AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL
of
MISSION STUDIES

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 Articles, Reflections and Reports, and Book Reviews

Articles

It publishes scholarly Articles in missiology, normally from 2,000 to 5,000 words, if accepted after scholarly, double-blind peer review (at least two double-blind peer reviews for each academic Article, where the reviewers' decisions are final).

Reflections, Reports, and Book Reviews

It also publishes Reflections and Reports of up to 2,000 words, and Book Reviews of up to 500 words.

Purposes of Australian Association for Mission Studies

- 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.
- Affiliate with the International Association for Mission Studies (IAMS), work in partnership with the Aotearoa/ New Zealand Association for Mission Studies (ANZAMS) and build links with those engaged in mission studies in the South Pacific.

Contents

Editorial

In these rapidly changing times, the relationship between faith and culture is as complex and urgent as ever. The latest edition of our journal delves into themes critical for reimagining Christian mission across Australia, New Zealand, and our broader region. The convergence of globalization, secularization, and the shift away from various expressions of Christendom presents both profound challenges and unique opportunities for the church's mission. Through the insights of our contributors, we explore how these dynamics invite us to rethink and renew our commitment to the gospel's proclamation and embodiment in a world that is at once deeply connected and profoundly divided.

Jacob Bloemberg's "Global Nomads" underscores the strategic positioning of international churches in urban mission. These congregations, which are too often dismissed as mere expatriate havens, hold untapped potential for significant urban impact. Bloemberg reminds us of the apostolic roots of such communities, suggesting that today's diaspora can similarly catalyse a missional movement. The call to understand and engage our urban contexts with contextualized ministry is not just timely but imperative. The Love Hanoi campaign exemplifies how international churches can lead the way in loving and serving their cities, offering a model for others worldwide.

My exploration of "The Atonement, Healing, and Christian Mission" challenges us to broaden our understanding of healing within the Atonement's framework. My theological reflection compels us to consider healing's multifaceted nature—physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual—integral to Christ's redemptive work. This comprehensive view of healing invites the church to embody a mission that reflects the fullness of God's kingdom and integral mission, anticipating its ultimate fulfilment in the Parousia while actively participating in God's healing work in the present.

Michael D. Crane's discussion on "Dashboard Symbolism" addresses the complexities of interfaith engagement in a pluralistic world. As Christians navigate multi-religious communities, Crane emphasizes approaching others with Christ-like humility without compromising the gospel's public truth. This balance between sensitivity and confidence is crucial as we strive to be faithful witnesses in a religiously diverse urban landscape.

Ben Boland's advocacy for including older people in urban mission strategies draws attention to a frequently overlooked demographic. The imperative to minister to older individuals highlights the need for a mission that is as broad and inclusive as the kingdom of God itself. This focus demands re-evaluating our priorities and practices, urging us to see the face of Christ in every age and stage of life.

The book reviews presented in this edition, covering works by Sam Chan, Stephen McAlpine, Michael Frost, Rebecca McLaughlin, and Garry Worete Deverell, offer a rich tapestry of perspectives on engaging with a sceptical world, confronting challenges as "the bad guys," understanding mission as intrinsic to the Christian life, and reimagining theology from a place of deep learning from First Nations peoples, and from a place of contemplation and connection to land. These reviews highlight the diversity of thought within contemporary

Christian scholarship and serve as a resource for those seeking to navigate the complexities of mission in today's context.

As we reflect on the insights and challenges presented in this edition, it becomes clear that the mission field before us is as vast as varied. The shifts within our culture toward a post-Christian, secular landscape requires us to reconsider the methods and models of our mission and the very heart of what it means to follow Jesus Christ in these times. The call to renew and pursue Christian mission in Australia, New Zealand, and our region is to embrace the gospel's transformative power in all aspects of life and society.

As we move forward, let us do so with a renewed commitment to a mission as comprehensive as the gospel we proclaim. Let us be inspired by the early church's adaptability, resilience, and unwavering focus on Christ's lordship over all of life. May we engage our communities with the creativity and love demonstrated in urban missions, the holistic healing offered through the Atonement, the sensitive yet confident proclamation of the gospel in a pluralistic world, and the inclusive embrace of all people, including the often-neglected elderly. This is our challenge: to pursue and renew Christian mission in these changing, largely secular times, with the hope and prayer that through our faithful witness, the kingdom of God might be made more visible in our world today.

Graham Joseph Hill

Guest Editor

ARTICLES

Global Nomads: Expats on Mission in a New Urban World

Dr Jacob Bloemberg

Dr Jacob Bloemberg moved with his family to Hanoi, Vietnam, in 1997 and became Lead Pastor of Hanoi International Fellowship in 2005. HIF launched the Love Hanoi campaign in 2012, which has become a citywide movement, inspiring Christian leaders worldwide to start their Love [Your City] campaign. Jacob holds a Doctorate in Transformational Leadership: City Transformation from Bakke Graduate University.

International churches are uniquely positioned to engage strategically in urban missions in any context. With a wealth of resources, know-how, and well-connected people, they can have a significant impact within their cities. Sadly, international churches are often perceived as Christian clubs for expatriates with little relevance to the community in which they are located. Many do indeed start that way, but that is not the ideal, nor should they stay that way.

In this paper, I will start by showing how the first missional movement led by the Apostle Paul was birthed in an international church and continued planting such churches throughout the Western world. In addition, research has proven that, though much history has been lost, the church thrived in urban centres throughout the Eastern and Southern hemispheres. The global diaspora of people during those early centuries paved the way.

Such a diaspora movement is happening in our century as well. Several networks envision this trend as an opportunity for ministry to go through and beyond the diaspora. This is where and how international churches can be most effective by mobilizing today's global nomads for urban missions. I will briefly discuss the role of international churches, affluent churches, and pastors in citywide movements.

International churches need to understand their urban context to contextualize urban ministry. A short discussion of contextualization is presented and illustrated by my context, the city of Hanoi, Vietnam. I will describe how partnerships and networking are vital for international churches to launch citywide movements to love their cities. Using the Love Hanoi campaign as an example, I will explain the first stages of starting a movement. Because if we can do it in Hanoi, other international churches worldwide certainly can, too!

1. Biblical and Historical Precedence

The involvement of the international church in citywide movements and global urban missions is not a new endeavour. Both biblical and historical precedents from the first century and the first millennium are repeating this phenomenon today. To begin with, let me take you back to the sending church of the Apostle Paul. I will then take you across the Asian continent and back to Africa to show how the early church thrived in urban centres of ancient Christian, Muslim, and Buddhist nations.

Antioch: The First Missional International Church

"Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed," it says in Acts chapter eleven, "travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus."[1] Although churches had been planted in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, this was the first time disciples of Jesus were venturing outside their national borders towards the ends of the earth. Not by choice, mind you, but some shared the gospel with non-Jews, and soon enough, the first congregation outside Israel was born. It became so successful that Luke writes, "The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord."[2] For a year, "Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught many people."[3] The Antioch church was a large, non-Jewish, urban church.

When a visiting prophet came from Jerusalem and foretold about the upcoming famine in Israel, the Christians (first called Christians in Antioch) started sending money to help those experiencing poverty. The Antioch church was missional. Two chapters later, Luke records the leadership team of the Antioch church gathering for a conference. He relays those who were present: "Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul."[4] Each of these men came from a different nationality. The Antioch church was international. In response to the word from the Holy Spirit, the leadership team set aside Barnabas and Paul and sent them off on the first global mission journey. The Antioch church was a sending church.

The First-Century Diaspora: Global Urban Missional Movement

The church in Antioch was truly remarkable: it was a large, non-Jewish, urban, missional, international, and sending church with great sensitivity to the move of the Holy Spirit. As a result, the Antioch church became a launching pad for a global urban missional movement that is still going on today. It became a model church for all the churches Paul, Barnabas, and their teammates planted throughout the Roman Empire. The Antioch church is still a model church for us today.

Within twenty-five years, this missional movement had spread from Antioch throughout Asia Minor to the European continent and as far as Rome, the empire's capital city. This was made possible because of the first-century diaspora of the Jewish people. Since the days of the exile, Jews had settled in cities throughout the Assyrian empire and established synagogues wherever they lived. Only ten men were needed to start a synagogue, though some newer cities like Philippi did not even have that many. Paul and his international church-planting team traversed from city to city — it was an urban missional strategy. The Roman Empire had paved the way, literally. Due, in part, to the transportation infrastructure, a common language, and the diaspora network, Paul's mission succeeded.

From Antioch to the Far East and Back

Antioch was the launching pad for the Western (Roman) church and the Eastern (Asian) church. It is a popular, though erroneous, belief that after Paul's mission, the gospel kept moving west into Europe, then the USA, then to Asia, and is now returning to Jerusalem. However, during the first thousand years of the church's history, it was predominantly an Asian church.

In *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia—and How It Died*, Philip Jenkins uncovers the forgotten roots of the Asian church. Long before

the Roman Catholics travelled The Silk Road to China, the Nestorian and Jacobite missionaries set out from Syria to the Far East, reaching Mongolia, Shanghai, India, and perhaps as far as Vietnam, the Philippines, and Korea.[5] It is estimated that by 1000 A.D., "Asia had 17 to 20 million Christians" who "stemmed from Christian traditions dating back twenty-five or thirty generations."[6]

Nestorians in the seventh century contextualized the gospel to communicate it in Buddhist and Taoist terms. Here is a sample text from a Nestorian monument dating back to 780 A.D.:

"The illustrious and honourable Messiah, veiling his true dignity, appeared in the world as a man; . . . he fixed the extent of the eight boundaries, thus completing the truth and freeing it from dross; he opened the gate of the three constant principles, introducing life and destroying death; he suspended the bright sun to invade the chambers of darkness, and the falsehoods of the devil were thereupon defeated; he set in motion the vessel of mercy by which to ascend to the bright mansions, whereupon rational beings were then released; having thus completed the manifestation of his power, in clear day he ascended to his true station."[7]

Another example is the design used by the Nestorians to identify themselves, namely a cross on top of a lotus, the "symbol of Buddhist enlightenment."[8] This symbol can be found even today on tombstones throughout China and India. The image below depicts the icon located on a tombstone in China (see Figure 1: Headstone with Lotus and Cross, Yuan Dynasty (1272–1368), Quanzhou Maritime Museum). This symbol is an inspiring example for Asian Christian designers today. Christian artists have been designing church logos or symbols for the past two thousand years. Designers today are continuing an ancient trade of applying contextualization to their art. What would a contextualized church logo in Asia look like today?

Figure 1: Headstone with Lotus and Cross, Yuan Dynasty (1272–1368), Quanzhou Maritime Museum9

As the title of Jenkins' book suggests, much of the church's history in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa has been lost. Yet, what is known is that at the start of the third century, several kingdoms were Christian in religion. The king of Osthoene, with Edessa as its capital city, accepted Christianity around 200 A.D.[10] Armenia followed around 300 A.D., of which the capital city, Ani, became known as "the city of 1,001 churches."[11] Next in line were Georgia, Adiabene, Nubida, and Ethiopia (Abyssinia). Aksum, Ethiopia's capital, became "the kingdom's main Christian see" by 340 A.D.[12] Ethiopia was so full of churches that one could not "sing in one church

without being heard by another, and perhaps by several". Furthermore, the Christians had "a natural disposition to goodness, they [were] very liberal of their alms."[13]

Much of the non-Western church history might have been lost, but Jenkins has proven that Christianity thrived in urban centres and numerous nations during the first millennium. The church, to begin with, was urban and Asian.

2. The Missional International Church Movement of Today

Having established that the church of Acts was a missional movement of international churches which continued to thrive in urban centres of the East, South, and West, we will now jump ahead to the third millennium in which we find ourselves. First, we will briefly highlight current trends of the global diaspora and the Global Diaspora Network. Then, the Missional International Church Network and, for example, the Hanoi International Fellowship will be introduced to show how international churches today can play an influential role in urban missions. Considering the wealth of resources in such churches, attention is given to the role of international churches, the affluent, and the pastor.

The Twenty-First-Century Global Diaspora

Akin to the first-century diaspora, the global dispersion of people today is an unprecedented flow of people migrating predominantly from East to West, South to North, and rural to urban environments. According to the Global Diaspora Network (GDN), "there are now over 200 million international migrants, and over 700 million internally displaced people or close to 1 billion scattered peoples."[14] To visualize this global movement, the Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Global Human Capital has done a beautiful job creating an information graph, as shown at http://www.global-migration.info/. I printed these on banners and posted them at our church to raise awareness of this global trend.

Migration flows within and between ten world regions in 100,000s. This circular plot shows all global bilateral migration flows for the five years mid-2005 to mid-2010, classified into a manageable set of ten world regions. Key features of the worldwide migration system include:

- There is a high concentration of African migration within the continent (except Northern Africa).
- There is a "closed" migration system in the former Soviet Union.
- There is a high spatial focus on Asian emigration to North America and the Gulf states.

Cities are the places where these streams of global migration merge. In these urban centres of globalization, migration, and urbanization, international churches (ICs) thrive. In every major city around the world, ICs serve the dynamic expatriate community. Generally, expatriates roam the world like global nomads from city to city, job to job, posting to posting, and calling to calling. It is like a rushing river streaming around the globe. Among them are Christians from various nationalities, vocations, and denominations. The Missional International Church Network (MICN) is focused on mobilizing ICs to empower this global stream of Christian expats to be missional wherever they go.[15]

One of these ICs is the Hanoi International Fellowship (HIF), which I am privileged to serve as Lead Pastor. HIF started as a fellowship of about a dozen Christian expats in the capital city of Vietnam some twenty years ago. For the first decade, the fellowship was internally focused, primarily meeting the needs of Christian

foreigners living and working in Hanoi. In 2005, just before I was appointed the pastor, I attended the MICN conference in Dubai. As a church, we realised that God was calling us to become externally focused, but how could we do this as an IC in our context? MICN gave us a vision, language, and peer group that helped HIF transform into a missional community.

The Role of the International Church

Joy Tira, director of the Global Diaspora Network (GDN), calls upon the church to respond to the global diaspora phenomenon. Tira outlines three ways for Christians and churches to get involved by ministering to, through, and beyond the diaspora.[16] This provides a helpful framework to categorise the types of ministries the IC can be involved with. For example, by reaching out to the expatriate community in Hanoi, HIF is ministering directly to the diaspora in our city. Mobilising and equipping HIF members to be missional is ministering through the diaspora. When HIFers become acquainted with the culture and context, we can minister beyond the diaspora and build bridges with local communities and society. International churches are uniquely positioned to become bridge builders between the global diaspora and the local population, between the worldwide church and the local congregations, and between global organisations and corporations to meet local needs.

One of the challenges that I continued to struggle with is this: how can an international church transition from being a church that has come "to" the city to being a church that is "in" the city to be a church that is "for" the city, to becoming a church that collaborates "with" the city? Hanoi International Fellowship transitioned some years ago from being a fellowship of Christian foreigners to becoming a missional international church. We have realised that we are called to be a city church, a church that is "in" and "for" the city. Today, the challenge before us is the transition: to become a church with the city. How can HIF collaborate across sectors and with city institutions to bless the city of Hanoi? Or, in the words of Swanson and Williams, how can the whole church bring the whole gospel to the entire city?[17]

The Role of the Affluent Church

Equipping expatriate Christians to serve the poor in the city immediately raises the issue: how can the affluent expats help without hurting? Lowell Bakke, professor at the Bakke Graduate University (BGU), stated during a lecture on urban transformation: "The boulevard churches speak to power; the off-street churches speak to people."[18] This means there is room for both the upscale downtown church and the neighbourhood community churches.

During my study in Manila for a BGU course, I had a chance to visit two boulevard churches (Union Church Manila, a one-hundred-year-old international church, and Christ Commission Fellowship, a wealthy local church with a brand-new, debt-free, 10,000-seat facility) and two off-street churches (Botocan Christian Community Fellowship in a squatter area and the small church in the Wawa slum community). I know that most members of the international church cannot do what the people in the squatter community churches are doing. However, the opposite is also true: the small house churches cannot influence those in positions of power in the city and nation. What is important is that both the affluent and the community churches work on behalf of the poor.

While reading and researching about urban ministry, I fell into the trap of believing that you need to move into the poor neighbourhood and live like people experiencing poverty to help people experiencing poverty

effectively. As it is often labelled, incarnational ministry can be easily misunderstood as being at the pinnacle of the ministry pyramid (see Figure 2).
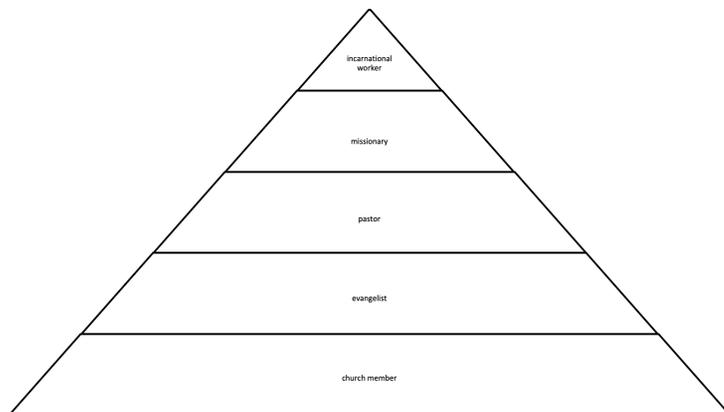

Figure 2: The Ministry Pyramid

In the evangelical church, a mindset exists that serving God as an evangelist, pastor, or missionary is more holy than having any other job. This view is very much prevalent among Asian churches. The saying is, "If you want to serve God, quit your job and work for him full-time." This is a false mindset since every Christian is called to serve God in their homes, offices, classrooms, neighbourhoods, and wherever else they work, live, and go. The danger is that incarnational ministry is viewed as the most sacred and effective way—perhaps the only way—to serve people experiencing poverty in the city.

Incarnational ministry can be very effective if done well. Viv Grigg, the founder of Servant Partners, has mobilized many incarnational workers and missionaries who have laid down their riches to live and serve among people experiencing poverty in slums worldwide. Aaron Smith, whom I met in the Botocan squatter community, is one of them. However, only a few are called to such extremes, often for a relatively short time. What about the rest of the church? Can they serve people experiencing poverty besides supporting the incarnational missionaries? Suppose incarnational ministry is seen as the pinnacle of mission. In that case, everyone else will always feel like their service is of lesser value—that they will never measure up or can help effectively.

Thankfully, Grigg offers a much broader picture. He writes, "Typical Christian responses of aid and community development, even when done brilliantly, affect only the micro-environment of the squatter area."[19] Grigg goes on to explain that there is a distinct role for the affluent Christian:

"The primary response of middle-class Christians (while not neglecting other issues) will probably be in the transformation of economic life, political life, government bureaucracy, and other structures of the city that perpetuate slum poverty. It will probably also be necessary to deal with international factors that increasingly loom as dominant forces in worldwide urban poverty."[20]

In chapters 20 and 21 of his book *Cry of the Urban Poor*, Grigg recommends middle-class and international elite Christians and churches. "Middle-class professionals . . . may effect change in the implementation and governing of the cities at an urban planning level," while "Christians in the international elite may change the macro-economic systems."[21] Table 1 below outlines the potential responses of the middle class to poverty.

In speaking of the role of the affluent church, Grigg states, "Far more important [than giving financial help] is giving personnel who can impart spiritual life and technical skills."[22] Still, providing financial support for widows, orphans, refugees, seed capital, expansion capital, scholarships, and community leadership programs is valid.[23] Figure 3 outlines what the upper and middle classes can do in the fight against poverty.

Figure 4 displays how a simplified lifestyle of Westerners (or the affluent) can lift those who are labouring while experiencing poverty in developing nations out of poverty, which in turn lifts those experiencing destitution to become those who are labouring while experiencing poverty.

Table 1: Middle-Class Responses to Poverty

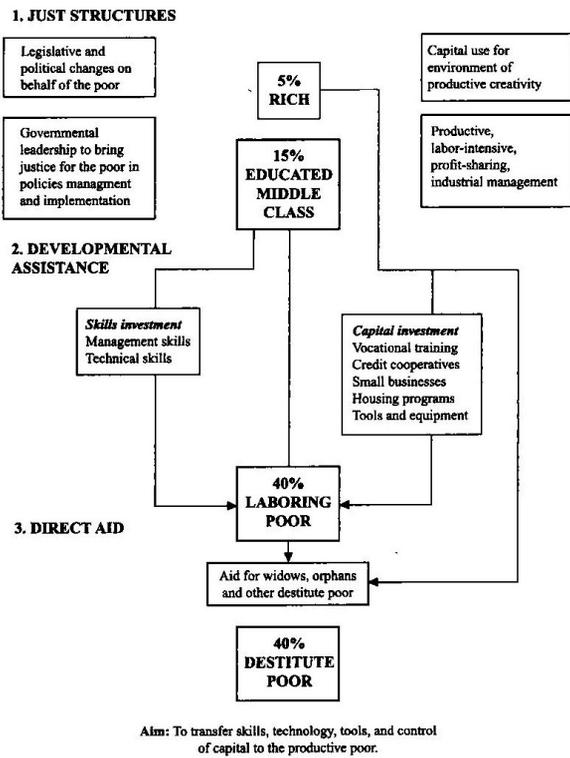| LEVELS OF POVERTY	POTENTIAL RESPONSES
Street sleepers	Social work relating to existing agencies
	Direct aid — food, clothing
	Food for work, housing
Relocation area	Upgrade work operations
	Food for work or housing
	Social work relating to existing agencies
Bustees/Slums (Where housing available, no work)	Co-op loans draw local industries into area
	Co-op into job placement, feasibility studies of jobs
	Direct grants to establish small-scale businesses:
	Food line
	Clothing line
	Manufacturing line:
	Electronics
	Welding
	Woodworking
	Chemicals, soaps
	Avoid handicrafts unless there are existing skills
	A skills-training institution nearby
	Food for work
	Overseas job placement agency
Slum-housed (Majority working)	Co-op housing program
	Credit co-op
Drug addicts, alcoholics	Specialized long-term pastoral communities and rehabilitation

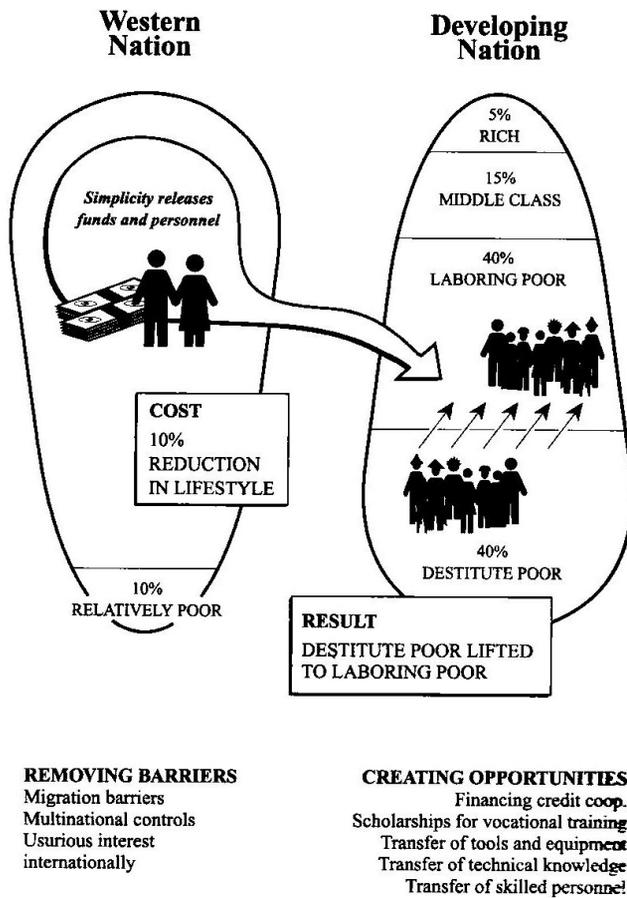*Figure 3: The Fight Against Poverty: What the Upper and Middle Class Can Do24*

Figure 4: Sacrificial, Simple Lifestyles: Inter-Church International Economic Justice (2 Corinthians 8–9)25

At HIF, we are moving in the direction Grigg points through our City Partnerships ministry. We aim to connect resources in HIF with opportunities in the city. We recruit volunteers to share their time and expertise and to raise funds to support initiatives such as orphanages, vocational projects, and start-up ministries. The vision, guidelines, and implementation of City Partnerships need clarification and refinement. It would help our middle-class and international elite church members see their role in fighting poverty and our corporate role in the city.

The challenge of reducing our lifestyle by 10% to uplift productive people who also experience poverty could be turned into a campaign for financial stewardship. The campaign could challenge HIF members to live on 80% of their income while giving 10% to ministries and 10% to the church.

The Role of the Pastor

One change that needs to take place to overcome these challenges is in the pastor's posture towards the city. Are they the "pastor in a church which happens to be in a community, or which is for a community?" questions Lowell Bakke. The answer to this question unveils what the pastor thinks about their role in the city. During my tenure as pastor of HIF, I also needed to make this paradigm shift. When we decided to be a church for the expatriate community and the city, it also changed my role and posture. The city had become my parish.

During one of our lectures in Manila, Rainier Chu, an attorney with Mission Ministries Philippines (MMP), challenged us to consider the posture of the Catholic priest. "Learn to journey with the poor; all other things become secondary," said Chu. In coming to a community, comparing a Catholic priest and an evangelical pastor provides quite a contrast in posture. Chu explained:

"When entering the slum, a priest has a very graphic image of Jesus (as a statue), whereas a pastor has the image of Jesus's presence (ethereal). A priest has a theology of God's presence everywhere. A priest comes to the community to find God there, whereas the pastor goes to bring God. In his order, the priest goes there to grow old, die, and be buried there. In his books, Francis Schaeffer says evangelicals have already "found" Jesus, whereas the orthodox have a great sense of journey. Pastors divide between members and non-members; the priest is called to the parish."[26]

The table below lists the differing postures between priest and pastor (see Table 2). This is exaggerated and stereotyping, but it worked on me. Looking at the pastor column, I can identify more with the pastor than the priest: bringing God to the city focused on accomplishing a project, moving fast, and focused on preaching and communication. I have a dilemma: I want to see the city as my parish, but I have to fight against my default approach to the city as a typical pastor.[27]

Table 2: Contrast Between the Priest and Pastor[28]

PRIEST	PASTOR
Theology of finding God	Bringing God
Journey	Project accomplished
Walk slowly	Walks fast
Called to entire parish	Divide members/non-members
Focus on sick, poor, dying	Focus on Scripture

One excellent example of such a priest is Father Ben Beltran of the Smokey Mountain community in Manila. When Fr. Beltran moved to the largest garbage slum, he made it his parish and saw every person as a member of that parish. He asked everyone, "Who do you think Jesus is?" Through this exercise, he discovered that Jesus was already present in the community. This became the thesis of Beltran's doctoral degree and was later published as *The Christology of the Inarticulate: An Inquiry into the Filipino Understanding of Jesus the Christ.*[29]

Beltran said, "No one will follow you unless you spend time with them; it is about relationships."[30] So he spent time with the members of his parish and asked a simple question. As a result, Smokey Mountain is no longer a garbage dump. Through collaborative efforts, Beltran and partners were able to transform the city's garbage collection and processing, launching their own businesses and recycling programs. Veritas Social Empowerment, Inc. runs an IT school and other educational programs and takes an entrepreneurial approach to working with people experiencing poverty. The company's slogan, "Imagine. Innovate. Impact," clearly states the company's vision and intent.[31]

3. From Contextualization to City-wide Movements

The Nestorians knew how to communicate the gospel in the Asian context. Today, the same strategy and skill are needed when talking about the involvement of the international church in urban missions. By definition, the church members and leaders are foreigners and outsiders in the host city. First, I will give a short introduction to the concept of contextualization. Then, I will paint a picture of the urban context of Hanoi City, Vietnam's capital. It will become apparent that the international church can be effective only through networking and partnerships. In conclusion, I will introduce several formats of consultations to gather like-minded people to learn from and serve the city.

The Need for Contextualization

"Contextualization means doing theology ourselves," explained Dr Tim Gener, President of the Asia Theological Seminary, during our class on Filipino theology in Manila.[32] Doing theology is thinking biblically about something. Thus, Asian contextualization is "thinking biblically in the Asian context." As Gener stated, Christians have "the right to articulate the evangelical traditions in their own terms in light of their own issues".[33]

It was a pleasant surprise to discover several theological books published by the seminaries in Manila. The Asian Theological Seminary (ATS) holds an annual forum and publishes the presenters' papers in book form each year. The publisher, OMF Literature Inc., is working on making these resources available in eBook format. However, the following titles are currently available in print at ATS:

Doing Theology in the Philippines (2005)

Naming the Unknown God (2006)

The Church and Poverty in Asia (2008)

The Earth is the Lord's (2009)

Walking with God (2012)[34]

For example, the book *The Church and Poverty in Asia* is a compilation of thirteen papers presented at the fourth Theological Forum in 2008. It represents a broad range of evangelical thought and practice in the Philippines. Based on Mary's song from Luke 1:53, the conference's theme was, "He has filled the hungry with good things". In response, presenters were asked, "What is our theology of poverty, and how are we to make our theology actionable in a fallen world filled with need?"[35] The book is divided into two parts, the first wrestling with the theological and theoretical challenge and the latter discussing best working practices among people experiencing poverty. The forum was hosted at the Union Church of Manila (UCM), the oldest international church in the city.

Another similar book is *Asian Church and God's Mission*, edited by Wonsuk and Julie Ma, former Korean missionaries to the Philippines. This is a collection of papers presented at the Asian Mission symposium in Manila, Philippines, 2012. The conference theme, "Empowering the Asian Church for God's Mission," was expounded upon by sixteen experts in the field.[36] The presenters came from various nations: Honduras, Finland, Burma, Korea, the Philippines, Canada, the USA, Nepal, Japan, and India. The collection is divided into Reflections, Context, and Strategies. The Asia Pacific Theological Seminary supported the event.

Having lived in Asia for seventeen years, it is the first time that I have come across such rich resources in contextualisation. I have collected the books available from ATS and look forward to receiving this year's book on the theme of globalisation, migration, and diaspora. It is inspiring to think of writing, presenting, collecting, and publishing such papers in my context of Hanoi, Vietnam.

Example: The Urban Context of Hanoi

Hanoi is a unique city. Unlike Manila or Bangkok, it does not have significant slum areas and only a few squatter houses. The city government has tight control of the expansion of the city, which is a good thing in many ways. Hanoi is also unlike Western cities, which are the focus of so many urban mission textbooks, and unlike African cities, another textbook's favourite context. To start thinking about loving Hanoi, a clearer picture of the local context must first be painted.

When trying to understand who those experiencing poverty are in urban Hanoi, it is helpful to use Viv Grigg's list of eight specialized groups. Segmenting the population helps in creating specialized ministries. Questions to ask are: do these groups have a communal identity, meet one another, have some influence on each other, and is there a church ministry already working among these groups?[37] Below is a listing of these groups with a description of the people for each segment.

Street vendors: These people are trying to make a living on and off the streets. Although the city government has restricted street hawkers from the main boulevards and roads, they can be found on many street corners, along sidewalks and in front of shops and homes. From the women selling flowers, bread, kitchenware, clothes, and pottery off their bicycles to the men and women serving tea and cigarettes, noodle soup, lunches, doner kebabs, and egg sandwiches, vendors are everywhere throughout the city. Repairers ride bicycles through the neighbourhoods, calling out for any needed jobs.

Marketplaces: Long before daybreak, suppliers of produce and meats are riding their motorbikes into the city or deliveries in the multitudes of marketplaces. Run mainly by women, the sellers work from morning to night, living hard lives daily.

Street children: Because of government efforts to keep children off the streets, these have now gone into hiding. Blue Dragon, an international NGO working to rescue street children, has found one of the hiding places on top of a train bridge pillar twenty-five meters off the ground (see Figure 5). Because sales of postcards or shining shoes are banned, young boys and girls run a much higher risk of getting involved in the sex trade and being trafficked.[38]

Figure 5: Street Children Living on the Ledge of a Bridge, Eighty Feet Above the Ground39

Drug addicts: With drugs available cheaply, students especially are susceptible to drug addiction. An epidemic problem throughout the city with low success rates at government rehabilitation centres has provided churches in Hanoi with a unique opportunity to be of help. At least five house-based Christian rehab centres are in the city, with another ten in surrounding provinces. At least eight to ten churches, including HIF, are collaborating upon invitation by the government rehab centres to minister there several days per week. Graduates from their three-year program now have the option to join Christian halfway houses in the city.

Alcoholics: An unrecognized social issue in Vietnamese culture, beer halls and hard drinking are a deeply ingrained problem. Men will spend food money on cheap beer, feeling obliged to drink all hours of the day during business-related meetings, and will drink until they are hospitalized or die of alcohol poisoning. This happened to a friend who explained that he had to drink to win clients for his travel business. Alcoholism is not admitted to be an addiction, but it is everywhere, significantly impacting health, families, and society.

Prostitutes: Although illegal, prostitutes can be found in most karaoke bars, discos, massage parlours, and hostels. Prostitution is hidden, yet it is always there and available everywhere. Men are almost expected to have extramarital relationships. Prostitutes who are drug addicts will sell their service for as little as $2.50 to get their next dose of heroin. Recently, Christians were given access to a government rehab centre for prostitutes to evangelize among them in the hope of transforming lives. When prostitutes leave the centre, government staff tell them to "find a church in the city because they have the answer."[40]

Deaf, blind, and amputees: Lacking equal opportunities in education and the job market, people with disabilities are often kept inside the house or sent to centres. Slow progress is made to integrate them into mainstream society. Several NGOs and social businesses have successfully provided vocational training and set up handicraft shops and a bakery café.

Prisoners: Jail ministry is not yet allowed in Vietnam, except for those who minister at the rehab and prostitution centres, which function much like prison camps. It will not be surprising if recovered people with a substance use disorder, prostitutes, and criminals will soon be allowed to start prison ministries because of the testimonies of their transformed lives. It is also unknown to me if there are international prisoners who our international church members could visit. This is a typical ministry provided by fellowships like ours in other nations.

These eight groups can easily be identified in Hanoi. Several others may be added, such as garbage collectors and street sweepers, migrant construction workers, day labourers, students from poor and ethnic families in the provinces, and those with serious health problems awaiting treatment they cannot afford at government hospitals. Clarifying and improving this list with further details and statistics will be most helpful in developing ministries among those experiencing poverty in urban centres.

The Need for Networks and Partnerships

During my six months of study focused on urban transformation in Manila, the red ribbon running through all the educational experiences is partnerships and networking. All the success stories, whether from Veritas, Servant Partners, the Centre for Community Transformation, or Grameen Bank, are the results of networking and strategic partnerships between for-profits, non-profits, and government institutions.

Speaking of the success of the National Coalition of Urban Transformation (NCUT), founder Corrie DeBoer writes:

"Networking is the key to the success of this project. Networking helped to reduce the competition in the Christian arena, both among Protestants and between Protestants and Catholics. This study has shown the wisdom and strength of pulling leaders from different churches and religious organizations together to advise each other and seek enlightenment about relations between organizations and the lessons that can be learned in dialogue. The result has been successfully completed plans because of this pooling of resources and cooperation. Networking has brought about this ecumenical cooperation."[41]

Referencing Marvin Weisbord of Future Search, Corrie explains that for collaborative relationships to succeed, partners must develop and commit themselves to shared goals and objectives. Secondly, they must be willing to contribute their organization's resources to these common goals.[42] DeBoer experienced that Catholic and Evangelical seminaries were cautious when using the term "collaborate" as it felt too close for them. Instead, the seminaries preferred the term "networking" and organized themselves as a loose alliance under the "Network for Theological Education" banner. As a result, the seminaries "decided to work together in sharing library facilities, faculty, and other resources."[43]

On the other hand, DeBoer experienced "that the urban practitioners were more open to the concept of 'partnership' than the theological educators". She explains:

"Other reasons for interest in partnership were found to be the common ground and interest they held with the other members, the enjoyment of being in partnership in working among the poor, the trust that being in partnership elicited, the ownership to the expected outcomes this partnership provided, and sharing of resources with each other. These characteristics went beyond the descriptions normally ascribed to groups working together."[44]

Looking at the establishment and impact of NCUT as a role model for Love Hanoi, it is clear that we need to gain more understanding of what is meant by networks and partnerships, how these are different from a movement, and how they can be best utilized in our context to serve the goals of Love Hanoi.

Networks and Partnerships Defined

Phil Butler, author of Well Connected, believes the brokenness and divisions within the body of Christ to be a great sin. Jesus, right before his betrayal and death, prayed for the unity of the church. "I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me, and I am in you. May they also be in us so the world may believe you have sent me."[45] The Lord desires all Christians to be united so that the world may know that the Father has sent his Son because of his great love for them. Working in collaboration through networking and partnerships outwardly demonstrates God's love.

Butler lists seven primary motivations for and benefits of partnerships and networking: greater efficiency, building on each other's strengths, increased effectiveness, greater flexibility, expanded resources, reduction of risk, and expansion of options for action.[46] Not to confuse networks and partnerships, Butler defines each of them distinctively:

Networks: "Any group of individuals or organizations sharing a common interest, who regularly communicate with each other to enhance *their individual purposes.*"

Partnerships: "Any group of individuals or organizations, sharing a common interest, who regularly communicate, plan, and work together *to achieve a common vision beyond the capacity of any one of the individual partners.*"[47]

The critical difference between networks and partnerships is the purpose for collaboration, either for their purposes or for their common goals. "While networks may bring people or organizations together through a common interest," explains Butler, "partnerships galvanize linkages around a common vision or outcome. By working together on that common vision or outcome, they can achieve ends far beyond the capacity of any of the individual members of the partnerships."[48] The book has been made available as a free download at www.connectedbook.net.

From Networks to City-Wide Movements

In his book, *The Good City,* Glenn Barth outlines the six "stages of development for organizations serving city movements". [49] These six stages are as follows: exploration, formation, operation, breakthrough, transformation, and replication.[50] Each stage requires different functions and skills by the movement leader. The table below shows how movements develop and what kind of leadership is needed from stage to stage (see Table 3).

Table 3: Stages of Development51

Stage	Function	Skill
Exploration	Catalyst	Relational
	Visionary	Communication
		Convening

Formation	Visionary	Communication
		Facilitating
		Management
		Creative thinking
Operation	Management	Decision making
		People building
		Motivational
Breakthrough	Prayer	Doing the right things at the right times
Transformation	Discipling	Presence-based prayer
Replication	Teaching	Training and coaching skills

In 2012, inspired by Swanson and William's book, *To Transform a City*, HIF launched the "Love Hanoi" campaign.[52] We first had to go through the exploration stage to get the movement off the ground. Barth states, "Exploration is a foundational stage and must be given adequate time for relational equity to develop."[53] For stage one, the leader needs to be a catalyst and visionary with the skill set of being relational, a good communicator, and able to convene mixed groups of people.

Referencing Butler's Process of Partnership Exploration from *Well Connected*, Barth lists six parts to stage one:

- Gathering initial information.
- Doing initial interviews.
- Reviewing and expanding information.
- Doing further interviews.
- Drawing initial conclusions.
- Deciding whether to move to the formation stage.[54]

Currently, I am the champion of the Love Hanoi movement, which will need to transfer to another leader at some point. Now, Love Hanoi needs to transition to the next phase. "Formation is a critical stage that can only be entered into when there is evidence of significant buy-in from, and relational equity built, with key leaders around the vision for the development of a coalition to lead a city movement," writes Barth.[55] Formation is needed for the organization of the movement to go operational. Love Hanoi must pass through this stage in the coming year to avoid getting stuck in exploration indefinitely or remaining solely a HIF campaign. Often, I am asked, what is Love Hanoi? It is helpful to clarify the differences between a campaign, movement, network, and partnership and how they all relate.

Campaign: As the initiator of Love Hanoi, HIF owns what would be best defined as a campaign to promote loving the city. It is not a program or project (although in Vietnamese, the word "dự án" is broader in meaning). It is more like an idea or initiative. It is not a committee and does not have a structure or budget, which

would likely kill it. It is a promotional campaign using the word in advertising to promote loving the city. In translation to Vietnamese, it is essential to use appropriate language to avoid making it sound like a military campaign or the Christian crusades of the Middle Ages.

Movement: The vision is for Love Hanoi to become a movement that inspires collaboration among churches and across the three sectors of society (public, for-profit, and non-profit). Love Hanoi will likely not become an organization but will remain a vision and inspirational idea. A good example is the "I'm a City Changer" campaign, "a global movement to share and spread individual, corporate, and public initiatives that improve our cities." The website states, "I'm a City Changer campaign is convened by UN-Habitat, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, with support from private and public sector partners."[56] This vocabulary is beneficial and has been adapted to describe the Love Hanoi campaign in our brochure and website as follows: "Love Hanoi is a campaign to inspire and mobilize individual, corporate, and public initiatives for the benefit of the city. City Partnerships, the charity arm of Hanoi International Fellowship, promotes it."[57] This wording works well in our expatriate context.

On the other hand, Love Hanoi could become organized and have various working groups and discussion forums working on specific issues. Taking the Lausanne Movement as an example, it defines itself as "a global movement that mobilizes evangelical leaders to collaborate for world evangelization. Together, we seek to bear witness to Jesus Christ and all his teaching in every part of the world—not only geographically, but in every sphere of society and the realm of ideas." Lausanne's purpose statement is "Calling the Whole Church to take the Whole Gospel to the Whole World."[58] If Love Hanoi were to become solely an evangelical movement, the Lausanne statement could be adapted as Bakke and Swanson use it: Calling the Whole Church to take the Whole Gospel to the Whole City. This, however, may be too evangelistic for our expatriate and political contexts, hindering us from building relationships with government and non-Christian organizations. At this time, it would be better to use the language from UN-Habitat and integrate it with biblical references and perspectives, such as Jeremiah 29:7, to "seek the peace and prosperity of the city" and to "pray for it."

Networks: Although Love Hanoi is already creating an informal network through relationship building, consultations, and joint projects, the question is, should Love Hanoi organize itself as a network? As a movement, Love Hanoi can birth networks, such as a network for non-profit organizations, an association of Christian drug rehabs, or a coalition for promoting the integration of the disabled in mainstream education. If Love Hanoi were to become a network, it may limit the freedom to start other networks.

There is a need for a network. Like NCUT in the Philippines, a network is needed to unite and strengthen the various efforts for urban transformation. NCUT became the mother of other networks, groups, and organizations. The idea of a national coalition also increases the scope from focusing on one city to expanding nationwide, learning from and strengthening urban transformation initiatives throughout Vietnam. This might be a good reason not to call it the Love Hanoi Network, but perhaps the Hanoi Network for Urban Transformation and later change it to a national network.

Partnerships: Only through relationships can God's love be expressed more fully and completely. Love Hanoi as a movement can become an incubator for networks and partnerships. DeBoer learned in Manila that some organizations and individuals may be more comfortable staying at the network level while others are more eager to collaborate closely on shared projects. Partnerships not only strengthen each partner and provide synergy to accomplish the goal, but they also witness unity among Christians and outsiders. During

the previous Tet Holiday visit by ECVN, HIF, and a Korean Baptist church with the National Religious Affairs office, the Vice Director encouraged increased partnerships among the churches to do social work. The Easter concert displayed partnership and collaboration, praised by the city government. These partnerships can now be extended into other realms of ministry to express God's love for the city.

City Consultations: Big and Small

To connect more people, build networks, and create partnerships, the Love Hanoi Movement can implement more and varied consultations. Bakke and Sharpe give several ideas for one-day consultations and provide an outline for a three-day, city-wide consultation. Examples of one-day models are as follows:[59]

- **City Ministry Summit:** celebrate signs of hope, address most pressing issues.
- **New Pastors Orientation:** introduce to civic leaders, ministries, and congregations.
- **City Tour:** expose church members, leaders, and pastors to the city.
- **Think Tank:** one issue, sharing, present papers, and action steps.
- **Denominational Consultation:** assess urban ministry nationally and internationally.
- **Academic Seminars:** one week, lectures and immersion, and academic credit.
- **Three-day consultation:** city-wide catalyst for creating partnerships and initiatives.

A possible course of action for the Love Hanoi Movement to move forward is establishing what Bakke and Sharpe call the Envisioning Team, which will organize ongoing consultations leading up to a three-day, city-wide event. Sharpe explains,

> "A team capable of networking widely in the city and providing the necessary resources to do good research is vital. This team should represent diverse ministries, churches, mission organizations, educational institutions, and ethnic groups and should have whole church connections. The team should include Roman Catholic, orthodox, mainline, evangelical, and Pentecostal representatives, as well as people from ministries working with homelessness, poverty, refugees, youth at risk, and other social issues."[60]

To find such team members, we must ask, "Who knows everybody, and who can we trust?"[61] For example, Corrie DeBoer is mentioned as the person in Manila with relational capital. Who are the Vietnamese and expatriate "Corries" in Hanoi? Who is a networker, who has the influence to gather people across denominational and organizational lines, and who has the relational capital needed to make this team successful? From what denominations and organizations do we want to pick these members? In addition to networkers, the team will require people with analytical skills and experience in the socio-economic and political realm, as well as people with administrative skills.

Conclusion

The book of Acts tells the story of the first-century, missional, international church movement. Originating in Antioch of Syria, this movement spread westwards and to the Eastern and Southern hemispheres. The church thrived in urban centres, some known for their many chapels and cathedrals. The diaspora of the early centuries made it possible for the gospel to spread through word and deed.

Today, the global diaspora is high, with almost one billion displaced worldwide. Nearly a quarter of those are intentionally and predominantly moving from rural to urban areas, from East to West, and from South to North. These are expatriates who, if they are Christian, attend international churches. The Global Diaspora Network and the Missional International Church Network see this as an opportunity to minister to, through, and beyond the diaspora. International churches are uniquely positioned to make an impact.

To do so, several things must be considered: What is the role of the international and affluent churches? What is the role of the pastor of such churches? Viv Grigg has helped us understand these roles, and Catholic priests have shown us how to make the city our parish.

Finally, I have outlined how international churches can move within their context to become missionally engaged through partnerships, networking, and starting a city-wide movement to love their cities. Using HIF and the Love Hanoi movement as examples, I have illustrated how international churches can be effective in urban missions worldwide. If it is possible in Hanoi, it can be done elsewhere.

Endnotes

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2   Acts 11:21

3   Acts 11:26

4   Act 13:1

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8   Jenkins.

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44   DeBoer.

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49   Glenn Barth, *The Good City* (Tallmadge, OH: S.D. Myers Publishing Services, 2010), 41.

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The Atonement, Healing, and Christian Mission

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I came to a personal faith in Jesus Christ in my late teens. Having grown up in a Reformed, Free Church, congregational tradition, I decided to follow Jesus in an Australian Pentecostal church. I quickly embraced both the biblical foundations of my childhood and the spiritual enthusiasm of Pentecostalism. Then, in my early twenties, I experienced a spiritual crisis. The Pentecostal church I attended taught that physical healing is guaranteed in the Atonement and that one only needs enough faith to be healed. I was told that the following formula ensures physical healing:

1. The personal faith of the sick person

2. The faith of the believing congregation

3. The spiritual gift of the charismatic leader

4. The atoning work of Jesus Christ

5. The biblical guarantee of present physical healing

Even as a young person, I struggled to reconcile this with Scripture, modern medicine, and human experience. Then, in the early 1990s, two Pentecostal Christian leaders I knew died from cancer in the same year—and both of them were certain that God would heal them from their cancer in this life. As I watched their congregations try to make sense of their deaths (which was at complete odds with their theology), I decided that I would allow Scripture to speak for itself on this matter of the relationship between the Atonement and physical healing.

Some Pentecostal, neo-Pentecostal, and Charismatic movements have attempted to explicitly link physical healing with the Atonement by appealing to Isaiah 53:4–6, Matthew 8:16–17, and 1 Peter 2:24. This theology has been felt in Evangelical, Free Church, and mainline Protestant circles also, especially in the majority world and among churches with charismatic leanings. Rigorous debates have been around the associated theological, biblical, and pastoral issues. On one end of the spectrum are those who believe that physical healing is guaranteed in the Atonement (e.g. A.B. Simpson, Kenneth Hagin, and Kenneth and Gloria Copeland). On the

other end are those who reject any such notion and focus almost exclusively on how the Atonement deals with sin (e.g., B.B. Warfield, Merrill F. Unger, John MacArthur, and Richard Mayhue).

There is, of course, a long tradition of linking healing with Atonement—with variations on what is meant by healing and Atonement. Roman Catholic theologians often have healing at the centre of their view of the Atonement. The Patristic era produced Atonement theories that were healing-based (though to call them theories may be overstating the case), and this is also true of Eastern Orthodox theology—theosis being the critical lens for such treatments. Theosis is the theology of spiritual and holistic healing and transformation, found in union with God and the attainment of his likeness—through purification of body and mind (katharsis), spiritual contemplation and illumination (theoria), and the union with and likeness of God found in sainthood (theosis). Such understandings of the spiritual healing found in the Atonement may be associated with Athanasius, Clement, Irenaeus, and Origen. All this leads me to ask, "Can a theology of healing be developed from these three biblical passages, and if so, what do we mean by healing?"

Millard Erickson introduces the arguments used for healing in the Atonement. Those who make the case for physical healing in the Atonement suggest that since sickness is a result of the Fall, it is dealt with in the same way as the rest of the Fall's results—through Christ's atoning death and resurrection. They argue that in Matthew 8:16–17, the Gospel writer links Jesus's healings with his sin-bearing work (as in Isaiah 53:4–6). Some even see sickness (or some of it) as a direct result of sin—this view was common in ancient times and in Jesus's time. Therefore, the remedy is the same for both sin and sickness—the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. While Erickson recognizes that, in general, sickness has its origins in the Fall, Jesus did not make a direct link between illness and an individual's sin (see John 9:1–3), and his healings were not often connected with forgiveness of sin. The intimate connections made by some between illness and individual sin and between healing and forgiving sins are not justified by biblical data.[1]

So what do we make of the relationship between the Atonement and physical healing when we examine Isaiah 53:4–6, Matthew 8:14–17, and 1 Peter 2:21–25?

Isaiah 53:4–6

4 Surely, he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.[2]

John Oswalt rightly argues that the principal theme of Isaiah is servanthood: "The servanthood of God's people through whom his saviorhood is revealed to the world. This theme is made explicit at the outset in 2:1–5."[3] Chapters 1–39 lay the theological foundations for such servanthood, and chapters 40–66 explore the implications of the vocation of servanthood. Chapters 49–55 consider the changes that are necessary within God's people, "changes in relationship and character if hope is to endure (48:18–19)," if "sinful Israel" is to become "servant Israel."[4]

This brings us to substitution and Atonement. John Oswalt writes that according to Isaiah 49:1–55:13, the *means of servanthood* is Atonement. Sinful, broken, deaf, blind, and rebellious Israel cannot be made right with the Lord God (in relationship and character). God will send his substitutionary, delivering Servant to be punished for others, to suffer, heal, deliver, and atone. The Servant is the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The Servant

will "give himself to be for and in Israel what Israel could never be in itself."[5] "The language of carrying and bearing sets the stage for the substitutionary understanding of the Servant's suffering . . . The Servant is not suffering *with* his people (however unjustly), but *for* them."[6] The Servant secures for Israel what she cannot secure for herself. He is unjustly punished for the sake of her healing and deliverance so that she may enter the loving embrace of the Lord God, with justice being satisfied.

John Goldingay puts the references here to Israel's wounding and healing in the context of the entire book of Isaiah and all the witnesses in the Old Testament. In this light, the primary meaning is metaphorical. While the meaning is primarily metaphorical, it is not entirely metaphorical. They are suffering physically because of the Assyrians, whom God is using as the rod of his anger (cf. Isa. 10:5).

The chastisement takes the form of "wounding", another link with 1:2–6, which emphasized that the people had received no treatment for their wounds. "Healing" then nuances well-being and constitutes another link with Ch. 6, where v. 10 warned that they would never find healing (Lam. 2:13 also asks who could heal Jerusalem). Healing is also another exodus word (Exod. 15:26; see further Deut. 28:27, 35) . . . The servant is the means of that healing coming. The talk of wounding and healing in these passages puts us on the track of the significance of this image here: it suggests the restoration of a broken nation.[7]

Notice the first-person plural pronouns in this passage. We are rebellious and willful. He was crushed and atoned for "our transgressions" and "our iniquities." Because of his wounds, we are healed, forgiven, justified, delivered, purified, and in the right relationship with God. We are called to accept his substitutionary sacrifice and to come to him in repentance and obedience. While physical sickness and healing are dealt with metaphorically in Isaiah 53:4–6 (illness and healing as a metaphorical reference to sin-bearing and spiritual deliverance), there seems to be more than a metaphorical reference to sin-bearing here, but also a reference to actual sickness. So physical illness and healing seem to be here, even though this is not the primary intent or meaning of the passage (even though physical illness and healing are not the central concern, it seems to refer to healing from actual physical healing). The primary reference is to the healing of the wounded nation. However, can we understand this as physical healing on demand in the present life?[8] The passage does not bear that interpretation out.

Matthew 8:14–17

> 14 When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. 15 He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him. 16 When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. 17 This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases."

Christology is the central theme of the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus is the Messiah (Christ), the promised Savior and Redeemer, the Son of God, and the Son of Man. Jesus is the anticipated King of the kingdom of God, the Judge, Lord, and Mediator of the divine presence.[9] In the light of that Christological purpose, Matthew recounts ten examples of Jesus's miracles in 8:1–9:38. "Matthew 8:1–17 shows Jesus's authority over sickness; 8:23–28 shows his authority over nature, demons, and paralysis; and 9:18–34 demonstrates his authority over disabilities and death."[10] Jesus, the Savior, King, and Lord, has authority over all creation and humanity, and we are called to recognize, obey, and declare that divine authority. Jesus's divine authority calls us to fully committed and obedient discipleship.

The healing of Peter's mother-in-law in Matthew 8:14–17 is another story that serves as an apology for Jesus's messianic claim (and illustration that he is the King over the kingdom of God). However, there are also implications for Matthew's audience and us. Craig Keener writes, "Matthew spends much of his narrative presenting Jesus as a healer because he expects his audience to experience Jesus as a continuing healer, as one who now holds all authority in heaven and on earth (28:18; cf. 9:35–38; 10:1; Rom 15:16; 1 Cor 12:9; 2 Cor 12:12; Gal 3:5; Jas 5:14–15)."[11]

Atonement and physical healing may not be the primary reason Matthew recounts this or the other stories in Matthew 8. Matthew is keen to show that the messianic King is deeply concerned for the outcast, broken, marginalized, and "unclean." Matthew 8 follows this theme closely—Jesus touches, heals, dignifies, and cares for the leper (8:1–4) (a physical outcast), the non-Jewish Centurion (8:14–15) (an ethnic outcast), and a woman (8:14–15) (a gender outcast). Craig Blomberg makes this point central to interpreting the purpose of Matthew 8. "It may be, after presenting three cases of Jesus's potentially defiling himself ritually, that [Matthew] simply wishes to underline how Jesus was willing to become unclean in order to make others clean. The physical removal of the virus or bacteria would thus prove less significant than the spiritual removal of a human-made distinction that ostracizes certain kinds of people from the love of God and fellow humans."[12] Hence, "He took our infirmities and carried our diseases." We have to be careful, as we wrestle with the theme of physical healing in this passage, that we do not miss the author's actual intent—to demonstrate Jesus Christ is the King who has all authority over creation and humanity and who, furthermore, is concerned for the cleansing, dignity, and healing of the outcast (thus revealing the true nature of his Person and kingdom).

Matthew 8:17 can be interpreted in several ways: (1) Jesus vicariously carried human sickness when he died on the cross (e.g. A.B. Simpson, founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, and some Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals).[13] (2) Isaiah 53:4 refers metaphorically to sin-bearing, and Matthew applies the verse literally to Jesus's healing activity in Matthew 8 (e.g. Rowland V. Bingham, *The Bible and the Body*).[14] (3) Both Isaiah 53:4 and Matthew 8:17 refer to "actual physical sickness and mental distress rather than sins" and to an empathy with it, not a carrying of it (e.g. Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*).[15] (4) Both Isaiah 53:4 and Matthew 8:17 (ultimately) refer metaphorically to sin-bearing (e.g. Don Carson, *Matthew*: "Jesus's healing ministry is itself a function of his substitutionary death, by which he lays the foundation for destroying sickness . . . Jesus's healing miracles point beyond themselves to the cross").[16]

Some combination of the second, third, and fourth views seems best:

1. Isaiah 53:4 is readily understood in metaphorical terms, as the next two verses clearly deal with sin, not sickness.

2. There seems to be more than a metaphorical reference to sin-bearing here, but also a reference to actual sickness, and to Christ's empathy with it-as Millard Erickson notes, this moves the theological emphases from the Atonement to the incarnation, or, in my view, means that our understanding of the Atonement and the incarnation come to the fore in our theology of healing (how this works and what I mean by healing will be discussed later).

3. Matthew frequently employs Old Testament texts in an illustrative fashion, rather than in the strict sense of predictions fulfilled (e.g. Matthew 2:15 [Hosea 11:1] about God's son called from Egypt; and 2:18 [Jeremiah 31:15] about Rachel weeping for her children).

Therefore, some combination of the second, third, and fourth views seems justified, including, but does not guarantee physical healing (we can expect healing in the Parousia). This blend of views certainly expands our understanding of the nature and scope of healing and its connections with the Atonement and the incarnation.

Don Carson asserts that Matthew 8:17 "cannot be used to justify healing on demand. This text and others clearly teach that there is healing in the Atonement; but similarly, there is the promise of a resurrection body in the Atonement, even if believers do not inherit it until the Parousia. From the perspective of the NT writers, the cross is the basis for all benefits that accrue to believers; but this does not mean that all such benefits can be secured at the present time on demand, any more than we have the right and power to demand our resurrection bodies. The availability of any specific blessing can be determined only by appealing to the overall teaching of Scripture."[17]

Craig Keener provides an insightful treatment of the issues at hand when he writes:

> "Finally, Matthew informs his audience that healing was part of Jesus's mission, which God provided at great cost to Jesus (8:17) . . . The context in Isaiah 53 suggests that the servant's death would heal the nation from its sin (53:4–6, 8–9; cf. 1 Pet 2:22–25), a figurative usage (along with judgment) frequent in the prophets (13:15; Is 6:10; 57:18; Jer 3:22; 6:14; 8:11; 14:19; Hos 14:4; cf. 1QH 2.8–9; Sir 28:3; Pesiq. R. 44:8). But the broader context of Isaiah . . . shows God's eschatological concern for his people's complete wellness . . . suggesting secondary nuances of physical healing in 53:4–5 as well . . . The servant's suffering would restore to Israel eschatologically the benefits lost through sin . . . Thus, Matthew cites Isaiah 53:4 to demonstrate that Jesus's mission of healing fulfills the character of the mission of the servant, who at the ultimate cost of his own life would reveal God's concern for a broken humanity. Matthew himself also recognizes that genuine physical healings can illustrate principles about spiritual healing (9:5–7, 12; 13:15) . . . Jesus's sacrifice to bear others' infirmities may also provide a model for the disciples; it appears elsewhere in early Christian parenesis (Rom 15:1–3; 1 Pet 2:20–24)."[18]

The story of the healing of Peter's mother-in-law in Matthew 8:14–17 is primarily Christological in character—it demonstrates Jesus's messianic mandate, fulfilment, authority, and concern (especially his love for the outcast).[19] Even the quotation of Isaiah 53:4 is a Christological device, a "fulfilment formula quotation" designed to "show that what is occurring in these healings is the fulfilment of the OT."[20] Jesus is the Servant of the Lord, and he is about the ministry of healing, deliverance, and Atonement, and the redefinition of reality through the values and priorities of his kingdom. Jesus identifies with the leper, the vulnerable, the outcast, and "humanity in its suffering."[21] This story is about more than physical healing but about the person, ministry, and compassion of Jesus Christ. "Is 53:4 guarantees no one healing in the present age. What is guaranteed is that Christ's atoning death will, in the eschaton, provide healing for all without exception. The healings through the ministry of Jesus and those experienced in our day are the first fruits, the down payment, of the final experience of deliverance."[22]

1 Peter 2:21–25

> 21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 22 "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." 23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. 24 "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed." 25 For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

The primary theme of 1 Peter is discipleship to Jesus Christ. Its purpose is to exhort and encourage Christians facing persecution and guide them in Christian identity, calling, hope, and the imitation of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2:21–25 is essentially about imitatio Christi—imitating and following the example of Jesus Christ. He left us an example to follow. He set an example of integrity in suffering characterized by uprightness, purity, honesty, and trust. He refused to retaliate but entrusted himself to the One who judges justly. He did all this for us, bearing our sins, healing us, enabling us to imitate him, helping us live for righteousness, and drawing us back to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls.

Jesus Christ serves as an example for us, but he is more than an example—he is our Saviour, Redeemer, Healer, Shepherd, and Overseer of our souls. He suffered and died not only as our example but also as our Lord and Saviour. We have gone astray, but he has brought us back to God. We are sick with sin, rebellion, and unrighteousness, but he has healed, restored, and made us righteous in the atoning incarnation, suffering, cross, and resurrection. We were subject to God's judgment, but he has given us unmerited, underserved mercy, righteousness, healing, and grace.

1 Peter 2:21–25 is not primarily about physical healing, and it is possible to say that this passage is not about such physical healing at all. It is about imitating Christ, following his example of integrity in suffering, and finding in him our source of righteousness, shepherding, mercy, and healing from the bondage and curse of sin. As the passage says, "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed." "Like Isaiah before him, Peter uses physical healing as a metaphor for religious conversion, as he will explain in v 25 (in the Gospel tradition, cf. Mark 2:17; Luke 4:23)."[23] Jesus bore our sins vicariously on the cross, and we are now healed, that is, dead to sin, rebellion, and unrighteousness. Jesus's innocent suffering bears our sin and is our example of non-retaliation and endurance in suffering. Christ's atoning death provides an example for us of suffering but also the solution to our waywardness, woundedness, and unrighteousness.[24] Peter Davids puts it well: "We no longer live that way. Instead, our lives are characterized by 'righteousness,' that is the ethical lifestyle about which Peter has much to say. The salvation in Christ is not just a freedom from future judgment or from guilt, but a freedom from the life of sin and a freedom to live as God intends."[25]

In summary, our interpretation of Isaiah 53:4–6, Matthew 8:14–17, and 1 Peter 2:21–25 may include physical healing but does not guarantee it. Even though there is undoubtedly healing in the Atonement (present healing, from time to time, and ultimate healing when Jesus Christ returns), these verses cannot be used to justify a theology of physical healing on demand.

Healing, Inaugural Eschatology, and the Resurrection

While the Atonement includes the possibility of physical healing in the present, this healing cannot be demanded "any more than we have the right and power to demand our resurrection bodies."[26] Only in the age to come, are we completely healed and receive our promised resurrection bodies. As Craig Blomberg puts it:

> "Charismatics have regularly appealed to [Matthew 8:17] in maintaining that there is healing for physical maladies in the Atonement. Inasmuch as the healings consistently function as pointers to God's in-breaking Kingdom, one should expect the present blessings of God's reign at times to include miraculous recovery from illness. However, to require such healing of God this side of eternity loses sight of the future aspect of the Kingdom. Only in the world to come will sickness and death be banished altogether from believers' lives. Claims that so far all who were sick in Jesus's presence seem to have been cured must be balanced with the data of John 5:1–15, in which Christ selected only one of many sick people to receive healing. Nor is it adequate to reply that the others did not ask either. Jesus frequently worked miracles to create faith where it was not already present (e.g., Mark 4:35–41; 5:1–20), even while refraining from such activity in similar situations elsewhere (e.g., Mark 6:1–6a; 8:11–13). There is physical healing in the Atonement for this age, but it is up to God in Christ to choose when and how to dispense it. Perfect healing, like the believer's resurrection body, ultimately awaits Christ's return."[27]

Inaugural eschatology affirms that the kingdom of God has present and future dimensions. The end is already here, and the kingdom has already been inaugurated through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but it is yet to be consummated. It is now, but not yet. The ultimate future reality was brought into the present through the person and work of Jesus Christ, as he demonstrated the current presence of the kingdom in his life, death, and resurrection—yet it is only in the final consummation that all disease, suffering, conflict, and death are no more (Revelation 21:4). John Dickson writes that in the ministry of Jesus,

> "Evil was overthrown, frail bodies restored, nature itself was put right. The "kingdom of God" has in miniature come upon them… As much as the miracles point to Jesus's compassion and authority, fundamentally, they preview the renewal of all things in the kingdom to which Jesus invited his hearers . . . Christian hope is thus confidently restless: it praises God for the preview (in Jesus's life) and pleads for the finale (in the "kingdom come"), when evil will be overthrown, humanity healed, and creation itself restored."[28]

Because the kingdom is *present*, believers are healed from their sin and unrighteousness and are physically healed occasionally. Because the kingdom is the *future*, our ultimate physical healing, like our resurrected bodies, awaits the final, decisive future reality. The life, kingdom message, passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ witness this, so we are "confidently restless," awaiting the final restoration of all things, including our bodies. Bodily healing is integrally associated with the Atonement, just as is every other blessing God promises us. However, while people experience divine healing on occasion, and this is related to Christ's Atonement for our sins, "God has not seen fit to shower us with all physical blessings now in the way he has with spiritual blessings (Eph 1:3); we await the final consummation of God's redemptive plan, and this is our "blessed hope"—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13)."[29]

We are inspired, comforted, and given hope by the present and future dimensions of the kingdom, that is, its full, inaugurated, and eschatological nature. Jesus and the New Testament authors characterize this current age

as one characterized by grief, sinfulness, struggle, and evil, along with signs of the redemptive in-breaking of the kingdom of God. The age to come, however, will be one of joy, holiness, peace, rest, and comfort. The kingdom of God in the coming age will be the dwelling of the righteous and the healed.[30] The whole created order will be transformed and healed so that it reflects its original glory,[31] we will live a transformed existence characterized by resurrection life,[32] fellowship will be restored with God,[33] and this restoration is likened to a wedding feast.[34] Such descriptions of the present and future kingdom of God give us hope amid pain and struggle, and encourage us to continue proclaiming the good news of the kingdom—for its presence and coming are realities orchestrated by the Father through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Nature and Scope of Healing

The church needs to develop a broader understanding of healing and its relationship to our theology of the Atonement. If Craig Keener is correct and "Matthew informs his audience that healing was part of Jesus's mission, which God provided at great cost to Jesus (8:17)," we need to consider the various dimensions of healing associated with the Atonement (and with Christ's empathetic connection with our human condition in the incarnation) while recognizing that ultimate healing is in the Parousia. We need to explore what it means for us to experience physical, emotional, relational, spiritual, and other healing thanks to the atoning life, passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We need to be careful here. Atonement is primarily about the cancellation of guilt, about God's work in liberating individuals, the church, and the created order from guilt and sin. However, our theology of the Atonement can expand our understanding of the nature and scope of healing and its connections with the Atonement, the incarnation, and the resurrection. We have seen that physical healing is available to all through the Atonement, but, thanks to the already but not yet nature of the kingdom, it is not available to all in this present life. It is only guaranteed in the age to come. Douglas Moo concludes, "The atoning death of Christ provides for the healing of all our diseases—but nothing in Matthew or the NT implies that this healing will take place in this life. Indeed, as we have seen, the NT gives reason to think that triumph over physical disease, like triumph over physical death, will not come for most believers until the future redemption of the body."[35]

Although ultimate bodily healing is in the resurrection of our bodies, we should also acknowledge that God can heal bodily if he chooses to do so. Therefore, we should pay attention to praying for those who are sick. However, we also need to explore the nature of healing associated with the Atonement in its broadest sense— liberation from sin, restoration of relationships, freedom from addictions and slavery, rejection of idolatries, and peace, freedom, and joy in the emotional, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of our lives. As a sign, foretaste, herald, and witness to the now but not yet kingdom, the church participates in this healing ministry for the sake of Jesus Christ and his eschatological mission in the world. The church is called to demonstrate this healing through its corporate life and ethics, public witness and service, and its faithful pursuit of the healing mission of God. The church does this best with a mature, biblical view of the kingdom of God and this kingdom's present and future dimensions.

Some Implications for Our Theologies and Practices of Christian Mission

The discussion on the implications of a broader understanding of healing in Christian theologies and practices of mission, particularly concerning the Atonement, opens a rich tapestry of theological reflection and practical application. This idea, grounded in the biblical narrative, invites the church to expand its conception of

healing beyond the mere physical to encompass emotional, relational, spiritual, and other dimensions. Such an expansion has profound implications for how the church understands its mission and practices it in the world.

Firstly, incorporating a broader understanding of healing into the theology of the Atonement challenges the church to see the Atonement as not only dealing with sin and guilt but also as a comprehensive provision for the healing of all creation. This view aligns with the scriptural portrayal of Jesus's ministry, which includes healing as a sign of the inbreaking kingdom of God. It emphasizes that Christ's atoning work is not only about reconciling humanity to God but also about restoring all aspects of human life and creation that have been marred by sin. This holistic view encourages Christians to see their mission as one that addresses the whole person and the whole creation, reflecting the full scope of God's redemptive plan.

Secondly, understanding healing in the context of the Atonement and the resurrection brings a balanced perspective on the already but not yet nature of the kingdom of God. It acknowledges that while complete healing—be it physical, emotional, or spiritual—is guaranteed in the age to come, the church is called to be an agent of healing in the present age. This eschatological tension informs the church's mission, motivating it to pray for healing, work towards reconciliation, and foster communities where signs of God's kingdom are evident, even as it recognizes the ultimate fulfilment of all healing in the Parousia.

Moreover, exploring healing within the Atonement and the incarnation framework provides a theological basis for the church's engagement in holistic mission. It challenges the church to practice a ministry that is empathetic, incarnational, and oriented towards the liberation and restoration of individuals and communities. Therefore, The church's mission becomes one of bearing witness to the healing power of the Atonement through actions that reflect God's concern for people's physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

Furthermore, this broader understanding of healing redefines the church's public witness and service. It calls for a mission that is verbal and visible, demonstrated through acts of compassion, justice, and care for creation. The church's engagement in social issues, advocacy for the marginalized, and efforts to combat injustice can all be considered integral parts of its healing mission. This approach resonates with the biblical call to be salt and light in the world, offering a foretaste of the kingdom to come.

In conclusion, embracing a broader understanding of healing as intricately connected to the theology of the Atonement invites the church to re-envision its mission. It broadens the scope of the church's ministry to include the proclamation of the gospel and the demonstration of the kingdom's presence through healing in its various forms. This perspective enriches the church's theology and practice, urging it to embody the healing ministry of Jesus Christ in anticipation of the ultimate restoration and renewal of all things upon his return.

Endnotes

1   Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 836–39.

2   All references are in the TNIV.

3   John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 7.

4   Oswalt, 9–10.

5   Oswalt, 287.

6   Oswalt, 386.

7   John Goldingay, *The Message of Isaiah 40-55: A Literary-Theological Commentary* (London: T&T Clark, 2005). 503.

8   John Oswalt, *Isaiah.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003). 585; John Goldingay, *Isaiah.* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001). 304–5.

9   Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 61–71.

10   Keener, 258.

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12   Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew* (Nashville, TN.: Broadman, 1992), 145.

13   A.B. Simpson, *The Gospel of Healing* (New York, NY: Christian Alliance, 1880).

14   Rowland V. Bingham and W.H. Griffith Thomas, *The Bible and the Body: Healing in the Scriptures* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2007).

15   Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 840.

16   Donald A. Carson, *Matthew.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 205–7.

17   Carson. 207.

18   Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 273.

19   Note also the background of Isaiah 35:5–6 for understanding the Christological importance of Jesus's healing.

20   Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13.* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 211.

21   W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew.* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 38.

22   Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 211.

23   J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter* (eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barkeribid; Waco, TX.: Word, 1989), 149.

24   Paul J. Achtemeier and Eldon Jay Epp, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter.* {Minneapolis, MI: Fortress, 1996), 203.

25   Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 113.

26   Carson, *Matthew*, 207.

27   Blomberg, *Matthew*, 22, 145.

28   John Dickson, *A Spectator's Guide to Jesus: An Introduction to the Man from Nazareth* (Sydney: Blue Bottle, 2005), 44–45.

29   W. Kelly Bokovay, "The Relationship of Physical Healing to the Atonement," *Didaskalia* 3 (1991): 37.

30   Matthew 5:20; 7:21; Mark 9:47.

31   Matthew 19:28.

32   Luke 20:34–35.

33   Matthew 5:8; 25:21, 23.

34   Matthew 22:1–14; 25:1–12.

35   Douglas J. Moo, "Divine Healing in the Health and Wealth Gospel," *Trinity Journal* 9 (1988): 204.

Dashboard Symbolism: Sensitivities and Confidence in Interfaith Dynamics

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Interfaith realities and tensions have been accelerated by rapid globalisation and urbanisation. Christians must learn to engage with multi-religious communities with sensitivity towards other religions and confidence in our faith in Christ. In a globalised world where interfaith conflicts abound, Christians have a model in Christ for maintaining a humble and loving presence while maintaining a public witness of the gospel as truth for all humanity. This calls on all Christians to re-evaluate how they engage those from other faith traditions.[1]

1. Dashboards and Interfaith Dynamics

While sitting in the inevitable traffic of my city, I peered into the windows of cars around me. The taxi's dashboard beside me was covered with religious symbols and statues. On display were various Hindu gods, representing a complex pantheon of interrelated deities. Dangling from the mirror above these statues was a large, shiny crucifix, calling to mind the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for the sake of the world. Another car proudly displayed a statue of the Buddha. Just ahead of me, a car had a Muslim prayer rug thrown in the back window and a bumper sticker proudly declaring their Islamic faith commitment to the world. With no opportunity to interview each of the drivers, I speculate whether each display of religious symbolism demonstrates their genuine devotion or simply publicly aligns them with a religious identity. I am wildly curious about how the taxi driver reconciles his devotion to many Hindu gods with the powerful symbol of Jesus' crucifixion, which has universal implications.

Just as each vehicle displays a staked-out religious loyalty, we are reminded of the active presence of different faiths all around us in our cities. We all share the everyday experience of sitting in a traffic jam. These symbols in or on our cars suggest that faith is essential in our day-to-day living and the image we project to others. We certainly do not live in the highly secularized world once predicted by academics.[2] There is an edge to these displays, subtle as it may be, that marks space for a particular faith tradition. The car, the home, and the roadside altars are not neutral, secular spaces as we suppose them to be. Like the apparent confusion between a crucifix in the same space as Hindu idols, our relationships with those of other faiths can be points of tension, both inwardly and outwardly.

The Twin Engines of Globalisation and Urbanisation Accelerate Interfaith Interaction

In 2005, a church in rural North Carolina put a message on their kiosk urging the Islamic holy book be flushed down the toilet. It was almost immediately reported on the front pages of newspapers throughout the Muslim world. In today's world, news travels fast, translating into flared emotions.

More recently, in 2013 in Myanmar, a city's religious composition changed almost overnight. Buddhist Arakanese began assaulting the Muslim Rohingya population until they were expelled entirely from the provincial city of Sittwe. Interfaith conflict forced neighbours to become ex-neighbours. The conflict did not stop there but sparked acts of revenge from Muslims in India, Indonesia, and Malaysia.[3] In our globalised world, a local religious conflict is no longer only local.

Even as the world's population reaches unprecedented levels, people are more globally connected. And if you do not believe it, you can find a Facebook app that will show you the global connectivity of your friends. Reports of a rapidly globalising and urbanising world are not new news. We have been inundated with concerns about the economic implications of globalisation or seen it as a media phenomenon. Our economics and pop culture are affected by globalisation, as are our interfaith dynamics. Interfaith conflict has been around for thousands of years. Still, now it can rear up from the most unsuspecting corners of the globe and be reported in an equally inaccessible opposite corner of the world almost immediately.

As a people called into the city to love our neighbours and proclaim a radical reordering of life in Jesus the Messiah, these interfaith dynamics call for deep reflection and a response from the church. It seems the natural defaults are collision-course interfaith conflict or having a faith emptied of its truth claims and transformative living. This article seeks a middle path for Christians serving in interfaith communities.

Immersion Experiences: Short Descriptions

A vital component of the ISUM Summit working groups was to participate in immersion research experiences. Our working group went to three locations, each with a stake in interfaith dynamics. In each case, working group participants were treated to the hospitality of another group and allowed extended observation and interviews. The three locations were Projek Dialog, the Buddhist Missionary Society, and a Sikh *Guruwara* (place of worship).

Projek Dialog (Project Dialogue) was birthed in multi-ethnic, multi-religious Malaysia as the brainchild of Ahmad Fuad Rahmat, a professor, radio show host, and public intellectual.[4] The purpose behind Projek Dialog is to create spaces and paths for interfaith dialogue. In Fuad Rahmat's experience, conducting big, highly publicized interfaith dialogues does little to advance understanding of other faiths. He also recognizes that different groups share their news through trusted sources in their preferred languages. Projek Dialog attempts to put the information in the hands of Muslim Malays to expose readers to alternative perspectives. The organization also seeks to create small venues for interfaith exchange that is not open to the public. The goal is to foster greater understanding despite barriers between religious groups. When an interfaith gathering is publicized and open to the public, it is often thought of as an opportunity to amplify one's religious message rather than hear from others. In contrast, it is clear Projek Dialog organizers are working diligently for a society

where people of all creeds are free to practise and propagate their faith without fear and to create an atmosphere of understanding that allows for an exchange of ideas.

The Buddhist Missionary Society is located in the centre of the teeming Brickfields community of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. With temples, churches, and mosques in every direction, the mere location of this temple-society complex viscerally communicated the need to reflect on interfaith dynamics in our cities. Our group was welcomed into a conference room to engage in an extended interview and discussion with the chairman of the board of directors and a Sinhalese monk.[5] The society is a story of international migration, adaptation, and religious propagation. It began as a temple in 1884 by Sinhalese immigrants and became a hub for the Sri Lankan enclave. A Buddhist missionary challenged them to look outward to spread the faith. In response, they switched their communication medium from Sinhala to English and began a worldwide literature outreach program. In their own words, "We share the truth". They offer three services daily and have a Sunday school with over seven hundred children. Their goal is to embed habits and rituals of the Buddhist tradition that will become normative for all of life and to encourage the use of their temple complex 24/7. Although they eschew a conversion-type process, they believe in the necessity of meditation and self-purification to save themselves.

The team visited the Guruwara (place of worship for Sikhs) on the north side of Kuala Lumpur.[6] The Guruwara runs a primary school with 220 students and provides religious classes for some 600 members of the Sikh community in the area. Central to the Sikh faith is the concept of *seva*, or service to the community. In the Guruwara we visited, this was expressed by a common kitchen, i.e., food will be cooked each morning by volunteers and served for free to anyone and everyone who visits Guruwara, irrespective of background or faith tradition. This seeks to uphold the principle of equality of all people, a concept developed in contradiction to the caste-based practices where Sikhism originated. The Guruwara also has a welfare society that looks to the needs, firstly, of the needy Sikhs in their community, as well as for others in their society. They engage in other aspects of *seva*, like serving food to street dwellers and homeless people one evening a week, organizing blood donations, health screening, and supplying a hearse and related services to poor Sikhs.

One feature that was quite impressive was that they have a minimum of staff, and volunteers primarily run all their activities. Regarding interfaith collaboration, they indicated this was not a focus, although they are in contact with other faith groups in their community. They expressed their caution regarding interfaith cooperation as primarily fear of being proselytized, especially by Christians. They also noted that interfaith marriages could be divisive, and they discourage it in their community.

2. Signs of Hope: Confidence

A shoe cobbler from England named William Carey sparked the modern mission movement by moving with his family to India, a country wracked by interfaith tensions. Among Carey's incredible works was starting a college open to every "caste, colour, or country". He was committed to allowing Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity to be taught at the new college because "Carey was committed to pluralism… to the idea that the state should not support one religious belief over another".[7] Carey's confidence in the gospel's truth was such that it would shine even while other religions were being explained.

A common narrative predicts that increased globalisation and urbanisation will bring us into a worldview clash.[8] In reaction to this tension, many have proposed a path of tolerance and/or secularisation as the way forward. We are left to think that our only choices are interfaith conflict or secularisation, in which faith

is relativised and privatised. A third choice emerges from the Scriptures and has been modelled by faithful Christians throughout history. We are called to a persevering faith in the one God who is good and great and to live a life of service and witness that attests to God's character.

We cannot build our faith in God by tearing down the religious traditions of others. Our faith in God should be based on who God has revealed himself to be throughout the Bible and ultimately in Jesus Christ. We acknowledge God's greatness as both Creator and Redeemer. The goodness of God is seen broadly in his common grace and, more specifically, in God's saving grace through the finished work of Christ on the cross.

The Bible consistently enjoins us to serve all people as our own families. Leviticus 19:33–44 indicates that we are called to love others indiscriminately. We do not love to gain something from the relationship; we love because God loves (1 John 4:7). Gavin D'Costa crystallises this point: "If we are to avoid the danger of allowing the love of neighbour to turn into various forms of power, manipulation, and coercion over our neighbour, then we require the pattern and practice of suffering self-giving love".[9] Our love for those with different religious convictions is never conditional on their agreement with our beliefs or their reciprocated love. God loved us at a point when we were best thought of as enemies of the kingdom (Romans 5:8), and now as God's children, we are to love with that kind of unflinching love.

In our interactions with people of other faiths, we also bear testimony to who God is and what he did through Jesus. Acts 1:8 calls on Jesus' disciples to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Samaria, and to the farthest reaches of the globe. Even as Jesus' disciples enter Samaria, they enter a context of conflicting faith convictions. One challenge is that faith is always clothed in cultural and ethnic identity. When Jesus was himself bearing witness in Samaria, he separated faith in God from ethnic identity, implying that faith in Jesus is life-giving for *all* people (John 4:21–24). Our faith is not tied to a particular culture or ethnicity; ethnic distinctions diminish in the faith family (Gal. 3:28). Our works or successes do not guarantee our faith; it is secured by faith in Christ (Eph. 2:5).

The Christian should find confidence here. As we enter interfaith situations with confidence in our faith, we are less prone to react out of insecurity or territorialism. We are called to serve and bear witness. We entrust our actions and words to the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of others. Thus, we do not have to feel responsible or defensive about the results.

3. Challenges to Hope: Sensitivities

If news media are to be believed, interfaith conflict is the norm worldwide. Exclusion based on creeds, religious persecution, and even some wars stem from an inability of people of different faiths to coexist peacefully. Some factors provoke conflict. While no effort is being made to offer a comprehensive list of provoking factors, we will offer those that surfaced in our research and discussions.

Language and Attitude

The childhood adage "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me" is untrue. Words have a way of searing our souls like few other things. When Christians use the language of exclusion and derision, it harms interfaith dynamics. It seems obvious, but it still needs to be repeated. This does not mean we avoid witnessing the hope in Jesus for all people. Still, we must be vigilant in doing so respectfully and

gently (1 Peter 3:15). It also means we speak of other religions in ways that strike a balance between respect and honesty.

Internet and Social Media

There is a common perception that the Internet has created more significant exposure to different beliefs, which fosters open minds and liberalization. However, contrary to common perception, Fuad stated that the Internet and social media have not necessarily led to liberalization or more open minds. The anonymity allows for angry online interactions that mimic a mob mentality. Fuad said, "There is a parallel world online where religious controversy grows". Our group was told of a highly publicized case in Malaysia where Buddhists used an Islamic prayer room for their religious ceremony. The local community worked through the issue amicably until it became a social media firestorm among Muslims from other parts of the country. In other words, social media has the potential to ignite religious controversy.

Power Plays and Political Involvement

Power is seductive, even for those with altruistic beginnings. Religious organisations want a say in how a society is structured, and when different religious groups are present, it can increase attention to political influence. There is a desire to legislate religiously influenced moral standards.[10] This becomes particularly troubling when a religious creed includes political dominance, much like a now antiquated Christendom model of Christian existence or Islam as it is practised in many nations.[11]

Religious tensions are further aggravated when religion is tied to ethnic identity. Such tensions have flared up all over the world.[12] These tensions will likely continue because there is no way for religious communities to be entirely apolitical. Nevertheless, there is a need for each religious community to learn how to continue their faith practices while allowing other religious communities to thrive.

Competitive Evangelism

There was a clear perception from those of the other religious communities we interviewed that Christianity was among the more aggressive in seeking to convert people from their communities. When asked about their pursuits of converts, they used different terms to describe their practice as opposed to the approach of Christians. They expressed their efforts as "welcoming" others into their community. This contrasts the perception that Christians use pressure and coercion to "win" them. When we examine ourselves honestly, we do not have to look far to see examples of questionable evangelistic tactics. Of course, Christians are not alone in using questionable tactics to gain converts or adherents. Each religion brings an analysis of the human condition and offers a unique solution. When there is a firm conviction that their answer is true, it is an act of concern for fellow humanity to provide the solution to others. Consequently, every person becomes a contested soul, which raises the temperature of interfaith dynamics.

Challenges do come to us as opportunities to improve. Some challenges have clear solutions. Christians must avoid language disparaging people of other faiths and limit terms connoting violence.[13] Other challenges lack clean solutions. They are natural repercussions of a world condensed by globalization and urbanization. For

instance, we cannot stop news from spreading through the Internet or misinformed reactions on social media websites. But we must learn to live with the knowledge that our every word and deed can be reported worldwide.

4. Ways Forward for the Church

Sensitivity amidst Confidence in Athens

The New Testament church took root in cities rife with diverse and vibrant religious communities. Rodney Stark notes the pluralistic nature of the Roman cities: "To say that the Greco-Roman world was polytheistic is a gross understatement."[14] We can see how the early church navigated the need for sensitivity and confidence amid faith communities competing for the hearts of Roman citizens in Acts 17:16–34. Paul awaited his teammates, Timothy and Silas, to join him in Athens. Athens was past its prime as a political city but still retained its reputation as the gathering place of intellectuals. What struck Paul, however, was the overwhelming presence of idols. With thousands of statues of gods around the city, idols may have outnumbered citizens.[15]

We are told in verse 16 that Paul is "greatly distressed" when he sees that the city is full of idols. "Instead of being impressed by Athenian architecture and learning," notes Dean Flemming, "Paul is 'deeply distressed' over the pervasive idolatry and religious pluralism he observes there".[16] We do not get the impression from the text that Paul is being religiously arrogant or intolerant. Instead, his confidence is so deeply placed in the universal God (v. 24) that it destabilises him to see so much devotion given to these idols.

Though upset, Paul chose not to speak angrily or condescendingly to the Athenians. Instead, in verse 22, Paul compliments the people of Athens for their religious fervour. He is not acquiescing to the truthfulness of their religious beliefs. Paul is unequivocal in asserting that the God in whom he has faith has overcome a universal human problem (v. 30) by appointing Jesus as the solution for all of humankind (v. 31). Paul's tone and language remain respectful and congenial. Yet, his message provocatively invites Athenians to believe in God's solution through Jesus.

5. Statement from the Working Group

A few common themes emerged as our working group came together to discuss the topic and reflect on our field research. From these common themes, we formulated a statement that represented our conclusions. The statement:

> *"We believe in God the Creator, Redeemer, and the Sustainer who calls us to work amongst all peoples in the cities. Our hope lies in the birth, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

> *Our aim in relating with different faith traditions is to develop deep relationships of trust and openness so that we can work together on projects of mutual concern and interest and experience life as God intended. In such encounters, our confidence is strengthened when we come in love and with integrity, with no hidden agendas, engaging in mutual listening and recognising that God has been working and continues to work in our communities.*

Our confidence is also strengthened as we seek to understand each other's faith traditions, identify key commonalities that allow us to work together, note key differences that may be obstacles in relating to each other, and reaffirm our understanding and personal commitment to our faith in Christ."

Comments on the Statement

The statement consolidates the critical points from the ISUM working group. Some further thoughts here might benefit from additional commentary.

Humble Learning Posture

Christian confidence must not be confused with Christian arrogance. Our message to others is understandably rejected when we show no interest in listening while making assumptions about their beliefs. We must learn how to listen honestly to those from other faiths. Our confidence in the gospel does not warrant a one-way conversation directed at the non-Christian. An essential element of loving others should always include listening and humility. No matter a person's beliefs, they are indisputably made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27).

There is also the question of where truth can be found. All humanity has access to generally revealed truths about God (Romans 1:20). At the risk of oversimplifying the theological landscape, evangelicals have tended to fall into two categories.[17] Some evangelicals believe there are unique theological truths that Christians can learn from other religions.[18] Others who acknowledge that theological truths can be found may not believe those truths add to theological truths found through God's Word.[19] Views on this topic depend on theological positions on revelation, the work of the Spirit, and epistemology. There remains a general agreement in the unique and finished work of Christ as the only sufficient solution for salvation for all nations.[20]

Christians have benefitted from philosophers who have influenced our theology. Paul Griffiths draws on the examples of Augustine and Aquinas to say: "The greatest advances in Christian thinking have come when serious Christian thinkers have paid close attention to alien particularity."[21] Can the same be said of other religious perspectives? It can indeed be acknowledged that other religions may offer further insight into human nature and the human condition. Acknowledging that truths about God can be discovered in other religions is more challenging. However, God's Word remains the final arbiter of competing truth claims in the final analysis. Suppose another religion holds up an understanding of God that is impersonal and unknowable. In that case, it conflicts with our knowledge of God as both personal and knowable and actively pursuing us. We know God through his revelation and relate to God because God brought reconciliation through Jesus.

More Work Needed on Theology of Religions

The previous discussion on what truths can be known in other religions highlights the need for more reflection and conversation around the topic of a theology of religions. Evangelicals have tended to zero in on the salvation of the unevangelised, but there is a need for more writing on the theology of religions.[22] There is pressure to conflate distinct religious beliefs into a "harmonious" amalgamation in secular societies. Too often, we have been content to reduce this complex topic to bumper sticker platitudes. Catholic scholar Gavin D'Costa, poignantly observes what happens when we try to put all religions on equal standing: "The Enlightenment, in granting a type of equality to all religions, ended up denying public truth to any and all of them."[23] In other

words, to assume all religions are the same is unfair to any religion. We need thinking and writing that is not content with reductionist adages.

Religions can be dangerous and manipulative. Religions have been used to oppress and tyrannize in terrible and imaginative ways. Religious adherence has been the cause of wars, schisms, suicide bombings, and exploitative empire-building. We even see the people of God use religion to oppress others (cf. Ezek. 22; Isa. 58). The church has perpetuated injustices from the pulpit.[24] A theology of religions is needed that aids in our discernment of religions both in their positive attributes and shadow side.

More reflection is needed regarding sources and critical assessment of other religions. Some have made the case that the operation of the Holy Spirit in those of other religions calls us to acknowledge their spiritual development as guided by the Spirit.[25] While we do not dispute the work of the Spirit, we must also acknowledge the potential for other revelatory sources to deceive and distort any truths claimed by those other faiths. As evangelicals, we recognise human frailty extends to the mind and the activity of the spirit world. The human mind is prone to believe deceptions when it is advantageous to do so. This frailty can lead to religious views built on untruths rather than truths. And the spirit world can be a source of religious knowledge that has the potential to be damaging rather than a source of hope. Even though we may not readily acknowledge the presence and activity of spirits in the West, all would quickly agree (I hope) that the person who hears a voice calling for mass human sacrifice is deceived.[26] Religions cannot simply be dismissed as devoid of all truth, nor can different religious beliefs be placed on the same pedestal.

Other aspects of interfaith dynamics need more reflection that will directly impact our urban ministries. For example, is there room for collaboration across religious lines in working with poor people when our theological beliefs about poverty differ? Or how do interfaith dynamics work in cities upheld as sacred in one faith and not others? There is a need for a more open and frank discussion at times when religious communities contribute to an ongoing injustice due to a theological conviction. These issues and many more need biblical reflection and continued dialogue.

Confidence in Witness

To develop a pattern of listening and learning from others, we need spaces for dialogue, but we cannot let go of our witness. Dialogue across religious lines can be invaluable in many ways. It helps us in learning about others. Open conversations can reduce the natural build-up of mistrust and prejudice between religious communities. Dialogue can even help us crystallize our own beliefs and restore confidence in our faith in the triune God. But "…dialogue is neither a substitute nor a subterfuge for mission".[27] Dialogue cannot stand in for our witness.

When Jesus was teaching his disciples in anticipation of his ascension in Acts 1, his primary mandate for the church was to be his witnesses in every corner of the world. This is not intended as a privatized, "Jesus was great for me" kind of witness. The late missionary statesman Lesslie Newbigin contended that the good news of Jesus Christ's incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection is public truth for all humanity. "If these things are true, they must be told."[28] This public news does not discriminate based on status, language, gender, age, or religion. We can and must minister with the confidence that this truth of the gospel is liberating to those of every creed.

Unconditional Love and Respect

As we confidently attest to the truth of the gospel, our lives mirror this truth. When we live more deeply in the gospel story, we witness the truest demonstration of sacrificial love in Jesus. But witness entails cost. Jesus predicts those who are his disciples will suffer for his name (John 15:18–27). Persecution and suffering are normative for the Christian life.

Jesus' disciple Peter wrote to the church undergoing persecution. Peter's plea to the church was that it persists in personal holiness and good public works even while being reviled by the multi-faith public (1 Peter 2:11–20).[29] When interfaith dynamics become hostile, the church should not enter interreligious competition. The model is always that of Christ, who suffered and died so that we might be declared righteous. We are to love and respect others no matter their response to us. We bring honour to Christ through our witness and our lives.

Conclusion

Multi-religious life is our reality. We, as Christians, have a long way to go in learning how to live and speak with greater sensitivity. But we are not to become so sensitive that we lose our confidence in the public truth of the cross of Christ. Newbigin asserts the word "confidence" as the best one to describe our interfaith engagement: "The world into which the first Christians carried the gospel was a religiously plural world and — as the letters of Paul show — in that world of many lords and many gods, Christians had to work out what it means that in fact, Jesus alone is Lord. The first three centuries of church history were a time of intense life-and-death struggle against the seductive power of syncretism. But if the issue of religious pluralism is not entirely new, it certainly meets our generation in a new way. We must meet it in the terms of our own time."[30]

As faith symbols displayed on car dashboards assert religious allegiances, Christians must learn how to meet this religiously plural urban world afresh. We must do so with the humility of Christ to serve and love while never forsaking the call to upend the status quo with the good news of the Saviour.

Endnotes

1   This paper was the result of a working group on "Sensitivities and Confidence in Interfaith Dynamics" during the International Society of Urban Mission (ISUM) Summit held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. This article was first published as Michael D. Crane, "Dashboard Symbolism: Sensitivities and Confidence in Interfaith Dynamics" in Graham Joseph Hill (ed.), *Signs of Hope in the City: Renewing Urban Mission, Embracing Radical Hope* (Melbourne, ISUM, 2015), 49–64.

2   Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective*, Rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1966).

3   "Fears of a New Religious Strife," *The Economist*, July 27, 2013, http://www.economist.com/news/asia/21582321-fuelled-dangerous-brew-faith-ethnicity-and-politics-tit-tat-conflict-escalating.

4   "Projek Dialog," http://www.projekdialog.com/.

5   The Sinhalese are the largest ethnic group of Sri Lanka.

6   The description of the Guruwara was contributed by working group member, Ajit Hazra. He serves as Director for Faith and Development with World Vision International, South Asia and Pacific Region.

7   Vishal Mangalwadi, *The Legacy of William Carey: A Model for the Transformation of a Culture*, 1st US ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 85.

8   Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998).

9   Gavin D'Costa, "Christ, the Trinity, and Religious Plurality," in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D'Costa (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 21.

10 Two examples of religiously influenced legislation demonstrate the point. The Christians were a vocal influence during the prohibition era in the United States. In countries with Islamic majorities there has been heated debate about Islamic (shari'a) law and whether it extends to non-Muslims.

11 Irving Hexham, "Evangelical Illusions: Postmodern Christianity and the Growth of Muslim Communities in Europe and North America," in *No Other Gods Before Me?* ed. John G. Stackhouse Jr (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 155.

12 The links between ethnicity and religion can be formal, as it is in Malaysia, or informal, as it is in France. In a country like Malaysia, where ethnicity is linked to religion by law, political debate becomes intertwined with religious debate. In France, the immigrant community has been associated with Islam, which has resulted in anti-immigrant discrimination aimed at the Muslim community. For more on immigrant faith and religion see Phillip Connor, *Immigrant Faith: Patterns of Immigrant Religion in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe* (New York: NYU Press, 2014), 12.

13 It can be argued that the issue goes deeper than mere language; deeper worldview issues are involved that need to be addressed. Hostile language is an outward sign of inward attitudes.

14 Rodney Stark, *Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 32.

15 Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 722; John B. Polhill, *Paul and His Letters* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 1999), 208.

16 Dean Flemming, "Contextualizing the Gospel in Athens: Paul's Areopagus Address as a Paradigm for Missionary Communication," *Missiology: An International Review* XXX, no. 2 (April 2002): 200.

17 Paul J. Griffiths, "An Evangelical Theology of Religions?" in *No Other Gods Before Me?* ed. John G. Stackhouse Jr (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 166–167.

18 Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Beyond a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK; Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2003); Gerald McDermott, *Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions: Jesus, Revelation and Religious Traditions* (Downers Grove Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

19 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids; Geneva: W.B. Eerdmans; WCC Publications, 1989); Vinoth Ramachandra, *The Recovery of Mission: Beyond the Pluralist Paradigm* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996).

20 Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 148.

21 Griffiths, "An Evangelical Theology of Religions?" 167.

22 Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions*, 21.

23 Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 1–2.

24 Just as one example, the church in the South of the United States continued prejudice in churches and public statements long after slaves were emancipated in 1871. Alan Cross, *When Heaven and Earth Collide: Racism, Southern Evangelicals, and the Better Way of Jesus* (Montgomery, AL: NewSouth Books, 2014).

25 D'Costa, "Christ, the Trinity, and Religious Plurality."

26 Amos Yong has done the most toward discerning between demonic inspiration and divine inspiration. Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 137–161.

27 David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 487.

28   Lesslie Newbigin, *A Word in Season: Perspectives on Christian World Missions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1994), 151.

29   For a thorough treatment of 1 Peter 2 see Bruce W. Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994).

30   Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 157.

REFLECTIONS AND REPORTS

Should Urban Mission Include a Focus on Older People?

Rev Ben Boland

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The World Bank estimates that 56% of people live in cities today, which is expected to rise to 70% by 2050.[1] Therefore urban mission is increasingly critical. What is less often considered is that the distribution of older people is skewed towards urban contexts, mainly because medical and aged care services tend to be urban. This reflection will address the question, "Should urban mission include a focus on older people?" by examining the current mission to urban seniors, the Biblical importance of the mission to seniors, and how an urban mission to seniors might be staffed.

Before exploring these topics, defining what "mission" means is critical. While mission is as old as Christianity, it is incredibly diverse.[2] Amid this diversity, one of the distinctions has been between evangelism (sharing Jesus within your own culture) and mission (sharing Jesus with people from another culture).[3] Early in my chaplaincy ministry, a missiologist told me aged care chaplaincy was not mission because it was not cross-cultural. However, Robert's perspective resonates deeply with me, as he defines mission as:

Sharing Jesus with people who do not know him.[4]

Therefore, since a core component of aged care chaplaincy is "*Sharing Jesus with people who do not know him*",[5] aged care chaplaincy is mission.[6] Indeed, some people (including some chaplains) will disagree with including evangelism as a core part of chaplaincy. However, the position in this reflection is that sharing Jesus is a biblical imperative.[7]

Having established the importance of urban mission, noted the high proportion of older people in cities and defined mission, it is appropriate to examine how urban mission currently interacts with older people.

Current Mission to Urban Seniors

Currently, urban mission does not prioritise older people, as evidenced by the following equation:

$$\$ + time \rightarrow <30\text{'s} \propto \$ + time \rightarrow >70\text{'s}.$$

Or, putting the comparison into words: What proportion of resources (financial and time) are allocated to mission to people under thirty vs to people over seventy?

Before addressing this missional imbalance, it is essential to examine why it has occurred. There are three factors at work: cultural pressure, poor theology, and ethical hesitancy.

Regarding cultural pressure, the World Health Organisation states that 50% of the world's population is ageist against older people.[8] This attitude has infiltrated the church. Biblically, however all people are of great value to God, as all people bear God's image.

Additionally, poor theology has impacted our allocation of resources. Specifically, there are three critical poor theological positions at work:

Firstly, the position that "'young people are the church's future"' dominates much decision-making. However, this emphasis on "youth"' ministry is not biblical; the New Testament has almost no mention of ministry or mission aimed at younger people.

Secondly, the theological position that ministry must be "strategic" is misguided.[9] By contrast, James warns his readers against strategic ministry.

My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favouritism.[10]

While James is explicitly talking about giving the rich special care, the reason his readers were tempted in this area was at least partially because the rich are powerful and thus strategic, as their financial and social impact would far outweigh the effect on a poor person.

Furthermore, Jesus's ministry was not strategic (at least in the human sense of the word). Born to an unwed poor mother, his disciples (except Paul) were not gifted, and most of his ministry was given to people with low "strategic" value (e.g., people experiencing poverty, outcasts, and women). As such, a ministry that seeks to target a "strategic" people group, excluding the "weak," is not scriptural.

Thirdly, poor theology has been shaped by misunderstandings about older people and faith. For example, there is a common misperception that older people are "hardened" to the gospel. Research across multiple generations has shown that older people are incredibly open to spirituality.[11] Indeed, a world expert on spirituality and ageing, Rev Dr Elizabeth MacKinlay, has stated:

Spiritual growth is not simply possible in later life; it's likely![12]

Another myth is that people living with dementia cannot become Christians. Mark Wormell's book, *Coming to Christ in Dementia*, has powerfully addressed this question.[13] I have also produced a video debunking five myths which inhibit mission to people living with dementia.[14]

Ethical hesitancy is a final key reason for the lack of mission to older people. Recognizing that many older people live with some degree of "frailty" (physical and cognitive) has created hesitancy about mission in this context.[15] Certainly, elder abuse[16] is rampant, and COVID19 has increased its prevalence.[17] Therefore, some people fear mission to older people, and particularly to people living with dementia, will result in older people being abused. My response is three-fold:

> Sharing Jesus should never be coercive or abusive.
> Failing to share Jesus with older people and those living with dementia is abusive. Biblically, life and life to the full, both now and into eternity can only be found in relationship with Jesus.
> There is strong research that the most effective way to prevent elder abuse is to support older people and their carers. Consequently, mission to older people has preventative value regarding elder abuse.[18]

Therefore, while urban mission to older people is not a priority, the reasons for this position (e.g. cultural pressure, poor theology, and ethical hesitancy) are unsupported.

Biblical Importance of Mission to Seniors

Having established the key reasons seniors' ministry is a neglected missional opportunity, it is appropriate to examine Scripture regarding seniors; specifically, there are two key Biblical points which should inform Christians' engagement with seniors.

Firstly, Scripture repeatedly commands care for widows, which can best be understood to mean older people generally. [19] While not all widows are older, most are. Furthermore, church history is replete with Christian's caring for widows and nursing homes were pioneered by Judeo-Christian organisations. Additionally, excluding other older people (e.g. never married and widowers) is contrary to the spirit of these exhortations.

Secondly, both the Ten Commandments and Ephesians six exhort God's people to honour their parents. Sadly, these texts have often been understood to only apply to young people. However, none of the other commandments are age limited; indeed, some instructions apply almost exclusively to adults.[20]

Therefore, in addition to basic missional texts (e.g. the Great Commission) emphasising the importance of sharing Jesus's love with all people, there are specific biblical exhortations to care for older people.

How Urban Mission to Seniors Might be Staffed

The global trend to urbanisation and the higher proportion of older people in urban contexts, coupled with the Scriptural drive toward mission and care for older people, mean urban mission must include focused mission to older urban people. The question arises: What should urban mission to seniors look like? This is not the space for a full exploration of mission in the aged care context, but it is appropriate to consider the question: How might urban mission to older people best be done?[21]

Exploring this question starts with an evaluation of the effectiveness of current aged care missionaries. Presently, there are two groups of current aged care missionaries: chaplains and volunteers.[22] Exploring the strengths and weaknesses of these groups as missionaries to older people is critical in thinking about how mission to older people should evolve.

One key strength of chaplains as missionaries is they are paid, allowing chaplains to focus on aged care. Ideally, they are embedded in a village/facility which allows time to build relationships with residents, families, and staff.[2324] This embedding is particularly critical when there are lockdowns due to diseases (e.g. COVID-19, flu, and gastroenteritis), when even families may have difficulty entering a facility. Additionally, they have the opportunity and ability to care for aged care staff which is difficult for any other person to do. Finally, the concept of a paid missionary aligns with other forms of mission, as it is common for missionaries to be paid.

There are four weaknesses in chaplains as aged care missionaries:

> Chaplains are almost exclusively employed by Christian aged care providers but the number of Christian aged care organisations is declining and many older people do not live in villages/facilities.[25] Some chaplains and organisations employing chaplains are "hesitant" about mission and evangelism. Effective chaplaincy demands a combination of specialised training and God-given abilities. Sadly, historically chaplaincy has been a dumping ground for clergy who were not functioning in a local

church. Today some denominations require lower qualifications for chaplains' vs local church ministry and may assume any local church minister is capable of being a great chaplain.

Finally, chaplains cost money.

One obvious solution is to focus on volunteers instead. Certainly, volunteers are critical to urban missions and, specifically, to seniors' ministry. Their typically short hours mean they are less likely to burn out.[26] Their diversity is also an asset (e.g. a female chaplain greatly benefits from having a male pastoral visitor for people who would prefer to speak to a man).[27] Finally, as mentioned previously, volunteers are "cheap", or at least seem to be. However, recruiting, training, managing and fare welling volunteers is neither quick nor easy. Furthermore, recruiting, training, managing and fare welling volunteers can rarely be done effectively by a volunteer, and resource development is another critical area where volunteers are generally weak.

I am passionate about volunteers and actively work with them, but note the following challenges:

Length of tenure. Many volunteers stay for less than a year.

Unless a volunteer has "special skills" (e.g. playing the piano for church, qualifications to drive a bus driver or administer Holy Communion), or volunteers for more than two hours per week, the hours required to manage a volunteer can outweigh their contribution.[28]

Australian legislation requires a volunteer to complete paperwork and training similar to an employee, which is onerous and can deter many people from volunteering.

The previous section highlighted that chaplains and volunteers have significant weaknesses as missionaries to older people. So, what other methods could be used to share Jesus' love with older people? Family members can and do provide exceptional spiritual care for their loved ones; however, this focuses on the loved one. Resources (e.g. books, videos, and podcasts) can be effective, but the mission has always been primarily relational. I heard one denominational leader argue that seniors should minister to seniors. However, we do not expect any other group to lead ministry to their peers. Additionally, older people ministering to older people is volunteering, with the complication many older people are terrified of care homes.

The future of urban missions can be found in improving the quality and quantity of volunteers and chaplains who minister to older people. This is not an easy task; it will require mission organisations, churches and Christians to learn to love older people and pray for missions to them, generally and specifically in an urban context.

Endnotes

1   https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment/overview#:~:text=Today%2C%20some%2056%25%20of%20 the,people%20will%20live%20in%20cities. Accessed 15 March 2023.

2   Robert, Dana L. *Christian Mission*. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2009), 1.

3   Dipple, Bruce. *Becoming Global.* (London: SMBC), 11.

4   Robert, *Christian Mission*, 1.

5   Robert, *Christian Mission*, 1.

6   https://www.eternitynews.com.au/australia/how-and-why-chaplains-came-to-share-the-love-of-jesus/ Accessed 15 March 2023.

7   Browning, Jim and Jim Spivey. *The Heart of a Chaplain*. (Irving, TX: B.H. Carroll, 2022), 31 and 121.

8   https://www.who.int/health-topics/ageism#tab=tab_1 Accessed 15 March 2023.

9   Marshall, Colin and Tony Payne. *The Trellis and the Vine.* (Newtown: Mathias Media, 2009).

10   James 2.

11   MacKinlay, Elizabeth. *Spiritual Growth and Care in the Fourth Age of Life*. (Warriewood: Jessica Kingsley, 2006).

12   Talk at the 8th International Conference on Ageing and Spirituality which was held in Canberra 27–30 October 2019.

13   Wormell, Mark. *Coming to Christ in Dementia*. (Ultimo: Mountain Stream Media, 2016).

14   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CWHmkjRj_xU

15   Most older people including those who medicine classifies as "frail" do not identify as frail.

16   Abuse of older people. While the most frequent form of elder abuse is financial, other forms also occur (e.g. emotional, physical, and sexual). https://aifs.gov.au/research/research-reports/elder-abuse-understanding-issues-frameworks-and-responses. Accessed 1 May 2023.

17   Weissberger, Gail H. et al., "Elder Abuse in the COVID-19 Era Based on Calls to the National Center on Elder Abuse Resource Line." *BMC Geriatrics*, *22* (1), 2022, 689–689.

18   https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/elderabuse/fastfact.html. Accessed 15 March 2023.

https://www.eternitynews.com.au/australia/six-signs-of-elder-abuse-and-how-you-can-help/ Accessed 15 March 2023.

https://www.eternitynews.com.au/opinion/guarding-against-elder-abuse-in-church/ Accessed 15 March 2023.

19   https://www.eternitynews.com.au/australia/should-churches-stop-providing-aged-care/ Accessed 15 March 2023.

20   E.g. Do not commit adultery, do not covet your neighbor's wife, and do not bear false testimony.

21   I have written a book on this topic which is with the publisher.

22   Chaplain in this context being a Christian who is paid to minister to older people.

23   Aged care chaplaincy should include ministry to family and loved ones of older people. Indeed, aged care ministry provides an opportunity to reach and care for younger people (e.g. families and friends) who are otherwise hard to reach.

24   Staff includes both paid workers and volunteers.

25   https://www.eternitynews.com.au/australia/should-churches-stop-providing-aged-care/ Accessed 15 March 2023.

26   Over 70% of volunteers do less than 100hr/year (on average they volunteer for less than 1.5hrs per week). Over 70% of volunteers do less than 100hr/year (on average they volunteer for less than 1.5hrs per week). https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/ uploads/VA-Key-Statistics_2020.01.pdf. Accessed 8 March 23.

27   The majority of aged care chaplains I know are women.

28   E.g. Recruit, train, care for, and farewell.

BOOK REVIEWS

Public Christianity for a Post-Christian World

Reviewed by Professor Dr John Dickson

Reviews by Professor Dr John Dickson (PhD) who is an author, historian, and public advocate for the Christian Faith. The founder of Australia's Centre for Public Christianity, he is now the Jean Kvamme Distinguished Professor of Biblical Studies and Public Christianity at Wheaton College, Illinois. He lives in the US with his wife Buff and the youngest of their three children.

Australia is about ten years behind the US in everything, except in the process of secularization, where my homeland is sadly ten years *ahead* of America. The percentage of those claiming to be some kind of "Christian" in Australia has dropped precipitously, from 61% in 2011 to 44% in 2021. Christians—that includes nominal ones—are now a minority in Australia. In America, Pew Research reports that those claiming to be some kind of "Christian" fell from 78% in 2007 to 63% in 2021. This decline is almost identical to Australia's, ten years behind.

As long ago as 1976, the eminent historian Patrick O'Farrell described Australia as the "first genuinely post-Christian society." What he meant was simple. If a "Christian society" is one where biblical belief and practice are generally assumed as norms, a "post-Christian" society is one where this *used to be* the case but where now Christian belief and practice are generally rejected or transposed into a secular key. America seems situated somewhere between a Christian country and a post-Christian one.

I can report that bringing the gospel to a post-Christian environment has both challenges and delights. In a pervasive nominal Christian culture, the gospel wouldn't be controversial enough to be part of the vigorous public debate. In a wholly secular environment, Christianity would be too discredited, too passé, to be thought worthy of consideration. But it is precisely the tension-point in a post-Christian environment between *increasing irreligion* and *enduring Christian memory* that creates opportunities for public witness. Evangelizing in a post-Christian setting is scarier and more fun than you might imagine.

In this context, I want to recommend four books that will help us reach a secularizing (perhaps not yet post-Christian) America. Three are from Aussie authors, one from a marvelous US-based public advocate for Christ.

Sam Chan's *Evangelism in a Skeptical World* is a masterful account of how to reach our rapidly changing world. Sam has a PhD in speech-act theory as it relates to Scripture and Christian proclamation, and he puts this expertise to great effect in a work that stays true to the unchanging gospel but duly grapples with the fact that *what we say* isn't always *what people hear*. The book provides a lovely combination of biblical exegesis, systematic theology, sociology, and rhetorical theory. And it all comes from one of the most sought-after and effective—and funniest—evangelists of my homeland.

Being the Bad Guys by Stephen McAlpine is a kind of mission-memo from the frontlines of the battle for the gospel in a post-Christian setting. McAlpine is one of the most insightful conservative Christian commentators in Australia. He is also a pastor and public communicator. His thesis is simple and important, if sometimes exaggerated for rhetorical effect. Christians need to get comfortable—cheerful even—being the "bad guys" in a society that finds our vision of the good, especially around sex and identity, to be evil and harmful. McAlpine doesn't advocate for a culture war or fighting fire with fire. He calls us to gospel fidelity, zeal, and, above all, humility to lose graciously as we win people to Christ.

Very (very) different is the book by missions academic—and one of the best evangelists I have ever heard—Michael Frost. His recent *Mission is the Shape of Water* explores one of Christianity's great strengths and key vulnerabilities: it is a highly transportable faith. The gospel can find a home in 21st-century China just as easily as it did in 6th-century Gaul. And this mission-flexibility makes it both evangelistically effective *and* vulnerable to compromise. With these thoughts in mind, Frost examines ten historical paradigms of Christian mission, showing how the Church has succeeded—and sometimes failed—to reach radically diverse cultures with the unchanging news (the "water") of Christ's life, teaching, death, and resurrection. Frost comes across at times as a bit of a "progressive", but there is much here to challenge and inspire. Read in tandem with McAlpine's more conservative (sometimes pessimistic) account of our evangelistic moment, I think Frost has a lot to teach us.

Rebecca McLaughlin's first book *Confronting Christianity* was the best all-round defence of the Christian faith I had read in a decade. Her *Secular Creed* is the perfect complement. In it, this British US-based public advocate for Christ points the way to a different kind of "muscular" Christianity, one that is able to flex the *muscle of conviction* and the *muscle of compassion* at the same time. For a church—and a world—too often forced to choose between smug conservatism and acquiescing liberalism, Dr McLaughlin recovers the genius of Jesus Christ, showing us how to love the truth and human beings with equal passion. The result is an utterly compelling and humane treatment of five contemporary issues, including racism and sexuality, which Christians have to get right in our post-Christian mission field.

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Contemplating Country: More Gondwana Theology

Reviewed by Professor Glen O'Brien

Professor Glen O'Brien is a Uniting Church minister in the Yarra Yarra Presbytery with a placement to full time theological education in The Salvation Army. He is a Professor of the University of Divinity and Research Coordinator at Eva Burrows College where he lectures in Christian History and Theology, specialising in Wesleyan studies.

Garry Worete Deverell's *Contemplating Country* is the second volume in the series, *Faith and Justice in These Lands Now Called Australia*, each intended volume of which 'seeks to examine a particular form of injustice and asks how Christian faith and discipleship might contribute to a more just response' (ix). The 'More' in the subtitle indicates that this book draws on themes first established in the author's previous book, *Gondwana Theology* (Reservoir: Morning Star, 2018). Deverell, who is a trawloolway man, Anglican priest and Academic Dean in the University of Divinity's School of Indigenous Studies, has played a significant role in the development of Indigenous theology in Australia. He is uncompromising in his commitment to Aboriginal ways of seeing and knowing as a beginning point for theology, not simply as a 'perspective' to be added to Eurocentric curricula. Too often the tokenism of Reconciliation [In]Action Plans and other institutional devices add up to little more than 'black cladding' that soothes whitefella guilt but does little to make any real difference for First Nations participation in churches and theological colleges. *Contemplating Country* is a ringing indictment of such an approach and calls instead for a deep listening to Aboriginal wisdom.

Deverell is alert to the ways that he undertakes his work in a colonised space and sees both colonised and colonizers as caught up in imperial ways of thinking that need to be resisted and overcome. He is critical (in ch. 11 and elsewhere) of the Preamble of the Constitution of the Uniting Church which sets out the idea that Indigenous spirituality is somehow completed and brought to fulfilment through settler colonial engagement. In this view, Aboriginal people knew God and Christ in law and ceremony but came to a fuller revelation with the arrival of the Christian Gospel. Deverell wants to resist such 'stump and graft' typologies and instead recover Indigenous spirituality on its own terms and for its own sake. The central way he attempts this is by reconfiguring the concept of 'Country' as more or less functioning for First Nations people as 'Christ' functions for white Christians. The idea that Jesus of Nazareth should be considered 'as one of the more important creator ancestors or "old people"… or as a paradigm or parable of the ontological patterning put in play through every

form of embodiment or incarnation' (p. 17) may be difficult for readers with a more 'orthodox' Christology to accept. Yet there is a beauty and a consistency to the analogous relationship between the cycle of life and death in the natural environment and the Paschal mystery. There is a correlation also between the murderous colonisation and dispossession of Aboriginal people and the crucifixion of Jesus by the Roman state.

In the book of Hebrews, Jesus is placed 'in the order of Melchizedek', a Canaanite priest, thereby situating him 'within a matrix of authority which is essentially indigenous rather than Jewish in origin.' In the same manner, 'Jesus is more creator ancestor than archbishop. He is a figure of country, not of merely churchly rites and successions.' From this, Deverell argues that the Indigenous spirituality of country embodies a biblical form of authority, one not recognised by those who accept only settler-colonial readings of Scripture (pp. 84-87).

The author is also an insightful liturgist, as evidenced in the Eucharistic liturgy provided in his previous work, and in the liturgical suggestions that appear throughout this latest book. In chapter 3, he offers valuable observations on embedding the idea of 'Christ as Country' into ritual spaces that take embodiment and context seriously. Time is experienced by Aboriginal people in a present-continuous manner, so worship should reflect a sense of 'place' as well as a sensitivity to the way that 'orality' is more highly valued than written texts, or more accurately, where dancing and singing on country are themselves understood as 'the text'. After all, Christian liturgical texts all began in a culture of orality and performance before they were committed to written form.

In the sixth chapter on 'Decolonizing Scripture', the author finds both bad news and good news for Indigenous people in the texts of terror relating to Israel's attempted genocide of the Canaanites. The bad news is that such texts have been used to legitimise Aboriginal dispossession and enslavement. On the other hand, the same texts reckon with the fact that the peoples who were intended for annihilation were absorbed into the colonising power through negotiation and treaty. When Christian settlers can understand better their own history through such texts, there may be a greater willingness to work for justice for Indigenous people within the present colonized space.

The tone of the book is scholarly throughout and there are many passages of real depth and power. At the same time, there is a clear focus on practical action that should flow out of the solid critical analysis. A good example is the advice on 'Acknowledging Country' in chapter 8 which highlights several 'pitfalls to avoid' including referring to 'emerging elders' (you are either an elder or not an elder), the use of the possessive 'our Aboriginal people' (they are not 'ours' but their own), and the use of 'traditional owners' which renders connection to country something in the far-off past, thereby masking the fact that land was never legitimately ceded, but stolen. One I confess to having used myself is speaking of the Aboriginal care of country as having occurred 'since time immemorial'. There *is* a memory of such care, and a carefully preserved and curated one. To render it 'immemorial' is therefore, in Deverell's words 'deeply insulting,' as is referring to 'any Aboriginal people who may be here with us today'. Deverell appeals to the reader to avoid such depersonalising moves by 'using our personal names please. Treat us as people, not as abstractions' (p. 84).

There is also much practical wisdom in chapters 9 through 11. Attempts at reconciliation, without reparation or restitution, may amount only to a form of virtue signalling. The under representation of First Nations people at all levels of church life across all denominations, and the fact that lands stolen by the crown and gifted to the church remain firmly in the hands of those who received it, speak to the inability of churches to surrender their power and privilege. What would happen if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander bishops were fully funded?

If Indigenous knowledge was mandated in theological colleges? If land gifted to churches by the crown were transferred to the ownership and use of Indigenous agencies? Or if a proportion of all property sales (most churches are overburdened with underutilised properties) were set aside to fund important Indigenous ministries? Without the enactment of such practical measures, talk of 'reconciliation' rings hollow. A 'kenotic' moment lies open before the churches to move away from the limited and limiting constraints of their colonial heritage into a new mode of being, characterised by grace and generosity.

The book gathers material from a variety of previously published sources, including position papers, journal articles, opinion pieces, conference papers, and sermons, as well as incorporating entirely new work. Nonetheless it does not feel fragmented but exhibits a cohesive argument throughout. It is graced by an insightful Foreword by Indigenous scholar, Professor Anne Pattel-Gray as well as cover art by Aboriginal artist and fellow priest, Glenn Loughrey. 'From the Depths, Life Rises,' depicts an aerial view of country carved up into neat squares of ownership, each square containing memorial crosses, the casualties of dispossession. Yet from that checkered landscape a ring of living beings in concentric circles emerges to bring new hope to the decimated land. It is a fitting image for a book that offers just such renewing potential.

Mobilizing Gen Z: Challenges and Opportunities for the Global Age of Missions

Reviewed by Tamie Davis

Tamie Davis is Mobilisation Lead with CMS SA/NT. She served with CMS in Tanzania from 2013–2023. While there, she completed a PhD about the prosperity theology of a group of Tanzanian women.

Gen Z are those born between 1996 and 2010. A stereotype is that having been coddled by their parents and never looking up from their phones, and they pursue their "own truth" while paranoid about getting "cancelled." However, according to Jolene Erlacher and Katy White, Gen Z are also "driven, pragmatic and skilled" learners who want to contribute to the world (p.ix). In *Mobilizing Gen Z*, Erlacher and White make a case for how this might happen in the service of global mission.

The book is divided into four parts: Part 1 examines the cultural shifts in North America that have changed the missions landscape; Part 2 introduces Gen Z; Part 3 examines mobilisation strategies; and Part 4 makes suggestions about the context of mission after mobilisation has occurred.

As an Australian, I found Parts 1 and 4 the least helpful because the mobilising strategies they critiqued seemed particular to specific North American contexts. For example, Erlacher and White argue that mission mobilisers can no longer turn up to a Christian college (university) once a year, give an appeal, and expect to recruit missionaries. Aside from the fact that Christian colleges play a much smaller role in the Australian tertiary landscape, the image of flocks of undergraduate students signing up for missions after hearing a speaker was unfamiliar to me as an Australian.

The data and examples in Parts 2 and 3 are also primarily drawn from an American context. Still, the trends were recognisable, so these sections were more immediately applicable. I appreciated how Erlacher and White first reframed what appear to be Gen Z's weaknesses. For example, they show how Gen Z's phone use unites them with young people across the globe as they watch the same funny videos, listen to the same music, and share the same trends. This global youth culture situates Gen Z as uniquely able to make connections across geography and cultures (p.7).

Another example of the authors' reframing of Gen Z is around the dominance of postmodernism in Gen Z's world. On one hand, this gives Gen Z an a priori resistance to mission: they associate it with colonialism and cultural imperialism (p.20) and believe it is wrong to impose their beliefs on others (p.6). However, Erlacher and White argue that this is not immediately equivalent to a weak doctrine of the uniqueness of Christ. On the contrary, Barna's research reveals that most Gen Z believe people's lives would be better with Christ (p.6). However, Gen Z also believes that our current mission strategies fail to communicate Christ effectively. Gen Z's primary need, then, is missiological. They need space to explore contextualisation and mission models if they are to consider being a part of the mission.

Erlacher and White repeatedly call for the discipleship of Gen Z but emphasise that a different approach is required from previous generations. For example, millennials must be confronted with their weakness despite being told, "You can do anything!" Gen Z are aware of their weakness and need courage and a big God if it is not to overwhelm them. They cannot be shoved through an assembly line to world missions; they need to be nurtured so that their gifts might be fanned into flame. The sympathetic profile of Gen Z provided by Erlacher and White is a good starting place for considering how to do that.

Australian Association for Mission Studies