



Mary and Charles Hipsley

Reimagining the Landscape of Faith

Essential pathways for spiritual growth

Praise for *Reimagining the Landscape of Faith*

‘As Eugene Peterson said, “There’s no such thing as your spiritual life, just your life.” *Reimagining the Landscape of Faith* explains how developing a robust inner life of self-awareness helps build deeper God-awareness, which flows into healthy, mature and long-lasting outward acts of service: at home, at church and at work. Using practical tools rooted in ancient wisdom, Charles and Mary help us to see how our experiences and assumptions have informed the maps we use to make sense of our lives – and encourage us to be cartographers who navigate the world with skill, empathy and grace.’

Tim Yearsley, Head of Innovation, LICC

‘This is the ideal guide to read as part of your spiritual journey. Charles and Mary have an amazing knack of unsettling us both kindly and knowingly to offer resources that help us at every twist and turn. You’re safe in their hands whichever route you take through the easy and tough times. I particularly appreciated how they shared so openly from their own experience, and I would heartily recommend that you make room for this wonderful resource in your backpack.’

The Revd Dr Chris Sheehan, Pioneer Distinctive Deacon, Worcester Diocese

‘As I read *Reimagining the Landscape of Faith*, it was as if two wonderfully gifted spiritual directors were guiding me along the past, present and future of my own faith journey. This is a refreshing and profound exploration of spirituality, brilliantly combining insights from scripture, theology, psychology and, of course, cartography. I have never been particularly good at reading actual maps but as a result of reading *Reimagining*, I feel much more able to make sense of my journey towards God.’

The Revd Dr Simon Steer, Chaplain, Abingdon School, and former Principal at Redcliffe College, Gloucester and The London School of Theology

‘In my role supporting Christian colleagues to grow and develop as they work in an international charity supporting children in challenging circumstances, I can see that this book will enable those I work with to open a space for a deeper relationship with God, and a sense of working together with God in the world. *Reimagining the Landscape of Faith* will help activists and those who are engaged in social justice to recognise that their action can be even more powerful when it is grounded in deeper self-awareness.’

Kezia M’Clelland, Director for People and Organisation, Viva

‘Charles and Mary have been faithful companions on my spiritual journey for many years and I can’t wait to introduce them to others through this book! Their material hangs together well with a penetrating coherence, managing to make contributions from historical Christians and contemporaries much more accessible. In these pages they also vulnerably share their path through life and in doing so, undoubtedly equip others to find their own. Given today’s shifting and disorientating landscape of faith this is an incredibly timely book which offers fresh perspective on both ancient paths and contemporary thinking. I’m certain it will provoke courage to enable next steps in discovering the presence of God in unexpected places.’

Simon Shaw, Chair of Intercultural Churches, Derby City Vision and Jacob’s Well, Derby

‘As an African Pentecostal marrying an Anglo-French Catholic with a Dominican priest for a brother, my life – and understanding of God – has expanded far beyond the narrow boundaries I once set for myself. Much of this transformation I owe to the spiritual tools outlined in this book and the insights of its authors. Like me, you may have experienced profound loss, which fuels a deeper yearning for more. Mary and Charles guide us on this pursuit, challenging us to let go of rigid assumptions and unexamined certainty, to embrace critical reflection and humility. This book will guide you further and deeper on your spiritual pilgrimage.’

Amoge Ukaegbu, anti-trafficking and modern slavery professional

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*With love and thanks to all those who travel alongside us
on our spiritual pilgrimage – for your companionship,
which brings rich wisdom, fresh insights and so much joy.*

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Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Introduction | 9 |
| PART I IDENTIFYING YOUR MAP | |
| 1 How are you finding your way? | 16 |
| 2 Where has your map come from?..... | 31 |
| 3 Where are you starting from? | 63 |
| PART II ENLARGING YOUR MAP | |
| 4 Where are you on your journey?..... | 92 |
| 5 What happens when your map runs out? | 120 |
| 6 Where is your centre of gravity? | 150 |
| 7 How do you navigate from a new perspective?..... | 177 |
| 8 How does 'looking beyond' change how you live? | 202 |
| Epilogue..... | 232 |
| Appendix 1 Some key contributors to spiritual formation | 235 |
| Appendix 2 Sketching out your faith journey | 239 |
| Appendix 3 Spiritual practices | 240 |
| Further resources | 248 |
| Notes..... | 251 |

It is time

*Turn your gaze upon your soul, for it is time.
Look past the shadows, look between the light;
it has been waiting –*

*waiting for you to step back
from the endless undertakings,
to take your leave from the busyness of existence,
to release (let us say it) the obligations,
to realise that you are here.*

*Turn your gaze upon the world, for it is time.
Reach out to it, afraid or otherwise;
it has been waiting –*

*waiting for you to wake up,
to open your heart entirely to wonder, to beauty,
to the divine (that is, to the abundance
and generosity of reality).*

*Do not delay; let us bow to the surge of grace
that comes with each breath; let us embrace the gift
that is each singular and heaven-scented moment.*

*My friend, my good and worthy friend –
it is time.*

Gideon Heugh, from *Rumours of Light* (2021). gideonheugh.com

Introduction

How do you feel about your journey of faith? Do you feel confident, sure-footed, that you know where you're going? Or perhaps you're a little uncertain, disappointed at where the path has taken you, or even lost. Maybe it would have been handy to have had a 'faith map', so that you could have planned your course and recognised some key landmarks as you travelled.

We all carry a kind of mental map of our spiritual journey, even if you are not aware that you do. As you delve deeper into this book, our hope is that you will learn not just how to recognise that map, but also how to critically evaluate it and begin to make choices based on a much deeper understanding of yourself and the nature of your map as you continue to journey with God.

But even when we *are* aware of having a map to hand, some of us still aren't sure how to read one or even which way up it should be! In my (Charles) many years of walking in the beautiful Lake District, the hardest part always seemed to be choosing the right direction to head out of the car park.

How are you reading your map, and what kind of faith landscape does it show?

Your map probably depicts familiar landmarks by which you navigate and measure progress on your faith pilgrimage. Symbolising the fundamentals of faith – such as orthodox beliefs and doctrines; regular personal and communal times of worship, prayer and sacraments; acts of evangelism, mission or social action – we consider our landmarks or milestones as being there to keep us on the 'right path', ever pointing towards God.

But here's a question to consider: are these common landmarks the *only* ones? They may seem fundamental, creating familiar rhythms of Christian life, but is there a possibility that your map is not yet complete? If you turned to the next page of your map, might you notice landmarks you haven't seen before, or could you even reimagine some old landmarks from time to time, sparked by changes in your experience or understanding? Might there be there some benefit in looking *beyond* your familiar routes to identify some even deeper and more significant pathways?

So, how might this book help you?

This book arises out of our experience as trained spiritual directors.¹ While this is a well-established historical ministry, the art of spiritual direction may be less familiar within some Christian traditions. It's a different way of listening that helps people to notice what may lie beneath the surface of what's going on in their lives, to discern and interpret how God might be working towards their spiritual growth. We encourage people to ask themselves good questions, to take intentional notice of the landscape through which they are travelling and to pay attention to the feelings which arise. A key part of this process is to encourage the active use of their God-given imagination as they explore the roots of their beliefs and expectations, facilitating both better self-awareness and God-awareness.

We find this approach to be helpful because having had many conversations with people who are wrestling with their faith, we noticed that they tend to be strongly influenced by both recognised and unrecognised expectations for their spiritual journey. These expectations often colour our perceptions of what's happening along the way. Philip Yancey helpfully summarises some common hopes for the life of faith saying:

I want God to... overcome my doubts with certainty, give final proofs of his existence and his concern. I want quick and spectacular answers to prayers, healing for my diseases, protection, and safety for my loved ones.²

So it won't be a surprise to learn that we will be inviting you as a reader to become more conscious of your secret hopes and often hidden inner world, activate your imagination, identify your feelings and participate in asking yourself some good questions. But rather than leave all those questions until the end of each chapter, we will weave them into key ideas, inviting you to reflect on how what we're sharing applies to your own faith journey as we go.

We're also exploring how a variety of disciplines must work in co-ordination if we are to fully grasp the contours of our maps of faith, especially if we want to grow spiritually. These include theology, spirituality, psychology and epistemology (how truth is pursued and perceived). When these aspects of our faith come together, it can be hugely enriching (see Appendix 1 for further discussion of how these disciplines relate to our formation).

Realising that we are not experts in all these disciplines, we have drawn on a range of those who are, many of whom you can find referenced in the endnotes and suggested reading list at the back of the book. But our overall aim is to highlight and integrate an awareness of where our Christian beliefs have come from together with an understanding of the humanity (heart, mind, body and spirit) with which we engage those beliefs.



Overview of content

In part 1, 'Identifying your map', we will look at the map as a concept and as a useful metaphor for our journey of faith. We'll explore the cultural and Christian assumptions that have shaped the faith

landscape we perceive ourselves to be travelling through and look at how our human make-up as map-readers can affect the ways in which we perceive our journey.

Part 2, 'Enlarging your map', tackles the stages of our journey, helping us to work out where we are now. We face up to what happens when we run into rough terrain, and how consequential challenges can stimulate equally significant spiritual growth if we allow ourselves to be trained by them. All this leads to some pivotal changes of perspective as we wrestle with what it really means to put off our old self and put on the new. And we offer some practical steps towards that. We end by exploring what living from a different perspective looks like in our daily interactions with God, others and ourselves and how looking beyond this current existence towards life after our physical death can affect the perspective with which we live in the present.

You may be wondering how two authors co-write a book without there being confusion about who is 'speaking' at any given time. Perhaps unusually within a partnership like this, we have chosen to use just one voice in presenting our material, i.e. using the first person 'I'. We only default to one or the other as we tell specific personal stories or introduce friends of ours. Thus, although each chapter has been developed and written by both of us, a name appears at the head of every chapter to bring clarity as to whose voice is being used for the majority of personal reflections or stories within that chapter. If a story from the other pops up, it is so labelled in brackets – e.g. 'I (Charles)...'

You may or may not belong to a formal Christian community or always feel comfortable with how God is presented in church circles, either in gendered terms or in familial images used. You may feel there is no map which could adequately explain your past or direct you in a faith-related future. We may not even pose the questions that most frequently bother you or address them in the way you desire. But our sincere hope is that you will still be able to successfully steer a path through the landscape we have out laid out because this book is for *all* pilgrims making their way in life, all adventurers, wanderers and

wonderers, wherever they find themselves and whatever their Christian background.

Our aim is to give you space to reflect on the map you may be consciously or unconsciously using to find your way, even if there have been some unexpected twists to the journey you originally anticipated. You may even allow yourself the freedom to reimagine seminal landmarks and milestones you've perhaps taken for granted or, alternatively, found quite baffling. To that end we introduce approaches and tools to help you recognise and understand your map better – where it came from, where it's leading you and how to use it more intentionally so you can travel with greater confidence and purpose.



Part I

Identifying your map

1

How are you finding your way?

Charles

*We are all pilgrims on the same journey –
but some pilgrims have better road maps.*

NELSON DEMILLE

It's a bleak November day in Cambridge. A cold wind is blowing across the fens as my 18-year-old self jogs down the tow-path in an attempt to get fit for an upcoming rowing race. I'm a slow jogger, so there's plenty of time to think. It's been three years since I responded to an invitation to come to Christ at my local church's mission. But what's bothering me is that nothing much seems to have changed since then. Yes, I've picked up the disciplines of the Christian faith – regular church, lots of Bible study and prayer – but I don't feel I've changed. Well, not significantly anyway.

After about three miles I stop running, look back from where I've just come from and ask myself, 'How did I get here? Is this all there is?' And I'm not referring simply to the tow-path. I couldn't quite imagine what it might be, but I felt there had to be more to Christian life than what I was currently experiencing.

Twenty years later, I'm married, have two kids, a busy job... and lots of leadership responsibilities at church. As I listen to the morning sermon, it strikes me I've heard those same truths and themes expounded many times before. Or at least something similar. In fact, I've probably

spoken about them myself in different Christian contexts. I feel like I've explored these same landmarks many times.

And then I'm in my 50s, and I find myself wondering what it is I have invested my time in so far. The jigsaw pieces of life seem to have fallen apart in the last couple of years: I've stepped down from leadership roles at work and in the church; my children have left home; and we have moved to a different area. I'm not sure anymore where this journey of faith is taking me, and that same old question keeps cropping up: 'How on earth did I get here and is this all there is?'

Sometimes questions come back periodically to haunt us like that – causing us to stop and evaluate *where* we are in life, to consider what's happened to shape *who* we are, and to wonder *how* we are.

I wonder what questions you ask yourself? Or perhaps have asked God?

I'm not sure I was waiting for God to actually answer my question. Rather, I think it took that long for me to realise what that question meant and why I kept asking it. And I've since worked out that it's the sort of question God seems to delight in answering – but in God's own unique way. Every time I've asked that kind of question, unexpected experiences crop up: events or revelations that seem to shift the tectonic plates of my life. It's like God is just waiting, impatient almost, for me to realise that the picture of life in Christ I have at any given time is far too limited and doesn't allow for 'the unknown', at least what's unknown to me! And, what's more, I'd not been in the habit of stepping back to evaluate any of it.

It seems that God carries such a strong desire for us his children that he works through all the aspects of our lives to draw us closer, to help us realise who we truly are created to be. But it's not always obvious what's going on. Wouldn't it be handy if there was a map we could be following, with recommended routes that might help us to arrive at that place?

In my current work as a spiritual director, I travel alongside other pilgrims and try to help them listen to their life. We reflect on where they sense God might be in the twists and turns of their story and look for perspective and wisdom so they are better equipped to discern how these life experiences might be part of God's loving formative purposes.

I also have someone to do the same with me, to walk alongside me in my own faith journey, and I'm convinced that mentoring or spiritual accompaniment promotes a kind of self-understanding and spiritual growth which is hard to discover otherwise. Something I've observed within this sort of spiritual accompaniment is that I can often be blind to where I've got to on my own faith journey. I need the help of a wise friend to recognise when God may be carefully unfolding another page, signposting that which lies beyond my present understanding towards a far greater vista.

'Ah... I see... there's more to understand, there's always more terrain to explore than I originally thought or imagined. My life isn't necessarily what I assumed it would be and the person of God isn't either...'

Life can be like that. We become so preoccupied with *doing* life – with all its busyness, demands, stress and excitement – that we travel on for years before we realise that our vision really hasn't grown much. And when something happens that cuts across our expectations, we can find that we are just not equipped to respond well. Often our mental image of the journey is actually quite limited, though we're blissfully unaware of this, and it lacks the depth of maturity to help us with anything that falls beyond the narrow boundaries of our hidden assumptions.

It's a bit like using a satnav. We glance periodically at a small portion of our journey, just the bit we are on at the time. But, of course, we are missing the big picture. And there are so many salutary stories of people who trusted their satnav to get them to a certain destination but found themselves ending up in a place of the same name in a different county. By contrast, maps of old, real physical maps, were made to show us

the whole journey and to help us choose a route: to set out the way points, landmarks and terrain we'd expect to encounter on the way.

The connection between maps and our journey of faith was brought home to me recently when Mary and I visited an exhibition at the Bodleian Library in Oxford.³ On the surface, the exhibition simply led us through the history of maps by displaying various designs on a timeline. In reality, it turned out to be a ride through the worlds of history, philosophy and even epistemology (how truth is pursued and perceived). The aim of the exhibition was to help me as the viewer to step back and consider what a map actually represents, the fact that every map tells a story. We might only think of them as mere route-finding devices, and while they do usually get you from A to B, people have used maps throughout history to understand not just *where* they are, but *who* they are.

What I was doing on that tow-path was essentially to question the map of faith I seemed to be holding:

- Where was I on my faith map?
- Where was I hoping to get to?
- And where had this 'map' come from? How had it been formed?

In this first chapter, we'll be exploring how our understanding of physical maps and the ways in which they are created and operate can help us to reflect on and expand the faith maps we carry. But to do that, we first need to delve a little deeper into what maps really are and what they represent.



A brief excursion through the nature of maps

When you think about the concept of a map, I wonder what picture comes to mind. Is it an Ordnance Survey (OS) map you might take with you to walk the South West Coast Path? Is it your satnav app that helps you navigate when driving through unfamiliar territory? Maybe it's the Mercator projection map of the world, so familiar from your geography studies at school.

In truth, there are many types of maps and many forms of coded information which qualify as some sort of a map. We're probably all so familiar with using maps in their different forms that we may never have considered the nature of the cartography that lies behind them. So, before we go any further, it may be helpful to define what a map is, in its most general sense. According to the Bodleian exhibition:

A map is a spatial model which attempts to represent aspects of reality, within certain recognised limitations thereby recognising potential for distortions. In war and peace, on land and on seas, maps have enabled people to build empires, discover new worlds, and plan military campaigns. We use them to construct our cities and understand our place in them. They are key tools in defining the boundaries between nations and administering the states in which we live. Maps are not just instruments of scientific communication or political ideology, they are proposals about our world. Artists and writers have always understood the powerful illusion of reality that maps offer their users.⁴

From these descriptions we learn that maps, at base level, are 'storied vehicles',⁵ representing how humanity has evolved through changing eras of geography, philosophy, politics and history.

Not all maps are the same. They differ in their purpose, construction, scale, precision and level of detail. One would not expect the average

AA road map, which looks at travel from the motorist's viewpoint, to provide the same sort of detail as an OS map, which helps the hiker to navigate the contours of a Lakeland Fell. There are maps for navigating rivers or canals and tourist maps, which omit some minor roads and rivers, because their primary purpose is to highlight points of interest like castles, National Trust properties or famous gardens for the typical holiday-maker.

Ancient mariners used astronomical 'maps' (the changing position of stars in the sky and their arrangement in constellations) to navigate their way, and without access to modern computers or other instruments, some still do. But reading the stars also depends on where you are, as those in the northern and southern hemispheres see different constellations. And in fact, we're really looking at the past since by the time we see that light, it can be decades, centuries, even millennia out of date.

We understand the intrinsic differences between each of these types of maps and therefore realise in advance that the average city tourist map, for example, will be unlikely to provide enough information to help us find the nearest motorway, let alone identify all the service stations along the way.

In recent times we have also begun to extend the conventional idea of mapping to other activities, such as constructing a mind-map or spider-map to help with thinking through a set of ideas or concepts. This sort of map enables a wealth of information to be seen at a glance, establishing the relationship between ideas, events and facts. Like all maps, these kinds of exercises help the human brain to make sense of big unmanageable concepts by breaking them down into smaller parts, often so that they can be classified and categorised.

Any family tree or photo album represents this kind of map, because more than simply depicting a bunch of random snapshots of the past, they tell the story of how a family may have evolved and who they are today. And it's interesting to note that different members of the

same family may well construct entirely different versions of exactly the same material or data because their recollections and even their purpose in constructing such a map may vary enormously.

Maps are rarely what they seem on the surface.

And this leads us to ask how cartography actually works. Surely most maps are just documenting ways to get us from where we are to where we want to go, aren't they?

Well, yes, and no.

Map-makers (cartographers) tend to assemble their material to fulfil a specific brief or agenda. In other words, they fashion their material to tell a particular kind of story, often to suit their intended target audience or market. This will inform their selection, emphasis and composition of the information, eliminating less relevant data and simplifying more complex data in order to portray significant features or represent patterns of information.

This same sort of process informs how the evening news bulletin will be put together or how we self-edit the stories of our own lives when we tell them to others. But we might not realise that the common thread running through the drawing of all maps is that they too are also subject to bias and are only representations of reality, someone's unique interpretation and documentation of that reality. If we expect cartography to be a wholly objective, dispassionate and exact recording of the nature and reality of landscapes, geography and travel routes, we are misled. In fact, maps of any description are the end product of a very specific process of 'selection and emphasis'. In addition, the cartographer's own cultural, political, geometrical and even theological presuppositions will influence *how* their maps will be drawn and *why* they are map-making in the first place!

A prime example of this is the 'standard' Mercator projection world map we are used to seeing today. Great Britain is located at the centre

because in a meeting of 25 countries in 1884, it was decided that the prime meridian, ground zero for measuring latitude, should run through Greenwich in London. It's moved since then, but only by 102.5 metres to the east, when the international reference meridian was established 100 years later.⁶ Furthermore, countries closer to the north and south poles, like Greenland, look somewhat bloated relative to those at the equator because of the philosophy Mercator adopted in projecting a 3D world on to a 2D map.

If I had asked you to picture a 'map of the world' in your mind, there is a strong possibility that you would immediately imagine the Mercator projection. More recently other projections, such as that proposed by cartographer Oswald Winkel in 1921, give a more accurate representation of the relative areas, directions and distances between different countries. This illustrates how something as seemingly intractable as our idea of how the world looks can merely be the product of someone else's imagination, and so can change.



Is this all there is to faith?

Every Christian carries a map, a mental image of their journey through life, created from their Christian tradition, their cultural background and their understanding of the Bible. Many Christians will also, at some point in their life, begin to question their map – causing them to ask, ‘Is this all there is?’ and ‘How did I get here?’

Mary and Charles Hippsley help us to identify our faith map, including the unexamined assumptions that underpin it. Then, drawing on a range of sources of wisdom, including personal experience, they gently encourage us to allow God to expand our map when we find that our faith doesn’t match up with the reality of life. They aim to equip the reader to navigate their journey towards maturity by exploring new paths and landscapes of faith.



Mary Hippsley holds a Masters in Christian Spirituality from Sarum College and is a spiritual director and chaplain to a Christian charity. She has many years of experience in pastoral care. **Charles Hippsley** spent ten years as director of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity’s Work Forum. Charles is also a spiritual director and trains others in his role as a tutor for the London Centre for Spiritual Direction.

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