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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).

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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.

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Editorial



Our June edition offers a number of papers on a diverse range of topics. The intention had been to focus on gender issues in mission, but although the guest editor received a number of positive responses, the papers did not eventuate.

However, we have a rich range of papers which include a more than usual number of smaller papers which we hope will engage you in a variety of ways and contribute to your own mission possibilities.

This edition begins with a thoughtful and challenging paper from Kirk J. Franklin which addresses the question of the interface between Western missions and the reality of

moving to the global South. How can Western missions be influenced and changed by the need for inculturation which necessitates openness to the new and continuity with faithfulness to mission. The paper addresses the need for collaboration, adaptability, and innovation.

A long-time member of the Association of Mission Studies offers us an oral memory of the growing ecumenism between the Australian Churches. This is a paper that depends very much on memory rather than documentation and might have been lost except for the author's long-term participation in the evolution of the Australian Council of Churches.

We all rely on biblical translations, but even if we are familiar with the original languages, mission requires a commitment to making our foundational texts available to communities who have no knowledge of biblical languages. In many contexts missionaries have created dictionaries linking native languages with more dominant international languages and then provided translations of our sacred texts. This is an intriguing story of a systematic endeavour to provide a translation suitable for the indigenous peoples of Australia who share many languages.

We are then blessed with four papers which address different concerns about anthropology and mission, inclusion and initiation, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and a research project about which a doctoral student seeks advice and information.

Pope Francis, of happy memory, initiated this year as a jubilee year inviting us to be "pilgrims of hope." In a broken world, we need to be hopeful, and we have a reflection in this week of national reconciliation on the contribution of two Australian indigenous elders on the theme of hope as we pursue the agenda of reconciliation.

Patrick McInerney offers us a homily on the feast of St Columban which takes us through the ages of mission and constructively reflects on the contribution of his religious community, the Columbans.

This issue concludes with a reflection on the new Pope of the Catholic Church, Leo XIV, several book reviews, by our ever-generous reviewer Ross Mackinnon.

The final notice is about the SVD-AAMS Conference in October. The flyer is included, and more details will follow, but for the present there is an invitation to participation and presentation:

The Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) and the Australian Association of Mission Studies (AAMS) are holding a Conference at YTU on Thursday and Friday 2-3 October. The theme of the Conference is

Missio Dei: An Ecumenical Conversation. There will be four keynote speakers: Fr Anthony Pernia SVD (former Superior General); Professor Vicky Balabanski (Uniting College of Leadership and Theology); Professor Glen O'Brien (Eva Burrows College); and Adjunct Professor Susan Paccoc (University of Western Australia). We wish to invite anyone who would like to offer a paper or a workshop to notify Rev Associate Professor Michael A. Kelly CSsR (m.kelly@ytu.edu.au) by 15 July 2025. Please send the title of your proposed paper and a two-hundred word abstract.

This is an important Conference for the Divine Word Missionaries who will celebrate 150 years since their foundation with a three-day symposium preceding the Conference.

Michael A. Kelly CSsR

Reimagining Western Missions: Navigating Change in a Majority World Context



Kirk J. Franklin (PhD, University of Pretoria)

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Abstract

The shifting dynamics of global Christianity necessitate a reassessment of the identity, role, and relevance of Western missions within the *missio Dei*. This article, originating from a 2024 webinar hosted by the Australian Association of Mission Studies, explores the challenges and opportunities facing Western missions as they interact with the growing influence of the Global South. Through an analysis of historical frameworks, demographic data, and theological metaphors such as “new wine in new wineskins,” the paper addresses the need for collaboration, adaptability, and innovation. It critiques power dynamics, explores lessons from the 1971 African moratorium on foreign missions, and advocates for a “Third Space” approach—honouring legacy while fostering equitable partnerships with Majority World churches. Drawing on theological insights, this article calls Western missions to embrace transformation as a reflection of God’s ongoing purposes, ensuring their contributions empower, rather than constrain, the flourishing of Global Christianity.

Introduction

Western missions stand at a crossroads, facing both unique challenges and new opportunities in an era of Global Christianity. The future of Western missions is an important topic because of the changing nature of Global Christianity. This article originated from a webinar hosted by the Victorian chapter of the Australian Association of Mission Studies (AAMS) on 19 April 2024, titled “The Future of Western Missions.” The event sparked thoughtful engagement with the participants, shaping the focus of this paper. Therefore, the basis of this paper is to frame the shifting global dynamics that challenge Western

missions and call them to reassess their identity, place and role within the *missio Dei*, considering the changing dynamics of the global Church.

As the landscape changes for Western missions, this article calls for a vision for a renewed commitment to fostering collaborative efforts that honour the agency and leadership of the global Church. In doing so, Western missions can remain faithful to their calling while finding their place in the unfolding story of the worldwide church.

Parameters for the topic

There are key terms in the topic of The Future of Western Missions that need to be clarified so that there is a common understanding of them. They are:

Western: Church historian John Dickson emphasizes that the term “the West” or “Western civilization” is not intended as a “code for ‘white civilization’ or for any contemporary longing for the recovery of a ‘Judeo-Christian society’ of the past.”¹ Instead, Dickson provides a more nuanced description:

much of the laws, ethics, philosophy, literature and culture of the countries of Europe, Britain, Ireland, the United States, South America, Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand can be traced to concrete precedents—good and bad—in the Greco-Roman and Jewish-Christian societies that spread westward from Italy in the fourth to the sixteenth centuries.²

In the context of missions, geographical terminology such as Western has been widely used, particularly to describe historical interactions between the Global North (West) and the Global South. This concept gained prominence after the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, a landmark event that symbolized “the all-time high-water mark in Western missionary enthusiasm.”³ Francis Anekewe Oborji described the conference as “the meeting-point of the old missionary paradigm of the last century” and “the emerging missionary outlook of Christians from the southern continents.”⁴

All of this underscores the Western missionary movement’s significant influence while acknowledging the shifting dynamics as it interacts with the growing vibrancy of Christianity in the Global South.

Missions: This term specifically refers to the human activities undertaken to fulfill God’s mission. Adding the “s” to “mission” means “the varied works and activities of the church to reflect and participate in God’s mission”.⁵ At its core, *missions* encompass the individuals and organizational structures they create to carry out God’s mission. Michael Stroope succinctly differentiates the term by stating, “Mission is divine activity, but missions includes human and ecclesial activity.”⁶

From a Western Protestant perspective, missions frequently denotes organised efforts, particularly those undertaken by mission agencies and organizations. The modern understanding of missions emerged

¹ John Dickson, *Bullies and Saints: An honest look at the good and evil of Christian history* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2021), xxiii.

² Dickson, *Bullies and Saints: An honest look at the good and evil of Christian history*, xxiii.

³ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 338.

⁴ Francis Anekwe Oborji, *Towards African Missiology: Issues of New Language for African Christianity*, vol. 1 (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2020), 459.

⁵ Lalsangkima Pachuau, *God at Work in the World: Theology and Mission in the Global Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022), 1.

⁶ Michael Stroope, *Transcending Mission: The Eclipse of a Modern Tradition* (London: Apollos, 2017), 14.

from the late eighteenth century missionary movement, most notably initiated by William Carey. This historical foundation frames missions as the intentional and organized human participation in God's mission.

In some Protestant circles, the term "parachurch mission societies" has been used to describe organizations operating alongside the church. Kelebogile Resane explains that "the prefix 'para' means 'alongside of, by, or near'" highlighting that parachurch refers to organizations functioning "alongside of the church"⁷ often focussing on "evangelism, empowerment and social welfare."⁸ Johannes Knoetze adds that such societies may serve as the "conscience of the church" challenging the church where it has failed to fully embrace its missional calling.⁹

Related terms are "mission" and "missional." Mission in its broadest sense, refers to God's overarching purpose to redeem and restore creation, initiated by the Triune God's sending nature and accomplished through his commissioning of individuals and the Church. The term missional describes the actions, relationships, purposes, or identities that align with actively participating in God's mission. Missional thinking shifts the focus away from institutional maintenance toward active engagement with God's purposes, emphasizing the relational and transformative dimensions of living out the gospel in every aspect of life.

Future: John Johnstone critiques the tendency among Westerners to "ignore the past" as they "scrap what's in place and charge into the future."¹⁰ This approach risks overlooking valuable lessons and insights from historical experiences. In contrast, Dean Flemming's missional reading of Colossians offers a theological foundation for engaging with the future: "embrace a forward-looking hope, kept for [us] in heaven" that is "promised in the gospel" (1:5) from long ago of "the reality of future glory" (1:27) or as the NET translates, "the hope of glory".¹¹

What does this hope look like for missions? In mid-2020, during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Wycliffe Global Alliance conducted a survey of leaders from dozens of Bible translation organizations. Despite the challenges and uncertainties of the pandemic, many responses reflected a remarkable optimism grounded in faith. One leader articulated this hope, stating that their organization "trusted in God that he would use this crisis for his glory and purpose."¹²

Amid rapidly changing contexts—contexts locally, regionally, and globally—the hope of glory provides a theological and practical perspective about the future of Western missions. This hope invites reflection on how Western missions remains faithful to God's purposes while adapting to new realities and embracing the opportunities of what lies ahead. A forward-looking optimism with a deep reliance on God's promises offers a hopeful vision for missions in an evolving global landscape.

⁷ Kelebogile T. Resane, "The church and the parachurch: Can the two dialogue in order to agree?," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 41, no. 1 (2020): 2, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v41i1.2099>.

⁸ Resane, "The church and the parachurch: Can the two dialogue in order to agree?," 1.

⁹ Johannes J. Knoetze, "A long walk to obedience: Missiology and mission under scrutiny (1910-2010)," *In die Skriflig / In Luce Verbi* 51, no. 2 (2017): 2, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v51i2.2192>.

¹⁰ John Johnson, *Missing Voices: Learning to Lead Beyond Our Horizons* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2019), 239.

¹¹ Dean Flemming, "A Missional Reading of Colossians," in *Reading the Bible Missionally*, ed. Michael Goheen (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2016), 222.

¹² Kirk Franklin and Susan Van Wynen, *The Future of the Bible Translation Movement Survey*, 13 May 2020 2020, Wycliffe Global Alliance.

Framing the discussion

There are four framing questions to guide the topic at hand as follows.

First, how can we effectively “increase cooperation among diverse global Christianities” in the pursuit of God’s mission?¹³ Terry Muck asked this in 2022, emphasizing that “if the goal of mission is to facilitate the process by which ‘all tribes and peoples and languages’ (Rev 7:9) call Jesus Lord, then finding ways to cooperate with all forms of the global church is crucial.”¹⁴ This challenge invites reflection on the implications for Western missions in light of Jesus’ declaration: “The good news—the Message of the kingdom—will be preached all over the world [‘the whole inhabited earth’ (NET)], a witness staked out in every country. And then the end will come” (Matt 24:14, MSG). How might such cooperation align with this eschatological vision and address the realities and complexities of the global mission landscape?

Second, could the biblical metaphor of new wine and new wineskins inform the future of Western missions? In the Old Testament, God’s provision of “abundant harvests of grain and bountiful new wine” symbolized divine blessing, representing the “fertility of the ground [and] the foundational elements of survival and prosperity.”¹⁵ Yet, this abundance was not guaranteed indefinitely. Isaiah prophesied a time of desolation, stating that “new wine mourns, the vine decays” (Isa 24:7, AMP), when the grapevines would be laid to waste and “there is no new wine” (Isa 24:7, NLT). This imagery gives impetus to critically assess the adaptability and sustainability of Western mission paradigms.

Jesus spoke of the necessity for new wineskins to hold new wine, stating “New wine is stored in new wineskins so that both are preserved” (Matt 9:17, NLT). This imagery highlights not only “continuity with the past” but also the transformative and unprecedented nature of Jesus’ mission—“something radically new and different within the unfolding narrative of God’s work.”¹⁶ Dana Robert et al draw a parallel by highlighting that collaboration in mission can embody a form of new wineskins as it provides structure that allows for “a common witness to Christ that transcends differences.”¹⁷ Such partnering holds the potential to adapt to the complexities and challenges of contemporary contexts while preserving the essence of the Gospel as the new wine that brings hope and renewal. For this to happen, it means defining the boundaries of missional collaboration, cooperation, ecumenism, and partnership within the global body of Christ—the new wine in new wineskins for today’s context. In the process, the question could be: what should be left behind as outdated?

Robert et al observe, “In collaborative mission, old structures feed new movements of missional vitality.”¹⁸ Their research reveals that, despite the decline of some traditional mission structures, these may still serve as vital infrastructure for launching new collaborative networks. Rather than a simple dichotomy of decaying old structures “versus surging new movements”, collaboration frequently

¹³ Terry C. Muck, "Questions of Context: Reading a Century of German Mission Theology," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 46, no. 2 (2022): 271.

¹⁴ "Missiology (New Rochelle, New York)," 271; Muck, "Questions of Context: Reading a Century of German Mission Theology."

¹⁵ John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 59.

¹⁶ Tokunboh Adeyemo, *Africa Bible Commentary*, ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 1129.

¹⁷ Dana L. Robert et al., "Missional Collaborations 2021: A Report from North America," in *A Hundred Years of Mission Cooperation: The Impact of the International Missionary Council 1921-2021*, ed. Risto Jukko (Geneva, CH: World Council of Churches, 2022), 371.

¹⁸ Robert et al., "Missional Collaborations 2021: A Report from North America," 376.

emerges “in unexpected and hidden places.” New mission initiatives often leverage existing structures, and “churches undergird parachurch movements.”¹⁹

This interplay of old and new invites reflection, symbolized by new wine poured into new wineskins. How might the Western mission enterprise embrace continuity with the past through honouring traditions while simultaneously nurturing adaptability and innovation to address the challenges of an evolving global context? This vision suggests a missional framework that both preserves the richness of heritage and traditions and remains open to the transformative possibilities of the future.

Third, how does the declining prominence of Western forms of Christianity shape the future trajectory of Western missions? Craig Noll explored the implications of global Christianity’s “shift southward” and its impact on “Christians in the North”, framing this shift through two critical questions:

- “How deeply are we convinced of the interconnectedness of all Christians?
- How willing are we to engage with ideas and Christian practices that may be unfamiliar to us?”²⁰

These questions challenge Western missions to reconsider their assumptions about leadership, influence, and cultural paradigms within a rapidly changing global church. What might this shift demand of Western missions in terms of humility, adaptability, and collaboration?

Fourth, could Jesus’ clearing of the sellers from the temple be a metaphor for reimagining the future of Western missions? In John 2:13-16 (NLT), Jesus entered and found “merchants selling cattle, sheep, and doves for sacrifices,” alongside money changers conducting their business. Declaring that his Father’s house had been turned into “a place of commerce” (verse 16, AMP), Jesus drove them out, confronting a system where “making money, and not worship had become the focus” of the religious leaders. Jesus’ decisive action reflected a profound insistence on “a different priority for activity in the temple”, restoring it to its intended purpose.²¹ When his disciples heard this, they recalled the psalmist David’s words, “Passion for your house has consumed me” (Ps 69:9, NLT).

What lessons might Western missions draw from the recalibration of priorities, challenging any tendencies to prioritize or benefit from financial gain, institutional preservation, or cultural dominance over authentic participation in God’s mission? How might a renewed focus on worship, justice, and holistic engagement of the gospel reshape the missional enterprise in the future?

Implications of the rise of Global Christianity

An examination of data from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity provides insights for Western missions in understanding their role within the broader Global Church. According to the data, Christianity remains the world’s largest religion, with over 2.5 billion adherents, accounting for 32.4% of the world’s global population. However, this represents a slight decline from 34% in 1900, highlighting the changing demographics of the Christian faith.²² This table outlines the changing demographics:

¹⁹ Robert et al., "Missional Collaborations 2021: A Report from North America," 376.

²⁰ Craig Noll, "Editorial: World Christianity Now “in Season”,” *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 46, no. 4 (2022): 471.

²¹ Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary New Testament*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014), 254.

²² Gina A. Zurlo, Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing, "World Christianity 2024: Fragmentation and Unity," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 48, no. 1 (2023): 51.

Population of Christians by Continent¹	2000	2024
Global North (Europe including Russia; North America)	816,126,000 [41%]	836,646,000 [32%]
Global South (Africa, Asia, Latin America, Oceania)	1,171,780,000 [59%]	1,795,295,000 [68%]
TOTAL	1,987,906,000	2,631,941,000

¹ Zurlo, Johnson, and Crossing, "World Christianity 2024: Fragmentation and Unity," 52.

Over the past century, the Christian movement has grown significantly, from 558 million adherents in 1900 to 2.5 billion in 2024. Notably, this growth has been concentrated in the Global South, where the majority of the world’s Christians now reside.²³ For this reason, some prefer to call this the “Majority World”.

The demographic shift underscores the evolving nature of Christianity. What was once predominantly centred in the Global North has become increasingly engrained in the Global South. As a result, the term “global Christianity” better captures the dynamic and interconnected reality of the worldwide church today. This reorientation challenges Western missions to reconsider their position, role, and contributions in this increasingly diverse and decentralized Christian landscape.

Global Christian missionaries

The concept of who qualifies as “a missionary has evolved since the beginning of the twentieth century” making it increasingly challenging to determine the total number of missionaries globally.²⁴ Researchers at the Center for the Study of Global Christianity define missionaries as “Christians of all traditions who cross national borders for... two years or more.” This definition excludes “short-term international missionaries or national workers who serve in their own countries.”²⁵

Despite shifts in global mission dynamics, the portion of foreign missionaries has remained relatively stable at 3-4% of the total Christian mission and evangelization workforce. In contrast, the vast majority, 96-97%, are national workers, citizens serving as missionaries within their own countries.²⁶ This trend highlights the increasing reliance on local leadership in mission efforts. The following table illustrates these trends:

²³ Gina Zurlo, *Global Christianity: A Guide to the World’s Largest Religion from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2022), 4.

²⁴ Gina A. Zurlo, Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing, "World Christianity and Mission 2021: Questions about the Future," *IBMR* 45, no. 1 (2020): 16.

²⁵ Zurlo, Johnson, and Crossing, "World Christianity and Mission 2021: Questions about the Future," 17.

²⁶ Zurlo, Johnson, and Crossing, "World Christianity 2024: Fragmentation and Unity," 52.

Description	1900	2000	2024	2050
Christian Mission & Evangelization				
National workers (citizens)	2,100,000	10,900,000	13,400,000	17,000,000
Foreign missionaries	62,000	420,000	435,000	600,000
Total	2,162,000	11,320,000	13,835,000	17,600,000
% National	97%	96%	97%	97%
% Foreign	3%	4%	3%	3%
Foreign mission sending agencies	600	4,000	5,700	7,500

These figures reveal the growing emphasis on national workers as the backbone of Christian missions and evangelization. This shift reflects a movement toward contextualized mission strategies, empowering local leaders to engage their own communities effectively. Additionally, the steady increase in foreign mission sending agencies—from 600 in 1900 to a projected 7,500 by 2050—indicates sustained organizational commitment to global mission through “missionaries today [being] sent from everywhere and received everywhere.”²⁷

Affirming and concerning dynamics

The shift to global Christianity brings both affirmation and concern. On one hand, some growth in Christianity can be attributed to the foundational efforts of earlier Western-founded international missions. This realisation has laid the groundwork for the Majority World (or Global South) to increasingly take on leadership, ownership, and active involvement in mission and global evangelization.

On the other hand, this shift also raises significant concerns, particularly regarding the decline of professing Christians in the West. Western centres of Christianity are generally in decline, leaving Western missions and their supporting constituencies grappling with questions about their future role. Without serious reflection and adaptation, Western missions risk marginalization within the broader context of global Christianity.

The moratorium

This is not the first time Western missions have faced questions about their role. Valuable lessons can be drawn from Kenyan leader John Gatũ, then general secretary of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), and his call in 1971 for a moratorium on foreign missionaries in Africa. At a New York church conference, Gatũ asserted:

We cannot build the church in Africa on alms given by overseas churches; we are not serving the cause of the kingdom by turning all bishops, general secretaries, moderators, presidents, and superintendents into good, enthusiastic beggars when we continuously sing the tune of poverty in Third World churches.²⁸

²⁷ Zurlo, Johnson, and Crossing, "World Christianity and Mission 2021: Questions about the Future," 17.

²⁸ John Gatũ, *Fan into Flame: An Autobiography* (Nairobi: Moran Publishers, 2016), 128.

Gatũ became known as the instigator ‘of the Moratorium Debate’²⁹ because of “his controversial but prescient [prophetic] call for a moratorium on Western missionaries and finances on the continent of Africa.”³⁰ The two were tied together—Western missionaries came with funding. Western donors gave money to the African churches because of the Western missionaries. Gatũ advocated for “principles of selfhood, self-reliance, and self-determination for the church and the nations of Africa.”³¹ The moratorium for Gatũ was an opportunity for both Western donors and African recipients to reassess their relationship, enabling a more equitable and effective partnership “for the good of the Church as a whole.”³²

Fifty years later, Jesse N. K. Mugambi reflected on the legacy of Gatũ’s call. He noted that “Christian mission in Tropical Africa is no longer about winning converts because Christianity has, in fact, already permeated most areas, both rural and urban.”³³ Mugambi observed the persistence of many Western missionaries who continue to focus their efforts where Christianity is “already established and thriving.”³⁴ According to Mugambi, fifty years after Gatũ’s call, little has changed with the approach of Western missions. This highlights ongoing challenges in rethinking the role of Western missions in the contexts of maturity and self-reliance in the Majority World church.

The question remains whether the Majority World mission movement will one day issue another moratorium, calling for greater independence from Western funding and influence. If such a call were made, how might Western missions respond?

Western missions may unintentionally mute the voices and perspectives of participants from the Majority World. Muted Group Theory (MGT), developed by Edwin and Shirley Ardener in 1975, provides a helpful framework for understanding this dynamic.³⁵ Originally focussed on anthropological studies, the theory explored how women’s voices were disadvantaged unless their views were framed “in a form acceptable to men.”³⁶ The theory was later expanded to examine communication “between dominant and sub-dominant groups.”³⁷ Consequently, Western missions, as a dominant group, may unconsciously perpetuate power imbalances that mute the perspectives and contributions of the Majority World participants.

This muting occurs in several ways:

1. Western missions operate within systems of power that include gender, ethnicity, social status, education, whiteness, and financial influence. The language and frameworks of mission are often shaped by these dominant perspectives, creating barriers for sub-dominant groups.

²⁹ Kirk J. Franklin and Paul Bendor-Samuel, *The Mission Matrix: Mission Theologies for Diverse Mission Landscapes* (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2024), 41.

³⁰ Jesse N. K. Mugambi, "Either Patronage or Partnership in Christian Mission: Moderator John G. Gatũ’s Proposal for Moratorium on Western Missionary Funds and Personnel," *Journal of African Christian Biography* 2, no. 2 (2017): 22.

³¹ Gatũ, *Fan into Flame: An Autobiography*.

³² Mugambi, "Either Patronage or Partnership in Christian Mission: Moderator John G. Gatũ’s Proposal for Moratorium on Western Missionary Funds and Personnel," 23.

³³ Mugambi, "Either Patronage or Partnership in Christian Mission: Moderator John G. Gatũ’s Proposal for Moratorium on Western Missionary Funds and Personnel," 33.

³⁴ Mugambi, "Either Patronage or Partnership in Christian Mission: Moderator John G. Gatũ’s Proposal for Moratorium on Western Missionary Funds and Personnel," 33.

³⁵ Shirley Ardener, "Introduction," in *Perceiving Women*, ed. Shirley Ardener (London: Malaby, 1975), vii.

³⁶ Linda Lee Smith Barkman, "Muted Group Theory: A Tool for Hearing Marginalized Voices," *Priscilla Papers* 32, no. 4 (2018): 3.

³⁷ Barkman, "Muted Group Theory: A Tool for Hearing Marginalized Voices," 3.

2. Participants from the Majority World may struggle to articulate their perspectives when faced with the power structures of Western missions. Marginalized groups within the Global Church may feel muted because their views must be translated into terms acceptable to the dominant group.
3. Majority World groups may have to translate their ideas—linguistically, culturally, or conceptually—before communicating with Western mission groups. This extra step often places them at a disadvantage, as they must navigate the dominant group’s norms while maintaining their own authenticity.
4. Despite these challenges, both Western missions (dominant group) and Majority World missions (sub-dominant group) can learn from each other: Western missions can courageously create opportunities for Majority World voices to be heard and valued. God’s mission calls for the full, unhindered, and unmuted participation of all groups, enabling both to “develop to their God-given potential.”³⁸

Western missions are called to evaluate their practices and resources. Do their efforts unintentionally stifle the selfhood, self-reliance, self-determination and self-theologizing of the Majority World church and its missionary movements? By reflecting on past lessons and adapting to new realities, Western missions can position themselves as partners that empower rather than constrain, ensuring their contributions support the flourishing of Global Christianity.

Ambitions of Western missions

Western mission institutions, with their longstanding structures and significant presence, present a complex dilemma in the context of global missions. Peruvian missiologist Samuel Escobar, writing in 2014, highlighted the sheer volume of data available in resources like the *Atlas of Global Christianity*,³⁹ which provides comprehensive information “about peoples, nations, sociological trends, and cultural patterns.”⁴⁰ Escobar observes:

Some of us are also familiar with a formidable set of missionary institutions, denominational and interdenominational, each one with its agenda that reflects its theological convictions, as well as an accumulated wisdom that cannot be despised. There is data that cannot be changed, but institutions and patterns need to be open to change.⁴¹

Escobar’s critique underscores how Western mission agencies often control mission data and decision-making processes. Many of these institutions, some over a hundred years old, are well-endowed with financial resources and other assets. This raises the question of whether their structures and influence inadvertently create inequalities in their relationships with the Majority World church. Navigating this “grey zone” requires careful reflection on how to balance institutional authority with the need for more equitable collaborative efforts.

The rise of Finish The Task (FTT) highlights the potential and challenges of Western missional institutions in shaping global priorities. Led by Rick Warren, FTT aims to fulfill the Great Commission through “a coalition of thousands of believers, churches, denominations, and organizations coming

³⁸ Mary Lederleitner, *Women in God’s Mission: Accepting the Invitation to Serve and Lead* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2018), 208.

³⁹ Kenneth Ross, Sandra Lee, and Todd Johnson, *Atlas of Global Christianity* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

⁴⁰ Samuel Escobar, “Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes,” *IBMR* 38, no. 4 (2014): 195.

⁴¹ Escobar, “Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes,” 195.

together' to respond to 'a call to mobilize all of Christ's Church, to do all Christ commands, with all people, in all places, using all of God's gifts, all for God's glory by 2033, the 2000th anniversary of the instructions given to us by Jesus (Matt 28:18-20).'⁴²

FTT has goals to achieve its mission: 1) Bibles: Ensure that every person on earth has access to the Gospel in their heart language. 2) Believers: Equip all 2.6 billion Christians worldwide to share their faith personally. 3) Bodies of Christ: Encourage every existing church to sponsor and plant a daughter church in unchurched areas. 4) Breakthrough Prayer: Facilitate prayer for every individual who does not yet know Jesus by someone who does.⁴³

FTT exemplifies a Western evangelical initiative with ambitious, time-bound goals, leveraging extensive data and organizational capacity. While its ability to mobilize global efforts is significant, it raises important questions about the dynamics of power, control, and collaboration in Global Christianity.

How can these Western institutions use their resources to empower rather than overshadow the Majority World church? What steps can be taken to ensure that institutional approaches adapt to the changing realities of global missions? Addressing these questions is crucial for navigating the future of Western missions and fostering equitable partnerships.

Conclusion

Nearly three decades ago, Andrew Walls observed that the Western-founded modern missionary movement had entered "its old age," though not one of uselessness or decrepitude.⁴⁴ Instead, Walls argued that the movement retained relevance in certain contexts, even as the conditions shaped by "the Lord of history" had profoundly altered the global Church.⁴⁵ His insights remind us that the missionary structures of the past, while significant, must continually adapt to the new realities of God's mission.

Fourth-century theologian Gregory of Nyssa's doctrine of *epectasy* offers a lens to view this process of adaptation. Gregory posited that "while not every change is inherently good, change itself is a good and beautiful *feature* of humanity."⁴⁶ When Western missions "embrace a vision of eternity" that acknowledges the goodness of change they can more readily see transformation as "an embodiment of our eternal destiny."⁴⁷ This theological grounding challenges Western missions to see change not as a threat but as an opportunity for renewal and alignment with God's purposes. The missiological embrace of *epectasy* provides "a theological weight to change that can shift our default attitude from suspicion to expectancy."⁴⁸ Such a perspective calls for a posture of openness to the Spirit's leading through communal discernment and the wisdom of tradition.

The future of Western missions can also consider creating a Third Space between the First Space of the legacy of Western missions and the Second Space of the newer Majority World mission movement. In

⁴² FinishingTheTask.com.

⁴³ FinishingTheTask.com.

⁴⁴ Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 261.

⁴⁵ Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, 261.

⁴⁶ Joel Hinck, "New Every Morning: Epectasy as a Theology for Innovation" (MTh Luther Seminary, 2019), 17.

⁴⁷ Hinck, "New Every Morning: Epectasy as a Theology for Innovation," 17.

⁴⁸ Hinck, "New Every Morning: Epectasy as a Theology for Innovation," 17.

the middle is the Third Space created as a hybrid form through asking the right kinds of questions. These third or liminal spaces provide “new possibilities” that “unstick” our minds.⁴⁹

Dana Robert et al encapsulate this dynamic by noting, “Fresh commitments surge forth from unexpected locations. Yesterday’s centre provokes today’s margins, and today’s margins are tomorrow’s centres.”⁵⁰ The shifting influence and vitality within the global Church challenge Western missions to adapt to a world where the Majority World is increasingly the epicentre of missional activity.

In this Third Space, Western missions can honour their legacy while reimagining their future within God’s mission. It is here that both the strengths of the past and the vitality of the Majority World Church can converge to shape a renewed and unified vision for global missions. This vision invites all participants to move forward together in hope and expectancy, trusting in God’s ongoing work to bring about his purposes in the world.

⁴⁹ Christopher Baker, *The Hybrid Church in the City: Third Space Thinking* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 68.

⁵⁰ Robert et al., "Missional Collaborations 2021: A Report from North America," 372.

Growing Ecumenism in Australian Churches



Rev. Dr Dean Eland

Rev. Dr Dean Eland has been a UCA minister for sixty-five years, serving in three Australian states. Ordained in 1963 by the Congregational Union of SA he began his ministry in Hectorville-Rostrevor, followed by a twelve-year term in Redfern, South Sydney. He also served five years in Whyalla, eight years at Alberton Port Adelaide Parish, and five years with the Sunshine Mission in Melbourne. From 1992 to 1998, he was the Director of Mission Planning with the Uniting Church in Victoria. In retirement, he completed his Doctor of Ministry Studies and led the Urban Mission Network within the Presbytery of SA. He is a member of the Australian Association of Mission Studies, President of the Uniting Church SA Historical Society, and secretary of the SA Church History Network.

Over the past twenty years the Australian Association of Mission Studies has hosted ecumenical conferences to encourage scholars and provide opportunities for members of various traditions to explore how mission paradigms are experienced in changing global, national and local contexts. The two-day October 2025 AAMS-SVD conversation is another opportunity for activists and scholars to learn from each other as they interpret and join in God's mission, 'Missio Dei'.

Three global agencies, the World Council of Churches, the Lausanne Conference, and Vatican II have endorsed and encouraged effective ecumenism expressed through unity in diversity. This growing movement includes respect for denominational traditions, customs and theological points of view.

In the decades following World War Two Australian churches were influenced and encouraged by the ecumenical movement and new insights emerged from their shared commitment to the Gospel. Concepts and paradigms of mission developed from conference events, and practical contextual mission engagement that led to social justice initiatives, adaptive evangelism and emphasis on missional congregations.

This paper will outline several missional themes and achievements that emerged from the relationship between the WCC and Australian churches. Formal and agreed initiatives were adopted by leaders who were involved in what became the National Council of Churches in Australia in 1998. Regional and local ecumenism also affirmed the vision which was demonstrated through several voluntary and self-directed movements that confirmed how missional congregations learn from experience across urban neighbourhoods.

Australia Ecumenism and the NCCA

In 1946, two years before the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam, organised ecumenism in Australia comprised Protestant and Anglican denominations and was named the Australian Council for the World Council of Churches. Those who were present at the WCC assembly were encouraged to include other traditions and the Australian Council of Churches (ACC) was formed in 1949. Following the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church in Australia resolved to

connect with other denominations and in 1998, the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) succeeded the ACC, with the Catholic Church as a member.

The NCCA is gathered from across this wide brown land, who have embarked on a pilgrimage together. We each bring a widely varied history of place, experience, and theology, but we share a common faith and confession in the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour. We also share a common future as we are convinced that the future of Christians in Australia lies together, not in separation.¹

The NCCA works through several commissions, networks, taskforces and programs and mission commitment involves national, state councils and local support groups. Current programmes include Act for Peace, Refugee Task Force, Justice, Peace and Creation Care, and Australian First Peoples. The history and commitment of the NCCA is well documented through a series of forums held every three years.

In 2025, eighteen church traditions are members of the NCCA. Representatives are appointed by their denomination and involve heads of churches including bishops and presidents. The NCCA is a member of the East Asia Christian Conference and the WCC.

Changing Context

For Australians the 1960's was a time of social change. Pre-war conventional patterns of church life included active youth groups, Sunday schools and adult membership was often based on family loyalty. Church routines and customs were challenged by a range of cultural and contextual factors as immigrants arrived from Europe and later from Asia. Industrialisation replaced a rural-based economy and opportunities for advanced education enabled upward social mobility.

National Conference of Australian Churches 1960

Members of the ACC were aware that a growing post-Christian secular ethos had implications for all churches, and this became a call to discern new models of mission engagement. In 1968-69 ACC officers planned for a national conference and this event generated a new impetus for churches to come together, reflect and share insights from their experience.

The conference met in Melbourne for ten days in February 1960. In the following decade four Australia-wide mission projects: the Church and Life Movement, Action for World Development, Australian Frontier and Inter-church Trade and Industry Mission became a national response to conference recommendations. These programmes became new expressions of mission and encouraged denominational church departments, leaders and congregations to adapt, change conventional practices and learn a renewed mission vocation.

Guest speakers included staff of the WCC, the East Asian Christian Conference and Australian theologian Colin Williams. This event was to be the only ecumenical experience of its kind and involved 430 members from Australian churches and overseas visitors. Conference presentations, conversations and group work included Bible study, five Commissions and plenary sessions included observations, commentary and recommendations. The Commissions addressed major challenges facing the church in

¹ National Council of Churches in Australia, <https://www.ncca.org.au/> accessed 16 May 2025.

response to social change. The 181 page conference report edited by David M Taylor, 'We Were Brought Together' includes lists of those involved, summary of presentations, events and a series of recommendations.²

Led by Bishop Lesslie Newbigin,³ of the Church of South India, four 1 Peter Bible studies produced several theological themes. Conversation followed and members of thirty-six discussion groups shared their insights. Newbigin's commentary on 1 Peter 2: 1-10 involved theological reflection and began to explore an emerging mission model.

The truth of course is that the Church exists in its prime reality from Monday to Saturday, in all its members, dispersed throughout fields and homes and offices and factories, bearing the royal priesthood of Christ into every corner of His World.⁴

Plenary sessions at the end of the conference involved reports and recommendations from five commissions. Each commission had a specific topic related to emerging mission challenges related to former or conventional patterns and the impact of social change.

Commission One

The theme for commission one, 'The authority of the Word of God, primarily as mediated in Holy Scripture' was based on a study prepared by the Division of Studies of the AC/WCC, *The Authority of the Word of God primarily as mediated in Holy Scripture*. Discussion, debate, and controversy exposed differences about how denominations understood authority and the report proposed that, "further study along the lines developed therein will contribute to the renewal, unity and mission of the churches."⁵

Commission Two

Recommendations and comments from commission two proposed that, "The evangelistic task of the Australian churches in their world setting" included observations about the impact of economic development and how "the nation has turned in some measure from emphasis on primary industries to a fully-fledged growth of secondary industries."⁶

Attention was given about the impact of migration and urban development.

Since the Second War approximately 1,300,00 migrants have joined the Australian community although not all of them the Australian nation. They have enriched our way of life manifestly by their cultures.⁷

In the last few years there has been an increasing movement of people to the cities; 63% of our population is found in six capital cities-the highest percentage of any country in the world.⁸

² David M Taylor, *We Were Brought Together* (Sydney: Australian Council for the World Council of Churches, 1960).

³ See, <https://newbiginresources.org/> accessed 19 May 2025.

⁴ Taylor, *We Were Brought Together*, 96-97.

⁵ Taylor, *We Were Brought Together*, 18.

⁶ Taylor, *We Were Brought Together*, 21.

⁷ Taylor, *We Were Brought Together*, 22.

⁸ Taylor, *We Were Brought Together*, 22.

Recommendations from this group led to the Church and Life Movement, an inter-church study programme organised by the ACC with a focus on the witness and commitment of church members. The Australia wide programme involved group meetings designed to equip people for their daily life, in relation to their work, leisure, community living and home life, and for their part in social, national and international affairs.

In 1964, Diocese Synods, State Assemblies and Conferences were asked to support the programme and agreed to adopt the Church and Life Movement as their 1966 study. Those involved included the Anglican Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence study and a Methodist three-year study, 'The Mission of the Local Church'.

Christian education departments in each state organised workshops and these were held in the last half of 1965 and the first half of 1966 to prepare leaders for group meetings held across Australia. The target was to train 10,000 people who could then lead the group programmes each week from June 19 to July 31, 1966, i.e., 10,000 groups invoking 100,000 people.

The study was prepared by an ACC working group and involved seven weekly house meetings with a focus on everyday living. Each study included issues of personal concern e.g., Am I good enough? Do I have to do the same as everybody else? Do I have to worry about others? How should I use what I've got?

These questions encouraged group conversations in addressing,

issues of modern life - failure and success, handling wealth in an affluent society, using scientific power, using social power, loneliness in mass society, responsibility for others. All concerns of a common humanity, not the special concerns of Christians and aimed to equip the people of God to serve the concerns of all people.⁹

Recommendations from this commission included a proposal to establish a national ecumenical institute to provide postgraduate ecumenical research and study. Research to include sociological analysis to understand the impact of social change and how to respond to community needs in their local context. The ACC agreed to sponsor the formation of Australian Frontier, and the story of this initiative is well documented by Frank Engel in his 1988 book, "21 Years of Australian Frontier. An Extraordinary organisation for extraordinary times 1962-1983. Its achievements, organisational, financial and management challenges."¹⁰

While the director Peter Mathews and his committee set out to build and staff the institute in Canberra it became a drawn-out process without results. In the first two years, conference programmes were based on the topic, 'The Local Church in the New Reformation'. A collection of these sessions was published by Australian Frontier in 1966.¹¹

In January 1967 a Sydney conference was led by Joseph Matthews, leader of the Ecumenical Institute Chicago. The methods and assumptions of Chicago EI were very different from WCC's Ecumenical Institute Geneva. This decision led to different community development models, pedagogical methods and controversy over the name, Ecumenical Institute.

⁹ Frank Engel, *Times of change, 1918-1978, Christians in Australia* (Melbourne: JBCE, 1993).

¹⁰ Frank Engel, *21 Years of Australian Frontier. An Extraordinary organisation for extraordinary times 1962-1983. Its achievements, organisational, financial and management challenges* (Carlton, Vic: Australian Frontier, 1988).

¹¹ Peter Mathews, *"The Local Church in the New Reformation"* (Carlton, Vic: Australian Frontier, 1966).

Conferences involving church leaders were replaced and a series of well-designed consultations became Australian Frontier's priority. Eighty locally based sessions were convened and involved local government representatives, community leaders, academics and invited residents. Consultation methodology encouraged local responses to social change and involved a range of issues including support for youth at risk, housing, health and urban planning. The success and influence of these sessions changed Australian Frontier's relationship with the church as it did not depend on their involvement. Dynamic and effective director of Australian Frontier Peter Mathews retired in 1975 and the story of his lifelong leadership in the church and community is recorded in a 2001 publication, "Peter Mathews A Memoir," edited by Robert Brown.

Commission Three

The report of commission three: "Ethical problems of economic aid and technical assistance, and their implications for missionary strategies." included two dominant themes, increasing economic aid to developing countries and changes in the relationship between the sending (Western) and receiving (Asia and Pacific) churches.

Sixteen specific recommendations were submitted to the conference plenary session. Eleven were directed to the Australian Council for the WCC, one to the National Missionary Council of Australia and four to the churches participating in the conference. "This conference recognising that the church's task of missions remains unfinished, affirms the principle that this task belongs to the whole church."¹²

Recommendations about overseas aid led to the formation of Action for World Development and a 1970 national conference of 200 members met in Sydney. Following the conference a four-week, home-based ecumenical study programme involved about 150,000 members. Four preparatory documents were commissioned by the two sponsoring organisations, the ACC and the National Commission on Justice and Peace of the Roman Catholic Church.

Study titles are one indication of their purpose; Rich and Poor Nations, Development Through Trade, What does Theology Tell? and Politics and Education. A number of overseas aid agencies emerged following this movement. Its ongoing programme continued to draw attention to the evident inequality between rich and poor nations and campaigned to increase the federal governments overseas aid.

Commission Four

Recommendations from commission four: "The role of the church in the changing industrial community" are listed under six headings; the welfare state, industrial chaplaincy, training the clergy, training the laity, social problems arising from industrialisation and conclusion.

Discussion about industrial chaplaincy was timely as the Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne, Frank Woods was committed to the innovative urban-industrial mission movement. He invited Laurie Styles to Australia and was supported by other church leaders. The history of ITIM is documented by Laurie Styles in his 1998 publication, *My God, What Now: stories about God at work: 50 years of Industrial Mission*.

A significant number of ministers were involved in chaplaincy roles and financial support was given by industries. By the end of the twentieth century global free trade agreements created Australia's post-

¹² Mathews, *The Local Church*, 39.

industrial economy and employment opportunities became based on services and new technology. A summary comment by this commission summed up the diverse and challenging next phase of this ministry.

We urge a complete re-appraisal of the Church's witness in relation to social questions and social problems, bearing in mind that not only are some problems solved in this generation, but actions in this generation may pave the way for solutions in the next.¹³

Commission Five

The report and recommendations of commission five, "Obeying the Word where we live: the life and structure of the local congregation" centres on the challenges facing local congregations. One recurring conversation topic, the fundamental rhythm of the church's life, its gathering and sending, was the subject of the conference bible study and guest speakers.

Recommendations involved the complementary roles of lay and ordained ministry, work and leisure and the serving ministry of churches in the neighbourhood. Comments were noted about opportunities for local congregations to connect, develop their relationship and knowledge of one another. Two denominational groups, Lutheran and Anglican, proposed that the report include their statement about reservations they had about ecumenism.

As a SA theological student and member of this commission I sensed that that there was more to come. Often confusion and uncertainty are resolved when actions are taken and in 1967, I began a twelve-year ministry in Redfern and became involved and informed by others who were exploring the possibilities and options for churches in inner city contexts.

Emerging Insights and Urban Mission

Australian theologian, Professor of Systematic Theology Colin Williams of Queen's College Melbourne presented the final conference message, "Ye are my People." After the conference Williams became Executive Director of the Central Department of Evangelism for The National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA and Chairman of the Department on Studies in Evangelism for the WCC.

In 1963-64 he published two studies to encourage congregations to explore and discover *missio Dei* in the local context. The titles "What in the World?" (1963) and "Where in the World?" (1964) are a clue to their content, what do we do, and where to we do it across the changing and diverse contextual settings, rural, suburban and inner city. These two resources were reprinted several times, widely read and encouraged the ongoing ecumenical conversation about the nature and scope of urban mission.

Williams anticipated the role of social analysis, action- reflection methods and sociologists and church leaders were conscious that inner city environments involved small and declining congregations. Terms such as 'Post- Christian', 'Urban Industrial World' and 'Secular City' were used in book titles on the must-read list. The list from the UK and USA included, 'Church and People in an Industrial City', by E. R. Wickham, 1957; 'Come out the Wilderness', Bruce Kenrick, 1962; 'The Church Reclaims the City', by Gibson Winter, 1963; 'Call to Commitment', Elizabeth O'Connor 1963; 'The Congregation in Mission', George W. Webber 1964; 'The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological

¹³ Mathews, *The Local Church*, 44.

Perspective', by Harvey Cox, 1965; Priest and Worker. The autobiography of Henri Perrin', 1965. 'The Church Reclaims the City', Paul Moore, 1965.

New titles emerged in the next decade including 'The Meaning of the City', by Jacques Ellul, 1970 and 'Built as a City: God and the Urban World Today', by David Sheppard, 1974. These reflections prompted inner city ministry leaders to form networks and learn by sharing their experiences. Theological and missionary models also emerged from the contribution of Lesslie Newbigin.

Two WCC Mission Events in Australia

In the 1980's and early 90's ACCs partnership with the global church was enhanced by two major events. In 1980 the ACC sponsored the WCC's World Conference of Mission and Evangelism in Melbourne with the theme *Your Kingdom Come*. The conference process involved a growing appreciation of the changing paradigm, the invitation to join in God's mission in the world by being a church for the poor.

Guest speakers were influenced by Latin American liberation theologies and included Bishop Mortima Aria of the Methodist church in Bolivia, who spoke on the topic, 'Good News for the Poor'. Dr Coen Boorma from the Netherlands explored the theme 'Church Witnesses to the Kingdom'. Other speakers included Fr. Cyrille Argent Marseilles, from the Orthodox tradition on the topic, 'Crucified Christ Challenges Human Power', Dr Allan Boesak of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa and Ms Halina Bortnowska a Catholic lay member from, Krakow Poland.

Delegates highlighted the radical aspects of the kingdom message, and the serious challenge it threw to traditional missiology and mission programmes. Other aspects of Melbourne however also deserve recognition. There was ground-breaking work done on evangelism and on the church as healing community in the section dealing with the church's witness. The conference also highlighted how Christ's choice of vulnerability and way to the cross challenges the use of power, in political, church and mission life.¹⁴

The seventh Assembly of the WCC met in Canberra 1991 with the theme, 'Come, Holy Spirit - Renew the Whole Creation.' This assembly became a public event, looking outwards and is remembered by its creative worship experiences and a confronting response to the speech of Prime Minister, Bob Hawke. Diverse theological questions surfaced about the role of culture within Christianity. The dominance of western culture was challenged and questions raised involved who and how any culture was judged or compatible with Christian faith. Underlying theological questions concerned justice, peace and the integrity of creation and whether this was an issue for the faithful or is it a component of the political and social agenda.

Dr Chung Hyun-Kyung from South Korea invited the participants to call on the Spirit present in all creation but particularly among those who belong to the 'underside of history'. For her the image of the Holy Spirit came from the Goddess of compassion and wisdom venerated by East Asian women's popular religiosity. Dr Chung represented the new voices based on experiences which have been excluded from the theological enterprise. There was a freshness in the presentation

¹⁴ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission, Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 380.

of the young Asian woman as she made use of music and dance by Australian Aborigines and Koreans to help each person listen to the spirit within.¹⁵

The WCC Assembly interpreted the mission of the Church in terms of its commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation. It was suggested that a new type of mission is required today, not into foreign lands, but into 'foreign' structures, that is economic, social and political structures which are destructive and need conversion. As Christians we should confess our failure to recognize and to fulfil our responsibility toward creation. The Church as a redeemed community is called to be a sign of 'new creation' in Christ and has a crucial role in the renewal of creation. In this pluralistic age the Christian Church does this in dialogue with other religions and ideological faiths.¹⁶

Members of the Assembly and the 1980 WCME conference were appointed by denominations and guest speakers represented the global church in its diversity and mission engagement. Both events included a visitor program and Australian church members were both observers and involved in several para-church sessions.

Bishop Lesslie Newbigin

Bishop Lesslie Newbigin led four Bible studies and addressed the 1960 conference. All agreed that his contribution was memorable for the challenges and insights he shared.

While all our distinguished overseas guests made their own special contribution to our fellowship and to our thinking, all willingly concede that Lesslie Newbigin was the outstanding personality of those ten days.¹⁷

In 1947, Newbigin, a Presbyterian minister and missionary, was one of the founders of the Church of South India and was one of the first bishops in the Diocese of Madurai Ramnad. In 1959 he became the General Secretary of the International Missionary Council and oversaw its integration with the World Council of Churches. In 1965 he returned to India as Bishop of Madras and retired in 1974 and moved to Birmingham and was a member of the United Reformed Church (URC) and Moderator of the URC General Assembly for the year 1978–9. His background and experience, teaching and example made him one of the most respected and significant theologians of the twentieth century.

Today he is remembered for his theology that is both contextual and grounded.

“Newbigin’s vision nourishes congregations toward their calling to be “hermeneutic of the gospel,” the interpretive lens through which people will see and read what this gospel has to do with them and the world in which they live. It has the power to open up dynamic ways for churches to be living, speaking, acting signs of the reign of God.”¹⁸

¹⁵ https://www.theway.org.uk/sup_home.shtml. Accessed 1 May 2025.

¹⁶ Ellen Leonard, “Theological Trends - Ecclesiology, I: Differing Gifts,” *The Way*, 325.

¹⁷ Taylor, *We Were Brought Together*, 3.

¹⁸ George R Hunsberger, *bearing the Witness of the Spirit, Lesslie Newbigin's Theology of Cultural Plurality* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: William b. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 279.

Craig Van Gelder's preface in his edited work, "The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry" proposes that the context and culture movement for missional congregations began through the work of Newbigin.

His focus was on the relationship of gospel and culture, and the particular context...and Newbigin helped to develop a particular Gospel and Culture programme in England in the 1980s and that soon found its counterpart in the United States, where it became known as the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN).¹⁹

Local Mission and Australian Urban Context

In Australia, historical cultural traditions and denominational character is related to their social identity. Well known nineteenth century examples include Methodist Cornish miners in SA, Lutheran congregations in SA's Barossa Valley, Irish Catholics in Sydney and Church of Scotland traditions in Melbourne and the western district of Victoria.

WCC and NCCA conferences assume and explore global agendas and perspectives, "go into all the world." In the past sixty years Australian inner-city congregations also gather and are sent and their going out is contextual and grounded in place. Well known examples of engagement include the Wayside Chapel, Kings Cross and former Methodist Missions that developed welfare programmes to support the unemployed and homeless. In many instances their city ministry eventually led to the formation of large-scale community services including aged care and Lifeline.

Urban and inner-city ecumenical events have shown how activists become missiologists by learning from their shared setting and from one another. From the late 1960's leaders of these congregations began to form their own networks and these became collaborative support systems. Networks organised conferences, workshops and forums and were self-directed and affirmed and enabled remnant congregations to become called and sent. They related to their denominational identity but found support across those earlier divides. Several inner-city congregations in Sydney founded the National Urban Network (NUN) and later the name was changed to Australian Association of Urban Mission (AAUM).

In October 1977 the Inner-City Uniting Church Parish sponsored a series of annual meetings and in the following decade workshops were held in South Melbourne and at the 264 Pitt St city parish on the topic "Socio eco perspectives new life and new community in Urban World." Members from ten parishes were involved and the invitation described its purpose. The eighties are almost upon us, and the local church is the focus of hope for the future. Small is beautiful and changes come from the grassroots strength in commitment. The people know what to do. Come to share insights, reflect together and compare experiences.

In January 1981, the conference on "Ministry in an Urban Age" was attended by thirty members including Pitt St, South Yarra, Whyalla, Eastside and Inner-City churches. In 1982, Harry Daniels, first secretary of Rural Urban Mission for the Christian Conference of Asia was guest speaker and Athol Gill and Alan Matheson of the ACTU were involved.

¹⁹ Craig Van Gelder, ed., *The Missional Church in Context: helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007).

In June 1882 an Urban Mission laboratory was held in Whyalla. In May 1984 one of the most successful Congress events was held at Whitley College Melbourne. The Key speaker was John Vincent leader of the Inner-City Ecumenical Mission and the Urban Theology Unit, (UTU) Sheffield. Founded in 1969 UTU equipped lay and ordained mission leaders with resources based on radical contextual theology.

Several creative and formative networks evolved in Melbourne and included the work of Ross Langmead and the Westgate Baptist community. Other groups were the Centre for Urban Research and Action Fitzroy founded by Brian Howe. Tim Costello was based in St Kilda and later the Collins St Baptist church. Peter Hollingworth was director of the Brotherhood of St Lawrence and Christian community residential communities were experimental and adapted traditional spiritual disciplines.

Examples of mission as engagement began from the ministry of the UCA South Sydney parish and they founded a local community-based agency, South Sydney Community Aid. Staff, volunteers and residents became involved in a wide range of campaigns and services in Redfern, Waterloo and nearby suburbs. In the late 60's and 70's and with the support of SSCA, several major projects included the first Aboriginal Legal and Medical services, the Black Theatre and the Block were founded by First Nation activists.

In Sydney, Scaffolding was described as an informal network of churches and groups in the inner-metropolitan area and in 1985 published "Green Shoots in the Concrete: Towards a more sensitive Christian presence in our cities."

In a 2011 paper, "Mission Legacy: Australian Urban Mission 1960-2010," I described several core urban mission characteristics and they in part reflect the experience of others who found their calling in disadvantaged neighbours and public housing estates. These and other patterns contribute to our current ecumenical conversation as we face again the challenges that come with social change.

Mission draws on praxis, an inductive process, a cycle of action and reflection. Mission study discerns and embodies formative theological images or models for being the church, mission as servant of the servant Lord. Mission involves learning from engagement in partnership with community-based groups and social movements. Being a church in exile with a liberating and transformative ethos, not militant and triumphant but with a preferential option for the poor.²⁰

Looking Ahead

Australian mission initiatives over the past eighty years have grown and been informed by ecumenical partnerships. Partnerships have involved working for justice, seeking the common good and a support system grounded in the lives of those living nearby and on the street. Applied and practical expressions of mission are found in local, national and global contexts. In that tradition AAMS has encouraged scholars, teachers and reflective practitioners to meet and discover how mission is located in historical and cultural settings. As we share and explore the gospel AAMS encourages us to listen to indigenous voices and learn from their sense of place and belonging. Gatherings, networks, conferences and seminars empower us, in being together we find hope, and discover good news by loving our neighbourhood and those on the road.

²⁰ Dean Eland, *Mission Legacy: Australian Urban Mission 1960-2011*, AAMS Conference Paper (July 2011), 8-9.

Ecumenism as a movement is a continuing sign of cooperation and joint mission. Some experiences will draw on local congregations and other conversations will be regional and national. Ecumenism is founded and grows on the conviction that being together in Christ unites us beyond doctrinal, social and cultural difference and this leads us to be partners in God's mission in the world.

Some surprising outcomes from translating the Bible into Australian Kriol



Rev. Dr Joy Sandefur

Joy has spent twenty-five years working with Aboriginal people in the North of Australia. Almost eighteen years were spent with Wycliffe Bible Translators which included fourteen years as part of Kriol Bible Translation team. A further seven years was spent in the Northern Territory, working with the Bush Church Aid Society to support the Indigenous Anglican Churches in Arnhem land and on staff of Nungalinga College which equips Aboriginal people for lay and ordained ministry. Her PhD examined how the Ngukurr Anglican church was contextualizing the gospel.

The translation of the bible into Kriol has had a number of important outcomes for Kriol speakers apart from providing them with the Bible in their language. Kriol is the largest Aboriginal language in Australia¹ and is spoken by 30,000 plus speakers² It is one of 700 languages throughout the world to have a complete bible and the only Indigenous language in Australia to have the complete bible. I will address the question What difference does it make that the bible is available in Kriol? To answer this question, I will discuss three things. How having the bible in Kriol has empowered churches. Second, the many ways it has contributed to raising the prestige of Kriol as a language and third empowered many individuals who speak Kriol to use it publicly and no longer feel shame for speaking their heart language.

Kriol is spoken in Northern Australia. The area extends through the Kimberley in Western Australia in the Northern Territory where it extends from Katherine and Southern Arnhem Land to Tennant Creek and some speakers are found in Northern Queensland. In the 1980's it was estimated by linguists working with the Summer Institute of Linguistics to have about 30,000 speakers. For some it is a first language, for others it is a second language. It is also used to communicate between Aboriginal languages in the area³

It is a modern Aboriginal language that emerged at the Roper River Mission that started in 1908 as a haven of safety for the remnants of eight tribes who were depleted in numbers by massacres.⁴ That group of people creolised the cattle station pidgin into a mother tongue that is strongly influenced by the grammar of the languages in the area but much of its vocabulary comes from English with the words often having a different semantic range to English. For many years people were told not to speak it and that it was a rubbish language. Today the language is widely recognised and the speakers have pride in Kriol.

Having the bible in Kriol has given Kriol speakers access to the scriptures in their heart language, the language they understand best. For many Aboriginal people in the north of Australia, English is their

¹ Margaret Mickan, "For Such a Time as This," *Journal of Friends of Lutheran archives*, No 31 (December 2021), 61.

² Wikipedia. Google *Australian Kriol to go to an informative article in Wikipedia*. Also google *The Indigenous Literacy Foundation: Josie Lardy, Mela Langgus – Our language Kriol*. 27th July 2023

³ Margaret Mickan, "For Such a Time as This," 61.

⁴ John Harris, *One Blood: 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity: A Story of Hope* (Sutherland, NSW/Claremont, CA: Albatross Books, 1990), 694-697.

fourth or fifth language. When churches have the scriptures in their heart language their understanding of what the bible teaches is far more comprehensive. It enables teaching of scripture at a deeper level than the retelling of narrative stories.

Three Comments before I answer my question, what difference does it make that the bible has been translated into Kriol?

Firstly, the bible is linguistically translatable and can be translated into other languages. Jesus taught in Aramaic: this was translated into Koine Greek when the gospels were written and the writers quoted from the Septuagint Greek Old Testament.

Secondly, the message of the bible is also culturally translatable. In the Scriptures God reveals God's self in the different cultures of Israel, Egypt, Babylon and Persia. If God can do that, God can also be revealed in Aboriginal culture and other cultures

Thirdly on the day of Pentecost, the miracle was that everyone heard in their language. Fifteen languages are listed in the New Testament book of Acts.⁵ It was clear that God intended that people learn about God in their own language.

Bible translation empowers the Church.

Preaching and teaching from the bible now happens in the heart language of Kriol speakers and is at a much deeper and more comprehensive level than when the Kriol hearers struggled to understand it in English. When Scripture in Kriol was read for the first time in the churches at Ngukurr and Barunga people clapped, they were so happy to hear it in their language. When the Bible Society made a film about translation of the bible into Aboriginal languages, they asked Margery Hall, a member of the Kriol translation team, what she thought about bible translation into Kriol. Her response was, "Now I know that God speaks my language."⁶ Can you imagine what it would be like to think that God did not speak your language. What language would you pray in? How much of the bible would you understand in English your fourth or fifth language? Kriol speakers now have a prayer book in Kriol. Kriol speakers gave generously of their time to assist with the preparation of the prayer book.⁷

Another way the Aboriginal churches have been empowered is that four Aboriginal people who worked on the translation for a long time went on to be ordained Anglican ministers and others to be strong lay leaders. The daughter of Ishmael and Irene Andrews who were part of the translation team now is a teacher at Nungalinya College, an interdenominational Bible College which equips Aboriginal Christians to serve in various roles in their churches. Two other Kriol speakers are also teachers there. They co-teach with white staff, working together to enhance the quality of the teaching. People from 100 remote communities large and small attend the college, speaking many different languages. They come for a time of intensive study and then return home.

When you have the Bible in your own language it assists greatly in contextualising the teaching of the bible. Rev Carol Robertson said to me one day. "Joy, a white Christian told me that we Aboriginal people should get rid of our kinship system as it was bad for us." Carol then told me "I have read the whole bible and I cannot find anywhere that we should get rid of our kinship system." That well-meaning

⁵ Acts 2: 5-12.

⁶ Personal communication from Margery Hall

⁷ Kriol Preya Buk, pub by Anglican diocese of the Northern Territory, 2021

person had no idea of how complex the kinship system is and how much of society would unravel without it.⁸

Having the bible in Kriol has enabled its speakers to find answers to questions that are important to them. A question of great interest to them was could they pray and ask God to heal a person or should they continue to ask the local shaman who had special supernatural powers to heal them? Their conclusion was as Christians they should pray and ask God for healing and consult their local clinic about illness⁹.

As a people they are very much aware of the world of the supernatural. A pressing question was what to do about the spirit of a dead person that hung around after a person died.¹⁰ Should Christians have the Shaman do the smoking ceremony to send it away? Or did they accept the scripture teaching that the spirit of a Christian who died was with Jesus? The Christians decided that they believed that the spirit of a Christian who died was with Jesus and there was no need to have the Shaman do a smoking ceremony to send the spirit away.

Having the scriptures in their heart language has enabled Kriol speakers to find answers to the many questions that they have. It has resulted in many becoming mature in their faith. The Bible in Kriol is being read and studied and a second edition has been published to meet demand.

2. The Bible in Kriol has helped raise the prestige of the language

When the first edition of the bible was published in Kriol the Aboriginal members of the team were insistent that it should look like those nice bibles that white people have. They wanted it to be seen as equal to bibles in English. The Bible Society were the publishers and out of their experience of publishing scriptures in many languages they agreed to produce a nice-looking bible. On the day that it was released at the Katherine Christian Convention on the first weekend in May 2007, to my amazement 2000 people turned up for the event including the Anglican Primate of Australia to dedicate it. Many other churches and missions were represented. It even made the News services that day. God had raised the prestige of a Kriol from a despised language to one that its speakers are proud of. It is still the only complete bible in an Aboriginal language.

Ngukurr an Aboriginal community on the Roper River in Arnhem land has gone from a town where people would not admit that they spoke Kriol to a place where the local council runs a program to teach white staff to speak and read Kriol and produces materials in Kriol.

Kriol Speakers are now proud of their language and openly acknowledge it. Children's books and other literature have been published in it. Today there are Kriol interpreters for the courts and hospitals. The ABC in Darwin broadcasts the news in Kriol and information in emergency situations. At Nungalinga College Kriol speakers are encouraged to use the bible in Kriol as part of their studies.

The linguistic work and other work that went into translating the Bible into Kriol and the publication of it have all contributed to raising the prestige of Kriol. Several years were spent by linguists learning the language, analysing the grammar, establishing an alphabet, publishing papers about the language and learning where it was spoken.

⁸ Personal communication from Rev Carol Robertson.1996

⁹ Joy Lorraine Sandefur, *The Aboriginalisation of the Church at Ngukurr*, 1998, PhD Latrobe University, 231-239

¹⁰ Joy Lorraine Sandefur, *The Aboriginalisation of the Church at Ngukurr*, 1998, PhD Latrobe University, 218-220.

The reason the whole bible was translated was because the speakers of the language came to own the project. In May 1993 they strongly expressed their desire to complete the whole bible and to support it in any way they could.¹¹ They supported the project in many ways. It became their project and they are proud of it. Today the language is widely accepted as a modern Aboriginal language. The project to translate the bible into Kriol has done much to raise the prestige of the language and triggered many other positive responses.

Bible translation has empowered individuals.

Having the bible in Kriol gives Christians confidence to share the bible and its teaching with others. Teaching is always best understood when it occurs in your heart language. Church members have organised and led small groups to study the scriptures. They are confident to read the scriptures in church services. Kriol is now recognised as an acceptable language and this has freed them and all Kriol speakers from the shame, they felt in the past about speaking a language that was constantly put down. Some have attended songwriters' workshops and written Christian songs for use in church services and their nightly Fellowships meetings.

Nungalinya College encourages all its students to use what Scriptures they have in their studies. They place a high value on the Bible. Many have donated their time to a project to record scripture. This is available for people to download to their phones or computers. The potential audience is high with Kriol speakers estimated at 30,000 plus. The scriptures in Kriol continue to empower Christians as they grow as followers of Jesus.

The translation of the Bible into Kriol has contributed to the raising of the prestige of Kriol which is now recognised as a proper language throughout large areas of North Australia including the Kimberley where it is spoken. It has empowered Aboriginal churches and encourages them to worship, teach, sing, and pray in their heart language.

Recognition of Kriol as a proper language has given confidence to its thousands of speakers that their language is one they can be proud of. It has empowered all speakers of Kriol as today they see it used in many different situations, such as schools, hospitals, health workers at clinics, the ABC news services, local council activities. Kriol has emerged from the shadows of wrongly being called a rubbish language to one that is widely recognised and used comfortably in many situations.

In conclusion the translation of the Bible into Kriol has contributed to the empowering of Kriol speaking churches by enabling them to worship in their language. Today they have clergy from their own communities who speak Kriol and use the Bible in Kriol to teach and preach at a deeper level. It has given its many speakers access to the scriptures in their language. Today, worship, prayers and songs are all in Kriol. They gather and worship in their own language and are richer for it. Individual Christians participate in services, nightly Fellowship meetings or Children's programmes and conduct bible study groups in Kriol. They are also much more confident about their faith in God and in expressing that. The translation of the bible into Kriol has contributed to raising the prestige of Kriol to the status of a proper language. This has had many positive outcomes for its speakers. The shame of speaking Kriol has disappeared. Today, it is spoken in all contexts with pride and confidence. The project of translating the bible into Kriol has had many positive results for all Kriol speakers as well as the church.

¹¹ Margaret Mickan, Meeting held at Katherine Christian convention on the first Saturday of the first weekend in May 1993.

The Study of Anthropology and Mission



Fr Nick de Groot SVD

I was the third child of ten and was born in 1943 in The Hague, the Netherlands and migrated to Brisbane Australia in 1953. I joined the novitiate of the Divine Word Missionaries at Marburg, Qld, in 1961 and made first vows in 1963. I then travelled to the Major Seminary of the SVD's in the USA for philosophy and theology, returned to Australia and was ordained in Brisbane on 1 July 1969. An important factor in my training was my four years of pastoral work with the “black” American teenagers on the South side of Chicago slum area. After ordination I went to Rome, spent a few weeks studying Italian and went to the Alphonsianum to get my degree in moral theology. I was then missioned to teach at the major seminary in PNG. However, before starting my teaching, I asked for some months in the bush of PNG to learn the local language of Pidgin and learn something about the people's culture. I taught for seven years, then came back to Australia to become Novice Master at Marburg. After seven years and the closure of Marburg, I taught in the major seminary in the Philippines for three years. I was called back to PNG in 1990 to work at the Melanesian Institute for Cultural Research. I became the Director of the Institute and stayed there for sixteen years. I was then appointed as General Secretary to the Bishops Conference of PNG and the Solomon Islands. I returned to Australia in 2009, had two years as parish assistant in Rockhampton, then moved to Melbourne to become Director of our SVD Interfaith Centre for six years. After handing over, I moved to Sydney to help with SVD Province Administration and in 2024 moved to Brisbane to assist at the Parish of Maximilian Kolbe in Marsden.

I was first made aware of the science of anthropology during the two years of my philosophy studies in the major seminary. It was during that time also that we were taught that anthropology was a very important study for our SVD society, being a mission focused society.

I am grateful to our founding father, St. Arnold Janssen, who promoted the study of anthropology for all of our members. It was during his lifetime, that the new science of anthropology came into its own.

“The modern discourse of anthropology crystallized in the 1860s, fired by advances in biology, philology and prehistoric archaeology. The term ‘Cultural Anthropology’, which was the subject taught in the 1960’s, was first used and defined in 1860.

The Founding of the SVD Anthropolos Institute.

In its constitution, the “Anthropolos Institute is an international network of individual members and member institutes, dedicated to the scientific study of cultures and religions” (*Statutes* 1.1).

It expresses the specialisation of the Society of the Divine Word (Divine Word Missionaries) in the field of social and religious sciences and binds together SVD scholars and institutes specialised in these fields.

The beginning of this tradition goes back to the Founder of the SVD, Fr. Arnold Janssen, who, besides being a man of faith and prayer, was also a man of sciences. In his first major seminary, Sankt Gabriel

near Vienna, Austria, at the beginning of the last century, he prescribed for the members of his Society not only the usual theological studies but also the then new specialisation of missiology and especially ethnology, sociology, and linguistics.

The one who influenced the founder in this direction and gave academic form to this tradition was Fr. Wilhelm Schmidt SVD, whom the Founder had previously sent to the University of Berlin where he studied linguistics.

While lecturing at Sankt Gabriel, the SVD seminary, where the future missionaries were trained, Wilhelm Schmidt founded in 1906 the international journal *Anthropos*. Arnold Janssen decided that the *Anthropos* journal should be sponsored by the Society. For him the *Anthropos* journal and what it stood for, namely the study of cultures, languages and religions, was to be a continuous concern of his missionary society, a hallmark of the same.

Fr. Wilhelm Schmidt in 1931 subsequently founded the *Anthropos Institute* in order to secure this anthropological tradition and soon there were branch institutes in India and Brazil. The overall leadership and the publication of the journal and eventually, of the book series, remained in the Anthropos Institute in Sankt Gabriel. During the Second World War the Anthropos Institute moved, for safety reasons, from Austria to Switzerland and in 1962 the Generalate of the Society moved it to Sankt Augustin, near Bonn, Germany

Present Situation

The Institute went through a process of restructuring to adapt itself to the current global situation and culminated in the approval of new Statutes in 2003, revised Statutes in 2007, and slightly amended Statutes in 2015. From an Institute understood as primarily a centre in Europe, where the director resided and where the council met, it changed to a network of individual members and institutes worldwide, coordinated by a person whose office is not tied to any centre or country but by a coordinating Council which meets, using modern internet technologies.

Dr Roger Schroeder SVD was reappointed as coordinator for another term (2016-2018) and his office is in Chicago, USA. Elected as councillors for this term were Dr Philip Gibbs SVD, who resides in Madang, Papua New Guinea, and Dr S. M. Michael SVD, who resides in Mumbai, India.

Since the beginning of 2017, there are now more than forty-seven members of the Institute working in and/or associated with various institutions including some of the following:

- Anthropos Institute Sankt Augustin: responsible for the publications of the *Anthropos* journal, the book series *Collectanea Instituti Anthropos*, *Studia Instituti Anthropos*, and *Anthropology and Mission*.
- Institute of Indian Culture (former Anthropos Institute of India), Mumbai, India
- Sanskriti: North Eastern Institute of Cultural Research, Guwahati, India.
- Melanesian Institute, Goroka, Papua New Guinea.
- Tamale Institute of Cross-Cultural Studies, Tamale, Ghana
- Aditya Wacana: Center for Studies of Religion and Culture, Malang, Indonesia
- Nanzan Anthropological Institute, Nagoya, Japan
- Anthropos do Brasil, Brazil
- Sanskruti -- Institute of Dravidian Culture and Research, Hyderabad, India.

- Sanskruti Kendra – Tribal Cultural and Research Centre, Sundargarh, India.

My first direct contact with the Melanesian Institute was in 1972 when I participated in an introductory course when I first came to work in PNG. But for more than sixteen years, from 1990 to 2006, I had the privilege of working at the Melanesian Institute in PNG Goroka. This Institute started in Goroka, PNG, in 1970, after Vatican II, as a cultural research centre. The new teachings of the Vatican Council inspired us to do something new and different to set up the Mission Institute. Negotiating with the three main Christian missionary groups working in PNG, we invited the Anglican, Lutheran and the United churches to join with us Catholics and contribute equally to the professional staffing of the Institute. Consequently, we soon had a variety of very capable staff; two anthropologists, a missiologist, a psychiatrist, and a sociologist, who contributed to the teaching, research and writing about the cultures in PNG. The two well-known publications were the annual Point series and the quarterly, *The Catalyst*.

Over the years, the mission outreach from each of the Christian churches had already collected important data regarding the local cultures, but it was only after the Melanesian Institute was established that this data was put together and with the new invention of the computer, the data was entered analysed and compared. The Institute began to organise four-week courses of Introduction to Melanesian Cultures for all newly arriving church members from overseas. There were priests, pastors, teachers, nurses, nuns, brothers, volunteers who attended the courses and we even had many people from other faith traditions who participated.

One essential part of this teaching was to actually have our material confirmed by the local people of Papua New Guinea. Shortly after I arrived, I was asked to find two or more able local priests and pastors who would do study overseas to acquire a degree in either anthropology or sociology. This venture would help confirm the veracity of our teaching about PNG cultures. The other way was to invite men and women from the villages to listen to our presentations at the courses and confirm with their own personal history and experience, the truth of what was talked about.

The overall impact of this anthropological input made great changes in the missionaries' theological views. When the first missionaries came to Melanesia, they came believing that Melanesians were 'lost', or at least in danger of being lost. That they had no knowledge of God or of God's Son Jesus Christ. In this sense we judged them to be pagans and in need of salvation. The missionaries came with a certainty in these beliefs and came with a burning faith to teach these people about their need for God's saving grace.

It now seems arrogant and brash to insist that God had not loved or cared for the peoples of Melanesia before the coming of the missionaries. A wide range of scholars, but particularly anthropologists, have had new insights into Melanesian cultures and customs. Consequently, the theological attitudes of the first missionaries are no longer acceptable and Christians blush at some of the past words and actions which were done 'in the name of the Lord'. Words have been changed for example from pagan to primal or primitive to primal.

The change of taking the European religion, context and all, to make it the final product in other cultures around the world is no longer tenable. Our experience has been that God can talk and be revealed in all cultures and languages. To listen and to learn and to discover the love of God among all God's peoples will only enlarge the beauty and truth of God's mystery: "I am who I am."

It has been a gift and a great joy to work so closely with the cultures of the Melanesian people. I thank them for teaching me to listen and to see in different ways who God is and who God's people are.

Inclusion and Initiation



Rev Dr Paul Dalzell

Paul Dalzell is a retired Anglican Priest who as parish priest since the 1990s was, and remains passionate about the initiation of Christians, seeing it as the main task of the church. His doctoral studies were a comparison over a year of the similarities and differences between the Alpha programme and the Catechumenate as it has been revived for modern times since the second Vatican Council. This comparison was viewed through the lenses of faith development, psycho-social development and conversion. Since retirement, Paul has focussed on refugee and asylum seeker issues. He is now serving as president of Rural Australians for Refugees and has become a supporter of two families from Afghanistan who have applied for Humanitarian Visas for Australia. Paul is married to Robyn Ellis

The Beginning:

This article began when the bishop visited my congregation. I had printed on the pew sheet that “Everyone who is baptised is welcome to receive communion in this church. Everyone is welcome to come to the altar to receive a blessing.” The bishop said to me “You should say “Everyone who has been baptised in a *trinitarian* church is welcome to receive communion here.” From this I got the message that communion was for those who had been “Baptised into Christ, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”

Later, I was visiting the USA as a locum priest. I put the same statement onto the pew sheet. A member of the congregation, who was baptised, came and said, “I am disturbed that you have written this.” At coffee we talked at length about this person’s upbringing in the Roman Catholic Church and how they felt terribly excluded by their behaviour. They loved the inclusion that was represented by the ‘open table’ invitation that they had received, before my coming. This inclusion was expressed in the words “This is the table of the *Lord* (meaning, not ours, it is not ours to say who comes or who does not) all are welcome here.” Recently, in the presence of another bishop the same style of invitation was offered to members of a congregation at a eucharist.

My thoughts turned once again to the relationship between baptism and eucharist.

The Current Context.

The ‘model’ that the church operates under has had many iterations over the centuries. The Church began in its ‘illegal phase’ by meeting in Christians homes, with rooms large enough to cater for a congregation but without paid clergy. When martyrdom as the most desired form of witness no longer became an option, the Desert Fathers emerged as a group of Christians who went out into the desert, where the daemons lived, to do battle with them. This gave rise to the ‘Monastic Model’ of the early Christendom period to High Middle Ages. After William the Conqueror divided all of England into

parishes, the ‘parish’ or geographical model with paid clergy and other staff became the dominant model of Church.

Some of these ways of being Church have been theologically inspired, while others, presuming that everyone was a Christian, were more administrative arrangements than theological ones.

The parish model which has been the dominant model to this day, is expensive, and is coming under increasing pressure, occasioned by the decline in numbers of mainstream Christianity in the West. There has been a number of responses to this decline. Congregational ‘start ups’ like Hillsong have been successful in attracting numbers and have grown to a denominational size. Within the ‘parish’ model, though, rather than a theological thinking through of what model of Church best suits our times, we have seen an administrative adaptation, based on the amalgamation of parishes and their funding via Opportunity Shops. This has meant more work for clergy with fewer people to share the mission. This is true no matter what the ‘tenor’ of the diocese. The diocese of Tasmania, for example, has elected an ‘evangelical’ bishop but is amalgamating and selling churches to many people’s distress. Wangaratta is amalgamating and deconsecrating churches also, to name just two dioceses.

Responses

In this context of decline in main-stream parish Christianity there has also been some thinking about strategies as to how the witness of the Church might look.

The response of Anglo Catholics has been to opt for an alliance with a certain sector of society, and to emphasise ‘inclusion’ as its main emphasis, both against the evangelicalism of Sydney (say), and to correct the perception of the Church in society that it is, ‘bigoted and persecuting’, as the nineteenth century W.S. Gilbert of Gilbert and Sullivan fame might have had it.

The idea and practice of inclusion is a good place to start. Within the context of the increasing visibility and public acceptance of LGBTQIA+ people, and of transsexual people, inclusive Churches want to send the message “We (in the Church) used, with the rest of society, declare you to be illegal and or sick, but now we see that ‘love is love’ and to what-ever group you belong, we want to say, ‘You are welcome’.”

This message represents a change from what the Church used to say and also resonates well with the current secular culture’s emerging attitude regarding LGBTQIA+ folk. It also leaves room for a welcome for other forms of diversity too, like those who identify as neuro-diverse, or who live with the many forms of disability.

More importantly, the message of inclusion also resonates with what Mathew Fox very early on named ‘original blessing’. The emphasis on inclusion takes us away from an emphasis on *sin* as a starting point for Christian faith and highlights God’s blessing as a starting point.

The Gospel story of the Prodigal Son shows us dramatically, that even *before the prodigal could get his confession out* his father was *running* toward him in embrace and joy.

Further, in the letter to the Romans chapter five, Paul starts his thought with the couplet “As in Adam all die, but in Christ all will be made alive.” But he is not happy with the seeming equal weight placed on the ‘death and life’ aspects of this pairing of Adam and Christ. He falls over himself to say that the ‘free gift’ is *not like* the trespass. Like the father in the story of the Prodigal Son (or the prodigally loving Father) Paul wants us to ‘get’ that God’s overflowing love is where we can start.

The same is true of the story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts Chapter 10. *Before Peter has finished speaking*, he sees in Cornelius the action of *same* Holy Spirit that came on him at Pentecost. God's overflowing and 'spendthrift love' (as the hymn has it), is the starting point of everything else that follows for Cornelius. The proper pattern of accepting Christ is *not necessarily* that of 'being convicted of sin, repentance and baptism into the body of Christ.'" Billy Graham knew that 'Just as I am...I come' is a good starting point.

This kind of 'message of blessing' is a good strategy to 'put in our handouts'. But the problem with it is that this messaging then tends to be the *only thing* that a congregation does. It advertises "We are an 'inclusive' place," and that's it. You can 'come and be included' whoever you are.

But within this message of welcome there is an implied actual limit to the inclusion: that it applies to 'nice' people, or people for whom the acceptance of society at large is assured, but whose acceptance in the church might be thought doubtful. An inclusive church does *not* say 'We are inclusive of rapists and murderers and paedophiles and violent people, just as you are'. This implied limit means that either these congregations have nothing to offer to such really unacceptable folk, or that they are asking that everyone just 'attend' church, without much else.

Inclusion and Initiation in Human Development

In the realm of human development, there is a very important beginning, which represents 'inclusion'. When a baby is born, the young child is 'included' into the family. There is a very real sense of 'just as I am, I come', because for the first year of life at least, everything is provided for the new person, and nothing is asked of them. They eat and eliminate when they want or need to, and the universe revolves around them. Here the proper ceremonies are those of 'welcome' or 'inclusion', such as the naming and blessing of a new-born.

While all societies need rituals of *welcome* (inclusion), society also needs rituals of *initiation*.

This is because 'society' is *literally* a 'social construct'. What it means to be a member of any given society is not given by nature but by *culture*. What it means to be a man, or a woman is not a matter of 'doing what comes naturally' but of joining a culture and learning its ways. One becomes a man, and one becomes a woman.

Christian Welcome and Christian Initiation

This is as true of the Christian society as an alternative to the 'world' as it is of any other. Christians are made, not born. Moreover, this process does not happen by osmosis, or by just 'coming along', (though there may be some implicit initiation in order for someone to participate). Christians who are capable of giving an account of their faith, as the epistle of Peter invites them, are the products of an intended process of *initiation*.

A lot of Western culture has been heavily influenced by Christianity, but none the less, it still takes a process of initiation to learn the ways of Jesus and to follow them. This is the other side of St. Paul's emphasis on 'the free gift'. In Romans too (chapter nine), St. Paul urges us to "not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you might know the will of God."

This is Jesus' own call. He acts out the process of inclusion by showing us whom he meets, and whom he includes in his group. But then he says, 'follow me'. For some like the rich young ruler, this is a step too far, but for many others, their journey of initiation into the ways of the Reign of God, according to Jesus has just begun.

This was also true in the pre-Constantinian days of Christianity when candidates for baptism were 'scrutinised' in lent. Their sponsors were asked 'are these people living a life worthy of their calling? Are they giving money to the poor? Are they discovering their ministry?'

An emphasis on 'inclusion' can be likened to a ritual of welcome. At first, there are no questions asked of a newcomer, they are received 'just as they are'. They are welcomed like new babies,

More than this though, a connection between 'inclusion' and the natural welcome of a new-born, 'inclusion is a good form of witness to what we think Jesus is about. This kind of witness may bring out some people's questions or interest and even their attendance, but 'attendance' alone is not enough. Even the devil 'attends church every week' to win some for the dark side!

Alongside rituals of and witness to 'welcome and inclusion' we also need rituals of initiation, which are rituals of transformation. In the church this means baptism. As a very common 'rule of thumb' I have heard is that the Eucharist is the *repeatable* part of our baptism. Participation in the Eucharist's holy meal is an expression of our 'Yes' to the call to follow Jesus. It is baptism which transforms us from an ordinary person to a person 'in Christ.' Baptism gives a person an 'ecclesial identity' and a standing within the alternative form of society which is the Church. To offer an open table invitation leaves open the question 'Then what *use* is the sacrament of baptism?' The question that follows soon after that is 'What use is the Church?' We soon end up with Don Williams singing "Well, I don't believe that heaven waits / For only those who congregate. I'd like to think of God as love / He's down below / He's up above / He's watchin' people everywhere / He knows who does and doesn't care / And I'm an ordinary man / Sometimes I wonder who I am."

The functional answer, read from current practice is that 'Baptism has changed from a sacrament of initiation (transformation) to a sacrament of welcome (just as I am) without anyone marking or thinking about this momentous change'.

The structure of initiation

Having made the point of the necessity of initiation, I now turn to a description of what it looks like.

Following the work of *Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner*,¹ we now understand that every process of initiation has three elements to it: The first element involves a process of 'leaving behind' or 'dying' or an 'unpicking' of one's former life. For some this might mean the beginning of a regular enquiry session, or coming to Church, or a stopping of an activity in order to make room for something new. Either way, the first step in initiation involves 'separation'.

¹ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1969). Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

Unpicking:

It is here that a comment about how this ‘unpicking’ or separation happens is worthwhile. In the ‘traditional’ pattern, the ‘unpicking’ is done when a person becomes aware of their ‘sin’. This may be because of the pain of a destructive life that they want to leave behind, or because they become aware of some other factor that has not been part of their life before which needs changing. The traditional language for this is that a person is ‘convicted of sin by the Holy Spirit’. This opens them to hear the ‘word of grace’ and to receive Christ.

Some negative experiences which force us to wonder how life makes sense can be the vehicles of God’s trying to get our attention. Some events in life itself (like a death, divorce etc.) may do the unpicking, and open a person to a new life.

But more importantly sometimes *positive* experiences may be equally confronting. For this discussion about ‘inclusion’, an act of inclusion *itself* can do the unpicking!

I remember clearly the movie ‘Sweet Charity’. ‘Charity’ is a prostitute and very ashamed of her life. She is loved by her new man but being loved is new for her and she almost cannot bear it. She says, ‘Don’t look at me’. The comfortability of a *known* self-loathing is disturbed and unpicked by the unmerited love (inclusion) of another. Blessings and ‘inclusion’ serve the process of ‘unpicking’ as much as any other disturbing confrontation. What is important to note however is that the acts of blessing or inclusion serve as the *beginning* of a process of initiation, not the whole thing, or the end of it.

Another event of which I am aware that gives expression to the ‘unpicking’ nature of an experience of God’s overwhelming generosity is where a priest of whom I have been told pronounces the absolution *before* confession. This action says, “*Because* God loves and *already* forgives you, you are made strong enough to confess your sins.” This is brilliant and confronting way of giving expression to God’s prevenient grace, as Wesley would have called it.

Isaiah experienced the same kind of thing in his call. Isaiah saw the *glory of God* in the temple, and it was this experience of wonder that then made him aware that he was ‘a man of unclean lips who dwelt among a people of unclean lips’.

This means that ‘inclusion’ or ‘original blessing’ can be either part of a ceremony of ‘welcome’ or the powerful ‘unpicking’ part of a process of initiation.

Formation:

The second step in an initiation process is the process of ‘formation’ or cooking’. An initiate is trained in the ways of the new society, and their progress is noted at each stage. This process takes as long as it takes. In the early Church it was reckoned at about three years. The early Methodists thought that from the time a person was ‘convicted of sin’ to when that person was a fully functioning Christian who was able to be a witness to others and to take up their ministries in the Church was about five years.

When the main form of initiation switched from baptism to ordination, university degrees designed to produce clergy lasted three years, as does ordination preparation today.

Emergence of the New Person:

The final stage of an initiation is the celebration of the 'new life' which has been formed, the reflection on 'what has just happened to me', *and* the exercise of the gifts and competence bestowed upon the newly initiated person by their training and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

There are many metaphors that describe this process. A butterfly is first a caterpillar who then has to 'die', to being a caterpillar and to go into the 'grave' of the chrysalis, where a new body is formed. In a marriage, two single people are separated from their 'singleness' and are formed by 'going steady' into a 'couple' and then after the wedding ceremony are allowed a 'honeymoon' to get used to one another as a "new 'one flesh' married' person."

One can also see this process at work too in Indigenous Australian initiation rites. Young men are taken from their mothers where they have spent most of their childhood to date and taken to the initiation ground. There they are taught 'men's business' and initiated in various ways through trials and having to undergo painful operations. They then return to the main camp but join the 'men's group'. They are no longer children.

In this third phase of initiation, a 'new creation' emerges into the world, and is integrated as such as a part of a new society. The old being 'rises' and its new 'butterfly' self begins its new life.

I have deliberately chosen these metaphors of 'separation' 'cooking' and 'new life' because they correspond to the imitation of Christ, and the recapitulation of the process of his own transformation. A new Christian who is in the process of initiation imitates the *same* process as that of Jesus' own life. They die, are entombed and rise to new life. By following him in death, entombment and rising they are being formed into Christ's likeness.

A 'baptism' is not just something nice for a new-born that happens in church. Instead, a baptism describes the whole process of Christian initiation that is necessary in order to be 'transformed by the renewing of their mind'. What happens in Church is the intense, sacramental reproduction of this same 'baptism into Christ' and imitation of his death, entombment and rising that has been going on in other ways outside of a liturgical structure.

But it is this necessary process that is just what is missing in the whole of the Church for adults (apart from candidates for ordination). We talk about 'inclusion' but avoid initiation. In human terms, we leave new Christians at the metaphorical age of twelve months.

The connection between eucharistic liturgy and Christian 'Life in the World'

I would like to argue now that the structure of the Eucharist is an intensive and symbolic playing out of the same kind of life that a Christian lives daily, in the world. The structure of the Anglican Eucharist involves an 'unpicking' (preparation and opening up to God), 'Formation' (Hearing the Word of God) and an exercise of that new life in a statement of belief and prayer (Creed and Intercessions). This happens again for the Holy Meal with 'unpicking' (confession) receiving a new life (Absolution and peace, and the Eucharistic meal) and the celebration of the new life (being sent on mission).

Participation in this liturgy is participation in the same extensive process of initiation as happened when we were baptised. But whatever way we initiate people, we need to give *expression* to both welcome

and initiation in the Church because the Church is not a part of society in general, but an alternative version of it.

The Eucharist itself does this for us liturgically, by making admission to communion conditional on being initiated in baptism. The way I think that this happens is that ‘welcome’ happens at the church door. ‘Initiation’ is given expression at the Eucharist’s holy meal.

Because ‘what happens in Church’, however, is a symbolic and concentrated form of the life we live outside the Church, the Church also needs forms of ‘witness’ to this new way of life in the community: that is, we need to be able to offer demonstrations of what being ‘in Christ’ looks like to the rest of the world. This can’t be just ‘the church is for putting on Church’. We need demonstration events of the blessing character of God who called all of creation ‘good’ and blessed it. (For example, blessing of back packs before the school year, blessing of homes, blessing of relationships, tools of trade, fleece, harvest, animals). We also need a witness of the calling out of the ‘dissonances’ between life ‘in Christ’, the truly human one and life lived under the tyrannical rule of ‘the beastly one’, to use a metaphor from Revelation. We need to be able to identify and name the places where, on behalf of those who cannot defend themselves, and in the name of Christ, repentance and transformation (initiation) are called for.

A focus on Christian initiation in the church helps to answer the question about renewal in the church, which according to Bonhoeffer cannot come about without a renewed enlivenment of the ‘arcane discipline’ (Catechumenate) and a new answer to the question ‘Who is Jesus for us today?’ As Catholic minded protestants (Anglicans) we also need to follow this process of dying, entombment and rising, by following our own dictum ‘It is the nature of the Church to be in continual reformation. (*Ecclesia semper reformanda est*).

The weakness of the Anglican Catholic movement is that it has emphasised an evangelising strategy of welcome (inclusion), both in congregations, and in its public pronouncements, without attending to initiation or conversion. It has put on a lot of concerts with very fine music, but has not invited the concert goers to ask the question ‘If you liked this, maybe you would like to take the next step and find the One who inspired this music?’

The weakness of evangelicals is that they place too many blockages in the way of welcome, while missing the *‘spendthrift’* ** generosity of God. Too often they begin with conversion via a person’s lack of Christ. They want to determine who is ‘welcome’ and who is not by depending, not on a process of mutually accountable discipleship (a Christian praxis perhaps following the model of Thomas Groome), but on the right of the ‘authorities’ to determine what the Bible says, and who is a sinner in need of repentance. Only *then* can initiation (discipling) take place, within this already determined doctrinal framework.

Since I have put a double emphasis on ‘inclusion’ *and* ‘initiation’, it is necessary for me to say also, that any normative process offered by the Church must leave room for God’s sovereign grace. What I mean here is that the process of Christian initiation though it can have its idea of what is ‘normal’, these ‘norms’ ought not to become hardened into fixed laws. God works in mysterious ways, and we must be ever alert to look for the operation of God’s ways with us that do not match the ‘normal ways’.

Look again at the story of Cornelius. Not only was Peter convinced by his dream that gentiles could be Christians too (without any prior initiation), Peter discovers that *before baptism*, the same Spirit is active in Cornelius, in the same way that the Spirit was active in the Apostles. Leaving room in a ‘normative’ process for God’s action which is outside the norm is essential. While being ever flexible in how

initiation is carried out, it is worth heeding Aidan Kavanagh in his ‘The Shape of Baptism’², where he points out that, even though there are anomalies, a Christian is made by the process of hearing and ‘echoing’ the Word of God; undergoing the *liturgical* celebration of this hearing in what he calls ‘the water bath’; What follows is Christian ministry in the Church and the World in the power of the Holy Spirit. John himself says as much “I baptize you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” A form of Baptism that does not produce Spirit filled ministering Christians is according to Kavanagh incomplete, and the equivalent of John the Baptist’s baptism.

God’s grace and power aside for the moment, it is also true is that we can’t complain about Church decline if we have not tried all that we can, in taking both welcome, and initiation seriously. I am opposed to the abrogation of Christian responsibility for mission by saying, ‘It is God’s Church.’ Christians have a responsibility to be faithful, with all of the knowledge and courage that we can muster. Having done that, we can leave the rest up to God, saying ‘It is God’s church’, but not before we have done all that we have been asked to do with all of the knowledge and skill at our disposal.

A proper corrective to this is not to swap ‘welcome’ (inclusion) for ‘initiation’ but to make sure both are present.

*I say ‘genuine initiation’ here because most baptisms of infants *function* as ceremonies of welcome in that they ask nothing of anyone much, just like a newborn baby.

** (See Hymn 676 in “A Spendthrift Lover is the Lord,” *Together in Song: Australian Hymnal Book II*).

² Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991).

Research in Progress: the life of Australian Baptist Missionary Executive Rev F. A. Marsh (1897-1976)



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This article outlines my PhD project on the life of Australian Baptist Missionary Executive Rev F. A. Marsh (1897-1976) to highlight current themes of interest and invite comments.

Marsh is one of the most significant Australian and Victorian Baptist figures of the mid-twentieth Century and worthy of a more thorough historical study than has yet been the case. He is best remembered for his statesman-like management of the Australian Baptist Foreign Mission. But Marsh was also an active ecumenist in the pre-Vatican II era when many Protestants viewed Catholics and Orthodox Christians with suspicion. His travels and working life brought him into contact with people of different faiths in the Asia-Pacific and those living 'behind the Iron Curtain' and in China during the Cold War. Marsh's experience and perspectives are credited by some as moderating more narrow fundamentalist theological views circulating in Australia at the time

An examination of his life is an opportunity to better understand one aspect of the waning of British and missionary influence in our region, the dynamics of social change in Australia and the place of India and Hong Kong in the Australian imagination.

The son of English immigrants, Marsh joined the Baptist Church in South Australia as a teenager in about 1911. He was rejected for missionary service on health grounds but trained for home ministry at the Baptist College in Melbourne, held pastorates in Victoria, married Frieda Uebergang in 1925 and began a family. In 1934, he accepted appointment as general secretary of the Australian Baptist Foreign Mission (ABFM), guiding it through the Depression. After World War Two, the ABFM accepted responsibility for missionary work in Assam and Papua New Guinea in addition to its long-standing work in Bengal. Independence and Partition of India in 1947 split missionary work between India and East Pakistan (later Bangladesh). In 1950, the Department of External Affairs appointed him as a 'special adviser' to the Australian delegation to the United Nations General Assembly. From 1959-62 he was President General of the Baptist Union of Australia and a member of a mission of fellowship to USSR, Czechoslovakia, and China in 1954. He was comptroller of the Hong Kong Baptist College between 1962-64 until ill-health forced his return to Australia.

Completing the picture

In the lead-up to the two-hundredth anniversary of overseas mission work by Australian Baptists in 1982, retired missionary Jessie Adelaide Redman (1901-1982) authored two books to highlight work undertaken in the first half of the twentieth century. The first was her memoir which offered an engaging view of life as one of the denomination's longest serving missionaries; *The Light Shines on: the Story of the Missionary Outreach of the Baptist People of Australia, 1882-1982*.¹ The second was a thinner publication; *Mission Accomplished: the story of F A Marsh*.² It was based on notes which Marsh prepared and material provided by others after Marsh passed away before completing his draft. However, Marsh's eldest daughter, and a niece who had lived under his guardianship in her teens, found the work "disappointing" and "nothing like Uncle Frank" respectively."³ The reason for these discrepancies is not what was included but what was left out. This study is in part a quest to find the missing pieces to see the whole man.

Marsh's role in managing Baptist missions has been broadly documented elsewhere.⁴ His non-missionary activities (or at least those which seem at first glance to be non-missionary) and the influences of his family background have not been examined. While Marsh experienced some resistance in his later career, he found common ground with some other Victorian 'churchmen' (at the time all of them were men) during the Cold War. Their views were compiled and received attention in the press but have not been examined to understand the dynamics involved within and between their denominations and wider Australian society.⁵

The ecumenical inclination is characteristic of his career from the beginning. However, his desire to promote Baptist principles was also strong. Marsh's role at the Hong Kong Baptist College (now University) combined elements of both motivations. His role is mentioned in a history of the institution and the period examined more closely in a doctoral thesis, though neither examine Marsh's work as such.⁶

A significant aspect of his time in Hong Kong was his engagement with the Swatow-speaking (潮州話) Baptist churches and the resettlement of refugees from the mainland on Chu Lap Kok Island. Stanley Chen 陳聯芳 and Dr Lam Chi-fung 林子豐 (1892–1971), who helped found the College, were close to Marsh and leaders of the Po Kong Village Baptist Chapel which later became Kowloon City Swatow Baptist Church (KCSBC). Marsh's assistant at the College during this period, Adrian Leong 梁毓靈, is thought to have been part of the same congregation. While information and archives covering the College for this period are good, information on the Hong Kong Baptist congregations and refugee work is proving more difficult to locate.

¹ Jess Redman and Australian Baptist Missionary Society, *The Light Shines on: the Story of the Missionary Outreach of the Baptist People of Australia, 1882-1982* (Hawthorn, Victoria: Australian Baptist Missionary Society, 1982).

² J. Redman, *Mission Accomplished: the story of F A Marsh* (Hawthorn, Victoria: Australian Baptist Missionary Society, c 1982).

³ From personal conversations of the author with Leonore Woff *nee* Marsh (1926-2017) and Joan Lyell *nee* Marsh (1921-1997).

⁴ Tony Cupit, Ros Gooden, and Ken Manley, eds., *From Five Barley Loaves: Australian Baptists in Global Mission 1864-2010* (Preston, Vic. Mosaic Press, 2013).

⁵ E. L. Williams, *Free or Fettered?: Statements by the Victorian members of the churchmen's delegation to the churches in Russia, China and Czechoslovakia, July, 1959* (Melbourne: Methodist Church [1959]).

⁶ 黃嫻梨: 《香港浸會大學校史》 [History of Hong Kong Baptist University] 香港: 香港浸會大學, 1996年: 1-73; A. K. To, 'Lam Chi-fung's Transformative Role in Shaping Hong Kong Baptist Life between 1950 and 1970' (PhD thesis, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2018). See also: <https://www.hkbu.edu.hk/>

A Word on Geography

While Marsh's personal perspective was global by the time he was managing Australia's Baptist overseas missionary efforts, the focus was on the area once known as Bengal. The Bengal locations are now split between West Bengal (India) and Bangladesh, known as East Bengal from 1947 until 1955 when it was renamed East Pakistan.⁷ Frederick S Downs' *History of Christianity in India*, covers 'northeast India' in volume five. He provides a general picture of Christianity in northeast India; however, this is problematic as he defines the region by 'general contemporary usage' at the time he was writing (1992).⁸ The older understanding of northeast India included the Darjeeling region as well as what is now Bangladesh where missionary work was done.

Darjeeling was a significant part of the cultural life of Australian Baptist missionaries, and other westerners working in Bengal. It was the place for recuperation, escape from the hot summers of the plains, conferences, and local language training as well as the place to educate their children in boarding schools such as the Mount Hermon School.⁹

Both 'Darjeeling' and 'India' also had a place in the Australian public imagination. Retired Baptist missionary 'Bessie' Lindeman (*nee* Bethell) named her Melbourne home (purchased in the mid-1920s) 'Darjeeling' to recall her experiences as a missionary recuperating and later marrying in Darjeeling.¹⁰ Evidence of the place of Darjeeling in the Australian public imagination of the interwar years is hinted at in a house named 'Darjeeling' designed by the prominent Melbourne architect, H.V. Gillespie.¹¹ Several of Marsh's public presentations seem to be based on tapping this interest in the region.¹² The loss of access to Darjeeling on Partition in 1947 increased the costs and difficulties of access to health care, recreation and education for missionaries and their children.

Other emerging themes

The material on Marsh is broad, so it will be necessary to construct a balanced view of the diverse range of material and make choices about the themes to frame the study. Amongst the primary materials readily available are newspaper reports including several in the many Baptist publications augmented by material held in Baptist archives.

An unexpected find in the general press, was that in 1931, Marsh responded immediately and positively to the call from Rev R. G. Nichols at St Mark's Anglican in Fitzroy to create what became the National Christian Crusaders of Australia and seems to have been part of the drafting group for the organisation's statement of purpose. While Nichols later became withdrawn, he was in his day a well-known figure in Melbourne. The project will explore this relationship further. Nichols was widely known at the time as

⁷ Bengal had been briefly and unsuccessfully partitioned in the early twentieth century.

⁸ Frederick S Downs. *History of Christianity in India, V/5, Northeast India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Bangalore, 1992; 1.

⁹ See Nandini Bhattacharya, *Contagion and Enclaves: Tropical Medicine in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), which emphasises the Hill Stations as a place of healing for Europeans. Australian Baptist missionaries, and others, took this further by including spiritual and cultural rejuvenation.

¹⁰ Author's discussions with the current owner of the house and another with a relative of Mrs Lindeman in 2022.

¹¹ Peter Andrew Barrett, HO7 Elwood St Kilda Balaclava Ripponlea Precinct heritage review Stage 2: Review of existing heritage citations, 2021.

¹² See also the work of Sarah Besky, *The Darjeeling Distinction: Labor and Justice on Fair-Trade Tea Plantations in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014) and 'The Plantation's Outsides: The Work of Settlement in Kalimpong, India.' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 63, no. 2 (2021), 434.

‘Brother Bill’ and developed a strong public profile.¹³ Nichols effective use of film, radio, and commentary on the applicability of Christianity to economic, political, and social problems seems to have resonated with Marsh who also made effective use of the media of his day.

Marsh’s public presentations about the 1938 missionary conference in Tambaram, India, were often accompanied by a colour film or slides. He emphasised the diversity of participants and that while some nations represented were at war (China and Japan), all were united in the conference. Marsh wrote several items about it in *Our Indian Field* emphasising the mission opportunity and focused on tribal groups such as the Garo, located in the Northeast Indian state of Meghalaya, who were not subject to the traditions of Hinduism. He described evangelisation and communal uplift as ‘complementary’ activities. My impression is that the phrase is an understatement of his view of how the two activities were linked. Marsh’s attendance at the Conference came relatively early in his role as a mission executive and made a lasting impression on him. What impressed him most was not so much the effort which had gone into the conference (which was enormous) but:

That peoples of seventy nations could dwell, pray, worship and confer together with such unity of purpose and pure joy of friendship in these days of international tension and strife, is a most significant thing.¹⁴

Several newspaper reports describe Marsh as an expert on India. In 1943, on one occasion, he spoke on this topic alongside former NSW premier Sir Bertram Stevens who wrote about Indian politics. The assumption is that the topic was of public interest, which could also be harnessed to promote mission support. In the leadup to Partition, Marsh often spoke on ‘the new India’ and what independence might mean for missions. On other occasions, he presented on the ‘talkie sound film “The Life and Work of William Carey.”’ In 1937 he was the main author of the booklet *The Missionary heritage of Australian Baptists* which emphasised the work of Carey who also focused in Bengal. While this is not unexpected, it is worth noting that he took the lead on this issue at a time when Australian’s were more aware of other missionary models, particularly in China.¹⁵

In 1945, as a member of the (Australian) National Missionary Council, Marsh was involved in a decision to commission Dr A. P. Elkin (also a member of the Council) to write a ‘survey’ of indigenous people.¹⁶ Elkin had been responsible to the Commonwealth Government for training of administrative native officers for New Guinea since 1933, the reconstitution of aboriginal policies and administration in the Northern Territory and New South Wales and author of *Citizenship for the Aborigines*.¹⁷ The Minister for Native Affairs in Western Australia promised his full co-operation.¹⁸ The project will

¹³ David A. Pear, ‘Muscular Christianity: The Rev R. G. Nichols in Fitzroy, 1925/ 1942’ *Victorian Historical Journal* (Melbourne, Vic.: 1987) 62, no. 1-2 (1991): 3-17; David Pear, ‘Nichols, Reginald Gordon Clement (1888–1960)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/nichols-reginald-gordon-clement-7843/text13621>, published first in hardcopy 1988, accessed online 23 May 2023; David Adrian Pear, ‘Two Anglican Responses to the Depression and Second World War in Melbourne: A Study in Churchmanship, M. Th. thesis, Melbourne College of Divinity, 1985.

¹⁴ F. A. Marsh, ‘What did Tambaram Say?’ *Our Indian Field* (6 Feb 1939): 1.

¹⁵ F. A. Marsh, Australian Baptist Foreign Mission, *The Missionary heritage of Australian Baptists* (Sydney, Australian Baptist Pub. House, 1937).

¹⁶ The National Missionary Council formed in 1926 later became part of the WCC. Tigger Wise, ‘Elkin, Adolphus Peter (1891–1979)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography*, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/elkin-adolphus-peter-10109/text17845>, published first in hardcopy 1996, accessed online 18 July 2023.

¹⁷ A. P. Elkin, *Citizenship for the Aborigines; a National Aboriginal Policy* (Sydney NSW: Australasian Pub. Co., 1944).

¹⁸ Aubrey Augustus Michael Coverley – Biographical Register of Members of the Parliament of Western

ascertain the outcomes of this and the extent of Marsh's involvement; Baptists subsequently developed aboriginal missions.

In May 1945, the Melbourne *Age* reported on a resolution presented by Marsh, as general secretary of the foreign missions, and 'passed unanimously' by the Victorian Assembly. It stressed that the retention of Australia's immigration policy in its present form 'must inevitably aggravate the country's future relationships with her potentially powerful neighbors of the Orient'. The project will investigate how far he took this view and what impact that had within the Baptist and wider communities.¹⁹ By this stage of his career, Marsh had shown a willingness to publicly defend his views on social issues. He saw this as a natural consequence of his faith while at the same time attracting support for mission work. Later in the year in his role as President of the Australian Missionary Council he delivered a sermon titled "The White Australia Policy in the Light of War-time Experience."²⁰

In 1951 Marsh and the Most Rev Dr Eris Michael O'Brien, Auxiliary Bishop to Cardinal Gilroy (1895-1974), were the two Australian 'special advisors' to the Fifth Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations.²¹ Marsh obtained good publicity for his work after this event but apparently found it an ineffective role. His successful role working with the Government to free a detained Baptist missionary in East Pakistan after Partition may have brought his diplomatic skills to the attention of the Menzies Government. He followed up with a series of public lectures/sermons linking his work to the role making a deeper examination necessary.

Marsh's participation in a group of, mostly Victorian, churchmen who visited Russia, Czechoslovakia, and China in 1959, is referred to above. On their return Marsh made presentations on the trip in Canberra which were reported in the *Canberra Times* with two detailed reports on the visit and other evidence of religious freedom in China published in the *Tribune* by the Australian Communist Party. This activity brought him, and some of his colleagues, most of whom had been foreign missionaries, to the attention of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO). The Melbourne group published their views in *Free or Fettered?*²² Responses within the Baptist church apparently included those who thought Marsh had become 'a bit pink.' The study aims to understand how this played out in Baptist circles and the wider community.

Invitation

The overarching research questions to be investigated are: how does a reassessment of the life of Rev F. A. Marsh contribute to an understanding of Australian Baptist identity, the role of the churches in Australian society during the first half of the twentieth century, and the Australian Baptist perceptions of mission during this period? All comments will be welcomed.

Australia, [https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/parliament/library/MPHistoricalData.nsf/\(Lookup\)/42DFD23E82B57CB0482577E50028A587?OpenDocument](https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/parliament/library/MPHistoricalData.nsf/(Lookup)/42DFD23E82B57CB0482577E50028A587?OpenDocument)

¹⁹ 'United Front in Churches,' *Age*, 17 May 1945: 5. The full resolution is in 'Baptist Union of Victoria, Autumnal Assembly', *Victorian Baptist Witness*, 5 June 1945:1; and the BUV Autumn Assembly 1945 minutes.

²⁰ 'Advertising' *Williamstown Chronicle* (Victoria), 3 Aug 1945: 6.

²¹ 'Australian Delegation to the Fifth Session of the General Assembly: Statement by the Prime Minister and Acting Minister for External Affairs, Rt. Hon. R. G. Menzies, K.C., M.P., 16 September, 1950'. *Current Notes on International Affairs*, Vol 20, no. 9,(September 1950): 656. For O'Brien, see Elizabeth Johnston, 'O'Brien, Eris Michael (1895–1974)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/obrien-eris-michael-11273/text20111>, published first in hardcopy 2000, accessed online 22 July 2023.

²² E. L. Williams, *Free or Fettered?: Statements by the Victorian members of the churchmen's delegation to the churches in Russia, China and Czechoslovakia*, July, 1959 (Melbourne: Methodist Church [1959]).

Rev. Dr Peter Woodruff SSC

A high proportion of people around the world are born into a world of poverty, adversity and struggle. To survive they need to strive and, at times, endure extreme difficulties.

Hope is the virtue that gives all people strength to push on, regardless of the challenges we may be facing. Hope, like all virtues, is a gift from God, a gift from God to all humans of goodwill. Life in the midst of thousands of poor families in Peru led me to the conclusion that most of those who do push on regardless of major challenges, are the poor of the world. I believe that God has a preference for the poor and their allies in the struggle for justice, regardless of their religious beliefs.

Hope and faith are virtues for this life on earth, into which all have been born. Love or charity is the virtue that endures beyond death, unless we totally eliminate that virtue from our way of life on earth.

During the forty years of my life focussed on our mission in Lima, Peru, I came to see the millions of struggling Peruvian families as a people of enduring hope. They found ways to live with adversity and, as often as not, deal with it successfully. Many were Christians; many were not. But, as we know, God loves all people and so endows us with what we may need to work our way through life.

I left Peru definitively in 2009 and have lived in Essendon, Victoria since then. While retired from priestly ministry I was not retired from life and, like many Australian retirees, I have enjoyed wandering to various parts of this country.

The travels helped me become more aware of the plight and struggles of Indigenous Australians. Their situation was similar, but not on the same scale as that of the Peruvians. However, a key ingredient of their struggle was similar, in that it was driven by hope. Both peoples have striven for years to push back against a vicious colonial enterprise directed by a ruthless European colonising enterprise.

A high proportion of non-Indigenous Australians want to support our Indigenous peoples in their struggle for justice. Finding effective ways forward continues to be fraught with obstacles. However, there are signs of hope in the attitudes and actions of many courageous and insightful Indigenous, grassroots leaders, two of whom are the subject of rest of this article.

Lowitja O'Donoghue

A member of the stolen generations, Lowitja O' Donoghue, was born in north-west South Australia. Aged two, she and her sister were taken from her mother and handed to missionaries of the United Aboriginal Mission by her father, Tom O'Donoghue.

Lowitja and her siblings were survivors of a harrowing time in Australia's history when Aboriginal children of mixed ancestry were being removed from their families. The sisters were taken by their father to a church mission home, Colebrook Children's Home in the town of Quorn in the Flinders Ranges, where they were reunited with their eldest sister and only brother who had been taken to the home seven years earlier. Lowitja was given the name Lois, a birth date and a birthplace and did not see her mother again for thirty-three years. The children were not allowed to speak their own language or to ask questions about their origins, or even about their parents.

Working in health

Employed as a domestic servant at the age of sixteen years, Lowitja was encouraged to work as a nursing aide at the Victor Harbour Hospital. When she applied to complete her nursing training at the Royal Adelaide Hospital, she was refused the opportunity because of her Aboriginal heritage. In the stoic fashion for which she would come to be known, Lowitja fought the decision, which included personally seeking support from the then South Australian Premier of the day, Sir Thomas Playford. The decision was eventually overturned and in 1954, she became the first Aboriginal person to train as a nurse at the Royal Adelaide Hospital.

In 1967, Lowitja joined the Commonwealth Public Service as a junior administrative officer in the Adelaide office of the newly formed Department of Aboriginal Affairs. After eight years she became the Director of the Department's office in South Australia, a senior officer position, responsible for the local implementation of national Aboriginal welfare policy. This work was recognised in 1976 when Lowitja became the first Aboriginal woman to be inducted into the new Order of Australia.

In 1984, Lowitja was named Australian of the year for her work to improve the welfare of Aboriginal people.

In 1990, she was appointed inaugural chairperson of the now dissolved Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), a position she held until 1996.

In December 1992, she became the first Aboriginal Australian to address the United Nations General Assembly during the launch of the United Nations International Year of Indigenous People.

She also received honorary doctorates from a number of Australian universities.

Following her retirement, she formally added the name Lowitja to her existing legal name, Lois O'Donoghue Smart, to emphasise her Luritjan heritage.

In February 2015 she launched the Lowitja Institute – Australia's National Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research.

She continued to be a speaker, writer, mover and shaker on behalf of her people. She died, aged 91, at her home in Adelaide, February, 2024.

Patrick Lionel Djargun Dodson

Patrick Dodson born January 29, 1948 in Broome, Western Australia, has become known as the "father of reconciliation."

A member of the Yawuru people, Dodson was the son of an Irish-Australian father and an Aboriginal mother. When Patrick was two years of age, his family moved from West Australia to Katherine in the Northern Territory to escape the West Australian laws which prohibited mixed-race families. Both his parents had been imprisoned in the early years of their relationship as a result of their refusal to adhere to government-imposed racial segregation.

In 1960, Patrick, then thirteen years of age, and his six siblings were orphaned. Although an aunt and uncle battled with authorities to prevent the children from being sent to live in a Catholic mission settlement, Patrick, his younger brother Mick—who would become a renowned activist and scholar in his own right—and two of their sisters were made wards of the state.

In 1961, two priests from the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart obtained scholarships for Patrick and Mick to finish their education at Monivae College, a Catholic boarding school in Hamilton, Victoria, at which they were the only Aboriginal students. At Monivae, Patrick not only proved to be a conscientious and accomplished student, but he was also elected college captain and served as captain of the school's Australian Rules football team. He was already displaying strong leadership skills and the potential to become a powerful voice for indigenous rights.

After graduating from Monivae, Patrick studied for the priesthood. He joined the order of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart in 1975, becoming the first Aboriginal person to be ordained a Catholic priest in Australia. As a priest, Dodson sought to balance and blend his faith in Catholicism with his Aboriginal spirituality. However, after many years of struggling to reconcile the two, he left the priesthood.

This marked a new beginning of his journey of activism for Indigenous rights and his commitment to the reconciliation movement. In 1981, Patrick joined the Central and Kimberley Land Councils, and eventually was appointed the director of both Aboriginal organisations. In that capacity, Dodson successfully negotiated the return of the giant monolith Uluru/Ayers Rock to its traditional owners, the Anangu people.

He was a key player in many sensitive and significant negotiations with the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments at a time when negotiations over the issues of Aboriginal land rights were generally bitter, divisive and politically contentious.

Patrick made some of his most acclaimed and influential contributions to the pursuit of rights for Aboriginal peoples as a royal commissioner appointed in 1989 to investigate the deaths of Aboriginal persons in custody. His work as the founding chairperson of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) from 1991 to 1997 led to his becoming known as the “Father of Reconciliation.”

He was awarded the Sydney Peace Prize in 2008. After retiring from CAR, he continued his advocacy for constitutional change and recognition of Indigenous rights. He served as chairperson of Nyambu Buru Yawuru Ltd. (2010–16).

In 2016 he was appointed as the Australian Labor Party's replacement for Joe Bullock as a senator representing Western Australia when Bullock stepped down over differences with his party on the issue of same-sex marriage. Patrick also served as an adjunct professor at the University of Notre Dame in Broome and was recognised as a National Living Treasure.

Patrick also served as co-chair of the Expert Panel for Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians (2010–16). He was devoted to building constructive relationships between Indigenous and

non-Indigenous peoples through mutual respect and dialogue. He brought fundamental issues of the country's past to the forefront.

Between 2016 and 2017 he was involved in the Regional Dialogues that fed into the Uluru Statement from the Heart in May 2017. The thirteen Regional Dialogues were attended by 1,200 First Nations delegates in locations around Australia, which culminated in the Uluru Convention in May 2002. The convention's final statement calls for a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution. It was a way to allow First Nations peoples to take up their rightful place in Australia. It would give them power over their own destiny. They would walk in two worlds and their culture would be a gift to the country we call Australia.

Patrick Dodson retired from Parliament due to illness in January 2024.

Conclusion

Both Lowitja and Patrick, along with others not named here, have left an inspiring heritage of hope-inspired social action. Each has achieved much and inspired other emerging leaders to become messengers of hope that lies at the core of sowing sanity and peace in the hearts of all humans.

Homily for the Feast of St Columban, Essendon, Vic (23 November 2024)

[Readings: Is 52: 7-10; Ps 65; Luke 9:57-62]



Rev. Dr Patrick McInerney SSC

Rev Dr Patrick McInerney is the Director of the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations. He is a Columban missionary priest. From 1979 to 2000 he was assigned to Pakistan where he worked in parishes, leadership and the fledgling efforts at dialogue getting underway at that time. Since 2002 he has worked at the Centre in Sydney.

He is a member of Religions for Peace (NSW) and serves on its executive. He is also a member of the Council of Christians and Jews (NSW), of the International Association of Catholic Missiologists (IACM) and the International Association of Mission Studies (IAMS). From 2009-2017 he served three terms on the Catholic Council for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Relations. From 2011–2017 he was an Honorary Fellow of the Australian Catholic University.

He is the current leader of the Columbans in Australia.

Introduction

There are ages or eras in the mission of the church. Pope Francis has said that we are not just in “an era of change, but a change of era.”

The Eras of Mission

First was the **Apostolic Age**. The early church encountered the crucified and risen Jesus Christ, through whom the Reign of God broke into human history. Its greatest achievement was the corpus of letters and documents later canonised as the twenty-seven books of the New Testament.

In the **Patristic era**, the Gospel engaged with Greek culture, which posed different questions from the original Jewish context, and required different answers that met the Greek quest for *logos*, for reason. The greatest achievements of this age were the conciliar decrees, which laid the foundations of Christian philosophy and theology. Next year we celebrate the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, which affirmed the divinity of Christ, as in the Nicene Creed that we recite each Sunday.

The conversion of Emperor Constantine in 312 ushered in the era of **Christendom**, the nexus of Church and state, which lasted up to Vatican II. Constantine’s Edict of Toleration given in Milan in 313 de-criminalised Christianity. -Emperor Theodosius’s Edict of Thessalonica in 380 affirmed Christian conciliar doctrines. Christianity, previously a *proscribed* or ‘prohibited’ religion in the Roman Empire, became the *prescribed* or ‘required’ religion of the Empire. Previously a persecuted minority in the Roman Empire, it became empire in its own right, able to enforce its conciliar decrees using imperial power and military might, and persecuting dissidents. The great achievement of this era was the

consolidation of Christianity throughout the Empire. Its greatest flaw was its alignment with Empire, such that its fate rose and fell with that Empire.

When the Goths and Vandals sacked Rome in the fifth century, the Church in Europe fell into disarray. It was the Irish monks from the far western margins of Europe who restored Christianity on the continent, among them Saint Columban and his companions, ushering in the era of **monasticism**. The Columban and later Benedictine monasteries were centres of education, learning, agriculture, and commerce, in short, of Christian civilisation. Among the many monastic achievements for which we are forever indebted are craft beer and Benedictine liqueur.

When Christendom in Europe fractured in the Reformation and religious wars, the **mendicants**—the Franciscans¹, the Dominicans², the Carmelites³—came to the rescue, not drawing people into the stable life of the monastery, but going out to the poor in cities, towns, and villages. The great achievement of this medieval era, arising from the renewed encounter with Greek philosophy passed on by Muslims, was scholastic theology.

Christian Europe from the seventh century onwards had been hedged in by the crescent ring of Islamic empires to the east, south, and west in north Africa. “In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.” Five years later, Vasco da Gama sailed around the Cape of Good Hope on his voyage to India. The Islamic ‘blockade’ was broken. The European “discovery” of the Americas and of Asia opened new horizons. The shock of vast hordes of peoples who had not heard of the Gospel triggered the modern missionary movement, characterised by church **institutions**. The Franciscans, the Dominicans, and the newly-formed Jesuits⁴ went out to preach the Gospel to the people of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Missionary societies formed, including in 1916 the Missionary Society of Saint Columban, at just over one hundred years old, one of the last such missionary organisations.

The great achievement of the missionary institutions of this era is that the church fulfilled the missionary mandate of Acts 1:8, reaching “to the ends of the earth” – the church is present in every country and corner of the world. Its liabilities derive from the colonial umbrella under which it operated, from which it benefited, and the excesses of which it too rarely challenged. In hindsight, the flaws of this era of mission - and of the church in general - were many:

- It was territorial and divisive, dividing the world into Spanish, Portuguese, and French protectorates; into Catholics and Protestants; into Christians and “pagans”; not to mention the intense rivalry among Catholics!
- It was patriarchal and clerical – mission was largely the preserve of men, almost exclusively clerics, though there were congregations of religious sisters who were “auxiliaries” in the missionary enterprise.
- The language of mission as “insertion” and “penetration” and “conquest” betrayed a male sexual approach – it is revealing that the sexual position of Europe became known as the “missionary” position, which makes one wonder how the missionaries engaged with the local people!
- It promoted inequality – we spoke of “mother” churches and “daughter” churches, only after Vatican II, speaking of “sister” churches.

¹ St Francis of Assisi, 1181–1226.

² St Dominic, 1170–1221.

³ Historical origins uncertain, probably founded on Mt Carmel in twelfth century Israel.

⁴ St Ignatius, 1491–1556.

- It was unilateral—we spoke of *ad gentes* mission, of going “to the nations”; we were the benefactors, and they were the beneficiaries; we spoke of “sending” churches and “receiving” churches. It is only in recent decades that missiologists speak of *missio inter gentes* = “mission among or between nations,” implying reciprocity and mutuality, that we can all learn from each other.

Columbans too, followed this territorial and institutional model of mission, initially wrestling territory from the Franciscans in China, and later from the Marists in Fiji. We were the “official” Church:

- We provided the bishops – I think of Ned Galvin and Patrick Cleary in China; Patrick Usher and John Howe in Myanmar; Paddy Cronin and Harry Byrne in the Philippines; Thomas Quinlan, Thomas Stewart, Harold Henry, and James Michaels in Korea; John Dooley, Apostolic Delegate in Indochina.
- We provided the priests – in their hundreds, in the Philippines and Korea, and significant numbers in other countries.
- From the generosity of benefactors, we provided the money - to build churches, schools, clinics, social services, shelters for refugees, and feed the poor.
- All too often, contrary to Jesus’ modelling of mission as poverty and vulnerability, we were the rich, powerful, benefactor, evangelisers, and the people were the poor, powerless, recipient, evangelised. In recent decades, the tide has turned on the Church in the “west”, including the Columbans. Vocations have fallen. Our median age has increased. Numbers have decreased. We face what the General Assembly politely called “diminishment.”
- Are we washed up?

Columbans Did Our Job

Before I answer that, I first want to say, “We Columbans did our job.”

- In Korea in 1969, there were 152 Columbans in seventy-one parishes. Now all those parishes are staffed by Korean priests.
- When I first visited the Philippines in 1979, there were Columbans in parishes all along the coast of Mindanao. Now those parishes are all staffed by Filipino priests.
- When I arrived in Pakistan in 1979, the first Punjabi Capuchin was ordained; all the rest were Belgians. When I visited in 2014, it was the reverse; all the Capuchins were Punjabis, except one Belgian who has since died.
- And the same is true in every country where we have worked.

Yes, we did our job. We established the church in the places to which we were sent.

Are we washed up?

We look to God for Salvation

Again, before I answer that, let me first say:

As we stand proud amid our achievements, and hang our heads in shame and pity amid the many wars and violence of our times, the ravages of climate change, the environmental threat to the planet, and the ruins of our “diminishment”, like the Israelites of old, we too look to God for salvation:

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news,
who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation ... (Is 52:7)

Are we washed up?

Washed Up on a New Shore

Yes! We are washed up! Not as the “end” of the journey, but as the “beginning” of a new one.

We stand, not on the shore of the old “institutional” form of mission of past centuries, but on the shore of a new era in which all church members are called to be “missionary disciples.” A whole new continent lies open before us.

As we stand on the shore of this new era of mission, the Gospel commands us:

- We have no place to lay our heads, no place to stay, we must keep moving. (c.f. Luke 7:58)
- We cannot go back to ways of the past that are dead and buried, no matter how cherished and honourable they were, but must seek out new paths and new life. (c.f. Luke 59-60)
- We cannot go back to the old familiar patterns of relating but must seek the new ways of the kingdom of God. (c.f. Luke 7:61-62)

As we stand on the shore of his new era of mission, if we are prone to fall, it is not because of the dim-sightedness of old age or the bone-weariness of frail, old men who have finally arrived at *Finisterre*, the end of the known world. Ours is the unsteadiness of children who are learning to walk in this new way of mission, learning to walk together the path of synodality, of equality, of inclusiveness, of participation, of communion:

- We are learning to walk together as young and old.
- We are learning to walk together as ordained and lay.
- We are learning to walk together as women and men.
- We are learning to walk together with you, our family, friends, benefactors, and supporters.
- We are learning to walk together with the indigenous First Peoples.
- We are learning to walk together with migrants and refugees.
- We are learning to walk together with believers in other world religions and world views.
- We are learning to walk together with all other creatures, plants, birds, and animals, in the myriad bio diversities which make up our common home.

The ‘Priceless Gift’ of the Columbans

As we stand on the shore of this new era of mission, we Columbans bring one priceless gift. The church and the world are in transition from one era to another. But we have been through transitions before. We left our homes and families. We left the familiar. We went to other countries, learned other languages, lived among other cultures, lived with other religions - we had to become children again, learning to speak, to relate, and to operate in a strange, new world - and we survived, and in some cases, thrived. Through these transitions, our minds and our hearts have expanded. We have found new life. Yes, we have been wounded and broken in the process too. We were hurt. And we hurt others, mostly unintentionally, oblivious of our blunders. We learned to be humble, and penitent, and grateful. In our transitions, we Columbans went through the paschal mystery from death to new life.

Now as we stand on the shore of this new era of mission, we give witness: Do not be afraid! This transition too will give new life to the church and to the world, as have the many transitions in the history of the church, and in our personal and communal histories of Columban mission.

Conclusion

God is with us. God is for us. God will save us. Let us have confidence in reaching out to walk together with all the women, men, and children of our day, especially the poor and vulnerable, caring for our common home, in this new era of church, of mission, of participation, of communion.

Thank you.

Habemus Papam: The Election of Pope Leo XIV



Fr. Michael Nguyen SVD

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May 9, 2025

In his first public address following his election as the successor to Saint Peter, Pope Leo XIV firmly reaffirmed the Church's essential identity and enduring mission in the face of an increasingly fragmented and unstable socio-cultural landscape. Speaking with clarity and pastoral urgency, he declared: "We must find ways to become a missionary Church, a Church that builds bridges, that engages in dialogue, that opens its arms wide to welcome all."

Reclaiming the Church's Missionary Identity

Pope Leo XIV's inaugural message articulates a compelling vision for the Church in the 21st century; i.e., a return to its foundational calling as a missionary community. This missionary Church actively engages with the pressing challenges of our time, ranging from ecological degradation and systemic inequality to deepening secularization and social fragmentation.

His exhortation decisively rejects any notion of the Church as an insular or self-preserving institution preoccupied with ritualism, hierarchical structures, or internal privilege. Instead, he proposes a dynamic image of the Church as a *pilgrim in mission*, a body constantly "on the move," venturing beyond comfort and convention to accompany a suffering world. This movement is not only geographical or institutional but fundamentally spiritual: a call to interior conversion and renewed compassion.

In his inaugural address, Pope Leo XIV emphasizes on compassion, peace, and closeness to those who suffer strongly resonates with the Church's mission to engage with all those on the margins, geographic, cultural, existential, and spiritual. These frontiers are inhabited by individuals who endure isolation, suffering, and a profound longing for meaning and belonging. In continuity with the vision articulated in *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Leo XIV places evangelization at the center of ecclesial life, not as proselytism, but as a ministry of presence, encounter, and accompaniment rooted in the joy of the Gospel.

Only a Church willing to take risks, to leave behind self-centeredness, and to walk with the excluded can truly embody the presence of Christ, the one who came not to be served but to serve, and who emptied himself to dwell among the poor. In this light, the Church is summoned to become a tangible expression and effective instrument of God's mercy in the world.

Cardinal Robert Prevost: Embodied Witness to Mission

The life and ministry of Cardinal Robert Prevost, an Augustinian friar and prominent member of the College of Cardinals, exemplify the missionary ethos articulated by Pope Leo XIV. His personal narrative offers a powerful illustration of ecclesial witness in a globalized yet divided world.

Born into a migrant family in the United States, Cardinal Prevost grew up with a deep awareness of marginalization and vulnerability, experiences that would later shape his pastoral sensibilities. Responding to a missionary vocation, he dedicated decades of his priestly life to serving in Peru, immersing himself in the language, culture, and spiritual life of rural and impoverished communities.

His ministry in Latin America was marked not by distant administration or episodic visits, but by incarnational presence. He lived among the people, adopting their struggles as his own, and bearing witness to the Gospel not merely through words but through a life of solidarity, humility, and compassion. His approach reflects Pope Leo XIV's conviction that authentic missionary outreach cannot be reduced to strategies or programs. Rather, it must emerge from personal conversion and lived compassion.

In Cardinal Prevost, one sees not only pastoral effectiveness but also theological integrity: a commitment to mission that flows from the heart of Christ, crucified and risen.

The Significance of the Name Leo XIV

The selection of the name *Leo XIV* carries rich historical and theological resonance. It evokes the memory of Pope Leo XIII, renowned for his courageous engagement with the social issues of the late 19th century. Most notably, Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* laid the foundation for modern Catholic social teaching, addressing the rights of workers, the responsibilities of capital, and the role of the state in promoting the common good.

By assuming this name, Pope Leo XIV signals a pastoral and theological continuity; i.e., a Church that does not retreat from the complexities of the modern world, but rather steps forward as a prophetic voice for justice, peace, and human dignity. In doing so, he affirms the Church's responsibility to respond to contemporary crises, climate change, economic disparity, mass migration, and spiritual disorientation, not with fear or detachment, but with courage, creativity, and hope.

This choice also echoes Pope Francis' call for a "Church that goes forth," a Church that prioritizes the poor, heals wounds, and builds a culture of encounter. *Leo XIV* is thus not merely a historical reference, but a programmatic statement for a pontificate oriented toward pastoral renewal, social engagement, and Gospel fidelity.

The College of Cardinals: Discernment and Unity

The rapid election of Pope Leo XIV, accomplished within two days, underscores a remarkable unity of purpose among the College of Cardinals. Their swift discernment reflects not only confidence in the new pontiff's leadership but also a collective recognition that the Church must decisively embrace its missionary character.

In selecting a leader who embodies humility, openness, and global awareness, the Cardinals affirm the need for the Church to abandon models of clericalism and triumphalism in favor of evangelical simplicity and servant leadership. The image of the Church that emerges is one of solidarity: a community willing to walk with the poor, to share in the suffering of the world, and to proclaim Christ through presence and mercy.

This ecclesial vision draws inspiration from the Incarnation itself: *“The Word became flesh, dwell, and journey among us”* (John 1:14). In the humility of the Incarnation, Christ entered fully into human history, taking on weakness, pain, and poverty, to redeem and uplift. The Church, in imitation of her Lord, must do likewise.

A Church That Goes Forth

In conclusion, the election of Pope Leo XIV, his choice of papal name, and his first public address collectively articulate a renewed mandate for the Church in the contemporary world. That is, to go forth in mission, to dwell among the wounded, and to witness to the mercy of God in every human situation.

This is not a retreat into nostalgia nor an accommodation to prevailing ideologies. Rather, it is a bold retrieval of the Church’s evangelical identity, one shaped by encounter, sustained by compassion, and oriented toward hope. As salt of the earth and light of the world (Matthew 5:13–16), the Church is called to illuminate the shadows of our time with the truth and love of Christ.

Pope Leo XIV’s pontificate begins with a decisive call: to become again a Church of the poor, for the poor, and with the poor, a missionary Church in the heart of the world.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples



Ross Mackinnon

Past editor of the Australian Journal of Mission Studies

To my shame, I was not aware of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) until a friend mentioned it to me recently and suggested I write something on it for the Journal. What follows is a reflection, not a scholarly analysis.

This Declaration was adopted by the United Nations in 2007. It took two decades to formulate. That seems a long time, but getting over 150 nations to discuss it and come to agreement on such a difficult issue is no mean feat. It had its beginning in a 1982 study by the United Nations Special Rapporteur José Martínez Cobo. His study investigated the problem of discrimination of indigenous peoples, especially oppression, marginalisation and exploitation.

The Declaration begins with some affirmations. These include the equality of all people, the contribution made by indigenous peoples to “the diversity and richness of civilizations and cultures, which constitute the common heritage of humankind,” recognition of past injustices, the urgent need to respect and promote the rights of indigenous peoples, the close connection of indigenous peoples with the environment and the care they have given to its preservation, the right to education, and the right to self-determination.

These affirmations are followed by forty-six Articles which outline in brief the rights which should be accorded to indigenous peoples. It is up to each State to determine how these rights should be recognised.

These rights should be familiar to most Australians as they have been publicly discussed in recent decades and have been the subject of national inquiries such as the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the Australian Human Rights Commission Report on the Stolen Generations. More recently, we had a Referendum on giving our First Nations Peoples an advisory Voice in Parliament. Sadly, the nation rejected this proposal. The rights outlined in the Articles cover three main areas – identity, freedoms, and the land. Indigenous peoples are entitled to have their own identity, culture, languages, art, stories and spirituality. They are encouraged to pass on their cultural beliefs and practices to the next generations. They have the right to self-determination, self-government and autonomy. Regarding freedoms, they have the right to be safe - no genocide, no forced assimilation and no destruction of culture, no forcible removal from traditional lands and no exploitative child labour, and they have the right to redress for past injustices. They have the right to participate in decision making in matters pertaining to them. As for the land, they have the right to occupy their lands, and there is to be no storage of hazardous materials or military activities on native land without permission.

The Declaration urges States to respect the cultures of indigenous peoples and to do all they can to support the rights outlined in the Declaration. “States, in consultation and cooperation with indigenous peoples, shall take the appropriate measures, including legislative measures to achieve the ends of this Declaration” (Article 38). It is important to note that the Declaration is not legally binding.

When the Declaration was put to the vote in the United Nations Assembly in 2007, the voting results were:

For – 144

Against – 4 (Australia, New Zealand, Canada, United States of America)

Abstentions – 11.

The four countries which opposed the Declaration later supported it. Australia did this in 2009. Australia’s initial opposition hinged on the Declaration appearing to advocate different rights for indigenous peoples based on race, self-determination for indigenous peoples which could place native law above national law and giving control of national resources on traditional lands to indigenous peoples.

What has Australia done since 2009? Symbolically, there has been considerable action. Meetings around the nation often begin with recognition of the original custodians of the land (worship services in my own church always begin with this recognition), welcome to country ceremonies are often a part of special events, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags are found flying together with the Australian flag, especially on public buildings. Australians are becoming more respectful of sacred sites and there are loud outcries when mining interests damage sacred sites, and the tourist industry is making tourists aware of Aboriginal culture and their unique connection to the land. Some locations are returning to their original Aboriginal names, and some media outlets, especially the ABC and SBS include the Aboriginal name of the area they are reporting from when they make their reports. Historians such as Bill Gammage (*The Biggest Estate on Earth*) and Henry Reynolds (*Forgotten War*) are teaching us the dark side of our history – the destruction of aboriginal culture (regrettably many Christian missionaries were party to this), the acquisition of land, the ruthless despoiling of the environment, the horrific massacres in the 19th Century – the list goes on. More positively, it is heartening to see the growing number of indigenous leaders speaking out and taking their place in our governments and universities. Indigenous novelists such as Alexis Wright and Tony Birch are also making us aware of aboriginal culture and history.

But, as to the UN Declaration itself, what have our governments been doing? To date, nothing much. In 2022, the Senate established an Inquiry into the application of UNDRIP in Australia. Two bodies which made submissions to this Inquiry are the Law Council of Australia and Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR). The Law Council’s view is that Australia must formally adopt the UN Declaration of Rights of Indigenous People. It notes that “to date the protections offered by the Declaration have only been implemented domestically in a piecemeal manner.” A post on the Law Council’s website on 27 July 2022 continues:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been subject to colonisation, dispossession, discrimination, marginalisation, and significant breaches of human rights across multiple areas, historically and in contemporary Australia, not least in the protection of cultural heritage and land rights and in the treatment of persons in

contact with the criminal justice and child protection systems. The practices and impacts of colonisation continue in the present day.

The Law Council considers the UNDRIP as foundational to addressing this state of affairs....Given the systemic nature of the issues facing First Nations peoples, comprehensive legal and policy reform across all federal, state and territory jurisdictions is required. Without this, breaches of human rights in Australia will continue to occur.

The ANTaR website tells us that ANTaR is a national advocacy organisation dedicated to achieving rights, justice and respect for the First Nations Peoples of Australia. ANTaR has been working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, organisations, and communities since 1997. It is a non-government, not-for-profit, independently funded and community-based organisation.

In a post on its website on 20 July 2024, like the Law Council, ANTaR points out that Australia has not made any moves to incorporate or implement UNDRIP into domestic law, and it is time for this to happen. Professor Megan Davis comments:

Although Australia's support for the Declaration does not create new rights, it provides a comprehensive framework for action to influence laws, policies and program reforms in line with its commitment to upholding and respecting the individual and collective rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Both the Law Council and ANTaR are still waiting for action.

The issues raised in the United Nations Declaration are complex, and the Declaration will have different implications for different countries, but ignoring the Declaration is not an appropriate stance. Each of the forty-six rights outlined in the Declaration needs to be addressed and action taken. I am sure that we have people clever enough in this country to do this.

In May 2000, thousands of Australians all over the country took part in the first Reconciliation Walk. I took part in the Melbourne Walk. It was a day of great joy and love. That was twenty-five years ago. Can we recapture that joy and love somehow and use that energy to make progress in giving our indigenous peoples their rights?

**Letters From Kiribati:
Correspondence by the
Daughters of Our Lady of
the Sacred Heart**



**Congregation of Catholic mission Sisters to the
mother house in Issoudun, France and Thuin,
Belgium, 1895-1944**

By Ursula Nixon and Judith A. Bennett

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Reviewed by Ross Mackinnon

Past editor of Australian Journal of Mission Studies.

This book comprises 144 letters sent by French missionary nuns stationed in the Gilbert Islands (now Kiribati) from 1895 to 1944. The nuns are OLSH sisters (Our Lady of the Sacred Heart), and the letters are to their mother house in France (and later Belgium). In 1895, six OLSH sisters arrived in the Gilbert Islands after a long journey from France, via Sydney and Fiji. Some priests and brothers from the male Sacred Heart Order had preceded them. They had asked for sisters to come to work especially with women and children. Protestant missionaries had settled in the Gilbert Islands some time before and were not happy when the Catholic missionaries arrived. Relationships between the Catholics and Protestants were often hostile.

For the original sisters, the experience was totally new. They had to adapt to local customs, a new language, a vastly different climate (equatorial), new food (coconut, pandanus fruit, breadfruit) and strong winds which could, and did, flatten buildings. Houses were simple structures made with light timber, thatched roofs and held together with home-made string. Travel was by foot or boat, but a simple boat or canoe trip could be dangerous because of capricious tides, winds and currents. Contact with the outside world was minimal. Trading ships called in three or four times a year to deliver letters and supplies from Sydney and France and to collect outgoing mail. The sisters also had to cope with diseases such as leprosy, tuberculosis, dengue fever and ugly ulcers. One thing the sisters learnt immediately was that if you wanted a peaceful sleep, a mosquito net was obligatory. Intriguingly, the Gilbert Islands were a British Protectorate and relationships with the administrators and the Catholics were not always cordial. All of these changes were daunting, but the sisters coped with them with common sense and good humour.

The sisters quickly learnt the local language, established schools for girls, and taught reading, arithmetic, music, needlework, cooking, craftwork and, most importantly, the Catholic catechism. The children responded warmly to the sisters. The Gilbertese loved music and entertainment, and the sisters wrote songs and hymns for the Gilbertese in their own language. Saints' days and special celebrations were popular as these required decorating the churches, staging wonderful outdoor processions and having a feast. The children were also taught basic prayers – Ave Maria, Our Father, and the rosary. The islanders loved the rosary beads and religious medallions of the Virgin Mary and other saints such as Benedict and Joseph. The Protestants could not compete with these strategies.

As well as teaching, the sisters provided medical care to anyone who needed it – men, women, children, Catholics and Protestants. They were also kept busy assisting the priests by preparing churches for Mass and setting up the sacristy for all services.

The letters show that the sisters were dedicated, intrepid, patient, good-humoured, resourceful, and people of deep faith. They were there for the long haul. For them, the Catholic faith was the one, true faith. Their job was to save souls – they were not there to represent their country. If you wanted to go to heaven, you needed to be baptised and become a Catholic. They believed deeply that God would provide (“Man proposes, and God disposes” is a constant refrain in their letters), and that the Virgin Mary would protect them. If things went wrong, then that was a test. If things went well, then the Virgin Mary’s intercessions had been fruitful. It was important that Catholics should die a good death by making a final confession and receiving the last rites, and this is illustrated by the detailed descriptions of the deaths of priests, brothers and sisters.

The book covers fifty years of endeavour by the French sisters and concludes with the trying time they had when the Japanese occupied the islands during World War II.

This book is fascinating, revealing and astonishing. The personalities of the different letter-writers show up in the letters which become chattier as time progresses. The book reveals a captivating part of mission history from the inside out.

Regarding the women who put this book together, Ursula Nixon, an Australian scholar, translated the letters in this book from the original French into English.

Judith Bennett is a New Zealand scholar with a special interest in Pacific affairs. Her Introduction to the book gives a brief history of the relationship between Church and State in France from the Revolution onwards, and she provides a very helpful summary of the life, customs, politics and economy of the Gilbert Islands at the time the sisters first went there. Throughout the book, she gives notes explaining matters specific to life in the islands and matters relating to Catholic beliefs, customs, celebrations and rituals. The Introduction sets the context for the sisters’ letters.

The book contains some photos, illustrations and maps. There is neither index nor bibliography, but the books cited in the Introduction can serve as a bibliography.

The Once and Future Bible: An Introduction to the Bible for Religious Progressives



By Gregory C Jenks

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Reviewed by Ross Mackinnon

Past editor of the Australian Journal of Mission Studies

Gregory Jenks is an Australian Anglican priest, a scholar, and a member of the Jesus Seminar.

This book is a compact handbook for reading and interpreting the Bible based on recent scholarship.

The author stresses there is no such thing as one Bible. There are countless variations in the ancient texts, and there are many variations in the classifications of the biblical books, their arrangement, and the hundreds of translations available. Further, we are constantly discovering ancient texts such as the Dead Sea Scrolls which can add to our understanding of the Bible. Archaeological finds, such as the current diggings at Bethsaida, also expand our knowledge of the background to the Bible.

Jenks explores the many ways in which the Bible can be used – apologetic, devotional, doctrinal, liturgical and historical. He also deals with the dark side of the Bible – racism, slavery, gender and sexuality. He discusses barriers to reading the Bible. For example, time and place – we are thousands of years away from Biblical times and cultures. Our languages are different from the original Hebrew and Greek texts, and we tend to impose our own beliefs on the Bible when we read it. Jenks urges us to keep an open mind when reading the Bible.

We are introduced to the various critical methods which have been used in reading and interpreting the Bible. They include textual, source, form, redaction, literary, narrative, rhetorical and canonical methodologies. And we are introduced to modern interpretive ways of reading the Bible, particularly arising from questions we ask. These include, feminist hermeneutics, and post-colonial, liberation and eco-theology interpretations.

Having given the reader this background, Jenks gives succinct critiques of all the books in the Bible (including the books in the Apocrypha) one by one, starting with Genesis and concluding with Revelation. His critiques include the context, content (the main themes) and purpose of each book.

Jenks provides us with historical timelines which give the context for each book. From time to time, he gives us cameos on which to reflect. These include choosing a Bible (Jenks' preferred translation is the New Jerusalem Bible), Lady Wisdom, second temple Judaism, the Jesus Seminar, Paul and Jesus, and the Antichrist.

In his final chapter, Jenks deals with a crucial current issue – does the Bible have a future? Is the Bible relevant today? If so, how? He concludes that the Bible is still important, especially if we hear it telling us to become inclusive communities committed to social justice and the welfare of the world.

This book is well-researched. It is engaging, challenging, and despite its subtitle, it is not just for Progressive Christians. Astonishingly, for a book of 236 pages, it covers enormous territory without being superficial.

The book includes a bibliography, an index and a very helpful glossary.

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