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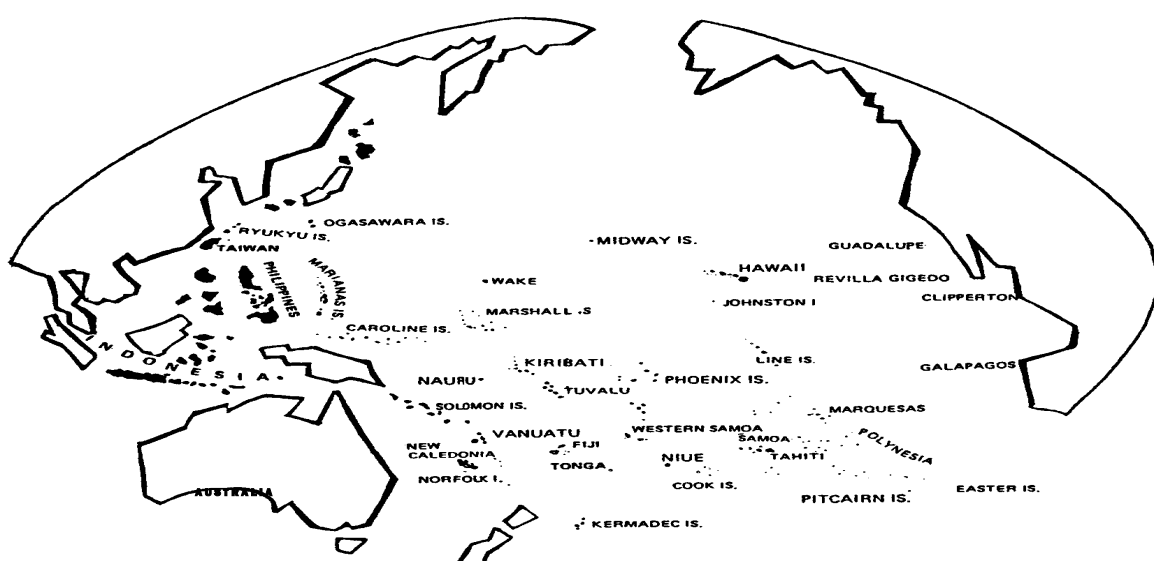
**JUNE 2019**

**Volume 13**

**Number 1**

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**AUSTRALIAN  
JOURNAL  
of  
MISSION  
STUDIES**



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# Australian Journal of Mission Studies

published by

## Australian Association for Mission Studies

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The Journal is intended as a means for the exchange of ideas and opinions. Articles published express the views of their respective authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the editorial committee, or the publisher.

### Contributions to this Journal

*This Journal publishes both Articles and Reflections*

#### Articles

It publishes scholarly Articles in missiology, normally from 2,000 to 5,000 words, if accepted after scholarly review by the Editorial Board.

#### Reflections

It also publishes Reflections and Reports of up to 2,000 words.

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- Promote the theological, biblical, historical, practical and contextual study of mission, local and global;
- Promote engagement with the cultures and people with whom Christians share and explore the gospel, including, in particular, Australian indigenous voices;
- Encourage cooperation and sharing of research and experience among individuals and institutions engaged in mission;
- Bring together, through networks, conferences and seminars, those engaged in mission studies;
- Stimulate publications in missiology, including a journal;
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Website : [www.missionstudies.org.au](http://www.missionstudies.org.au)

ISSN 1834-4682

### GST-free

#### SUBSCRIPTION—\$50 Australian per year

One annual subscription or membership equals two (2) issues of the journal per year.

**President :** Rev Dr Patrick McNerney SSC  
([patrickmcnerney@columban.com.au](mailto:patrickmcnerney@columban.com.au))

#### Correspondence regarding articles, send to

Email : [pjwoodruff@msn.com](mailto:pjwoodruff@msn.com)

**OR** Peter Woodruff  
PO Box 752  
Niddrie Vic 3042  
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#### Correspondence regarding subscriptions to

Dr Peter Wilkinson

AAMS Treasurer

Email : [pjw52@bigpond.com](mailto:pjw52@bigpond.com)

OR

Rev Dr Darrell Jackson (Secretary AAMS)

Morling College

122 Herring Road

Macquarie Park NSW 2113

AUSTRALIA

## Editorial



Peter Woodruff

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***Peter Woodruff** is a member of the Columban Mission Society and resident in Melbourne. He is a veteran of mission in Peru and presently devotes himself to writing about the work of people on mission overseas. He is the editor of the Australian Journal of Mission Studies and a member of the Association board.*

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Once born, we are nurtured, encouraged, taught and challenged to realise our potential as humans. At our baptism, we recommit to this and more in Christ. In the time of Christendom, that is now either passed or passing, our parents often made this baptismal commitment in our name. At Easter, we regularly renew this same commitment as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Living out this commitment is the core challenge in the life of a Christian. In striving to do so, the Christian is likened to the mustard seed (Matthew 13, 31-32), a likeness that a friend illustrates in a poem he wrote and read at the funeral of Heather, his sister-in-law.

### I SEE YOU NOW — for Heather

by Kevin Peoples



I do not see you lying still,  
boxed in under some high-blue Canberra sky.  
I reject that image.

I see you now  
on the landing outside your bedroom door  
in your pink pyjamas  
taking your place before the television  
drawing on your history  
barracking for the Magpies<sup>1</sup>  
joyous as they march gloriously  
into yet another Grand Final.

I see you now  
racing to your front door  
on yet another mission of mercy  
and me, as if I knew,  
trying to keep in touch for a last goodbye  
following your car onto the road  
watching you speed away  
out of my life forever.

I see you now  
the still-point of your family circle  
around which all others swing and dance,  
the invisible pole rooted deep in the earth  
that bolts and holds all things together,  
the picker-up of broken pieces  
that you take up and make whole,  
the solid rock that stands and comforts,  
the lighthouse that flashes its love for those  
who lose their way and slip and slide at water's edge  
and all this: your strength, your courage and dignity,  
your invulnerable spirit that lives and grips  
and entangles all of us in your being,  
all this you learnt on your knees.

I see you now, here now  
reaching out to those who mourn  
and celebrate your life  
embracing us not like some pale candle in the wind  
but rather sweeping us up and up  
on a Pavarotti high note  
sung to the stars  
reminding us to live as you live.

This issue of the *Australian Journal of Mission Studies* helps us delve into the beauty that is the heart of this poem:

- faith in God, who is for all, opening up a tribal (and so, restrictive) cultural practice;
- statecraft of parties attempting to tentatively feel their way towards collaborative dialogue questioning the approach of a static standoff of mutual distrust and hostility;
- faith and faith sharing, innovative leadership, along with vital and nurturing worship and a strong sense of belonging, plus other factors, enabling a Christian community to become a sign of life;
- a Church community seeking to be in solidarity with the needy in a suburb at the lower end of the economic scale;
- the joy and privilege of being called to mission, which also often requires much courage in the face of unbridled power.

Also in this issue, we have more than the usual trickle of book reviews that point us to a variety of contemporary sources of Christian wisdom ■

## END NOTE

1. *The Magpies* refers to the Collingwood football team, an iconic Australian Rules outfit that wears the black and white colours of the Australian magpie, a bird of melodious song and aggressive forage. Founded in a depressed area of Melbourne in 1892, *The Magpies* have delivered much, but promised much more. The team is famous for its ardent supporters that believe and hope so strongly that even in the face of total disaster they keep faith with their heroes. Often dubbed those of *true faith*.



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## Anthropology sheds light on the relationship between David and Jonathan

Frank Tucker




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**Frank Tucker** is an adjunct lecturer in Intercultural Studies at Tabor College and formerly also an adjunct lecturer in missiology at the Bible College of SA. He was a global missionary with the Asia Pacific Christian Mission working with the Evangelical Church of Indonesia in Irian Jaya (now Papua) from 1976-1987. His latest publication is *Centre, Edges and Beyond: Applying Missiology for the Western Church*. His interests are in applied cultural anthropology, intercultural communication of the Christian message and the application of global missiology to the Australian dominant cultural context.

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*In recent years, much debate has taken place surrounding the interpretation of 1 Samuel 20 concerning the relationship between David and Jonathan. This article adds to the debate, but unlike other contributions, it draws on an understanding of tribal cultural elements that are relatively timeless and widely applicable. These cultural elements are explored and illustrated from tribal Israel in the Old Testament. From this, conclusion are drawn about the relationship between David and Jonathan and the family dynamics that are plausible for a tribal society without the need to derive and interpretation from our contemporary modern western perspective. The study concludes that some aspects of family relationships are entirely consistent with tribal kinship obligations and in other aspects they are subversive of kinship relationships in ways that are consistent with God's sovereignty over human relationships and consistent with the values of the Kingdom of God expressed by Jesus. This has implications for the Church as the visible community of the King and its mission that crosses national, tribal, clan and family boundaries*

### Introduction

We are all prone to select or emphasise biblical texts that fit our personal biases and ignore the ones that do not fit. We are also prone to gravitate towards applying a meaning to a text from our contemporary cultural understanding. Some go so far as to regard that we cannot know what the author's intended meaning was so the only meaning that is relevant is the one we bring to the text.<sup>1</sup>

Consequently, the biblical record of the relationship between David and Jonathan has been a contentious one between proponents of LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex) relationships and those who regard that the bible does not support such relationships for God's people.<sup>2</sup> Both sides of this debate extrapolate beyond the text to draw

conclusions about meanings that are not drawn from the cultural context.

However, the intended meaning of the text should be first sought in the context of the times and culture in which the text was first written. In addition, the bible commentaries on 1 Samuel chapter 20 available to me, and papers on the relationship between David and Jonathan, have not considered the cultural context from a tribal perspective. The argument in this paper seeks to bring an understanding from *outside the box* of the contemporary western gender debate.

An anthropological perspective is used to explore aspects of tribal life concerning the relationship between David and Jonathan. It proceeds on the

assumption that an understanding of contemporary tribal cultures is relevant for understanding the tribal culture<sup>3</sup> of Israel before it transitioned to a peasant culture under various kings. In doing so this study challenges the contemporary western understandings of the text. It also examines our relational obligations by the love of God reflected in us that crosses personal, social and cultural barriers which has implications for the Church's mission.

### **Tribal cultures**

Each tribal culture is different, nevertheless, they share many common features such that generalisations can be observed. Like all cultures, they change but relatively slowly over time.<sup>4</sup> Tribal worldview assumptions about time can be described as episodic.<sup>5</sup> They are not future oriented so progress and development is not desired.

Tribal people look back to formative primal past so the people make the primal past present through ritual re-enactment (such as the Australian Aboriginal Corroboree).<sup>6</sup> Consequently, it is widely recognised that contemporary tribal cultures share much in common with the cultures portrayed in the Old Testament compared with modern western cultures. Therefore, relevant cultural characteristics of tribal cultures can shed light on the tribal culture of Israel in the Old Testament and, in particular, the relationship between David and Jonathan. It is accepted, however, that Israel had a distinctive concept of time based on Yahweh's revelation of himself and his planned future for his creation. Also Yahweh is not a tribal god, but God of all people.

### **Kinship relationships**

Kinship relationship is foundational of all tribal relationships. There is also the rare possibility of fictive kin, such as in the case of adoption. Anyone without a kin connection is most likely a stranger and enemy. These relationships are highly structured based on blood or marital bonds. Kinship regulations influence who can relate to who and the nature of social rights, obligations and responsibilities.

It is a powerful social control mechanism, a non-formal education system and the primary social support network. A tribal person should honour relatives according to the prescribed rules, and protect and provide assistance to kin-related people when needed. The solidarity of the group is such that conformity is expected and clan members are supported against any threat to the survival of the whole. Deviance from the norm that threatens the survival of the group is actively discouraged.

In Old Testament Israel we see evidence of kin obligation. Levirate marriage is an example. The

story of Ruth is about kin obligations to provide offspring and welfare for family members left destitute

Tribal solidarity contributed to the conflict between the clans of Israel and Judah. And the power of kin obligation is the most likely explanation why David could not deal justly with Joab after he had murdered Abner (2 Samuel 3: 30) in revenge for the death of his blood brother while not in a theatre of war. David had previously exacted justice regarding others who were not extended family members, but Joab was the son of David's mother's sister, a cross cousin of David. Joab also colluded with David in the death of Uriah, no doubt because of kin obligation.

### **Collective decision-making and action**

Tribal societies are collective,<sup>7</sup> to varying degrees, compared with the individualism of western societies. The worldview assumption is that the welfare and survival of the in-group is paramount over and against that of the individual. Consequently, these societies express "we" conscious, collective identity, emotional dependence, group solidarity, collaborative duties, and obligations. Personal privacy is minimal. The ordinary person does not make unilateral decisions on important issues that affect the solidarity of the group.<sup>8</sup> Anyone who takes unilateral action on issues that may have an impact on the whole community is sanctioned. The right of personal choice is limited and it is expected to be in accord with group values. Consequently, marriage partners are arranged or, at least, approved by parents and significant others.

A biblical example of group solidarity in Israel was the occasion when the tribes of Reubenites, Gadites and half tribe of Manasseh returned to the land they were given (Numbers 32:33) on the eastern side of the Jordan. They set up an altar there (Joshua 1). The tribes of Israel on the western side of the Jordan had already established an altar to worship God at Bethel (Genesis 35:7).

They understood that God could only be worshipped where the Tabernacle was located. The existence of another altar (Joshua 22) was interpreted as an act of idolatry, a rebellion against God, that threatened the existence of Israel as a whole (Numbers 32:15, Joshua 22:18). The tribes in the west of Jordan believed they had to go and defeat the others because of the threat they posed. However, before they engaged in battle they consulted and discovered that the altar was not to worship another god. It was given a different meaning—it was not to be an altar for offerings, but a witness that they will remain faithful to God (Joshua 22:28).

### **The honour and shame spectrum**

All cultures can be located on a triangular spectrum

where honour-shame,<sup>9</sup> guilt-innocence and fear-power are apices of a triangle (as shown in the diagram).<sup>10</sup> Roland Muller<sup>11</sup> states that guilt, shame and fear are not necessarily mutually exclusive characteristics of different cultures.

There are elements of each of these characteristic in all cultures, but one may dominate. It is similar to mixing three separate colours to produce a variety of blends, so too the mixing of these characteristics can result in a variety of cultures. Israel of Old Testament times can be located between an honour-shame and fear-power apices although God reminds them of guilt in the legal sense.

The dominant western culture has been mostly guilt-innocence, but has shifted more towards shame-honour in recent years. Many tribal cultures would by-locate towards the fear-power and shame-honour apices. Many Asian and Middle Eastern cultures would be located towards the shame-honour apex although fear-power is also evident.



Cultures that are predominantly guilt-innocence understand sin in legal terms. Tribal societies can be captive to fear of powers in the spirit world. For them, the primary sin is not trusting in God's power over the subordinate and dependent spirit powers. Honour-shame cultures major on relationships and community solidarity, so sin is bringing shame upon oneself, family or clan. To bring shame on a family or clan by failure to observe kin obligations is the ultimate betrayal. People will avoid causing shame. If it does happen, it is dealt with by disinheritance, estrangement, suicide or murder of the offender in some cultures.

Saul's railing against Jonathan because of his relationship with David can best be understood in terms of kin obligations and the solidarity of the group in an honour-shame society. Jonathan betrayed the traditional kin obligation (and his inheritance) by supporting David as the anointed king and so bringing shame on the Saul's family.<sup>12</sup> This way was the greatest offence a tribal person could commit. The idea that Jonathan should make a political pact with David and show loyalty, even devotion to David at the expense of his own kin, was a betrayal of his social obligations. It was an anathema akin to treason. That explains Saul's out-burst:

*'You stupid son of a whore!' he swore at him. 'Do you think I don't know that you want him to be king in your place, shaming yourself and your mother?' (1 Samuel 20:30 NLB).*

The shame that Jonathan had brought on his family of origin may have led Saul to plan on killing Jonathan—a killing to restore honour. This is still not an uncommon way of dealing with the shame brought upon an in-group in Middle Eastern societies today. In this tribal context, the loyalty between Jonathan and David was truly surprising and radical. Their commitment and loyalty was against powerful ingrained tribal traditions. Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin and David was from the tribe of Judah. Relationships between these tribes often led to conflict (see 2 Samuel 2:8ff) despite the political arrangement of David's exogamous marriage<sup>13</sup> to Saul's daughter, Michal. When David became king it took some years for the tribes of Israel to accept him as their king.

Such animosities ran deep and resurfaced in the division between the Kingdom of Judah and Israel after Solomon's death. Jonathan's recognition of David's anointing as king trumped his family and clan loyalties. "It is because he puts the Lord above king and kin Jonathan is able to put his friend before his father."<sup>14</sup>

Recognising and accepting the will of God was more important to Jonathan than his own ambition and tribal tradition. This reinforces the observation that the God of Israel is not bound by cultural mores. He often acts contrary to them. For example, he chose Isaac not Ismael, he chose Jacob not the Esau, the eldest son. He chose Joseph and David. Jesus' ancestry included three women who had been disreputable and some were not Israelites.

### Tribal expressions of affection

Romantic love (*eros*) is not a factor in marriage partner choice in traditional tribal societies. Such a notion is alien to these communities. I have known Christian husbands and wives amongst tribal people in Papua, Indonesia, who grew to love one another, but romantic love is not considered important in partner choice. Amongst the tribal people, in Papua, Indonesia, the public expression of affection is actively discouraged since it implies that something dishonourable is taking place between them. However, it is quite appropriate to express affection, in public, between people of the same gender.

In tribal societies, marriages are arranged by parents and other family members may be involved. Marriage is a communal affair not an individual one, it brings communities together since the cohesion of the tribal community was more important than individual

preferences. A choice of partner may be made for economic, productivity and inter-clan political alliances. Attractiveness and character are not primary considerations.

Associated with partner selection is the making of payments for the bride. These payments reflect the worth of the bride and the social status of her family. Bride price is significant in binding communities together, since the groom's extended family contributes to the bride price and the bride's extended family is normally a recipient of the payment.

These people will be involved in the maintenance of the relationship. Bride price is a practice that is integral to social cohesion. Suitor service is the work provided to compensate the bride's family for the loss of her economic contribution to the family of origin. Isaac (Genesis 24) provided such a service. However, like any cultural practice this can be abused, as it was by Laban in Isaac's case, to the detriment of the bride and groom.

#### **A case incident of marriage partner selection in a tribal society**

An employee of the Christian college where I worked in Irian Jaya (now Papua), Indonesia, asked me to arrange a plane flight to the highlands for his marriage to a girl from his area. I asked if he knew her. He replied that he did not, but he knew of the family.

Knowing her was clearly not a priority for him. The flight request was not granted for some time so he came to me and said not to bother about arranging a flight. I asked him what would happen regarding his potential bride, after all, she may marry someone else. That did not concern him since he considered that there were others available.

Knowing a prospective wife and developing a relationship with her before marriage was not important in that cultural context. The story recounted in the incident is not uncommon, but strange to western people today. However, we should note that our emphasis on romantic love and individual choice of partners is a fairly recent one in western history and a product of western individualism.

During the Middle Ages, western society followed a similar pattern to tribal cultures.

In the Middle Ages, marriage was primarily an economic and political union, usually arranged by the fathers of the bride and the groom and closely supervised by the clan and the neighbours. There was little privacy, nor was there much expectation for emotional fulfilment in marriage.<sup>15</sup> The transition to modern romantic love as a key factor in partner selection was a gradual one.

David and Jonathan's apparent display of kissing is still a common practice between males in the Middle East today. John Woodhouse states; "In the Old Testament the kiss was an expression of friendship, but also of veneration. Samuel had kissed Saul when he anointed him as King."<sup>16</sup> In this context Jonathan and David were what Anne of Green Gables would call "kindred spirits" or as Australians would say "they were good mates". A Jewish rabbi referred to the relationship as "soul brothers".<sup>17</sup>

In Israel, "a husband's loyalty is first to his mother, then his sisters, and finally to his wife."<sup>18</sup> The wife's primary devotion is to her sons, not her husband. Consequently, conflict between multiple wives will occur over the status of their respective sons in the family. This is evidenced in the conflict between Sarah and Hagar (Genesis 21:9-10). On this basis, we should not be surprised at David saying, at the time of Jonathan's death, that he was like a brother to him and that his love for David was more wonderful than that of a woman (2 Samuel 1:26).

They trusted each other with their lives and made a parity covenant<sup>19</sup> with one another, which had the effect of establishing a kinship relationship<sup>20</sup> that anthropologists term *fictive kinship*, such as that between adopted family members. Jonathan speaks:

*'May the Lord be with you as he has been with my father. But show me unfailing kindness like the Lord's kindness as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family not even when the Lord has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth.'* So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, 'May the Lord call David's enemies to account' (2 Samuel 20:13b-16).

Jonathan recognised God's hand of blessing and anointing of David. He would forgo any claim to the throne because he recognised David as God's anointed king and he did not want to oppose God for the sake of family ties. His understanding of God's purpose for David subverted any family and clan loyalties. The giving of his royal garments to David is best seen as symbolic of Jonathan's surrender of his claim to the throne. The covenant between them served a political purpose, but it was also a self-giving, self-sacrificing one. This was the same faith in God's purpose as for Joseph when he said to his brothers: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good" (Genesis 50:20).

The text states: "Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself" (1 Samuel 20:17). When Jonathan spoke of his love for David it was in the same terms that Jesus used when he said: "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Mark 12:3). This love has its origin in God.<sup>21</sup>



The evidence in the text suggests that David and Jonathan recognise that their relationship with God, and so with one another, transcends traditional family and clan relationships, and anticipates Jesus' words to his disciple: "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me." 22

## Conclusion

David and Jonathan were people of their times and culture, not ours, so we should seek to understand them primarily in that context. However, they were not bound by their culture in a deterministic way. At times they acted contrary to the culture mores, just as Jesus did (see Matthew 9:10-17; Mark 2:15-22; Luke 6:1, Mark 3:1-6), in response to their devotion to God and what they spiritually discerned God was doing amongst them.

Here is a powerful lesson for us to subordinate our family, clan, tribal, ethnic and national loyalties, as well as our obligations for a unity in the family of God that transcends these relationships. Our compassion for people in need, our advocacy for them and humanitarian service is not to be selective or discriminatory based on family ties, gender, political persuasion or religious affiliation.

The redemptive message of God expressed in terms of the Kingdom of God is expressed in cultural terms, but God is not bound by any culture and may act contrary to cultural tradition. His kingdom is culturally inclusive, nevertheless, the Kingdom of God subverts cultural practices that may work against God's redemptive mission. God works with human cultures, but he is not bound by them and may act contrary to them ■

## END NOTES

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3. CROSS, Frank, *From Epic to Canon: History of Literature in Ancient Israel*, (Baltimore, NJ: John Hopkins University, 1993), p3
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5. TUCKER, Frank, *Intercultural Communication for Christian Ministry*, (Adelaide, SA: Frank Tucker, 2013), p165
6. BERNT, Ronald M and BERNT, Catherine H, *The First Australians*, (Sydney, NSW: Ure Smith, 1967), pp96-103. See also TUCKER, Frank, *Aboriginal Religion, Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* edited by Scott Moreau, Harold Netland and Charles van Engen, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), pp27-28; EDWARDS, William H, *An Introduction to Aboriginal Society*, (Wentworth Falls, NSW: Social Science, 1993), p65-76
7. HOFSTEDE, Geert, *The 6-D Model of National Culture*, <https://geerthofstede.com/culture-geert-hofstede-gert-jan-hofstede/6d-model-of-national-culture/>
8. See also KIM, Uichol, TRIANDIS, Harry C, KÂĞITÇIBAŞI, Çiğdem, CHOI, Sang-Chin, and YOON, Gene (eds.), *Individualism and collectivism: Theory: Method and Applications*, *Cross-Cultural Research and Methodology Series*, Vol. 18, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994); TRIANDIS, Harry C, *Individualism and Collectivism*, (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1995). HOFSTEDE, Geert, *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations*, 2d ed, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001); TROMPENAARS, Fons and HAMPDEN-TURNER, Charles, *The Seven Dimensions of Culture: Understanding and Managing Cultural Differences*, <https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newlmd/1194.html>
9. Western Christians have understood this as an expression of familial love and an example to individualists; however, the driving motivation for many is not free expression of familial love but obligation or duty which if ignored may result in serious consequences
10. LIENHARD, Ruth, A "Good Conscience": Differences between Honor and Justice Orientations, in *Missiology: An International Review* Vol 29, 2001, pp131-135
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14. Normally marriages in Israel were endogamous to keep the extended family inheritance within the family but this is restricted by incest rules
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20. ALCORN, *The Covenant*, p29
21. Ibid, 23
22. Ibid, 52

## Historic agreement between Beijing and the Vatican

*Reflections from the point of view of a journalist in Hong Kong*



Jim Mulroney

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**Jim Mulroney** belongs to the Columban Missionary Society and worked for 16 years in Hong Kong as the editor of the Catholic English-language newspaper, the Sunday Examiner<sup>1</sup>, reporting regularly on the Church in China and relations between the government of the People's Republic and the Vatican. He now lives at the Society's home in Melbourne.

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*On September 22 last year an historic agreement was signed between the Vatican and Beijing, the contents of which have remained a tightly kept secret, other than a vague outline of measures to ensure that no further ordinations of bishops would take place without the authority of the pope, something which the Catholic Church has always safeguarded so as to ensure the apostolic succession of its teaching authority. Although its secrecy has created problems on the ground, the Vatican believes that it can help create conditions of greater religious freedom in the future, which can also help heal the divide within the Church in China. The material contained in this document is largely compiled from interviews over the years with bishops and priests from the mainland and Hong Kong, as well as other journalists, Vatican officials, diplomats and scholars. The bulk of this material has been published in the Sunday Examiner*

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### Note on terminology

I use *unofficial* (sometimes referred to as underground) to designate Church communities not registered with the government, as distinct from *official* for those which are, and often, in an incorrect and undescriptive manner, referred to as the Patriotic Church

Agreements between states seldom reflect new ways, but rather a formalisation of practices that have been developing informally over time and proven to be beneficial to both parties.

On September 22 last year, a joint press release from the Vatican and Beijing revealed that the head of the Vatican delegation for discussions with Beijing, the

undersecretary of the Office for Relations with States, Monsignor Antoine Camilleri, had signed a Provisional Agreement on the Appointment of Bishops with the deputy minister for Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, Wang Chao, at the office of the ministry in Beijing.

The press release tells us little else, but it does clarify

that the agreement is provisional and will be subject to periodic review. This is cited as the reason why the full text of the document was not released, leaving the way open for a proliferation of official and unofficial leaks and the long standing guessing game to continue to thrive.

As a journalist who has written on China-Vatican relations for the past 16 years, the cynical side of me says that in the current climate of renewed restriction on the practice of religion in China, no other than a flag carrying party man will ever pass muster as a bishop, putting a bright-red, indelible stamp on the Church.

However, my shadow tells me that there is sincerity on the Chinese side and to approach the matter from any other point of view would be simply churlish. China wanted this agreement and put pressure on the Vatican to sign.

## Two questions

There are two questions that need to be addressed. First, what is in it for the Vatican? Second, what is in it for China?

The appointment of bishops in China has been a sticking point for the Vatican for decades. China adopted a self-select, self-appoint and self-ordain policy for bishops without reference to the Holy See in the 1950s, something that the Vatican could never accept. While it has always pulled back from labelling the Church as being in schism, it has constantly worried that a proliferation of illicitly ordained bishops could promote one.

However, in the last decade or so, we have seen tacit agreements between the Vatican and Beijing not to ordain without papal approval. This was ruptured when a series of events judged by Beijing as Vatican interference in China's internal affairs, beginning with Pope Benedict XVI penning his 2007 letter to the Catholic people of China, occurred.

Although Beijing displeasure over the letter was muted at the time, what were judged further indiscretions eventually prompted the government to respond with four illicit episcopal ordinations and the blocking of one Vatican-approved candidate between 2010 and 2012.

This is one scenario and cannot be ignored, but another tells of a different story.

In the middle of this rash of illicit ordinations, Father Shen Guo'an was slated by the government to be ordained on 28 May 2011 as the bishop of Wuhan, an area made up of three cities; Hankou, Wuchang and Hanyang. They are situated at the confluence of the

Yangtze and Han Rivers and used to be three separate dioceses, which the government has since amalgamated into one.

It is a significant place in terms of the history of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association—a quasi-government organisation responsible for managing local Church affairs—as Hankou was the diocese of Bishop Bernadine Dong Guangqing, the very first to be ordained without papal approval back in 1958.

The bishop's chair had been vacant since his death in 2007 and the government wanted to ordain a new bishop in 2008 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the first self-select and self-elect ordination. However, both clergy and people vehemently resisted and nothing happened.

The matter went to the back burner while China celebrated the Olympic Games, the Shanghai Expo and the 60th anniversary of the foundation of the People's Republic. Three years later, claiming further irritations, the government renewed its push, this time backing Father Shen.

He was the administrator of the diocese and well liked, but there were serious reservations about him being the bishop and rumours of a gambling habit emerged. While not an uncommon thing in China, he was believed to be a major scale punter.

The ordination date was set, but in the face of local opposition, passed quietly. Dates were then proposed for early June. The first passed. But the government push did not cease and one local priest estimated that 36 million yuan (US\$6 million) had been spent paying off people in the right places, in addition to renovating the Hankou cathedral and seminary, as well as the stately church in Wuchang, in order to promote Father Shen's cause.

The priest added that people in villages had been prepaid to pressure them to attend the ordination and there were rumours that stipends for sisters and priests would go up by 30 percent.

However, during this time Father Shen himself maintained he did not want ordination without the Vatican nod and local priests said that although he had not done much to blot his copybook, he had done even less to commend himself, other than presenting as a safe candidate for the government.

Finally, Father Shen had a letter carried to the pope, saying that he did not want to be ordained without a mandate from the Vatican. A visit by Vatican officials to the Chinese embassy in Rome followed and, in the ensuing negotiations with Beijing, in which the ambassador said there was no desire to ordain him against his will, the matter was put to rest.

This may not have been a regular procedure, but it was not an isolated one either and the fact that it happened quickly means it certainly was not the first time.

I use this example because I know about it and it illustrates that despite the absence of formal, diplomatic relations, communication channels between the two states have not been non-existent.

In this context, the new agreement, which may be better described as a memorandum of understanding, is formalising what has been a growing practice rather than introducing anything new, while also giving a respectful nod to mutual wisdom.

In clarifying remarks, the director of the Pu Shi Institute for Social Science in Beijing, Liu Peng, suggests that the current practice of electing bishop candidates by diocesan panels made up of representatives of the priests, sisters and lay people, will continue, but from now on, the emerging name or names will also be formally sent to the Vatican for the pope's consideration.

While Pope Francis did comment during an in-flight press conference that he would have opportunity of suggestion, Liu seems to propose otherwise.

However, he would presumably have the opportunity of veto, which if exercised, the expert in the relationship between religion and the rule of law in China suggests would become the subject of discussion and may even go back to the drawing boards. Nevertheless, we do not have access to the full text of the agreement, so do not know the exact procedure, let alone what may happen informally.

### **Opposition to the agreement**

But this is a particular point where opponents of the agreement come to life. The chief protagonist of opposition, the retired bishop of Hong Kong, Joseph Cardinal Zen Ze-kiun, parodied the arrangement as the pope on his knees before the president, Xi Jinping, begging recognition of his existence.

The voice of Cardinal Zen is one to be listened to with respect. As a son of Shanghai, he has an in-depth understanding of mainland ways and wiles, and knows that the well-established practice of diocesan elections can be a complete sham and generally does not have a great track record.

Delegates to these panels are carefully chosen and those feared not to vote the right way have found road works blocking their access to the polls, been suddenly delayed at home or called to the local police station for the euphemistic cup of tea (a visit that may last hours, days, weeks or months) for a chat.



***Cardinal Zen (right) lighting a candle with Martin Lee Chu-ming, a former member of the Legislative Council known as a champion of democracy, at an outdoor service commemorating those who died in the Tiananmen Square Massacre of 1989.***

Although the process may seem to be highly democratic and even Vatican II-ish, democracy, as understood in the west, is not a developed concept in China and elections are mostly viewed as just one of several ways to manoeuvre preferred candidates into position.

In this context, it must be remembered that Cardinal Zen has seen agreements over the special administrative region of Hong Kong gradually chipped away by Beijing, with the promised freedom of religion and speech significantly hosed down, as well as democratic elections all but abandoned.

Catholics in China too have grown up under a Communist regime and because of their lifetime experience, the orthodoxy of their judgement should not be taken for granted.

People in Guangdong once commented that a bishop from the unofficial community with a Vatican mandate, but not the approval of the government, could not possibly be legitimate, because there had been no diocesan election process prior to his ordination.

This exposes an ignorance of Church Law, while at the same time reflecting the only system they have ever known.

### **A new geo-politic**

But in what the Italian journalist and professor at Renmin University in Beijing, Francisco Sisci, described as a bold move dawning a new geo-politic, Pope Francis sent a greeting to the president and people of China for the Lunar New Year in 2016.

Published by the Hong Kong-based Internet news portal, *Asia Times*, on 2 February 2016, Pope Francis said, "... I wish to convey my best wishes and greetings to President Xi Jinping and to all the Chinese people. And I wish to express my hope that they never lose their historical awareness of being a great people, with a great history of wisdom, and that they have much to offer the world."

Although not immediately, Beijing did acknowledge the papal greeting in a low key yet positive manner, as it was left with the problem of how to handle it and furthermore, if it was considering signing any sort of agreement with the foreign head of a religion, there had to be something in it for China.

Sisci speculates that while the fostering of a harmonious society may be part of the Beijing motivation, he also believes that China has developed a covetous attitude towards Vatican international soft power.

On 15 March 2016, he told a lunchtime gathering at the Foreign Correspondents Club in Hong Kong that China is the biggest challenge facing the west since the fall of Rome, but at the same time, the Middle Kingdom struggles to operate effectively in a world that does not really understand it.

Sisci added that the easiest path to progress is probably an escalation of tension, but China does not see this as its way to achieve worldwide influence and sniffs an ally in Pope Francis, as he does not either.

In 2015, Pope Francis and the president of China found themselves in the United States of America (US) at the same time. Sisci related how the Chinese delegation was stunned at how the pope completely wiped their man off the media map and shut him out of the headlines for the entirety of his visit.



**Francesco Sisci at the Foreign Correspondents Club in Hong Kong.**

He described this as soft power and suggested it is the type of influence that China craves. He added that it also sees Pope Francis as a better bet than his predecessors, as he does not have any record of avid anti-Communism and his role in brokering agreements between the US and Cuba, as well as with Russia over the Ukraine, are well recognised.

Pope Francis and Xi came to office on the same date and from day one made overtures of friendship towards each other. Pope Francis sent Xi a congratulatory telegram and Xi spared the pontiff the highly critical articles that other popes have been the butt of in Chinese media.

On the contrary, the current incumbent of the Chair of St Peter has enjoyed a series of tabloid-style presentations with little content and big pictures.

While Sisci commented that China is interested in relations with the Vatican, he said it has been in no hurry to form them and, although enthusiastic articles prophesising an imminent signing of an agreement between the two dotted world media for almost one year, I was always sceptical and counselled foreign correspondents who asked to be so too.

My hunch was on the money, but September last year was different, as the signing was preceded by a series of positive articles in the *Global Times*, a tabloid newspaper published in English by the *People's Daily* to fly kites among the international community to monitor reaction.

One spoke of the Vatican as an historical continuity of thousands of years of western civilisation and the Chinese government as the continuity of three millennia of history.

"This deal signals that, for the first time, these two civilisations are meeting as equals, in peace, without the hatred of war or the petty calculations of trade," the tabloid editorialised.

### **Problem areas**

Nevertheless, many problematic areas remain. Pope Francis has removed one by pardoning the seven bishops who did not have papal approval and not been reconciled with the Holy See.

While it is a type of solution often employed by dictatorial regimes to solve dilemmas without expunging guilt, it may bring a solution on one level, but create problems on another, as some are unpopular with both the priests and the people of their dioceses, and the Vatican has swallowed a lot of past rhetoric without even a glass of water to wash it down.

Cardinal Zen points to long-standing contradictions in

the Vatican outreach to China, even citing mistranslations in the letter Pope Benedict wrote to the Catholic people of China in 2007.

A significant one relates to the pardoning of the illegitimately ordained bishops. In his recently published, *For love of my people I will not remain silent*,<sup>2</sup> Cardinal Zen points to a paragraph in the original text of the letter that says, "Some, in special situations, under pressure, have accepted to be illegitimately ordained."

But the Chinese translation has a different emphasis, "Some, caring for the good of the faithful and looking far into the future, have accepted to be illegitimately ordained." Words the cardinal describes as adjusting the impact for Chinese ears and eyes.

The cardinal interprets the ambiguity as inferring that those who refuse illegitimate ordination "do not care about the good of the faithful."<sup>3</sup>

A second basic contradiction that he refers to involves Pope Benedict's condemnation of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association in his 2007 letter. The former bishop of Hong Kong points out that despite this, those illegitimately ordained that had been pardoned and made legitimate are being allowed to hold onto their positions in the association.

While this may be good diplomacy, Cardinal Zen describes it as a source of real confusion for the faithful of China and directly contrary to Pope Benedict's instructions.<sup>4</sup>

### **A 70-year first**

In addition, a small detail that has escaped much attention is that for the first time since 1949, China has allowed the Vatican to redraw diocesan boundaries. Significantly, it is in Chengde, where Bishop Joseph Guo Jincai, ordained illicitly on 20 November 2010, reigns over a diocese created by the Chinese government.

The government has set it up as a model, with the building of an US\$11 million complex in an area where most Catholics are poor farmers. Bishops considered somewhat recalcitrant have been taken there as part of their re-education programmes to see what government cooperation can do for their dioceses. Bishop Guo has also undergone a lightning fast rehabilitation process—progressing from deemed under excommunication to father at the synod of bishops in Rome in October last year—all within the space of a few weeks.

### **Problem bishops remain**

Other problem areas lie with the bishops that are in

communion with the pope, but not recognised by Beijing. They pose a sticky problem as some have vexed both Beijing and the Vatican, and recognition is a party that the government is not anxious to come to.

They are also not members of the Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China and the conference itself, long regarded as a rubber stamp for government policy, is not recognised by the Vatican either.

In a vein similar to the Vatican, China has also shown itself not to be entirely closed off to what it regards as the religiously recalcitrant, with *AsiaNews*<sup>5</sup> reporting that on September 30 last year the newly rehabilitated, formerly government-unregistered Bishop Joseph Han Zhihai, from Lanzhou, received a meteoric rise to the prestigious post of president of the local branch of the Patriotic Association.

However, this did not come entirely out of the blue, as Bishop Han has a long history of seeking government recognition. An article posted on *AsiaNews* on 11 October 2017 says that during a meeting in Belgium in 2003, he called for an end to the useless division in the Catholic Church in China. *AsiaNews* adds that there were rumours around in 2010 that the government was ready to give him recognition.

However, the *same post* quotes others as telling a different story. They say that Bishop Han was told that he needed to prove his stripes and was refused recognition at the time, so since then, he has stayed away from his brothers and sisters in the unofficial communities and allowed his two vicars general to join the Patriotic Association, an unusual move for an unofficial bishop.

### **Pastoral or political agreement?**

In his comments at the time of the signing of the agreement, the Vatican secretary of state, Pietro Cardinal Parolin, described the objective as a pastoral one.

Cardinal Parolin said, "The Holy See intends just to create the condition, or help create the condition, of a greater freedom, autonomy and organisation" for the Church in China.

But *AsiaNews* quoted Yan Daming, from the United Front Work Department, as saying in announcing the appointment of Bishop Han on September 30 last year that the bishop would adhere to the principles of an independent and autonomous Church in China.

However, his context was not that of Cardinal Parolin. Rather he was referring to a Church that would spurn the authority of the Holy See and operate totally under its own, or more specifically government, authority.



This was reemphasised by the deputy minister of the United Front Work Department, Wang Zuoan, in the March 26 issue of the state-published newspaper, *Zhongguo Minz-Bao*, reiterating the Communist Party stance against foreign influence on religions in China, especially in the area of the appointment of bishops.

### A previously hidden face from Beijing

The agreement has occupied miles of column inches in the media and the general feeling among foreign correspondents in Hong Kong is that as probably the only agreement Beijing has signed with another state that is not competitive or oppositional, it may give real insight into an up until now hidden face of the dragon in Beijing.

But the question is, which hidden visage may reveal itself.

### Scope of the agreement

The scope and limits of the agreement are now being tested. The scope may be revealed with the launching of a process to select candidates in Inner Mongolia and Shaanxi for two new bishops, which according to the new agreement, are to be vetted by Pope Francis.

Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post*<sup>6</sup> reported on March 29 that the diocese of Wumeng—traditionally known as Jining—in Inner Mongolia, had begun such a process. On April 12, *UCAN*<sup>7</sup> reported that the initial election had already been held along with one in Hanzhong, Shaanxi province, but the Vatican said it had not received any official notification of the matter up to that date.

Both elections were conducted under tight supervision, with security officials guarding the venues where they were held. In Hanzhong, priests were ferried to the venue under security, although two were blocked from taking part, and delegates at both elections were told there would only be one candidate and they must vote for him.

Local Catholics reported that both candidates were the preferred choice of the pope, which they described as very the practice that has been building over recent years that has now been ratified in the agreement between Beijing and the Vatican.

It is significant that the venue for the voting in both places was a hotel, not the customary diocesan headquarters, a strong symbol that Beijing regards it as political ceremony and expects a bishop's allegiance to primarily be to the state and the Communist Party, and only secondarily to the Church.

Nevertheless, a priest from Mongolia was quoted by the *South China Morning Post* on April 16 as

describing the events as a gift from Beijing, as the only nominated candidates had been approved by the Vatican some six years ago. However, an official announcement has yet to be made and no ordination dates promulgated, so the final result is not yet official.

This can be a lengthy and rather drawn out process, as the results still have to be scrutinised locally by the Patriotic Association and the United Work Front Department<sup>8</sup>, before going to the national level of these bodies, as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and finally the Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China (which is not recognised by the Vatican).

### Limitations of the agreement

On the other hand, the agreement's limitations are already becoming evident, as the detaining of bishops and priests from the unofficial communities continues—and in a much more overt and physically rough manner—most recently with Bishop Vincenzo Guo Xijin, who had been appointed by the Vatican ahead of the government-recognised Bishop Zhan Silu (who had been ordained illicitly and only recently pardoned by the Vatican) as the bishop for both the official and unofficial communities in Mindong diocese.

Although Bishop Guo was willingly received by people from both communities, the government refused to recognise him as the bishop and he has spent much of his time since his appointment under detention; either at re-education courses, on official sightseeing tours, in hospital or whereabouts unknown.

Since that time he has mostly been missing from the diocese and although his parishioners were told that he would not be allowed back to celebrate Easter, he did concelebrate the Chrism Mass (Mass with the priests on the morning of Holy Thursday at which the oils for use in the sacraments of baptism, holy orders, confirmation and the anointing of the sick are blessed) with Bishop Zhan.

At the time of the agreement between the Vatican and Beijing, Bishop Guo was asked by the pope to stand down as the bishop—despite over 80,000 of the 90,000 Catholics in the diocese patronising the unofficial community churches—in favour of the newly rehabilitated Bishop Zhan. Bishop Guo did this, but the government refuses to recognise him in his new Vatican appointment as auxiliary bishop unless he joins the Patriotic Association, which is not even required under Chinese Religious Law, but he steadfastly continues to refuse to do so.

*AsiaNews* reported in early April that 200,000 yuan (US\$45,000) is being offered to priests of the unofficial communities to register with the Patriotic Association,

about what used to be the going rate offered by the now defunct State Administration for Religious Affairs for submitting to ordination by an illicitly ordained bishop.<sup>9</sup>

It is also regarded as illegal for a bishop ordained other than in a government-sponsored ceremony to reveal his identity to the people and, although mostly a blind eye is turned, Bishop Agostino Cui Tai, from Xuanhua in Hebei province, has been reported by *AsiaNews* as having been taken away from his unofficial diocese on the accusation of revealing his identity to his people.

It is these unofficial Catholic communities that have been of greatest concern for Cardinal Zen. Back in the 1950s, the government placed great pressure on priests to register with the newly created Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and submit to its authority.

While some agreed, many refused and continued to practice the faith and carry out their ministry in a clandestine or underground manner. This signalled the beginnings of a long-standing split in the Catholic Church into official and unofficial communities, or those that choose to register with the government (Patriotic Association) and those that do not.

Both the official and unofficial communities have suffered greatly over the decades; the official communities have fought to put a public face on the Church and the unofficial communities have been involved in a long and bitter struggle for freedom.

### One Catholic Church in China

While the distinction between the official and unofficial communities is real, it also has blurred edges, as efforts over the years to reconcile differences have seen much cooperation between the two in some places. Nevertheless, this experience is not universal, but it is not correct to refer to two Churches in China, as both sides of the split are recognised as having legitimate apostolic succession in their authority and also recognise the primacy of the pope.

But it is the unofficial communities that have been among Cardinal Zen's major concerns. He has called the agreement a betrayal of their conscience. He told a gathering in Hong Kong on March 15 this year that many priests have spent much of their lives in prison "because of the perseverance of their conscience," and that the agreement does not recognise their valour and endurance.

*UCAN* quoted Chan Shun-hing, from the Department of Religion and Philosophy at the Baptist University of Hong Kong, as saying at the same gathering that recognition of the value of resistance has been

valuable in the unofficial communities' struggle for freedom.

He added that his research shows that many of its members are refusing to join the official communities and there are trends that show that they may eventually disappear or even split, forming various factions according to the degree of support for or rejection of what they think is contained in the Vatican-Beijing agreement.

Candy Chan, from *Radio Television Hong Kong*, added that in the making of a documentary she discovered the agreement has weakened Vatican authority across the board in China and many are at a loss as to how to react.

It has also been reported that officials from the Patriotic Association have been visiting the unofficial communities and telling them they have to register with the association, because in the agreement between the Vatican and Beijing, Pope Francis is telling them to.

It is because no details of the agreement have been published that people are at a loss, with one priest even calling the secrecy disrespectful and in early April, Steve Bannon, a former strategist for US president Donald Trump, telling the French Catholic daily, *Crux*, that he may lead a lawsuit to compel the Vatican to release the text of the deal under the terms of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.



by Ada Mok — Hong Kong



## Life at the coalface

Meanwhile, those who live their faith under the sign of the hammer and sickle are still subject to the ever-tightening regulations monitoring the practice of religion imposed by the Chinese government on February 1 last year.

So while some may interpret the signing of the agreement as a breakthrough in religious freedom, it is important to note that the Vatican chose its Office for Relations with States to sign the agreement and China the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, not the United Work Front Department, which monitors the Patriotic Association and the on the ground, day-to-day activities of the Church.

In addition, *AsiaNews* claims in a 17 October 2018 report that the United Work Front and the Patriotic Association actively campaigned against the signing of any agreement with the Vatican.

The gap in attitude between the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the United Work Front was illustrated at a gathering organised by the Front in Wuhan from October 8 to 11 last year.

Xiong Huaqi, from the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee, was reported by *UCAN* as telling a gathering of Catholic representatives that despite promising otherwise, the Vatican had absolutely no intention of giving up its meddling in China's internal affairs, but would simply be more surreptitious about it.

The ambition of the United Work Front seems to be to create a tension to encourage Beijing to significantly revise or drop the agreement altogether, but the relationship among these government departments is far from simple and their agendas bear little relation to each other.

The radically differing attitudes of the United Work Front and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs illustrates clearly that China is not a homogeneous reality and what one department sees as advantageous for relations with other states is not necessarily what another sees as good for domestic policy.

While foreign affairs can be flexible, domestic organisations are always aware that all activity in the country must occur under the thumb of the Communist Party.

Both Beijing and the Vatican want to see an end to the unofficial communities, but not for the same reason and not in the same way. The Vatican is seeking reconciliation, but Cardinal Zen complains that lack of clear distinction on its behalf between reconciliation and unification creates problems on the ground.

On the other hand, the intentions of the United Work Front to unify rather than reconcile are much clearer, as are the methods it employs in achieving it.

While future hypotheticals both for and against the agreement abound, the coalface is currently a difficult place to be and while the high profile bishops from the Patriotic Association sing the praises of the agreement, those on the outside suggest the best thing about it is that it will be reviewed.

However, Beijing wanted this deal and had been pressuring the Vatican to come to the table with veiled threats of once again pulling its trump card from the pack and orchestrating another illicit ordination.

It was the Ministry for Foreign Affairs that signed the agreement, so that is the visage we should scrutinise for a hitherto unseen face of the dragon in Beijing, and not search among the machinations of organisations on the ground, like the United Work Front or the Patriotic Association.

In diplomatic terms, Beijing has signed an agreement with the Vatican, not with the local Church in China, and whether the extent of the pope's pre-eminence among his brother bishops stretches beyond their appointment is specified in the agreement or not, we do not know.

The Vatican is in a complex relationship with a state where good will and betrayal can sit quite comfortably in the same chair. But, not everything is about government agencies.

Psalm 20 tells us that some put their trust in horses and some in chariots, but Pope Francis seems to be putting his trust in the *sense of faith* (*sensus fidei*) of the Chinese Catholic people, so maybe the smart money should go on them, as they constitute a resilient group and have proven their fidelity and ingenuity many times over.

As one priest puts it, "The government may have the rules, but we have the way!"

May God bless China ■



## END NOTES

1. The *Sunday Examiner* is published weekly by the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong. It reports on a variety of topics from a religious and Church perspective
2. *For the sake of my people I will not remain silent: On the situation of the Church in China*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2019. Translated from Chinese by Pierre G Rossi (Macau)
3. Ibid. p37
4. *Letter of Pope Benedict XVI to the Catholic people of China*, 2007, No 7, End Note 36
5. *AsiaNews* is an online news service based in Rome and sponsored by the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (often referred to as the Milan Mission Society). It is a worldwide organisation and has contributors from many corners of Africa, Asia and other areas. It is published in English and Italian on [asianews.it](http://asianews.it).
6. The United Front Work Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China is an agency of the Communist Party of China that manages relations with various important and influential elite individuals and organisations inside and outside China. These are people and entities are outside the Party proper, but hold social, commercial or academic influence, or represent interest groups. It seeks to ensure that these groups are supportive of and useful to Communist Party and reports directly to the Party Central Committee
7. The *South China Morning Post* is the major English-language daily newspaper published in Hong Kong.
8. UCAN (Union of Catholic Asian News) is an independent online news agency based in Bangkok, but with contributors from across Asia and an office in Hong Kong that gathers, edits and reports on Church, political and civic news from Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan and China. It publishes in English, but also has a Chinese-language service at [ucanews.com](http://ucanews.com).
9. SARA (State Administration of Religious Affairs) was a functioning department under the State Council which oversaw religious affairs for the People's Republic of China. Originally created in 1951 as the Religious Affairs Bureau, it was closely connected with the United Front Work Department and charged with overseeing the operations of China's five officially sanctioned religious organisations: the Buddhist Association of China, the Chinese Taoist Association, the Islamic Association of China, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (Protestant) and the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association. Dissolved in 2018, all religious affairs were placed directly under the United Front Work Department.

## BOOK REVIEW

*continued from page 51*

## TO FULFIL, NOT TO DESTROY

A major part of the book is devoted to the ideas of two very different Hindu converts. First, Krishna Mohan Banerjea (1813 to 1885), who was Brahmin by birth and became an Anglican priest and then a professor at Bishop's College, Calcutta. Banerjea believed that Hindu converts could pledge allegiance to Christ while remaining loyal to their ancestral culture.

Second, Sadu Sundar Singh (1889 to 1929), who was a Sikh who became an itinerant Christian evangelist and preacher. The outstanding characteristic of Singh's theology was that is grounded in personal experience and emphasised the mystical and personal relationship Christians can have with God—"the mystical quest for union with the divine" (p46).

Singh is famous for saying: *Christianity is the fulfilment of Hinduism. Hinduism has been digging channels. Christ is the water to flow through these channels* (p47) and *Indians greatly need the Water of Life but they do not want it in European vessels* (p51). Singh also took the revelation of God in nature very seriously.

Given the multi-cultural world in which we now live, this book is food for thought. Although it is set in an Indian context, it has much to tell us about our relationships with people of other faiths in Australia and our approach to Aboriginal spirituality. As the author says in his conclusion:

*This study... explores the relationship between Christian truths and the evidence in non-Christian religious tradition of the universal revealing and redemptive action of God towards all human kind.*

Food for much thought!

The book is clearly written and would appeal to anyone interested in the interface between Christianity and other faiths. It includes a handy Glossary of Hindu religious terms and a short Further Reading list.

Ivan Satyavrata's unedited thesis is available from Regnum Books International and contains an extensive bibliography ■



## Positive complexity in building a capacity for faith-sharing

Ian Robinson




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**Ian Robinson** is an Alan Walker Lecturer in Mission Evangelism and Leadership, United Theological College and Charles Sturt University.

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*Mainline denominations have made many and long attempts to arrest their half-century of decline. Following a systems approach, this paper begins by introducing National Church Life Survey research on the nine core qualities of vital congregations. It then evaluates their relative weight of influence over that vitality. Highlighting the exceptional influence that is seen to come from growing capacity for faith-sharing, the complexity of that task is demonstrated. Theoretically, this means a positive complexity is possible. Thirdly, a few examples will demonstrate how this same complexity can enable a positive inter-operability of the Core Qualities*

### Introduction

If you are discouraged about evangelism, this paper offers some rich perspective. Mainline denominations have made a many decades-long goal to arrest their decline. No longer a privileged religion, no longer Christendom, many departments with

they have witnessed the passing of charismatic/Pentecostal revivals, decades of evangelism, purpose-driven lives, the temporary growth of migrant churches, many models of congregational mission-planning, Church growth surveys and studies,

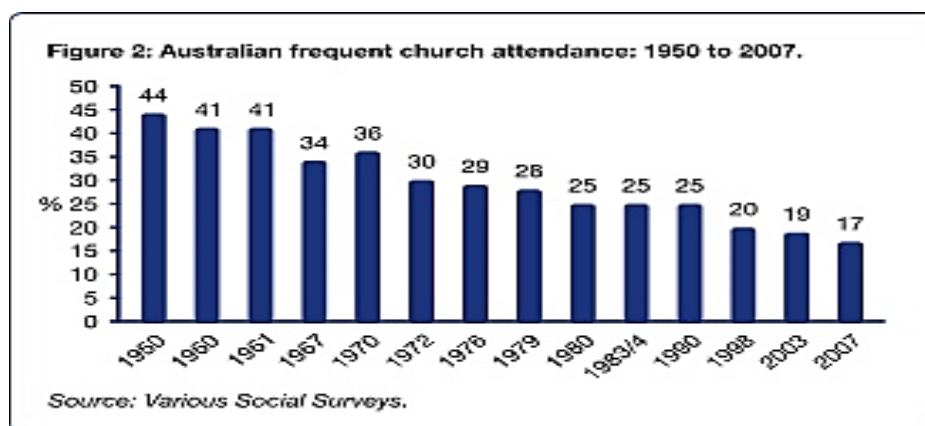


Figure 1

talented people with deep faith and creative theological tools have built many resources and plans. Across decades and continents, in a demise shared by all mainstream denominations, some deep-seated decline is under way.

leadership burnout studies, leadership summits and a vast array of training resources and programmes that once worked somewhere. While each had value, they have not halted the deep decline (see Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> To add to this graph, the 2016 figure (Australian

Community Survey 2016)<sup>2</sup> is 15 percent, a continuation of the general trend.

Churches have not only manufactured programmes and solutions. In the ancient horticultural metaphor a vine with no fruit is unhealthy (John 15; Matthew 7.17f), so in recent decades Church organisations have turned to the study of healthy systems in church life.<sup>3</sup>

The Alban Institute, in particular the late Loren Mead, was innovative for 40 years in addressing the matter systemically.<sup>4</sup> This too has value, but the graph shows that over those 40 years the Churches did not adjust, suggesting either that the information was subverted by passive resistance or else the hermeneutic is adequate or both. This study will not resolve that question, but take the latter part of that dilemma and take one step to suggest a positive complexity in the theory when applied in congregations.

This paper proceeds in three steps. It begins by laying the foundation of what the Nine Core Qualities are about, and then moves to the way that the Core Qualities interact. If readers are already familiar with this work, please feel free to move to the second section. Thirdly, out of that complexity, I will provide just three examples of how the core qualities can be leveraged in the light of faith-sharing to build a much stronger vitality.

### Nine Core Qualities of Vitality

It may come as a surprise to most Australians, who much prefer their experts to speak with a foreign accent, that one of the global leaders in this research is the National Church Life Survey in Australia.<sup>5</sup> For more than 20 years across thousands of churches in many denominations across Australia and three other countries, the National Church Life Survey (NCLS) has surveyed congregations, Church leaders and wider communities. They have come to identify nine core qualities that are essential for the health, faith and vitality of a congregation.<sup>6</sup>

The NCLS research shows, over the consistency of decades of longitudinal study, that the nine Core Qualities are the ones that local leaders can work on reliably.

Not unexpectedly, many Church leaders prefer a confirmation bias towards their own experience or their theological brand. By seeking to address a major problem from within the constructs that have created it, and which across continents and decades have proved fruitless, they have rendered futile their own attempts to find pathways to better congregational health.

They may claim that more staff or more prayer is the

key to their renewal, but they may also be avoiding the research that can open the doors to fresh approaches.

Let me remind the careful reader that the technical definitions of the key words below are important, lest one reduce their meaning in the vernacular or within one's own tradition.<sup>7</sup>

**The nine core qualities, in three groups, are:**

1a INTERNAL CORE QUALITIES describes the inner life of the community of faith:

- Faith: Measures of an alive and growing faith describe the factors most important to congregants in the expression of their beliefs and practices
- Worship: measures of perceptions of vital and nurturing worship describe whether they find them inspiring, joyful, challenging or strengthening and how that works for them
- Belonging: measures of a congregant's sense of belonging show whether that sense is growing and how it is expressed through levels of friendliness, participation, support...

1b INSPIRATIONAL CORE QUALITIES describe leadership and direction in the Church:

- Vision: Measures of a clear and owned vision

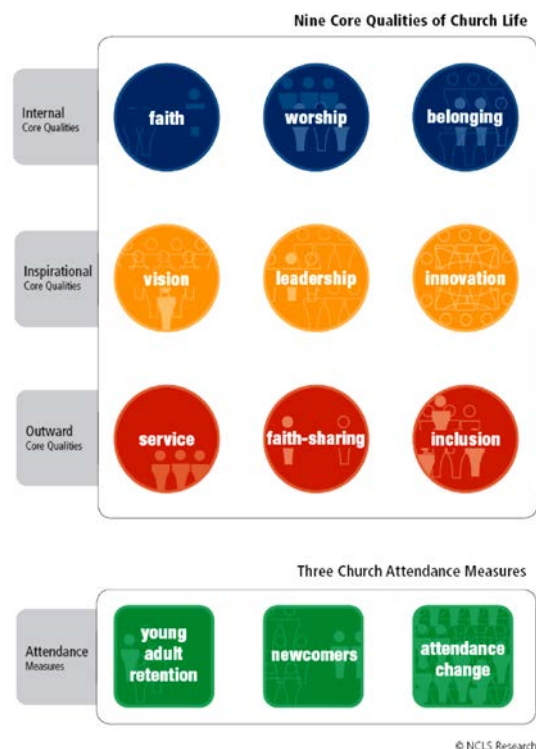


Figure 2

describe attenders' awareness of their Church's directions and how confident they are that it can be achieved.

- Leadership: How inspiring and empowering are the current leadership and how much do attenders seek and value participation.
- Innovation: Measures of open and flexible innovation show how ready they are to try new things.

1c OUTWARD CORE QUALITIES describe how the Church focuses beyond itself:

- Service: These measures show how attenders value and get involved in that diverse and practical community service or welfare programmes for which the Church is famous.
- Faith-sharing is the measure of how willing and effective the attenders are personally at sharing their faith in conversations, how willing they are to invite their friends and family to church activities, including any evangelistic programmes.
- Inclusion: This category measures the welcome that any newcomers receive, as well as the attenders' willingness to follow up those who have drifted away.

These core qualities are linked to numerical outcomes such as the extent to which they retain their young adults, the proportion of newcomers who are welcomed and incorporated, as well as how attendance has changed by both inflow and outflow.

To return to the horticultural image, numerical growth (the fruit) follows from these Core Qualities (the health).

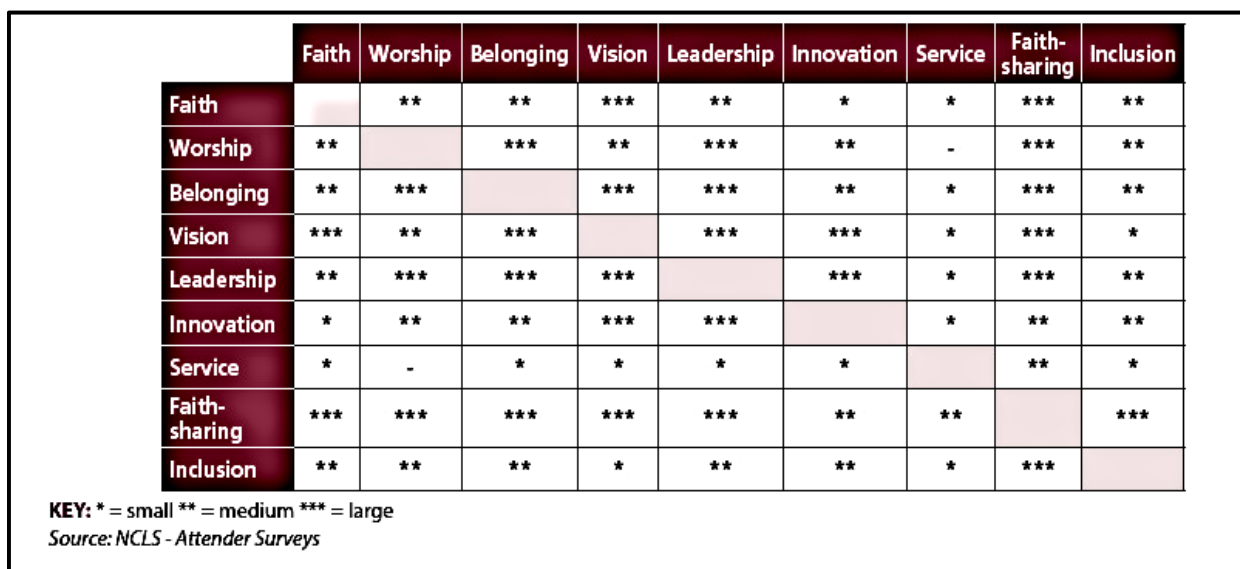
## 2 Strength of Influence

Interestingly, while the nine are all essential, they are not equal in influence. By further statistical analysis in 2006 and again in 2011, the Core Qualities were compared with each other to assess which has the most influence on overall vitality.

This research method moves beyond statistical association methods of correlation and multiple regression, to include valuable longitudinal data of what has been happening in 4,991 of Anglican and Protestant Churches over time, including an analysis of what factors preceded growth.

Therefore, this data set assists in identifying causal relationships. Structural Equation Modelling provides confirmatory factor analysis, a process which "tests the exact factor structure (which) the researcher postulates" (pp148-149). The factors that have stood these tests as positive correlations are listed under each of the core qualities. While most data sets suggest correlations, in other words, this data set more rigorously shows processes or degrees of influence, though 'causality' may be putting it too strongly.

On the following graph (Figure 3) from *Enriching Church Life* (2012),<sup>8</sup> their relative influence is shown



Relative influence.	16	17	19	19	20	16	8	22	15
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Figure 3

as a strong, medium or small correlation by the use of stars. Behind the somewhat informal appearance of stars are statistical methods that numerically these categories of strength, (available in Appendix 3 on p151).

For instance, showing two stars, the Faith quality (as defined above) correlates with Inclusion (as defined above) with medium strength. In other words, if the congregation are confident that their faith experience is growing, they may be more likely to welcome newcomers into their midst. Work on growing capacity in one quality will influence the other to a medium degree.

On the other hand, showing three stars, a leader will see strong connections between a good measure of Worship (as described above) with the congregation's sense of Belonging (as described above) and vice-versa. Therefore, if leaders work on their levels of friendliness, participation and mutual support it will be felt in their responses to Worship. This is how they work together.

None of the nine qualities is irrelevant to Church vitality, as the NCLS researchers stated: "For Churches who want some guidance as to their next steps, there is the reminder that all the Core Qualities are strongly interrelated."<sup>9</sup>

However, the methods described above, since they have been applied to individual factor analysis, allow us to rank them to some degree. The strongest two correlations are between Faith-sharing and Faith (0.84) and Vision with Leadership (0.75). The lowest two are the correlation between Service and Inclusion (0.11) and Service and Innovation (0.2).<sup>10</sup>

As we sum the columns across the qualities, the strongest influence in overall congregational vitality is, by a clear margin, Faith-Sharing (22 stars out of a possible 24) and the smallest influence is Service (8 out of a possible 24). In a second tier of strength (19-20) are Leadership, Vision and Belonging. A third tier of influence (15-17) includes Growth in Faith, Worship, Inclusion and Innovation. These summations lead us to at least two arresting observations.

One is that a culture or capacity in faith-sharing is the most significant influence in the health of a Church. What does that mean? Many will jump to an allergic reaction that this means force-feeding faith to young people or lunchroom arguments with atheists or possibly expensive public events with loud speakers and celebrity endorsements. However, this quality does include:

- involvement in the evangelistic or outreach activities of their Church

- readiness to share the faith with others
- Willingness to invite outsiders to Church activities.

More than pursuing the second, third or fourth tier qualities, the gentle art of a faith-filled conversation is the single most change-making task that a church can undertake. Further, as defined in the survey, it is a task, which their leaders can observe and plan to carry through. Those three ingredients above do not circumscribe it, but there is enough shape there to indicate a practice that should not be evaded.

This measure of high influence concurs with other findings that show that it is conversations with friends or family members that accounts for the impact upon 80 percent of the newcomers who come into the life of the Church, and only 10 percent of those conversations take place on Church property.<sup>11</sup>

### Some observations

Consequently, insofar as a Church community has not been equipped or given confidence (some training effects neither of these<sup>12</sup>) for those conversations, their future congregation has been reduced by that same percentage. Strange to say, many Churches are nevertheless extending their Service in the hope of reviving their life, but falling exhausted for reasons we can now see in one graph.

Such a clear direction has not been welcome in many Churches and among missiologists. In my own denomination, a steadily decreasing percentage of attenders are willing to share their faith or invite anyone to Church. Many who intend to grow the health of the Church nevertheless insist on holding onto convenient memes about evangelism—that it is *proselytisation* or *bible-bashing*.

They focus instead on other Core Qualities. This Core Quality of Faith-sharing is too important, both theologically and ecclesologically, to let that excuse go untested. This first observation makes a compelling case for a re-focus upon authenticity and conversations in faith-sharing.

The second arresting observation is about complexity. It follows logically that the high influence of the Core Quality of Faith-sharing suggests a high complexity in taking action to address it. To touch on that quality is to cause a shift in all the others, like interlocking gears, and to encounter resistance to change and friction of change in not just one but all the other qualities. That indicates a lot of work for leaders. If these other qualities are not also attended to in time, then the best faith-sharing models and exercises will die on the vine.

This complexity of interactions suggests an

opportunity, however. By pursuing other core qualities with the goal of authentic conversations within them, the leadership creates a culture in which faith-sharing outside the Church can grow. With that goal in mind, they build a more significant strength to the vitality of the Church than the other core qualities by themselves.

The next section provides just a few examples as to how that might be done. The careful reader will note that the theory of positive complexity does not rise or fall on whether they relate directly to the three examples.

### Examples of positive interaction

Let us now show these examples of helpful interaction between the qualities, as they focus on faith-sharing.

3a The internal qualities comprise an alive and growing Faith, vital and nurturing Worship and strong and growing Belonging. We will use an example from the first of these.

An alive and growing Faith includes how important respondents believe God is to them, whether respondents have experienced a moment of faith commitment or whether their commitment grew gradually, whether respondents spend time in private devotions (prayer or bible reading), whether attenders believe that their faith has grown in the past year.

“Local churches where there are higher proportions of people who feel that they are growing in faith tend to be churches with higher levels of growth in attendance and higher levels of newcomers.”<sup>13</sup>

Anyone who feels stale or unconfident in their faith will simply lack the hospitality and authenticity to participate in grace-filled conversations. They may still claim to do so, but it is most likely they will speak in an objective or preachy manner and not from within themselves—that is, not qualitatively, vulnerably or personally.

Conversely, once they begin to feel the vulnerability implied in grace-filled conversations, they will become dissatisfied with worship that sounds the same as it did a year ago.

Local Churches can support and model this, for instance, by helping everyone to speak personally about life, meaning and faith. The leadership can do this in their sermons, pastoral care, small groups and conversations.

On the other hand, they will increase resistance if they merely preach more about the obligation to evangelise and put on public events that the people are supposed to invite someone to. This Core Quality is needed in

order to deepen the people’s experience of the love of God and neighbour.

From this third-tier example, the internal qualities can create a culture of Grace as newcomers and visitors are invited to see if faith really works in life. Congregants may rediscover the same. It builds the almost-confidence that is required for invitations to Church or other activities.

Conversely, if there is only a faint desire for faith-sharing, there will be only a faint desire for belonging or growth in faith. The worship will become predictable and possibly pretty, but not nurturing. Sadly, this *starvation diet* is exactly the kind of worship that is often hotly defended.

3b Similarly, an example from the inspirational qualities can be given, this time from the second tier of influence as outlined above.

Inspiring and empowering Leadership needs to be defined, but in the current epidemic of leadership books, that task is daunting. For this purpose, *Strongly directive leadership* is not as effective as *leadership that inspires people to action* which is in turn more effective than *overly non-directive leadership that allows other people to start most things*.<sup>14</sup> Across all four countries of the NCLS, it is clear that inspirational leadership is the one that is most associated with growth in attendance.

Therefore, this core quality may include leadership behaviours that discern with people their gifts and skills, match them with tasks that give intrinsic reward, equip and encourage them to serve, and work as a team through conflicts, challenges and celebrations.

Even where there are leaders who have a strong sense of vision and are highly motivated, a vision cannot be achieved by the leadership alone. Faith-sharing is mostly done outside the Church walls, so a truly shared common direction is needed to hold everyone on course. Faith-sharing can make people a bit nervous and raise troubling new questions. It can bring rejection or uncover community needs.

Those who enter an experience of the love of God will find in the light that there are old wounds that need healing. All these require the immediate help of a team. Leadership must find a ready capacity to imbue their people with confidence and courage, empowering and equipping them for what they see that they need. It simply reflects the biblical idea of the Church as a body made up of different parts, each with different functions (1 Corinthians 12).

If the people are not being equipped, their own fledgling awareness of their gifts and strengths may



become a rich source of complaint—they will see around them what is missing, but not what they can do about it. They will also want to be reassured that the leadership are themselves sharing their faith outside the Church. They sense that it could be disastrous if they brought a friend along to Church, maybe with needs or questions, only to find that their leadership acted ignorantly toward them.

From this example, the inspirational qualities can promote relationships of depth, confidence and openness that are essential to authentic community engagement. Without a desire to be faith-sharing in everyday life, however, Church relationships will be pragmatic, programmatic and predictable.

When leaders start to focus outwards, they will therefore find friction and resistance in Church arising from people's fears, unspoken hurts and the loss of direction in their own lives. Even the most positive leaders may quickly default to a comfortable confidence in their traditional roles, their organising ability, the ever-present pastoral needs or their sharpened ability to see what is wrong with someone else's beliefs. Any single one of these will shut the experiment down. I hope that the leadership will find in their own experiments that their newly felt vulnerability is their key resource, not a limitation.

3c The Outward Core Qualities are practical and diverse Service, willing and effective Faith-sharing and intentional and welcoming Inclusion. We will now take an example from the fourth tier of quality influence, Service.

Practical and diverse Service expresses Jesus' calls to the believers to love our neighbour and to help others in practical ways (Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 10:25-37) and to be *salt and light* in our communities (Matthew 5:13-16). The Church throughout the ages has responded with great distinction to this call with acts of service and justice that reflect God's heart for the world.

Local Churches that follow Jesus can therefore be expected to be engaging with their neighbours in community service, social justice or welfare activities from within their Church. No less an action of the Church, members may join in community service or social action with welfare groups beyond the Church.

They may choose to act in informal ways such as giving blood, donating to charity, interventions for preventable blindness, caring for the bereaved and helping people with drug or alcohol problems. All these actions express *salt and light* by identifying with the poor and marginalised, possibly by being a prophetic voice against greed and injustice, or by offering friendship to the lonely or remaining faithful in the face of opposition.

It is not a trick that they do in order to recruit people to Church. If they thought it might be, it does not work:

There are definite research links between Churches having an outward focus beyond the congregation and seeing growth in attendance. Minor links have also been found between attender involvement in wider community care and growth in attendance.<sup>15</sup>

Even less is there a consequence in *merely living the life without words*, that is, informal helping. There is very little statistical link between changes in attendance and the level of informal helping among Church attenders. If it is not about growing attendance, what is it?

"Sometimes there is confusion between what churches should be doing to be effective and what they should be doing to be faithful. In this respect, the involvement of attenders in service has more to do with being faithful to Christ's call than with directly drawing people into the life of the church. It should not be assumed that all Core Qualities must lead to growth in attendance. There will be key aspects of church life that have their own importance irrespective of their impact on growth. This appears to be one such area."<sup>16</sup>

A genuine lover of God will take a loving interest in their neighbour, as the Book of James insists (James 2:14). A person combines "life word and deeds"<sup>17</sup> and a congregation combines "worship, witness and service".<sup>18</sup>

This research shows that serving others is an essential mark of genuine faith. If it were lacking, it would show a lack of generous grace, a lack of love in practice. Conversely, the attractive ingredient is not the charity, but the generosity and integrity. McCrindle Research published the results of some community questionnaires, showing that the top factor in strongly attracting newcomers is when they see those who live a genuine faith.<sup>19</sup>

Many Churches have become busy establishing agencies of community service, small or large, but omitted to learn to share their faith as appropriate in opportunities sought in prayer. Some have become falsely proud of their deeds and imagined that words were not necessary.<sup>20</sup> Such Churches, now ageing, have no one who can take up their very important community work.

One more thing may be added here. "The research underlines that this is an area where good intentions matter a lot less than actions. Few Churches resolve to do less outreach, but frequently this is what happens by default.

Churches need to sow in a multiplicity of ways in order



to reap even a moderate harvest among those who are currently beyond the life of the church.”<sup>21</sup>

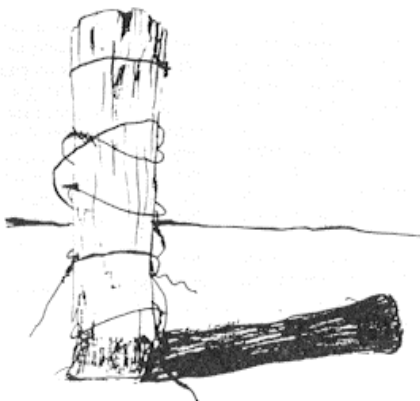
This important example of the outward qualities warns us that the practical work of the vision of Jesus for the Reign of God (Matthew 25) can be left on a whiteboard somewhere in Church office. The institutional focus on clergy or Sundays or community service can smother that vision.

Yet those of us who know the joy of being in Christ find him to be compelling, healing and inspiring, so why the default? It is not our acts of kindness, our community services or our worship services, essential as they all are, that introduce people to that joy but our conversations that go beyond smiles and introductions.

### Conclusion

To grow in faith-sharing is complex, but that complexity itself means there are many avenues to building capacity. When Christians are inspired and supported to engage outwardly in the complex lives of others—their hurts, hopes, highs or histories—and to do so with the values described in *the fruit of the Spirit*—(Galatians 5.24) love joy peace patience kindness goodness faithfulness and self-control—their faith becomes open, generous and infectious. Their inner spiritual life grows strongly in depth and intention. Together, their Church becomes a gathering characterised by relevance and relationship.

The data suggests that without a leadership focus towards an authentic desire for faith-sharing and invitation into Christ (as distinct from invitation into Church), that hard-working congregation will most likely become exhausted, comfortable, or proud. They succumb to their culture instead of building the reign of God. Therefore, please decide carefully what you do with these findings ■



### END NOTES

1. <http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=6516> accessed 20 Aug 2018. *Enriching Church Life* 2012 p 141
2. [http://2016ncls.org.au/resources/downloads/Local%20Churches%20in%20Australia-Research%20Findings%20from%20NCLS%20Research\(2017\).pdf](http://2016ncls.org.au/resources/downloads/Local%20Churches%20in%20Australia-Research%20Findings%20from%20NCLS%20Research(2017).pdf) accessed 20 Aug 2018  
Also McCrindle Research: Faith and Belief in Australia Report, 2017, p 6,  
<https://mccrindle.com.au/insights/publications/reports-and-summaries/faith-and-belief-in-australia-report/> accessed 18 August 2018
3. For instance, Steinke, Peter L, (2006) *Healthy Congregations: a systems approach*, Alban Institute, Herndon Va described church health through ten principles\
4. Their books are continued through Alban at Duke university <https://rowman.com/page/albanbooks> accessed 20 Aug 2018
5. Formed in Sydney Australia 1990, NCLS Research has been a catalyst for creative mission through credible research and life-giving resources. They have worked in Australia New Zealand, UK and USA, [www.ncls.org.au](http://www.ncls.org.au) accessed 18 August 2018
6. <http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=6889> accessed 18 August 2018
7. <http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=24> accessed 18 August 2018
8. *Enriching Church Life*, NCLS, second edition, 2012, p97 accessed 18 August 2018  
<http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=7168>
9. *Enriching Church Life* (2012), p 141. For churches who want some guidance as to their next steps, there is the reminder that all the Core Qualities are strongly interrelated
10. My own denomination has been preoccupied with the latter to the exclusion of the former for some years.
11. KALDOR, P, BELLAMY, J, MOORE, S (1995), *Mission Under the Microscope*, NCLS, Ashfield Sydney, p 87.

Various investigations support this general hypothesis as follows: A. “NCLS research has also found that inviting others to church appears to be the key way in which newcomers arrive at church. Among newcomers to Australian churches, some 38% were prompted to attend through the invitation of their spouse, a family member or a friend”  
<http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=6477> accessed 18 august 2018.

B. “Further, today people come to Christ primarily in the context of community. Belonging comes before believing”, Richardson, Rick (2006) *Reimagining Evangelism*, IVP Downers Grove IL, p 27.

c. McCrindle *op cit* p 20. When asked “which influences have prompted you to think about spiritual etc”, the category “conversations with people” ranked highest (31%) well above life crises, health or unhappiness (16-19%). When asked about “the

greatest influences on their opinions about Christianity” they ranked parents and family at 57%, networks and friends at 25%. This is where the 80% figure comes from.

12. KALDOR, P et al (1995) *op cit* p 76-79
13. <http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=6470> accessed 18 August 2018
14. KALDOR, P, CASTLES, K, et al, (2002) *Connections for life: core qualities to foster in your church*, Open Book Adelaide, p82
15. KALDOR, P, BELLAMY, J, et al, (1997) *Mission under the Microscope*, Open Book Adelaide, p108-117
16. Core Quality 7, <http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=6476> accessed 18 August 2018
17. GOHEEN, M W, (2014) *Introducing Christian Mission Today*, IVP, Downers Grove IL, p227-263
18. Uniting Church in Australia *Basis of Union* <https://assembly.uca.org.au/basis-of-union> accessed 18 August 2018
19. McCrindle Research—*Faith and Belief in Australia* 2017
20. One meme attributes St Francis with promoting this illusion in the sentence: ‘Evangelise everyone. If necessary, use words.’ Of course, Franciscan scholars assure us that he never said it. He was an effective leader of healthy outreaching and innovative communities
21. HUGHES, B, BELLAMY, J, (2004), *A Passion for Evangelism: turning vision into action*, Openbook Adelaide, p115–119

## BOOK REVIEW

*continued from page 45*

### CHALLENGING TRADITION

Joanna Feliciano Soberano (Chapter 17—*Exploring the Possibilities of Portfolio as an Alternative to the Traditional Dissertation*) guides us through both the philosophy and the process of portfolio development as an often preferable means of demonstrating competency.

Marvin Oxenham (Chapter 18—*Digital Scholarship*) has critically engaged with the literature, theoretical commitments and practices associated with digital scholarship, and introduced us to this rapidly changing world.

Sam Ewell (Chapter 19—*Doing Theology from the “Land of Samba”: Integrating Personal Experience in the Task of Advanced Theological Research*) was

enabled in his PhD at the University of Birmingham to doing an autoethnographic approach to doing “theology from the middle”.

In much of the Majority World, the preferred rhetorical patterns are through story, proverb and poetry, rather than the linear-rationalist argumentation generally required in advanced study.

The final four chapters present samples of what quality scholarship might look like in these contextually significant forms.

Havilah (Chapter 20—*Telling Stories That Embox Theology*) demonstrates how a major theological issue in the Book of Judges ought to be addressed through the classical form of multi-layered narrative.

Dwi Maria Handayani (Chapter 21—*Proverbs as Theology*) similarly uses dialogue as a form through which to develop a master’s level thesis proposal.

Xiaoli Yang (Chapter 22—*Poetry as Theology—a Creative Path*) brings us an insightful reflection on poetry as theology. As is common through much of the Majority World, Xiaoli finds poetry a preferable vehicle for engaging with God, and for reflecting theologically on the world in which we live. More than this, Xiaoli points to the creative act itself as part of God’s essential character (pp325-327).

In the Epilogue, the editors gave a caution about being optimistic when trying to change an institution. They write: *Frequently, the dominant voices are faculty who are more comfortable as traditional scholars than as theological leaders. In addition, theological faculty are generally those who have succeeded in the system and are consequently very reluctant to question the system to which they have devote so much of their lives. It is therefore difficult for established faculty to initiate much needed reform. As Parker Palmer points out, “Changing a university is like trying to move a cemetery. You get no help from the inhabitants”* (pp461-462) ■



## Church community engagement in a *struggle town*

*A reflective account from Doveton Baptist Church*



Douglas Hynd

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**Douglas Hynd** is a former public servant who worked in social policy, programme management and public sector reform and accountability in the Australian Public Service for around 25 years. He was also a sessional lecturer in *Christian Ethics and Australian Church and Society* at St Mark's National Theological Centre. He is now an Adjunct Research Fellow at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, Charles Sturt University, having just completed a PhD at the Australian Catholic University, a theologically informed inquiry on the impact on Church-related social welfare agencies mission and identity of contracting with government.

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*This paper explores community and government engagement by Doveton Baptist Church, a congregation in a suburb on the edge of Melbourne that emerged out of the postwar boom and has been shaped by the subsequent decline of manufacturing. The narrative that I present draws on an extended interview with the pastor of the Church that explored in a reflective way the nature and impact of the Church's engagement with the community and government and the relationship of that engagement to the mission of the congregation. The involvement of the congregation extends beyond welfare provision into community building more generally. Important themes that emerge are the entanglement of Church and state at a local government level and the porous boundaries between welfare provision, community building and the Church's mission. The theological account of that mission is Christologically grounded in the life of the congregation*

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### Introduction

While many congregations across Australia are involved in welfare and community activities, detailed accounts and theological reflection on that engagement are hard to find.<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiologists seem to have paid relatively little attention to this dimension of congregational life, while social policy researchers having apparently taken their secularisation thesis undiluted, concluding that there was nothing worth researching and moved on.<sup>2</sup>

We therefore know very little about community engagement by congregations at a local level in Australia. The following account of Doveton Baptist Church's (DBC) community engagement over the past decade therefore cuts against the grain of this scholarly disinterest and provides an account of such

engagement that pays particular attention to the relationship of the Church with local government in a context of entrenched economic and social inequality.<sup>3</sup>

An extended reflective interview I conducted in January 2014 with Paul Llewellyn, who had been pastor of DBC for six years at that stage, provides the basis for this article. The interview was shaped by my research into the impact on Churches and their agencies of engagement with government in providing welfare services and was designed to encourage a reflective response by leaders of agencies.<sup>4</sup>

That interview on that engagement opened up a fresh perspective on the nature of engagement with local

government. I have included substantial quotations from the interview as it documents in a textured way the extent and character of that engagement.

### **From postwar boom to economic decline**

Doveton, now a suburb of around 8,000 residents, was constructed during the 1950s and 1960s to provide housing for workers in the nearby expanding industrial plants around Dandenong, an outer urban service and retail centre, 30 kilometres southeast of the Melbourne Central Business District. Despite its proximity to Dandenong, Doveton sits just inside the northern boundary of the formerly semi-rural City of Casey, whose population centre of gravity is now in the rapidly expanding commuter belt suburbs to the south around Cranbourne and Narre Warren.

The manufacturing boom in Australia that brought Doveton into existence in the 1950s lasted only two decades. Changes in economic policy, under the banner of neo-liberalism,<sup>5</sup> including tariff cuts and the floating of exchange rates, led to the gradual winding down and eventual closure of manufacturing plants in the region during the 1980s and 1990s, resulting in fewer well-paid and secure jobs. Deteriorating employment conditions and associated periods of high interest rates led to financial stress and increasing poverty.<sup>6</sup>

As a result of the decline of manufacturing and the casualisation of employment by 2007, Doveton was in the top 40 postcodes in Victoria with respect to the level of socio-economic disadvantage. The situation has not improved since then.<sup>7</sup> In 2015 Doveton was named as one of the state's top seven *struggle* towns, based on the extent of unemployment, criminal convictions, family violence and level of education.

An associated vulnerability for Doveton is in the lack of not-for-profit organisations. To engage with government in seeking grants and delivering activities, requires organisations with a legal structure, an ability to manage finances and a capacity to harness volunteers.

While organisations located outside a community can carry out these activities, an outside location is likely to reduce their effectiveness in both speaking for, and engaging with, the community. The key organisations within Doveton are the Doveton Neighbourhood Centre the Doveton Baptist Church and the Holy Family Catholic Church.<sup>8</sup> While the Catholic Church remains a major presence in the community, with only one priest, its activities tend to be confined to the Catholic school and the various congregations within the parish.<sup>9</sup>

Doveton Baptist Church (DBC), a member of the Baptist Union of Victoria (BUV), was established in

1964.<sup>10</sup> According the pastor, Paul Llewellyn, attendance at the DBC Sunday service is about 70 people. Half of the congregation are retirees, or the elderly, so gold coins and \$5 notes are common in the collection plate. The church doesn't have a lot of natural leaders as most of the congregation comes from lower socio-economic groups who don't see themselves in that light.

*The only reason the church can afford a fulltime pastor is that we have op shop income, and because the Church was physically larger in its past, we own a number of houses that we now rent out. Now we rent them out at largely below even Doveton market rent, so that it's not a lot, but it still is income. This size church would normally only have a three day a week pastor, and so the fact that I probably do spend two days a week doing community chaplain sort of work.*<sup>11</sup>

The Doveton Baptist Benevolent Society (DBBS) was established by the DBC during the late 1990s as an incorporated body separate from the Church to carry out welfare activities on its behalf. Originally DBBS depended on personal donations and some funding from the Church. An op shop was set up in the Doveton retail area in about 2008 to help with its funding. Subsequently the DBBS almost completely financed its welfare activities through a quarterly grant for the Emergency Relief programme, under a three-year funding agreement with what was then the Federal Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).<sup>12</sup>

### **Community engagement**

Community engagement by DBC over the past decade has involved dealing directly or indirectly with all three levels of government. In 2007 prior to the arrival of Paul Llewellyn as pastor, the congregation had participated in a community development project funded by the state government in partnership with the City of Casey and the Brotherhood of St Laurence. The programme involved capacity building to enable communities to organise local activities. In Doveton that programme resulted in the establishment of a range of community activities including Australia Day celebrations and the Doveton Show.

When the funding ended the Church played a role in establishing partnerships to ensure these activities continued. Three community groups, DBC, working through DBBS, the Doveton Neighbourhood Learning Centre, and Myuna Farm, formed an incorporated body, DETA (Doveton Eumemmerring Township Association Incorporated) that provides a framework for them to work together.

DETA gets the funding to do Australia Day, for example, the volunteers will largely come from DBC,

while people from other organisations will help support the Church to do the carols, which are funded by the City Council.<sup>13</sup>

### Social welfare provision

Through the Emergency Relief funding, the Church provides a local food relief programme three days a week. As well as providing food vouchers there is some food available to take away, along with petrol vouchers and vouchers for medical prescriptions.

Most of the people seeking assistance are referred by Centrelink, though referrals from other agencies are also accepted. The Emergency Relief programme also provides Christmas hampers. Each Thursday there is a free community lunch where people can just turn up. The lunch is provided in partnership with Cornerstone in Dandenong, a drop-in centre which provides the equipment and skilled volunteers, while DBBS meets the other costs and provides some volunteers.<sup>14</sup> About 30 people generally come for lunch.

On managing the reporting and documentation resulting from receiving government funding Llewellyn observed that the FaHCSIA grant which was then on a three-year funding cycle was probably the most routine.

*We do have a database, that the client records go into, that we can run reports from that generate the stats that FaHCSIA are looking for, and from a financial acquittal, they don't have any fixed format so basically when we've done our audited accounts, it's pretty simple to do the financial acquittal. For the City of Casey, there is a lot of paperwork involved, quite lengthy grants that have to be done every year, equally lengthy acquittals process... the carols grant and the playgroup grant, they're big numbers, they're worth the paperwork, but it is a fair bit, and beyond the paperwork there's a human networking...*

Subsequent to the assessment of the funding in the January 2014 interview, the newly elected federal government required all agencies to apply for new funding agreements, which led to a new involvement with the City of Casey on the funding and management of Emergency Relief funding. The application process was a huge amount of work and left Llewellyn with the impression that the government's aim was to reduce the number of agencies it dealt with directly as the process was more suited to a regional or even national organisation. As a result of the process DBC was informed that it would not be funded directly by the federal government.

All was not lost. DBC signed a memorandum of understanding with Casey CISS, the City of Casey

runs a centre in Narre Warren, to be its *Doveton branch*.<sup>15</sup> Under this arrangement DBC still receives \$20,000 per annum, as under the previous funding agreement. The bonus for DBC is that Casey CISS handle all of the statistical data uploads to the Department of Social Services.<sup>16</sup>

CIS spent over \$20,000 in having a new database developed to handle the data uploads and has provided it to DBBS at no cost. The paperwork apart from the data uploads almost disappeared. The annual financial acquittal is a one page statutory declaration that the funding has been spent appropriately, while Casey CISS will handle most of the reapplication process.

The result of the refunding process was the City of Casey retain most of the federal government emergency relief funding that it had previously received, while the neighbouring City of Greater Dandenong lost around \$480,000. Not surprisingly DBC has subsequently seen an increase in help sought from people living in Dandenong.<sup>17</sup>

The Emergency Relief funding of \$20,000 per annum has not increased in the 10 years that DBC has been receiving it, so it has sought other funding to support its welfare activities. As Doveton is an identified low socioeconomic community with high needs, it is not difficult to obtain grants, and the Church does not face competition from other organisations within Doveton.

DBBS has received funding from Lord Mayors' *Feed Melbourne* for several years, three years funding from the Lord Mayor of Melbourne's Charitable Trust, and a grant from Collier's Charitable Trust. The paperwork for these grants is reasonable, but DBBS struggles with the uncertainty of one-year grants, and a wait of up to six months between applying and getting the funds.<sup>18</sup> These are issues it should be noted that are common across the sector.

The range of DBC community engagement beyond the provision of welfare programmes is extensive. There are two non-English-speaking congregations, a South Sudanese Nuer group and a Tamil group who share use of the Church building, along with an Alcoholics Anonymous group.

*We have a funded playgroup... the church itself receives a \$7,000 a year grant for the playgroup, that's part of the supported playgroup programme... a federal government programme that the money is given to the local councils to distribute... it caters for the mums who need more intensive support in even knowing how to play with their children... they get more one on one time with the leader... a qualified early childhood worker, who has the expertise... to guide and network those mums into other support, maternal health, help*

*them get enrolled in kindergartens and assess the children if there are some extra needs.<sup>19</sup>*

At the time of the interview the Church was looking at facilitating further activities in response to identified community needs, working in partnership with local government and specialist service providers.

*What we're looking at starting for this year is conversational English classes for asylum seekers where they can't get access to government funded English programmes... our niche will be focussing on some of the young mums from the asylum seeker community... the aim is to try to get them into the playgroup, and then at the end of playgroup, while we mind the kids, have them have an hour or so of English classes... that's something that we've been talking to the City of Casey about, and they're thrilled.*

*... It was natural for us to go and seek a partner to do that with. So I went checking out who's already doing this conversational English, can you come in and provide the training and the resources and the guide?<sup>20</sup>*

The relationship of DBC with the City Council sprawls across the porous boundary between welfare provision, community building and the congregation's life and mission. As Paul Llewellyn explained, the City Council still has a prayer to open every council meeting.

*I've been on that roster for the last four years, and particularly the first year or so, they were scratching to get anybody to show any interest. So I was up there about every month or six weeks. I just figured that if they're giving me \$10,000 a year, it helps them to see a face and see a name and when the grant applications come around, they're aware.<sup>21</sup>*

Difficulty in maintaining strict boundaries is also evident in the case of the carol service in Doveton. The City of Casey has in the past few years given the Church \$3,000 towards doing a carol service, something that DBC has done for 25 years as the principal Church involved.

*It's held out in public space, and really we just do all of the organising and make sure it happens, and invite a lot of participation.<sup>22</sup>*

### **Family violence, social policy and breaking the silence**

Entanglement is another metaphor to describe the relationship between Church and government in the social policy space. A good example of this entanglement is DBC's involvement in the *Promoting Peace in Families Program* a joint initiative of the City

of Casey, Cardinia Casey Community Health Service, a state government-funded entity in partnership with the Casey Pastors Network. Funding came from the federal government's Attorney-General's National Crime Prevention Program.<sup>23</sup>

The Casey City Council had the highest incidence of domestic violence in Victoria in its region, taking up a half of all police time. The council employed a couple of part time workers to get the programme underway. Four large Churches came on board as the first group to help develop the material. They were Churches with multiple pastor teams who could release somebody to work with the council workers, and then ran the programme in their Churches.

In the next round there were only eight Churches in the region who were willing to be involved in this four-to-five-week educational programme directed at giving survivors of family violence the opportunity to tell their stories within a Church context. Llewellyn noted some of the realities of Church and class that lay behind the silence that the programme was seeing to address.

*Churches have a high predominance of older single women in many denominations. Some of them are widows, but a lot of them were divorcees escaping abusive marriages that they couldn't talk about, it was going to be a stigma just to be divorced and be single, let alone without getting into the dirty laundry of what was going on...*

*If somebody tried to talk about it, they would be effectively punished for bringing up a taboo subject... a lot of people in the Church had this fairytale belief that it didn't happen to people like them... it's just as prevalent within Church groups as it is in the wider community... a middle class person has more resources to cover up what's going wrong in their life, compared to somebody who lives in Doveton where the neighbours for six houses around will hear about it.<sup>24</sup>*

DBC was already involved in supporting people in this situation, and the leadership of the Church agreed to participate. The programme involved nearly nine months of preparation and training with Llewellyn taking the responsibility for coordination within the Church and involvement with the grant coordinators.

*It meant monthly meetings... there was a fair bit of training provided, a lot of the funding went towards those training courses. There was one person in the church who was trained at a certificate four level, four days training.*

*There was a couple of us who attended two-day training, and then a whole whack who did one day or half day training... anybody who was either delivering material, or was going to be somebody*

*that people would then disclose to, had to have some level of training.*<sup>25</sup>

The Church received no direct funding and was not involved in the grant writing or the acquittals for the programme. The grant covered the training and the materials, while the funding and acquittals of the grant were managed by an oversight committee, which included representatives from the Council, Casey-Cardinia Health, Victoria Police, and the Casey Pastor's Network, respectively.<sup>26</sup> There were some difficulties with the material that reflected both class and theological issues and required some reworking by Llewellyn for use by DBC.

*... the bible study guides were over the top of the heads of a working class, they were developed by somebody who works in a more middle class educated environment... The sermon materials I very majorly reworked... they were full of 'drop the odd verse in here and there'... I'm a much more exegetical preacher, if I'm going to deal with a passage I want to deal with it authentically. I was reworking the material to the framework that I was comfortable with, without it at all decreasing the impact of the message.*<sup>27</sup>

The council sought the grants for a project and engaged with the Churches in framing a message that was congruent with the language of the Churches while meeting the social policy aims of a federal government programme.

*... it was a pretty unique council who would think let's do all this effort to apply for the grant funding, and in fact put matching some funding in themselves, and see churches as where we should deliver it.*<sup>28</sup>

The churches who went through the programme had people coming forward for the first time to report their experience of family violence.

*DBC... had four or five out of a relatively small congregation... It did require the Churches to deal with a taboo topic, not just on Sundays in the sermons, but in small groups, for a whole month.*<sup>29</sup>

### Exceptional or typical

Whether or not the engagement between DBC and the City Council documented in this article is either exceptional or typical with respect to this level of government in Australia we have no way of knowing.

While there were tantalising hints in the interview that engagement between Churches and local government in Greater Dandenong City Council has a different character to that in Casey, the topic requires further research before anything definitive can be

said. The potential for tension in the engagement between local government and *religious bodies* has certainly been manifest in recent planning controversies at the local government level over the siting of mosques.

### Theology and ministry

Paul Llewellyn drew attention to the distinction between Church creating space for community engagement by groups within the Church and the Church itself actually owning an activity. He illustrated this by the difference between DBC and Heathmont Baptist, a much larger Church where he had been for many years.

*At Heathmont... if somebody had a bee in their bonnet and a passion for something, sure the church would let them do whatever, but it wouldn't own it. So you had these isolated small groups, doing their particular passionate thing... there was stuff being done trying to reach homeless people. There was stuff done for playgroups. Heathmont Baptist got into playgroups before there were community playgroups. But there wasn't this sense that the Church was doing this.*<sup>30</sup>

The distinction between the Church's activities as Church and its role as a focal point for initiating local community activity is hard to draw here. A significant proportion of the DBC congregation live in rental or public housing and are on Centrelink benefits, so are typical of the wider community that it is part of. Llewellyn explained that:

*...we're embedded in a high needs community, we actually look around us and see the same needs that government at whatever level, sees in the community. So there's actually a commonality in purpose and desire.*<sup>31</sup>

### Funding distribution

In terms of resource flows it is difficult to disentangle the sources of funding between Church and government. About a third of Church funding comes from the Op Shop, while the Church facilities are made available without charge to a wide variety of groups as a contribution to the community.

DBC provides the volunteers for the food welfare programme, the Op Shop and the lunch programme. Taking account of the op shop, DBS and Church ministry programmes, about 80 percent of the volunteer effort is directed at people who aren't part of the Church.<sup>32</sup>

About two-thirds of activities in the Church building do not relate to congregational activities. In the past year the Church began to rethink its vision and mission and

wondered about whether it should be making distinctions between what it did as Church and what it did as DBBS. In the end they just integrated the vision, affirming that it didn't matter what bank account the money came out of, or whether it was funded by a government agency, or the Church.

*...,it was all our ministry of this faith community, reaching out to its wider community. We see our whole purpose of existence is to be a blessing in whatever way we can, so we're not running programmes overtly aimed at building the Church numerically.*

Theology as the primary language for articulating the mission of DBC stands in contrast to the terminology of social capital with its inflection towards the hegemony of the economic.<sup>33</sup> The underlying theological commitment is that Church is engaged in the community because that is what Christ has called the Church to do and be.

The Church exists for its local community and to help them in any way that it can. People know where DBC can be found and that it has remained in the community when other organisations have departed. On how community engagement relates to evangelism, discipleship and Church membership Llewellyn had the following comments:

*It is a joy and a blessing when we see people out of those ministries, come and engage with us in our little community, and that's happened a little bit, and that's a real encouragement... we're in the loving people mindset in whatever opportunity we engage them in, and if that leads to something more, that's terrific... if you're new and you're a visitor and for that first year we'll just love you, but by the end of that we expect you to contribute... that's sort of the DNA, we're a Church of doers, maybe not leaders, but definitely doers, and it's not a comfortable church to be a pew-sitter in, we do lose people who obviously don't want Church to be a big part of their life, they want it to be just an hour and a half on a Sunday morning and nothing else, long term those people don't stick around.<sup>34</sup>*

## Conclusion

This narrative of community engagement by DBC provides evidence that an emphasis on the role of the congregation as a community is not necessarily in conflict with a congregation having a cooperative and complex entanglement with government.<sup>35</sup>

Further research is needed to get a clearer picture of the circumstances under which that engagement can take place and the theological accounts that drive that engagement on the part of congregations. This account of the Baptist Church in Doveton also

suggests that Kaye's characterisation of the relationship between Church and state in Australia, as one of *non-separation* and *equitable entanglement* also holds at the local government level<sup>36</sup> ■

## END NOTES

1. NCLS Research, **Community Connections: Social Service and Social Action**, *Denominational Research Partnership Topic Paper 8* (Sydney South, NSW: National Church Life Survey, 2010).
2. On the lack of research see Doug Hynd, "What's in a Name? Social Welfare Agencies Engagement with Government Beyond 'Religious', 'Faith-Based' and 'Secular' Terminology," *Third Sector Review* 20, no. 1 (2014). On secularisation see: CASANOVA, José, **Public Religions in the Modern World** (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). "Rethinking Secularization: A Global Comparative Perspective," *The Hedgehog Review: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Culture* 8, no. 1-2 (2006); CALHOUN, Craig, JUERGENSEMEYER, Mark, and Vanantwerpen, Jonathan, eds., **Rethinking Secularism** (New York, N.Y: Oxford University Press, 2011); GORSKI, Philip, S. et al., eds., **The Post-Secular in Question: Religion in Contemporary Society** (New York, New York: Social Science Research Council & New York University Press, 2012).
3. This study of community engagement is a byproduct of a research project into contracting by government with church-related agencies in the delivery of social welfare. The ethics clearance for interviews was provided by ACU Human Research Ethics Committee 2013 82N. The interviews were publically attributable unless explicitly excluded by the interviewee. On the research project and interviews see HYND, Douglas, **On (Not) 'Becoming an Extension of the State' While 'Seeking the Flourishing of the City': A Theologically-Informed Inquiry into the Impact on 'Church-Related' Agencies of Contracting with Government to Provide Social Welfare and Human Services in Australia, 1996-2013**. (Australian Catholic University, 2017). The interview with the pastor of Doveton Baptist Church Paul Llewellyn on which this article was based was undertaken on 22 January 2014 with follow up emails, 21 January 2015 and 20 January 2017. I also draw on documentation filed by the Doveton Baptist Church and the Doveton Baptist Benevolent Society with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission (ACNC) [www.acnc.gov.au/](http://www.acnc.gov.au/)
4. On methodological issues on interviewing see Cronshaw, Darren, "Interviews and Other Practical Research Approaches for Theology," *Crucible: Theology & Ministry* 4, no. 1 (2012)
5. Neoliberalism is not just a suite of economic policies, but is also an approach that goes to issues of governance, social structure and welfare provision. See: HARRIS, Harris, "Neo-Liberalism and the State: Implications for Economy, Society and Human



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6. For a detailed discussion of the situation in the 1990s and the economic fate of the major industries in the region see BRYSON, Lois and WINTER, Ian, **Social Change, Suburban Lives: An Australian Newtown 1960s to 1990s** (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin/Australian Institute of Family Studies, 1999). This volume also reports on the previous community study of Doveton in the 1960s
  7. See: VINSON, Tony, **Dropping Off the Edge: The Distribution of Disadvantage in Australia. A Report of Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services in Australia** (Richmond, Victoria: Jesuit Social Services, 2007). VINSON, Tony, **Dropping Off the Edge** (Richmond, Victoria: Catholic Social Services Australia, Jesuit Social Services, 2015). Newspaper reports: BAILEY, Megan, "Doveton a 'Band One' Disadvantaged Suburb According to Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia" *Berwick Leader*, August 4 2015. Bailey, Megan, "An Economy Is Not a Society: Doveton Author Calls for Fair Go," *Berwick Leader*, August 4 2015
  8. A check of the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission (ACNC) web site <https://www.acnc.gov.au/> revealed only four bodies with charitable purposes located within Doveton
  9. Interview Paul Llewellyn, 22 January 2014
  10. Doveton Baptist Church did not receive mention in either the 1960s, or the 1990s community studies. On the role of the churches in Doveton and the changes between the two studies see BRYSON and WINTER, 174, 184, 203
  11. Interview Paul Llewellyn, 22 January 2014
  12. Now Department of Social Services (DSS)
  13. Interview Paul Llewellyn, 22 January 2014
  14. Interview Paul Llewellyn, 22 January 2014
  15. Email, Paul Llewellyn 29 January 2015
  16. Previously FaHCSIA
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  19. Interview Paul Llewellyn, 22 January 2014
  20. Interview Paul Llewellyn, 22 January 2014
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  22. Interview Paul Llewellyn, 22 January 2014.
  23. Borderlands Cooperative, **Final Evaluation Report** (Phase II: 2008-2009 Promoting Peace in Families Partnership Project for the city of Casey and Partner Faith Communities), 2009
  24. Interview Paul Llewellyn, 22 January 2014
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  26. Interview Paul Llewellyn, 22 January 2014
  27. Interview Paul Llewellyn, 22 January 2014
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  29. Interview Paul Llewellyn, 22 January 2014
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  31. Interview Paul Llewellyn, 22 January 2014
  32. Interview Paul Llewellyn, 22 January 2014
  33. For a critique of social capital as a framing concept see DINHAM, Adam, **Faith and Social Capital after the Debt Crisis** (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). The argument in Chapter 9 "An Alternative Discourse of Faith" is particularly relevant
  34. Interview Paul Llewellyn, 22 January 2014
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  36. KAYE, Bruce, "From Anglican Gaol to Religious Pluralism: Re-Casting Anglican Views of Church and State in Australia." In **Church and State in Old and New Worlds**, edited by John Gascoigne and Hilary M. Carey Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2011. 289-90



## The Matthean Great Commission revisited

Vince David Vughere



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**Vince David** is an ordained minister of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He has served cross-culturally outside of his native Solomon Islands in Vanuatu, Fiji, and more recently Papua New Guinea. In Fiji, he taught at Fulton College (Tailevu) and in Papua New Guinea he taught with the School of Theology at Pacific Adventist University (PAU). He recently was the principal of Hoda Theological School. While at PAU he developed an interest in the area of mission studies. In 2008 he was sponsored by AAMS as a pacific scholar to attend the International Conference on Mission Studies in Hungary. He is currently the Director of the Western Sub-Office of SDA based at Kukudu.

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### Introduction

The Matthean Great Commission has traditionally been used to provide a biblical motivation and basis for mission.<sup>1</sup> Missionary activity was a product of great religious changes in Europe and America.<sup>2</sup> The evangelical revival that swept through England and America stressed the conversion of the individual through recognition of sin, repentance and faith in the sacrifice of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

This resulted in active love and service to others, particularly to those who have not been reached by the gospel. This was largely due to the recovery and sensitivity to this great commission.<sup>4</sup>

This brief overview relooks at the Great Commission and seeks to provide a more holistic and biblical-based understanding of mission. For to lift these words out of its rich Matthean context, we “run the risk of doing violence to the text and its intention”.<sup>5</sup>

### Old Testament foundations for mission

David Bosch in his outstanding volume, *Transforming Mission*, asserts that the “New Testament witnesses to a fundamental shift compared to the Old Testament” in regard to mission theology. He sees the advent of Jesus as resulting in the first paradigm

*The phrase ‘teaching them to obey everything’, according to Hertig, is to safeguard and protect the disciples through the ages from the narrowing of the broad scope of mission which must hinge on the motives of love and authenticity. He adds, “the great commission coupled with the implicit great commandment may be summed up as ‘love in action’*

shift.<sup>6</sup> Bosch does not see any indication in the Old Testament of the covenant people being sent out by God to cross geographical, religious and social barriers in order to win others to Yahweh.<sup>7</sup>

Kostenberger, in evaluating Bosch’s theology of mission, finds this problematic in that he “uses a modern-day definition, that of the sending of *missionaries*, in his evaluation of the biblical material”.<sup>8</sup> This he argues leads Bosch to exclude the Old Testament while accepting the New Testament alone as a missionary document,<sup>9</sup> and claims Bosch’s methodology to be seriously flawed.<sup>10</sup>

Kostenberger argues that while Bosch is correct in maintaining that

Israel was not specifically called to go out and evangelise the nations, this would in no way “take away from the fact that the Old Testament, as a document, provides in the Abrahamic blessing the foundational paradigm of mission that is realised in the history of salvation through... Jesus Christ, and the mission of the church, with the result that all nations of the earth are blessed.”<sup>11</sup>

Moskala, in his article *The Mission of God’s People in the Old Testament*, contends that “the Hebrew

Scripture knows nothing about an election for salvation, but knows an election for mission (Exodus 3:7-10; 7:1-2; 19:5-6; Jeremiah.1:5).<sup>12</sup>

In response to those who object and argue that in the Old Testament there is no specific call to evangelise in contrast to the New Testament call to evangelise the world, he argues that this difficulty is due largely to the basic characteristic of the Old Testament.

He asserts that the Old Testament is a storybook with a "metanarrative on salvation and not a handbook on mission with its philosophy, neither a blueprint for a programmatic missiological behaviour."<sup>13</sup>

He affirms that the language and imagery used in regard to mission in the Old Testament are different from what we use today, hence one should not be surprised to discover a lack of direct commands to mission. Instead, in the stories are hints and explicit statements that reveal the mission of God's people in the Hebrew Scripture.<sup>14</sup>

### Matthew 28:18: 'ἐξουσία' (Authority)

Paul Hertig, in the *Great Commission Revisited: The Role of God's Reign in Disciple Making*, looks at the Great Commission within the context of a post resurrection declaration of God's universal reign. "The *πάσα ἐξουσία* in heaven and on earth has been given to me" was said by Jesus to indicate that his resurrection was his enthronement, the beginning of his kingly reign.<sup>15</sup>

Oscar Brooks sees two emphases in the Great Commission: that of *authority* and *teaching*. She persuasively shows how these two emphases control the structural design of the entire Gospel of Matthew.<sup>16</sup>

William Hendriksen in his commentary on Matthew interprets "to me has been given" as referring to a gift Jesus has received as a resurrected mediator.<sup>17</sup> He adds saying this is his reward based upon his "accomplished mediatorial work, the atonement which he rendered."<sup>18</sup>

James Park states "the whole concept of missionary discipleship in the Great Commission... is under the umbrella of the authority of Jesus who is affirmed as 'Lord', and the whole focus of the teaching and the baptism element of making missionary disciples is to call the nations under the Lordship of the Risen and the exalted Christ..."<sup>19</sup>

According to Hubbard, this bold claim to complete and absolute authority is classified as the divine confrontation in his model of commissioning.<sup>20</sup> The declaration of this universal reign has great implications ethnically, socially, spiritually and

theologically.<sup>21</sup> Jesus' resurrection enthronement brought about a new era of missions to all nations.<sup>22</sup>

### Disciple-Making-the heart of the Great Commission

The imperative of the Great Commission is to *disciple* the nation. Hesselgrave notes that there is widespread misunderstanding as to what 'discipling' might be.<sup>23</sup> He points out saying discipling is not just introducing people to Jesus, "nor is it taking the most promising converts and making good, solid Christians out of them..."<sup>24</sup>

Rather he argues to disciple means to make followers, students, learners, beginning at the time when one repents and exercise faith in Jesus right through till one reaches the glory of God's heaven.<sup>25</sup>

Hertig further adds, to "make disciples" does not only mean adding new members into a congregation, nor expanding the Church numerically. Rather, he insists discipleship is costly, for it urges one both to understand Jesus' words and to apply them without compromise. It goes beyond preaching and can only refer to the process of transforming into the likeness of Jesus.<sup>26</sup>

Walter Norvell, in the context of Christian transformative learning, agrees, saying the phrase "make disciples" is all about transformation.<sup>27</sup>

The theme of discipleship is central to Matthew's gospel and to Matthew's understanding of the Church and mission.<sup>28</sup> The verb, *matheteuein*, "to make disciples", occurs only four times in the New Testament, three of these in Matthew (13:52; 27:57; 28:19) and one in Acts (14:21).<sup>29</sup>

The noun form "disciple" *mathetes* is common in the gospels and Acts and is not found anywhere else in the New Testament. The term, according to Bosch, is far more central in Matthew than in the other synoptic gospels, for it is used 73 times in Matthew, 46 times in Mark and only 37 times in Luke.<sup>30</sup>

### Ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ ᾠκτῇ (All the Nations)

The phrase "all the nations" (*panta ta ethne*) has divided scholars.<sup>31</sup> David Bosch points out some scholars, particularly those who believe the author of Matthew to be a Gentile, suggest that these words refer to all nations *excluding* the Jews: "those who had not been called before may now become Jesus' disciples; those who had been called previously are now rejected."<sup>32</sup>

He, however, believes with many New Testament scholars that this is a misinterpretation of Matthew, and claims that the term also includes the Jews.<sup>33</sup>

James B. Slack admits that there is a current and common misunderstanding of who the *nations* are. He claims the typical missionary, pastor and person in the pew today thinks the *nations* in the Great Commission refers to countries or government entities that are defined by geographical boundaries.

He claims many do not understand that the *ta ethne* in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, and specifically in the Great Commission are the ethnolinguistic people groups then and now.<sup>34</sup>

He backs this up by an analysis of Acts 1:8 and claims Jesus here is saying to his disciples that they are to focus on the *ta ethne*, and that focus is to begin at home. This he contends was fulfilled during the Day of Pentecost when each of the ethnolinguistic people groups heard the gospel in their own distinct languages.<sup>35</sup>

### Baptising them

Matthew puts the baptismal command before the command to teach, this however has been exactly the opposite of missionary practice for many centuries. This has led some missionaries and missiologists to advocate a return to the original *modus operandi*: first baptise converts, followed by teaching. Bosch suggests it is doubtful if we could use Matthew this way.<sup>36</sup> Gerhard Friedrich relates “baptising” with “becoming disciples” and the reality of salvation experience through the forgiveness of sins.

He states:

*The sequel “baptising” and “teaching” is not a doctrinal oversight but consciously chosen by Matthew. Through baptism people are called into becoming disciples of Jesus. Baptism is no human act or decision, but a gift of grace. Through baptism the one who is baptised is made to partake of the entire fullness of the divine promise and the reality of the forgiveness of sins.*<sup>37</sup>

Hendriksen agrees, saying, “...the sacrament of baptism is the sign and seal that God the Father adopts him as his son and heir; that God the son washes his sins away by his precious blood; and that God the Holy Spirit dwells in him, and will sanctify him; actually imparting to him that which objectively he already has in Christ...”<sup>38</sup>

David F Wright notes, for sometimes now it has been fashionable especially in ecumenical circles to describe the Church as a Eucharistic community.<sup>39</sup>

However, in the light of the New Testament he thinks it is more accurate to view it as a baptismal community.<sup>40</sup> Wright looks at how important baptism was held in the congregations of patristic Christianity,

the preparation and the screening process that was involved before the candidate was accorded the rite.<sup>41</sup> This goes to show how important baptism was held by the early Church. For the one who submits to it is proclaiming that he has broken the tie with the world and has been brought into union with the triune God, to whom he intends to devote his life.<sup>42</sup>

### Teaching all that Jesus commanded

According to the Great Commission *discipling* was to be achieved by the twofold element of baptising and teaching. Jesus told his disciples, “...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (NIV).

Teaching is a major component of the discipleship process. Walter Norvell looks at the imperative of teaching in the Great Commission and sees in it the important contribution Christian Education must make in the overall Church’s mission today. This teaching aspect of the Great Commission is one that is too often neglected.

Dallas Willard once asked, “Have we done what is necessary to bring the earnest convert into his or her possessions as a child of God, as a brother or sister of Jesus Christ in the new life?” He answers no. He regards the *teaching* phase of the Great Commission the “Great Omission.”<sup>43</sup>

It is important to note that this teaching both precedes and follows baptism. The early Church rigorously demanded that before the person to whom the gospel had been proclaimed be admitted to membership he give evidence of genuine repentance and knowledge of the basics of Christianity.<sup>44</sup>

The phrase “teaching them to obey everything”, according to Hertig, is to safeguard and protect the disciples through the ages from the narrowing of the broad scope of mission which must hinge on the motives of love and authenticity.<sup>45</sup> He adds, “the great commission coupled with the implicit great commandment may be summed up as ‘love in action’.”<sup>46</sup> It takes great time and effort to make disciples, considering the various contexts in which disciples are born and bred.<sup>47</sup>

What the disciples are to “teach” according to David Bosch, “is to submit to the will of God as revealed in Jesus’ ministry and teaching.”<sup>48</sup>

What Jesus taught can be seen in his discourses, parables, including some of his precious sayings and predictions.<sup>49</sup>

The phrases, *all* authority, *all* nations, teaching them to obey *all*, and *always*, to the very end of age indicates the completeness, totality, and finality of the great commission.<sup>50</sup>

## His presence till the end

In the great task of disciple-making through baptising and teaching it was indeed reassuring for the disciples to know that he will not leave them alone but that he will be with them till the very end, for this was his promise. The promised presence of God here at the end of Matthew's gospel can be linked right at the beginning of his gospel in Matthew 1:23 where the quotation from Isaiah 7:14 predicts his name will be "Immanuel" meaning "God with us." This theme of Immanuel runs throughout the book of Matthew, from beginning to end (Matthew 1:23; 28:20) and can be seen as a literary inclusion.<sup>51</sup>

The cosmic universal mission task of disciple-making requires the assurance of God's presence due to the importance of the task.<sup>52</sup> The mission of the disciples requires the presence of the resurrected Christ. For any attempt at mission without the presence of Jesus is doomed to failure.<sup>53</sup>

## Conclusion

The Matthean Great Commission given by Christ to the disciples on the mountain before his ascension still rings loud and clear to believers now as it was to them back then. His resurrection reign and authority necessitated the mission to go to all the nations.

Disciple-making is the heart of the Great Commission. *Discipling* is not merely making converts though part of it, which implies evangelism is part of the initial process of *discipling*, but not the only substance of all that entails disciple-making. For being a disciple means being a learner, a student and a follower, beginning when one professes belief in Christ till one reaches the shores of eternity. *Discipling* is a life-long process that results in transformation of life into the fullness of Jesus.

Baptism and teaching are the twofold elements that make a disciple. While baptism is important, teaching on the other hand is equally important as it encompasses the whole lifespan of the believer in contrast to the once off baptism experience. In this work of disciple-making via baptising and teaching we are assured that God, through his presence, will be with his disciple-makers till the very end ■



## END NOTES

1. DAVID, J, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, (Maryknoll, New York: Obis Books, 1991), 57
2. GARRETT, John, *To Live Among the Stars: Christian Origins in Oceania*, (Suva, Fiji, Institute of Pacific Studies, 1994), 8
3. Bosch, 8
4. Ibid
5. Ibid, 15
6. Ibid
7. BOSCH, David, 17 as cited in Andreas J. Kostenberger, *The Place of Mission in New Testament Theology: An Attempt to Determine the Significance of Mission within the Scope of New Testament's Message as Whole*, *Missiology: An International Review*, vol. xxvii, 3, July 1999
8. Ibid
9. Ibid
10. Ibid
11. Ibid
12. MOSKALA, Jiri, *The Mission of God's People in the Old Testament*, *JOTS*, 19/1-2, 2008, 40
13. Ibid, 41-42
14. Ibid, 42. The Mission of God's people in the Old Testament can be seen in two ways, the centripetal and centrifugal. The former is an inward focus on Israel while the latter an outward focus on the Gentile nations. (see Moskala, 43)
15. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 1971, 310 as cited in HERTIG, *The Great Commission Revisited: The Role of God's Reign in Disciple Making*, *Missiology: An International Review*, vol. xxxix, 3, July 2001, 345
16. BROOKS, Oscar S, (Sr), *Matthew xxviii 16-20 and the Design of the First Gospel*, *JSTN* 10, 1981
17. HENDRIKSEN, *Matthew*, (New Testament Commentary), London, Great Britain: Billing and Sons Ltd, 1973, 998
18. Ibid. The question arises as to whether Jesus claimed or exerted any authority prior to this. It is pretty obvious when one reads the gospel that Jesus did show his authority prior to this pronouncement by exercising power over sickness, including leprosy, and over hunger, over demons, over winds and waves, even over death. But there is a difference. Before his resurrection "the enjoyment of that gift was always in some ways curtailed." For instance, he told the leper not to make known that he was cured (8:4). The blind men who received his sight was given a similar order (9:30). Although all that he did prior to his resurrection was astounding, it is not the same as actually exercising unlimited power over both heaven and earth, having it proclaimed everywhere without restriction... It is the

- investiture of the risen Christ with such unrestricted, universal sovereignty, that Jesus now claims and which especially within a few days that after his ascension to heaven, he is beginning to exercise. (see Hendriksen, 998)
19. PARK, James, *Making Missionary Disciples in Matthew*, Asia-Africa Journal of Mission and Ministry (AAMM), vol.1, October 30, 2009, 57
  20. HUBBARD, Benjamin J, *The Matthean Redaction of a Primitive Apostolic Commissioning: An Exegesis of Matthew 28:16-20*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series, No.19 (Missoula, Scholar Press, 1974), p. 69 as cited in Oscar S. BROOKS, Sr., *Matthew 28:16-20 and the Design of the First Gospel*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament, issue 10, 1981, p.3
  21. HERTIG, Paul, *The Great Commission Revisited: The Role of God's Reign in Disciple Making*, Missiology: An International Review, vol.xxxiv, No.3, July 2001, 344
  22. Ibid. Bosch notes this announcement seems to contradict immediately by Jesus' next words: "Go therefore and make disciples..." (28:19f). Is Jesus then still not really and fully the universal Lord? Do his followers have to make him that, through their discipling, baptising, and teaching of the nations? Does his sovereignty still have to be ratified by the nations acknowledging him as King? Is his reign in jeopardy if they do not? (see Bosch, *Transforming Missions*, 78.) Mission is a logical consequence of Jesus' induction as sovereign Lord of the universe. In the light of this, the "Great Commission" enunciates an empowerment rather than a command. (Han, 1980, 38 cited in Bosch, 78)
  23. HESSELGRAVE, David, J, *Essential Elements of Church Planting and Growing in the 21st Century*, Evangelical Missions Quarterly, vol. 36, No.1, January 2000, p. 27. James Samra contends that there are reasons for this confusion. He suggests three reasons: Firstly, the word "disciple" (μαθητής) and its related verb form (μαθητεύω) sometimes have educational, intellectual sense (Matthew 10:24; 13:52), in which case "discipleship" is simply the process of being educated by a teacher. Other times and more often discipleship seems to involve life transformation (16:24; Mark 8:34; cf. 1:17-18), in which case discipleship is seen as the process of becoming like one's master. Secondly, at times the focus is on the beginning of the process (Matthew 27:57; Acts 14:21), in which case discipleship is *becoming* a disciple. At other times (and more frequently) the focus is on *being* a disciple (Luke 14:26-27), in which case discipleship is the process of becoming like one's master. James contends a holistic sense of discipleship is necessary to encompass all the New Testament's material on discipleship. It involves both becoming a disciple and being a disciple. At times the focus is on the entrance into the process (evangelism), but most often the focus is on growing in the process (maturity); it includes both teaching and life transformation. He suggests it is best to think of discipleship as the process of becoming like Christ. (See James J. SAMRA, *A Biblical View of Discipleship*, Bibliotheca Sacra, vol.160, April-June 2003, p. 219-220)
  24. HESSELGRAVE, David J, p. 27
  25. Ibid
  26. HERTIG, p347
  27. NORVELL, Walter H, *The Great Commission Imperative of Teaching: Why Christian Education Should be on a the Cutting Edge of the Church's Mission Today*, Journal of Baptist Theology and Ministry, vol.1, No.2 (Fall 2003), p. 102, (article-on-line); available from <http://baptistcenter.com/Journal/2003-fall/06>; accessed in 11th June, 2010
  28. BOSCH, p73
  29. <sup>1</sup> Ibid
  30. BOSCH, p73.
  31. HERTIG, p347
  32. BOSCH, p63.
  33. Ibid. Bosch admits that the *ethne* in Matthew's gospel mostly refer to Gentiles only. But he asserts that in almost all these cases we are dealing with either Old Testament quotations or materials of non-Matthean origin. He claims where Matthew adds *panta*, "all" to *ta ethne*, an important nuance is added. Matthew uses *panta ta ethne* four times, all of these are in the final part of his gospel (24:9, 14; 25:32; and 28:19), where the Gentile mission comes into focus ever more clearly. He admits the various parallels to Matthews fourfold use of *panta ta ethne* also evoke universalist imagery: *hole he oikoumene* (the whole inhabited world)...An unbiased reader of Matthew chapters 24-28 can only suggest that Matthew's chief concern was with all mankind, including the Jews. (see Bosch, p.64)
  34. SLACK, James B, A "Ta Ethne" Ethnolinguistic People Group Focus as Seen in the Scriptures" 2-3 (article-on-line); available from [http://omages.acswebnetworks.com/2015/15/slack\\_Ta\\_Ethne\\_Doc.pdf](http://omages.acswebnetworks.com/2015/15/slack_Ta_Ethne_Doc.pdf); accessed April 16, 2010. This is a paper Dr. James Slack presented in the 2003 Summer State leadership Meeting & Church Planting Missionary Forum in Atlanta. In this paper Dr. James looks at scholarly and biblical sources in regard to the meaning of the "nations" in scripture and affirms that a biblical understanding of the term refers to People Groups as correctly defined by Webster's dictionary to be: "A stable, historically developed community of people with a territory, economic life, distinctive culture, and language in common"
  35. Ibid, P9
  36. BOSCH, p78
  37. FRIEDRICH, Gerhard, 1983: 182 cited in Bosch, p79
  38. HENDRIKSEN, p1001.
  39. WRIGHT, David, F, *The Baptismal Community*, Bibliotheca Sacra, vol. 160, No.637 (January-March 2003), p.4
  40. Ibid
  41. The *Apostolic Tradition* attributed to Hippolytus of Rome prescribes a rather rigid process for those who

want to be baptised. Firstly, they were shifted. "Those who come forward for the first time to hear the word shall first be brought to the teachers before all the people arrive, and shall be questioned about their reason for coming to the faith. And those who have brought them shall bear witness about them, whether they are capable of hearing the word. They shall be questioned about their state of life; has he a wife? Is he the slave of a believer? Does his master allow him? Let him hear the word. If his master does not bear witness about him that he is a good man, he shall be rejected. Instructions would then follow on how they were to conduct their lives. For instance if a person is not living with a wife, he shall be instructed not to fornicate, but to take a wife lawfully or remain as he is. The questioning normally moves on to the petitioners' occupations. Brothel-keepers were to cease or be rejected, sculptors must also give up making idols. A number of rulings were similarly unsurprising, people involved in gladiatorial contests, prostitutes, astrologers etc. A soldier was rejected unless he promised not to kill. If a Christian wanted to be a soldier, he could not be baptised. In a different ruling that reflects social distinctions, a man's concubine—his mistress—could become a catechumen if she were his slave, had reared her children, and had remained faithful to him alone. But a male in such a liaison must make the woman his lawful wife or be rejected. See CUMING, Geoffrey J, ed., *Hyppolytus: a Text for Students* (Bramcote, UK: Grove, 1976, p. 15-16 as cited in WRIGHT, David F, *The Baptismal Community*, p. 6f

42. HENDRIKSEN, p. 1001.
43. WILLARD, Dallas, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row Pub., 1988), 15-16 cited in Walter Novell, 101
44. HENDRIKSEN, p1001
45. HERTIG, p348-349
46. Ibid, p349
47. Ibid
48. BOSCH, p.66-67 cited in HERTIG, Paul, p349
49. HENDRIKSEN, p1002
50. HERTIG, p349
51. KINGSBURY, Jack Dean, *Matthew as Story*, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1986, p.39-40 cited in HERTIG, p. 349
52. HERTIG, p349
53. Ibid



## Outfoxed by a vixen

*The forced departure of Australian missionary  
Sister Patricia Fox from The Philippines*



Jim Mulroney

When Sister Patricia Fox was handed her marching orders by the Immigration Department of the Republic of The Philippines in October last year, she heard government officials speak a truth that revealed their ultimate lie.

The Australian sister from the Congregation of Our Lady of Sion was condemned as being in breach of her missionary visa because she had involved herself in politics. However, distinguishing truth from lie in this accusation depends more on how her story is told than the nature of her actions.

She reflects that if the fancy terminology and names of organisations are left out of the story, it simply becomes one of sticking up for the underdog and the victims of crime, but when it is the government and vested interest committing the crime against people's natural rights, then the matter becomes political and the lie is translated into the language of political truth.

Sister Fox left the confines of her congregation's convent in Quezon City and headed for the country's most southern province where she became involved with the Rural Missionaries of The Philippines, an organisation sponsored by the Major Religious Superiors Conference of The Philippines and made up of volunteers from various religious congregations and lay people dedicated to living among the poorest of the country's peasant population and campaigning for their welfare.

Her immediate focus was to bring her legal background to the task of documenting extrajudicial killings, illegal detention, torture and disappearances. While she is far from the first to involve herself in this work, Sister Fox entered the fray at a particularly ticklish moment, as the authoritarian president, Rodrigo Duterte, had declared martial law over the province and was threatening to expand its boundaries across the whole country.

Since moving into Malacañang (presidential palace),

Duterte has bristled at all criticism of his regime, singling out journalists and human rights workers, as well as the bishops and priests of the Catholic and Independent Churches, even threatening to arrest all of his critics in one foul sweep.

But he particularly bristles at foreigners when they step into this arena and Sister Fox came at a highly volatile time.

All up, she says she helped with the recording of 54 cases of murder by government security officials or private armies, along with other breaches of human rights, the very rights that Duterte is determined to quash rather than uphold during his reign.

But apart from revealing some of the many crimes the government wants covered over, she also stood with the peasant farmers at their rallies demanding that their rights be recognised—and although she maintains she never took a front spot or spoke at any of them, it served as sufficient proof for the Immigration Department to declare the lie of political involvement to be a truth.

Listening to Sister Fox tell her story carries a sense of déjà vu. Her words cast the memory back to those of the pioneers of the Free Farmers Federation and its founder, Jerry Montemayor, in the 1950s and 1960s; those of Martial Law dissidents from the 1970s and the reports of treason charges brought against Father Brian Gore and the Negros Nine in the 1980s, as well as the voices of Tribal peoples and the Muslim minorities of later generations.

On the surface it may seem that nothing has changed, but in fact it has. In the days Montemayor was conducting his campaigns, The Philippines had an economy rated on a par with Japan, but its inability to progress in its social construct and confront crippling corruption has seen it squander its inheritance and, during the Martial Law era of the 1970s, embark on its sad journey towards becoming the poor man of Asia,



a spot it is hanging onto with tenacity to this very day.

Montemayor understood that seeking a peaceful alternative to the semi-feudal conditions of desperately poor farm labour would be branded subversive.

Father Gore and the Negros Nine learned this the hard way, having charges of treason and multiple murder thrown at them for their solidarity with the landless worker and Sister Fox learned it through her termination of stay.

Although the 27 years Sister Fox spent in the country was in a different era, the hurdles she encountered had not changed. Both Montemayor and Father Gore spoke of a culture of impunity, whereby the rich and powerful defend their wealth through the sacrifice of innocent life and livelihood at no cost or threat to themselves.

Sister Fox speaks of the targeted killings of those who resist; the jailing of people on trumped up charges, torture and mutilation, all without consequence for the perpetrator.

But she also has a message for the Church, both in The Philippines and in Australia. She describes the continued high popularity rating of Duterte among his people as a conundrum, as despite the broken electoral promises, the lack of economic progress, continued instability—especially in war-torn Mindanao—flagrant abuse of human rights, continual degradation of women and mass murder of suspected drug dealers, so many still quite doggedly believe in him.

Nevertheless, she notes that there are a few things that stand out. Duterte is a street fighter, he talks the language of the gutter which the people both understand and love. He pokes fun at sacred cows, especially those that have wielded much control over people's lives, including the Church, which they find refreshing and enjoyable.

And this is in stark contrast to the norm of Filipino politics. A Cebuano poet once described the people as being like a trunk without a head, with politicians like a head without a trunk, as there was no communication between the two, no common language and neither had any particular interest in the other anyway.

The same can be said of the Church, which by and large does not touch the common people, speaks in a language most do not understand and about issues that are irrelevant to them.



But Duterte has managed to cross this divide and with his often foul and erratic words form a communication line between the head and its previously severed trunk.

Sister Fox also has a message for the Australian Church, calling for some involvement in alerting people to the type of government Australia is supporting in Manila, especially through its virtually unpublished military presence in the country. She

points out that it is almost impossible to track what the Australian military is doing in The Philippines, as even its budget has been redacted in the published version of the country's military expenditure.

But what she views as the saddest part of this whole saga is that The Philippines has been there before. Duterte has declared martial law in Mindanao and hinted strongly he wants to extend it across the whole country.

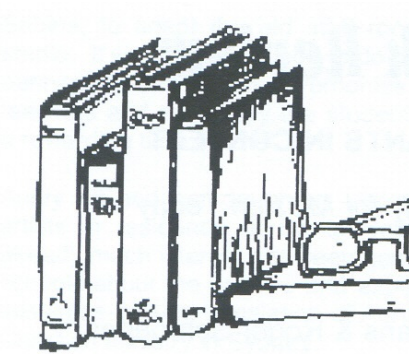
He wants to change the constitution in a manner that would allow him to continue as head of state, something that Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo attempted unsuccessfully during her presidency.

Either of these moves would end whatever semblance of human rights remain in the country and this Sister Fox sees as being a great catastrophe for the Filipino people, noting that the irony of it is that the nation has been there before under the 1965 to 1986 president, Ferdinand Edralin Marcos.

But with what the former president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of The Philippines, Archbishop Socrates Villegas, calls the *Great Forgetting* of the people, Sister Fox mourns the loss of the valuable lessons of that era.

It is what Conrado de Quiros describes as a new fight in a book of reminiscences of editors of university publications from that time, *Not on Our Watch*. It is a fight to remember that the lie of martial law has been replaced by the lie of economic progress and that the people have not been freed from the tyranny of political dynasties and laws that favour the rich and privileged, as the shackles that bind still stalk the election platform that Duterte strode so eloquently and sprinkled so liberally with promises he can never fulfill.

Sadly, as Marcos and his wife Imelda were airlifted out of Malacañang in 1986, the people danced in the streets, but while some danced to remember, it seems many more danced to forget and the people were once again outfoxed by the rich and powerful vixen that has inhabited the corridors of Philippine politics since colonial days ■



## BOOK REVIEW

### LOOK BACK IN HOPE

*An Ecumenical Life*

by

Keith W Clements

*Published by:* Resource Publications (Wipf & Stock), Portland Oregon, pp423

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**Reviewed by William Firth-Smith**, a peripatetic medical doctor, with a past-history of tentmaking in South Asia and studies in Missiology at the University of Divinity.

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This author is a British academic historian, theologian and ecumenist who has written a large number of books and articles. His memoir represents a culmination of an exemplary life. Readers will relish the many insights provided in Doctor Clements's wonderfully envisioned memoir, which I would recommend to all our readers.

Clements is no stranger to the Melbourne theological scene having taught courses for many years on Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Reconciliation at Whitley Theological College within the University of Divinity. He is a dynamic lecturer with insightful understanding and empathy, which is extraordinarily well demonstrated in this important book.

The breadth of his global experience is vast and includes visits to numerous places of sectarian violence. His deep involvement with peace-building initiatives and conflict resolution has taken him to many places characterised by religious conflict—viz. Northern Ireland, Palestine, Timor Leste, the Balkans, Fiji and others.

He has had a long involvement in the *Apartheid* struggles in South Africa that in so many ways is a reflection of the struggles that preceded it with Hitler and Nazism. These conflicts are in every sense complimentary to his life work in studying Bonhoeffer.

I also find his consideration of the Third Balkan War particularly enlightening. Clements is greatly supportive of the Australian Indigenous rights movement. His deeply held ecumenical views are also explained in his (2013) book: *Ecumenical Dynamic: Living in More than one Place at a Time*. He strives for the "creation of a true community in the world, of people among themselves, with God, and

with creation". The key is enculturation—a concept familiar to us all as missionaries.

I was heart-warmed to read of his parents who were China Inland Mission partners and became refugees in the face of the invasion by the Imperial Japanese Army—at a similar time when me and my family became refugees in Malaya. We too thank God for our survival!

One of Clements's earlier books was on Friedrich Schliermacher (d. 1834) whose idea was that religion is not so much a form of *knowing*, but rather a form of *doing*. Biography as theology need not repudiate the propositional statement of theological doctrine, but what it must insist on is that the propositional statement be in continual and intimate contact with the lived experience.<sup>1</sup>

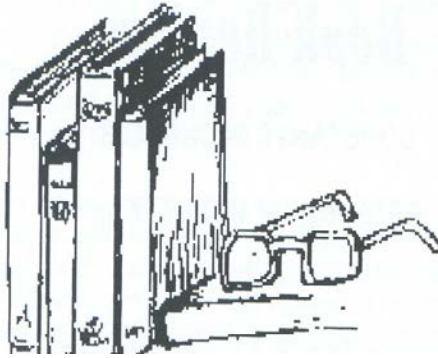
Without this vital contact, theological doctrine becomes an objective remote from Christian experience. In the words of Paul (Romans 12: 11) "Never let your zeal flag, maintain the spiritual glow, Serve the Lord".

Clements, the great communicator through his wide breadth of experience, his communication skills and holistic worldview brings us face-to-face with many important and endearing personalities. Clements is a serving pastor of the Baptist Church in the United Kingdom.

This is a book worth reading; it is obviously impossible to fully convey the breadth and depth of the contents of this book in such a brief review ■

1. McCLENDON, James W Jr, *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology* (Philadelphia PA: Trinity Press International, 1990)

## BOOK REVIEW



### UNDERSTANDING RESILIENCE

#### *Lessons for Member Care Workers*

by

Duncan Watts

*Published by: Regnum Books International and Redcliffe College, Oxford, UK, 2018, 93pp. ISBN 9781912343744 available in print from Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, GBP 9.60, or as an eBook Kindle version AUD 6.54*

**Reviewed by Sam Hey, Christian Heritage College, Brisbane**

Setbacks and stress are a normal part of life, and they often increase when a person steps into a new situations, such as missions work in a new culture. Even small challenges can at times be hard to deal with and the challenges associated with a fresh endeavour in a new cultural setting often requires the developing of strategies and resources that are needed to bounce back from tough times.

In this informative book, *Understanding Resilience: Lessons for Member Care Workers*, Duncan Watts combines an extensive literature review with practical insights into ways in which resilience can be better understood and developed. This well written, relatively short publication, addresses the need to better understand the nature of resilience and ways in which it can be assessed and developed by missionaries, and those who send and support them.

The book is divided into two parts. Part 1 looks at the nature of resilience and in the first chapter, the author reviews the scholarly writings on resilience. He examines the literature and the ways it shows how people who face a range of adverse events can develop the resources to help them to respond in healthy, life promoting ways.

The author considers scenarios that promote resilience through inner self care, outer relational member care and wider networks of support.

*This chapter highlights the importance for the leaders and supporters of missions to more fully understanding the importance of resilience and ways it can be evaluated and measured when considering the suitability of applicants and ensuring that they are fully prepared for their future undertakings*

Headington Institute's list of protective factors (cited on pages 6 and 38) is identified as offering useful adaptive approaches, including bodily fitness, emotional and behavioural regulation, spirituality and developing a sense of purpose for mission and life.

Windle's "Layers of resources and assets" (on page 10) is particularly helpful for identifying further areas to consider that include personal biological, mental, attitudinal and motivational stability and fitness, social support through interactions with family members, neighbourhood and wider social

networks.

Finances, employment, health, welfare, housing and education are also identified as important. A sense of certainty and coherence (page 23) is shown to be particularly important and able to be enhanced through spiritual resources, confidence in a higher power, emotional and behavioural regulation, and a strong sense of mission purpose.

Chapter 2 explores the nature of resilience in a range of contexts by examining further the ways individuals can develop inner resources and outward external support networks so as to achieve more beneficial outcomes.

A useful overview of further scholarly studies is provided, including a study by Hegney et al (2007), where resilience is described as the "capacity to

‘bouncing back’,” with resourcefulness, accepting and embracing change, being adaptable and flexible, innovative, creative and proactive, having goals or visions for the future. A work-life balance and a supportive team environment are shown to be important. The insights from O'Donnell (2011) are used to show that resilience is aided by developing a strong personal identity that helps cope with loss and grief associated with change, avoids destructive behaviours, and addressing the challenges associated with living with change and uncertainty.

Part 2 of this book begins by looking at the importance of understanding resilience when assessing the suitability and preparedness of potential cross-cultural mission workers.

The third chapter offers practical insights into the ways the resilience of potential cross-cultural mission candidates may be assessed. It provides an overview of useful questionnaires and assessment scales and other important resources for this task. This chapter highlights the importance for the leaders and supporters of missions to more fully understanding the importance of resilience and ways it can be evaluated and measured when considering the suitability of applicants and ensuring that they are fully prepared for their future undertakings.

The benefits and limits of a number of other assessment tools are also considered, including interviews, input from the applicants' communities, direct observations of candidates in communal settings and evaluating biological factors.

Chapter 4 provides practical insights into the ways in which resilience can be promoted. It suggests that workers can be better prepared for missions through initial exposure to moderate stress and disruption before they face future, more stressful, situations. This exposure appears to act like a medical vaccination in promoting the development of the resources and attitudes needed to meet future challenges.

Other suggestions include the development of the candidate's ability to build support networks, particularly those that provide spiritual direction, mentoring and promotion of altruistic behaviour. Physical fitness, a balanced diet, self-care and changes in external environments are also important.

This book highlights the need for mission's organisations to take seriously the need to fully evaluate candidates' preparedness, and to provide appropriate, ongoing member care strategies and resources that will help to promote resilience. It highlights the importance of fully considering the challenges that missions workers face within a variety of settings, and ways in which a capacity to bounce

back from disappointments can be developed. It also shows the seriousness of being realistic when assessing the skills and suitability of those who are supported, and the importance of long term support that promotes long term resilience. This book provides insights that help to better understand resilience and ways it can be evaluated, and it identifies useful strategies and resources to assist in this task ■

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## BOOK REVIEW

*continued from page 50*

### ASIA'S FORGOTTEN CHRISTIAN STORY

This is an important book because the Western Church has, until very recently, dismissed the East Syrian Church and its history, labelling that Church as *Nestorian*. But, as the Foreword points out:

*For the first 900 years of the faith, the majority of Christians were found in Africa and Asia. When you study early church history, however, you are invariably presented with a largely European story.*

Further, the book gives us an important historical snapshot of how Christians living as minorities seek to survive in hostile contexts while desiring to be effective witnesses to their faith in Christ.

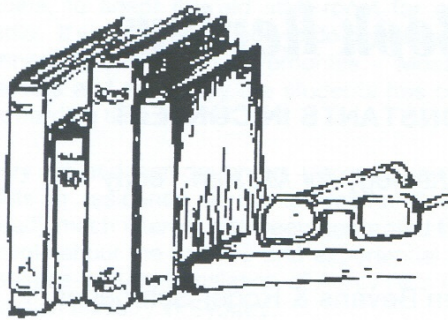
The mission strategies of the East Syrian Church were similar to those of the early Celtic Christians—ie, first, establish a monastery as a base and then move on to establish another monastery. The East Syrian Christians were canny enough to build their monasteries along the established trade routes.

Cochrane concludes by contending the monasticism still has its place in our times. He points to the continuation of the monastic tradition in the Greek Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Coptic Church in Egypt, and in the rise of “new monasticism” among Protestants. He points out that:

*A growth and re-birth of monasticism has included in many places the dimension of intentional contact and exchanges with other faiths (p71).*

This little book has whetted my appetite to know more of the East Syrian Church and its mission. I was not familiar with many of the monasteries mentioned in the book and was kept busy googling them! The book is clearly written and could be classed as “A Friendly Guide to” or “An Introduction to” an important topic in mission. One thing is missing from the book—a map showing the places mentioned ■

## BOOK REVIEW



### UNDERSTANDING RESILIENCE

#### *Lessons for Member Care Workers*

by

Duncan Watts

*Published by: Regnum Books International and Redcliffe College, Oxford, UK, 2018, 93pp  
ISBN 9781912343744  
available in print from Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, GBP 9.60  
eBook Kindle version AUD6.54*

**Reviewed by Karen Davison**

On taking up his role as personnel coordinator and member care provider for an international mission organisation, Duncan Watts became aware of the interest in resilience in mission circles, but was unsure what it meant and whether or not it could be assessed and enhanced in cross-cultural workers. This book is the result of his research into these questions.

This book is written for mission member care workers with the intent of clarifying the complex concept of resilience and exploring ways to assess and enhance it. The central thesis is that resilience is essential for cross-cultural workers, but is not a characteristic that one either has or doesn't have. Rather, it can be enhanced through the nurturing of both internal and external factors.

The book is divided into four chapters over two parts. Part 1 scopes the academic question of, "what is resilience?" The second part takes a more practical look at how resilience may be assessed and enhanced in cross-cultural mission candidates and workers.

Chapter 1 reviews literature on resilience that has been produced across a range of disciplines over the last 40 years. This is a good critique of the key literature in the field and provides insights into factors that can enhance resilience.

*Whilst the scholarly nature of the book may be a drawback for busy member-care workers, the inclusion of the author's own professional reflections and questions are a strength. These reflections and questions provide good launching points for member-care workers and mission leaders to evaluate their own approaches and practices when assessing and enhancing the resilience of candidates and cross-cultural workers*

It is a helpful overview for those unsure what is meant by *resilience* and for those doing research in a related field. It is quite a scholarly summary, but Watts helpfully adds his own professional reflections and questions for thought and discussion at the end of this, and every, chapter.

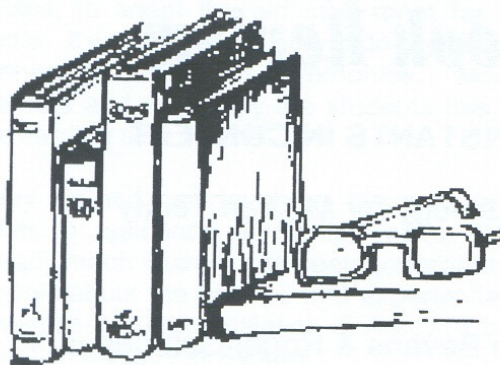
In the second chapter, Watts focusses on specific contexts in which resilience has been more thoroughly researched, seeking to draw lessons from those studies and apply them to the context of cross-cultural mission. He then briefly reviews resilience in member care literature and suggests factors to consider when screening mission candidates.

Having defined resilience and the internal and external factors that can enhance it, Watts addresses the challenges of assessing resilience. He evaluates several assessment tools and concludes that a multi-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative assessments, would be most effective.

Self-report questionnaires, interviews, observation in communal living settings, input from the applicant's community and potentially assessing biological markers all have a place.

***continued on page 49***





## BOOK REVIEW

### CHALLENGING TRADITION

*Innovation in Advanced Theological Education*

Edited by

*Published by: Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Global Library, 2018. Pp 487. Index provided. AUD 37.64*

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**Reviewed by Larry Nemer**, Lector Emeritus in Mission Studies and Church History at Yarra Theological Union (Box Hill) and founding president of the Australian Association for Mission Studies.

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This is a book that is worth looking at, even if one does not have time to read the entire lengthy book, by anyone connected with or responsible for the theological education of non-Western candidates either as an administrator or a lecturer.

It was written by Evangelicals for Evangelicals, but would be of value to people of any other form of Christianity as well. In many ways it is also a Handbook, since there are questions for discussion at the end of each chapter. It is based on scientific research done on different ways of learning by reason of culture and gender, as is evident from the bibliographies that follow each chapter and on the personal experience of the authors of the articles.

There are three sections in the book, divided into 23 chapters. The sections are: I *Principles for Innovation in Advanced Theological Studies*; II *Innovative Possibilities for the Dissertation*; and III *Innovative Forms of Advanced Theological Studies*.

There is a richness and challenge in these articles that cannot be adequately summarised in a book review. However, this reviewer will choose some points that hopefully will spark the creativity of theological educators in the Majority World.

In Chapter Three entitled *Innovation and Criteria: Ensuring Standards While Promoting Innovative Approaches*, Perry Shaw, who has been engaged in non-traditional theological education, says in his opening paragraph: *As we discuss throughout this book, there is an increasing recognition that the traditional understanding of scholarship is educationally rigid and narrow. The perceived-as-*

*normative approach to higher education reflects the preferred learning styles of only a small minority of the world's population—predominantly (but not exclusively) white Western males who approach learning through a rigid, linear, step-by-step, empirical approach to reasoning (p43).*

He points out that the definition of *critical thinking*, a term repeatedly used in official documentation, is largely shaped by Minority World understandings, often in the form of the critical analysis of texts, leading to a movement of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. However, he states, equally complex thinking can be found in seeking to see practice through theoretical eyes, comparing of case studies, or seeking harmony between apparent paradoxes (p57).

These significant differences are highlighted again and again by the authors in the first section with many concrete examples of their argument.

In Chapter Five, entitled *Culture, Gender, and Diversity in Advanced Theological Studies*, Perry Shaw states that gender and differences in learning is controversial. He says that studies show that the male brain is attuned to specificity in tasks and prefers to compartmentalise and simplify tasks as much as possible: it is hardwired for understanding and building systems around specific content.

In contrast, there is a tendency for the average woman's brain to be geared to see multiple implications and the big picture when completing tasks (p101). He also states that women have greater interconnectivity between the verbal, reasoning and emotional parts of the brain, and consequently tend to

prefer learning in community by talking through the issues and ideas being presented.

Males tend to prefer processing ideas and issues without having to exercise the language part of their brains, or, if they use speech in learning it tends to be through debate and argument over very specific points (p102).

Among the other chapters in this section Chapter 7, is worth consideration. It is entitled, *Scholarship in Our Own Words: Intercultural Rhetoric in Academic Writing and Reporting*. Stephanie L Black speaks of her experience while teaching in Kenya: *It was only at that point that I realised it wasn't that they couldn't write the way I told them to; it was that, perhaps unconsciously, they didn't want to* (p128).

She lists the question that people from the Majority World have to ask—a question that may not occur to someone from the Minority World: *What May Be Discussed? Who Has the Authority to Speak/Write? What Form May the Writing Take? What Is Evidence?* (especially in an oral-preferenced culture); *What Arrangement of Evidence Is Likely to Appeal (Be Convincing) to Readers?* She recognised that “the African system is [more] one of negotiation with the audience to make them ‘accept’ their work” (pp131-138).

The Second Section of the book is dedicated to articles on Innovative Possibilities for the Dissertation. In the forward to this section is a challenge for all educators of Majority World students. Reflecting specifically on advanced theological studies Michael Griffiths has described the process as ‘theological circumcision’. And Walter Wink concludes that much of what we do is develop “trained incapacity to deal with the real problem of actual living persons in their daily lives.” Some of the best minds of the Church sacrifice the best years of their lives writing something that virtually no one will read, and likely will have minimal if any impact on the world for Christ (pp186-187).

Let me just list the suggestions made; the reader may want to read in depth the suggestions made. Paul Clark (in Chapter 10—*Pathways of Integration for Theological Knowledge: Integrative Knowing / Learning for Thesis Construction in Advanced Theological Studies*) says this integration should be not merely inter-disciplinary, but also engaging of the whole integrated person.

John Jusu (in Chapter 11—*Problem-Based Learning in Advanced Theological Studies*) has done extensive work on problem-based learning as a contextually significant model for the African Church. Action research is an approach in which the questions and answers to significant issues are generated and

solved collaboratively between the researcher and the community in which the research is taking place.

Caleb Hutcherson, in Chapter 12—*Action Research for Theological Impact: Reflection from an Arab Context*, has used this approach in projects at the master's level.

Rafael Zaracho (in Chapter 13—*Studying Together: Joint and Collaborative Research*) has experimented with a variety of collaborative approaches in Paraguay, and brings insights and suggestions for advanced theological studies.

Jay Moon (in Chapter 14—*Chicken Theology: Local Learning Approaches from West Africa*) has extensive experience engaging with oral communities in the Majority World.

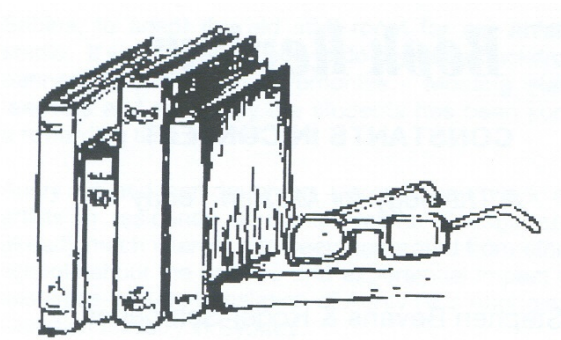
Larry Caldwell (in Chapter 15—*Ethnohermeneutics and Advanced Theological Studies: Towards Cultural Appropriate Methodologies for Doctoral Programs*) came to see that our hermeneutical approaches are culturally shaped. “Every culture has a rich corpus of literature—both classic and contemporary.

The final chapter (16—*Boldly Go! Tracking Trends in Comparative Literature*) of this section, Havilah (Dharamraj) traces current trends in comparative literature studies, demonstrating how *literature* is more than text, and investigating the implications of comparative studies for both the content and the shape of work that might encourage our best thinkers to take a creative path in their thesis (pp185-188).

The third section, *Innovative Forms of Advanced Theological Studies*, is possibly the most stimulating and challenging section to this book, so rich in its content. In the introduction to this section, the editors write: *In the globalization of distinctly Western patterns of communication and thought, our current approach to advanced theological study too often teach people to answer questions that nobody is asking. We train emerging leaders to learn and then teach in culturally inappropriate patterns, answering questions using thought processes which people in the local context find unconvincing in their cultural frames of thinking. We haven't realized that the time to dig a well is now—not after we see that irrelevance has caused theological education to auto-combust* (pp325-326).

It would be difficult to summarise the various proposals so once again I will simply list them and invite the reader to explore the ones they find most stimulating or useful.

**continued on page 24**



## BOOK REVIEW

### THE SOULS OF CHINA

*The return of religion after Mao*

by

Ian Johnson

*Published by:* Pantheon Books, New York, 2017, pp455, US\$30  
ISBN : 9781101870051 (hardback)  
ISBN : 9781101870068 (ebook)

***Reviewed by Jim Mulroney***

On one level, *The Souls of China: The return of religion after Mao* reads like the diary of a man who has lived on and off in China over a period of some 35 years, with a recent span of six spent among three somewhat similar, but also divergent religious communities.

But the author, Ian Johnson, is telling the story of one of the greatest faith revivals of all time. An accidental corollary of a policy enacted in 1982 granting constitutional freedom of religion, it expanded exponentially, contrary to the expectation that strict government control would keep it small, impotent and tightly under the thumb.

But the unthinkable occurred. Religion, which has lived under a controlling or suppressive hand in China for around a century, relished this loosening of the bridle and in a period of 35 years around 300 million people have come to hold some adherence to either a religion, devotion, spiritual master or New Age sage.

*The Souls of China* chronicles one man's search through the underbelly of modern China's glittering economic gods to discover a web woven by ritual, tradition, myth and faith that speaks loudly to the souls of a people searching for meaning in life and reaching out for some basis to ethic and morality.

After the mad, chaotic years of Mao Zedong, Beijing adopted a less restrictive vision, believing that a freer

*As a journalist, he is a story-teller of prodigious degree, who carries his erudition with a light heart; his profound insights a conversational piece of recall of what he did, heard, observed and felt, coupled with a sharp attention to what inspires others*

society focussed on economic prosperity could strengthen the hold on power of the Communist Party.

But, among other things, it required keeping tight tabs on anti-Communist sentiment. This included religious sentiment, but rather than quash, it sought to subvert.

Over 455 pages, including 38 chapters, notes, an extensive index, bibliography and afterword, Johnson documents his meander through an unofficial (not registered with government) Christian community, a Buddhist pilgrimage association and the ministry of Daoist priests, telling

the stories of each with sensitivity, insight and simplicity.

Through extensive commentary on the country's political scene, including some surprising detail on the background of current and recent leaders, Johnson places his religious insights within the context of the officially sanctioned narrative of an economically-driven, often socially blinded administration.

As a Pulitzer Prize winning author, he writes attractive prose, infiltrated with imaginative word pictures of physical terrain and human circumstance.

As a journalist, he is a story-teller of prodigious degree, who carries his erudition with a light heart; his profound insights a conversational piece of recall of



what he did, heard, observed and felt, coupled with a sharp attention to what inspires others.

This makes *The Souls of China* an attractive book for anyone with an interest in modern China, whether from a political, religious, academic or general knowledge point of view.

It is among these unofficial religious communities that Johnson believes the only truly free civic space in China exists, making fertile ground for this tremendous religious growth to occur.

From a Christian point of view, he specifically identifies the unofficial Protestant communities, often referred to as House Churches, and to a much lesser extent the unregistered communities of the Catholic Church, as being in this space.

He notes that the official (registered with government) Catholic Church has stagnated in its growth over the past 20 or so years, as the tight control placed on belief systems and activities, through strict supervision of seminaries and Church administration, seems to have left it less attractive to people seeking a free space in which to express their faith.

Although he pays little attention to the official Churches, his occasional comments and insights are worth noting, even though this is outside the grasp of his primary theme. But a little more on the topic may have given a greater comprehension to the struggles of both registered and unregistered faith expressions, as well as some contrast to enhance the reader's understanding of the attraction of the freedom he speaks of.

While Johnson stresses that the bottom line of the Communist Party in regard to all matters, including religion, is always to be in control, it has also moved to harness the influence of religion to its own purposes.

The eventual real winners from this approach, Johnson tips as being those named by the secretary general of the Communist Party and president of China, Xi Jinping, as falling within the tradition of Chinese life; Buddhism, Daoism and folk religion.

But despite the constant government harping against foreign influence on religions, House Churches and mainstream religions continue to internationalise and to a certain extent the Communist Party welcomes this, as it gives it an opportunity to spread its soft power in the wider world.

But while the current president has largely abandoned the light handed touch on religion of his recent forbears, rather than crushing, he seeks tighter channelling of belief systems into Communist Party

purposes through a programme he dubs *Sinicisation*, which delves into giving theology, discipline, administration, worship and faith life what he calls *Chinese characteristics*, something, which Johnson believes the unregistered communities are far better equipped to resist.

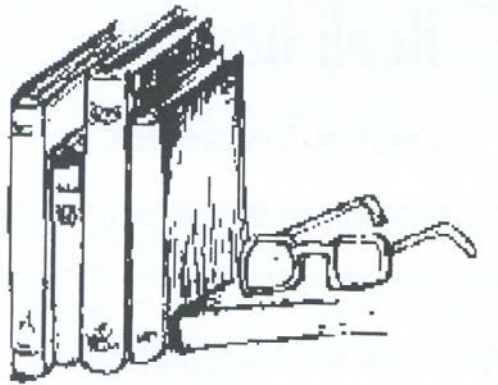
Johnson concludes his opus with some interesting predictions on the future shape of religion in China, but he anticipates the real tension between believers and civic authorities will come over the religious aspiration referred to as *heaven* (tian)—a well ordered society with a sense of respect and justice that transcends anyone in either government or the Communist Party.

He quotes the twenty-five-hundred-year-old *Book of Documents* as putting it this way, "Heaven sees as my people see. Heaven hears as my people hear" ■



**A modern replica of a centuries old Christian stele, evidence that Christianity has been present in China for well over 1,000 years.**





## BOOK REVIEW

### MISSION IN SECULARIZED CONTEXTS OF EUROPE

*Contemporary Narrative and Experiences*

by

Marina Ngursangzeli Behera, Michael Biehl  
and Knud Jorgensen

*Published by:* Regnum Books, Oxford, UK, 2018

***Reviewed by Joy Sandefur***

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Contrary to popular expectations that secularisation would result in religion disappearing, especially Christianity, this has not been the case. Secularisation has occurred differently in each European context discussed in this interesting book. True, attendance in mainstream Churches has declined rapidly in many places. However new expressions of the Christian faith have arisen in the form of migrant Churches, fresh expressions of Church and Pentecostal forms of worship.

Today religion is still an important part of life for many people. Also, in many modern societies, there is an increasingly greater variety of religious beliefs, which in turn tends to lead to dialogue and mutual enrichment.

This book highlights the complexity of secularisation in the varied contexts of Europe. It is simplistic to say that secularisation is responsible for the decline of Christianity and religion in general. Both are in fact alive and well. It proposes missiological responses to each context discussed. The authors argue that a good missiological response requires a good understanding of each context where mission is occurring.

*Mission in Secularized Contexts of Europe* explores how secularisation and the Christian faith interact with each other in different countries or context. It concludes with three perspectives.

The book has four parts, followed by an epilogue. The authors describe their own context and missiological perspective and, while accounting for a variety of contexts, this allows them to lay the groundwork for a wider discussion about religion and Church in Europe today.

In Part One (*General Perspectives*), Knud Jorgenson presents an overview of the contexts in which mission occurs in Europe. Grace Davie, who is credited with coining the expression, "Europe—the exceptional case", writes about *Religion in Modern Europe: Stabilities and Change*. Part one concludes with an article by Raag Rolfson, who uses a philosophical approach to examine the same material to explore possibilities of faith during and beyond this era.

Part Two (*Perspectives on the Secular Formation of Culture*) is the largest section of the book and has nine articles. These explore how secular culture has formed nine different contexts and possible missiological responses. These articles argue that there is no one way that the secular has formed culture and that each context must be understood for what it is before a missiological response can be formed. This is a reminder of how important it is to know and understand the context within which we work.

Hielke Wolters writes from an Ecumenical and a Dutch point of view about how people search for identity in a secularised context. Michael Biehl introduces us to the complexities of how people believe in a secular way in West Germany. This is followed by Martin Reppenhagen and Thomas Schlegel's article, *Perspective on Secularization in Eastern Germany*. They describe a very different context in East Germany to that of West Germany, but the issue is still secularisation and faith.

Next, in Daniel Buda's article, we learn about an Orthodox Church perspective on secularisation and faith in the Romanian context. Then, Annemarie C Mayer gives us a Roman Catholic perspective on mission in the secularised contexts of Europe. This

article discusses two opposing views: the cause of Christianity's decline and the rise of religion.

Mayer argues that there is more going on than the two opposing views suggest. Cathy Ross, an Anglican, presents us with a British perspective and explores the five marks of Global mission. Attendance in Anglican Churches is declining, but neither the Christian faith nor religion in general is disappearing. Ross discusses the Five Marks of Mission and how they allow for a Christian witness that is contextual, creative and holistic.

Gerrit Noort, using a Dutch secular context, reflects on the emergence of new styles of Churches and whether they can survive. This is followed by an article by Lars Dahle that discusses secularisation and the survival of religion from the cognitive dissonance that many people live with. Part Two concludes with an article by Paul Bendor-Samuel, in which he tackles the question of what the future mission of the Church in Europe might look like.

Part Three (*Perspectives among Youth*) contains two articles, which examine ecumenical youth organisations and how mission emerges for them in a secularised Europe. Zuzana Babicova and Pawel Pustelnik write about *Ecumenical Youth Organisations and their mission in Secularised Europe*. Then Tijana Petkovic discusses the youth of the Serbian Orthodox Church and their interaction with secular society and their Church.

In Part Four: (*Europe and Beyond*), Harvey Kwiyanzi looks at the reaction of the new migrant Churches to secular Europe. The members of these Churches come from backgrounds where religion is part of everything in life. Then follow two articles from the global south. Marina Ngursangzeli Behera writes about secularisation in India and Esther Mombo has a focus on East Africa.

The Epilogue (*Thinking Two thoughts*) by Jorgensen closes the book. The book achieves its goal of showing that the secular contexts of Europe are widely varied and that in doing mission the Church needs to understand each context and how best to relate the gospel to the people occupying this particular space ■

## BOOK REVIEW

### UNDERSTANDING RESILIENCE

*continued from page 43*

Given that resilience is enhanced by good support networks, Watts reminds mission organisations that they too have a role and must ensure they have

good practices and policies in place as they consider applicants, the needs of workers and placement contexts.

In the final chapter, Watts considers ways to enhance resilience. He gives some good suggestions of practices and methods to consider. He also points out that, whilst certain external factors cannot be controlled, such as the socio-political or natural environments of a cross-cultural worker's placement location, the organisation can help enhance the resilience of individuals and teams. Good leadership training that equips leaders to understand and build resilience, as well as best-practice organisational policies and practices, are key.

This is a well-written, scholarly work exploring the understanding of resilience generally, and specifically in cross-cultural mission contexts. The author makes several assumptions in approaching his research. He assumes the concept of resilience is not well-understood by the member-care/mission community.

He also assumes that it is necessary, as cross-cultural mission workers are under significant stress on the field and need to be resilient. In the way he has written this book, Watts is making assumptions about the academic interest of his readers and their willingness/desire to grapple with the scholarly approach.

Whilst the scholarly nature of the book may be a drawback for busy member-care workers, the inclusion of the author's own professional reflections and questions are a strength. These reflections and questions provide good launching points for member-care workers and mission leaders to evaluate their own approaches and practices when assessing and enhancing the resilience of candidates and cross-cultural workers.

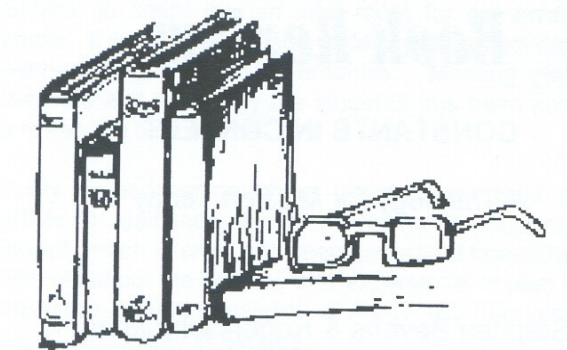
The diagram on page 10 of Windle's "Layers of resources and assets that facilitate resilience" is another helpful resource for mission organisations and mentors to use with applicants as they seek to enhance resilience.

Member care workers will appreciate the overview and the thought given to assessment and enhancement of resilience in cross-cultural mission workers.

Researchers and students will appreciate the groundwork done in the literature review and ideas for further research that are raised throughout the book.

The appendix contains 11 pages of definitions of resilience, with references. The bibliography contains another 11 pages of source material. This is not a 'good read' book, but one to work with ■

## BOOK REVIEW



### ASIA'S FORGOTTEN CHRISTIAN STORY

by

Steve Cochrane

*Published by: Regnum Books International, Oxford, UK, 2018. 75pp*

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**Reviewed by Ross Mackinnon**, retired teacher, technical school inspector, education consultant and active member of his local Uniting Church congregation. He is former Editor of **Australian Journal of Mission Studies**.

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Steve Cochrane has worked in South Asia for over 30 years, especially in the area of Christian-Muslim relations. **Asia's Forgotten Christian Story** is an abridged version of his longer book, **Many Monk's Across the Sea: Church of the East Monastic Mission in Ninth Century Asia**.

The author concentrates on the place of Christian monasteries in mission in the East Syrian Church at the end of the eighth and beginning of the ninth centuries during the Abbasid Caliphate, and especially the time when Timothy I was Patriarch of the Church of the East from 780 to 823.

The author wrote this book because he believes previous authors have not focussed in any depth on the important role of the monasteries in mission in the East Syrian Church, and that there has been no investigation into how the monks were trained for mission or what the role of Patriarch Timothy may have been.

Because this book is an abridged version of a longer work, it is broad brush in its approach, but it serves as an excellent introduction to the history and mission of the East Syrian Church during the early Abbasid period.

The East Syrian Church began largely as a "refugee Church" as it was forced east when the forces of Rome and Persia clashed. The Church continued to move eastwards to India and China.

*The author wrote this book because he believes previous authors have not focussed in any depth on the important role of the monasteries in mission in the East Syrian Church, and that there has been no investigation into how the monks were trained for mission or what the role of Patriarch Timothy may have been*

During the time covered by the book, Islam had been established and was on the rise. Patriarch Timothy was living in what the author calls a "zone of contact" and Timothy worked hard at establishing good relationships with his Muslim overlords. His monasteries at this time were places of learning, hospitality and mission training. Many monasteries had impressive libraries and, in many places, monasteries established local schools.

We are fortunate that many of Timothy's letters (59 of them) have survived. As the author says:

*Timothy...brought together in his own person East Syrian elements of scholarship, a heart for mission, a breadth of learning and understanding of the mission of his Church across Asia, while recognising and living within the Islamic context he found himself in. He valued deeply the monastic framework he was educated and nurtured in, especially the monastery of Beit Abhe (p69).*

The author refers constantly to original sources such as Timothy's letters, Thomas of Marga's **Historia Monastica** and contemporary Muslim accounts of the East Syrian monasteries. Reference is also made to recent archaeological discoveries in the Middle East, India and China.

**continued on page 42**



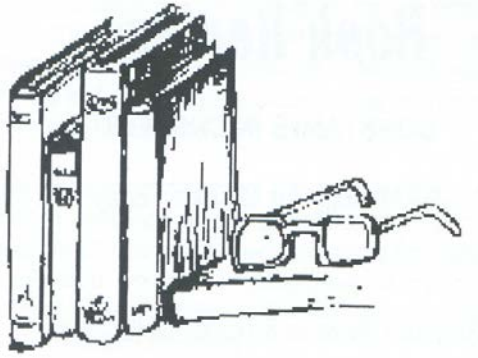
## BOOK REVIEW

### TO FULFIL, NOT TO DESTROY

*Christ as the Fulfilment of Hindu Religious Experience in Indian Christian Theology*

by

Ivan M Satyavrata



*Published by:* Regnum Books International, Oxford, UK, 2018. 68pp

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**Reviewed by Ross Mackinnon**, retired teacher, technical school inspector, education consultant and active member of his local Uniting Church congregation. He is former Editor of **Australian Journal of Mission Studies**.

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Ivan Satyavrata is Senior Pastor of the Assembly of God Church in Kolkata, capital of West Bengal State, India. His interests include Christian witness to people of other faiths and the Christian response to social issues. His Church has a significant social outreach and provides education and basic nutrition for several thousand children in the Kolkata area. **To Fulfil, Not to Destroy** is a condensation of his PhD thesis.

This short book makes for fascinating reading. First it traces some of the attitudes to the concept of *fulfilment theology* at the beginning of Christianity and then moves to some of the attitudes during the 19th century and up to India's independence after World War II.

The author's definition of fulfilment theology is:

*Fulfilment theology is based on a theory of the relationship between Christianity and other religions, which holds that all religious traditions have partial access to the truth, to spirituality and to transcendence, but Christianity has access to them in all their fulness (px).*

The author asks a fundamental question:

*Is there a way of relating the Christian faith and experience to other religions, which ascribes genuine value to the religious experience of people of other faiths, while affirming the essential claims of the Christian faith? (p1).*

The book comments on the attitudes to Hinduism of the first Protestant missionaries in India, attitudes which were largely conservative and confrontational.

It then turns to the views of four key Indian Hindu thinkers and their associations with Christianity:—

- Keshub Chunder Sen (1838 to 1884), who remained a Hindu, but was deeply attracted to Christianity;
- Nehemiah Goreh (1825 to 1895), a high-caste Brahmin and Sanskrit scholar, who converted to Christianity and viewed Christ as the fulfilment of the anticipations and yearnings of his Hindu ancestors;
- Brahmandhab Upadhyay (1861 to 1907), a Bengali Hindu Brahmin, who became a member of the Roman Catholic Church while retaining a firm allegiance to both Hindu culture and Roman Catholicism;
- N V Tilak (1862 to 1919), a Brahmin convert and famous poet, who was devoted to Christ and also deeply committed to his Hindu heritage.

Tilak believed it was a misconception that becoming a Christian involved denying your traditional cultural heritage and separating yourself from your Hindu community.

The next chapter is devoted to the ideas of Scottish missionary John Nicol Farquhar (1861 to 1929), who brought a more peaceful and harmonious attitude to Hinduism. Farquhar insisted that a sympathetic attitude is an essential prerequisite for a proper understanding of Hinduism. The author also provides a critical analysis of Farquhar's approach, which wasn't always well received by his Western colleagues.

*continued on page 16*

JUNE 2019

## *Research student/candidate:*

*Clement Papa*

Thesis title:

*Tracing the Origins and the Development of Bernard Lonergan's Idea of Redemptive History*

Degree: Ph.D

College/university: Yarra Theological Union (YTU)

Completion or expected completion date (month and year): December 2019

Supervisor(s): Doctor Kathleen Williams RSM

### *Abstract:*

This dissertation has long been in the making. Having been introduced to Bernard Lonergan's works during my first year in philosophy (by Tom Daly SJ) during my seminary training (1991), I have kept that interest all along until now.

The years I spent in Mount Hagen (Good Shepherd Seminary), in Port Moresby (Catholic Theological Institute), in Rome (Urbanian University), in Toronto (Regis College) and in Melbourne (YTU) have enhanced my knowledge of Lonergan and my appreciation of his academic contributions.

Before moving to Melbourne in 2015 to work on this project, I was deeply orientated towards Lonergan's socio-pastoral concerns apart from what he is commonly known to be—an accomplished systematic theologian.

My interests in social concerns evolved way back at the beginning of my parish ministry when I first got appointed to a remote parish in Papua New Guinea (PNG). Basic provisions of public servicing and rural infrastructure had neither been maintained nor expanded.

The rural population had suffered the consequences of long government neglect resulting in the upsurge of rural-urban migration. Over the past 40 years since Independence, PNG society has suffered under poor governance.

Health funds had been chopped from national budget allocations, leaving hospitals and rural clinics to starve. Schools are overcrowded with no desks; text books are scarce and teaching staff stretched to the limits. Poor political decisions lead to weak and dysfunctional government institutions operating mostly on an ad hoc basis.

The cancer of corruption has deeply corroded the system of governance; dysfunctional institutions and poor performance in the public sector resulting in lawlessness and disorder. I find myself asking almost the same types of questions Lonergan raised some decades ago.

Why is it that a small country with a relatively sizeable population of seven million, its huge promise of economic boom ignited by massive gas exploration suffers under rapid social decline? Some of PNG's progress has been remarkable. But the economic and social outcomes are only a fringe benefit relative to the much talked-about wealth of PNG.

What has gone wrong? How do we get out of this mess? My thesis is an attempt to give a theological response to PNG's social concerns. In order that both theology and the cultural context might be mutually enriched, my project intends to draw primarily on the theological and historical insights of Bernard Lonergan's theology of redemptive history ■

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Contact details: Dorish Maru College, 100 Albion Road, Box Hill VIC 3128  
Telephone number: (61) 410 237 648  
Email address: *clementpapa@gmail.com*

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