Twitter Thread by Heather Morgan (she/her)■■■■■■■■■■



Heather Morgan (she/her)■■■■■■■■■■
@poweredbylove2



Okay ... ready to try the first one. I just read Alister McGrath's 'Theology: The Basics' and have been thinking through his chapter on The Church through the lens of the work I'm doing on Belonging, so here goes ...

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> Thinking about ways to translate what I am doing at school into everyday words, and wonder if anyone would be interested in me trying to tweet some of my readings this year?
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> I don't I can get them into single tweets, but if folks were interested I'd try 4 short synoptic threads.
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> — Heather Morgan (she/her)\U0001f469\u200d\U0001f9bc\U0001f3f3\ufe0f\u200d\U0001f308 \U0001f1e8\U0001f1e6 (@poweredbylove2) January 3, 2021

In the study of the theology of the church McGrath notes two ways of viewing the church, both of which are problematic if 'belonging' is our goal. The first view is of purity and the second an idea of a 'mixed body' of sinners and saints.

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In the purity model, cohesion/acceptance are based on a person's commitment to a narrowly prescribed list of rules/requirements. Succeed at keeping these rules and you can stay. Otherwise, you will need to be put 'out' because your failure risks the purity of the Church & u.

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Those churches most concerned with keeping out (LGBTQ, women in ministry, whatever) are most likely to adhere to a purity model of church (and although this goes beyond purity culture, it's part of where that idea comes from).

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The search/drive for purity creates evermore insular groups of individuals to the point where one church in our city is convinced that in a city of 74 churches the only Christian's in the city are the 17 that attend their church.

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Others from their denomination have been concerned about us entering their building without a letter of introduction in case we somehow "brought" the devil with us and would make them impure (I kid you not - actual, real conversation).

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While these are extreme examples, this purity mindset can easily be used to control, constrain, limit (and consequently cast out) those within its ranks. As such, it is extremely problematic for any inbuilt need or desire for belonging we might have.

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(The human need for belonging - for a safe place to call home - is the central tenet of attachment, the basic building block of emotional, spiritual and psychological well-being in humans ...

https://t.co/73gulgNERo)

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The purity model of church is problematic to belonging because in this world you can only be accepted because (or to the extent that) you perform appropriately. There is no room for uniqueness, much less limitation or difference in this world.

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As such, whether you 'succeed' or not you will have no means of finding belonging in this space, because it won't be YOU that is there, but your capacity to perform the correct behaviours in the correct ways at the right time and place (and avoid those that are incorrect).

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You may gain (and even keep) power, status and recognition by supporting the purity standards, but if it feels unsatisfying, that's because it's not (and cannot ever be) the same as belonging.

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In the 'mixed body' model, the assumption is that some in the church are saints and some are sinners. Sometimes we can tell and sometimes we can't, but there's no way to safely separate the sinners from the saints without damaging the saints, so we'll leave that to God.

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On the surface, this may seem like a better option. There's less of the infernal, continuous fear of being 'tainted' sloshing around. However, it's still problematic.

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That's because it still focuses on a 'community' built through and around structures of authority. Institutional policies and procedures (as opposed to purity codes) tend to be the dominant guiding forces in these 'mixed body' churches.

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Unsurprisingly these groups tend to be far less 'communal' and far more 'institutional', and again our quest for belonging is stymied.

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That's because the best institutional can achieve is 'inclusion', and inclusion differs from belonging in several key ways:

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Inclusion is controlled by structures while belonging is rooted in relationships.

Inclusion creates programs while belonging nurtures growth.

Inclusion allows for entrance while belonging celebrates presence.

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If belonging is the goal, institutions aren't going to get us there any better than a hospital room can feel 'homey', a school reading nook feel like your bedroom, or a nursing home feel like Grandma's house.

18/

Without the feeling of home, belonging and the safety it brings is lost, as are the possibilities for nourishment, warmth and healthy growth-related risk-taking that it nurtures.

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So if the church has typically fallen into either a 'purity' model or a 'mixed body' model (and I don't disagree that it has) is it possible to reach for/find belonging in the church? Or is that just a pipe dream?

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I'm going to argue that it's not only possible, but critical, if we want to create a space that enables the discipleship, growth, healing and transformation the NT talks about us reaching for as the church.

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This is found (as @GrantMacaskill writes in 'Autism and the Church') in and through relationships of mutual interdependence that extend to the margins or periphery of the church.

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As a disabled woman I can tell you that learning to be interdependent is a hard - even painful - task of formation. It requires humility, grace, vulnerability and an enormous amount of courage on the part of everyone involved.

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But I believe that it is in these spaces that the church lives most plausibly into Christ's calling to become transformative (both in the church and beyond). Belonging must become the litmus test, because it is only when we belong that we feel safe enough to grow.

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@unfard I'd love your feedback on this ... it was an interesting process, but I'm sure there's room for improvement!