



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Postdoctoral Research Assistant (Pastoral Care, Literary Care and Religious Dissent in the Early Modern British Atlantic), School of English, Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures

This post is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council as part of a Leadership Fellowship awarded to Dr Alison Searle in 2019 (AH/T003197/1 Pastoral Care, Literary Care and Religious Dissent: Zones of Freedom in the British Atlantic (c. 1630-1720)). Present-day thinking about public health has come to give increasing attention to forms of wellbeing and caregiving. This project will contribute to such thinking by addressing some of the contexts in which caregiving has emerged and has been formulated as a social practice. Its study focuses on description and analysis of the concept of pastoral care as it was practised in three communities of faith operating across the British Atlantic between 1630 and 1720. The project will further assess how practices of care in the pre-modern past both inform and can shape pastoral care and holistic wellbeing in our post-secular present.

The project focuses on faith communities impacted by the development of nation states and the ways in which emergent states established a specific religious confession as integral to their identity. It will assess how these communities and their practices of care were shaped by political exclusion and/or geographical distance from centres of power. Government policy, such as the 1662 Act of Uniformity, which excluded citizens who refused to conform to its demands from participating in the state church, and geopolitical logistics, such as the challenges faced by a small national church based on parishes increasingly required to provide care for members living beyond the territorial limits of the nation state, created unprecedented spaces for experimentation. Whether by virtue of governmental coercion and persecution, or distant parochial oversight (due to an expanding commercial empire) these zones of freedom required communities to exercise initiative by reinventing practices of ministry and generating new ways of providing pastoral care.

The archives preserved by these communities allow their historical practices of pastoral care to be excavated. The project gives detailed attention to: 1) the concept of pastoral care - defining relationships between religious, philosophical and scientific forms of caregiving, and examining how this changed over time; 2) vocabularies of

pastoral care, emotion and experience, exemplified in letters, assessing what these reveal about the scientific, linguistic and theological epistemologies that shaped care provision; 3) the role of the pastor as a physician of soul and body - the boundary between physical and spiritual care was fluid in the pre-modern period and pastors prescribed treatment to ensure the holistic wellbeing of those under their care. This means focusing on the material ways in which these early modern communities practised care and considering how political exclusion and/or geographical distance from the metropolitan centre impacted increasing professional specialisation (e.g. between pastor, missionary and physician).

The project is rooted in, but extends beyond, an historical analysis of how liminal communities exercised care in zones of freedom. It asks how observing relationships between care and cure may contribute to the history of medicine as an emerging professional practice. It also considers how an historically and theologically informed concept of pastoral care can shape thinking about spirituality in our own evidence-based and instrumentalised public health context. More particularly, it will address present-day understanding of how the written word and the act of reading are glossed and (as with bibliotherapy) prescribed as forms of care or agents of cure. The project will also evaluate how the practices of care embodied by these historical communities speak to current thinking about the provision of aid and the role of faith actors in the global public sphere. Partnership with non-academic organisations will be integral to these public-facing dimensions of the project.