of questionnaire respondents.

Do you consider yourself to be:

Answer	Count	Percentage
Male (Gen1)	24	66.67%
Female (Gen2)	9	25.00%
Both (Gen3)	0	0.00%
Neither (Gen5)	0	0.00%
Prefer not to say (Gen4)	0	0.00%
No answer	0	0.00%
Not completed or Not displayed	3	8.33%

Table ii – Data showing age groups of questionnaire respondents.

Your age:

Answer	Count	Percentage
18-29 (Age1)	9	25.00%
30-39 (Age2)	5	13.89%
40-49 (Age3)	8	22.22%
50-59 (Age4)	9	25.00%
60+ (Age5)	2	5.56%
No answer	0	0.00%
Not completed or Not displayed	3	8.33%

Table iii – Data showing Liberal Democrat membership of questionnaire respondents.

Are you a member of the Liberal Democrats?

Answer	Count	Percentage
Yes (LDM1)	35	97.22%
No (LDM2)	1	2.78%
No answer	0	0.00%
Not completed or Not displayed	0	0.00%

Table vi – Data showing Liberal Democrat associated groups membership of questionnaire respondents.

Are you a member of any organisation within the Liberal Democrats?

Answer	Count	Percentage
Not a member of any organisation (LDG11)	4	11.11%
Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors (LDG1)	11	30.56%
Association of Liberal Democrat Engineers and Scientists (LDG2)	3	8.33%
Association of Liberal Democrat Trade Unionists (LDG3)	1	2.78%
Ethnic Minority Liberal Democrats (LDG4)	2	5.56%
Humanist & Secularist Liberal Democrats (LDG5)	0	0.00%
Liberal Democrat Christian Forum (LDG6)	20	55.56%
Liberal Democrat Disability Association (LDG7)	0	0.00%
Liberal Democrat Women (LDG8)	0	0.00%
LGBT+ (LDG9)	1	2.78%
Liberal Youth (LDG10)	4	11.11%
Other	8	22.22%
Not completed or Not displayed	4	11.11%

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Table v – Data showing denominational membership of questionnaire respondents. N.B. respondents were able to manually enter the denomination they identified with, rather than choosing from a predefined list.

Which Christian denomination do you most identify with?		
Answer	Count	Percentage
No Denomination (CD1)	10	27.78%
Other	23	63.89%
No answer	0	0.00%
Not completed or Not displayed	3	8.33%

Table vi – Data showing church attendance of questionnaire respondents.

How often do you attend a service in church?		
Answer	Count	Percentage
Never (CA1)	4	11.11%
Hardly Ever (CA2)	3	8.33%
At least 5 times a year (CA3)	1	2.78%
Once a month (CA4)	4	11.11%
Once a week (CA5)	15	41.67%
More than once a week (CA6)	6	16.67%
No answer	0	0.00%
Not completed or Not displayed	3	8.33%

Table vii – Data showing church involvement of questionnaire respondents.

Are you actively involved with your local church?		
Answer	Count	Percentage
No (CAct1)	12	33.33%
Other	21	58.33%
No answer	0	0.00%
Not completed or Not displayed	3	8.33%

Table viii – Data showing political involvement of questionnaire respondents.

In what capacity are you a member of the Liberal Democrats?		
Answer	Count	Percentage
Member (LDR1)	11	30.56%
Activist (LDR2)	11	30.56%
Unpaid elected position (e.g. member of local party committee) (LDR3)	7	19.44%
Councillor (parish/town/city/district/county) (LDR4)	3	8.33%
Paid elected position (MP/MSP/AM/MEP) (LDR5)	0	0.00%
Prefer not to say (LDR6)	0	0.00%
No answer	0	0.00%
Not completed or Not displayed	4	11.11%

Table ix – Data showing agreement of respondents to key policy areas of the Liberal Democrats.

- a) *On electoral reform.*
- b) *On the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union.*
- c) *On the provision currently in place for mental health treatment.*
- d) *On the equal treatment of people irrespective of race, religion, gender or sexuality.*
- e) *On the decentralisation of power.*
- f) *On the commitment to exceed the UK government's pledge to take no more than 20,000 Syrian refugees.*

Clarke Roberts

How far do you agree/disagree with the following statements? [I believe that the First-Past-the-Post voting system is fair and provides accurate representation in Parliament.]

Answer	Count	Percentage
Strongly disagree (PAA1)	23	63.89%
Disagree (PAA2)	4	11.11%
Not certain (PAA3)	0	0.00%
Agree (PAA4)	3	8.33%
Strongly agree (PAA5)	0	0.00%
No answer	0	0.00%
Not completed or Not displayed	6	16.67%

How far do you agree/disagree with the following statements? [I believe that the United Kingdom should leave the European Union.]

Answer	Count	Percentage
Strongly disagree (PAA1)	21	58.33%
Disagree (PAA2)	8	22.22%
Not certain (PAA3)	1	2.78%
Agree (PAA4)	0	0.00%
Strongly agree (PAA5)	0	0.00%
No answer	0	0.00%
Not completed or Not displayed	6	16.67%

How far do you agree/disagree with the following statements? [I believe that the provision currently in place for mental health is adequate.]

Answer	Count	Percentage
Strongly disagree (PAA1)	18	50.00%
Disagree (PAA2)	12	33.33%
Not certain (PAA3)	0	0.00%
Agree (PAA4)	0	0.00%
Strongly agree (PAA5)	0	0.00%
No answer	0	0.00%
Not completed or Not displayed	6	16.67%

How far do you agree/disagree with the following statements? [I believe in equality for all, regardless of one's gender, sexuality, race, religion, ethnicity or disability.]

Answer	Count	Percentage
Strongly disagree (PAA1)	0	0.00%
Disagree (PAA2)	0	0.00%
Not certain (PAA3)	0	0.00%
Agree (PAA4)	11	30.56%
Strongly agree (PAA5)	19	52.78%
No answer	0	0.00%
Not completed or Not displayed	6	16.67%

How far do you agree/disagree with the following statements? [I believe that local governments should be given more autonomy.]

Answer	Count	Percentage
Strongly disagree (PAA1)	0	0.00%
Disagree (PAA2)	0	0.00%
Not certain (PAA3)	6	16.67%
Agree (PAA4)	12	33.33%
Strongly agree (PAA5)	12	33.33%
No answer	0	0.00%
Not completed or Not displayed	6	16.67%

How far do you agree/disagree with the following statements? [I feel that government should accept no more than 20,000 refugees fleeing the Syrian conflict.]

Answer	Count	Percentage
Strongly disagree (PAA1)	17	47.22%
Disagree (PAA2)	9	25.00%
Not certain (PAA3)	3	8.33%
Agree (PAA4)	1	2.78%
Strongly agree (PAA5)	0	0.00%
No answer	0	0.00%
Not completed or Not displayed	6	16.67%

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Table x – Data showing responses to a question concerning the link between political involvement and religious belief.

How far do you agree/disagree with the following statements? [I am actively involved with politics because of my Christianity.]

Answer	Count	Percentage
Strongly disagree (PoTA1)	3	8.33%
Disagree (PoTA2)	7	19.44%
Not certain (PoTA3)	2	5.56%
Agree (PoTA4)	16	44.44%
Strongly agree (PoTA5)	2	5.56%
No answer	0	0.00%
Not completed or Not displayed	6	16.67%

Table xi – Data showing responses to a question concerning the link between church involvement and political belief.

How far do you agree/disagree with the following statements? [I am actively involved with the church because of my interest in politics.]

Answer	Count	Percentage
Strongly disagree (PoTA1)	16	44.44%
Disagree (PoTA2)	11	30.56%
Not certain (PoTA3)	2	5.56%
Agree (PoTA4)	1	2.78%
Strongly agree (PoTA5)	0	0.00%
No answer	0	0.00%
Not completed or Not displayed	6	16.67%

Table xii – Data showing responses to a question concerning the link between religious and political views/beliefs.

How far do you agree/disagree with the following statements? [I feel that my religious views have nothing to do with my political views.]

Answer	Count	Percentage
Strongly disagree (PoTA1)	14	38.89%
Disagree (PoTA2)	14	38.89%
Not certain (PoTA3)	1	2.78%
Agree (PoTA4)	1	2.78%
Strongly agree (PoTA5)	0	0.00%
No answer	0	0.00%
Not completed or Not displayed	6	16.67%

Table xiii – Data showing responses to a question concerning the link between religious and political views/beliefs.

How far do you agree/disagree with the following statements? [I feel that my political views are shaped by my religious views.]

Answer	Count	Percentage
Strongly disagree (PoTA1)	1	2.78%
Disagree (PoTA2)	4	11.11%
Not certain (PoTA3)	1	2.78%
Agree (PoTA4)	19	52.78%
Strongly agree (PoTA5)	5	13.89%
No answer	0	0.00%
Not completed or Not displayed	6	16.67%

Figure 1 – Data showing level of theological training or education of questionnaire respondents.

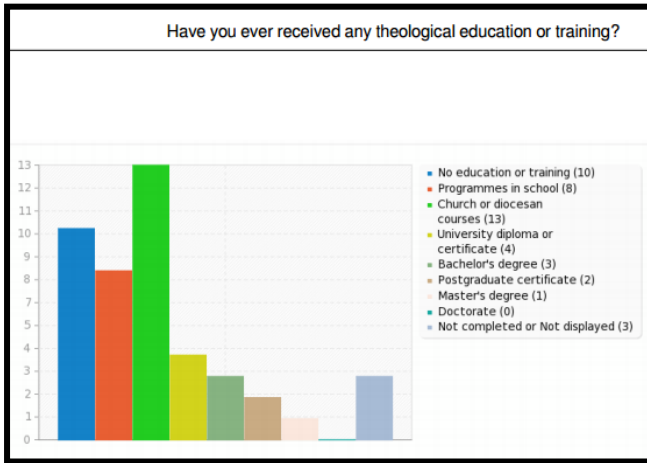


Figure 2 – Data showing how those surveyed responded to a question about biblical historical accuracy.



Figure 3 – Data showing how those surveyed responded to a question about the Bible's theological significance.

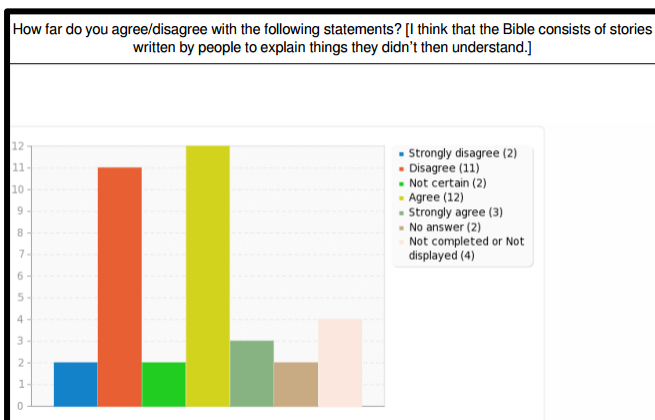


Figure 4 – Data showing how those surveyed responded to a question about the need for Christian doctrines to be changed.



Figure 5 – Data showing how those surveyed responded to a question about science’s involvement in shaping Christian doctrine.

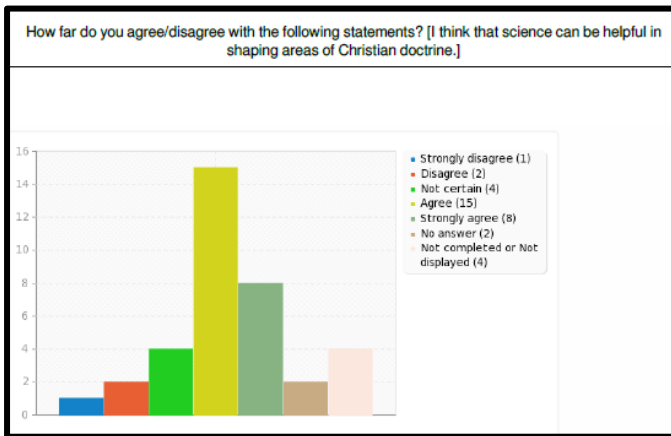


Figure 6 – Data showing how those surveyed responded to a question as to whether or not science and philosophical is harmful to the Christian faith.

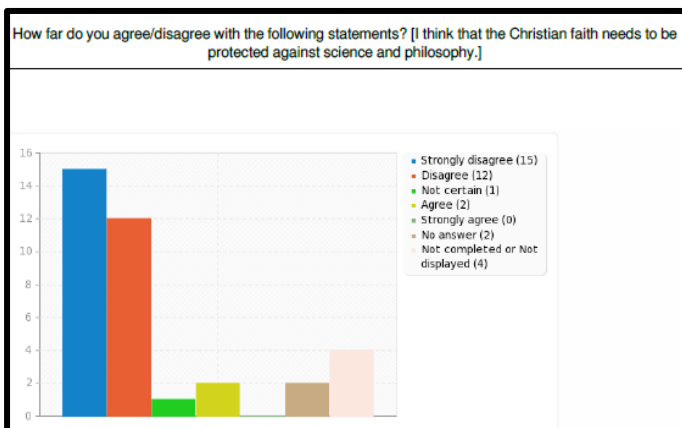


Figure 7 – Data showing the agreement of those surveyed on key Liberal Democrat policy areas.

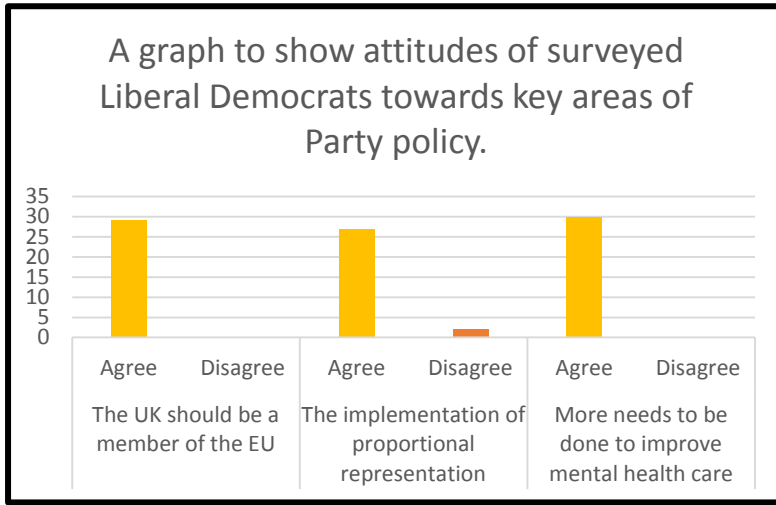
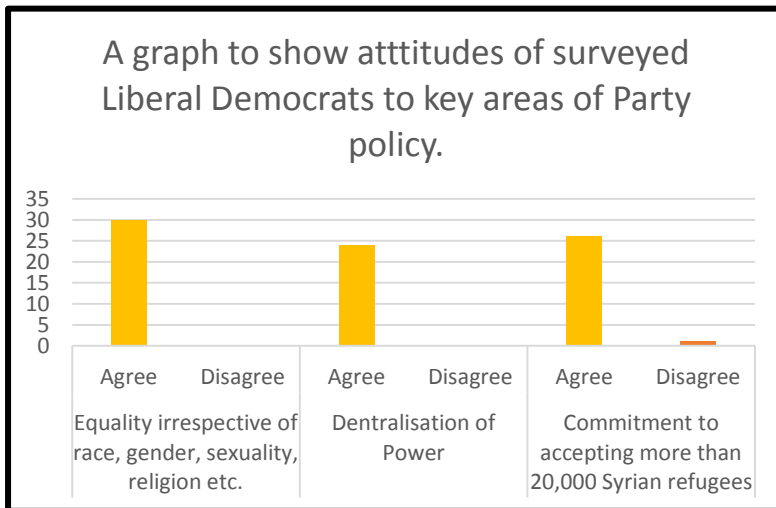





























Figure 8 – Data showing the agreement of those surveyed on key Liberal Democrat policy areas.



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Figure 9 – The results of the 2015 UK General Election (Source: BBC News 2015 (available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election/2015/results>) accessed: 01/08/2016

UK results after 650 of 650 seats		SEATS	GAIN	LOSS	+/-	VOTES	VOTE SHARE %	+/-%
	Conservative	331	35	11	+24	11,334,576	36.9	+0.8
	Labour	232	22	48	-26	9,347,304	30.4	+1.5
	Scottish National Party	56	50	0	+50	1,454,436	4.7	+3.1
	Liberal Democrat	8	0	49	-49	2,415,862	7.9	-15.2
	Democratic Unionist Party	8	1	1	0	184,260	0.6	0.0
	Sinn Fein	4	0	1	-1	176,232	0.6	0.0
	Plaid Cymru	3	0	0	0	181,704	0.6	0.0
	Social Democratic & Labour Party	3	0	0	0	99,809	0.3	0.0
	Ulster Unionist Party	2	2	0	+2	114,935	0.4	0.0
	UKIP	1	1	0	+1	3,881,099	12.6	+9.5
	Green Party	1	0	0	0	1,157,613	3.8	+2.8
	Alliance Party	0	0	1	-1	61,556	0.2	+0.1
	TUSC	0	0	0	0	36,368	0.1	+0.1
	National Health Action	0	0	0	0	20,210	0.1	0.0
	Traditional Unionist Voice	0	0	0	0	16,538	0.1	0.0
	Respect Party	0	0	0	0	9,989	0.0	-0.1
	Cannabis Is Safer Than Alcohol	0	0	0	0	8,419	0.0	0.0
	Yorkshire First	0	0	0	0	6,811	0.0	0.0
	English Democrats	0	0	0	0	6,531	0.0	-0.2
	Monster Raving Loony Party	0	0	0	0	3,898	0.0	0.0
	Socialist Labour Party	0	0	0	0	3,481	0.0	0.0
	Christian Peoples Alliance	0	0	0	0	3,260	0.0	0.0
	Christian Party	0	0	0	0	3,205	0.0	-0.1
	Workers Party	0	0	0	0	2,724	0.0	0.0
	British National Party	0	0	0	0	1,667	0.0	-1.9
	Class War	0	0	0	0	526	0.0	0.0
	Others	1	0	0	0	164,822	0.5	-0.3

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