

# Heath Street

## BAPTIST CHURCH



# Book Review

## Iain McGilchrist

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### The Matter with Things: Our Brains, Our Delusions and the Unmaking of the World

In his earlier work, *The Master and his Emissary* (2009), distinguished English scholar and psychiatrist Iain McGilchrist set out a strong neurological case for linking each of the two lobes of the human brain (indeed of all animal brains) to two different modes of attention to the world. (Those who are familiar with that work can skip the next couple of paragraphs). Using evidence from patient histories (strokes, head injuries) and from neuroscientific experiment (using imaging techniques, or non-invasive experimentation) he fleshes out the characteristics of these two modes of attention. The right brain is immersed in an immediate perception of the world, able to see objects as wholes, and appreciate their relationships in a space with depth. The left brain offers a serialised, analysed representation of the world that lends itself to expression in language, and



relationships defined by binary logic. The right brain is open to surprises, while the left brain is focused and task oriented. (For a self-test of these modes of attention, see the Basketball experiment on e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJG698U2Mvo> )

He puts this in an evolutionary context. As animals, to survive we need to operate in both modes on different occasions.

But for humans it goes further.

Here McGilchrist deliberately set out to challenge what had been the received wisdom in neuroscience, that the left brain, with its words and its logic, is the more evolved and intelligent aspect of ourselves. In fact, he argued, the right brain is capable of rich imaginative reasoning and intuitive, metaphor-laden understanding, while the left brain will follow its own wordy logic to a closed conclusion, even where new information might suggest otherwise. The two modes can operate exclusively, and so one can become dominant over the other. When the right brain is dominant, we deal well with the world, because it 'knows' about the left brain and can make use of its genuinely useful analysis. However, when the left brain is dominant, the more subtle and imaginative 'open' understanding of the world of the right brain can be excluded, because the left brain does not 'know' that the right brain exists and will cheerfully believe that its own reduced analysis of the world is sufficient.

In the earlier book, McGilchrist went on to propose that these two different modes of attention leave their traces on art, philosophy and culture

Further, he suggested that in western culture since Descartes (and ultimately since Plato), left-brain attention to the world has been systematically preferred to right-brain attention, with damaging consequences for the quality of our relationships with the world and one another. In *The Matter with Things*, he explores this thesis in much greater detail, in light of the body of research that has built up in the intervening years and in careful response to some of the challenges his earlier work evoked from the scientific and philosophical community. The result, particularly in the second volume, is an exciting and thought-provoking work of philosophy, relating the gritty evidence of neuroscience and biology more generally to a theory of mind and matter, discussing epistemology, time, space, the nature of existence in the universe, and (in the last chapter) religion and the idea of God. He weaves in the philosophical reflections of quantum physicists and biologists, constantly returns to art, music and poetry, deploying texts spiritual and philosophical from across global cultures and eras.

**-John Moffat**

# “Walking Together”

- Synod - from the Greek σύν/syn- “together”, ὁ δόξ/odos “road, way”

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On October 27, 2024, a mass in St. Peter’s Basilica closed the Synod on Synodality, a three-year reform process described by some as the ‘culmination of Pope Francis’ papacy’. The aim was for the Church to discern how it can better meet members’ needs and fulfil its evangelising mission in the 21st century. Among other things, this included discussion of the role of the laity and historically marginalised groups in the church. However, the aim of the synod was not doctrinal change, but ‘being church’ more collaboratively and inclusively, rather than the highly clericalised top-down approach often associated with Catholicism.

A ‘synod’ is a gathering of church officials to discuss and decide on ecclesial matters. In the Catholic Church, the Synod of Bishops consults the Pope on specific issues, such as the Family (2015)

or the Amazon Region (2019). (The exact nature of a synod differs between denominations. The bishops at the synod are mainly chosen by the relevant bishops’ conferences, though some are also chosen by the Pope himself.)

The term ‘synodality,’ coined around 20 years ago, reflects an approach from the early Church revived by the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). *Lumen Gentium*, an integral document arising from Vatican II, defines as *sensus fidei* the ability of the faithful to discern, recognise and uphold the truth, guided by the Holy Spirit. *Lumen Gentium* emphasises the ‘common priesthood of the faithful’ by virtue of their baptism rather than ordination, and recognises laity as ‘central in the life of the Church’. Pope Francis’ vision of synodality is deeply tied to this. It emphasises



the active participation of all members of the Church, in light of *sensus fidei*, in order to ‘journey together’, addressing the most important issues facing the Church today.

The Synod on Synodality was launched at St. Peter’s Basilica on October 10, 2021. It took place in three phases: diocesan, continental, and universal. Conversations began at the diocesan level, covering topics such as ecumenism, clergy-laity relations, and the role of women and LGBTQ

people. (Note that this is not an exhaustive list, as the consultation process was global and therefore the nature of issues discussed differed between regions.) These sessions aimed to give a voice to those who have historically not had a voice in church affairs, fostering open dialogue. The continental phase (2022-2023) reflected on the feedback given in the diocesan phase. Delegations comprising representatives of bishop’s conferences, religious orders, and lay people came together for continental assemblies; one

document per continent was then published synthesising diocesan and continental-stage discussions. The information gathered was synthesised and collated in a working document known as the Instrumentum Laboris, released in June 2023.

The universal phase consisted of two formal gatherings (synod assemblies) held in Rome throughout October 2023 and 2024. Of the around 370 voting members, more than 70 were non-bishops, marking the first time that women religious and lay men and women could vote. After the 2023 session, contentious issues (e.g., women deacons) were outsourced to study groups, which reported to the synod assembly but whose work will be completed in 2025. This decision was justified by the need to refocus on the question of how to be a synodal church, which could be derailed by divisive and oftentimes political questions. Nevertheless, the decision sparked criticism, as important questions seemed to be deflected from the main stage. However, the formation of study groups stands in line with the tradition of Vatican II, where

such groups were established (pre-council) and ‘adjusted once the council got underway’.

The synod’s final document called for structural reforms (though the authority of bishops remains ‘inviolable’), greater lay participation, and more female church leadership. Crucially, Pope Francis declared this final document part of his magisterium – though not doctrinal, the document holds authoritative weight within the Church’s teaching. (This does not mean that the document is binding or infallibly defined, but is rather a ‘set of guiding principles’.) Reflecting on the synod’s outcomes, Timothy Radcliffe OP, the synod’s main spiritual advisor, warned of the propensity to view the synod in terms of ‘startling decisions’ and ‘headlines’. He emphasised that its main outcome is a shift toward greater dialogue, unity, and mutual respect. Fr Radcliffe was created Cardinal, in part due to his contribution to the synod, at a consistory held in Rome on 7 December, 2024. He led the pre-synod retreats alongside Sr Maria Ignazia Angelini OSB, an Italian



nun, and also preached during the synod.

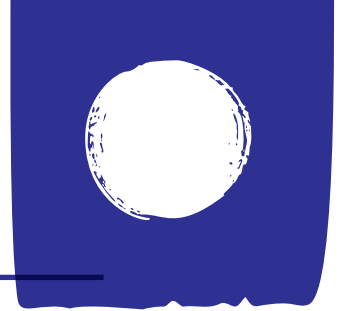
It is clear that a cultural change is taking place within the Church. Between 2021 and 2024, other notable developments have included allowing laypeople to lead departments (2022) and permitting non-liturgical same-sex blessings (2023). (The first lay person to head a Vatican department was Paolo Ruffini, who has headed the Dicastery for Communication since 2018.

However, this was only formalised in 2022.) It remains to be seen how these changes will influence the Church’s long-term direction, and what the synod’s role and legacy will be in that context. Nevertheless, the full impact of the synod will likely only unfold over time, influencing both theological discussions and the Church’s role in contemporary moral and social issues.

**-Isabella Giagounidis**

# #ichbinhanna

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*In October of 2015, I had just arrived in the city of Erfurt in eastern Germany. Having recently completed a doctorate on music and worship, I had run headlong into the challenges of the academic job market. Rather than continue with my weekly cycle of peripatetic music tuition, I had taken the one opportunity that had been offered to me, a one-year contract on the other side of Europe. Over the course of the next four years I went through six different short-term contracts with the same university, moving flat every time my contract was renewed. It was a time filled with uncertainty and with a fair amount of stress. I managed eventually to publish a second book, but I often had the feeling that this was despite rather than because of the system I was working in.*

*In 2021, the German ministry for education and research published a video online about a German law which regulates the contract lengths of early career researchers. The video explained that many early-career contracts are legally limited in length in order to prevent the system becoming clogged up and to allow new generations of researchers to come through. It explained how, at this early career stage, your contract is tied either to working towards particular qualifications or to fixed-term research projects, and that it therefore makes sense that many researchers are without permanent positions.*

*In order to make this all real, the video introduces a figure called Hanna. In the narrative of the video, Hanna is a biologist who's still at an early stage in her career. Hanna is presented as the model scientist – she understands the system, and is well aware that her current position cannot last forever. Because of this, Hanna seeks advice early on and makes sure to plan out her next steps.*

*It is fair to say that I was not impressed. The video seemed to ignore the effects that this system was having on my life and the lives of many others around me, and whilst I hadn't expected the system to change very quickly, to seek to reinforce it further, and*

*to place the blame on junior researchers for their bad sense of planning, seemed a somewhat inappropriate and unnecessary step to be taking.*

*I was not alone in my reaction, and the video quickly sparked a response on social media, coalescing around the hashtag #ichbinhanna (I am Hanna). Whilst many had quietly previously voiced their discontent to friends and colleagues, the video enabled a broader wave of solidarity and conversation to emerge, a wave which served to draw attention to the difficulties that many junior academics find themselves in but which has nevertheless failed to lead to any significant changes in either German legislation or working conditions.*

*The fundamental issue at the heart of this movement is the question of responsibility. Whilst the video placed the burden of navigating precarious situations in the hands of the workers, many of those workers are convinced it is the system that is the problem. Legislators believe that their system is justified and respond to concerns by shifting the blame to universities' implementation of the legislation. As a result, nothing is done to solve the problems that need to be solved.*

*When you're caught up in an established system, taking on responsibility can sometimes be difficult, particularly if the logic for the current way of doing things seems to have some sense behind it or if it feels that the real responsibility for change lies with someone else. Nevertheless, as Christians we are called to imagine that the world can be transformed, and that we might be part of that transformation. We struggle, we get it wrong, we fail in that calling, but we stand in solidarity with those longing for their own liberation and the liberation of the whole of creation, hoping to play our own part in opening up new and life-giving possibilities.*

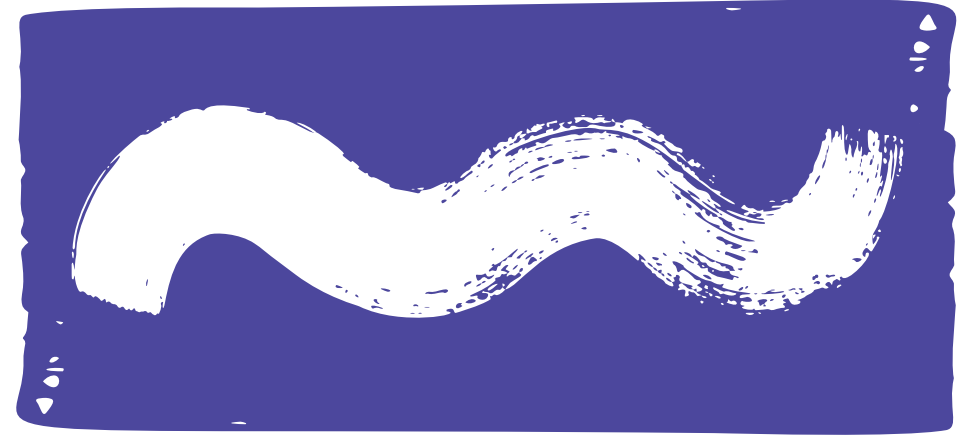
**–Dr. Mark Porter**

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# Black Parents Together Christmas Concert at Heath Street

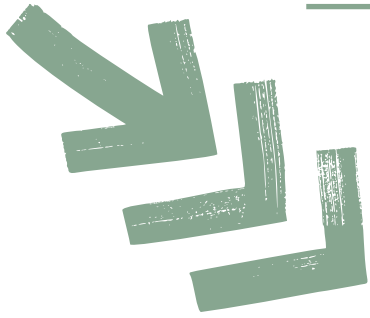
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Saturday, 21 December 2024





# The Second Annual Saul Drop!



Acts 9:24-25 “But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket.”

This wonderful scene is recreated for a second year by the children making ‘baskets’ that must protect a little ‘Saul’ as represented in his weakness and vulnerability by an egg! You’ll be pleased to know that very few Sauls were harmed in the event, with by far the majority surviving their descent unscathed!\*

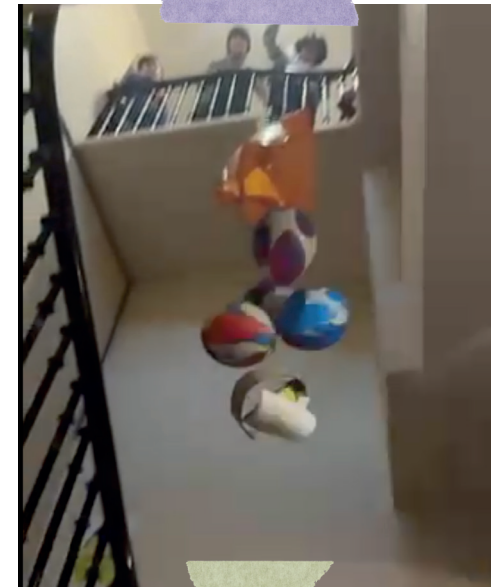
I’ll leave you with Paul (née Saul) and his first person account from 2



Corinthians: “If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands” (11:30-33).



\*It should be noted that Josh made short work of transforming the survivors into a sweet meringue!



-Wilf Merttens



# READINGS

## FEBRUARY 2-8

## EZEKIEL 43.27-44.4

2nd Thaddeus King  
3rd Hyun Ju Lee  
4th Evelyn Baker  
5th Genna Naccache  
6th Grace Jiang  
7th Dusol Lee  
8th Gaynor Humphreys

## FEBRUARY 9-15

## ISAIAH 6.1-13

9th Julie Benoit  
10th Beryl Dowsett  
11th Rhona MacEachen  
12th Zahra Safaryazdi  
13th Frida King  
14th Babak Agin  
15th Birgit Leuppert

## FEBRUARY 16-22

## JEREMIAH 17.5-10

16th Isabel Somers  
17th Fiona Ranford  
18th Emad Eisapour  
19th Ali Ghasempour  
20th Joachim King  
21st Maral Agin  
22nd Elya Ghasempour

## FEBRUARY 23-MARCH 1

## GENESIS 2.4-25

23rd Juno Lee  
24th Susan Le Quesne  
25th Coco Ellenbogen  
26th Jen Finamore  
27th Robin Thorne  
28th Phoebe Jiang  
1st Mar Sarah Harper

# & PRAYERS

## MARCH 2-8

## EXODUS 34.29-35

2nd Esme Baker  
3rd Tom Somers  
4th Anselm King  
5th Elisa Ghasempour  
6th Laura Somers  
7th Edward Humphreys  
8th Wilf Merttens

## MARCH 9-15

## DEUTERONOMY 26.1-11

9th John-Henry Baker  
10th Theresa Thom  
11th Mysie Johnson  
12th Cole Ellenbogen  
13th Leila Ranjibar  
14th Annie Fang  
15th Lydia Baker

## MARCH 16-22

## GENESIS 15.1-18

16th Otilie Johnson  
17th Ewan King  
18th for all who attend Oldtime Nursery  
19th Andrea MacEachen  
20th Josh Somers  
21st Nathalia Bell  
22nd Beauty Kunene

## MARCH 23-29

## ISAIAH 55.1-9

23rd Nesa Thorne  
24th HK  
25th Kylo Layton  
26th Gabrielle Falardeau  
27th Nomsa Ndebele  
28th for our community choir  
29th Thomas Roy



# Faith Hope & Love



## WEEKLY ACTIVITIES

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SUNDAYS	11am	<b>DIVINE WORSHIP</b> Including our Children's Sunday Club stories, crafts, drama and play for all ages  Live stream also available on request by e-mailing <a href="mailto:johnhenry@heathstreet.org">johnhenry@heathstreet.org</a> at least 24 hours in advance
	6pm 7pm	<b>SUNDAY SUNDOWN CONCERT SERIES</b> <b>CONTACT CLUB</b>
MONDAYS	4:30pm	<b>STORYMAKERS CLUB</b> An after-school club aimed at children between the ages of 7 and 13
TUESDAYS	9:30am	<b>OLDTIME NURSERY</b> Introducing old melodies and traditional stories to a new generation of children
THURSDAYS	10:30am	<b>OLDTIME NURSERY</b>
	7:30pm	<b>HEATH STREET CHOIR REHEARSALS</b>
FRIDAYS	3:30pm	<b>STORYMAKERS CLUB</b>



Please see the church website for updates  
[www.heathstreet.org](http://www.heathstreet.org)

For requests regarding church membership,  
Baptism or opportunities for Christian ministry in the church,  
please contact the minister.

### **Copy for the next Newsletter**

should reach Eleanor Patterson (eleanorlaise@gmail.com)  
not later than Wednesday 19th March.

### **Church Officers**

Gaynor Humphreys (Treasurer)  
Wilf Merttens (Church Secretary)  
Annie Fang (Deacon)  
Sarah Harper (Deacon)

### **Minister Ewan King**

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