

## Register Faith

## Switch off your smartphone and soak up the Sabbath

**Credo**  
Ephraim  
Mirvis



**H**an Jin Sook, a South Korean mother, recently spoke of the challenges facing her 18-year-old son. Once a model student at the top of his class, addiction is now threatening to ruin his life. He has dropped out of school and become aggressive, stressed and withdrawn. His addiction, however, is not to drugs or alcohol but technology. He spends an average of ten hours every day on the internet. It is where he works, plays and socialises. Now, in a desperate attempt to get his life back on track in a country with the

highest rate of internet addiction in the world, his family have sent him to a digital-detox bootcamp.

In our synagogues, we recently read the biblical account of the genesis of the world. At the dawn of the creation of man, God “breathed into him the breath of life”, which, according to Jewish tradition, means that we were endowed with the capacity to speak: the defining difference between humans and all other types of life that preceded us. We are blessed with the consciousness to engage in dialogue with others in a way that other creatures simply cannot. This, the most precious of gifts, gives us the potential to love, to counsel and to empathise, to befriend, sanctify, enthuse and inspire.

While the benefits of technology and digital globalisation are spectacular, human interaction is increasingly measured by retweets and Facebook “likes”. A recent

University of Derby study exploring our digital obsession concluded that “smartphones are psychologically addictive, encourage narcissistic tendencies and should come with a health warning”.

Next week, on Shabbat UK, more than 100,000 Jewish people across the country and millions more worldwide, regardless of their level of religious affiliation, will celebrate a very special Sabbath. In accordance with Jewish tradition, they will switch off their smartphones, televisions and radios for 25 hours and make a commitment instead to spend the day cultivating their relationships with family, friends and communities. Shabbat UK, now in its second year, is the largest mass participation project ever organised by the Jewish community. This year will set records for engagement with the day at celebratory meals, prayer services and huge cross-community

educational and social events. Yet, ask any one of the participants why they are committing to turn off their computers, give up all commercial activity and to leave the pressures of the working week at the door, and the answer, almost certainly, will not be the events, nor the great food or the rabbi's sermon. The universal appeal of Shabbat is the serenity of knowing that neither meetings nor emails can interrupt precious time with friends, that no television programme or video game will disturb family meals and that we can dedicate a day to elevate ourselves spiritually while quietly reflecting on our true priorities and *raison d'être*.

Sometimes the more digitally connected we are, the more disconnected we become from everything that is important. In this context, Shabbat is more relevant now than ever before. It is a time to deal with real friends, people and

challenges. Real relationships, whether a long overdue catch up with old friends or a joyful family meal, are strengthened by the discipline to rise above the weekly grind and experience something altogether more meaningful.

Jack Lew, an observant Jew who was former chief of staff to Barack Obama, speaks often of how understanding the president was about his leaving the White House for Shabbat. Lew says that the president would frequently point to his watch on a Friday afternoon and prompt him that it was time to get going — “to remind me that it was important to him, not just to me, that I be able to make that balance.”

Striking that balance is a worthy aspiration, not just for Jews, but for all of our society.

Ephraim Mirvis is Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth

## Bishop starts global quest to heal rifts in the Anglican Church

Graham Kings, the Archbishop of Canterbury's Mission Theologian, is reaching out to the church's 'Global South', writes **Bess Twiston Davies**

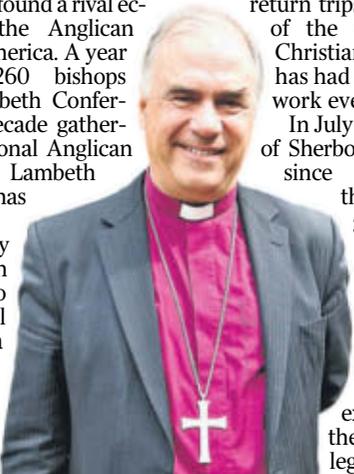
On a rainy Sunday last month, shortly before the Archbishop of Canterbury summoned the leaders of the worldwide Anglican Communion for crisis talks, a poignant if low-key ceremony took place at Canterbury Cathedral.

To the sound of an oboe playing the theme song of *The Mission*, the Right Rev Dr Graham Kings was formally installed as the first ever Mission Theologian for the Anglican Communion.

His task, simply put, is to promote the theologians of the “Global South” of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Yet the subtext is that Kings's role might help to heal gaping rifts in the communion, which represents about 85 million Anglican faithful. His appointment seems to be proof of Welby's determination to prevent the communion from falling into schism.

Since becoming Archbishop of Canterbury in March 2013, Welby has flown more than 150,000 miles to meet each leader of the communion's branches. Existing cracks had splintered further when the Episcopal Church in the US decided in 2003 to appoint an actively gay priest, Gene Robinson, Bishop of New Hampshire. Conservatives, opining that this is unbiblical, broke off in 2009 to found a rival ecclesial structure, the Anglican Church in North America. A year earlier, around 260 bishops boycotted the Lambeth Conference, the once-a-decade gathering of the international Anglican Church. The next Lambeth gathering in 2018 has been postponed.

In January, Welby will offer Anglican leaders a chance to reshape the global communion as a semi-independent federation where individual churches are less tied to those they



disagree with. The only requirement is that all vow basic allegiance to the Mother See of Canterbury. It is not a divorce, says Welby's spokesman, rather a case of “sleeping in separate bedrooms”.

Much is riding on Kings's new role and at the first gathering of “Global South” theologians at Lambeth Palace on Tuesday, it is hoped that he can enable new voices representing more diverse views in the worldwide Anglican communion. “Archbishop Justin sees me as encouraging people to listen to developing world theologians,” Kings says. “When they feel listened to, they may, hopefully, eventually take part in a Lambeth Conference.”

He first met Welby in December 1976, when, for a week on a student mission, they shared quarters in a “freezing” vicarage in Islington. A year later, Welby was a guest at Kings's wedding to Ali, a psychotherapist, whom he had met at the Oxford Christian Union. Later, the couple lived with their young daughters, Ros, Miriam and Katie, “up a mud track” in the shadow of Mount Kenya.

They learnt Swahili and later Kikuyu, in which Kings still preaches on his return trips to Africa. The founder of the Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide, Kings has had a passion for missionary work ever since.

In July he gave up his bishopric, of Sherborne in Dorset, and ever since has been setting up theology seminars in Bangalore, Nairobi and Buenos Aires. The idea is also to offer developing world theologians three-month sabbaticals to develop research theses into chapters of books. They will work, expense free and with their airfares prepaid, at colleges in Oxbridge, Durham



Kings baptises a new Christian. Can he help to give his church a fresh start?

or Virginia. “It's to give them the space to write,” Kings says.

His base is an office within the mission agency and publisher SPCK (The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge), which is planning to release a new series of books on Anglican theology from the Global South.

Kings arrived in Kenya aged 32 and the continent has reshaped his theology. On Kings's first day teaching, at St Andrew's College, Kabare, a student asked if his greatgrandfather — who died

before Christian missionaries arrived — “was ‘saved’ [assured a place in Heaven through faith in Jesus].”

Turning back to the Bible, Kings concluded that the grandfather's faith in Ngai — the Kikuyu word for God — guaranteed his salvation. He looked at the Bible's treatment of Abraham, the Old Testament patriarch, and writings of the Ghanaian theologian, Kwame Bedieko. “Jesus is not a portable deity, brought by the missionaries. God in Christ was in Africa before they came,”

he explains. Such questions, says Kings, when we meet in his house on a gritty estate in Bermondsey, south London, are vital, showing that the Gospel needs to be “recontextualised” and interpreted afresh by Christians.

He predicts that the Anglican Church will be reshaped by the life of poverty experienced by those in the developing world, now the heart, in terms of growth, of world Christianity. “The centre of Christianity has shifted from the north to the south of the world,” he says. “That echoes the shift of early Christianity from a Jewish to a Hellenistic culture. The church in the north can learn from the church in the south about the spiritual depths involved in surviving persecution.”

In places such as China, home to vast numbers of new Christians, mainly in Protestant churches that are not linked to a particular denomination, theology — the study of the nature of God and religious belief is fresh — even untried, he says.

Archbishop Josiah Idowu-Fearon, the Nigerian who is the newly appointed secretary general of the Anglican Communion, says that in Africa many new Christians have “no real knowledge of Anglican theology. Brother Graham has a very important but very difficult assignment,” he says, mentioning cynicism about the western church, viewed by some in Africa as “corrupt”.

Stimulating debate is nothing new for Kings: in 2003 he founded the theological website Fulcrum, aimed at “representing the centre ground of evangelical Anglicanism”, in the wake of fierce debates over the orthodoxy of the then newly appointed Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams.

By the time Kings retires — seven years hence — Idowu-Fearon hopes that the theologians of the “Global South” will be lining up to replace him. In the meantime, Kings's encouragement is vital: at the moment diverse theological opinions are sometimes suppressed. Idowu-Fearon explains: “In Africa, the leadership will not brook opposition,” although he adds that it is a myth that the church in the developing world is deeply conservative. “It is as diverse as it is here [in the UK],” he says.

The Rev Professor Joseph Galgalo, vice-chancellor of the University of Limuru, Kenya, will give the inaugural seminar for Kings's new role on October 20 at Lambeth Palace. Over the next seven years Kings hopes to discover “modern-day” Saint Augustines — an allusion to the African who transformed early Christian thought. Will they emerge to save the ailing communion?

[missiontheologyanglican.org](http://missiontheologyanglican.org)