Issue No. 8
2023

ISSN 2205-0442

JCMIN JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY MINISTRY

JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY MINISTRY

CRA
CHRISTIAN RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

Journal of Contemporary Ministry

Table of Contents

About this Journal

Editorial

As I said in Issue 7, we are privileged to be presenting two issues of *Journal of Contemporary Ministry* this year. This Issue 8 retains more of our "standard" structure, including four peer-reviewed articles, a pastoral reflection, a student essay and fifteen stimulating book reviews.

It may prove to be one of our most controversial, or at least stimulating, issues. The articles address such current topics as child abuse, LGBTI and the church, divorce, domestic violence and debates about contemporary worship.

They reflect something of the changing culture that Christians are now operating in. Many of the values and beliefs we "took for granted" are being challenged and even rejected outright by the wider society we live in, at least in the Western world. Hopefully the *Journal of Contemporary Ministry* will help us think through our responses to these changes and challenges. It is also notable that the majority of our contributors are female and nearly all are currently working on doctoral projects, implying that this journal may have given them a starting voice to express their research conclusions. That's something I take pride in as editor.

Let me introduce the contributions in this issue to you.

Rob Hornby opens with a re-examination of the thorny issue of divorce between Christians. Hornby demonstrates the impasse debates on this topic have reached, especially among evangelicals who hold to the Bible as their final authority. He suggests that new insights might emerge by studying not just the teaching of Jesus but also how he acted towards people in troubled situations. This opens up a stimulating exegetical study.

Julie Gardiner undertakes her reflection on the famous "Good Samaritan" parable in the context of her research into discussions between Christians and LGBTI people within the Baptist church in South Australia. She avoids some of the current arguments and dogmatic conclusions, offering instead a pathway towards respectful dialogue based on acceptance of the 'other.'

Nadia Pavich discusses a new form of therapy to help bring healing to those abused as children. She explains and illustrates (including with drawings) a new form of spiritual discipline called “Tractio Divina”, which combines some older spiritual practices and therapy through art in a stimulating way.

I’m always encouraged when I find that people are actually reading the journal and responding to its contents. So I was pleased to include **Sarah Bacaller**’s response to the article in Issue 6 by Clayton Coombs on worship and the mega church. Bacaller finds fault with Coombs’ conclusions but even more with his logic. Her analysis of the philosopher Immanuel Kant is stimulating and informative. We were then pleased to offer **Clayton Coombs** a “right of reply” in his Rejoinder. I’ll leave it to you to decide who had the better case but it’s very gratifying to have such a debate in this journal.

All these articles were subject to “double blind” peer review and went through several revisions prior to publication.

In our standard issues, we always try to include a **Pastoral Reflection** of a less academic, but still serious, nature. **Kevin Muriithi**’s contribution fits this requirement superbly and also gives readers insight into the thinking and changing attitudes of African young people, especially in key areas of sexuality, and suggests ways that youth workers can operate in this environment.

Next we have an outstanding **Student Essay** from **Wendy Hayes**. Wendy provides a fresh perspective on domestic violence and challenges conservative churches to come up with more positive and helpful responses, rather than just repeating tired and one-sided lines on submission and commitment.

We also have some 15 **book reviews** of interesting and challenging new material that will contribute to our thinking about ministry today. Thanks to Stephen Parker for editing this section.

Each of these contributions is worthy of your attention and reflection.

Finally, it is with mixed feelings that I announce **my retirement** as Editor of the *Journal of Contemporary Ministry*. It has been an honour to serve in this way and hopefully to lay a solid foundation for a great future. The journal began life in 2015 as an outlet for students, faculty and friends of Harvest Bible College. It nearly died when Harvest was merged with the larger Alphacrucis University College at the end of 2017. I am grateful

to Professor Philip Hughes and the Christian Research Association for giving it a new lease of life. I am also thankful to all those who have contributed peer-reviewed articles, student essays, pastoral reflections, research notes and book reviews over the last 8 years. The editorial board has been incredible supportive through all this time and I have enjoyed working with a number of great colleagues and volunteers who have made the production of each issue possible. The journal managers, initially Kerrie Stevens and recently Ashley Manly, have done a lot of the hard detail work to produce each issue. Thank you so much.

As I pass the baton to a successor (still to be appointed), let me encourage you to read this journal, tell others about it and hopefully contribute material to future issues. If you have never considered contributing to an academic journal, start with a review of a recent book in the broad field of Christian ministry.

Jon Newton

Peer Reviewed Articles

Journal of Contemporary Ministry

Peer Reviewed Articles

Should Actions Speak Louder Than Words?
Using the Past Deeds and Present Actions of Jesus to Unlock the Evangelical Debate on Divorce

Rob Hornby

Contact: hornbyr@roehampton.ac.uk

BSc and MPhil in *Management & Computer Science* (Aston University, Birmingham, UK), Postgraduate Diploma in *Theology, Ministry & Mission* (Durham University, UK), Professional Doctorate Candidate in *Practical Theology* (Roehampton University, UK)

Rob has a diverse denominational background in Pentecostal and Charismatic churches and is now a *Licensed Lay Minister* in the Church of England. He is part of the *Centre for Practical Philosophy, Theology and Religion* at Roehampton University where he is researching the lived experiences of divorced evangelicals. Rob is a pastoral volunteer on the *Restored Lives* course for people who have experienced relationship breakdown.

Abstract

This article is about evangelical divorce at the intersection of practical theology, ethics, and biblical hermeneutics. It aims to provide pastoral insights on a subject where scholarship has confused rather than informed ministry practice.

The article begins with current interpretations of Jesus' *words* on divorce in the Synoptic Gospels, showing many relevant voices are marginalised, and the dominant ones cannot agree. Despite occasional position changes by prominent scholars, there is no progress towards a normative consensus.

John's Gospel is then examined as a source of Jesus' historical *deeds*. Practical theological readings of two passages highlight his radical compassion and restorative

posture towards women with broken marriage covenants that challenge evangelicals to better imitate Christ towards the divorced.

Jesus' ongoing *actions* after his ascension are explored as a vital aspect of evangelical ethics and practical theology. However, the practicalities of discerning Christ's continuing salvific work amongst the divorced remain elusive.

Finally, a proposal is made to combine the *words*, historical *deeds,* and ongoing *actions* of Jesus into a normative symbiosis wherein each illuminates and moderates the others. Tentative implications for ministry to the divorced are offered after theological reflection on this basis.

Key Words: Normative Symbiosis, Imitation of Christ, Contemporary Actions of Jesus, Practical Theological Readings of Scripture, Evangelical Theology of Divorce.

Introduction

Evangelical theology of divorce has reached a stalemate. There are multiple, irreducible interpretations of the Bible on the subject that all claim to be uniquely true. Notwithstanding occasional new scholarly contributions, there is no sign of further convergence.

If divorce were a subject of merely academic interest, then perhaps this would not matter. However, marriage breakdown is a very real experience for a significant minority of evangelicals who marry. My pastoral work with *Restored Lives* in the UK (RL, 2022) suggests Christians of all kinds are often deeply affected by the theologies of divorce they are exposed to, especially when first considering separation and afterwards as questions linger about their moral position before God and the Church.

This article broadens the normative inputs to the divorce debate beyond Jesus' contested words to open a new dialogue. To do this, I have returned to the Gospels as a record of Jesus' historical deeds and the promise of his ongoing ministry through the Spirit after his ascension. For evangelicals, this should provide firm foundations for a new approach, even if the methods employed, such as practical theological readings of scripture, are not yet mainstream (Cartledge, 2015, pp. 44-46).

Evangelicalism is still best defined by Bebbington's *quadrilateral* as conversionism, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism (Noll, Bebbington & Marsden, 2019, ch. 6).

Considered inclusively and globally, the movement's centre of gravity has shifted from the West towards Africa, Asia, and Latin America in recent decades, fuelled by the rise of pentecostalism[1] (ibid., pp. 10-11). However, as will become evident below, most evangelical scholarship on divorce is yet to follow.

Nonetheless, pentecostalism's growing influence on biblical hermeneutics, with a greater emphasis on the illumination of the Spirit and discernment of the community (Oliverio, 2002), has proved helpful to my proposals, which are most naturally located in this dynamic branch of evangelicalism.

The Hermeneutical Challenge of Jesus' Words on Divorce

The Current Evangelical Debate

Evangelical interpretations of divorce employ scripture as the primary and often sole normative source (Reuschling, 2005). Only a handful of passages are usually referenced, including part of the creation account in Gen. 2:18-25, Old Testament divorce law in Deut. 24:1-4, God's divorce of Israel in Jer. 3, a call to marital faithfulness in Mal. 2:13-16, Jesus' words in response to the Pharisees in the Synoptic Gospels (see below), and the pastoral guidance of Paul in 1 Cor. 7:10-16. Even then, all other texts are usually placed into an interpretive orbit around Jesus' words, making them the absolute epicentre of evangelical ethical formulation on divorce. Yet, this focus has not led to a hermeneutical consensus, with Gushee noting a "staggering array of interpretations" (Gushee and Stassen, 2016, p. 273).

Of the gospel texts themselves, Matt. 19:1-11 is the most comprehensive passage on divorce. After locating Jesus in Judea, it begins in v3 with a question posed by the Pharisees, "*Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?*" [2]. Jesus does not directly answer their question but instead sets the context of marriage in creation by summarising Gen. 1-2, culminating in v6, "*So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate*". The Pharisees then ask in v7, "*Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?*". Jesus answers that this was an accommodation to "*your hardness of heart*" in v8. The so-called *exception clause* follows in v9, "*And I say to you: whoever*

[1] I am using pentecostalism uncapitalised to include the Classical Pentecostal denominations and multifaceted charismatic movement.
[2] All scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery". In v10, the disciples consider this teaching hard and suggest it is better not to marry. Jesus lets his challenging words stand in v11-12, saying, "*Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given*".

The Mark 10:1-12 parallel passage adds the equivalent notion of a woman divorcing her husband in v12, "*and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery*". Also, Matt. 5:31-32 confirms the exception clause but adds in v32, "*whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery*". Luke's contribution is a single verse (16:18), "*Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery*".

Evangelical scholars share a rare consensus that marriage is intended for life, and divorce is a departure from that ideal. Most consider the marriage bond a covenant that can be broken by divorce, but a minority believe it can only be ended by death (Wenham, 2019, pp. 59-67). The exception clause appears to concede adultery as legitimate grounds for divorce, but a few scholars limit it to the betrothal period before marriage (ibid., pp. 49-55). Several scholars consider "any cause" in the Pharisees' question technical language related to the teaching of the Hillel Rabbinical School that marriage could be ended for any trivial reason, arguing Jesus' response should be interpreted in that narrow context (Instone-Brewer, 2002, ch. 6).

There is also debate about what Jesus' audience would have inferred from his words in their cultural and religious setting. Some argue his listeners would take for granted the continuation of the Old Testament principles of divorce in Deut. 24:1-4 (Instone-Brewer, 2002, ch. 6), while others say Jesus' teaching superseded them (Grudem, 2018, pp. 805-806). Many argue the innocent party would have an assumed right to remarry (Heth, 2006, pp. 66-67), but a minority do not (Wenham, 2019, pp. 59-67).

Paul is usually interpreted in light of positions already taken on Jesus' words. Most scholars uphold his exception for abandonment in 1 Cor. 7:10-16, but there are disagreements about the right to remarry (Wenham, 2019, pp. 97-104). Additionally, some consider there are legitimate exceptions not mentioned in scripture, especially for abuse (Keener, 1991, pp. 105-109). Grenz even argues against the very idea of exceptions, considering Jesus opposed all forms of legalism (1990, pp. 128-132).

Implications drawn from these passages regarding the divorce of Christian leaders range from no mandatory sanctions to lifelong disqualification, with the role of repentance highly variable. Wenham calls for the progressive removal of divorcees from evangelical church leadership (2006, pp. 39-41), while Keener argues there is no prohibition on divorced church leaders *per se* unless their conduct in the marriage breakdown warrants it (Keener, 1991, ch. 7). The "overseer" qualification in 1 Tim. 3:2 of being the "husband of one wife" is not usually applied to divorce (ibid.).

To further complicate matters, notable scholars have changed their positions significantly, sometimes more than once. Wenham and Heth, who co-authored *Jesus and Divorce* (1984), originally proposed that divorce is permissible only for adultery and without the possibility of remarriage but have since diverged. Wenham now advocates no grounds for divorce, only separation (2019), whereas Heth has expanded legitimate exceptions, firstly to include abandonment (2006) and, subsequently, abuse (endorsing Roberts, 2008), all with the possibility of remarriage. Similarly, in *Christian Ethics*, Grudem cited two biblical grounds for divorce of adultery and abandonment (2018, ch. 32). However, soon after its publication, he redefined abandonment to include any other morally equivalent reason, acknowledging his motivation was "horrible real-life situations" (2019).

From a pastoral perspective, almost all aspects of a divorce situation are therefore contested: whether and when a divorce might be permissible, what implications for Christian life and leadership will follow and whether, in due time, the possibility of remarriage exists. Even a trusted source cannot always be relied upon, given the scholarly revisions cited above. Exposing evangelicals facing marriage breakdown to theological disputes on almost every aspect of their situation is not just unhelpful, it adds to their suffering.

To gain further insight into this complex and brittle interpretive situation, I propose a simple model (Figure 1) comprising two broad methodological approaches to biblical hermeneutics on divorce (horizontals) and multiple interpretive lenses representing the reflexive locations of the various evangelical scholars (verticals). The vertical lenses intersect the horizontals, and some scholars span more than one. As with all such representations, simplifications are inevitable and deciding where to place the various scholars is based solely on my judgement.

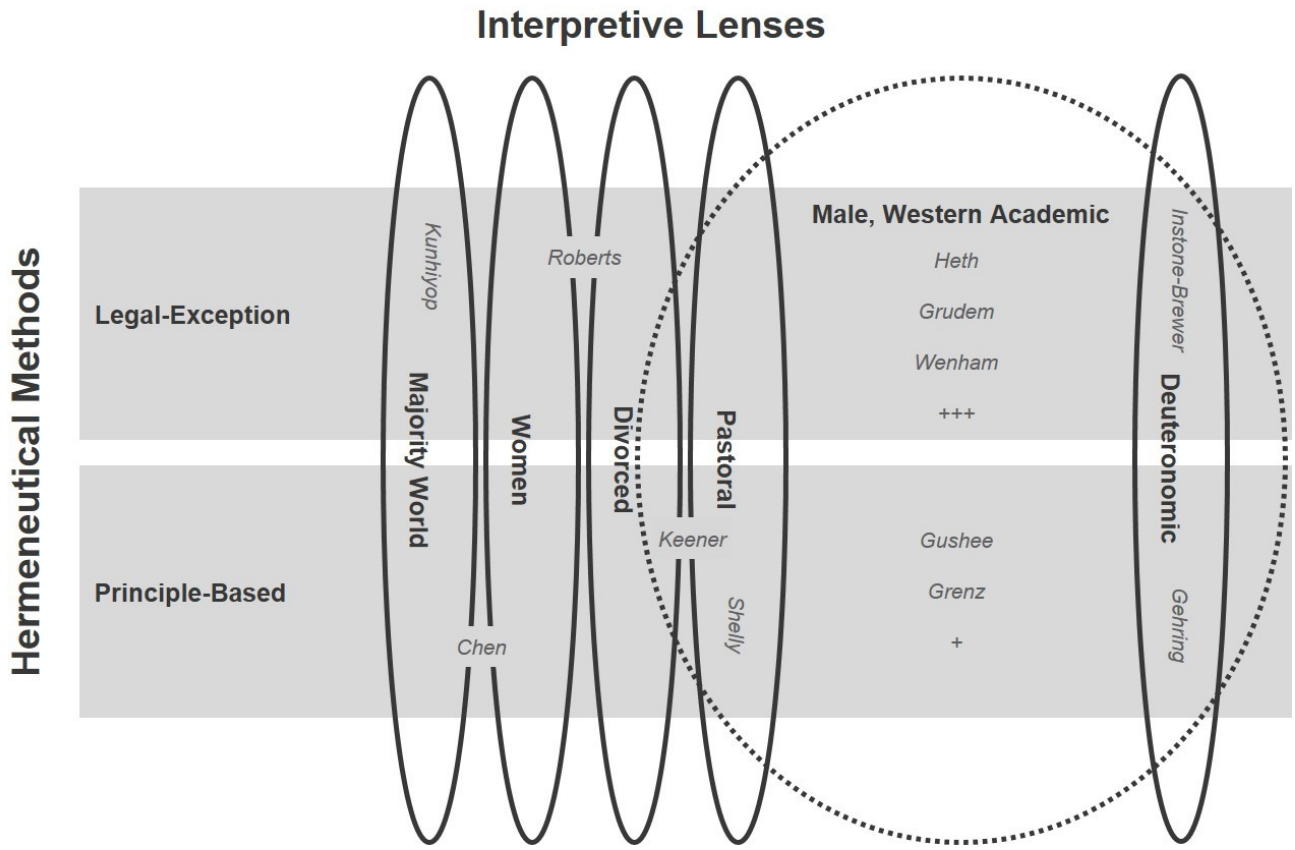

Figure 1: The Landscape of Evangelical Divorce Scholarship

Hermeneutical Methods

The most common horizontal is the legal-exception approach associated with the more conservative wing of evangelicalism, including Wenham, Heth and Grudem. Here, hermeneutical assumptions include the authority, clarity, necessity and sufficiency of the Bible (Grudem, 2018, pp. 85-102). The result is a search for universally binding ethical rules in the texts that transcend their immediate context. This approach has produced the greatest variety of positions on divorce, all sincerely claiming to be the Bible's true teaching.

The alternate principle-based horizontal adopts a narrative reading of scripture to identify ethical principles that contextualise individual commands. On divorce, Jesus' words are considered within a closed historical setting that was not universal or exhaustive. This approach is adopted by scholars such as Grenz (1990), Keener (1991), and Gushee (2016, ch. 14), but there is considerable variation in how far from the specifics of the texts these scholars are prepared to go.

Interpretive Lenses

The various vertical lenses represent a mixture of conscious and unconscious beliefs, judgements, and practices based on individual, cultural, academic, and religious factors. These predispositions may provide a helpful representation of certain groups and can arise from specialist knowledge, but they also risk blind spots and prejudices. As a result, disclosure and reflection are important antidotes to a pretence of interpretive objectivity.

Most scholars allude to the Old Testament and its interpretation by rival Hillel and Shammai Rabbinical Schools, but a small number develop this perspective to such depth it becomes the primary interpretive key to Jesus' words on divorce. This is the *Deuteronomic lens*. Instone-Brewer is a notable example on the legal-exception horizontal (2002), and Gehring is a corresponding instance on the principle-based horizontal (2013).

Evangelical contributions on divorce by *women* are extraordinarily rare, with Roberts on the legal-exception horizontal on domestic abuse (2008) and Chen on the principle-based horizontal with a feminist critique of divorce practice in the Taiwanese church (2003). When female theologians write on divorce, they tend to be distinctive in their treatment of the subject, so their scarcity is lamentable. In that vein, Ndioma contributes a compelling non-academic memoir shedding light on the lived experience of a female divorcee in an African Pentecostal setting (2015).

There are a few contributions by *pastor-theologians*. Shelly, on the principle-based horizontal, uses vignettes from his ministry experience to confound simple ethical formulations by complexifying their context (2007). Keener, also on the principle-based horizontal, declares a pastoral aim and grounds his exegesis in problems facing the church (1991, pp. 1-11). Shelly concludes, "While trying to be correct, we have sometimes been unmerciful. In our sincere efforts to follow the words of God, we may have abandoned the heart of God for his people" (2007, p. 20).

Roberts identifies herself as *divorced* (2008, p. 15), and Keener has co-written a book about his divorce and remarriage with his second wife (Keener & Keener, 2016). However, this is very uncommon amongst evangelical scholars in the field. The lack of theological reflection based on first-hand experience is compounded by a scarcity of

empirical data on the lived experiences of divorced evangelicals - research I am currently undertaking.

Evangelical divorce scholarship in the *majority world* is also rare. Chen has already been referenced from an Asian perspective. Kunhiyop provides a distinctively African ethical treatment, highlighting the primacy of procreation in his context and lamenting the progressive acceptance of Western values leading to what he sees as a form of "serial polygamy" (2008, ch. 18). Ndioma provides further insight about societal expections of women regarding Christian marriage in Africa that differ markedly from the less complementarian context in the West (2015).

Now to the elephant in the room. If the previous lenses are so uncommon, who is currently interpreting Jesus' words on divorce? The usual answer is *male academics in Western institutions who are not divorced*. The scholars selected for this article are deliberately more representative, but the vast majority fall into this category, with Grudem alone citing over thirty in the bibliography of his chapter on divorce (2018, pp. 839-841).[3] This situation is rarely disclosed or discussed reflexively.

Conclusions

This brief survey of evangelical scholarship on the words of Jesus about divorce has shown many relevant voices are marginalised, and the dominant ones cannot agree. The lack of diversity could be addressed by broadening scholarship to include more women, divorced evangelicals, pastor-theologians, and majority-world academics. However, even though this enlargement would represent an important advance, it might actually expand the range of interpretive options rather than converge them towards a consensus.

After over a decade of studying evangelical interpretations of divorce, I have concluded the persistent lack of consensus among credible evangelical scholars, many of whom share the same methodological assumptions, may mean Jesus' words on divorce cannot be *definitively* understood. If true, this implies that all well-attested evangelical exegetical options should be considered legitimate possibilities, something that I realise is antithetical to the evangelical instinct to argue for one correct interpretation.

[3] The two women included in his bibliography are not theologians.

Irrespective of whether the theoretical limit of exegetical clarity on Jesus' teaching on divorce has been reached, there is no immediate way forward without something from outside his recorded words to illuminate and arbitrate between interpretive options.

Imitation of Jesus' Historical Deeds

The life of Jesus has been considered a source of ethical normativity for almost half a Millenium. The idea is usually traced back to *The Imitation of Christ* by à Kempis, first published in 1580 (1952) and was further popularised in Sheldon's *In His Steps* (1899). Sheldon also introduced the term "What Would Jesus Do?", most recently associated with a late-twentieth-century Christian youth movement (Bennema, 2017, p. 13).

In recent decades, there has been a resurgence of interest in imitation or *mimesis* in academic circles. Burridge's *Imitating Jesus* (2007) was the first significant work of this revival, adopting a biographical understanding of the four gospels in which the key to interpreting their ethical content is the person of Jesus. Burridge writes, "The gospels are ancient biographies, not coherent ethical treatises; therefore, they must be interpreted primarily as a portrait of a person through their deeds and words" (Ibid., locn. 914-916).

Burridge acknowledges complex issues in discerning the historical Jesus but argues persuasively that there is enough consensus amongst the various 'quests' to sustain Jesus of Nazareth as the starting point for Christian ethics (2007, locn. 591-637). Burridge further points to an apparent tension between Jesus as a "friend of sinners" and orator of some of the most demanding ethical teaching in history (Ibid., locn. 1143-1163). He never fully resolves this tension, commenting, "Seeking to follow Jesus in becoming both `perfect' and `merciful' as God is perfect and merciful is not an easy balance" (Ibid., locn. 1162).

Nolland finds much to agree with in Burridge's work but is rightly concerned about a lack of clarity on the moral response required of the recipients of Jesus' mercy (2008, pp. 351-353). Hood, representing the Reformed strand of evangelicalism, also worries Burridge and others "downplay or dismiss some orthodox teachings" (2013, p. 183), but he is clear about the biblical basis of imitation, asserting it "permeates all corners of the Bible" (Ibid., p. 209), claiming "Humans were created in the image of God to reflect his character and his actions. They imitate God's perfect image-bearer, Jesus" (Ibid.).

Imitation has been a particularly fruitful ethical key when applied to John's Gospel. Burridge and Bennema highlight the previous majority view of scholars such as Blount, Meeks, and Schrage that Johannine literature lacks explicit moral content (Bennema, 2017, pp. 15-32; Burridge, 2007, locn. 3740-3749). However, after noting a change in scholarly sentiment towards imitation after 2000, not least because of Burridge, Bennema concludes about the Fourth Gospel, "At the heart of the believers' dynamic Spirit-led relationship with the Father and Son we find not a list of do's and don'ts but mimesis as a creative, cognitive, and mnemonic process that directs the believer's conduct and character" (Bennema, 2017, pp. 27-28; 272).

Burridge and Bennema both consider imitation primarily an *intellectual* response to the historical Jesus (Burridge, 2007, locn. 1075-1163; Bennema, 2017, pp. 126-135), albeit assisted by the Spirit (ibid., pp. 249-254). In his related book, *Go and Do Likewise* (2000), Spohn coins the helpful term "analogical imagination" to describe an indirect emulation of Jesus' moral perceptions, dispositions, and identity (Ibid., pp. 50-54). He also offers practical advice on imitation through participation in spiritual disciplines, community, and the eucharist (Ibid., pp. 112-175). However, his practices are generalised and do not help unlock any particular ethical subject like divorce.

It is here that practical theology as the study of *practice* is helpful. Cartledge proposes the idea of a practical theological reading of scripture that is "hermeneutically reflexive", attentive to the "explicit and implicit praxis of communities and individuals", observant of "agency and the relationship between the different agents", "holistic", and in the context of "contemporary questions and issues emerging from lived reality to the text" (2015, pp. 44-46). I have selected two passages in John's Gospel focusing on Jesus' interactions with women who have broken marriage covenants as a way to explore the imitation of Jesus on divorce.

However, before I begin, let me be attentive to Cartledge's first point about reflexivity by locating myself in these readings and broader discussion. On the one hand, I am yet another male academic in a Western institution. However, I am divorced and remarried, with extensive pastoral experience helping those facing marriage breakdowns. As a result, I have grappled with Jesus' words on divorce amidst painful lived experiences.

I remain an evangelical-charismatic, but exclusionary practices, especially around divorce, have caused me to question and sometimes reject aspects of evangelical

belief, practice and subculture. My experiences within the Anglican Communion and diverse research community at the University of Roehampton have been enriching through dialogue with people of very different backgrounds from my own.

In completing these readings, I will not consider the significant textual issues surrounding these passages, instead relying on their final form (Holmes, 2012, locn. 712-719). My purpose is not to provide an exegesis but rather to draw out Jesus' praxis and some initial questions on how it might be imitated. I will do this in a more conversational writing style.

A Woman Caught in Adultery (John 8:1-11)

Jesus is teaching a crowd at the temple early in the morning. Scribes and Pharisees bring a woman caught in the act of adultery to find a way to trick and charge him. The woman's situation is being used to further their religious disputes with Jesus, and the associated 'man' is notably absent (Keener, 2003, pp. 736-737). They tell Jesus that Moses said she should be stoned and ask what does he say? Jesus ignores the question and writes on the ground. We don't know what he wrote, but it isn't considered important enough to be mentioned in the story (despite all the theological ink spilt on the subject since). They keep questioning, and Jesus keeps writing.

Eventually, Jesus suggests someone without sin throw the first stone. Then he resumes writing. The people start drifting away, beginning with the elders, who acknowledge their sinfulness quickly until he is left only with the woman. Jesus asks who is left to condemn her, and she tells him, "no one" (v11). Then the only person without sin who could judge her without hypocrisy says he doesn't either. But Jesus also tells her to leave her life of sin.

The praxis of Jesus in this encounter is resistance to religious moralism, legalism, and hypocrisy. He refuses to condemn the woman in a situation of uncontested ethical failure. Instead, he points to the sin in everyone and rejects a hierarchy of unrighteousness. However, *after* Jesus has restored her future, he tells her she needs to take explicit moral action, demonstrating that a lack of condemnation does not mean moral indifference.

In considering contemporary imitation, this reading challenges evangelical beliefs and practices that categorise divorce differently from other moral failures, sometimes with

permanent sanctions irrespective of fault or repentance. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that some evangelicals also resort to moralism, legalism, and hypocrisy, given the uncompromising stance of many churches on divorce, whilst divorce rates amongst Western evangelicals are indistinguishable from their societal context (Pew Research Centre, 2014).

The Woman at the Well (John 4:1-42)

Jesus is travelling to Galilee via Samaria and sits at a well there in the noonday heat, tired from his journey. The disciples are absent from the story until later, intensifying the focus on Jesus as the primary agent. A Samaritan woman comes to the well to draw water at noon. Many commentators speculate she is avoiding other women, but Cohick argues there is no direct or contextual evidence of this (2009, p. 122). Jesus proactively engages her by asking for a drink, breaking several religious and cultural taboos of the day. Jesus talks to her about spiritual refreshment, and the woman primarily responds about physical water.

Changing the discourse, Jesus asks her to call her husband and return, but she answers she has no husband. Jesus reveals she has had five husbands and is not married to the man she is with now, noting her economy with the truth. In her cultural context, the woman could have experienced any combination of divorce by previous husbands, bereavements, or becoming a second wife or concubine (Cohick, 2009, pp. 122-128). Most commentators assume she is blameworthy for her marital history, but Jesus does not explicitly say so. It seems more likely she has experienced marital rejection, tragedy, or both. The woman acknowledges Jesus as a prophet but quickly asks a theological question about correct worship rather than dwelling on her marital history. Jesus engages seriously with her, culminating in revealing himself as the Messiah.

The disciples return and are “amazed” at what Jesus is doing (v27). The woman leaves and tells the town’s people she has met someone who told her “all that I ever did” (v29), indicating that her marital history has defined her life. He stays two more days, and many in the town believe.

In this passage, the overwhelming feature of Jesus’ praxis is proactive compassion moving beyond obstacles to bring about spiritual transformation. Jesus engages her when physically tired, moving beyond his need for rest. He breaks several taboos by

initiating the encounter, moving beyond religious and cultural acceptability. She doesn't comprehend what Jesus is saying, but he moves beyond his need to be understood and shifts the conversation to the circumstances of her life. She doesn't tell Jesus the whole truth, so he reveals it, moving beyond her reluctance to be fully honest. She changes the subject to a theological matter about which she is wrong, but Jesus moves beyond her doctrine and takes time to engage with her, culminating in a privileged disclosure of his identity. Finally, Jesus moves beyond his need to get to Galilee to spend two days with the people in Samaria, and many believe.

In considering contemporary imitation, the reading provokes questions about whether evangelicals demonstrate similar proactive compassion towards people traumatised, abused, or rejected in their marital history. It is easy to assume guilt on the part of those who are predominantly victims, in the way many commentators on this passage may have done (e.g. Osborne, 2018). Also, Jesus takes her seriously not only as a person in need but as someone with legitimate theological questions. Evangelicals can also imitate Jesus by affording everyone who seeks answers the same dignity of engagement, regardless of their starting point and circumstances.

Whatever theological clarifications need to be applied to Burridge's work, the pastoral priority of Jesus he advocates is palpable in these practical theological readings (2007, locn. 1478-1593). Evangelicals need to avoid winning technical arguments while missing this point. In that vein, it is humbling to reflect on whether evangelicals are actually most often imitating Jesus in these stories, or instead either the amazed disciples, unable to comprehend the lengths of Jesus' compassion; or worse, the religious people caught in disputes about the law and a source of moralism, legalism, and hypocrisy.

In conclusion, imitation has been shown to be a plausible biblical source of ethical normativity. Starting with the person of Jesus in the gospels provides a rich, embodied perspective on his moral deeds in contrast to the abstracted treatment of his words. Practical-theological readings in John yield significant insights into Jesus' ethical behaviour towards those with broken marriage covenants, behaviour that challenge prevailing evangelical attitudes and practices towards the divorced. However, the scarcity of relevant examples and their lack of context and completeness, compounded by limited insight into Jesus' moral reasoning, precludes a full theological

extrapolation on the subject. Imitating Jesus' historical actions challenges, but cannot universally underpin, an evangelical theology of divorce.

Discerning Jesus' Contemporary Ministry

There are moments amidst the tortuous debates about Jesus' words on divorce and efforts to understand what imitating his historical actions might mean in a given marital situation when it would be much simpler if Jesus were still present to guide and transform. Claims that this is precisely the case are made by both moral and practical theologians.

Eschatologically, there is a very real sense in which Jesus is currently both absent and present. After his ascension, he returned to his Father's right hand (Mark 16:19), where he intercedes for us (Rom. 8:34) in anticipation of his return (Acts 1:11). In this sense, he is absent. However, Jesus also said, "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). This dichotomy is best resolved by considering the Holy Spirit, sometimes referred to as the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9; 1 Pet. 1:11; Gal. 4:6), continuing the ministry of Jesus in ways that make him spiritually present to and through the body of Christ. Macchia writes, "The Christ of Pentecost is present in and among us, expansively so, through the […] body incorporated into him through baptism in the Holy Spirit" (2018, p. 349).

As well as Jesus' presence in and through his collective body, he also remains present to each individual believer. Holmes considers union with the living Christ fundamental to the Christian life, claiming, "We through Christ and in the Spirit become capable of God, not simply in terms of imitation of God but also in terms of participation" (2021, p. 107). For Holmes, *participation* opens us to divine action as a basis for evangelical ethics (Ibid.).

Holmes' distinction between *imitation* and *participation* is not found consistently in the literature. The terms can be used interchangeably, sometimes in opposition, and occasionally presented with one a subform of the other. For this article, I will impose definitions to maintain the clarity of my argument, with *imitation* meaning the cognitive response to Jesus' historical deeds and *participation* defined as the ongoing transformational union of the believer with the living Christ.

Aligned with these definitions, Root argues for the *concursus dei*, the free but unequal mutual participation between God and humans, as a form of hypostatic personalism (2014, p. 169). Like Holmes, he calls us to move "from *imitatio Christi* to *participatio* Christi" so that "divine action is freed from an inert tradition of interpretation or practice and can become a living personal reality" (Ibid., p. 80). Luhrmann has shown just how tangible this experience of divine presence can be, describing it as "hyperreal" in the lives of American evangelicals (2012, p. 301).

In light of the reality of the present Christ, Holmes asserts scripture cannot be "applied" to contemporary ethical situations because ethics is "a function of Christ's 'continually operative' reconciling and revealing intervention" (Ibid., locn. 86). For Holmes, "Christ is present in the Spirit as One who indefatigably continues to do what the biblical narrative says he did" (Ibid., locn. 3343). In other words, we do not need to apply Jesus' historical words and deeds to contemporary situations because Christ is already present in them to do a new thing.

Continuing this theme into practical theology, Root writes lucidly and movingly about the loss of a childhood friend and the effects on the child's mother and himself (2014, ch. 1). In both cases, he recounts a dynamic and decisive encounter with God that met their deep need. Root argues this sense of divine encounter is characteristic of Jesus' ongoing ministry (ibid., pp. 89-93). He builds on Anderson, his mentor at Fuller Seminary, who asserts, "Jesus still does stuff" (Ibid., p. 92).

However, there is a risk that both Holmes and Root depict the living Christ as a compelling alternative basis for Christian ethics and practical theology, respectively, but without ever articulating *how*. For example, Holmes asserts, "His presence is perspicuous and luminous, and it is his clarity that overflows onto us" (Ibid., locn. 150), but without explaining the way this "clarity" is received. Similarly, Root argues the meeting point of divine and human action is *ministry* (2014, pp. 93-98) but offers no pointers toward developing an associated pastoral praxis.

The applicability of the revelatory gifts of the Spirit in discerning the will of the living Christ will be evident to pentecostals. Parker offers a practical theology of discernment derived from studying a Pentecostal congregation making decisions in the context of their dynamic relationship with God (2015). He found a mixture of functional-rational and "Spirit-led" decision-making but with some difficulties amongst participants in discerning the source of their subjective experiences. Parker proposes a model for

discernment that embraces the intuitive-affective; shares these experiences within the community; adds multiple perspectives from tradition, theology, and psychology; and completes a conscious evaluation of all these inputs. Parker's reliance on Tillich may be problematic for some evangelicals, but the empirical data is illuminating, and the balancing of rationality, spiritual experience, and community in his proposed model is instructive.

In conclusion, rigorous practical insights into the discernment of Jesus' contemporary ministry remain elusive, even within the pentecostal tradition. However, Holmes and Root imply that in any situation of Christian marriage breakdown, Jesus is present and active. As a result, pastoral practice is part of *his* restorative mission, not the other way around. Further work is required to develop a deeper ministry praxis of ethical discernment in the light of these profound normative claims.

Combining Jesus' *Words*, Historical *Deeds* and Contemporary *Actions*

The *canonical narrative* theological reflection method proposed by Graham, Walton and Ward assumes the *words* and *deeds* of Jesus in The Gospels are "the key to interpreting not only the rest of scripture but also the unfolding events of human history" (2005, ch. 3). They further suggest, "The theological task is to discern how contemporary experience can be interpreted through the story […] about Jesus and to identify forms of practice that are coherent with this narrative" (Ibid., locn. 1786-1789).

Combining Jesus' words, historical deeds, and contemporary actions in theological reflection is justifiable because they share a common Christological and pneumatological foundation. The same Jesus who spoke and acted in The Gospels is now present as the living Christ (Heb. 13:8). Equally, the same Spirit who inspired the scriptures and empowered the earthly ministry of Jesus makes the resurrected Christ continuously present to us.

However, despite common ontological roots, the three Christological sources of ethical normativity require various tasks to reveal their relevance to contemporary situations. Jesus' recorded *words* and *deeds* require different forms of hermeneutics to exegete his teaching and reflect on his *praxis*. Invoking his contemporary *actions* demands

discernment in the Spirit. However, the forms of normativity revealed by these tasks are not in opposition and do not require dialectical analysis. Instead, they should be seen as illuminating, confirming, and clarifying one another in a dynamic more accurately expressed as a *symbiosis*.

In nature, a trio of living organisms can interact similarly for mutual benefit. For example, researchers have documented the relationship between a panic grass situated in very hot soil, a fungus found growing on it, and a virus that infects the fungus (Márquez et al., 2007, pp. 513-515). The grass can withstand arid conditions and thrive when all three organisms are present. However, the other two organisms die if the fungus is 'cured' of the virus. Similarly, the grass cannot grow without the fungus, but there is no fungus without the grass. This is a dynamic where each organism benefits from the other two in a way that strengthens the collective – a phenomenon known as *three-way symbiosis*.

A similar *three-way normative symbiosis* can be achieved by placing each Christological ethical source into dialogue with the others on a given subject. The words of Jesus in the gospels are illuminated by his recorded deeds, while his contemporary actions create restorative possibilities in new contexts. Such a symbiotic dialogue is never complete, but I draw some tentative conclusions from my early reflective iterations.

Tentative Conclusions for Ministry Practice

Jesus' words on the lifelong ideal of marriage and rejection of casual divorce are uncontested amongst evangelical scholars and unmodified by Jesus' historical deeds. They remain guiding principles in all ministry situations of marriage breakdown, meaning all divorce involves a departure from God's ideal. Consequently, Gushee is right to call for a radical reorientation of the Church towards supporting unions and facilitating reconciliation rather than debating divorce exceptions (2014, p. 286).

Evangelical preoccupation with moral divorce abstractions derived from Jesus' words contrasts with his empathetic encounters with real women in the practical theological readings in John. While Jesus did confront sin, he also brought hope and opposed condemnation. In imitating Jesus, evangelicals should seek out the divorced to offer hope and acceptance in the first instance, with ethical engagement as a natural progression.

The practical-theological readings also show the historical Jesus engaging, protecting and restoring women (Gench, 2004, pp. 109-159). Therefore, interpretations of Jesus' words that risk harm to women, such as encouraging them back into dangerous and abusive marriage situations, are inconsistent with Christ's demonstrated deeds.

Given Jesus' refusal to condemn or rank sinners in those same readings, interpretations of Jesus' words that call for exceptional sanctions for the divorced, such as lifelong disqualification from leadership regardless of circumstances or repentance, are inconsistent with his historical deeds. Similarly, this argument can be extended to the possibility of remarriage for all parties after appropriate repentance.

The particularity of the circumstances found in John's Gospel related to broken marriages, and Jesus' counterintuitive actions of mercy towards those involved suggest simplistic legal-ethical formulations were not the basis for his historical practice. This observation points ministry practitioners supporting the divorced toward principle-based hermeneutical approaches, the 'equivalence' argument of Grudem (2019) or the continuing Old Testament principles espoused by Instone-Brewer (2002, ch. 11).

Furthermore, the ongoing ministry of Jesus reminds us God is present in all the complexity of modern-day divorce situations to guide those in professional practice and restore people broken by marriage failure. Pastoral practitioners should recognise themselves as agents in a restorative process initiated by God and actively seek to discern his insights through prayer and the gifts of the Spirit. The canon of scripture is closed, but the narrative of Jesus' salvific actions in the lives of believers is ongoing, including amongst the divorced.

No doubt there will be strong reactions to some of these proposals. My purpose is partly to reframe the current debate in a broader normative scope and stimulate new thinking, so this is to be welcomed. However, my main priority remains ministry praxis, and I hope these initial findings provide some beneficial insights for pastoral practice. I contend that by reuniting Jesus' words, historical deeds, and contemporary actions, ministry to the divorced can be more informed, compassionate, Spirit-led, and, ultimately, more biblical.

References

Bennema, C. (2017). *Mimesis in the Johannine Literature*. London, UK: Bloomsbury.

Burridge, R.A. (2007). *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics*. Kindle Edition. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans.

Cartledge, M.J. (2015). *The Mediation of the Spirit: Interventions in Practical Theology*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans.

Chen, H. (2003). On Divorce: A Feminist Christian Perspective, *Feminist Theology*, 11(2), 244-251.

Cohick, L.H. (2009). *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians: Illuminating Ancient Ways of Life*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic.

Gehring, R. (2013). *The Biblical "One Flesh" Theology of Marriage as Constituted in Genesis 2:24*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock.

Gench, F.T. (2004). *Back to the Well: Women's Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels*. London, UK: Westminster John Knox Press.

Graham, E., Walton, H., & Ward, F. (2005). *Theological Reflections: Methods*. London, UK: SCM Press.

Grenz, S.J. (1990). *Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press.

Grudem, W. (2018). *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway.

-- (2019). *Grounds for Divorce: Why I Now Believe There Are More Than Two*. Retrieved from: www.waynegrudem.com/grounds-for-divorce-why-i-now-believe-there-are-more-than-two.

Gushee, D.P. & Stassen, G.H. (2016). *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Second Edition. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans.

Heth, W.A. (2006). Remarriage for Adultery or Desertion. In Strauss, M.J., (ed.), *Remarriage after Divorce in Today's Church: 3 Views*. (pp. 57-82). Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan.

Heth, W.A & Wenham, G.J. (1984). *Jesus and Divorce: Towards an Evangelical Understanding of New Testament Teaching*. London, UK: Hodder & Stoughton.

Holmes, C.R.J. (2012). *Ethics in the Presence of Christ*. Kindle Edition. London, UK: Bloomsbury.

-- (2021). *A Theology of the Christian Life: Imitating and Participating in God*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic.

Hood, J. (2013). *Imitating God in Christ: Recapturing a Biblical Pattern*. Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic.

Instone-Brewer, D. (2002). *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context*. Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans.

Keener, C.S. (1991). *...And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New Testament*. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson.

-- (2003). *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic.

Keener, C.S. & Keener, M.M. (2016). *Impossible Love: The True Story of an African Civil War, Miracles and Hope against All Odds*. Bloomington, Minnesota: Chosen Books.

à Kempis, T. (1952). *The Imitation of Christ*. Trans. by Sherley-Price, L. .London, UK: Penguin.

Kunhiyop, S.W. (2008). *African Christian Ethics*. Bukuru, Nigeria: HippoBooks.

Luhrmann, T.M. (2012). *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Macchia, F.D. (2018). *Jesus The Spirit Baptiser: Christology in Light of Pentecost*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans.

Ndioma, N. (2015). *Strange Women and Other Strangleholds: An African, Christian Memoir of Marriage, Divorce, and Survival*. Ellicott City, Maryland: StorySheWrote Media.

Noll, M.A., Bebbington, D.W. and Marsden, G.M. (2019). *Evangelicals: Who They Have Been, Are Now, and Could Be*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans

Nolland, J. (2008). Review of Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics by Richard Burridge, *Evangelical Quarterly*, 80(4), 351-353.

Oliverio, W. (2022). *Pentecostal Hermeneutics in the Late Modern World: Essays on the Condition of Our Interpretation*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock.

Osborne, G.R. (2018). *John: Verse by Verse*, Bellingham, Massachusetts: Lexham Press.

Parker, S.E. (2015). *Led by the Spirit: Toward a Practical Theology of Pentecostal Discernment and Decision Making*. Cleveland, Tennessee: CPT Press.

Pew Research Center (2014). *Religious Landscape Study*. Washington. Retrieved from: www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/.

Restored Lives, (2022), *About Us*. London, UK. Retrieved from: https://www.restoredlives.org/about-us.

Reuschling, W.C. (2005). “Trust and Obey”: The Danger of Obedience as Duty in Evangelical Ethics, *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 25(2), 59–77.

Roberts, B. (2008). *Not Under Bondage: Biblical Divorce for Abuse, Adultery and Desertion*. Ballarat, Australia: Maschil Press.

Root, A. (2014). *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press.

Sheldon, C.M. (1899). *In His Steps: "What Would Jesus Do?"*. Chicago, Illinois: Advance.

Shelly, R. (2007). *Divorce & Remarriage: A Redemptive Theology*. Abilene, Texas: Leafwood Publisher.

Spohn, W. (2000). *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics*. London, UK: Continuum International.

Wenham, G.J. (2006). No Remmariage After Divorce. In Strauss, M.J., (ed.), *Remarriage after Divorce in Today's Church: 3 Views*. (pp. 41-56). Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan.

-- (2019). *Jesus, Divorce & Remarriage: In Their Historical Setting*. Bellingham, Washington: Lexam Press.

Journal of Contemporary Ministry

Peer Reviewed Articles

A Theological Reflection on the Parable of Samaritan Luke 10:25-37

Julie Gardiner

7 Parken Court, Noarlunga Downs. SA 5168
julie@gardiners.me

Julie Gardiner is an accredited Baptist Pastor within Baptist Churches of South Australia (BCSA). She is a senior leader at Christies Beach Baptist Church, where she exercises her passion for social justice through local community projects. She is currently studying for her PhD thesis and is exploring the current conversation between LGBTQ individuals and their advocates and individuals in the member churches of BCSA. Julie completed a Master of Ministry at Tabor College Adelaide. She is married to Daniel, also an accredited Baptist pastor. They have twin adult sons and one granddaughter.

Abstract

This paper is a theological reflection on the Parable of the Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). It resulted from PhD research into the conversation and relational dynamics between LGBTQ persons and their advocates and individuals who are members of churches belonging to Baptist Churches of South Australia (BCSA). The paper weaves the issues, experiences, and expectations from the participants' narratives with a theological reflection on Luke's approach to 'other'. It concludes with the lessons gleaned from the parable of the Samaritan, along with some practical applications.

A Theological Reflection on the Parable of Samaritan Luke 10:25-37 (NIV)

The Parable of the Samaritan

25 On one occasion, an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus.
"Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"
26 "What is written in the Law?" he replied, "How do you read it?"
27 He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and
with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind';

> and ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’” [28] “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied, “Do this, and you will live.” [29] But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?” [30] In reply, Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. [31] A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. [32] So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. [33] But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. [34] He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. [35] The next day, he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ [36] “Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” [37] The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.” (NIV)

The following paper is a theological reflection on the parable of the Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37 NIV) that came from PhD research I am currently conducting through Adelaide College of Divinity and Flinders University. This study has full ethics approval and participant authorisation. I am an accredited Baptist Pastor in South Australia, and I am studying how to facilitate dialogue between member churches and congregational members of Baptist Churches in South Australia (BCSA) and LGBTQ persons and their advocates. There were 55 participants in the research project, from a range of different roles and identities, but all South Australian and all have personal interaction with Baptists in SA.

Using the methodology ‘grounded theory’, I analysed the interviews from the participants to understand the main subjects that people were dialoguing about in the conversation between the different positions towards LGBTQ and faith (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007). The research was born from necessity. In my pastoral work, I often

find myself standing between those in the church who affirm LGBTQ theology and praxis and those who come from a non-affirming perspective.

Luke-Acts is the story of the influence of diversity on the formation of the Early Church as cultures and worldviews wrestled with issues of faith and praxis. Comparisons between the Gospel of Luke and the other Gospels reveal Luke's priority to include 'other'—those overlooked, marginalised, and excluded by the majority in 1st-century society—into the story of Jesus' inauguration of the coming Kingdom (Green, 1995). Luke narrates everyday stories and parables as examples of how to action his theological perspective on inclusion. Luke's ability to couple his theology with praxis is an exemplar of how to conduct conversations in places of difference (Green, 1997, p. 426; Nadella, 2011, p. 115-16). Consequently, theological reflection on Luke-Acts provides a practical exercise in recognising the pitfalls in a dialogue between non-affirming and affirming perspectives on LGBTQ.

The parable of the Samaritan challenges the negative perception of 'others.' It appears in chapter 10 of Luke's Gospel; however, the background to the story starts in the previous chapter, which depicts the depth of hostilities between Jews and Samaritans. In Luke 9:51-55, Jesus sends messengers ahead of him to a Samaritan village. The village refuses Jesus' entry; an insult in a society where hospitality to a stranger is paramount in faith and cultural expectations (Koenig, 1985, p. 15-20; Chalmers 2020). Jesus' Jewish followers retaliate with a request for God's judgement to destroy the entire village with 'fire from heaven'. The speed of the escalation in the rhetoric is indicative of the enmity between the groups; a humiliating snub is met with a threat of violence against men, women, and children. However, Jesus' response is counter-cultural, and he rebukes his Jewish disciples, not the Samaritans who reject him (Dyck, 2013, p. 126-127). The moral of the story is seen in the disciples' ease in presuming to know God's perspective on the issue and their expectation that God's retribution would follow their judgement. It is easy to see the faults in the disciples; less easy to see those same faults mirrored in ourselves. In today's context, the language of 'fire from heaven' is heard in the rhetoric against LGBTQ lifestyles and the cultural war played out in the public discourse (Hollier, 2022; Marin, 2011). It is a Selah moment to consider whom Jesus would rebuke today.[4] From this familiar story of enmity between Jews and Samaritans, Luke moves his audience into an unfamiliar

[4] Selah is a Hebrew word that means pause and consider what was just said.

place where Jesus uses the Samaritan as the story's hero. In an unlikely plot twist, those who reject Jesus suddenly become the exemplar.

The first audience to hear the parable of the Samaritan lived in a religiously, socially, and ethnically diverse world which mirrors our 21st-century context, enabling a correlation between the two eras (Rhoads, 1996; Nadella, 2011, p.125). Luke-Acts acknowledges the reality of ‘other’ in a diverse world and the challenges that come when the different worldviews connect. In the interviews I conducted for my research project, participants also mentioned the challenges created by diversity, frequently referring to ‘us and them’ to explain cultural, social, and religious boundaries that surrounded their experiences of faith and church in a Baptist context. Some acknowledged the segregating language of ‘us and them’ but struggled to find alternative ways to express themselves. However, Luke uses ‘other’ (in Luke 10, it is the Samaritan) to challenge our picture of ourselves and those excluded by cultural, social, and religious boundaries.

In this positive account of Luke’s portrayal of ‘other’, it is important not to ignore Luke’s weaknesses. Luke is a 1st-century man, bound in many ways to the blind spots the culture of his day instilled in him. For example, feminist theologians have highlighted how, despite the prevalence of women appearing in Luke-Acts, Luke does not report women’s speech unless it is to use their words as the introduction to either Jesus or the Apostle’s correction or instruction. For example, in Luke 10:38-42, Martha's speech voices her perspective on Mary listening to Jesus’ teachings rather than submitting to the expected gender role of serving the disciples. Her perspective set the context for Jesus' rebuke. Equally, when relaying the story of the sinful woman at Simon the Pharisees’ house, the woman is reduced to an object in the story, being spoken about and not to until addressed by Jesus, and even then, in the story, she is the object of their gaze (Thibeaux, 1993)

Luke relies on parables in his narrative. The parable of the Samaritan allows him to widen the dialogue from a simple retelling of an exchange between Jesus and the religious expert to an invitation for the audience to join in the conversation. McCracken picks up on this idea of parables being an invitation, likening the parables to dialogue theorist Martin Buber’s I-Thou way of communicating. Buber argues that communication involves dialogue between people—I and Thou—and never between a person and a problem. He describes the dialogue between a person and an

ethical/moral issue as degenerating the conversation from a place of equality—I and Thou—into 'I-it' discourse (McCracken, 1994, p, 77). American theologian, Klyne Snodgrass agrees that the strength of parables is their invitational approach; he said: 'people tolerate discussion but attend stories'. However, he also compares Jesus' use of parables to speech-act-theory—i.e., Jesus anticipated a change in behaviour from hearing them (Snodgrass, 2008, p. 1-3; Briggs, 2001). Parables expect a response from the hearer; they create a space to say: What did you hear? What did you understand? 'Go and do likewise' Luke 10:37 (Wuthnow, 2012, p. 136-137). Based on speech-act theory, Snodgrass suggests the parable of the Samaritan demands two responses from today's audience:

> On the basis of this parable, we must deal with our own racism but must also seek justice for, and offer assistance to, those in need, regardless of the group to which they belong (Snodgrass, 2008, p. 361).

The parable of the Samaritan should force to the forefront the uncomfortable question: why a Samaritan? Luke's original audience would instantly pick up on the differences between Jews and Samaritans. They would be intrigued as Jesus pits Priests and Levites—who teach and uphold the Torah—against the Samaritans, who held a significantly different version of the Torah. Samaritans had a different Pentateuch from the Jews and situate God's Temple at Mount Gerizim, not Jerusalem. The Jewish high priest and prince—John Hyrcanus—destroyed the Samaritan temple in 128 BC when the Samaritans refused to convert to Judaism (Magen, 2007; Nodet 2011). However, the Samaritans are not a 'quasi nation' but rather represent another way of cultic worship of the God of Israel (Wolter et al., p. 79; González, 2015, p. 32). Luke's audience would question why Jesus deliberately chose the 'heretic' over his cultic faith to be the hero.

The parable of the Samaritan offers the same challenge to today's church regarding our attitudes toward others who hold a different theological interpretation from our own. If we listen, Luke-Acts shines a light on our propensity to preconceptions and prejudices. This parable allows today's audience to consider whom, in their own context, the Samaritan represents and whom they exclude and how they will change in light of this revelation. It is interesting to imagine emulating Snodgrass's question in a conversation between Baptists and LGBTQ who hold differing perspectives. Before

tackling the thorny issues that mark people's differences, what if the majority stakeholders had to explain not their position in the debate but rather what actions have been taken to 'seek for justice' and 'offer assistance' to 'other'?

The parable is known as 'the Good Samaritan', although the adjective is not used in the original story.[5] However, 'good' is a useful adjective to illustrate Luke's agenda for challenging the status quo on acceptance and exclusion as the character the original audience would have classified as the 'bad' person—the other from the marginal and 'disdained community'—turns out to be 'good' (Bovon et al., 2013, p. 51). Familiarity with the parable, coupled with the traditional sermon conclusions of 'love your enemy' or philanthropy and charity, and the innate predisposition of readers to play the part of the hero, conspire to dull the modern-day audience's ability to be challenged by Luke.[6] Theologians, such as Green and Wuthnow, argue that removing the parable from its historical location and studying it independently from its context within the Luke-Acts narrative has resulted in a narrowed application of the 'Good' Samaritan to a very individualistic ethical praxis (Wuthnow, 2012; Green, 2010, p. 77-78). Whilst the call to acts of charity and unconditional love is commendable, these are not the only messages of the parable. Jesus did not cast the character needing help as a despised Samaritan; Jesus cast the Samaritan as a role model to emulate. An ethical focus diminishes the offensiveness of Jesus' focus on the Samaritan as the exemplar for living obediently to the Torah (McCracken, 1994, p. 7).

To fully understand the challenge of Jesus' parable, Green suggests changing the character of the Good Samaritan to a modern alternative (i.e., those we view with equal prejudice), such as The Good Homosexual; The Good Feminist; The Good Refugee; The Good Addict. However, Green has missed an opportunity to emphasise his conclusions. By labelling 'other' as 'good', he adds a caveat to the parable— that it is only possible for the religious expert to learn from, and emulate, homosexuals etc., when they are judged as being 'good'. However, Jesus never labelled the Samaritan as 'good'. Adding 'good' to those we today would view with a prejudicial bias diminishes the powerful challenge of the parable. Luke aims to uncover hidden biases toward 'other', and he achieves this by confronting the audience with a radical concept. Those

[5] Luke 10:25-37

[6] However, there is research that shows that people who live by the guiding principles of their faith were less likely to be a good Samaritan towards people they viewed as 'sinners'. Batson, C. D., Eidelman, S. H., Higley, S. L., & Russell, S. A. (2001). "And Who Is My Neighbor?" II: Quest Religion As A Source Of Universal Compassion. *Journal For The Scientific Study Of Religion*, *40*(1), 39-50. https://doi.org/10.1111/0021-8294.00036

whom the audience would usually see as ‘good’ (for example, the religious leaders and teachers and experts in the Torah) are the antiheroes, and the ‘sinners’ are shown to be ‘good.’ Confronting our biases is essential in creating what theologian Miroslav Volf describes as the drama of embrace—a place of mutuality in a dialogue of fundamental differences—because it raises the uncomfortable question: why do I believe that you are ‘out’ and yet I am ‘in’? (Volf 1996).

Luke draws awareness to the murky waters of boundary keepers, bouncers who admit and prevent people from entering the fullness of the Kingdom of God. Snodgrass observes our propensity to set boundaries; for example, Peter wanted boundaries on forgiveness (Mat 18:21-22). In the parable of the Samaritan, the religious expert wanted boundaries to exclude others through the labels of ‘sinner’ or ‘heretic’. Snodgrass highlights how the religious expert's boundaries are influenced by racial hostility and not just ethics (Snodgrass, 2008, p. 358). The parable illustrates how recognising and laying aside our stereotypes—forged in our judgments on ethnic, social, racial, sexual and gender differences—tears down boundaries and keeps the welcoming posture of ‘open arms’ advocated by Volf (Volf, 1996, p. 107).

In his narrative, Luke highlights the religious boundary enforced by categorising ‘other’ as ‘sinners’ (Adams, 2008; Carter 2016, p. 153). It is language that resonates with today’s church as some participants in my research also referred to same-sex relationships as ‘sin’. ‘Sinner’ is a loaded term in Luke’s Gospel. It can be defined (as Sanders argues) as the ‘wicked’ who remain unrepentant (Sanders, 1985, p. 158; Powell, 2009). However, Luke frequently uses ‘sinner’ in a ‘factional context;’ as a label to exclude whole social groups who were known as the outcasts of their society or were deemed immoral or belonged to an immoral profession (Green, 1995, p. 85; Dunn, 2005, p. 478). For example, Gentiles, prostitutes, and tax collectors are all groups who were ‘sinners’ and excluded from belonging to the people of God. Gentiles were ‘sinners’ because they belonged to a different ethnic group and did not live according to the Law of the Torah. However, Jews could also be labelled as ‘sinners’, not only because of an individual sin or moral or ethical choice but by transgressing the religious boundaries which informed all aspects of Jewish life—socio-cultural, economic, moral, and political (Carter, 2016, p. 180-181; Slawomire, 2017, p. 4; Adams 2008). For example, Jesus was called a ‘Samaritan’ by the religious leaders in John 8:48; a pejorative label implying Jesus is a heretic and sinner (Lightfoot et al., 2015, p. 180).

It is not difficult to see the correlation between the 21st-century church and Luke's 1st-century world. Today's church has people groups judged to have transgressed the boundaries defined by the church and consequently excluded. In my research interviews, one of the participants shared a vivid illustration of his growing awareness of the boundaries placed on 'sinners' (in his example, gay men) and of operating as a bouncer to keep them firmly outside his church community. He said: 'they were a speck that grew into a cloud and threatened to change my world.' In his example, the 'other' was ignored, distanced, and perceived as a growing threat to be kept outside the boundaries of the church. A few participants also recognised their fears of LGBTQ 'sin' coming into the church. They vacillated between shame in admitting this and justification of their feelings. For some participants, the only course of action seemed to draw the boundaries between 'us' and 'sinners' more distinctly, equating church membership with holding what they deemed the correct theology. Differences in theology or praxis were not mere differences; rather, they were described as 'heresy' and 'unorthodoxy'.

However, Luke's narrative challenges the reader's definition of 'sin' and how 'sin' is forgiven and removed. Luke portrays sin not as breaking laws set by the church but as breaking a relationship with Jesus. As the story in Luke-Acts progresses, it is apparent to the audience that the religious leaders are the 'sinners' because they reject Jesus and his ministry (Szkredka, 2017, p. 165). Therein lies the challenge to the church. If a person holding an affirming theology is known for their growing relationship with the Trinity, if they are displaying the fruits of the Spirit, if they love God and neighbour, if their sex life and gender orientations are submitted to Christ, what is the basis for the policy of exclusion from church and ministry?

Luke tackles the boundaries that distance 'sinners' from the 'righteous' by moving the 'sinners' from the margins and including them as part of Jesus' story. The actions of the Samaritan 'sinner' were, according to Jesus, acts of faith to be emulated. Listening to the parable of the Samaritan highlights how our unconscious biases influence our opinion of 'other', labelling them often before we even have either a relationship or an experience to judge. Luke's parable challenges Baptist churches on the justifications for acting as the bouncer—admitting some and preventing others from joining their church community. Before any conversation between Baptists and LGBTQ could gain traction, there must be the conviction of how to include the perspective of 'other' with the same equality that Luke does. It is prioritising the voice of 'other' that allows the

challenge to peoples' justifications for acting as bouncers at the entrance to God's Kingdom.

Time to Adopt Luke's Challenge of Radical Reversal

To challenge assumptions of who is 'in' or 'out' of the Kingdom of God, Luke employs a technique known as 'radical reversal' throughout his Luke-Acts narrative (Card, 2011; González, 2015, p. 26-35). It is Luke's central theme for his Gospel; the radical reversal of expectations of privilege is bestowed on the minority who lack power, means, influence, or social importance (Card, 2011, p. 136; Green, 2010, 130-132). In the parable of the Samaritan, the radical reversal is seen when an expert in the Torah (who would be expected by the audience to know the answers) asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life (the audience would automatically assume an expert in the Torah would be included in the Kingdom of God and inherit eternal life). The religious expert becomes the catalyst for Jesus' parable of the Samaritan, and the Samaritan becomes the exemplar of belonging to God's kingdom. The radical reversal of whose actions should be emulated by those pursuing eternal life continues today to challenge the reader's world. However, the real challenge comes when that challenge is accepted.

Baptist participants rarely described themselves as 'radical', preferring 'Evangelical' or 'orthodox.'[7] Nor did they share stories akin to Luke's 'radical reversal.' David F Wells has even accused evangelical Baptists of 'losing their power for dissent' (Wells, 1993).[8] Radical reversal is only radical when applied, and, as one participant noted, there are no BCSA churches that publicly hold an affirming theological position, and he pitied the church that became the first. Such a radical reversal would make them an outlier within the movement. It could prove too difficult for them and the more conservative churches to stay together in BCSA. Thomas and Olson came to the same conclusions, seeing the trajectory of the current conversation on homosexuality within evangelicalism as the 'potential for division and schism' (Thomas & Olsen, 2012, p. 269). It remains to be seen whether challenging assumptions of who is 'in' and who is 'out' may yet prove to be too difficult a path for Baptist churches in SA to journey.

[7] Baptist Ministries of Australia describes it and its affiliated members as 'an Evangelical church.' About us: what we value https://www.baptist.org.au/about-us/#believe
[8] David F. Wells is Distinguished Senior Research Professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

Luke uses his narrative to radically challenge the audience's biases toward others by lessening their ability ‘to define them in finalising terms’ (Nadella, 2011, p. 66). It is a technique literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin describes as a ‘loophole,’ which is ‘an opening out of any closure’ (Bakhtin & Holoquist, 1981). A loophole challenges what has already understood to discover a new meaning (Shields, 2007, p. 59-61). However, the Samaritan is not the only character given a loophole. Luke introduced the religious expert as a character of ungodly motives sent to test (ἐκπειράζων) Jesus just as the devil tested (ἐκπειράζων) Him (Levine, 2014, p. 398; Davis, 2016; Bovon et al., 2013; Keddie, 2020). However, Luke refuses to allow the audience to judge the religious expert. The story ends with a loophole, seen in Jesus’ instruction to the expert to ‘go and do likewise’ and follow the Samaritan's example. There is no concluding observation as to whether the expert did, only the hope that he found the answer to his question of how he could inherit eternal life. In retelling this story, Luke gives dignity to all people in the dialogue. Luke does not allow the audience to cast the religious leader as ‘other’ and the one now to be excluded. It is also an excellent example of the power to shape or reinforce negative stereotypes, especially when the majority tell the stories of the minority group—an argument strongly advocated by Palestinian-American Professor Edward Said. Said believes those with the minority voice should primarily tell the stories (Said, 1979, 1997). However, Luke demonstrates that where this is not possible, it is still the author's responsibility to shape the story of others with Bakhtin loopholes—an escape route from the predetermined labels.

Deconstructing predetermined labels is counter-cultural, as Australian humour and sarcasm probably enforce stereotypes rather than dismantle them (Due, 2011). For example, a few male participants in my research were embarrassed about their history of telling gay jokes. One man spoke of ‘no poofs here’ jokes being part of his church culture, although this is no longer the case. In our discourse with others, a question needs to be asked: how often are definite statements or jokes about others’ agendas, character, or trustworthiness slipped into the conversation to reinforce our truth at their expense? Luke shifts the power, giving equal respect to the voice of ‘other’ even though it clashes with the view of many in his audience. It is a challenge when hosting debates today. Any framework for dialogue over differences needs to ask whether the other perspective was raised to a position of equality in the discussion. Or was it debased by stating negative stereotypes, limiting the access for ‘other’ to express

their opinions in their voice, and by power imbalances where the representatives of 'other' are afforded less time and respect?

Luke's intention, in this parable, is for the characters to participate in the ongoing dialogue as 'equal partners' (Nadella, 2011, p. 5.) It has been described by Raj Nadella as 'lively and intense continual dialogue' (Nadella 201, p. 117). The emphasis is on 'dialogue'; this is not a Gospel that resorts to one-liners from Jesus that dispels all arguments. Jesus listens to the religious expert as well as talks; thus, Luke shows that God is willing to dialogue back and forth over an issue. It is humbling to consider that Jesus, the God who could command our obedience, invites us to draw near and discuss the matter from our perspective.[9]

It is an interesting exercise to imagine how conversations regarding differences might progress if launched from a revelation of how the God of all creation approaches us in an attitude of I-Thou. Would it produce repentance for our stance towards others? Nave's research suggests that when Luke refers to 'repentance,' it is not simply highlighting the correct response; repentance is the *answer* to social, moral, ethical, financial, and religious inequalities (italics mine) (Nave, 2000). What would the fruits of repentance look like in a conversation over deeply held convictions? There were examples in the interviews I conducted of repentance that resulted from theological reflection on experience and praxis. Participants shared deeply personal accounts of their attitude towards 'others' (mainly gay men) who were excluded from their church. They confessed at the time, feeling a sense of relief, comfort, and security when LGBTQ people were excluded from their church. However, they went on to share the later conviction of their sin, and their sorrow that they could so easily lay aside Jesus' prayer in John chapter 17, which calls for love and unity between believers, equal to the love within the Trinity.[10] It is difficult to convey the intensity of emotions expressed in these personal stories. Participants were repentant in the Lukan sense of the word—a change in mindset and reorientation of actions (Leland et al., 2010, p. 704-705). Luke links deeds as demonstrating one's repentance (Nave, 2000, p. 40-41). Participants expressed how their repentance resulted in a desire to draw near and discuss—with emphasis on their role as listeners—issues with LGBTQ persons. There was a willingness to learn from 'other' and approach 'other' as I-Thou and not as an ethical issue that should be argued over or as boundaries that should be defended.

[9] Matthew 1:22-23 See Isaiah 1:18 Is 41:1 Is 43:9 Is 43:26 for Old Testament examples of God's invitation to dialogue with Him.
[10] John 17[21] *Jesus prayed: 'I pray for those who will believe in me through their message, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, may they also be in us.'*

Conclusion

The parable of the Samaritan is not a moral lesson on loving an enemy and acts of charity to the disadvantaged. Instead, it is a story that confronts religious exclusionism, and the boundaries Christians are guilty of building and reinforcing.

The first lesson begins with Jesus' choice of parables as a vehicle to engage in conversation. His aim was not just to give ethical direction; his priority was to include others in a conversation. Observing any dialogue over differences today suggests it is usual to defend and argue a position rather than to invite participation. This is evidenced by the warlike language that describes the broader conversation between conservative Christians and LGBTQ persons and groups (Marin, 2011; Armstrong, 2000; Coley, 2017). Yet, Jesus' invitational position is modelled throughout the encounter with the 'expert of the Law' in the parable of the Samaritan. Luke sets the scene; this is not a meeting of like minds and can potentially be a destructive dialogue. Jesus pre-empts the conversation from deteriorating by adopting a stance of inviting the other's opinion.[11] It is an I-Thou posture and is a prominent part of keeping the 'gesture of invitation' through 'open the arms' advocated by Volf's drama of embrace (Volf, 1996, p. 107). In the parable, Jesus models where the commitment should be focused—on 'other' and continually inviting their opinions to the conversation.

Theologically reflecting through Luke-Acts brings into focus the ease with which majority stakeholders slip into that place of privilege and power, silencing—whether deliberately or subconsciously—the voice and perspective of others. In the case of silencing others, the lesson is easy to emulate; invite 'other' into the conversation. However, it is more than an invitation to the conversation for Luke. He makes 'other' the main character in the narrative, as the parable of the Samaritan demonstrates. It is an example of the radical reversal approach Luke adopts towards those usually excluded by the moral majority. If Baptists want to emulate Luke's pathways for inclusion, then the conversation must include strategies which make LGBTQ the main characters.

[11] Jesus' invitation to the expert in the Law into the conversation is seen in Luke 10[26] *"What is written in the Law?" Jesus replied. "How do you read it?"* and Luke 10[36] *Jesus asked him. "Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"*

A framework for discourse in accommodating differences is seen in Luke's refusal to narrate the story endings with the appropriate and expected answer and his continual accommodation of differing perspectives. Luke is committed to keeping the dialogue going; he will not allow finalising statements—particularly those made about others—to shut down any voice. It contrasts with our usual agenda for conflict resolution and our expectation of finding an agreement to end the discussion and relieving us of the discomfort of an awkward conversation. One could almost conclude that Luke is an agitator, constantly adding a radical reversal to traditions and norms as a catalyst for keeping the conversation from stalling in the face of stereotypes and implicit biases.

Reflecting on the dialogue between Baptists and LGBTQ, through the theological reflection of Luke-Acts, there is evidence to suggest that the conversation is taken seriously when 'other' is the main character in the conversation. However, all the wise ways of journeying through the deeply held differences will falter if we fail to promote the voice of the 'other'. Not only encourage 'other' but afford 'other' equal rights in the debate. This is the challenge as it brings us back to the vivid picture of menacing black clouds that remain small and inconsequential when they stay in the comfortable world of unconscious biases but threaten us when they grow in power and move closer to crossing our 'boundaries'. It remains to be seen who dares to brave the storm clouds.

Bibliography

Adams, D. H. (2008). *The Sinner In Luke*. Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers.

Armstrong, K. (2000). *The Battle for God*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Bakhtin, M. M., & Holquist, M. (1981). *Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Batson, C. D., Eidelman, S. H., Higley, S. L., & Russell, S. A. (2001). "And Who Is My Neighbor?" II: Quest Religion As A Source Of Universal Compassion. *Journal For The Scientific Study Of Religion*, *40*(1), 39-50. https://doi.org/10.1111/0021-8294.00036

Bovon, F., Koester, H., & Deer, D. S. (2013). *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51-19:27*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers.

Briggs, R. (2001). *Words in Action: Speech Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation*. T&T Clark: New York.

Bryant, Antony and Charmaz, Kathy (2007) *The SAGE HAndbook Of Grounded Theory.* Los Angeles: SAGE

Card, M. (2011). *Luke: The Gospel of Amazement*. Westmont: InterVarsity Press.

Carter, T. (2016). Labelling Sinners in Luke. In *The Forgiveness of Sins* (pp. 153). Cambridge, UK: James Clarke & Co.

Chalmers, M. (2020). Rethinking Luke 10: The Parable of the Good Samaritan Israelite. *Journal of Biblical literature*, *139*(3), 543-566. https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1393.2020.6

Coley, J. S. (2017). Reconciling Religion and LGBT Rights: Christian Universities, Theological Orientations, and LGBT Inclusion. *Social currents*, *4*(1), 87-106. https://doi.org/10.1177/2329496516651639

Davis, M. (2016). The Politics of Asking the Right Question. *Political Theology Network*.

Due, C. (2011). "Aussie Humour" Or Racism? Hey Hey It's Saturday And The Denial Of Racism In Online Responses To News Media Articles. *Platform: Journal Of Media And Communication*, 36-53.

Dunn, J. D. G. (2005). Pharisees, Sinners, and Jesus. In J. D. G. M. Dunn, Scot (Ed.), *The Historical Jesus in Recent Research* (pp. 463-488). University Park: Penn State University Press.

Dyck, B. (2013). *Management and the Gospel Luke's Radical Message for the First and Twenty-First Centuries*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

González, J. L. (2015). *The Story Luke Tells: Luke's Unique Witness to the Gospel*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Green, J. B. (1995). *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Green, J. B. (1997). *The Gospel of Luke*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Green, J. B. (2010). *Methods for Luke*. New York: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511845048

Hollier , J. (2022). 'I Will Never Be Considered Human': The Devastating Trauma LGBTQ+ People Suffer in Religious Settings. *The Conversation*.

Keddie, G. A. (2020). "Who Is My Neighbor?" Ethnic Boundaries and the Samaritan Other in Luke 10:25-37. *Biblical interpretation*, *28*(2), 246-271. https://doi.org/10.1163/15685152-00282P06

Koenig, J. (1985). *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Levine, A.-J. (2014). Luke and the Jewish Religion. *Interpretation*, *68*(4), 389-402. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020964314540107

Lightfoot, J. B., Witherington, B., Still, T. D., & Hagen, J. M. (2015). *The Gospel of St. John: A Newly Discovered Commentary*. IVP Academic.

Magen, I. (2007). The Dating Of The First Phase Of The Samaritan Temple On Mount Gerizim In Light Of The Archaeological Evidence. In J. Zsengellér (Ed.), *Samaria, Samarians, Samaritans: Studies on Bible, History And Linguistics*. Boston, De Gruyter.

Marin, A. (2011a). Winner Take All?-A Political and Religious Assessment of the Culture War between the LGBT Community and Conservatives. *Political Theology*, *12*(4), 501-510. https://doi.org/10.1558/poth.v12i4.501

Marin, A. (2011b). Winner Take All?—A Political and Religious Assessment of the Culture War between the LGBT Community and Conservatives. *Political Theology*, *12*(4), 501-510. https://doi.org/10.1558/poth.v12i4.501

McCracken, D. (1994). *The Scandal of the Gospels Jesus, Story, and Offense*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Miller, A. C. (2015). Good Sinners and Exemplary Heretics: The Sociopolitical Implications of Love and Acceptance in the Gospel of Luke. *Review and Expositor (Berne)*, *112*(3), 461-469. https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637315598684

Nadella, R. (2011). *Dialogue Not Dogma: Many Voices in the Gospel of Luke*. London: T & T Clark.

Nave, G. D., Jr. (2000). *The role and function of repentance within the narrative of Luke - Acts and within the social world depicted by that narrative* ProQuest Dissertations Publishing].

Nodet, E. (2011). Israelites, Samaritans, Temples, Jews. In (Vol. 6, pp. 121-172). De Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110268201.121

Powell, M. A. (2009). Was Jesus a Friend of Unrepentant Sinners? A Fresh Appraisal of Sanders's Controversial Proposal. *JSHJ*, *7*(3), 286-310. https://doi.org/10.1163/147686909x12497389140589

Rhoads, D. M. (1996). *The Challenge of Diversity: The Witness of Paul and the Gospels*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Ryken, L., Wilhoit, J. C., Longman Iii, T., Ryken, D. L., & Longman, D. T., III. (2010). *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

Said, Edward. W (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books

---. (1970). *Covering Islam: How The Media And The Experts Determine How We See The Rest Of The World* New York: Vintage Books

Sanders, E. P. (1985). *Jesus and Judaism*. London: SCM.

Shields, C. M. (2007.). *Bakhtin Primer*. Peter Lang Publishing.

Snodgrass, K. (2008). *Stories With Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Szkredka, S. (2017). *Sinners and Sinfulness in Luke : A Study of Direct and Indirect References in the Initial*

Episodes of Jesus' Activity. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck.

Szkredka, S. (2017). *Sinners and Sinfulness in Luke: A Study of Direct and Indirect References in the Initial Episodes of Jesus' Activity*. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck.

Thibeaux, E. R. (1993). "Known to Be a Sinner": The Narrative Rhetoric of Luke 7:36--50. *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, *23*(4), 151-160. https://doi.org/10.1177/014610799302300403

Thomas, J. N., & Olson, D. V. A. (2012). Evangelical Elites' Changing Responses to Homosexuality 1960-2009. *Sociology of religion*, *73*(3), 239-272. https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srs031

Volf, M. (1996). *Exclusion and Embrace: a theological exploration of identity, otherness, and reconciliation*. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press.

Wells, D. F. (1993). *No Place For Truth, Or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Wolter, M., Coppins, W., & Heilig, C. (2017). *The Gospel According to Luke: Volume II (Luke 9:51–24)*. Waco: Baylor University Press.

Wuthnow, R. (2012). *Acts of Compassion: Caring for Others and Helping Ourselves* (Course Book ed.). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Journal of Contemporary Ministry

Peer Reviewed Articles

“Tractio Divina” – A Particular Christian Spiritual Discipline: Exploring how it may Assist Embodiment and the Transformation of Trauma

Nadia Pavich

MA (Specialisation in Chaplaincy) (NSWCCPE, Australian College of Ministries, and Sydney College of Divinity, Australia), BTh (Catholic Institute of Sydney, Sydney College of Divinity, Australia)

Contact nadiapavich@hotmail.com

Nadia Pavich is a Clinical Pastoral Care Practitioner/Chaplain and theologian who recently completed a MA (Specialisation in Chaplaincy) which included a research project exploring Tractio Divina (TD) – a particular Christian spiritual discipline – and its usefulness to transform trauma. She is the author of two spiritual handbooks for survivors of child sexual abuse: “Child, Arise!” (Awarded the 2016 Australian Christian Book of the Year), and “Come Forward!” (both using the pseudonym of Jane N. Dowling). She is a survivor of clergy child sexual abuse, and an advocate for other survivors.

Abstract

Although there is increasing research to demonstrate the beneficial effects of the classical contemplative practices to transform trauma, there is a gap in the research exploring the efficaciousness of the Christian Spiritual Disciplines (CSD) and how they may facilitate embodiment and the transformation of trauma. Some research recommends that further studies are needed to understand the role of spirituality in healing trauma. This article examines how Tractio Divina (TD) – a particular Christian spiritual discipline, practiced in combination with two other CSD – Lectio Divina (LD) and Visio Divina (VD), may facilitate embodiment and transform trauma from Child Sexual Abuse (CSA). It highlights the case study of a survivor of childhood sexual trauma who engages daily with these three CSD. It seeks to gain insight that may inform ministry and improve outcomes for trauma survivors – particularly, survivors of childhood sexual trauma.

Keywords: Tractio Divina, Christian spiritual disciplines, child sexual abuse, trauma, drawing, embodiment, transformation.

Introduction

One of the most destructive forms of trauma that severely impacts individuals is childhood sexual abuse (CSA) (Frans et al., 2005; Vilenica et al., 2013). Although there is considerable research investigating the physical and psychological impacts of CSA, there is less research that explores its spiritual impacts (Pargament et al., 2008; Awara et al., 2013). Research suggests further inquiry is needed to examine how spirituality contributes to healing trauma (van der Kolk, McFarlane et al., 1996; van der Kolk, Roth et al., 2005). While there is growing research to demonstrate how the classical contemplative practices contribute to transforming trauma (Farb et al., 2015; Payne et al., 2015; Levine, 2008),[12] there is less research that examines the efficaciousness of the various Christian Spiritual Disciplines (CSD) and how they may contribute to transform trauma from CSA (Larrivee et al., 2018). However, there are some studies suggesting that trauma may form a catalyst for further religious and spiritual growth (Castella et al., 2013; Peres et al, 2007; Shaw et al., 2005; Weaver et al., 2003), Mindful of this gap in the research, this article explores how a particular Christian spiritual discipline, namely "Tractio Divina" (TD), may assist embodiment and facilitate the transformation of trauma in survivors of CSA.[13] It examines my own practice of TD combined with Lectio Divina (LD)[14] and Visio Divina (VD)[15] as a case study and intends to contribute to the research suggesting that studies are needed "describing" the "subjective views" of the healing processes involved to transform trauma from CSA (Arias et al., 2013).

[12] Farb et al refer to "classical contemplative practices" as "traditions of first person reflection upon cultivation of specific modes of experience, and focus on those practices that explicitly involve interoceptive awareness, including types of medication and mindfulness-based approaches that allocate attention to body awareness (e.g., breath), or to specific areas of the body (e.g., abdomen), and yoga, tai chi, and other mind-body practices that may be performed in or outside of an explicit spiritual context."

[13] "Tractio Divina" (TD) is a method of praying through embodied drawing. It was created by Nadia Pavich during a Masters Research Project in 2022.

[14] Lectio divina (LD) is a method of praying the Scriptures that was introduced to the West by the Eastern desert father John Cassian early in the fifth century and has been practiced for centuries by Cistercian monks. The four elements it consists of are: *Lectio (reading), Meditatio (meditation), Oratio (prayer),* and *Contemplatio (contemplation* (Boa, 2001, p. 96-97).

[15] *Visio divina (VD) which means in Latin "divine seeing,"* is a method for praying with images or other media. VD invites us to "see at a contemplative pace" all that there is to see - "seeing beyond first and second impressions, below initial ideas, judgments, or understanding" - exploring the entirety of the image. (Catholic Diocese of Biloxi, *Visio Divina Workshop.* https://biloxidiocese.org/visio-divina.). In the context of my practice, of TD, it provides me with rich insight and assists meaning making, and thus, facilitates the transformation of my trauma.

Methodology

Autoethnography

The research used a primarily autoethnographic methodological approach (Cooper & Lilyea, 2022, pp. 197-208). Autoethnography is a "unique" qualitative methodology that draws upon several qualitative traditions including narrative research, autobiography, ethnography, and arts-based research (Cooper & Lilyea, 2022). It permits the social issue of trauma to be explored while drawing upon the empirical source of my life's contexts – firstly, as a Christian lay person who engages daily with the CSD of TD combined with LD and VD; and secondly, as a survivor of CSA and the somatic expressions of it in my female traumatised body (see Cooper & Lilyea, 2022 for more detail). Autoethnography allowed me as researcher to respond to the need for more studies describing "the subjective views of survivors' healing processes in recovery from CSA" (Arias et al., 2013). My intention of bringing my narrative into the space of the academic realm is that it might assist to understand the healing processes involved in embodiment, and the transformation and integration of trauma from CSA, particularly through the lens of the CSD.

Body-Spirit Based Methods

The research also engaged a combination of body-spirit focused methods – TD, LD, and VD – to demonstrate how they enable me to access the somatic expressions of my sexual trauma and to engage rigorously with my bodily memory of it.[16]

Data Source

The data was sourced from my daily spiritual practice of TD in combination with LD and VD. A total of sixty-two drawings created during the time frame of this research were collected, along with the journal records of VD that corresponded to these drawings. These were then individually and collectively analysed.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

General qualitative coding methods that are applicable and beneficial for autoethnography, including "initial coding," "descriptive coding," "emotion coding,"

[16] "Somatic expressions" refers to expressions arising in the body, rather than the mind.

and “in vivo coding” which uses the participants own words were adopted to analyse and synthesise the data gathered (see Saldana, as cited in Cooper & Lilyea, 2022, p. 201 for more detail). Analysing and synthesising my arts-based practice of TD allowed me as researcher to use non-textual techniques to make meaning of data that may not have been accessible through text-based methods (see McNiff, as cited in Cooper & Lilyea, 2022, p. 203 for more detail).

Initially, sixty-two drawings from my TD practice were individually analysed using descriptive coding, in vivo coding, and emotion coding methods. Attention was paid to the following categories: themes that were emerging, representations within the images, the use of colour, lines, and movement. The same coding methods were used to individually analyse texts from my prayer journal that recorded my experiences with VD and what happened within my-self post TD. Significant words relevant to the research question issue of embodying and transforming trauma were highlighted, e.g., “calmed,” “playful,” “transformed,” “soothed,” and “grounded.” A single table of analysis with this information was created.

This data was synthesised by taking up Cooper and Lilyea’s suggestion of layering the themes arising from the “thematic analysis over the autobiographical timeline” (Cooper & Lilyea, 2022, p. 203). Three categories were created from the analysed data: emerging themes, representations in TD images, and happenings/changes noticed within my-self after completing TD images. The data for each category was synthesised and tabled. This article will discuss these outcomes to assess how TD combined with LD and VD may assist embodiment and the transformation of trauma from CSA.

Literature

The Role of CSD

The CSD are the main tools for transformation within spiritual formation which refers to “the process of being formed in the image of Christ for the sake of others” (Mulholland, 2016, p. 19). Calhoun defines the CSD as intentional practices to “open space in our lives for the worship of God” (Calhoun, 2015, p. 22). Foster defines them as the vehicle that places a person before God – the one who transforms – and through them the person is drawn gently along a path of “disciplined grace” (Foster, 2008, p.

9). While the most addressed CSD include prayer, scripture reading, journaling, fasting, worship and service (Foster, 20018), Mulholland recognises that there other "more personal disciplines" that God can draw a person to which uniquely suit us and facilitate growth (Mulholland, 2016, p. 140). The CSD imply a "regular and routine" practise or "rhythm" that can be daily, weekly, monthly, or annually (Barton, 2006, p. 147). Coe acknowledges that through the practice of the disciplines, a spiritual process unfolds which can be deeply painful as the inner layers of one's heart are "peeled" back to reveal unconscious deeply held beliefs, values, and thoughts that are contrary to our understanding of God (see Coe, 2004, p. 2 for more detail). Benner describes the spiritual process as traveling through one's brokenness, woundedness and shame, parts of oneself that can tend to be uncomfortable, unwelcome, and unknown (Benner, 2015). During this process, and as the person enters more profoundly into an intimate, experiential, and loving relationship with the Trinity, God's grace works within them and they are slowly transformed into "the image of Christ for the sake of others" (Ashbrook, 2019, p. 32; Mulholland, 2016, p.19; Foster, 2008, p. 9).

Introducing "Tractio Divina" (TD) – a New CSD

"Tractio Divina," is what I have come to name the method of praying through embodied drawing that aims to gently draw out on paper what is in my traumatised body. *Tractio* is a Latin word that means "a drawing," and it is the noun of action from the past-participle stem *trahere,* meaning "to pull, or draw," usually along a tract. "Tractio Divina" utilises various tracts in the process of *drawing*: a divine source beyond my-self, my body's narrative, and the blank piece of paper in front of me. [17] As these tracts interact with one another – my body, God, and the blank piece of paper – there is a gentle pulling up or *drawing out* on paper what is within me while simultaneously being *drawn* to God/self/others.

"Tractio divina," is a "more personal" CSD that uniquely suits me and facilitates growth (Mulholland, 2016, p. 140). It aligns with Calhoun's definition of CSD since it is an intentional daily practice that creates a space/spiritual tract for God's grace to pass from within the hidden and unknown depths of my soul to without in the form of a drawing – visual art (Calhoun, 2015, p. 22). However, like most CSD, TD cannot be

[17] The meaning of "tract" can refer to either a large area of land or a system of tubes or organs in the body that are connected and serve a purpose. I am using "tract" here in a spiritual sense of "large spaces" that are "connected" to one another and "serve a purpose" in the process of TD. These tracts allow for God's grace to slowly uncover and draw out what has been covered deep within one's soul.

forced or pushed, nor can one make it happen (Willard, personal communications, accessed 2022). It depends on rhythms of grace to gently pull up and draw-out on paper what has been covered within. In this sense, TD affirms human agency and consent – needs that are vital for survivors of CSA – a reason why it may be a suitable CSD for survivors of CSA.

LD, TD, and VD: Drawing Out the Relationship between these Body-Spirit Based Methods

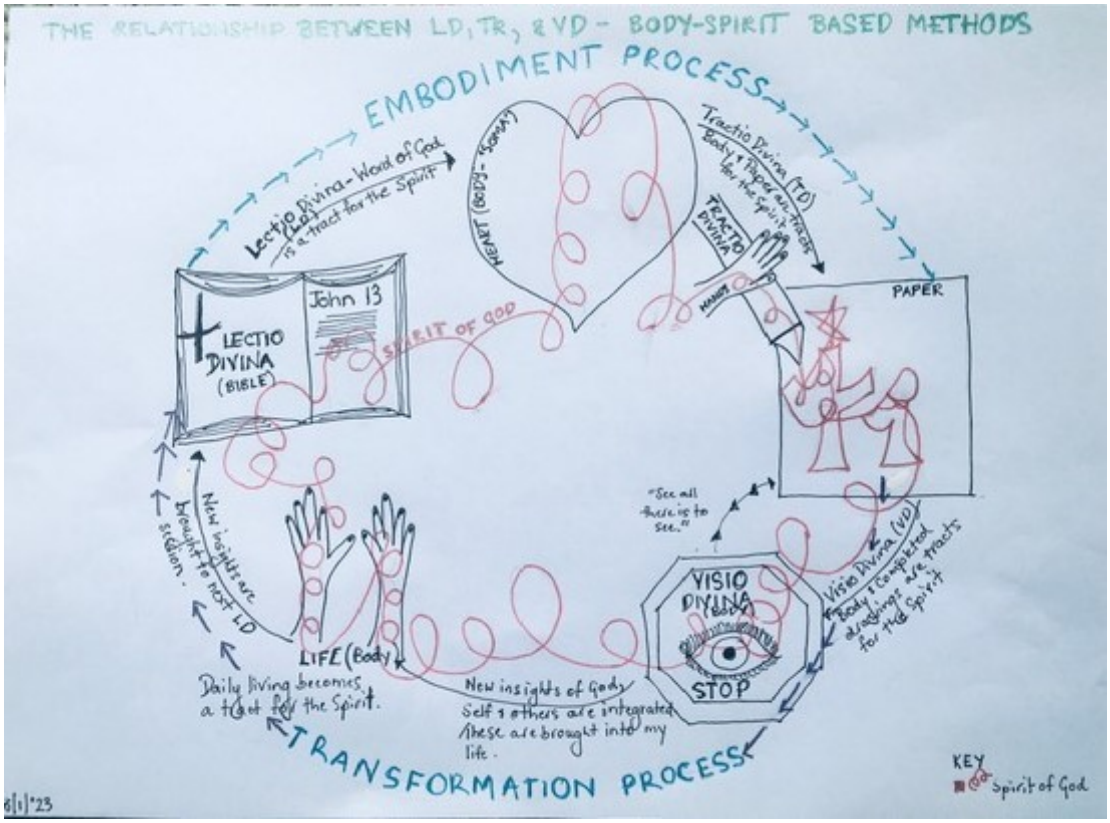

Image 1
***The Relationship between Lectio Divina (LD), "Tractio Divina" (TD), and Visio Divina (VD) – Body-Spirit Based Methods,* 28 January 2023, (Coloured pens on paper, 21 x 29.5 cm).**

Defining Trauma

Trauma has many different definitions resulting from the diversity of perspectives that have considered it. The word "trauma" etymologically derives from the Greek word meaning "wound." Hence, some authors like Jennifer Baldwin refer to "trauma" as "traumatic wounding" (Baldwin, 2018, p. 24). For the purpose of exploring how TD

may assist embodiment and the transformation of trauma, the following definitions of trauma were considered. Jennifer Baldwin defines trauma as "the response to an experience/s not the event experienced" (Baldwin, 2018, p. 25). She concurs with Gabor Maté who similarly defines trauma as "not what happens to you, but what happens inside you as a result of what happened to you" (Maté, personal communication, 2021). For Bessel van der Kolk, trauma is "an inability to inhabit one's body without being possessed by its defences" (van der Kolk, 2015, p. 100). Finally, for Peter Levine trauma is "a highly activated incomplete biological response to threat, *frozen in time*" (Payne et al., 2015, p. 14). It is important to note that in these definitions of trauma there is consensus that trauma occurs in the body.

Trauma and the Body

Trauma is primarily a "bodily" process – its roots lie in our instinctual physiologies (Levine, 1997, p. 34). Trauma is a "response" to an experience that mimics the original traumatic event (van der Kolk, 2015, p. 66)). The immediate symptoms of a trauma response may include: hyperarousal, constriction, dissociation, denial, feelings of helplessness, immobility, or freezing (Levine, 2008, pp. 15-16). Other symptoms, that are either affective or psychosomatic consequences of trauma, may include: hypervigilance, intrusive imagery/flashbacks, extreme sensitivity to light and sound, hyperactivity, exaggerated startle responses, night terrors, abrupt mood swings, shame, low self-worth, being easily stressed, and difficulty with sleeping (Levine, 2008, pp. 17-18; Ferrara, 2002; Saywitz et al, 2000). These complex bodily symptoms of trauma can cause survivors to feel "chronically unsafe inside their bodies" (van der Kolk, 2015, pp. 96-97).

The Challenge of Embodiment and Dissociation

Dissociation is a result of trauma survivors feeling chronically unsafe inside their body. In the literature, "dissociation" is the term that refers to "leaving one's body" (Goodwin, 1985; Herman et al., 1986; van der Kolk, 1987). In the cases of survivors who have experienced severe CSA,[18] the dilemma of embodiment might be expressed in this way: "How do I live with (but not in) a dangerous, damaged, or dead body?"

[18] CSA stands for "severe child sexual abuse" – Russell (1986) in a large-scale study found that the three most important factors relating to severity of traumatisation were (1) the severity of sexual abuse in terms of the intrusiveness of specific sex acts, (2) whether or not the perpetrator was a father or step-father, and (3) the degree of physical force or violence used in the abuse (Young, 1992).

(Young, 1992) For survivors who dissociate, on the one hand, they may define "me" and "mine" as events that go on "inside my head" rather than as events that go on "inside my body" (Young 1992). On the other hand, in terms of events that go on "inside my body" which are essentially physical and tied to embodiment, such as "sexual, sensuous, affective or proprioceptive experiences," they no longer have anything to do "with me, they are not me" (Young, 1992). While dissociation may make life tolerable, it comes with the high cost of losing awareness of what is going on inside the body, including the daily pleasure and comforts of human embodiment (van der Kolk, 2014).

The Challenge of Interoception[19] and Alexithymia

Being connected with one's body is vital for knowing what is going on inside oneself (Damasio, 1999). The technical term for not being able to identify what is going on inside oneself is alexithymia (Taylor and Bagby, 2004). People suffering from alexithymia are unable to articulate what they feel about any given situation or how they themselves feel (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 273). Alexithymia is the result of "numbing" which prevents a person from "anticipating and responding to the ordinary demands of their body" (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 273). Sensory awareness is critical for survivors to learn that they can "tolerate their sensations, befriend their inner experiences, and cultivate new action patterns" (van der Kolk, p. 273). This learning is also important in terms of learning to regulate the Central Nervous System (CNS).

The Challenge of Regulating the CNS: Hyper/Hypo-arousal

Learning to regulate the CNS is key to avoid traumatisation. It requires *"normalizing"* oneself and developing *"the ability to return to equilibrium and balance" (*Levine, 2008, p. 28). Peter Levine recognises that the failure to *"reset"* the CNS leaves it "stuck in a dysregulated state" – either a hyperaroused or shut-down (dissociated) state – making it impossible to function normally (Payne et al., 2015, p. 14). Survivors of trauma may find it challenging to regulate their CNS. Levine's research suggests that body-based methods may benefit regulation of the CNS (Payne et al, 2015).

[19] "Interoception is the scientific name for a basic self-sensing ability. Brain-imaging studies of traumatised people have repeatedly shown problems in the area of the brain related to physical self-awareness, particularly in the area of the insula." (van der Kolk, 2014 p. 414 for more detail).

Responding to the Challenges of Trauma from CSA through Body-Based Methods

The literature demonstrates that the most successful methods to achieve embodiment and transform trauma are body-based methods, those which establish a connection to the body (Levine, 2008, p. 27; Payne et al, 2015; Ogden, 2010; Ogden and Fisher, 2014). Body-based methods are concerned with "exploring physical sensations and discovering the location and the imprints of trauma on the body" (van der Kolk, 2014). They imply tapping into trauma energy to help process and integrate it, leading to a better regulated autonomic nervous system (Maté, personal communication, p. 7; van der Kolk, 2014, p. 245). Some of the body-based methods referred to in the literature include dance/movement therapy, art therapy, drama therapy, and poetry (Young, 1992). This article explores how the embodiment and transformation processes of two body-based methods – Somatic Experiencing ™ (SE) and Art – are also relevant and comparable to the body-spirit focused method of TD.

Somatic Experiencing™ (SE™)

The body-based method of SE was established by Peter Levine. Somatic Experiencing guides the trauma survivor's attention to "interoceptive, kinesthetic, and proprioceptive experience" (Payne et al., 2015; Farb et al., 2015; Delforge, 2002). It firstly establishes "bodily sensations associated with safety and comfort" (Payne et al., 2015, pp. 14-15). This involves identifying islands within the body – parts of the body, postures, or movements – that then "become a reservoir" of "embodied resource" which the individual can return to repeatedly for grounding whenever they feel stuck, terrified, or enraged as they "touch, bit by bit (titration) on the stress-associated sensations" of their trauma (Payne et al., 2015, pp. 14-15). This process of "biological completion" unfreezes the frozen energy of trauma as it allows for the discharge of the instinctive survival energy that one did not have at the time of a traumatic event (Levine, 2008, p. 31). Somatic Experiencing has been proven to transform trauma and leads to "the creation of new interoceptive experiences of agency and mastery" (Payne et al., 2015, pp. 14-15).

Creative Arts: Art, Imagination, Dance, and Movement

Other body-based methods such as the creative arts – art, imagination, theatre, dance and movement – have been effective in the transformation of trauma and the

symptoms of PTSD (Carey, 2006; van der Kolk, 2014, p. 242). As well, research has indicated that the creative arts can assist trauma sufferers to find language to articulate and write their experiences leading to overall positive health improvements (Pennebaker and Krantz, 2007).

More recent research studies specifically for military service members and veterans has demonstrated the benefits of art; these include assisting to understand and communicate internal processes, enabling to overcome avoidance patterns, creating new ways of seeing, interpreting and responding to daily situations, and using the images created as an active working document in multi-modal treatment (Lobban & Murphy, 2019; Kaimal et al, 2019; Jones et al, 2019). The benefits highlight Ashlee Whitaker's[20] claim that the visual arts are "an access point to the soul" which rather than using letters, words, rhyme, and symbolic meter, employs lines, colours, shade, and textures to express the "ineffable in a form of communication that can transcend language, geography, and cultures" (Anonymous, 2021, pp. 39-40). It is in this sense that an image can do so much that text and speaking cannot.

Likewise, there has been research that has focused on the healing effects of the imagination through DE-CRUTT, a theatre –based treatment program for traumatic stress in war veterans, and it has shown how the imagination opens up emotional and psychological space for the exploration of trauma, thereby constructing a path to transform trauma that draws up the "capacity for story-telling and meaning-making" (Ali et al, 2019).

The Findings

"Tractio Divina": A Body-Spirit Based CSD that may assist Embodiment and the Transformation of Trauma from CSA

This article aimed to explore how TD – a particular CSD – when combined with LD and VD may facilitate embodiment and the transformation of trauma. Image 2 below graphically encapsulates the overall findings. In total, 95.1% of the images gathered graphically represented trauma, revealing the trauma-sensitive lens through which TD, LD, and VD are practiced. It illustrates Baldwin's claim that trauma-sensitive

[20] Ashlee Whitaker is the Head Curator and the Roy and Carol Christensen Curator of Religious Arts at Brigham Young University Museum of Art (MOA) in Provo, Utah, USA.

hermeneutics "receives as subject or 'text' the embodied narratives of traumatic wounding as witnessed in our sacred texts…" (Baldwin, 2018, p. 79).

Image 2
Embodying *and Transforming Trauma in Christ (John 20:27),* 2 February 2022, Sydney, (oil crayon and chalk on paper, 21 x 29.5 cm).

As well, image 2 reflects the sacred space/tract that TD creates for God's grace to work in my traumatised body through the Holy Spirit. This is reflected in 96.8% of the images that conveyed a theme of God's active presence through the transmission of the Holy Spirit, confirming Calhoun's assertion that by practicing the CSD "we open space in our lives for the worship of God" (Calhoun, 2015, p. 22). It is in this "open space" that I am empowered through God's grace to "reach" and "feel into" the trauma wounds of the risen Jesus.[21] Empowerment through God's grace was a prominent theme that was evident in 88.7% of the completed drawings. This

[21] Ref Jn.20:27-28 – "Then he [Jesus] said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"
In this Scripture, the Risen Christ is himself the living text - "For the construction of a trauma-sensitive theology and practice, trauma sensitive hermeneutics receives as subject or "text" the embodied narratives of survivors of traumatic wounding as witnessed in our sacred texts and in the persons in our midst (Jennifer Baldwin, *Trauma Sensitive Theology: Thinking Theologically in the Era of Trauma,*79).

emphasises Barton's claim that CSD provide a "path of disciplined grace" (Barton, 2006, p. 147). While drawing image 2, my own traumatic wounding became activated through resonance with Christ and produced fragmented memories. This confirms Damasio's research that recalling a traumatic event from the past causes re-experiencing of the visceral sensations felt during the original event (Damasio et al., cited in van der Kolk, 2015, p. 95). This is confirmed in 80.6% of the drawing samples that conveyed the theme of a trauma activated response.

As these somatic expressions of trauma manifested in my body while drawing, the Holy Spirit invited me to "work out" my salvation with "fear and trembling"[22] but on paper with crayons, chalks, and coloured pens in hand, and with the confidence that it is God working in me to transform me "into the image of Christ" – a genuine fruit of the CSD (Willard, 2002, p. 23). This was supported in 100% of the drawings that depicted themes of God's power at work in my traumatised body, and 90.3% that demonstrated themes of transformation.

In the transformation process, the visual and kinaesthetic hands-on process of TD assisted to slow me down and to remain focused and engaged with Christ in a "back and forth" dialogue. During this dialogue with Christ, I shared the somatic expressions of trauma I was experiencing in my body as I connected to his. Not only did TD lead me to a deeper sense of being the "Beloved of God," as was expressed in 72.5% of the drawings, but as Baldwin claims, because it involved movement, it elevated my "somatic awareness, mindfulness, and interoception," and allowed me "to attend to the inner wisdom that emerges from the [my] body" (Baldwin, 2018, p. 48).

Consequently, this led to embodiment and integration. This was confirmed in 100% of the drawings that identified the theme of embodiment, and 85.5% the theme of integration. Embodiment for me is a "deeply painful" process and as Coe acknowledges, it required me to "peel back" the layers of my "inner heart" and to "reveal unconscious deeply held beliefs, values and thoughts" that are impacts of my trauma but contrary to understanding God (Coe, 2004, p. 2). It confirms Benner's claims that as I travel through my brokenness, woundedness, shame, and the parts of my-self that are uncomfortable, unwelcome, and unknown, my trauma is transformed (Benner, 2004, p. 2).

[22] Ref: Phil.2:12-13 – "Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

The transformation was palpable through a deeper connection with my-self, with God, and with others.[23] This was confirmed in 79% of the images that depicted the theme of groundedness to suggest connection with my-self, and in 90.3% of images that illustrated the theme of an intimate loving encounter with Christ to suggest connection with God, and 70.9% of images that revealed the theme of ministry to imply connection with others. Transformation was further evidenced through the "repair"/"reactivation" of my self-sensing system[24] and regulation of my CNS that indicated "new interoceptive experiences of agency and mastery" were being created (Parvizi et al., cited in Payne et al., 2015, pp. 14-15). Additionally, the data revealed that 90.3% of drawings rendered the theme of transformation, while 88.7% portrayed the theme of empowerment, and 87.1% the theme of salvation/redemption both suggesting transformation. The fact that 79% of the drawings portrayed the theme of fruitfulness/flourishing also suggested post traumatic growth.

Discussion

Responding to the Challenges of Transforming Trauma from CSA through TD combined with LD and VD

Some of the previously named challenges to transforming trauma from CSA were as follows: dissociation, interoception and alexythmia, and dysregulation of the CNS that resulted in states of either hypoaroual or hyperarousal. This research uncovered how TD may respond to these challenges:

TD and Establishing a Safe Connection to Body that Benefits Interoception

Throughout the course of this study, my trauma has been activated by a multitude of triggers – even while engaging in my spiritual practices – which has meant experiencing the symptoms of trauma in my body on a daily basis.[25] Practicing TD combined with LD has empowered me to meet God in my traumatised body by placing

[23] Prayer journal record describing my practice of VD dated 16/2/2022 – As I connect to Christ's wounds and embody my own, my trauma is transformed. This is demonstrated in my TD drawing as the dark effects of trauma in my heart are changed to a "golden" emission of the Holy Spirit that burst forth from my heart.

[24] In *The Body Keeps the Score,* Van der Kolk acknowledges the need for the "repair" of "the self-sensing system" that is damaged in trauma.

[25] "Symptoms" of trauma experienced during the timeframe of this research project have included those referred to on page 7 in the section headed "Trauma and the Body" – hypervigilance, intrusive memory, flashbacks, night-terrors, shame, difficulty sleeping, feeling overwhelmed, helplessness, fear, and freezing.

myself fully within a scripture story and living into it with my senses and imagination so that I am participating in the story. Images 3 and 4 (below) graphically demonstrate my prayer on two separate days while trauma was activated in my body. The images reveal how TD can open up emotional, psychological, and spiritual space for the exploration of trauma which is a similar outcome to research studies that explored how imagination in theatre benefits survivors of trauma (Ali et al, 2019). In both images, I am depicted in a state of hyperarousal and overwhelmed with a sense of helplessness. Not only does TD assist me to safely connect to my traumatised body but it guides my attention to "interoceptive, kinesthetic, and proprioceptive experience" – somatic experience which is key in transforming trauma (Farb et al., 2015, p. 14).

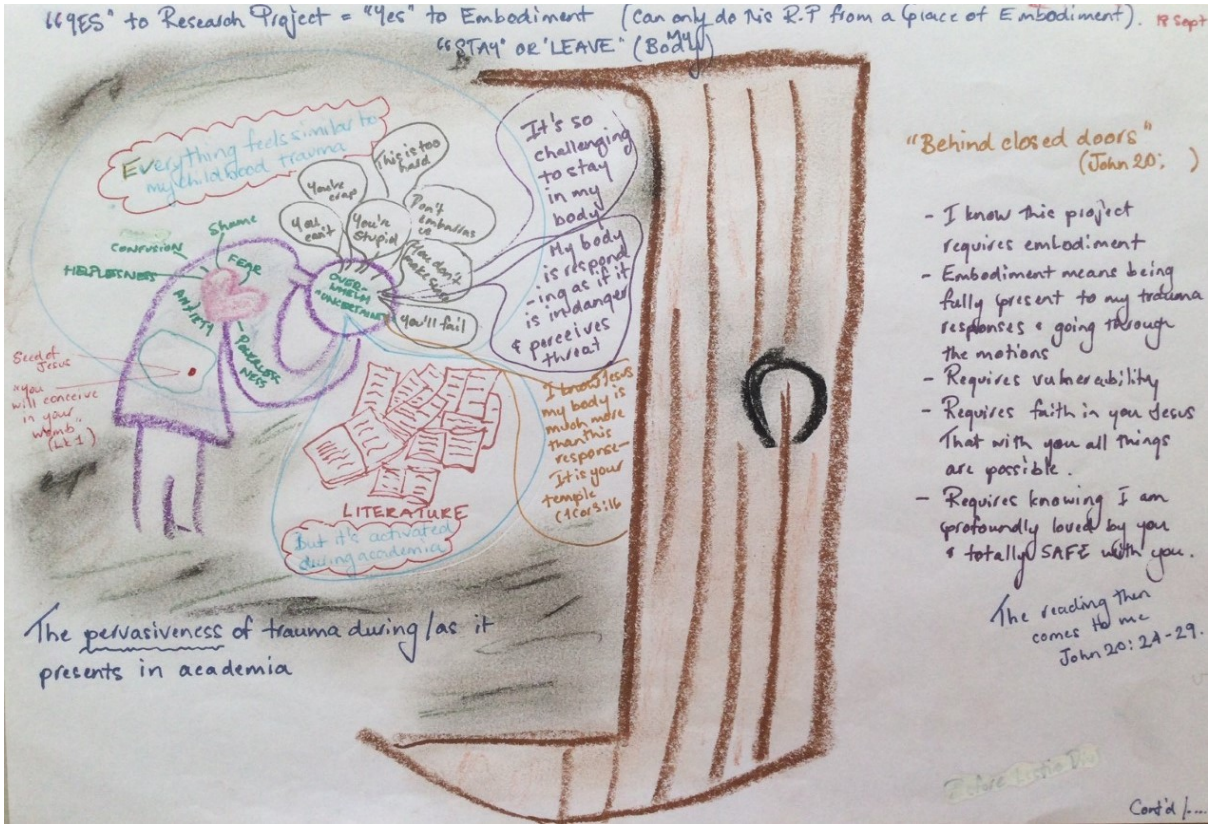

Image 3
Behind Closed Doors: My Yes to Safely Embody Trauma (Part 1 – John 20:19-23), 18 September 2021, oil crayon and chalk on paper, 29.5 x 21 cm, Sydney.

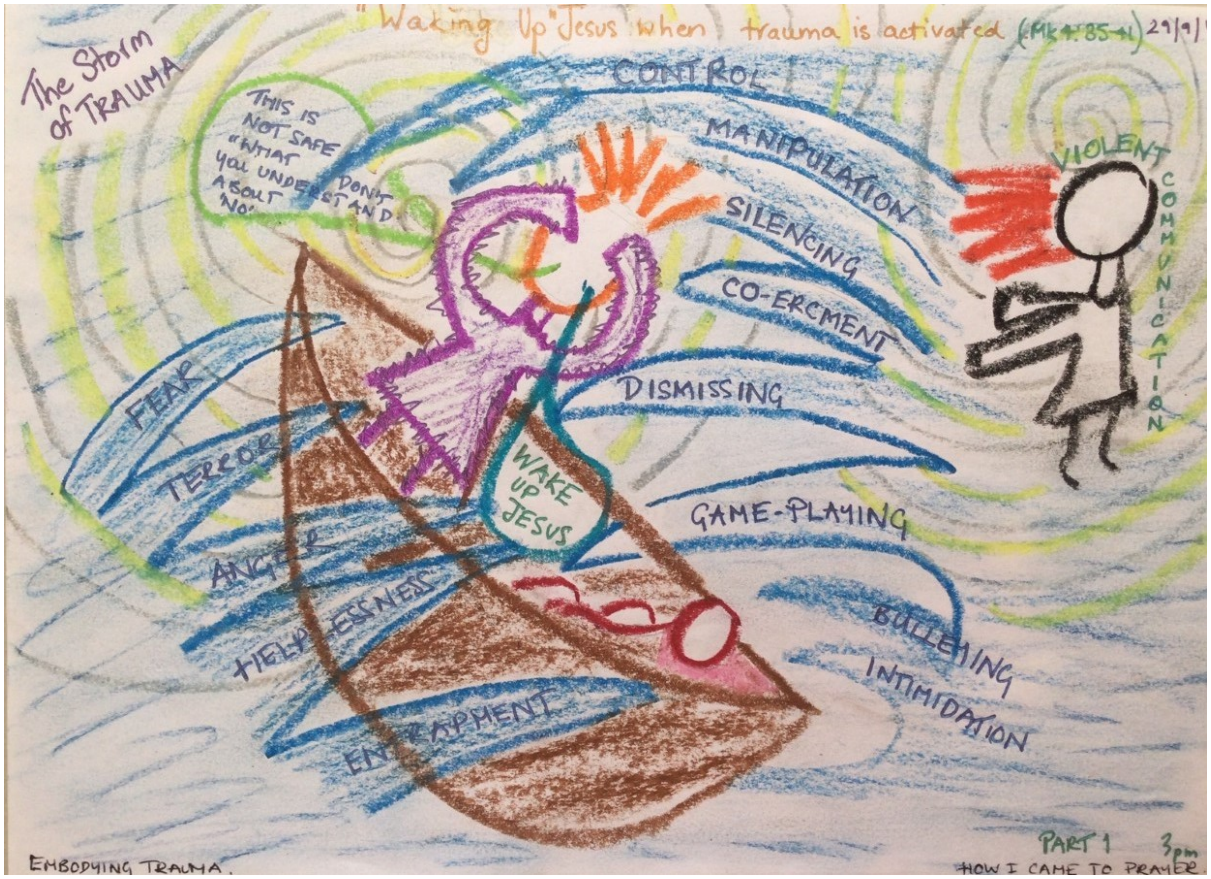

Image 4
***The Storm of Trauma (Part 1 – Mark 4:35-41),* 29 September 2021, oil crayon and chalk on paper, 29.5 x 21 cm, Sydney.**

TD and Staying in a Traumatised Body

As images 3 & 4 illustrate, embodiment of trauma through somatic experiencing can be terrifying for survivors and is the reason why they can feel "chronically unsafe inside their bodies" and experience "an inability to inhabit [their] body without being possessed by its defences and the emotional numbing that shuts down all experience…" (van der Kolk, 2015, pp. 96-100). However, the practice of TD has assisted me to "stay" in my traumatised body instead of dissociating which involves disconnection from parts of my body or being almost absent.[26] Staying in my traumatised body is evident firstly, in image 5 (below) – the transformed aftermath of my prayer with image 3; and secondly, in image 6 (below) – the transformed aftermath of my prayer with image 4. On both occasions, the method of praying through TD and slowly "drawing" out on paper what was bubbling from within me, calmed and

[26] "In trauma, dissociation seems to be a favoured means of enabling a person to endure experiences that are at the moment beyond endurance." Levine, *Healing Trauma: A Pioneering Program for Restoring the Wisdom of Your Body*, 16.

empowered me to stay in my body and prayerfully engage with and process my trauma.

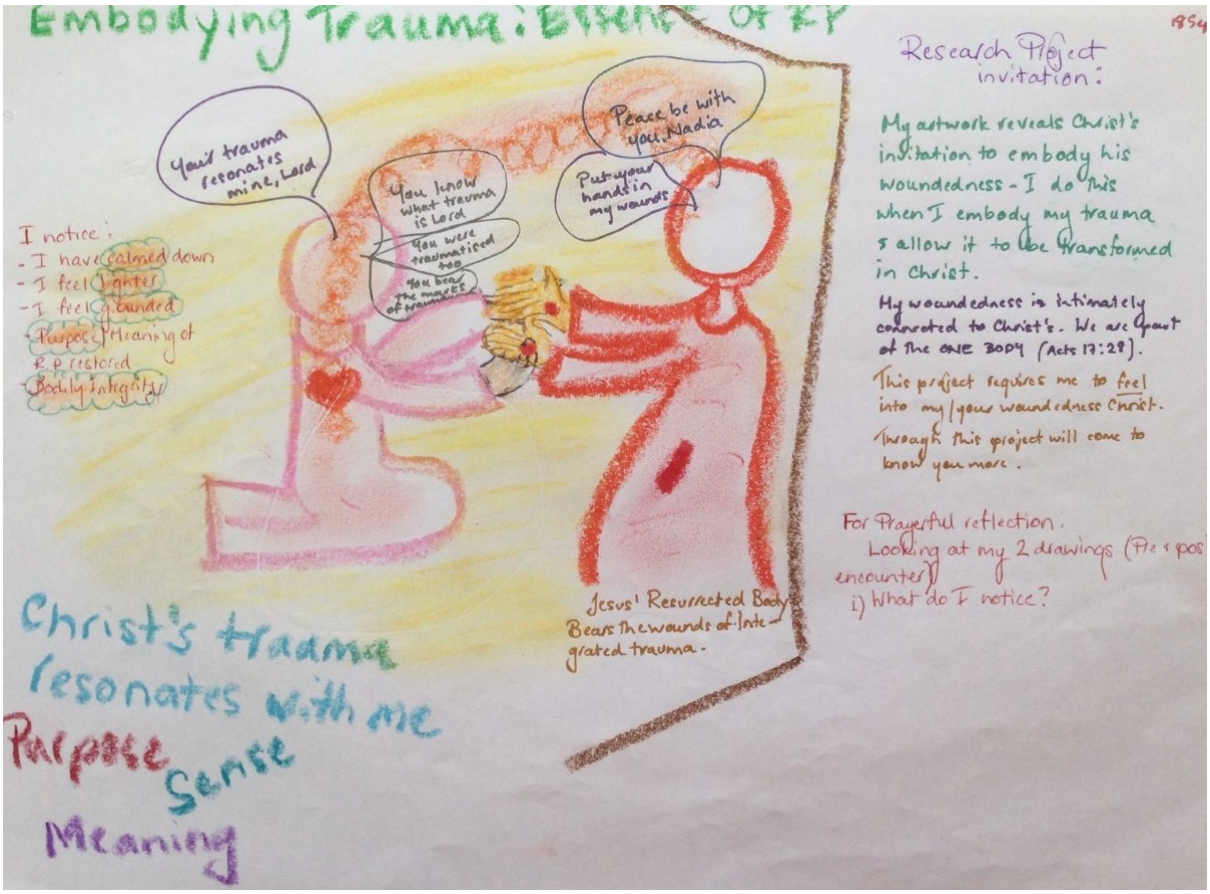

Image 5
***Embodying Trauma: The Core of My Research Project (Part 2 - John 20:19-23)*, 18 September 2021, oil crayon and chalk on paper, 29.5 x 21 cm, Sydney.**

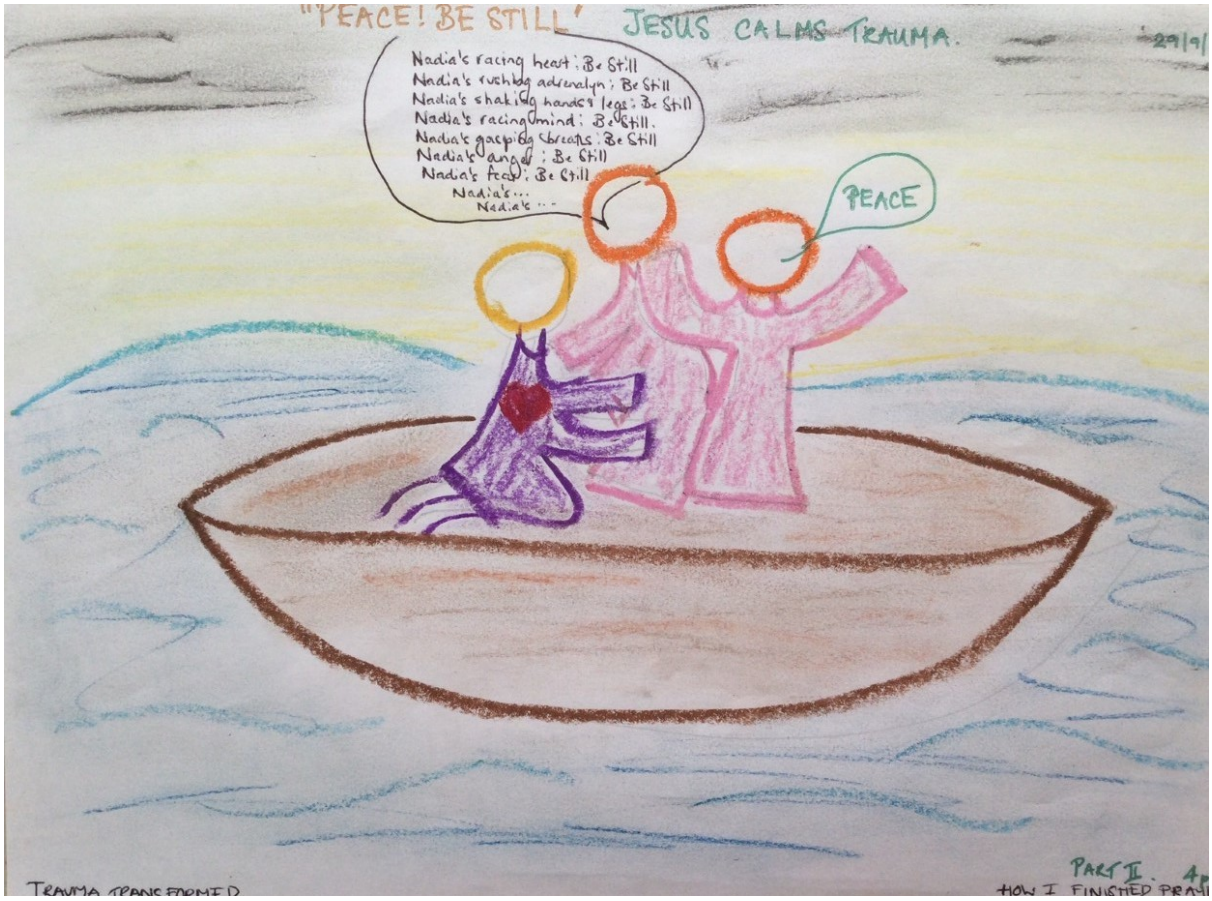

Image 6

***Jesus Calms a Trauma Response (Part 2 – Mark 4:35-41),* 29 September 2021, oil crayon and chalk on paper, 29.5 x 21 cm, Sydney.**

TD and Releasing the Frozen Energy of Trauma which leads to Regulation of the CNS

Peter Levine's research asserts that trauma is transformed and integrated when excess frozen trauma energy is released after a "freeze" or "immobility" response (Levine, 2008, p. 28). In Levine's method of Somatic Experiencing (SE™), this happens through a process of "titration" meaning that the bodily sensations are used as a "reservoir of innate embodied structure to which the individual can return to repeatedly as they touch, bit by bit (titration), on the stress-associated sensations" (Payne et al., 2015, p. 15). It enables a process of "biological completion" and unfreezing or discharge of the instinctive survival energy that was not available at the time of the traumatic event and leads to transformation (Levine, 2008, p. 31).

Images 5 and 6 (above) provide evidence of the potential of TD to "unfreeze" the frozen energy of trauma through a dual process of physical and spiritual traction.

Physical traction is created by the adhesive connection of one's hand gripping the crayon and moving it on paper. As this physical traction occurs, I draw out "bit by bit" on paper what is in my traumatised body. Simultaneously, a spiritual traction occurs whereby God's grace – through the Holy Spirit - moves within me shifting what is "stuck," loosening what is bound, and lifting-up what is crushing/burdening me. Both traction processes that occur with movement during TD produce the "titration" that Levine speaks of and lead to the "unfreezing" of "frozen trauma energy" in my body so that "biological completion" may be achieved. The titration process is further enriched through the movement of a "backwards and forwards" dialogue with God that occurs throughout.[27]

Consequently, both images 5 and 6 show evidence that relieving my pain in this manner is deeply calming, soothing, and transformative. Both images reflect the unfreezing of my frozen energy that led to the regulation of my CNS. My VD journal writing records captured this, "I have calmed down; I feel lighter; I feel grounded; purpose and meaning is restored; bodily integrity." Importantly, they reflect the "normalizing" and the "return to equilibrium and balance" of my CNS which Levine asserts is the "primary factor" to avoid "being traumatised" (Levine, 2008, p. 28). As well, my journal writing describes a stronger connection to my-self and a reactivation of my self-sensing system.[28] In this sense, TD can aid the challenge of alexithymia by providing language, and language empowers one to communicate their feelings and story. These outcomes support research that demonstrates how art therapy is assisting survivors of trauma to understand and communicate internal processes (Lobban & Murphy, 2019; Kaimal et al, 2019; Jones et al, 2019).

Recommendations for Further Research

While the findings of this research indicate that TD – a particular Christian spiritual discipline – combined with LD and VD may facilitate embodiment and the transformation of trauma in survivors of CSA, it is important to bear in mind that, as well as researcher and author, I have been the sole participant. In the future, further research needs to be done with a larger group of participants to confirm the findings demonstrated. Steps leading to such future research may involve the development of a program for Christian survivors of sexual abuse that incorporates the body-spirit

[27] "Backwards and forwards dialogue with God" – also implies titration and movement.
[28] Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing,* 92. The self-sensing system in the traumatised person breaks down due to trauma.

based method of TD as articulated in this research. Afterwards, the program might be piloted with a small group so that improvements can be made. After making the improvements, the program may then be evaluated with a larger group of participants.

References

Ali, A., Wolfert, S., Fahmy, P., Nayyar, M., & Chaudhry, A. (2019). The therapeutic effects of imagination: Investigating mimetic induction and dramatic simulation in a trauma treatment for military veterans. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, *62,* 7-11. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2018.12.006

Anonymous. (March 2021). The oneness of lines: Drawing, rather than talking, may be a key to accessing spirituality- and also empathy. *Sojourners Magazine, 50(3),* 39-40.

Arias, B. J., & Johnson, C.V. (2013). Treatment of childhood sexual abuse survivors: Voices of healing and recovery from childhood sexual abuse. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 22*, 822-841.

Ashbrook, R.T. (2019). *Mansions of the heart: Exploring the seven stages of spiritual \ growth.* Fortress Press.

Awara, M., & Fasey, C. (April 2008). Is spirituality worth exploring in psychiatric out- patient clinics?" *Journal of Mental Health, 17*(2), 183-191.

Baldwin, Jennifer. (2018). *Trauma-sensitive theology: Thinking theologically in the era of trauma*. Wipf and Stock Publishers.

Barton, Ruth Haley. (2006). *Sacred rhythms: Arranging our lives for spiritual transformation.* InterVarsity Press.

Benner, D. G. (2015). *The gift of being yourself: The sacred call to self-discovery.* InterVarsity Press.

Boa, Kenneth. (2001). *Conformed to his image: Biblical and practical approaches to spiritual formation*. Zondervan.

Calhoun, A.A. (2015). *Spiritual disciplines handbook: Practices that transform us*. InterVarsity Press.

Carey, L. (2006). *Expressive and creative arts methods for trauma survivors.* Jessica Kingsley.

Castella, Rosemary de., & Graetz Simmonds, J. (2013). There's a deeper level of meaning as to what suffering's all about: Experiences of religious and spiritual growth following trauma. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture, 16*(5), 536-556.

Coe, J. H. (2004). *Healing the heart's deep beliefs in the spirit: Intentionalizing spiritual formation through openness to God.* Unpublished manuscript. Institute of Spiritual Formation, Biola University, CA.

Cooper, Robin, and Lilyea, Bruce. (January 2022). I'm interested in autoethnography, but how do I do it? *The Qualitative Report, 27*(1), 197-208. https://www.proquest.com/docview/2621568305/abstract/827F8EB2A4A44127PQ/3

Damaisio, A. (1999). *The feeling of what happens: Body and emotion in the making of consciousness.* Hartcourt Brace.

Damasio, Antonio., et al. (2000). Subcortical and cortical brain activity during the feeling of self-generated emotions. *Nature Neuroscience, 3*(10), 1049-1056.

Delforge, G. (2002). *Musculoskeletal trauma: Implications for sports injury management*. Human Kinetics.

Farb, N., Daubenmier, J., Price, C. J., Gard, T., Kerr, C., Dunn, B. D., Klein, A. C., Paulus, M. P., & Mehling, W. E. (2015). Interoception, contemplative practice, and health. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *0*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00763

Ferrara, F. (2002). *Childhood sexual abuse.* Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole.

Foster, Richard. (2008). *Celebration of discipline: The path to spiritual growth.* Study Guide Edition. Hodder.

Frans, O., Rimmö, P.-A., Aberg, L., & Fredrikson, M. (2005). Trauma exposure and post- traumatic stress disorder in the general population. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, *111*(4), 291–299.

Goodwin, J. (1985). Post-traumatic symptoms in incest victims. In S. Eth and R. Pynoos (Eds.), *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in Children,* 155-168. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press.

Herman, J., Russell, D., & Trocki, K. (1986). Long-term effects of incestuous abuse in childhood. *American Journal of Psychiatry, 143,* 1293-1296.

Ignatian Spirituality. (Accessed August 12, 2021). Pray with Your Imagination – IgnatianSpirituality.Com. https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/pray-with-your-imagination/.

Jones, J. P., Drass, J. M., Kaimal, G. ((2019). Art therapy for military service members with post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injury: Three case reports highlighting trajectories of treatment and recovery. *The Arts in Psychotherapy,* 18-30. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2019.04.004

Kaimal, G., Jones, J. P., Dieterich-Hartwell, R., Acharya, B., & Wang, X. (2019). Evaluation of long- and short-term art therapy interventions in an integrative care setting for military service members with post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injury. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, *62*, 28-36. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2018.10.003

Krantz, A. M., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2007). Expressive dance, writing, trauma, and health: When words have a body. In *Whole person healthcare Vol 3: The arts and health* (pp. 201–229). Praeger Publishers.

Larrivee, D., & Echarte, L. (2018). Contemplative Meditation and Neuroscience: Prospects for Mental Health. *Journal of Religion and Health*, *57*(3), 960–978. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10943-017-0475-0

Levine, Peter A. (1997). *Waking the tiger: Healing trauma.* North Atlantic Books.

Levine, Peter A. (2008). *Healing trauma: A pioneering program for restoring the wisdom of your body*. Sounds True.

Lobban, J., & Murphy, D. (2019). Understanding the role art therapy can take in treating veterans with chronic post-traumatic stress disorder. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, *62*, 37– 44. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2018.11.011

Maté, Gabor. (Accessed 23 July, 2021). *Trauma Is Not What Happens to You, It Is What Happens Inside You*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmJOuTAk09g

Ogden, P., Minton, K., and Pain, C. (2010). *Trauma and the body.* Norton.

Ogden, P., and Fisher, J. (2014). *Sensorimotor psychotherapy: Interventions for trauma and attachment.* Norton.

Pargament, K. I., Murray-Swank, N. A., & Mahoney, A. (2008). Problem and Solution: The Spiritual Dimension of Clergy Sexual Abuse and its Impact on Survivors. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, *17*(3–4), 397–420. https://doi.org/10.1080/10538710802330187

Payne, P., Levine, P. A., & Crane-Godreau, M. A. (2015). Somatic experiencing: Using interoception and proprioception as core elements of trauma therapy. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *0*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00093

Peres, J. F. P., Moreira-Almeida, A., Nasello, A. G., & Koenig, H. G. (2007). Spirituality and resilience in trauma victims. *Journal of Religion and Health, 46*(3), 343-350. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-006-9103-0

Russell, D. E. H. (1986). *The secret trauma.* Basic Books.

Saywitz, A., Mannarino, A., Berliner, L., and Cohen, J. (2000). Treatment for sexually abused children and adolescents . *American Psychologist, 55*, 1040-1049.

Shaw, A., Joseph, S., & Linley, P. A. (2005). Religion, spirituality, and posttraumatic growth:

A systematic review. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, *8*, 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1080/1367467032000157981

Tan, Siang-Yang. (2019). Beyond resilience, posttraumatic growth, and self-care: A biblical perspective on suffering and Christian spiritual formation. In, Crisp, Thomas M., Porter, Steven L., and Ten Elshof, Gregg A., *Psychology and Spiritual Formation in Dialogue: Moral and Spiritual Change in Christian Perspective.* InterVarsity Press.

Taylor G. J., and Bagby, R. M. ((2004). New trends in alexithymia research. *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics,*73(2), 68-77.

Tedeschi, R. G., Park, C. L., & Calhoun, L. G. (1998). Posttraumatic growth: Conceptual issues. In *Posttraumatic growth: Positive changes in the aftermath of crisis* (pp. 1–22). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

van der Kolk, B. A. (1994). The Body Keeps the Score: Memory and the Evolving Psychobiology of Posttraumatic Stress. *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, *1*(5), 253–265. https://doi.org/10.3109/10673229409017088

van der Kolk, B. A., McFarlane, A. C., & Weiseth, L. (1996). *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society*. Guilford Press.

van der Kolk, B. A. (1987). *Psychological trauma.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Press.

van der Kolk, B. A. (2015). *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (Reprint edition). Penguin Publishing Group.

Vilenica, S., Shakespeare-Finch, J., & Obst, P. (2013). Exploring the process of meaning making in healing and growth after childhood sexual assault: A case study approach. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly, 26*(1), 39-54.

Weaver, A. J., Flannelly, L. T., Garbarino, J., Figley, C. R., & Flannelly, K. J. (2003). A systematic review of research on religion and spirituality in the *Journal of Traumatic Stress*: 1990–1999. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, *6*(3), 215–228. https://doi.org/10.1080/1367467031000088123

Willard, D. (2002). *Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (Reprint edition). HarperCollins Religious US.

Willard, D. (2002). *Renovation of the heart: Putting on the character of Christ*. NavPress.

Willard, Dallas. (Accessed April 28, 2022). *Becoming The Kinds of Leaders Who Can Do The Job*. https://dwillard.org/articles/becoming-the-kinds-of-leaders-who-can-do-the-job

Young, L. (1992). Sexual abuse and the problem of embodiment. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *16*(1), 89–100. https://doi.org/10.1016/0145-2134(92)90010-O

Journal of Contemporary Ministry

Peer Reviewed Articles

A reflective reply to Clayton Coomb's *Unapologetic Apology for Megachurch Worship Practices* – (and an introduction to German idealism for Christians)

Sarah Bacaller

Western Sydney University

www.sarahbacaller.com

Sarah Bacaller is a writer, researcher and audiobook producer from outer Melbourne, Australia. She is currently writing a PhD on G. W. F. Hegel through Western Sydney University.

Abstract

In a recent keynote address published in the *Journal of Contemporary Ministry*, Clayton Coombs presented an *unapologetic apologetic* for contemporary, communal worship in the Christian megachurch context (*Journal of Contemporary Ministry*, Issue 6 2022). The basis for his argument was a correlation between features of megachurch worship praxis and Christian revivals; interpreting the former through the lens of the latter provided for Coombs undeniable evidence of divine imprimatur upon megachurch worship praxis. This article offers a reflective reply to Coombs, with particular focus on the dichotomy of reason and revelatory experience in Coombs' implicit epistemology. By recourse to German idealist philosophy, particularly the work of Immanuel Kant, F. H. Jacobi and G. W. F. Hegel, I will show where arguments such as Coombs' have previously been made – based on a similar epistemological approach – and why utilising 'God-says-so' arguments in the context of Christian discourse, a method central to Coombs' epistemological defence of megachurch worship, raises important ethical and relational questions.

Key words: Pentecostalism, divine command theory, theological ethics, German idealism, Kant, Jacobi, Hegel, theological language, religious epistemology, worship

The welcome mat

In a recent keynote address published in the *Journal of Contemporary Ministry*, Clayton Coombs presented an *unapologetic apologetic* for contemporary, communal worship in the Christian megachurch context (2022).[29] The basis for his argument was a correlation between the features of megachurch worship praxis and Christian revivals; interpreting the former through the lens of the latter provided for Coombs undeniable evidence of divine imprimatur upon megachurch worship praxis. For those already convinced of the value and transformative nature of megachurch worship styles, his apologetic could only bolster existing positions. Yet there was an undeniable tension woven throughout Coombs' piece, centred around the division between faith and analytical thought. It is this dimension of Coombs' address, particularly the epistemological separation between faith and thought, and the implicit presence of a 'God-says-so' argument (an expression of divine command theory), that I will pick up as a stimulus for productive discussion—albeit leading into perhaps surprising terrain.

My hope is to invite Coombs, and others who think along similar lines, to consider reframing their 'God's-eye-view' language via reflection on its ethical and relational consequences. I hope my thoughts will also affirm those who are disquieted by God-says-so arguments by demonstrating *why* their disquiet is valuable and ethically warranted. Implicitly (and explicitly), this is an exploration of the consequences of applying a reason–revelation dichotomy to interpretations of the action and presence of God.

Where logic doesn't fly

Coombs' primary contention could be formulated in several syllogistic ways, with subtle differences, and without any change to the primary faith-focused assertion of his discourse:

> Megachurch worship resembles historic revivals;
>
> Revivals are an act of God;
>
> *Therefore* megachurch worship is an act of God.
>
> Megachurch worship is an act of God;

[29] See Clayton Coombs, "Sounds of Revival: An Unapologetic Apology for Megachurch Worship Practices", *Journal of Contemporary Ministry* 6 (2022), 9–19.

Revivals are an act of God;

Therefore megachurch worship resembles historical revivals.

We might even put it this way:

Megachurch worship is an act of God;

Revivals are an act of God;

Therefore they share key characteristics

and should both be accepted as acts of God.

The variables here are (a) megachurches, (b) their worship praxis and (c) historical revivals, but regardless of the order in which these variables are arranged, their presupposition, primary cause and ultimate justification is *God*, without whom the arguments fall apart. I will therefore refer to Coombs' article as having made a 'God-says-so' argument, predicated on divine command theory.

Coombs' apologetic is in part a response to the 2017 analysis of contemporary Christian worship practices by Lim and Ruth (2017). While he affirms much of this work, Coombs believes that Lim and Ruth are mistaken in ascribing megachurch growth to human causes; it is rather a sign of God's action (pp. 13–15). He also reminds readers that prolific musical generativity and the impetus towards contemporary language in worship—hallmark traits of megachurch praxis—are not new phenomena. Coombs traces several historical instances of prolific song generation in Christian history, from the Wesleyan Methodist revival back to the Reformation, citing Luther's own penchant for the composition of hymns (pp. 15–17). He links this artistic generativity with the pervasive desire (often present in times of historical Christian revivals) for the gospel message to be shared in the vernacular—as, for example, in Luther's translation of scripture from Latin into German. This impetus toward Christian vernacular expression was also evident (Coombs notes) in other eras of great receptiveness to the Christian gospel, such as in the time of Jerome (Jerome translated scripture into Latin) and during Pentecost itself, as recorded in the second chapter of Acts, where the arrival of the Spirit of Christ is evidenced in the speaking of many tongues. But Coombs' overarching purpose in making these points is to demonstrate that the artistically generative, vernacular worship praxis of megachurches can be interpreted as a locale of divinely ordained revival. To this end,

Coombs highlights Lim and Ruth's observation that, within megachurch contexts, worship itself becomes sacramental (though Coombs is uncomfortable with this non-vernacular label). Coombs locates the impetus for the Pentecostal sacramental view of worship in narratives of King David's temple in the Hebrew scriptures, where the Ark of the Covenant, as the tangible locale of God's presence amongst the Jewish people, is not hidden behind a veil; rather, it is directly in view—it is accessible. Contemporary megachurch worship, as an expression of revival, is similarly a locale for the real, transformative presence and action of an accessible God (pp. 18–19). As such it is both justified and in no need of justification.[30]

This is where a deep tension emerges in Coombs' argument. *God* here is what (and who) finally justifies megachurch worship praxis. God justifies megachurch worship as an expression of ordained revival, even as these need no justification because they *are* divinely ordained (that is, God is their source and origin). God is as much the premise here as the conclusion. Coombs can sense this circular reasoning, because in the introduction and conclusion to his argument, he makes clear that in the end, "mere analysis" (which "cheapens" experience) is not up to the task of proving his point (2022, p. 9, 19). Instead, he appeals to experience—to encounter—of the presence of God through contemporary megachurch worship itself. Despite Coombs' analysis of variables, God ends up playing the role of *deus ex machina.* Authentication then, rests on a God-given, transformative experience of revelation.[31] At the end of the day, logical modes of verification miss the point. Coombs is highly sceptical of how far analysis can go, when experience is the true mode of Christian encounter with God, and this is often facilitated through worship (note that this is also an epistemological claim—true knowledge of God is posited as experiential, and experience is implicitly separated here from thought). The act of faith is immune from the critique of logic because faith exists in a realm altogether different, where the same rules of logic don't apply—so it doesn't really matter whether Coombs' syllogisms hold up or not. Matters of faith cannot be interrogated in the way we approach empirical phenomena; this would be a category error. Coombs no doubt hopes that others arrive at a similar conclusion to him through their own experiential revelation. But Coombs' rhetorical strategy is not new in the history of Christian thought, and I would like to provide a

[30] One might wonder, if the Ark is a *typos* or type for Christ, why there is need to revert to a type prior to Christ in theologising Christian worship.
[31] This makes it very easy to accuse disagreeing interlocutors of not having been graced with divine insight.

(very small amount) of context so that, by considering where and why such strategies have been used before, we might be best equipped to think through the implications of Coombs' appeal.

Rethinking the wallpaper

Coombs' expression of faith is in keeping with the dynamics of the megachurch Pentecostal worship experience, where the revelation of God is central to what has become a sacramental space. Just as Coombs' argument stakes its claim on God, so megachurch worship itself (in the moment of its expression) tends to be experienced, interpreted and framed by its performers (that is, by worship leaders or ministers) as a locale and expression of divine presence.[32] No personal circumstance or individual experience can hold more weight than divine imprimatur for those who believe. If 'God says so', no more can be said. When an argument or experience is framed in this manner, it frames itself as revelatory whilst simultaneously framing any resistant position as a rejection of, or an assault on, God. Refutation can be framed as moral or religious failure—as disobedience, disrespect or a lack of faith. There is an implicit assumption here not only that a God's-eye-view exists, but that *one oneself* has the authority to verify that divine imprimatur—that is, to assume the accessibility of a God's-eye-view and assert this on God's behalf.

Coombs' very real application of the revelation/reason dichotomy should raise a variety of ethical (and deeply theological) questions. By holding ourselves and faith immune from logical critique – and by 'logical critique' I mean, holistic critical thought rather than legalistic rationalism or compartmentalised, unfeeling cerebralism – we risk ossification both in our self-growth and in the development of our social expressions … and worse. If we hold off reason and then interpret our own revelation (experiences) through the lens that 'God says so', this shapes a particular tonality of Christian culture where curiosity, questioning, difference and robust exploration may be heard as threatening. Coombs' argument should therefore give us pause to ask: What are the consequences – socially, relationally, phenomenologically – of making an argument that implies that megachurch worship is *unarguably* and *absolutely good* (that is, acceptable, right, important) because it is *of God*? What are the consequences

[32] I take this point as self-evident, whereby evidence is so profuse, especially online (since COVID-19 lockdowns) and within anecdotal experience that specific references would be arbitrary. I also realise that worship leaders and ministers may take exception to being labelled 'performers', but it is the clearest word in the context.

of dressing an absolute argument in the garb of a logical argument, while simultaneously decrying 'analytical thought', as Coombs does? What effects might such a methodology have on those who have contrasting experiences of megachurch worship to Coombs, or of Christian worship and faith generally? In other words, what are the consequences of this applied form of the revelation/reason dualism?

If the strength of an experience alone is the measure of its validity, or if the strength of an experience alone is perceived as the key to true interpretation of phenomena, then reasonable conversation may fade, individuals will clamour for increasingly intense experiences, and those who argue most forcefully for their own interpretation of events may suppress alternative perspectives. To invoke a "God's eye-view" can be a dangerous misuse of power that stifles freedom.[33] I am not saying that Coombs holds any such conscious intention; language use is cultural and accepted expressions become part of the wallpaper of existence, so that we habituate to them and no longer question their presence. But sometimes, the wallpaper needs changing.[34]

Echoes of Immanuel (Kant, that is …)

The Enlightenment has almost become a cliché point of reference in the history of ideas, and the nomination itself ('the Enlightenment') invariably oversimplifies and caricatures a rich and diverse history of human discovery in various geographical locations, cultures and disciplines. Nevertheless, it is accurate enough to describe the *Zeitgeist* of the Enlightenment, at least in part, as a historical movement of human thought constellations towards systematic and critical scientific discovery and reflection on the phenomenal world, away from superstition and authoritarian modes of knowledge promulgation.[35] The leaps in human understanding of the natural world through technological innovation, and the shifts in centres of power through political and social changes in Europe and the Americas through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, led to rethinking of diverse human and social phenomena. Ideas about religion and faith did not (and do not) occur in a vacuum but are interwoven with historical and cultural contexts, and developments in the ability to explain natural phenomena raised (and raises) myriad questions for theology and lived faith. Superstition was being demarcated from science, and questions of the nature and scope of human knowledge were as pertinent as ever.

[33] The "God's eye view" phrase is drawn from Bubbio, 2017.
[34] On language as 'wallpapering' existence, see Curkpatrick, 2001.
[35] See Kant's *An answer to the question, What is Enlightenment?* (2009).

If these new developments were accompanied by a euphoria over ‘reason’ and the human capacity for discovery and understanding, perhaps felt at times to be limitless, they also were accompanied by questions of the place of the human subject in its world, and indeed of the limits of human reason. For which domains was scientific discovery appropriate, and were there domains of human life and experience for which it was inadequate? Were there limits to human reason? How was knowledge related to perception, experience, feeling and the act of thought?

Prussian philosopher Immanuel Kant saw that the burgeoning emphasis on human reason had implications for religious faith in general and Christian faith particularly. His work tempered the sense of the limitlessness of human reason through an exploration of the reasonable limits of reason in human knowledge, judgment and experience. Kant also wanted to know what, in human experience, was received from external sources, and what was brought by the human mind to experience *a priori*, or in other words, what existed ‘prior to experience’ as the *conditions of the possibility for experience* and shaped the way in which experience was received by the human subject (CPR 1999). What was the role of the perceiving, experiencing subject in holding together its ‘world’? Kant’s work suggested that human knowledge was not received ‘unfiltered’ from the world around it, but that each person was itself a filter or subject who received external stimuli and information from a world outside themselves, and that no pure access to this outside world was possible beyond interpretations of human consciousness.

This insight was essential for acknowledging the role of the human subject in their interpretation of the world, but it also raised questions about nihilistic self-enclosure. If I am stuck only in my own world of perception and interpretation, how can I know truth? How can I see things from another’s perspective? Is genuine relationality even possible? Is it possible to know the truth of anything in-itself if it resides ‘out there’, beyond me, inaccessible to me except from within the bounds of my own filters and perceptions? This was (and remains) a real conundrum for understanding knowledge of self, others and of God, and for relationality. Importantly, it might evoke the feeling that we, as human beings, *taint* the pure truth of things-in-themselves.

If for Kant, the truth of anything existed beyond human grasp, what did this mean for human apprehension of God as the source of all truth? Kant had a solution to this. While human beings could never access God or truth in-itself, they could however

recognise that it was essential to the good of humankind that God be postulated for the sake of practical morality (see Kant, 1998/2003, 2015). Postulates were to be held 'as if' true for practical purposes but could not be guaranteed by reason. Belief in God was a practical necessity, facilitating the moral functioning of individuals and society at large; God was a belief with practical implications, and the impetus for faith was a matter of duty.

Locating God beyond the grasp of human experience and beyond the realm of rational proof or certitude may seem like a massive blow to faith, and in a way it was. But it simultaneously offered a way of protecting faith from the incursions of reason and the methods of scientific discovery (Kant himself wrote, "I had to deny knowledge to make room for faith, see 1998, p. 117, Bxxx). How so? If God or truth or the realness of anything was beyond human grasp, then these things were also immune to the critique of human reason. Faith was in a realm of its own. "The very separation of knowable *appearances* from unknowable *things in themselves*," writes scholar Paul Redding, "had left a place for God, as well as for the soul, unassailed by the considerations of modern science" (2011, p. 49). The Absolute (God) was abyssally inaccessible to the subjectivity of humankind, which meant God was also inviolable. In a strange way, the assertion of human subjectivity had elevated and underscored the absoluteness and transcendency of the 'Absolute' (synonymously as truth or God, a concept further developed by the philosophers Fichte, Schelling and Hegel), while opening the possibility of 'absolute relativity' in human thought and experience.

For some, Kant bolstered religious agnosticism; for others, Kant's critique was an invitation to take refuge in faith. One contemporary of Kant's, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743–1819), perceived a critical incongruity in Kant's work in relation to faith. While Kant denied the human possibility for knowing anything in-itself, and thus effectively denied the existence of the in-itself for human reason, Jacobi pointed out that in doing so, Kant had in fact built his system on the presupposition *of* things-in-themselves (1994, p. 537–590). What Kant had denied, he also relied upon. Jacobi wrote,

> What divides me from the Kantian doctrine is only what divides it from itself too, and makes it incoherent, namely that, as we have shown earlier, it both presupposes and denies the existence of two specifically distinct sources of cognition in man's mind [that is, the finite and the divine]. It presupposes them implicitly and

> unbeknownst to itself. But it denies them explicitly, openly, and radically (1994, p. 550).

Jacobi agreed with Kant that faith did not belong in the realm of empiricism, but unlike Kant, he did not agree that humans lacked the capacity to access religious truths directly. Rather, he posited “immediate knowing” or feeling as the epistemological conduit for the knowledge of faith. He likened this faculty to a revelatory “spiritual eye” that complemented the “physical eye”, the latter attending to the world around us (1994, 569). He thus maintained a faith that was safe from the incursions of rationality or reason, because the things of faith as “immediate” or unmediated were of a different realm and rule to the things of reason.

The upshot?

Assertions along the lines of both Kant’s and Jacobi’s reasoning continue to present themselves within and beyond contemporary Christian discourses. Agnostics may propose holding onto what we know we know (reason, empirical phenomena) and leaving God in the sphere of the unknown, while perhaps adopting an instrumentalist-flavoured view that propounds faith in God for its positive ethico-social effects. Contemporary Protestants are more likely to separate experience of God from ‘human reason’, giving the former its own special domain, so that access to God is retained despite our subjective relativity (and perhaps our ‘fallen humanness’). This approach can also protect God from the incursions of reason (as per Coombs’ article). Does it also, however, lead to a strange apparent rupture between our reasoning and experiencing selves? *Strange and apparent*, because such an approach is in danger of carving us up in ways that are disingenuous, both in relation to human existence and to faith.

Take Coombs’ article for example. On the one hand, he utilises logic and reason to make an argument about the resemblances between megachurch worship and divinely inspired revivals; on the other hand, he believes that analytical thought will never lead to the sort of conviction that revelatory experience of megachurch worship will bring. Sounds Jacobian, doesn’t it? That is, the implication of Coombs’ approach is that we have two faculties—one for faith and one for reason, and the divinely inspired faculty of faith surpasses that of finite reason. Coombs is acting entirely consistently with this perspective: he is providing food for our rational stomachs and an invitation for our

spiritual stomachs (to transpose Jacobi's metaphor). But is this perspective true to human existence (in our place and time), and is it conducive to human flourishing?

When a 'God-says-so' argument is invoked, Kant's contribution to our awareness of located, human contextuality is ignored, even if his insights on human consciousness lay a groundwork for differentiating separate forms of knowledge (faith and reason). With such an argument, a Christian speaker implies that they themselves are privy to the ways of God (that is, one would have to know God's perspective to know what God thinks or says on any given topic). This latter elides the *difference* between the human rhetorician's position and the divine outlook and, while making God inviolable as inhabiting a wholly other epistemological zone, it completely eradicates Kant's insight that human knowledge is always contextual to the experience of being human. How then, might we think about truth? Must we choose between God's truth or no truth, and accept that knowledge is either revelatory *or* rational?

Reconciling reason and revelation

Not according to another German philosopher—Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Responding both to Kant and Jacobi, Hegel believed that it was precisely in the capacity *to think* that human beings laid claim to that which made them distinctly human, and simultaneously to that which reflected the *imago Dei* (2007). *Faith and thought stem from the same root*, asserted Hegel—*this is what makes doubt so deeply painful* (2007, p. 39, 60). Hegel did not believe that knowledge of God was impossible ("God is not jealous," he declares—after all, why would God hide Godself when God expressly chooses to reveal Godself?) (2007, 67). But neither did Hegel believe that revelation of God was in any way distinct from the human capacity to *make sense of* life—that is, to reason, to think—and he asserted, like Kant, that all of thought is *mediated*. Feeling was not a sure judge of divine revelation, because truth and certainty were two different things; and truth had to be striven for, developed, shaped and made concrete so that it made a real difference in the lived experience of human beings, who were always shaped in communities.[36] Thus for Hegel, if faith is to be genuinely satisfied, reason must be genuinely satisfied too; we must make faith our own through thought. This is precisely where God-says-so arguments become problematic. Hegel writes:

[36] On truth versus certainty, see Hegel, 2007, p. 54–58. Also see Hegel, 2008, 2015.

> Everything spiritual is concrete; here we have before us the spiritual in its most profound aspect, namely spirit as the concreteness of faith and thought. These two are not only mixed in the most manifold fashion, immediately passing over from one to the other; they are also so inwardly bound together that there is no faith that does not contain within itself reflection, argumentation, or in fact, thought

Human beings seem to have an intractable inclination to *think* (though perhaps not always enough); the social and political implications of suppressing or compartmentalising reason can lead to an intense disconnect between the life of faith (Christian world) and the rest of life (secular world). In the latter, we rely on the discoveries of *reason* both in living generally as reasonable, clear-headed people, and in scientific endeavour—for example, in our reliance on health professionals and technology. But in the former, we aim to rely directly *on God* through experience; our trust in the secular realm can even be seen to undermine or compromise our trust in God. And so, painful tensions ensue when Christians are accused of living with double standards and try to prove their authenticity and faith by self-destructive measures—such as refusal of life-saving medical intervention, which takes this position to its extreme but logical conclusion. The tension that arises from this dualism is also visible in Christian apologists who desperately make use of logic and rhetoric to try and ‘prove’ their arguments, while working from a standpoint of faith which is apparently not related to logic in the first place.

The point of all this is to say that a stark divide between reason and revelation, where the latter is used as leverage against the former, is both disingenuous and unhelpful. Even when a statement of faith (as in Coombs’ article) is made, reason is entirely bound up with this argumentation; to suggest otherwise is disingenuous because it attempts to withhold itself from thoughtful critique. If God is the source of all truth, would not all revelation be, if not rational, then at least reasonable—if reason is that by which we make sense of the world? Human thought as inherently enmeshed with self-conscious awareness is implicated (in greater or lesser degrees) in all aspects of our existence and it cannot be separated from our human functioning without damage. We are always sensing and perceiving through the framework of our knowledge which is built on experience; thought dynamically binds this all together. There is much in our sub-conscious minds that has not made its way to conscious

awareness, but thought as self-conscious reflection can move us forward, beyond the sometimes unreasonable and destructive implicit beliefs that we carry with us without even realising it. Of course, reason on its own should not be idolised, and there is rationality that is misplaced; this then, is a reminder that reason is also entwined with maturity, and maturity with wisdom.

Recognitively wrapping up

I recognise that contemporary modes of Christian worship around the world have been a response to historical challenges, existential yearnings and cultural formations, and that these responses have held important functions to the people engaged in them. I therefore do not seek to denigrate or invalidate the positive experiences of those in such contexts; rather, in this article I have wanted to expand the dialogue to make space for those with contrasting experiences to that of Coombs'. But I not contesting Coombs' assertion that megachurch worship "should and must keep happening," even if I would frame the reasons for this in differing ways (Coombs, 2022, p. 9–10). I *am* saying that, as an existing social expression, megachurch worship will only *benefit* from critical reflective thought and the contribution of others with thoughtful, unthreatening but contrasting experiences. If such dialogue is shut down by anxiety as to the potential consequences of critical thought, with attitudes that pit 'reason' against 'revelation' in a manner that does not accord with the complexity of daily life, then 'God-says-so' arguments will undermine and stunt the very cultural expression (and the growth of those within it) that Coombs is eager to endorse. If megachurch practices are to evolve in a generative and life-giving manner, it is important for contrasting experiences to be given due consideration in their ongoing perpetuation. While hearing of these can be uncomfortable for those endorsing megachurch worship scenarios, such contrasting perspectives can, when heard, lead to positive strengthening and refinement of entrenched practices. It is important to consider in any space whether there is room for disagreement, and whether there is empathy for those who have alternative experiences or think differently. Absolute assertions should not be used to negate the possibility of individual difference, because individual difference is also shared (that is, what we share is our difference) and dialogue on this shared basis of respect can reshape social practices for the better, so that they are conducive to the flourishing of more people, more of the time.

I have attempted to show, by *thinking* through Coombs' mode of argument, that thought engaged with faith can be constructive and conducive to flourishing. Right where Coombs has sought to discredit analytical or critical thought, I have sought to apply it. The act of critical thinking need not diminish the value of experience as Coombs fears it might. Is it not rather by thoughtfully considering our experiences with sensitivity and insight that we honour them? This is how we integrate significant experiences into a wider whole of identity and make informed choices for the future. Further, it is a social and communal activity even as it is also deeply personal (Blunden, 2021).

At the end of the day, I suspect Coombs—like all of us—seeks positive recognition and validation in articulating experiences that have been moving and transformative in his own personal experience, as I do for my own experiences. He does not need to revert to absolutes for this to occur. Trying to secure the others' acceptance of our own perspective by reference to absolute authority (such as *God*) imposes upon others' freedom and dignity. Furthermore, life is complex and diverse, and others do not need to agree with us or have the same experiences as us for our own experiences to be valid—as affirming as it also is when we find the joy of sharing parallel experiences with others. Recognition and affirmation can only be given freely, as gift; some people will never give this to us, no matter how much we seek it from them. Others are more generous. My own experience of mega-church worship has been complex and painful, but this does not mean that Coombs' experience has not been positive and healing. I hope my intervention has expanded the dialogue and helped to bring out various hues that may otherwise have been glossed over. To give others space to work critically through our own assertions, and not to impose by invoking absolute arguments, is an expression of respect for the human dignity of others. In the context of Christian expression, and megachurch worship in particular, this should give us pause for thought concerning the interpretive framing and language that is used in the context of such expressions.

References

Blunden, A. (2021). *Hegel for Social Movements*. Brill.

Bubbio, P. D. (2017). *God and the Self in Hegel: Beyond Subjectivism*. SUNY.

Coombs, C. (2022). Sounds of Revival: An Unapologetic Apology for Megachurch Worship Practices. *Journal of Contemporary Ministry, 6*, 9–19. https://journalofcontemporaryministry.com/index.php/jcm/issue/view/11/1

Curkpatrick, S. (2001). Helen and Hermes' Conceit. In L. McCredden and F. Devlin-Glass (Eds.), *Feminist Poetics of the Sacred: Creative Suspicions* (pp. 182–197).

Hegel, G. W. F. (2007). *Lectures on the Proofs of the Existence of God* (Peter C. Hodgson, Ed., Trans.). Oxford University Press.

———. (2008). *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* (T. M. Knox with Stephen Houlgate, Trans.). Oxford University Press.

———. (2015). *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciencies in Basic Outline, Part 1: Science of Logic* (Daniel O. Dahlstrom and Klaus Brinkmann, Trans. & Ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Jacobi, F. H. (1994). David Hume on Faith, or Idealism and Realism, A Dialogue: Preface and also Introduction to the Author's Collected Philosophical works (1815). In G. di Giovanni (Ed., Trans.), *The Main Philosophical Writings and the novel Allwill: Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi* (pp. 537–590). McGill-Queens University Press.

Kant, Immanuel. (1998). *Critique of Pure Reason* (Allan W. Wood, Paul Guyer, Trans., Ed.) Cambridge University Press.

———. (2003). Religion within the boundaries of mere reason. In *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and other writings* (Allan Wood and George di Giovanni, Trans. with Robert Merrihew Adams) (pp. 31–190). Cambridge University Press.

———. (2015). *Critique of Practical Reason* (Mary Gregor, Trans. with Andrew Reath). Cambridge University Press.

Redding, P. (2011). The Metaphysical and Theological Commitments of Idealism: Kant, Hegel, Hegelianism. In D. Moggach (Ed.), *Politics, Religion and Art*. Northwestern University Press (pp. 47–65).

Rejoinder to Bacaller's 'Reflective Reply'

Clayton Coombs

I remain grateful for the opportunity afforded me in 2021 to be part of the inaugural megachurch worship conference hosted by the University of Sheffield. And I am delighted to see that my address has stimulated discussion beyond the conference itself. I would like to begin my response with sincere thanks for the engagement of Sarah Bacaller. In her JCMin article "A reflective reply to Clayton Coomb's (sic) Unapologetic Apology for Megachurch Worship Practices – (and an introduction to German idealism for Christians)," Bacaller makes a beautiful (if classic) argument for the synthesis of faith and reason–at least that is what I *hope* she is arguing for; at times it seems as if she is arguing for the replacement of faith with reason. Her reasoning is predicated on her assertion that my article rests on a 'God says so' argument that "dichotomises faith and reason." I suspect that Bacaller's parenthetical subtitle, "an introduction to German idealism for Christians" contains the real purpose of the article and in this she has done readers a great service as this is clearly an area both of passion and expertise for her. Since it is neither for me, I will not presume to challenge or add to what she has laid out in this regard. Bacaller suggests that my judgement may be coloured by my experience in a megachurch, but humbly acknowledges that her own may likewise be coloured by her negative experiences. I will engage her critiques in turn.

First, the 'God-says-so' argument. According to Bacaller, in a section titled "Where Logic Doesn't Fly":

> Coombs' primary contention could be formulated in several syllogistic ways, with subtle differences, and without any change to the primary faith-focused assertion of his discourse:
>
> > Megachurch worship resembles historic revivals;
> > Revivals are an act of God;
> > *Therefore* megachurch worship is an act of God.
> >
> > Megachurch worship is an act of God;
> > Revivals are an act of God;
> > *Therefore* megachurch worship resembles historical revivals.

We might even put it this way:

> Megachurch worship is an act of God;
> Revivals are an act of God;
> *Therefore* they share key characteristics
> *and* should both be accepted as acts of God.

I find this intriguing. My actual argument, which, perversely, Bacaller seems to understand quite well in places, and is *not* the same if you simply shuffle the 'variables', is this. Megachurch worship resembles historic revivals. Therefore, the presence of megachurches provides probable evidence of recent or current revivals. I admit that I stated this more forcefully and with less qualification in my article. But I'm not sure that amounts to a 'God says so' argument. I am happy to own, if pushed, that I have made an "I say so" argument, because I am speaking of my own observations. That is, after all, what good scientists do. They make observations. But I am not doing science. I'm doing history. Revival is a manmade word. It is, like a good medical diagnosis, a term that we give to a package of symptoms or observations. Comparing events or movements across time and culture to observe patterns or trends and to interpret those events or movements by means of those comparisons is simply good historiography. If Bacaller or others wish to challenge these parallels (megachurches represent centralised authority rather than broad based social movements; megachurch worship is unlike the hymns written by Wesley and those differences are substantial not merely stylistic; etc.) , then we would be having the same discussion. But Bacaller does not seem to be interested in having the same discussion. Rather she wishes to invite me "and others who think along similar lines, to consider reframing the God's-eye-view language of their perspectives through reflection on the ethical and relational consequences of such methods." This invitation appears to presume that my initial remarks were ill-considered or hasty and that if I were simply informed of a critical key that I had not considered that I would change the tone of my article, its internal logic and indeed my entire view of the phenomenon of the megachurch. That is unlikely.

I am suggesting that when we observe common features of revivals past–large crowds, new songs, numerous conversions, miracles of healing, stories of encounter and transformation etc.--that these features can be identified in the current or recent experience of many, perhaps most megachurches. In other words, the megachurch

phenomenon is not a *novelty*. It is consistent with how God has acted in history. And I suspect it is at this point that I lapse into the error that I am charged with. So let me state it clearly and unapologetically. I believe in God. I believe that God is personal and not distant. I believe God acts. And yes, I believe that God acts in this way. I believe God 'turns up' in certain places at certain times for his own inscrutable purposes. And furthermore, I believe in revival. I believe that there are times when the Spirit of God moves tangibly and discernibly in a church, a context or a culture and that mysteriously, though measurably (at least in certain ways that I lay out in my original address) this "move of God" is somehow more, or greater, at some times than at others. Pentecostals characterise this as the 'manifest presence' of God (as opposed to his omnipresence). In short I believe God can be experienced and if such an assertion is not in the realm of 'rational' discourse' then maybe rational discourse will not serve the present discussion quite as well as Bacaller hopes.

I speak of the activity of God in this way presuming that most readers interested in this topic will acknowledge that God may and does actually act. But to those who do not share my presuppositions, "move of God" is a term that is synonymous with "revival" for me. If someone does not agree with the characterisation of, say, the Methodist movement, as a revival then they are not going to accept my assertion that "big churches result from big moves of God." But regardless of presuppositions, I would challenge anyone to argue that we are talking about substantially different things when we compare the Methodist movement (for example) to the current megachurch movement. Does Bacaller mean to suggest that the Methodist movement was indeed a move of God and rightly described as a spiritual revival, but the current megachurch movement is not? Or does she actually mean to say that God does not act in this way then or now and we should seek instead for merely anthropological causes for these phenomena? The core of my argument is that the comparison is valid. And its validity does not depend on one's interpretation of the phenomena involved.

If I were to be facetious, I might say that Bacaller's own argument relies on observations and comparisons, and may be reduced to a similarly circular "Kant says so" argument as follows:

Immanuel Kant disagreed with Jacobi on the relationship between reason and experience.

Immanuel Kant represents a high water mark in enlightenment thinking. Therefore, it is more enlightened to adopt Kant's view.

Of course I am just displaying my ignorance. I promised not to embarrass myself by weighing into things that Bacaller clearly understands better than I do. But let's talk about the relationship between reason and experience. Bacaller would certainly not be the first to suggest that a Pentecostal is unduly dependent on experience at the expense of analytical thought, or at the expense of theology (as the accusation is variously stated). But it is not just a 'theology of experience'[37] but rather 'decrying analytical thought' that I am accused of. To say that "we must not cheapen what God is doing through megachurches throughout the world in this generation by merely analysing it" is not the same as "decrying analytical thought." It is true—indeed perhaps the main point of my article—that I consider praise and worship as a gateway to an Encounter with God that is *beyond* analytical thought. That is not the same as saying that I consider megachurches and their worship practices to be beyond criticism—though I do think that most megachurch attendees will never 'hear,' let alone engage with the type of discussion that we are having here. But surely I am permitted to defend against such criticism? And when I do, it is surely more helpful to at least begin with the way that megachurch worshippers understand and characterise their own experiences. If doing so requires the price of 'dichotomising reason and revelatory experiences' then I'm afraid that's a price that must be paid.

In the end, the curious dialectic that exists between reason and experience is substantially what we are talking about. My experience leads me to make observations about Christian revivals. Christian revivals themselves, represent a phenomenon not entirely measurable; packages of experiences that point to God's direct action. Cumulatively these experiences represent irrefutable proof of God's agency to those who are expecting and longing to see God act in this way, but to the skeptic, this self validating circle of experience-based reasoning is evidence merely of delusion. Ultimately what it comes down to, as the writer to the Hebrews puts it, is whether or not one believes that *God is*.[38] Admitting this belief is perhaps the foundation of the

[37] Pentecostals are more likely to articulate the tension between theology and experience by saying that we ought to have an experience of our theology rather than conceding that we ought to get our theology from our experience.

[38] I must stress at this point that I am not accusing Bacaller herself, or anybody else who disagrees with me of unbelief. Perhaps it is an implicit accusation that she has taken issue with. For this I apologise. But what I am attempting to do is to recast the conversation as one about faith, experience, worship and God's Presence, rather than one about reason and empiricism. For this I do not apologise.

"'God says so' argument." For if God is, then not only must God be permitted to *have* a say, but his 'say so' is surely the most important opinion by definition. And this brings us to where I disagree with Bacaller. For what I believe is at issue is not an argument between lazy reasoning on the one hand ("God says so!") and sound reasoning on the other, or even over the right to disagree about whether and what God has said. Rather the issue is an invitation to expect and experience and enter into what God is saying and doing. This 'entering in' is called worship. And it always has been. And one can't truly understand worship by observing it and documenting the phenomena associated with it. If one hopes to understand worship, one must…enter in. That God can be known, personally; can be *experienced* is the very scandal of particularity on which Christianity (not to mention pre-Christian Yahwism) is built. God is not merely an idea or concept to be understood; not even merely a mysterious Something to be studied and *analysed*—and there it is again. I can't help it I guess. God is a *Someone* who can be, and desires to be known, sought, and yes, worshipped. And of course that is not to say that one may not use all of their God-given faculties in this pursuit. God is sought and worshipped with the mind, even with rightly directed study, as surely as he is worshipped with the heart and the soul, and as surely as he is worshipped with the Body. So when I speak of 'mere analysis' in my article, I am not dismissing analysis itself, or study, or reason, or the intellect or rationality. I am urging not that we stop short of those things, but that we move through them and beyond them into that 'place' that can only be understood and apprehended by faith and through experience. To put it another way, I am not seeking an experience devoid of understanding, but an embodied experience *of* what we understand.

C.S. Lewis once famously compared theological development to the drawing of a map. His analogy articulated a fascinating tension between reason and experience with a view to correcting a person who preferred the latter to the former. The man who prefers his personal experience of the beach to reading a map may be compared to a person who prefers an isolated and personal experience of God over the rather more difficult work of formal theology. The genius of the analogy is that it puts personal experience into perspective, because the map itself is drawn from experience and observation. Thousands of real experiences sailing on the real ocean.[39] As with historiography, the thing about cartography is that it may only take one experience or one observation to challenge the way that the map has been drawn. But having said

[39] The passage, regretfully too long to quote in full, is found in *Mere Christianity*.

that, those experiences may only elicit small changes in a map that has been well drawn and on a route that has been well-travelled. And the first question that will be asked of the person who has the contrary experience is “are you sure you were reading the map right? Because those who have travelled this route have discovered that around the next bend is the harbour that you were seeking; you just had not gone quite far enough.”

Towards the end of her response to my article, Bacaller suggests that my defence of the megachurch is not only motivated but also coloured by my positive experiences in megachurches. Without wanting to diminish the negative ones I have also had, I would simply say she is right. I have had wonderful, transformative experiences in megachurches over many years in attendance. Furthermore I admit that the passion and conviction in my article which seems (to my shame) to have been mistaken for naivety and hubris, is born out of these personal experiences of encounter with God. The point is that I am not the only one having these experiences. They are the same sort of experiences that are claimed by thousands upon thousands of living Christians who navigate these seas, not to mention countless thousands from ages past.

But these are, after all, just my observations. This is the way I see it. And as entertaining as this exchange may be to the few that will read it, I may hope instead for an opportunity to sit down with Bacaller and talk about our respective experiences (and to personally congratulate her for using *Deus Ex Machina* in a sentence without referring to streetwear). I want to take the time to listen to and validate the experiences she has had, to look her in the eye and to apologise. Because I can guarantee that there is *more* in God to experience. After all, God says so. And I honestly look forward to learning more about German idealism.

Pastoral Reflection

Journal of Contemporary Ministry

Pastoral Reflection

Discipling Kenyan Gen Z's on Sexuality: Reflections from the Global Study on Youth Culture

Kevin Muriithi

Dr. Kevin Muriithi Ndereba (PhD, University of South Africa) is Lecturer and Head of Department, Practical Theology, St. Paul's University, Kenya. He is also a Research Fellow, Department of Practical Theology and Missiology, Stellenbosch University.. He has several publications in the areas of youth ministry, youth development, practical and public theology and apologetics. He leads Apologetics Kenya, an apologetics ministry to the next generations, previously served as a youth pastor in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa and is an executive committee member of the Africa Society of Evangelical Theology and the International Association for the Study of Youth Ministry.

Abstract

The African continent is among the youngest continents in terms of its demographic make-up. This means that strategic ministry within the continent must engage African youth. While there is some research surrounding millennials, there is a gap in research surrounding Gen Z, that is, those born after the 2000s. Fortunately, there has been recent research on Global Youth Culture (GYC) by OneHope that explored different aspects of Gen Z (ages 13-19) youth culture in twenty countries in five continents, Kenya being one of them. This article is a theological reflection of the findings of that research, exploring the implications for discipling Gen Z in the specific area of sexuality. While similarities are drawn between African (Kenyan) youth culture and other countries, this article also considers how the African (Kenyan) society in general still views sexuality as a taboo topic and how Church leaders can help parents and congregations to approach the topic of sexuality from a biblical worldview perspective and to engage in compassionate ministry.

Keywords

Gen Z; Practical Theology; Youth Culture; Youth Ministry; Youth Sexuality.

1. Introduction

The Kenyan 2010 constitution views youth as those aged between 18-34 years old (KYDP, 2018). However, in considering labor issues among this cohort, the constitution expanded the bracket to 15-35 years. More recently, the 2018 Kenyan Youth Development Policy has maintained the 18-34 years bracket (KYDP, 2018). This is already telling in so far as how we conceptualize youth within the Kenyan context, with an implicit neglect of those aged between 13 and18 or 19 years. For comparative purposes, the UN considers youth as between ages 15 and24 years. This article utilizes a wider range of 13-35 years, which comprises adolescents and emerging adults. Specifically, it considers the unique issues arising from the generational cohort called “Gen Z”.[40] While corporations and churches are wrapping their mind around millennials, the next generations defined as “Gen Z” are also creating both a challenge and an opportunity in the area of discipleship. Within the field of sociology, this generational thinking is utilized by scholars and researchers to observe unique trends that define specific cohorts of generations. Consequently , scholars are thus able to empirically predict certain markers that define these different cohorts (Dimock, 2019).

Gen Z are differentiated from “the silent generation” (Born 1925-1945) who experienced the Great Depression and World Wars, “the Baby boomers” (Born 1946-1964), largely defined by the relative economic prosperity of the post-war years, “generation X” (Born 1964-1980), caught up with the work values and onset of internet communication, and “generation Y” or “millennials” (Born 1981-1895), viewed as the socially connected disruptors (Low, 2018; Seemiller & Grace, 2018, pp. 3-11). Seemiller & Grace (2018) offer a comparative analysis between the generations based on the childhood experiences, socio-economic history and commonly held characteristics and how these have shaped the lived realities of generation Z. However, scholars acknowledge that the boundaries between the generations are not static, with a likelihood that the youngest and oldest in bordering generations may share some similar characteristics (Dimock, 2019, p. 5). While these categories are largely defined through European and North American lenses, some of the characteristics are shared within the African context, particularly among the younger generations due to the globalization of youth culture in the digital age. In a helpful sociological analysis, Wanjiru Gitau (2018, p. 5) observes that while African millennials are defined by the same technological markers as those in other regions, they are

[40] Gen Z will be used for the rest of this article as a shorthand for Generation Z

unique in the fact that they straddle the traditional world of their grandparents and the urbanizing world of their parents. She summarizes these changes as a grappling with Africa's (and Kenya's) colonial past as well as the intense global changes of the past decades (Gitau, 2018, p.6).

The psychologist Jean Twenge (2017) uses the term "igens" to refer to the "Gen Z's"., she views the ubiquitous nature of the digital world as a reality that defines the lives of these generations. Based on in-depth national reviews among 11 million young people, she summarizes Gen z as:

- super-connected
- less rebellious,
- more tolerant,
- less happy
- completely unprepared for adulthood

The increased notion of tolerance is not difficult to extrapolate from the increased interconnectedness of the digital culture that defines them. Thus, they interact more freely and seamlessly with those from other religions, cultures, and perspectives. However, the same media is correlated with increased anxiety and low levels of happiness, according to her research. Although they write from within a Northern American context, similarities could be traced to the African context. These issues have also been observed from a recent (2020) study on Global Youth Culture (GYC).

The research was conducted by OneHope from February 24, 2020, to March 27, 2020, in partnership with local churches, ministries, and governments around the world.[41] The study was targeted towards Gen Z (ages 13-19), across 20 countries with global representation in all the continents. Globally, 8,394 teens were surveyed, with approximately 400 teens sampled in each country. The table below summarizes the regional representation.

[41] More information about the research can be accessed from https://www.globalyouthculture.net/about-the-research/

Table 1: Countries represented in the Global Study of Youth Culture (GYC, 2020)

Region	Countries
Africa	Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Egypt
Asia	China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Vietnam
Eurasia	Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Romania, Spain, United Kingdom
Latin America	Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico
North America	United States of America

In terms of the categorizations, the study utilized quotas to ensure at least 10% were Christian, or that a minimal representation of Christians and Muslims was achieved (GYC, 2020). In Kenya, gender representation was ensured through using a sampling quota of 40% female. The study in Kenya surveyed 435 teens and explored a 72-item research instrument exploring questions surrounding Christian identity, discipleship practices, personal experiences, sexuality, views on other religions, among others (GYC, 2020).

2. Findings

a. Nominalism in Christian Expression

The GYC explored how young people define their Christian identity. The Kenyan Gen Z's who self-identified as Christian viewed their Christian identity as excluding Jehovah Witness or Mormon as a Christian identity. The study differentiated between "committed Christians" and "nominal Christians." Committed Christians are largely evangelical, in that they believe in God's existence, in salvation through Jesus Christ, in the forgiveness of sins, in the Bible as God's Word and in consistent Christian disciplines, such as prayer and Bible reading, as central to Christian life.[42] Christian self-identification among the Kenyan teens also included a wide variety of

[42] I am aware of how the term "evangelical" has elicited several critiques in recent literature and discourse. Whereas in the traditional sense it involved the beliefs in Jesus, the Bible, salvation, and the power of the Holy Spirit, it has come to include sharp debate based on how the evangelical community in the United States of America has responded to race and political issues. For more reading see Wells, D. F., (1994), *No place for truth: Or whatever happened to evangelical theology?* Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing; Emerson, M. O., & Smith, C., (2001), *Divided by faith: Evangelical religion and the problem of race in America*, Oxford University Press, USA; Kidd, T. S., (2019), *Who Is an Evangelical?* Yale University Press.

denominational and theological backgrounds. These include Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist, Orthodox, among others. Nominal Christians are those who did not believe in any of the above foundational beliefs that marks “committed Christians” in the study.

From the study of 435 Kenyan Gen Z’s, 83% of them identified as Christians, with 44% of this percentage being Roman Catholic. Of the figure, about 30% were committed Christians while a majority were nominal Christians. What is more interesting is that among the teens surveyed, a high percentage of them, 88%, acknowledged the place of faith or spirituality in their life. This speaks to how Gen Z’s may identify as “spiritual but not religious” according to the literature surrounding youth and spirituality (Ammerman, 2013; Bibby, 2018). These self-definitions had an impact on how the teens view real issues in their lives such as sexuality, culture, and ethnicity as well as social and community involvement.

b. Pluralistic Truth in a World of many Religions

On the question of truth, approximately half of the teens believe that all religions teach equally valid truths. Interestingly, it is Christian Gen Z’s who believe in the equality of religions (51%), more than non-Christians (49%). This correlates with a study that the researcher conducted among 77 Nairobian youth who had left the church (Muriithi, 2015). The question of truth remains a critical issue for the postmodern milieu that interprets truth from a subjective, and socio-cultural foundation as opposed to the biblical view on truth (Grenz, 1996). This means that ministry to Gen Z’s must engage in the metanarratives of competing worldviews, as a handmaid to evangelism and discipleship.

c. The New Sexuality – Identity, Attraction and Expression

The results in the area of sexuality reflect how much the global trends are also evident among “conservative” societies such as the Kenyan society. The study revealed the observations reported by youth workers in the areas of gender identity and sexual expression. Given the pluralistic context that Gen Z’s are growing up in, objective definitions around the area of sexuality are expanding and becoming more fluid. At a foundational level, Kenyan teenagers are facing personal struggles that seem to be

definitive of their generation compared to other generations. For example, the struggle with pornography ranked third after loneliness and anxiety. Depression and suicide ranked fourth and fifth respectively.

In terms of gender identity, 73% of Kenyan Gen Z's believe that it is dependent on sex at birth. Thus, a majority of Kenyan teenagers correlate gender identity with genetics. A minority of 22% believe that gender is dependent on one's individual feelings and preferences, while 6% believe it is determined by societal views towards an individual. Both Christian Gen Z's and non-Christian Gen Z's experienced sexual attraction to people of the same gender and also experienced gender confusion recently. Differences in both can be seen between committed Christians and nominal Christians. 9% committed Christians experienced same-sex attraction (SSA) while a higher percentage of 23% nominal Christians experienced SSA. In terms of gender confusion, 5% committed Christians compared to 11% nominal Christians answered in the affirmative. Sexual expression within the LGBTIQAA+ context has also expanded to include wider and fluid definitions in popular discourse.[43] The study also revealed that 53% of Kenyan Christian Gen Z's have been sexually active in the recent past. This shows that sexual ethics is a critical issue that Churches and youth ministries must engage. Finally, while a majority (76%) of Gen Z's view marriage as an exclusive and heterosexual long lasting relationship, minorities of 15% think it can be between people of the same sex and 10% are neutral. These are salient markers of the changing views on sexuality and marriage among Gen Z's.

3. Implications for Discipleship

i. The Focus on Children and Youth: "Let them Come to Me"

The implications of the study on discipleship abound. An interesting finding from the statistics revealed that whereas teenagers consult family members (and parents) when they are wrestling with important questions such as meaning, identity and morality, they first seek out peers and social media when it comes to sexuality. This reflects how sexuality is still a taboo topic within African communities. However, this

[43] LGBTIQAA+ is an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Asexual, Aromantic and + shows the ever-expanding definition of gender identities and sexual expressions in popular discourse.

study should encourage parents and church leaders, including children and youth pastors, to continue to invest in the discipleship of young people. While the hierarchical nature and the big power distance between elders and children is a part of African traditional cultures, Christian communities should view "eldership" and concepts of "childhood" or "youth" from within a biblical perspective (Chiroma 2019; Ndereba 2021a). Like Jesus, adults in African (and Kenyan) communities of faith must welcome young people to the Church and nurture them in the ways of Christ. Given that 82% of the teenagers surveyed noted that the children ministry they attended played a huge role in their spiritual life, the ministries of the Kenyan churches must invest "downwards".

ii. The Role of the Bible: "Equipped for every good work"

The study also reveals how cultural confusion must be met with biblical clarity. With Gen Z Bible reading habits in decline , children and youth workers must retrieve the centrality of the Scripture in the Church's ministry. Given the many questions that young people ask concerning a compassionate and truthful response to LGBTIQAA+ issues, we will do well to explore God's wisdom in these complex areas. Secondly, the doctrine of *tota scriptura* invites children and youth workers to continue to progress as better workmen of God's Word, as they develop a biblical theology for sexuality from the entire canon. Usually, challenges in sexual ethics among Gen Z's come from developing their viewpoints from an isolated text or reading biblical critical theorists. Youth workers who are convinced that the Bible is the final authority for matters of life and doctrine will increasingly be called to ground young people in the freeing truth of God's Word, written and incarnated.

iii. The Place of Evangelism: "Go therefore and tell the world"

The study reveled that Gen Z's are less likely to evangelize their peers. Based on the literature survey, this can be linked to the increasing view of tolerating different perspectives. While this could be a positive outcome of postmodernity, in that we sensitively learn how to deal with differing viewpoints, in a negative sense, it may water down some of the biblical expectations of what it means to live the Christian lives. Thus, youth workers are invited to tag Gen Z's along in their evangelistic

ministry. Secondly, youth pastors are urged to teach and model to Gen Z's how to have gospel conversations with friends and neighbors. Finally, there is a need to utilize the digital media that they are deeply embedded in, as a platform of evangelism. This means that church ministry may be called towards innovative ways of sharing the gospel in the digital culture that is definitive of global youth culture.

iv. The Place of Apologetics: "Always be Ready"

Whereas intermural debates in apologetics center on its usefulness, methodologies and approaches, practical ministry to Gen Z's cannot function without some level of apologetics. The researcher has argued elsewhere that in the African society, a good place to begin is by viewing apologetics not only as a cognitive aspect of theological ministry but also appreciating the affective aspects of adolescent development and their place in doing apologetics in or community (Ndereba 2021b). In light of this conversation on sexuality, practical apologetics must engage the field of Christian ethics, biblical interpretation, and pastoral sensitivity.[44] The need for apologetic engagement comes as a result of some scholars in the African context who are normalizing sexual practice that may be divergent with the biblical ethic of marital and covenantal sexual relationship between a husband and his wife.[45] On the underlying worldview foundations of popular ethics that distort Christian truth claims, youth workers will be called to explore the questions of truth, logic and reality as undergirded by a Christian worldview (Sire, 2020).

v. The Role of Parents: "Teach them all the time"

The study revealed that the African communal thinking still looms large even within the realities of globalized African societies. Gen Z's still value the opinion of their parents when it comes to critical life questions (Awiti, 2016; GYC, 2020). While parents are called to be more understanding, empathetic and conversational when it comes to dealing with the underlying taboos in the area of sexuality, this research reveals that

[44] I would recommend the following resources as a place to start: Allberry, S., (2013), *Is God anti-gay? And other questions about homosexuality, the Bible and same-sex attraction*, The Good Book Company; Butterfield, R. C., (2012), *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into Christian Faith,* Crown & Covenant; DeYoung, K., (2015), *What does the Bible really teach about homosexuality?* Crossway; Gagnon, R. A., (2002), The Bible and homosexual practice: Texts and hermeneutics, *Pro Ecclesia*, *11*(3), 377-379; Hill, W., (2016). *Washed and waiting: Reflections on Christian faithfulness and homosexuality*, Zondervan; Perry, J. H., (2018), *Gay Girl, Good God: The Story of Who I Was, and Who God Has Always Been*, B&H Publishing Group.

[45] See for example Van Klinken, A., & Chitando, E., (2016), *Introduction: Public religion, homophobia, and the politics of homosexuality in Africa* (pp. 1-16), Routledge.

this is an opportunity for parents to disciple their teens. Whereas children and youth ministries have been seen as a replacement of daily discipleship in the home, the biblical priority on the role of parents as the key disciplers of young people is emphasized. The biblical portrait of older generations commending the faith through personal convictions, public proclamation as well as public lifestyle will still be the major way of pointing our young people to Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit (Deut. 6; Ps. 78; Eph. 6).

References

Ammerman, N. T. (2013). Spiritual but not religious? Beyond binary choices in the study of religion. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *52*(2), 258-278.

Awiti, A., & Scott, B. (2016). The Kenya youth survey report.

Bibby, R. (2018). So You Think You Are Religious, or Spiritual but Not Religious: So What? In *Youth, Religion, and Identity in a Globalizing Context* (pp. 53-65). Brill.

Dimock, M. (2019). Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins. *Pew Research Center*, *17*(1), 1-7.

Chiroma, N. H. (2019). Exploring the nexus between children and youth ministry. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, *40*(1), 1-9.

Gitau, W.M. (2018). *Megachurch christianity reconsidered: Millennials and social change in African perspective*. InterVarsity Press.

Global Youth Culture. (2020) OneHope Research. Accessed 22 September 2021, from https://www.globalyouthculture.net/

Grenz, S. J. (1996). *A primer on postmodernism*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.

KYDP. (2018). Kenya Youth Development Policy. http://psyg.go.ke/docs/Kenya%20National%20Youth%20Policy.pdf

Low, U. W. (2018). A Millennial Talks Back: Practical Theology as a potential strategy for engaging Australian Millennials in churches? *Journal of Contemporary Ministry*, (4), 91-101.

Muriithi, K. (2015). Youth Worldviews among the De-Churched in Nairobi and Implications for Ministry. [Unpublished Master's Thesis]. *International Leadership University.*

Ndereba, K. M. (2021a). Let them Come to Me: A Youth Inclusive and Missional Perspective in Presbyterian Context. *Journal of Youth and Theology*, *1*, 1-13.

_____. (2021b). Ubuntu Apologetics in Faith Formation: An Ethnography of Youth Ministry in Nairobi. *Journal of Youth and Theology*, *1*, 1-16.

Seemiller, C., & Grace, M. (2018). *Generation Z: A century in the making*. Routledge.

Sire, J. W. (2020). *The universe next door: A basic worldview catalog*. InterVarsity Press.

Twenge, J. M. (2017). *iGen: Why today's super-connected kids are growing up less rebellious, more tolerant, less happy,--and completely unprepared for adulthood--and what that means for the rest of us*. Simon and Schuster.

Student Essays

The impact of childhood abuse and conservative church culture on the re-victimisation of women

Wendy Hayes

reviveministries.com.au

Wendy Hayes resides in Melbourne with her husband Ray. She is a professional Christian Counsellor with a Master of Community Counselling and over a decade of private practice. She has been involved in Church leadership for over 25 years. She has a passion for seeing Christian women stop out of shame and fear and to live in the freedom that Christ intended.

Abstract

The impact of domestic violence on Australian society is widespread. Research has told us that women who have been abused in childhood are three times more likely to experience domestic violence or sexual assault in their adult life. The research presented in this article involves a focus group of Christian women who have experienced some form of domestic violence, either in childhood or as an adult. The study reveals that conservative church culture has the potential to render Christian women more vulnerable to abusive relationships and domestic violence. This is particularly true of women who have experienced childhood abuse. When there is particular emphasis on certain doctrines, such as male headship, submission and forgiveness, abuse victims may be further disempowered and lack the ability to recognise and respond appropriately to abusive relationships. The findings of this research highlight the need for change within certain church communities in order to protect women and children against family violence.

Keywords

Domestic violence, conservative church, abuse, submit, re-victimisation

Introduction and Background

A study done by Hana Al-Modallal in 2016 found that those who have been traumatised by childhood abuse are more likely to be victims of sexual assault or domestic violence in adulthood (Al-Modallal, 2016). This is termed re-victimisation.

The Shark Cage is a metaphorical concept and an approach to domestic violence developed by Ursula Benstead, a Melbourne based psychologist. The metaphor "offers a conceptual and practical tool for understanding and reducing re-victimisation in abused women within a counselling context" (Benstead, The Shark Cage, 2011, p. 70) by providing a safe container (the cage) from further abuse (by the shark).

I have chosen to research this topic as many of the clients of my counselling practice are women who have experienced re-victimisation. Over the past twenty years, my clientele has increasingly been women or teenage girls who have experienced some form of sexual abuse or domestic violence. Many of these clients struggle with shame and self-blame. In my desire to help Christian women appropriate the freedom and identity that is their inheritance in Christ, I have found it important to help women overcome the impact of early childhood abuse. If the Shark Cage Group Program delivers on its claims, it has the potential to help many of these women heal from their abuse and protect themselves from further abuses.

This study will examine the effect of the conservative church culture and teaching on women who have experienced childhood abuse as it relates to domestic violence. In my work as a Christian Counsellor, a large proportion of my clients are women who state that they desire to live a life that is pleasing to God. In working with these women, I have noted that their beliefs about the behaviour that God is pleased with is largely shaped by the culture and teachings of the church that they attend or have attended. Imbalanced or incorrect theology has the potential to render women and children more vulnerable to abuse. For many Christian women, the belief that God is asking them to stay in their abusive marriage will be behind their resistance to leave. (Collins, 2019)

While change is happening, many conservative church cultures still foster attitudes which promote gender inequality, which is a leading factor in domestic violence. (Nason-Clark, 2009) The term "conservative" is being used in this research to describe Protestant churches which hold common theological positions regarding the bible and

basic doctrines which are fundamentalist in nature. (Schmeichen, 1980). Culture is the beliefs, ideas and practices that are widely shared by a particular group (Prinze, 2020). Culture is largely created by what is celebrated and what is disapproved of by the leaders of a particular group (Cloud, 2013).

There is mounting evidence that the power imbalance between men and women is a key factor in domestic violence. (Day, 2010) The aim of this research is to evaluate the Shark Cage Group Program as a means of reducing domestic violence within the Christian community by addressing certain theological teachings which disempower Christian women. An over-emphasis on the doctrines of submission, forgiveness and the laying down of rights renders survivors of childhood abuse less likely to protect themselves and their children from domestic violence.

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a major issue affecting communities not only in Australia but across the globe (Day, 2010, p. 1). It refers to an abuse of power within an intimate relationship whereby one partner is living in fear and is being intimidated due to the control exerted by the other partner (Day, 2010, p. 1). The term “domestic violence” may refer to such things as emotional and psychological abuse, financial abuse as well as physical and sexual violence. Domestic violence affects children along with the adult victim making the impact on our community even greater. (Day, 2010, pp. 1-2).

> International surveys have suggested that around one-third of all adult women will, at some point in their lifetime, experience abuse perpetrated by an intimate male partner. Domestic violence is considered to be one of the major risk factors affecting women’s health in Australia and there is a need for the community to respond in ways that reduce the likelihood of further violence occurring (Day, 2010, p. 1).

Understanding the driving forces behind domestic violence and the culture in which it thrives helps us to develop the most effective community interventions and approaches. The *Our Watch* handbook reveals that there are specific factors that drive violence against women, including adherence to gender stereotypes and roles, and the limitation on women’s independence through their partner’s control of decision

making within the relationship. All these drivers are produced in the broader context of gender inequality." (Our Watch, 2017, p. 10).

Revictimisation

I have heard many survivors of abuse and assault ask the question "Why does this keep happening to me? Is there something wrong with me?". They have observed that many of their friends and relatives have had no experience of this type, and yet they have had repeated incidents throughout their lives. The Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Study 2016 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017) confirms my experience as a counsellor. The majority of my clients who have experienced domestic violence as an adult have a childhood history of abuse. This research supports their view that these things happen more often to some women than to others. Re-victimisation is a very real issue.

> Compared to their counterparts, risk of severe physical partner violence was three-fold greater in women who experienced childhood physical violence and five-fold greater among those who witnessed mother-to-father violence. Victims of childhood maltreatment may encounter social and personal problems that increase their vulnerability to violence in adulthood (Al-Modallal, 2016).

One of the ways that childhood trauma impacts a person is the inability to connect with and regulate their emotions. Dissociation is a term used to describe the disconnection from emotions that often accompanies trauma (Strathopoulos, 2014). Dissociation makes it more difficult for women to feel the emotional and physical internal signals that a person or situation is not safe. (Benstead, 2011)

Another factor which increases a woman's vulnerability to domestic violence, which emerged during the project, is if she has been immersed in a conservative church culture. I will explore this in greater detail in the following section.

Women of Faith More Vulnerable to Abuse

While many Christian women speak of the strength and hope that their faith in God brings to their lives, there is a dynamic at play which can be detrimental to their wellbeing (Baird, 2018).

> While the nature and depth of domestic abuse can often remain hidden, an Australian study of Anglican, Uniting and Catholic church communities within the Brisbane area revealed that ‘22% of the perpetrators attended church regularly and a further 14% were involved in church leadership’ (JCDVPP, 2002, p. 24). This indicates that a total of 36% of perpetrators were seemingly active within their particular denomination. (Baker, 2010, pp. 8,9)

Christian faith adds a degree of complexity when dealing with the issue of domestic violence. Recent studies have revealed that within many Christian churches in Australia is a culture which increases gender inequality and hence the imbalance of power between husbands and wives (Baird, 2018). This is largely due to an over-emphasis on Scriptures which call for a wife to “submit” to her husband.

In 2015 the Victorian Government established the Royal Commission into Family Violence. The commission received 968 public submissions and tabled its report in March 2016, which made 227 recommendations. This commission, too, noted a "challenge" to faith leaders who were "predominantly or exclusively men". For many women who sought help from a faith leader, the commission reported,

> The response was inadequate … some faith leaders were uninformed and ill-equipped to respond to such disclosures, 'often the advice given wasn't helpful because the faith leader didn't know what kind of advice to give'.(Baird & Gleeson, 2018)

According to Baker, Christian women who are experiencing domestic violence, particularly those who belong to a church community, experience a conflict between their core values and the need to keep themselves and their children safe (Baker, 2010).

We spoke to more than 250 people, including counsellors, church workers, psychologists, clergy, theologians, sociologists, and survivors to try and fathom what

the cultural issues were: an emphasis on forgiveness and submission at all costs, a dearth of female leadership, stigma surrounding divorce even as a consequence of abuse, lack of understanding of what domestic abuse was and how to respond, reluctance to believe the stories of women, and an unwillingness to respond with any urgency. (Baird, 2018)

The failure to delineate between forgiveness, which is a biblical command, and trust and safety which are earned in the context of relationship, often results in a woman remaining in an abusive marriage. Each of the women involved in this study expressed that they had experienced leaders responding to their disclosure of abuse with an encouragement to forgive. As Baker comments,

> In some settings, the victim may be instructed by members of the clergy to provide ongoing forgiveness in a perpetual, unlimited and unconditional manner, regardless of the deed or activity of the perpetrator. Such an expectation can be extremely damaging to the individual who sincerely wishes to practise her faith, but is torn between her own survival and confusion regarding the needless pressure to extend forgiveness to a possibly unrepentant perpetrator. (Baker, 2010, p. 89)

There are many stories surfacing of dedicated Christian women who reported domestic violence to their pastors or church leaders only to be told that to please God they should stay and submit to the mistreatment (Baird, 2018, Baker, 2010). Pastors and leaders clearly place a high value on keeping the family unit together, hence the message sometimes sent to women suffering abuse is that forgiveness and hoping for change is the best way forward (Nason-Clark, 2009).

> Since many faith communities place the intact family on a pedestal, religious women are especially prone to blame themselves for the abuse, believe they have promised God to stay married until death, and experience both the fear and reality of rejection at church when attempts to repair the relationship fail (Nason-Clark, 2009, p. 383).

Two leading Christian Counselling approaches, “Nouthetic”, developed by Jay Adams and “Christian Counselling” by Gary Collins, also promote the concept that marital

unfaithfulness is the only legitimate reason to end a marriage. Very little attention is given to how to help Christians with the issue of violence or abuse within the home. (Cooper-White, 2011)

Christian women are more likely to seek help from within the church than from secular community-based agencies and clergy in most cases do not refer women to these resources (Nason-Clark, 2009). Therefore the need to train and assist church leaders with how to respond to domestic violence within the church is imperative.

Natalie Collins, in her book *Out of Control*, explains that although many church leaders think that they are against tolerating abuse, in practice their theology on marriage, forgiveness, headship and submission tend to foster a culture that would rather minimise the abuse than promote the breakup of the family unit. (Collins, 2019)

I believe that If we are going to be successful in reducing domestic violence in Australia, we must develop programs that successfully overcome the risk factors created through childhood trauma and the conservative church culture. I will now move to analyse the effectiveness of the Shark Cage Group Program with the aim of evaluating its ability to achieve just this.

Ethnographic Research at the Shark Cage Program

The research utilised an ethnographic approach for a group of Christian survivors of childhood abuse and domestic violence as they engaged in the 8-week Shark Cage program. It explored the effect that childhood abuse and conservative church culture has had on specific areas of belief and behaviour. The research also evaluated the ways in which the Shark Cage Program impacted these beliefs and behaviours.

For this research, I co-facilitated the eight-week Shark Cage Group Program. The group consisted of six Christian women aged between 30 and 63 years who had experienced abuse in childhood or domestic violence as an adult or in some cases, both. These women were interviewed prior to commencing the program and at the completion. Their names have been changed to protect their privacy. The research was approved through the Master of Community Counselling Program and the Human Research Ethics Committee of Eastern College Australia.

The research group consisted of:

Sandy - Co-facilitator - pastor and Christian counsellor who has experienced domestic violence. (55yrs)

Rachel - a counselling student who experienced childhood abuse. (45yrs)

Anna – a maternal child health nurse who experienced childhood abuse. (38yrs)

Emily - an accountant who experienced domestic violence as a child. (30yrs)

Monique – a group facilitator for sexual abuse survivors who experienced various forms of abuse as a child (45yrs)

Bronwyn – a mother of three who experienced domestic violence in her marriage (45yrs)

Five of the six women invited to engage in this focus group have served in church leadership and have either been involved in ministries that work with abuse survivors or have expressed an intention to do so in the future. They have been selected to be a part of this focus group based on their maturity level and ability to relate to the aims of the course without the risk of becoming triggered or emotionally overwhelmed. They have all indicated that they have strong family support, have internal and external resources and are emotionally stable. They have been made aware that individual counselling and support is available to them if they become distressed or overwhelmed at any point during the program.

Self-evaluating survey forms were completed by participants at the commencement of the program and again on completion. These forms, as seen in Table 1, ask the participant to evaluate themselves in 12 specific areas. These areas are known contributing factors of re-victimisation.

Table 1. Shark Cage Evaluation Form

	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Mildly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mildly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
1. I know the difference between a healthy and an unhealthy relationship.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I am able to set boundaries with people in my life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I am able to communicate assertively.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I have a good understanding of the impact of abuse.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. I blame myself for the abuse that has happened to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. I am able to be kind to myself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. I am connected to my feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. I believe that I am worthwhile as a person.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. I feel connected to my body.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. I believe that I have rights as a person.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. I am confident that I can recognise a potentially abusive or exploitative person.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. I take time to do things that are important for my wellbeing.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Measuring the variance between the ingoing and outgoing participant forms is one means of evaluating the success of the program in reducing the risk of re-victimisation.

The course consisted of 8 two-hour group sessions which were co-facilitated by the researcher. Each session consisted of a mixture of psychoeducation, interactive exercises and group discussion. Every effort was made to create a sense of emotional safety and connection within the group to facilitate honest and vulnerable discussion. The Shark Cage Group Program was used and followed precisely. The group were encouraged to share how the program was affecting them and any relevant events that had taken place during the week.

Discoveries

Data collection included a questionnaire, group discussion, survey forms and interviews. The questionnaire was completed by participants prior to commencing the Shark Cage Program and on completion to the program. The variance in scores was noted and is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Survey Results
This table shows the variance between the pre-course score and post course score.

	Anna	Emily	Sandy	Rachel	Monique	Bronwyn	Totals
I know the difference between a healthy and unhealthy relationship	2	1	-	1	-	1	5
I am able to set boundaries with people in my life	3	1	-	2	-	1	7
I am able to communicate assertively	1	3	3	3	-	-	10
I have a good understanding of the impact of abuse	2	-	-	2	-	-	4
I blame myself for the abuse that has happened to me	5	3	1	1	-	2	12
I am able to be kind to myself	1	3	-	1	4	1	10
I am connected to my feelings	4	-	3	1	1	-	9
I believe that I am worthwhile as a person	4	-	-	-	1	-	5
I feel connected to my body	3	4	1	1	-	-	9
I believe that I have rights as a person	4	1	-	-	2	-	7
I am confident that I can recognise a potentially abusive or exploitative person	4	1	-	1	1	-	7
I take time to do things that are important for my wellbeing	1	2	3	1	2	1	10
Totals	34	19	11	14	11	6	95

As the above table indicates, all the participants experienced a positive change from the program. The results reveal that the program has the greatest impact in the areas of:

1. Reducing Self-Blame
2. Growing in Assertive Communication
3. Increasing the level of Self-care

Certain themes emerged as the program progressed. I will now move to focus on the five key themes of re-victimisation, self-blame, knowledge of human rights, gender inequality within the church and self-care.

The Issue of Re-Vicimisation

One of the prominent themes which is addressed in the Shark Cage program is the issue of re-victimisation. The metaphor of the Shark Cage explains why those women who have experienced childhood abuse are more likely to experience sexual assault or domestic violence as an adult (Al-Modallal, 2016). The ability to put boundaries in place and to recognise a potentially abusive person have been hindered through the effects of childhood trauma leading to an increased vulnerability to abuse and assault in adulthood.

In one of the Shark Cage sessions, we focused on the skill of assertive communication. Following the teaching, we asked the participants to break into pairs and role play a real-life scenario they were dealing with that required assertive communication. Ensuring that the participants came up with a scenario that was not dangerous or triggering for them, we encouraged them to practice putting boundaries in place and handle the likely “shark” responses to that.

The group agreed that although this exercise was challenging for them, they benefited greatly from it. Participants found that being given practical communication tools helped them greatly with knowing how to put boundaries in place. It also reinforced the understanding that they have the right to say no to things and to not accept disrespectful behaviour toward them.

The group discussed likely responses from “sharks”. It was interesting to discover that many of the participants had believed that if they said and did everything just right,

the other person would respond favourably. Therefore, our discussion turned to the fact that “sharks” want to get their own way and will often use guilt or intimidation tactics to achieve their goal. Through discussion and role plays, the participants were conditioned to expect a negative response initially when they begin to put boundaries in place. We reinforced the idea that a negative reaction does not mean that they did anything wrong, it is merely the way some people behave to retain control.

It was interesting to note that as stories of breakthrough and change were shared with the group, the sense of encouragement and empowerment was increasing in each participant, even the ones who were yet to put what they were learning into practice. This suggests that hearing and observing the growing assertiveness and positive change in other women has an empowering effect upon Christian women.

The value of teaching women that they are never responsible for the reactions and behaviours of others became evident through the program. The core belief that if they did things correctly they would be treated respectfully needs to be exposed and challenged.

The issue of self-blame was also prominent theme that emerged throughout the program.

Dealing with Self-Blame

Through the discussions, we learned that many of the participants were still carrying a sense of responsibility regarding the abuse they had received. This issue scored highest in the variance table, indicating that of the 12 areas that the program aims to bring adjustment to, it was most successful in reducing self-blame. The group discussions and participant interviews revealed that the perpetrator script that they were the cause of their abuse had been largely accepted. Children who are told by parents or adults that they are being mistreated because they are “bad” or deserving of it do not have the mental capacity to dispel the belief. Core beliefs are formed that they are the ones who are responsible for mistreatment by others. This carries into adulthood and makes it difficult for them to recognise domestic violence or abusive relationships.

One participant, Emily, said:

> I felt like I was an evil person. I always believed that people treated me badly because I was a bad person. I felt that I was responsible for their abusive behaviour because something in me made them treat me that way. I believed that I was the cause of all the negative things that would happen to me and around me.

The group agreed that the program was helping them clearly see that the abuse was not caused by their behaviour. The teaching and discussions helped them to identify the difference between selfish behaviour, selfless behaviour and self-care; lines which had previously been blurred. This delineation challenged the notion that they were selfish when they didn't do as their partner desired. The program defines selfishness as attending to your own rights while disrespecting the *rights* of others. Selfless behaviour was defined as caring for the rights of others while disrespecting your own rights. Several of the women had been taught that any form of self-care was selfish, and they were often behaving in selfless ways which was detrimental to their wellbeing.

When perpetrators of abuse use guilt as a means of control in their relationships, the victim comes to see themselves as the problem (Baker, 2010). They are repeatedly told that if they did things just right they would not be mistreated and this self-blame hides the fact that their partners' behaviour is abusive. The victim's sense of self-worth and confidence are severely undermined in this process.

The lack of understanding of basic human rights is another contributing factor to self-blame and re-victimisation.

Impaired Knowledge of Human Rights

One of the central components of the Shark Cage program is the teaching on basic human rights. Each participant was given a list of their rights in six key areas: physical, emotional, social, financial, sexual & spiritual which were taken from the United Nations Bill of Rights (United Nations, 1948). The participants were asked to read through their rights and identify which ones were not yet solidly in their belief system. Although these participants are Christian women who have been involved in church leadership, the impact of identifying their rights was staggering.

Seeing their rights written in black and white had a great impact. They felt it drew a line in the sand, so to speak, and they could now see that any behaviour that violated their rights was not respectful behaviour. They said it also helped them clarify that it was not wrong for them to put boundaries in place to protect their rights.

As the discussion on rights took place, the conversation moved to the way the conservative church culture had affected their beliefs on having rights. One participant, Rachel, commented: *"I didn't know I had any rights."* Although Rachel indicated that learning about her rights had been the most impacting part of the program for her, she also conceded at the conclusion of the course *"I am still wrestling with the concept of having rights."*

Several participants spoke of how they were taught in their church that they were to submit as wives and that as children they were to obey. They were never taught in church that they had rights or that it was acceptable to not allow people to treat them in ways which were disrespectful or abusive. Monique, who began attending church at age 13, while being raised in a domestically violent home, said:

> In church, I was always taught that I had to submit; to respect and honour your parents. You have to lay your rights down. As a 42 year-old I shared in home group that the only right I believed I had was the right to forgive. I was a doormat. All the biblical teaching I received was that even if people hurt you, you have to love them and take it. I was 30 years old before I said no to my father, and I expected to be slapped when I did.

The prominent theme coming through from the participants was that the culture within their church had taught them that God is pleased with you when you tolerate being mistreated. It is viewed as spiritual maturity to love people who are abusive and disrespectful and therefore encouraged by the church leadership and Christian community.

As was previously mentioned, it is common for churches to celebrate those who endure suffering and to frown upon or shun women who leave an abusive marriage. This creates a culture where it is difficult for women who are being abused to feel good about making decisions to protect themselves and their children.

As was stated earlier, it is frighteningly common to hear of women who report domestic violence to church leaders being advised to “forgive and submit.” While forgiveness is a central teaching of the bible, there is a vast difference between forgiving and loving an abuser and tolerating abusive behaviour. It is possible to love and forgive someone from a safe distance, while still putting consequences in place that demand a change of behaviour before the relationship can be restored. (Silk, 2013). As Silk argues,

> Being exploited is not pretty. We all have had different experiences with being taken advantage of by consumers. But what really matters is how we respond to these experiences. Will we forgive the offense and become powerful people who can protect and share our resources more effectively? Or will we agree with the disrespect that was shown us, take on a victim mentality and allow people to continue to devalue our lives until we are fully exploited? (Silk, 2013, p. 249)

Natalie Collins, herself a Christian survivor of domestic violence, writes:

> My belief about forgiveness was that I should forgive and forget, but I learned that forgiveness does not mean nullifying the consequences. (Collins, 2019, p. 251)

When there is an assumption made that all members of the congregation have a knowledge of their basic human rights and the ability to enforce them, biblical teachers will often focus on doctrines that foster the laying down of those rights and submission to authority. These doctrines further disempower survivors of abuse.

Individuals first need to recognise that they have basic human rights and that God gives them a free will. From this place of strength, they can then make the choice to lay down their rights in love and faith.

Gender Inequality and Church Culture

Gender inequality is a significant factor contributing to domestic violence. The course participants all agreed that the church culture they were a part of, which was different for each participant, increased the power imbalance between men and women.

There was plenty of open discussion on the way that specific scriptures were emphasised in a way that led to a belief that husbands had all the power in the name of “headship”. The group agreed that scriptures regarding women submitting and the need for forgiveness shaped a belief system that regardless of what the husband or father did, the role of the child or spouse was to submit and forgive.

Emily spoke of the response of the church when her mother and she sought help for their situation which involved physical, emotional, financial and verbal abuse. As a daughter, Emily was told by leaders and members of the church that she should submit to her step-father. When her mother disclosed the abuse that she was enduring, she was encouraged to forgive him and be submissive so as not to provoke him to anger. When Emily’s mother finally worked up the courage to leave her abusive marriage, she was shunned by the church community and there was no support offered. Even when Emily and her mother were homeless, the members of their church did not offer help.

Emily went on to say “The husband was the head of the home, and no matter what he did, it was never his fault. The woman or child were always the cause of the abusive behaviour”.

Sandy was raised in the church and has gone on to become a pastor herself. In her family of origin, her father was very authoritarian and there was no doubt that he was the head of the home. As children, they were not allowed to have a say in any matters and had to obey. As a female pastor, Sandy found that she was treated differently from the male pastors. At functions and meetings, she was excluded from conversations and felt very much on the outer.

A few of the participants talked in the group about the emerging realisation that many of the things they had been taught in church had a negative impact on their wellbeing. Two participants expressed feeling angry about the detrimental impact that the religious culture had on their lives and the way it exacerbated their feelings of powerlessness and unworthiness.

New Testament scriptures are often used to teach the need for wives to submit to their husbands and emphasise male headship in the home. (New King James Version, 1991, Eph. 5:22-24). Danny Silk, in his book *Powerful & Free* (Silk D. , 2012) explains that

even without direct teaching on male headship, he picked it up through the prevailing culture.

> No one in the church actually had had to teach me that men were more important, valuable or powerful than women. I just picked it up by osmosis. It seemed to be the default position of Christian culture. (Silk D. , 2012, p. 22)

He goes on to explain the impact of this on his marriage:

> The male-female hierarchy we'd picked up in the church effectively made me the only powerful person in our relationship, which hurt both of us. (Silk D. , 2012, p. 25)

Whenever certain scriptures are taken on their own and overly emphasised it no longer reflects biblical truth. All truth is held in tension, the bible must be read as a whole, and doctrine formed through a correct exegesis of the text (Zuck, 1991).

> 28 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. (Eph. 5:28) (New King James Version, 1991).

To love "as Jesus does the church" means to love sacrificially. Jesus surrendered his own life, suffered physically and took on shame that was not His to carry out of love for the church. This scripture reveals God's desire for how a husband is to treat his wife; to love her equally as himself, and to nourish and cherish her. The headship that Jesus modelled and taught was for the purpose of empowering and protecting. Nowhere in any of the Gospels do we see Jesus disempowering, belittling, or using his authority and headship in a way that was restrictive or controlling. His desire was to enable His followers to go beyond the works that He did. (John 14:12, Matt.20:25-28 NKJV)

According to recent research and the experience of these participants, the above scriptures which emphasise the responsibilities of a man in the marriage relationship are rarely brought into play when domestic violence issues are raised in the church. They do not appear to form a strong part of the church culture in the same way that the submission doctrine does.

From the findings of this research, it appears that it is time to challenge some of these long-held beliefs and bring a change to church cultures which don't truly reflect the teaching of Jesus.

Diminished Capacity for Self-Care

The theme of self-care was very prominent throughout the program. Participants were taught that when we practice self-care activities it helps us to believe that we are worthy and that we do have rights. There was a self-care assessment which participants completed where they acknowledged the things they do regularly as acts of self-care and the ones they will commit to doing more often. There was agreement in the group that putting their needs ahead of the needs of others, even when it was to their detriment, made them feel that they were selfish. It was interesting to note that the more we discussed the distinction between selfishness, self-care and selflessness, the more the ladies realised they had a responsibility to look after their own wellbeing.

The conservative church culture had also blurred the lines for the participants in this area. Biblical teaching such as "laying down your life" for others, and the emphasis on serving in the church has created a belief in the participants that it is selfish and indulgent to care for yourself. The group discussed some scriptures which brought a balance to those teachings. For example,

> The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'[b] There is no commandment greater than these. (Mk 12:31 NKJV)

The implication in this text is that it is expected that Christians will love themselves. The more the group shared and talked, the more the new concept that it was good and important to take time to care for themselves was cemented. For the duration of the program "self-care" became an often-used phrase as the participants began to practice it and see the benefits to their emotional, physical, social and spiritual well-being.

Rachel, who described her parents as very religious and strict, said:

> The Christian culture taught me that I had to be a sacrifice in order to please God. I had to give up everything for Him. I learned that

> my body was not important and that I am not important. As a female, you have even less value.

Again, when childhood abuse has taught women that the needs of others are more important their own wellbeing, an emphasis on the doctrine of self-sacrifice leaves women feeling guilty and selfish for “loving themselves” by caring for their needs. The women in this study found basic things, such as taking the time to care for their emotional and physical wellbeing, very difficult to do. These women agreed that there was a belief that God is only pleased with them when they are giving to others and putting themselves and their needs last.

Conclusion

It is timely to be looking into the most effective programs for protecting women against domestic violence and re-victimisation. Domestic violence is an increasingly important topic in Australia and with the increase in media coverage and ensuing public outcry, it has now become a focus for the government (Royal Commission into Family Violence, 2016, Our Watch, 2017.)

In this paper, I examined the effectiveness of the Shark Cage Program in reducing the risk factors leading to re-victimisation and we identified the impact of certain church cultures on women’s vulnerability to domestic violence. Specifically, the increase of gender inequality due to the doctrine of women submitting to their husbands, and doctrines supporting self-sacrifice were identified as contributing factors. The results of my ethnographic research highlight the need for churches to address the imbalance in their teaching which is contributing to disempowerment in women and increasing their vulnerability to domestic violence.

It is recommended that going forward, a program designed specifically for Christian women who are impacted by childhood trauma or domestic violence be developed and conducted within churches. This should address the scriptural teachings that impact negatively on Christian women’s ability to protect themselves and their children from family violence. Training programs on domestic violence are needed for church leaders, with a view to increase awareness and address the cultural factors which are impacting women in the church. Pastors and leaders should be encouraged to create trauma-informed churches where there is an understanding of the impact of childhood

abuse and neglect and the ability to bring a balanced culture that fosters empowerment for Christian women and protection against abusive relationships.

I am personally in the process of developing such programs. Specific training for Christian counsellors on how to help Christian women navigate their faith and values while protecting themselves and their children is also recommended.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the six ladies whose bravery and vulnerability in forming the focus group enabled this research to be conducted. Thanks to Tom Edwards and the staff at Eastern College for their encouragement and support. Special appreciation to Dr Julie Morsillo for her ongoing support and expertise.

Declaration of Interest Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Bibliography

Al-Modallal, H. (2016). Childhood Maltreatment in College Women: Effect on Severe Physical Partner Violence. . *Journal Of Family Violence, 31*(5), 607-615.

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2017). *Personal Safety Study 2016.* Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Baird, J. (2018, Mar). Data Thy Neighbour. *St Mark's Review, 243*, 7-24.

Baird, J., & Gleeson, H. (2018, October 22). "*Submit to Your Husbands*" *Women told to endure domestic violence in the name of God.* Retrieved from ABC News: https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-07-18/domestic-violence-church-submit-to-husbands/8652028?nw=0

Baker, L. (2010). *Counselling Christian Women on how to Deal with Domestic Violence.* Bowen Hills: Australian Academic Press.

Benstead, U. (2011). The Shark Cage. *17*, 70-76.

Collins, N. (2019). *Out of Control .* London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

Cooper-White, P. (2011). Intimiate Violence Against Women:Trajectories for Pastoral Care in a New Millenium. *Pastoral Psychology*, 809-855.

Day, C. O. (2010, December). Integrated responses to domestic violence; Legally mandated intervention programs for male perpetrators. *Trends and Issues in crime and*

Criminal justice, 404, 1-8. Retrieved Augusst 24, 2017, from http://www.aic.gov.au/media_library/publications/tandi_pdf/tandi404.pdf

Nason-Clark, N. (2009). Christianity and the Experience of Domestic Violence: What does faith have to do with it? *Social Work & Christianity*, 379-393.

Nason-Clark, N. (2009). Christianity and the Experience of Domestic Violence; What does Faith Have to do with it? *Social Work & Christianity, 36*(4), 379-393.

New King James Version. (1991). *Spirit Filled Life Bible.* Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Our Watch. (2017). *Our Watch Handbook.* Retrieved August 24, 2017, from Our Watch: https://www.ourwatch.org.au/What-We-Do/Our-Watch-Handbook

Silk, D. (2012). *Powerful & Free: Confronting the Glass Ceiling for Women in the Church.* Redding: Red Arrow Media.

Silk, D. (2013). *Keep Your Love On.* Red Arrow Publishing.

Strathopoulos, M. (2014). Sexual revictimisation: Individual, interpersonal and contextual factors. *Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault*.

United Nations. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights.* Retrieved from United Nations: http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html

Zuck, R. (1991). *Basic Bible Interpretation.* Illanois: SP Publications.

Book Reviews

Community Engagement After Christendom

Hynd, Douglas G. *Community Engagement After Christendom*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2022, 254 pages.

Western Christianity is facing difficult times as societies increasingly ignore, or even attack, Christian values and ideas that they used to uphold. Moreover, the recent exposure of endemic child abuse in many churches is perhaps the most serious challenge to the moral authority of the churches and to the Christian faith itself for centuries. While I see God's hand here, exposing hypocrisy as God has always done, in line with the statement that "judgment begins with the household of God" (1 Pet 4:17), I am still experiencing pain and distress as I seek to articulate my faith and involve myself in my local community as a Christian.

This book is part of a series *After Christendom*, edited by Stuart Murray, written from an Anabaptist perspective. It is distinctive in being written by a former public (civil) servant in Australia and reflecting an Australian context.

The book begins with an extended Prologue, "A Perfect Storm," in which the author sets the stage for his discussion by exploring themes such as Post-Christendom, secularisation, postcolonialism and the scandal of sexual abuse in Christian churches and the defensive reactions by churches seeking to protect their own institutions. He then lays out the structure of the book's argument towards a new pathway for churches that are no longer "in control."

There are three sections. In Part I, "On reading Scripture 'again,'" the author seeks to re-read specific sections of the Bible in the light of the Anabaptist movement's rejection of Christendom and refusal to take part in forceful control of people's religious practices. Scripture reading by the 18th century poet William Blake, the 20th century lawyer-theologian William Stringfellow, the Black American protester Fannie Lou Hamer and the activist and biblical scholar Ched Myers set the stage here. The author revisits the stories of (Old Testament) Joseph, accused of being too complicit with Pharaoh's oppressive regime in Egypt, and the exilic figures Esther and Daniel. He highlights the anti-royal perspectives found in the Old Testament and reinterprets the

kingship of Jesus as subverting the conventional power dynamics of his day. He has an extended discussion of exile as a key biblical theme also found in patristic writings.

Part II, entitled "'Anticipating' a post-Christendom community engagement," draws on the life, work and teachings of an intriguing 16th-century Anabaptist leader, Pilgram Marpeck. Marpeck was able to maintain a level of involvement with local governments and economies while holding firmly to an Anabaptist and pacifist stance that sometimes got him into trouble with authorities. His life demonstrates that such a stance need not mean sectarian withdrawal from society. Similar stances informed recent Mennonite confessions in North America. Hynd advocates a Christian form of secularity and religious pluralism in the context of the state acting as a supposedly neutral service provider which frequently adopts a "sacralist" stance as in the ANZAC commemorations in Australia.

Part III, "Community engagement on the way out of Christendom," explores the actual experiences of Christian churches and agencies in Australia in relation to government initiatives which often sought to exploit and use churches to implement or assist in government policies on unemployed people and refugees. The moral here is that churches need to beware of getting too close to government and thus compromising their values and identities. There is a fascinating story here in which several large denominations boycotted a particular Australian government initiative designed to penalise uncooperative recipients of unemployment benefits. The later chapters tell of Australian churches, agencies and Christian advocacy groups that seek to help the disadvantaged and even resist government policies. The author concludes with a very helpful meditation on the Beatitudes in the light of post-Christendom society.

This is a very readable book. I found my thinking challenged regularly and my perspective broadened by the research on the Anabaptists and on multi-national issues. This author is well-informed on the events I am familiar with and has an insider perspective from his own career and recent interviews. Even when I disagreed (as on the Joseph story and some of the critique of Australian governments), I came away with new thoughts to consider. It is refreshing for an Australian reader to come across deep Christian analysis of Australian issues, though this might be off-putting for non-Australian readers.

Jon Newton
Alphacrucis University College Melbourne

Disciples & Friends: Investigations in Disability, Dementia and Mental Health

van Ommen, Armand Leon and Brian Brock, eds. *Disciples & Friends: Investigations in Disability, Dementia and Mental Health.* Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2022, 330 pages.

John Swinton is one of the most significant living theologians of today. Not just because of his clarity and scholarship but because his theology is focused on disability, dementia and mental health - topics which are emerging and critical for the church today. For example, Dementia is the biggest killer of women in the 'Western' world today (excluding COVID19).

Swinton's significance is not seen simply in the number of classic books he has written, his eloquence as an orator or his awards (e.g. appointment as the Queen's Chaplain and winner of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Ramsey Prize for excellence in theological writing), but rather how Jesus has used him powerfully to transform people lives. I do not simply mean those living with disability, dementia and mental health – though his impact in this context is amazing, but also John's impact on thought leaders. Indeed, a common thread through *Disciples & Friends, investigations in Disability, Dementia and Mental health* (D&F), a collaborative and scholarly survey of Swinton's life of work in these areas, is how much John's love has touched each of the contributors not simply as thinkers, but as people.

The challenge for all theologians and particularly those dealing with the complexities of disability, dementia and mental health is communicating with the 'common person'. As Doug Gay notes in D&F, Swinton's writing is 'not always easy, because he is a theologian who writes with depth and sophistication' (p. 62). Which is where D&F comes into its own - it makes Swinton accessible to the 'common person'. While it's not Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, it's not short, but each chapter both stands alone and builds on the other chapters, with most less than 15 pages.

Structurally D&F is a collection of essays grouped into four movements: I) Practical Theology in a Swintonian Key; II) Vulnerability Subverted; III) Quests for Faithful Embodiment and IV) Gently Living in a Violent World. The diversity of voices both

within and across each movement produced a harmony that improved each chapter and made the total more readable. Different chapters will touch different people, but my favourites included:

- *On Disability and the Dread of Vulnerability*, by Marcia Webb. A must read for both Christians and thinking atheists.
- *Does L'Arche Need Another Saint?* By Hans S. Reinders and Christina Gangemi. A profound engagement with the complicated legacy of Jean Vanier, founder of the wonderful L'Ache communities and abuser of women.
- *I Could Not for the Life of Me Remember His Name',* by Stephen Judd. About Swinton's powerful practical impact on HammondCare.

Clearly, I loved reading D&F (it was my best Christmas Present) but as a reviewer I am also called to highlight weaknesses. I have already mentioned length, which depending on perspective is a strength or a weakness and is mitigated by short chapters. The second weakness is cost (AU$125.75). However, D&F is so important a work I strongly suggest saving or buying a shared copy. The final weakness is each of the authors has clearly been deeply and personally touched by Swinton and at times it felt like a eulogy. For example, 'writing to celebrate the life and work of someone is a warm and affectionate task' (p. 61). As such at times I would have liked to see more rigorous engagement (aka argument with Swinton).

So, should you spend the $125.75 or just borrow a copy? Yes, I think the only real options are buy or borrow D&F. Not just people personally and professionally involved with disability, dementia and mental health, will treasure this work (we already know Swinton is core reading). All people involved in Christian ministry should be engaging with this book, and as all Christians are called to minister, then everyone should read it.

Ben Boland
Seniors Living Chaplain (Churches of Christ in QLD)

Freeing Congregational Mission: a Practical Vision for Companionship, Cultural Humility and Co-development

Farrell, B. Hunter and S. Balajiedlang Khyllep. *Freeing Congregational Mission: a Practical Vision for Companionship, Cultural Humility and Co-development.* Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 264 pages.

I'll admit it; I've been a STM (short-term mission trip) sceptic. I have often wondered about the amount of time and money invested in such trips thinking that the resources expended might have been better used. On the other hand, having been on such trips and hearing the stories of revolutionary change in church members' lives, there is no doubt that participants benefit from STMs. So, I've been left conflicted. It was a joy then to read *Freeing Congregational Mission.* The book addresses questions surrounding STMs and other mission programs along with key foundational issues in mission. The primary author, Hunter Farrell, has served for 35 years in intercultural mission in the US, Democratic Republic of Congo and Peru, and later as the director of Presbyterian World Mission for a decade. Co-author Balajiedlang Khyllep contributed the seven mission tools for reviewing and reorienting mission activities and programs.

The book was written for congregational mission leaders in US churches. The authors challenge both current mission thinking and practice asking how churches can accompany God in mission in more faithful and effective ways. The book initially identifies two challenges that have profoundly impacted mission. The first is the narcissistic trajectory of our age which has moved US culture toward deep self-centredness. The second challenge flows from mission history and its complicity with the colonial enterprise. Colonialism has been grounded in assumptions of white superiority, which bred paternalism and racism into the missionary endeavour.

In response to these twin challenges, Farrell calls for a reformation in the way US congregations understand and engage in God's mission. This he does in *Section One: The Three Stones* by proposing three foundational "stones", using African imagery, around which we can reimagine mission. The first stone is a Theology of Companionship. This companionship understanding shapes mission partners not as

donor and recipient but as friends who walk together in mission, being vulnerable to one another and having a teachable spirit. Our companionship extends beyond mere earthly friendship but includes the companionship with God. It is His mission, the *mission Dei,* into which we are called.

The second stone is an invitation to cultural humility. Loving one's neighbour means understanding and communicating effectively with them in terms they can understand. The challenge, Farrell maintains, is to move from a monocultural mindset to an intercultural mindset where a person adapts to intercultural situations. The third stone is the principle of co-development. This framework moves mission beyond a colonial mindset where Europeans and Americans know best and should control the development process, to prioritising the voice of the companions who have been marginalised.

In *Section Two: Using the Three Stones*, Farrell applies these foundational concepts to three areas: STMs, care of children and mission leadership. Rather than discarding STMs, some excellent suggestions are made to re-engineer them for the sake of those being sent and the receiving culture. While raising some disturbing questions about meal-packaging programs, child sponsorship and orphanages, Farrell sketches more sustainable mission directions. He ends the section by asking how mission leadership can be reimagined.

A great strength of the book are the seven tools scattered throughout the work. These take the mission critique and theoretical work of Farrell and provide some very practical tools which mission leaders will value. In section one they include ideas regarding representing others through photography, anticipating and addressing cultural difference, and a self-check for leaders to evaluate their actions in development projects. Section two provides an assortment of other tools, including excellent ideas to redeem STMs.

The book is well written and did not rush into giving answers but rather reframed the problem around the twin challenges of narcissistic "selfie" culture and colonial mission history. This for me set the book on a firm foundation that addressed root causes for the current challenges in mission programs rather than immediately providing answers. Further, this approach lent credibility to Farrell's practical suggestions in the final three chapters.

The book is unashamedly written to a US audience, and those beyond the US may need to do some work in applying some parts of the book. Further, the book focussed on the local church for the most part and did not address denominational or interdenominational mission agencies. That would have been, I dare say, beyond the scope of the work. That said, there are some excellent ideas that can be applied in large, medium and small churches wherever they are located.

If you are interested in mission work and ways the local church can be effectively involved, this is a book you should read.

Rod Russell-Brown
Associate Dean (Alliance Institute for Mission, ACOM)

From Inclusion to Justice: Disability, Ministry and Congregational Leadership

Raffety, Erin. *From Inclusion to Justice: Disability, Ministry and Congregational Leadership.* Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2022, 238 pages.

From Inclusion to Justice: Disability, Ministry and Congregational Leadership (*FITJ*) is a passionate argument that including people living with disability is not enough. Raffety argues this case by bringing ethnographic research, the voices of people living with disability and her extensive personal experience to *FITJ*. Justice and the Kingdom of God on earth, Raffety argues, looks like having disabled people in church leadership and an end to ableism (not simply discrimination in favour of able-bodied people but the overall 'premise disability is a problem' p. 4). Indeed, the major refrain throughout the book is Raffety calling out the sin of ableism in society and particularly in the church. As such, much of the book is an identification of the sin of ableism and its manifestations with comparatively little focus on practical application. However, there was great material on the importance of listening and lament as critical and uncomfortable components of ministry. Additionally, the book is quite academic in tone and style. Personally, I found the rigor stimulating, but this is not a popular level book.

Is *FITJ* worth purchasing or at least reading? I certainly found it provoked thought, lament and prayer, which is wonderful. If you have already immersed yourself in the theology of disability, much of the material will not be amazingly new, though the articulation and defense of passionate advocacy was very powerful. If you have not delved into disability theology, then this book is a good opportunity for you, as disability is a key area of ministry and theology for all Christians.

As always, your theological framework will impact how easily you digest *FITJ*. In particular, while Rafferty clearly heard the voices of people living with disability well, her ability to listen to Scripture was weaker. For example, the text Raffety focused most on was the healing of Bartimaeus, but she was primarily interested in the implications and details of Bartimaeus, rather than on the context and focus of the text itself. Another example was her treatment of the Acts 16 exorcism of the

Philippian slave girl which she saw as an example of ableism, as opposed to the passage's insistence of spiritual causation. So those with a liberal/liberation theological perspective will be more comfortable than those who are of a more evangelical/traditional position. As Raffety argues, Jesus and Paul are guilty of the sin of ableism. This is an interesting position, given Paul probably lived with disability (e.g. the thorn in his flesh/see what big letter I use- vision impairment?) and Jesus is biblically sinless. If you identify as evangelical and new to disability theology I recommend 'Redefining Perfect' by Amy Jacober as an easier entry point. Finally, I suspect the treatment of demon possession as disability will be seen as offensive by at least some people living with disability

It also likely that the approach to Scripture and academic tone and will dissuade some from reading – or finishing, this book. This is quite the shame, as ironically, it may well be this audience that is less familiar with, thus more in need of, the arguments of the book. Its thesis 'ableism is a major sin' is a powerful rebuke to the church, and one that requires careful thought, healthy exegesis and much application to our contemporary ministries.

Ben Boland
Seniors Living Chaplain (Churches of Christ in QLD)

From the Inside Out: Reimagining Mission, Recreating the World

Kuja, Ryan. *From the Inside Out: Reimagining Mission, Recreating the World.* Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018, 208 pages.

This is a book for everyone engaged in or supporting mission at home or overseas. Dwight Friesen states in the foreword that this book is 'among the first repentant works emerging from the modern Western Christendom missionary movement'.

Kuja's writing is from the heart, through his storytelling of his own spiritual journey and telling the stories of past atrocities enacted in the name of Western colonialism. For instance, he tells the history of Leopold III from Belgium who, bored at home, claimed to implement a civilising project in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo. This project, however, resulted in the death of half the population and enslavement of many. Kuja traces the Rwandan genocide of 1994 to the colonial rule of the British who favoured Tutsis over Hutus- peoples who had previously lived peacefully together. Consequences of the genocide resulted in violence in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo, starting in the mid-nineties.

By telling numerous stories of colonial oppression, Kuja demonstrates that North American missionaries still carry a sense of imperialism today, a notion that should be noted by readers from other western nations. We have too often imposed our own culturally informed concepts of Jesus onto other cultures. We have tended to see ourselves as saviours of the poor and oppressed rather than looking within ourselves, to our own brokenness as the means of identifying with others who are hurting.

All countries have their stories. Kuja demonstrates that at least some of these are myths. He cites an Afrikaner who stated the Dutch settled uninhabited land in what became South Africa. In this man's mind, the Khoikhoi and the San people who were already there didn't count as people. The myth of the United States being a city on a hill where peace and justice reign persists despite a history of large-scale genocide of indigenous people.

Kuja argues the shame experienced by the poor is often a result of a Western saviour mentality, with roots in the colonial projects of modernity, historically supported by

missions. He urges us to identify our own feelings of shame and unworthiness which, he believes, we all carry. We cannot offer anything to the poor of the world if we have not identified our own inner poverty. He criticises media and aid agencies for their blanket tendency to portray the world's poor as helpless, negating the many aspects of people and cultures that function well.

A new form of colonialism is apparent today in the form of globalisation, by which rich nations have maintained influence around the world, some of whom have initiated violence. Globalisation has prolonged wealthy nations' oppression of the poor.

The author's aim in writing this book is that of encouraging deep repentance and an inner journey that identifies and confronts our own brokenness. From this we form the spirituality of a wounded healer who can identify with and learn from the world's poor and oppressed. It is a call to the vital work of laying aside our cultural and personal myths in order to stop seeing ourselves as the world's saviours.

Kuja ends his book by recounting how he was forced to leave the mission field due to PTSD. His willingness to humbly reveal his own brokenness is powerful, acting as an encouragement for readers to embark on the important work of inner understanding. Doing this work is what enables us to truly be good news for others. This book could not have been written without the author's experience of pain and repentance. This is its strength, for Kuja does not ask readers to go on any journey he has not himself undertaken.

It is rare to read a Christian work of such authenticity. This encourages readers to engage with the reality of our histories, our inner darkness and our often deeply flawed attitudes to mission. It should be required reading for all Western missionaries in training. It has a wider application than those going overseas, for it encourages us all to relate to others out of our common humanity. Spiritual preparation for mission has often been overlooked, but this must not continue. Kuja's work helps us to begin this journey.

Sue Holdsworth
Honorary Post-doc Researcher (Eva Burrows College)

Grounded in the Body, in Time and Place, in Scripture: Papers by Australian Women Scholars in the Evangelical Tradition

Firth, Jill and Denise Cooper-Clarke, eds. *Grounded in the Body, in Time and Place, in Scripture: Papers by Australian Women Scholars in the Evangelical Tradition.* Australian College of Theology Monograph Series. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021, 303 pages.

“Marmanellā Marman wellainer narlumboon karboit” – begins this book. The Lord’s Prayer in Woiwurrung, language of the First Nations people of Central Victoria, Australia, greets readers as they enter this diverse collection. With a range of styles and foci, this book has wide appeal for a theologically inclined readership. By offering eighteen women-authored, “biblically rich and academically rigorous chapters,” the editors address a gap in theological scholarship that often manifests as a lack of bibliographical representation of women on university bibliographies.

This collection was developed from papers given at the 2019 *Grounded* conference at Ridley College, Melbourne. The book is divided into four sections: *Context* (land, time, place), *Old Testament Explorations, New Testament Explorations* and *Applied Theology*. Scholars interface with social, ethical and relational issues in conversation with Christian scripture and reflection. Topics include media, domestic violence, leadership, abortion, (dis)ability, representation and more.

Four chapters I particularly enjoyed are discussed below.

Deborah Storie’s engagement with the story of the Samaritan woman and Jesus at Jacob’s Well (from John’s gospel) is racy and refreshing. Storie’s reflections are grounded in her experience of contemporary Middle Eastern culture and social interaction. Her willingness to push the boundaries of previous interpretations, and to bring the conversation back to foundational, existential questions of human interaction, makes this chapter both enlightening and risky. This is the most enjoyable engagement with gospel narratives I’ve had in a long time.

Co-editor Denise Cooper-Clarke's nuanced and sensitive discussion of the ethics of abortion, her insight into common social dynamics around the issue — and their flaws — is a welcome treatment of a complex, emotive topic. By demonstrating that social good can be understood in a complementary (rather than antagonistic) manner, Cooper-Clarke shifts the debate from an oppositional framework (i.e. between mother and unborn child, as well as between debaters) onto ground that feels much more productive and intelligent than has often come to be associated with this emotionally charged landscape.

PhD candidate and Ridley tutor, Elizabeth C. Culhane, offers a creative challenge to Christians by inviting them to think more carefully and intentionally about the physical spaces in which they meet. Walking readers through the symbolic architecture of St. Paul's Cathedral in Melbourne, Culhane's challenge is not so much about any 'magic' inherent in spatial or architectural configurations themselves, so much as it aims to inspire readers in the knowledge that the *form* of a space is interwoven with its function, and that the two can work in harmony to express beauty and glory.

In the final chapter of the collection, Jill Firth sketches out a history of women's theological roles, endeavours and scholarship in Australia. With particular focus on Anglican, Baptist, Congregational, Pentecostal and Salvation Army traditions, this chapter is brimming with possibilities for future research. Firth has not the space to give more than a deft glance to many "grandmothers of intention" and this succinctness will evoke curiosity in readers. Women from several Christian traditions are not considered (Catholic, Orthodox and other free church movements, such as Churches of Christ), and this further signposts many open spaces for productive research and exploration.

These highlights give only brief insight into this collection. Themes are diverse, and so are methodologies, styles of scholarship and value-frameworks. There is something here for everyone, and both scholars, students and those in ministry will find topics of value that will stimulate thinking, broaden awareness and deepen understanding. In particular, the interface between scripture and women's experiences is important in offering a fresh engagement with scriptural narratives. This interface is a well of resources for ministry and relational engagement informed by the concerns, experiences and ideas of women in a range of contexts. Of course, it is also an important aspect of this text that the contributing women scholars are often

themselves modelling robust, thoughtful engagement with existential ideas within a Christian framework. To quote Marian Wright Edelman, “You can’t be what you can’t see”. It is great to see the emergence of this well-grounded collection.

Sarah Bacaller
PhD cand., (Western Sydney University)

Living for Shalom: The Story of Ross Langmead

Woods, Jeanette. *Living for Shalom: The Story of Ross Langmead.* Eugene, PR: Wipf & Stock, 2021, 283pages.

The city of Melbourne (Australia) is not generally known for its theologians. This biography of Australian missiologist, Rev. Dr Ross Langmead, goes some way to changing that. *Living for Shalom* is an insightful, well-resourced biography written by Langmead's sister, Jeanette Woods, during her time in enforced COVID-19 lockdowns. The book, displaying appropriate pathos while being widely informative, includes contributions from many notable figures of Australian theological contexts, along with the rich array of community-based characters who were part of Langmead's life.

Woods narrates the text in third person, creating a sense of professional distance as she surveys her brother's life with its struggles, victories and complexities. There is a delicate balance here that is managed consistently, whereby Woods has – from her privileged familial position – been able to make the most of sibling intimacy and resources, whilst avoiding the hagiological bias that at times is present when authors write about those they love. The interest of the reader is kept as an ever-present driver of the text.

Langmead's life is sketched in its own narrative arc, beginning with his arrival into the world, born into a Salvation Army overseas-missionary family. The anecdotes of early life are conveyed with amusement, insight and conjecture as to their ensuing effects on Langmead's development – a theme of Langmead's own later reflection, as demonstrated in excerpts of his private journals and public materials. From the get-go, it is clear that Langmead's intelligence, thirst for wisdom and grounded social ethic drove him in many concurrent directions, and that deciding in which directions to pour his limited time and energy was an ongoing wrestle. Music performance and outreach, practical research, skills teaching, community development, academic writing, theological lecturing, research supervision, church responsibilities and involvement in denominational (Baptist) and wider ecumenical contexts – not to mention overseas and cross-cultural work – Langmead was involved in so much. In this book though, we gain insight not only into his scholarly and broader social achievements, but into

Langmead's personal and family life—and importantly, into his health challenges, which included Type 1 diabetes as well as the persistent stresses that weigh on capable people who are in high demand. We see Langmead living out the incarnational, christological praxis he expressed in words – written, spoken and sung – particularly in his commitment to 'home-base': the unique-and-ordinary western suburbs of Melbourne, to which he had an enduring and unbroken commitment.

My only quibble with this book is its ending. The protagonist dies. Of course, we knew this at the outset, but that makes it no less discombobulating. This shows that not only has Woods managed to convey information about her brother's life, but that she has told us a story that has evoked deep sympathy with its protagonist, whose vulnerabilities and unsolved questions of faith only add to the reader's appreciation. Langmead was able to bracket his unsolved theological questions without suppressing them, and to recognise the ambiguities of life and faith beyond his self-confessedly fundamentalist upbringing. What he wagered his life on and strove towards was kindness, understanding and solidarity with all others, and this was fuelled – not hampered or contaminated – by his deeply held convictions.

This book will be of interest to various cohorts of Christians – those seeking inspiration from someone who lived relentlessly toward the generous values of good news for all people; missiologists and those with a passion for social justice, multicultural contexts, reconciliation and the environment, who will find those passions 'lived out' in this book; for creatives, who are keen to see artistic expression melded with critically thoughtful theology (as it was in Langmead's life); and for Australian leaders, ministers and thinkers, sensitive to the nuances of the Oceania context, distinct as it is from the traditional fonts of ground-breaking theologies in the West, such as the UK, Western Europe and the USA.

Sarah Bacaller
PhD cand., (Western Sydney University)

Words for a Dying World: Stories of Grief and Courage from the Global Church

Malcolm, Hannah, ed. *Words for a Dying World: Stories of Grief and Courage from the Global Church*. (London: SCM Press, 2020), 212 pages.

Words for a Dying World is a multi-authored volume that addresses the issue of climate change from a multitude of viewpoints and experiences: cultural, generational, and spiritual. Written in the spirit and style of lament, this book is not only an activist call to the global church, but also an easily accessible entry point for those who know they should care about climate change but find it gets lost amongst the myriad of other issues and calamities vying for our attention.

Editor Hannah Malcolm states her intention is to 'offer an incomplete book' (p. xxviii) designed simply to start a conversation. It is comprised of 35 short essays, divided into three sections that focus on the past, present, and future; each section is book-ended with poetry. It can be read in a traditional manner, cover to cover, or one can pick and choose the essays that pique their interest. However, this approach would be to the reader's loss as each piece provides another thread in the tapestry that the book weaves. While each essay deserves a mention, this review cannot comment in detail on them all. Instead, I will briefly discuss the highlights of each section.

As It Was Then is the title of the first section, and looks back on historical examples of climate grief and anxiety from various cultural settings including New Zealand, South Africa, Alaska and Latin America. The impact of colonialism on the land, and the subsequent inequity of that effect on women, is a pervasive theme through many of these essays irrespective of the culture. Indigenous voices are also a welcome highlight in several of the essays. Of particular impact is *My Grandma's Oil Well* by Lambelet. It speaks of the tension between the awareness and passion one can have about the negative impact of an industry's actions on the environment, and the resulting positive and privileged life that can stem from those actions in the form of financial security and education, sometimes without fully appreciating them. Lambelet wrestles with how 'my grandma's oil well grafts the reality of climate catastrophe into my own story' (p. 28). As a result, he reflects on the potential responses available to him as he highlights the power of lament.

The following section, *As It Is Now*, focuses on the present, and is again wide-ranging in the various cultural settings. Authors from Sri Lanka, India, Peru, South Korea and Australia discuss the current climate and environmental crisis in their individual contexts. This runs the gamut of the ways in which grief and suicide are unwelcome features of farming in India, through to the impact and aftermath of natural disasters such as cyclones on the border of Zimbabwe and Mozambique, and bushfires in Australia. It is hard to highlight just one of these essays, but Jones, in *Climate Grief - Climate Guilt,* highlights the important intersection between the climate crisis and our spiritual lives. Coming from a public theology perspective, Jones focuses on our sin of greed and sloth in a way that powerfully engages and convicts the reader.

The final section, *As It Will Be,* looks forward and is the more practical of the three. We see again the emphasis on the important ritual of lament but added to this are essays exploring potential corporate ecclesiastical responses. Reading this section as a biblical scholar, the essay by Ananthamohan titled *The Wrath of God* is particularly stimulating. The premise that the wrath of God was 'divine consent' rather than 'vengeful retribution' is worth reflecting on. He suggests that 'As we continue to worship the powerful fossil fuel industry as our idol, our planet continues to die and we all continue to suffer. When 'wrath' is thus framed as divine consent, we see how we are being punished *by* our sins, rather than *for* our sins [...] Thus, it is not God who actively punishing us for our sins but ourselves' (p. 183). This is not only a powerful statement in and of itself, but if one has read the preceding the thirty essays, there appears to be significant evidence to justify this position.

When reviewing any book of this nature, it is impossible to truly convey the nuance that each author provides in the tapestry of voices, and this is true for *Words for a Dying World.* The short essay structure allows for easy engagement and while it is an important work for the avid environmentalist already committed to the cause, its biggest audience should be broader. That is, the reader who wants to know why they should care, not unaware or opposed to the climate crisis, but find it simply one more issue in a crowded landscape of important issues. The multifaceted *Words for a Dying World* contains essays that will resonate with every reader, but it also has the potential to be an effective small group or climate focused preaching series resource. It is an accessible and important resource for everyone, but particularly Christians and the church.

Book Reviews

Edwina Blair

Academic Quality Manager (Australian College of Ministries)

Mental-Illness Behavior Sin or Sickness?

Guyton, Derek. *Mental-Illness Behavior Sin or Sickness?* Union City, NJ: Writers Republic, 2021, 336 pages.

Derek Guyton was a public-school teacher, CEO of two computer companies, and pastored two churches. He had a B.A. degree, two master's degrees, and two doctorate degrees and received two parenting awards. However, he was what he calls an oxymoron. He was diagnosed with schizophrenia, chronic schizoid affective type I, hospitalised 21 times, and had 21 car accidents.

In his book *Mental Illness Behavior: Sin or Sickness*, Clayton details his life's journey from rags to riches, from inept to gifted, from sane to insane. He recounts his struggle with mental illness—his lows and highs, symptoms, and recovery, his emotional and internal rollercoaster, and the state of how others react to those with mental illnesses, touching on his own mental illness. He describes how the support systems, care timeline, stigma for those in remission, and action plans can change for those with mental illness and the community around them. Guyton calls mental illness a lonely disease. Although his relationship with the church started with his father as a pastor, and he later became a pastor himself in the community, as he faced challenges of mental illness, multiple admissions, car accidents, and his divorce, he reports the church family was not there for him and his family.

Guyton wanted to prove that condemning spiritual failures as sin is a much heavier verdict for pastors, which he has done. He provides examples of how his and others' mental illnesses have caused frustration, isolation, and constant suspicion of the mentally ill in a way that causes them to fake normalcy and feel shame. Guyton describes how he adopted a secret lifestyle, masking his symptoms the best he could. He would manipulate others around him to prevent them from forcing him to seek treatment for his illness.

The book can be hard to follow because it repeatedly goes back and forth in time. Guyton speaks about his childhood and adulthood before returning to his teenage years and returning to adulthood again. However, the book is highly insightful, offering a unique perspective on how a person goes from depression to mania and how to deal with it.

The various chapters and sections of the book discuss his high school years, military service, hospital visits, signs and episodes of mental illness, his mother's perspective, and more. Chapter One takes a large portion of the book. The chapter's titles flow logically from Chapter One, focusing on Guyton's struggles with mental illness. Chapter Two details what he could have done to cope with his illness better. Chapter Three highlights what others with mental illness did because of their conditions and how others reacted to them. Chapter Four offers Guyton's opinion on what others can do to better deal with mental illness and help those with mental illness. The last chapter's title focuses on what those with mental illnesses can do.

The titles give a nice flow to the book, but the chapters are not easy to follow. Each chapter's structure differs a little. Chapter Two, for example, starts with an abrupt shift, and he then shifts into how he made excuses for not dealing with mental illness. Then Guyton wraps up the chapter by giving steps on how to confess.

Similarly, Chapter Three starts with a piece of literature in the form of an article in which a pastor committed suicide and shows comments from highly judgmental people who lack sympathy. It talks about how unsupportive or supportive people can affect those with mental illness by how they treat them. Eventually, Guyton learns to cope with his mental illnesses by deciding not to deal with his sickness as a sin but by turning to confession, therapy, and medicine. This unique perspective is helpful to those with a mental illness and their family and friends. As I consider the stigma attached to mental illness, especially in the (USA) Black community, more effort must be made to teach those affected that mental illness is not a sin, the devil, or a lack of faith. It is a treatable disease like cancer that needs care.

Although this book can be challenging to read, I recommend it. It could be helpful to different people, including churchgoers, church leaders, the mentally ill, and family and friends of the mentally ill. This book can give insight into many facets of mental illness and is excellent for all readers because mental illness is everywhere. Guyton's unique depiction can assist in educating society about mental illness and how we can move forward and begin stripping away stigmas long associated with mental illness. Hopefully it will better inform our Churches' ministry response to those suffering.

Marie Clemence Ulcena
Liberty University (Doctorate candidate)

Positive Psychology at the Movies: Using Films to Build Character Strengths and Well-Being

Niemiec, Ryan and Danny Wedding. *Positive Psychology at the Movies: Using Films to Build Character Strengths and Well-Being,* 2nd edition. Boston, MA: Hogrefe, 2014, 470 pages.

Great movies are not just entertaining but motivate our spirits and catalyse our thinking to make ourselves and the world a better place. The narratives and characters of a positive movie remind us of what makes life worth living. As a local church preacher and theology teacher, I often sought for just the right movie illustration to inspire a new perspective or motivate loving and just behaviour. Now as an Army chaplain, I am searching for the best scenes that are suggestive of the kind of virtues and values that recruits and soldiers need.

What movies best foster character and well-being? What theories helpfully underlie their interpretation? And what is best practice for helping people understand and learn from them? These are questions that led me to *Positive Psychology at the Movies.*

The authors are movie-lovers who identify and exegete the movies that best inspire viewers to admire and emulate an inspiring character or theme. Ryan Niemiec is Education Director of the VIA Institute on Character which uses a “positive psychology” lens to explore the latest science and practice of character strengths. Danny Wedding is an Associate Dean at California School of Professional Psychology. They both champion positive psychology, as pioneered by Martin Segilman, which focuses on what is best about humans and our strengths and virtues, rather than human problems and unhealthy diagnoses. It is an appreciative approach to character development and therapy which aims to foster optimal functioning and flourishing, and a key tool they utilise is film.

The book is structured around virtues and character strengths that popular psychology identifies: virtues of wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence, and underlying character strengths such as curiosity, creativity, love of

learning, bravery, honesty, kindness, justice, teamwork, humility, gratitude, and appreciation of beauty and excellence. They discuss a huge range of Western and international movies that embody the virtue or character strength, or show unhealthy aspects (when a virtue turns to a vice), all in cinematic form. They also provide relevant research on how to nurture the virtue or character strength, and homework exercises to take training outside the classroom; e.g., asking learners to actually confront those who tell racist or sexist jokes.

The most valuable contribution of the book is modelling attentiveness to the deeper positive psychological themes, narratives and characters of movies. Hundreds of movies are mentioned and dozens are discussed in depth. I noted several to unpack in teaching Australian Defence Force values:

- Service – Mother Teresa (2003), The Notebook (2004), Avatar (2009), Amazing Grace (2006), Forrest Gump (2004)
- Courage – Blood Diamond (2005), Hotel Rwanda (2004), Amelia (2009), Acts of Valor (2012), Saving Private Ryan (1998), Braveheart (1995)
- Respect – Remember the Titans (2000), Gandhi (1982), Mighty Times: The Legacy of Rosa Parks (2002), Lars and the Real Girl (2007), Invictus (2009)
- Integrity – A Few Good Men (1992), Good Will Hunting (1997), Courage Under Fire (1996), Erin Brockovich (2000)
- Excellence – Karate Kid (1984), The Soloist (2009), Apollo 13 (1995), Chariots of Fire (1981), The Legend of Bagger Vance (2000).

Positive Psychology at the Movies offers encyclopaedic coverage of how a huge range of movies embodies a wide set of character strengths. It is a useful book for teachers and instructors, chaplains and therapists, or anyone with an interest in viewing or studying movies and using them to foster character development. For those in Church settings, this would be an invaluable resource to locate helpful illustrations to effectively teach about the fruits of the spirit or other virtues at the heart of Christian discipleship.

Darren Cronshaw
Support Chaplain (Australian Army)

Research Director and Professor of Missional Leadership (Australian College of Ministries)

Redeeming Dementia: Spirituality, Theology and Science

Linthicum, Dorothy and Janice Hicks. *Redeeming Dementia: Spirituality, Theology and Science.* New York, NY: Church Publishing, 2018, 160 pages.

As an aged care chaplain and advocate I read rather a lot about dementia and particularly dementia and ministry. Some of the material is brilliant (e.g. Keeping Love Alive as the Memories fade, the 5 love languages and the Alzheimer's journey by Barr, Shaw & Chapman is exceptional particularly for families who have a loved one living with dementia). However, much is either highly academic or poor. 'Redeeming Dementia, Spirituality, theology and science' (RD) by Dorothy Linthicum and Janice Hicks was thus a pleasant surprise.

This short book written at a popular level has three major movements. Firstly, it provides a strong summary of the biology of the brain and dementia's impact on the brain. Then it examines the theology of dementia, primarily from the perspective of David Kelsey but also engaging John Swinton. Thirdly and finally the book moves to the praxis, challenging and equipping Christians to love and engage with people living with dementia.

The strength of the book is not that it is groundbreaking but rather its clarity about dementia and particularly dementia ministry. An easy reading tone and multiple personal stories (many of which showed significant vulnerability) make it a great introduction to the topic.

My only significant 'problem' with RD was the decision to base the theology section primarily on Kelsey's work. On one hand it inspired me to get a copy of his two-volume work 'Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology' as the question of what makes a person is critical for my ministry. However, I found the downplaying of the Imago Dei as pivotal to understand what a person is, on the basis Genesis 1-2 is 'primeval history,' (p. 46) challenging. So, I am looking forward to seeing how Kelsey's focus on the wisdom literature as the basis for understanding personhood functions. Irrespective, my concern with the focus on Kelsey's theology of personhood remains, as the vast majority of Christian theologies of dementia and personhood generally give

the Imago Dei prominence. So as a summary of the current theology of dementia it was a bit skewed.

As always, how helpful you find RD will depend on your circumstances. RD's introductory nature is of course both strength and weakness. If you are already familiar with the science and theology of dementia and are looking for cutting edge and new material you will not find it in RD. If dementia and dementia theology is a space you are new to I cannot think of a better introduction. Additionally, I would suggest RD is a great addition to any ministers/churches bookshelf as a great book to give or loan to people who are new to dementia theology, particularly as each chapter has reflection questions and a strong list of reference which facilitates further study.

Ben Boland
Seniors Living Chaplain (Churches of Christ in QLD)

Religion's Sudden Decline: What's Causing It and What Comes Next?

Inglehart, Ronald E. *Religion's Sudden Decline: What's Causing It and What Comes Next?* New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021, 208 pages.

For many years, ideas about secularisation have been debated. Is religion really in decline? Why does it appear to be declining in some places but not in others? This book is a very substantial addition to that debate and reframes secularisation in such a way as to make sense of the great variation in trends around the world. It is a book that all scholars of religion should study carefully. Many church leaders will also find it helpful to understand what is going on even in their own local churches and denominations. Its propositions make sense of why progressive denominations are declining most rapidly and why there is increasing antagonism between the conservative denominations and the wider population.

Inglehart begins with the fact that, in 2020, according to a range of surveys, most countries around the world were declining in the proportion of people describing themselves as religious, in belief in God and in attendance at religious services. While this decline is slight in some Islamic countries and in many economically underdeveloped countries, the decline was strong in all economically developed countries and most rapid in the United States of America. While there were a few exceptions to this decline, most of these exceptions were ex-Communist countries where religiosity was increasing to fill the gap left by the collapse of Communist ideology.

Ronald Inglehart is well known for his analysis of worldwide trends in values. He was well known for his ideas on post-materialism. However, this book looks at values in a different way. It argues that the decline in religion is being driven by a widespread change in values from 'pro-fertility norms' to 'individual choice norms.' He argues that one of the major social functions of religion has been to support pro-fertility norms: those values which see women's major role in life as bearing and raising children, and which prohibit sexuality activity not oriented to procreation such as homosexuality and masturbation.

Inglehart argues that these pro-fertility norms have kept cultures and peoples alive in times when infant mortality rates were high and average life spans were relatively short. However, as infant mortality rates have come down and where there are strong welfare systems, individual choice norms are replacing pro-fertility norms. These 'individual choice norms' involve tolerance for people choosing their own lifestyles, and include support for gender equality, divorce, abortion and homosexuality. As these individual choice norms dominate, religion is seen as irrelevant or, in many contexts, opposed to individual choice values.

Inglehart provides strong evidence from a great range of surveys to support his contention. He finds a strong negative correlation between the affirmation of individual choice norms and religiosity, however religiosity is measured. There are still many countries with high infant mortality and little social welfare support where religiosity remains strong. However, in most economically developed countries today, there is low infant mortality and strong social welfare support, and low levels of religiosity. At the head of this trend are the Nordic countries, including the Netherlands. Australia and Britain are not far behind. The United States has been held back in this process of secularisation, he argues, by the high levels of economic and social inequality and its poor social welfare provisions. However, religion is now declining in the USA at a faster rate than anywhere around the globe, he proffers.

Inglehart argues that in those countries where religion is in rapid decline, its place is being taken by a new set of moral values. While divorce is accepted, for example, there is much attention to consent in relationships. It is noteworthy that these countries are also among those which give the highest proportion of their GDP in aid for economic development of other countries. They are most tolerant in accepting immigrants and asylum seekers. The people in these countries have high levels of trust in each other and score high on life satisfaction.

Inglehart notes that there have been some setbacks in this development through the huge influx of Syrian and other immigrants into parts of Europe. This has led to some people feeling insecure and turning to more conservative political expressions. He wonders if COVID-19 will also cause insecurity and whether there will be a turning to religion as a result. However, he does not believe that the 'authoritarian reflex' will triumph in the long run and, thus, the long-term decline of religion is likely to continue.

Inglehart's thesis gives little hope to religious organisations. It may give great cause for reflection. Inglehart believes that the human search for meaning will continue, but religious organisations may need to approach this very differently if they are to remain relevant to the majority of people.

This book is likely to be seminal in thinking about religion for decades to come. While Inglehart is critical of religion's past social roles for contemporary societies, he says that people will continue to seek meaning in one way or another. What roles religion can play in the search for meaning is not clear. Overall, it is not well-written and often appears to be moving in circles, repeating its major themes in different ways. It is likely that the major themes will be nuanced by other writers in coming years. However, those themes will continue to challenge all religious organisations and scholars of religion.

Philip Hughes
Emeritus Professor (Alphacrucis University College)

Revitalizing the Declining Church: From Death's Door to Community Growth

Barrett, Desmond. *Revitalizing the Declining Church: From Death's Door to Community Growth.* Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 100 pages.

Revitalizing the Declining Church: From Death's Door to Community Growth by Desmond Barrett is a collection of 10 stories of turnaround churches. These stories are not about mega-churches nor do they provide a silver bullet for solving our problems. Each of these stories is in a setting where the church desperately needed revitalisation. This book is unlike other works on the topic of revitalisation. First, as mentioned, it is written in story form. Each of the ten stories is of a church at "death's door." One such church is just feet from the cemetery.

Desmond writes from the vantage of familiarity with the struggling pastor, the wounded pastor's heart, and the disillusion of church leaders. Desmond also has a story of his own Nazarene church, though not written as a chapter, summarised in the Preface: "Sunday after Sunday standing in the tiny foyer before anyone would arrive, I would stare out the double doors towards the church's long driveway crying out in prayer for God to send us a family with children to join the church. Week after week, it seemed no one would come except the same eight members. Was God even listening?"

The hero is the Holy Spirit. This hero's arrival was provided through the invitation of praying church members. Sometimes it was ladies' meeting on a designated night. Another time it would be organised into specifically planned expressions. Sometimes it was a group; other times, the pastor's prayers. In each story, a prayer focus invites and then surrenders the situation to the Holy Spirit. The diversity of the prayer expressions is insightful and encouraging. He notes "While you cannot control what is happening in society, you can control what happens in your soul. Leading your people in intentional prayer times will recenter the church back on Christ and prepare the way for the future."

Revitalizing the Declining Church: From Death's Door to Community Growth is a work of encouragement and hope. It is not a system or a program. This compilation of

testimonies of God's faithfulness, the power of prayer, and a need to have a living awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit in pastors and the church is consistent throughout each story. The book’s blurb claims that is ideal for “a pastor of a dying and struggling church searching for hope.” The accessible stories, focus on prayer and general encouragement ensure this is the case.

Terry L. Neumayer

The Missionary Spirit: Evangelism and Social Action in Pentecostal Missiology

Ireland, Jerry M. *The Missionary Spirit: Evangelism and Social Action in Pentecostal Missiology*. American Society of Missiology Series, No.61. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2021, 198 pages.

Jerry Ireland, an experienced Pentecostal missionary in Africa, now Associate Professor of Theology and Missions at the University of Valley Forge in Pennsylvania, has drawn on experience, theology, and Pentecostal history to launch a challenge to some recent trends in Pentecostal thinking and practice about missions. Ireland questions the near consensus among Pentecostal scholars that evangelisation and social action should have equal weight in Pentecostal missionary endeavours. Instead, Pentecostals should always prioritise proclamation across cultural borders in the power of the Holy Spirit, while not neglecting social welfare in a supporting role.

The book begins with a lengthy introduction in which he sets out his main thesis, anticipates his main arguments, identifies some of his main targets, discusses likely objections, and defines some key terms.

In Chapter 1 (“The Priority of Proclamation in Pentecostal Perspective”), Ireland makes an argument grounded in trends in missiology, Pentecostal missions history and biblical theology. Here he privileges classical Pentecostalism seen as “a Spirit-empowered missionary movement” (p.2), as evidenced by the urgency that motivated early Pentecostals. For Ireland, more recent trends have lost this urgency and priority:

> …. this emphasis on cross-cultural proclamation as the essence of missions has evaporated, owing in part to the mission as transformation/holistic mission movement emerging from the various Lausanne congresses that have taken place between 1974 and 2010 (p.6).

Ireland is opposed to such a “holistic” view of missions and he is highly critical of the Lausanne movement, recent evangelical missiology and several specific Pentecostal

authors, in particular the volume of essays edited by Murray Dempster et al, *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective*.[46]

Chapter 2 develops an argument for a "narrow view of Pentecostal missions" based on "tongues speech (*glossolalia*) as the key" to the missiology of Acts, "one that orients the church to the nations and emphasises its proclamational role" (p.31.) He argues that the focus on tongues among Pentecostals should be less on "initial evidence" and more on its "'enduring evidence' of the church's global missionary task" (p.45). Chapter 3 has a lengthy discussion on glossolalia both in the New Testament and patristic authors with a focus on cross-cultural missions, concluding, "missions and a missional outlook may be the greatest contribution that glossolalia makes in terms of ecclesiology" (p.83).

In Chapter 4, Ireland focuses more on Ralph Winter's sodality-modality distinction between mission bands and local churches. Both Catholic and Protestant cross-cultural missionary advances have traditionally been led by "sodalities," missionary societies or "parachurch" entities who often have had a tense relationship with the sending churches and even with the new churches their efforts have produced. But what concerns Ireland more is the role of compassion-oriented agencies working with overseas churches. "If missionaries act as the primary 'doers' of compassion, then often the result is that the local congregations become robbed of their role as salt and light in the community" (p.98). Foreign missionaries should instead concentrate on "discipling for compassion" (p.108).

In Chapter 5, Ireland challenges the broader understanding of the kingdom of God and the church as witness to Christ (Acts 1:8), urging that "the primary task of witnesses is to proclaim the gospel, for apart from this there is no salvation" (p.117). But "many compassionate projects in missions fail.... because instead of focusing on forming a people, they instead focus on starting a project and depend on outside personnel and resources for survival " (p.128).

This argument continues into Chapter 6 where Ireland criticises western missionaries' paternalism towards Africa and uses the African concept of *ubuntu* and the biblical concept of *koinonia* to "help foster forms of compassion that are truly indigenous and that therefore offer the greatest hope for lasting change" (p. 136). He notes that "several observers have noted that Pentecostal churches often succeed in

[46] Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991.

development in ways beyond even that of NGOs and FBOs[47]" (p.141) because they rely on their own members' contributions rather than overseas aid, preserve community relationships, "foster individual transformation" (p.142), maximise participation by all involved and take the spirit world seriously.

In Chapter 7, Ireland builds on his argument for a localised Pentecostal solution to African problems by contrasting *prosperity Pentecostalism*, which he sees as a secularising (as well as syncretising) force, with *missional Pentecostalism*, which has been driven by belief in the imminence of Jesus' return, multiculturalism, linking Spirit baptism to missions and a capacity for contextualisation (in spite of early colonialist and paternalistic attitudes), which made Pentecostal missions much more reliant on indigenous workers than other missionaries.

Finally in a brief concluding Epilogue, Ireland especially focuses on dependence on the Holy Spirit, rather than on human agency and capacities, and the priority of bringing people to Christ.

This book challenges our thinking on a range of fronts, which is no bad thing even if the reader ultimately rejects Ireland's argument.

Jon Newton
Alphacrucis University College Melbourne

[47] Faith Based Organisations.

The Rainbow and the Cross: Help for Pastors: Church Practice Concerning Biblical Sexuality

Paske, Elijah. *The Rainbow and the Cross: Help for Pastors: Church Practice Concerning Biblical Sexuality.* Self-published, 2023, 317 pages.

This is not a book you will find in most bookshops. In fact, the author has had to use a pseudonym. It challenges what most people are hearing about sexuality, especially homosexuality, and calls the church to a ‘non-affirming’ but pastorally encouraging stance.

The book begins by recounting the current position in the Western world related to sexuality and analysing the process by which today’s situation emerged. This section (Chapters 1-4) contains an informative history of ‘ex-gay’ ministries like Exodus. The author carefully distinguishes between hopes for change in orientation and desires for holiness and Jesus, contests claims that change never happens, reflects the pain felt by ex-gays who feel betrayed by governments and churches alike, reports on new ministries and responds to those who have left ex-gay ministry embittered and hurt.

In the next section, starting in Chapter 5, the author discusses some of the key Bible-based arguments in favour of an affirming stance towards homosexuality and considers theories of causation for homosexuality. Arguments for a genetic basis for homosexual orientation are debunked, although the author also contests the idea that sexuality is purely a choice.

The book reports that empirical research on sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE) often shows positive results, even though the orientation may not change, and almost never causes harm. Expectations of change in orientation are lower these days but the author calls for a balanced view: “Hard-line emphasis on either extreme, of saying people must expect to change or, that they cannot expect any kind of change, is equally unhelpful.”

This important comment leads gradually into the research that forms the heart of this book, which included interviews with people attending ‘non-affirming’ churches. The author’s own research suggests,

> Sexual preference change is not something churches can or would be interested in foisting onto non-believers or those who are accepting of their sexuality. A first step for any who are distanced from God is to introduce Jesus and salvation. This was the aim almost all of the pastors and leaders in churches I interviewed….

The discussion covers most of the biblical and theological arguments on sexual behaviour, not simply focusing on homosexuality but clearly supporting the conservative position. There is a good survey of denominational debates and positions, noting that Australian denominations have been reluctant to take a stand either way. There is also a critical review of literature from varying viewpoints.

The author is especially concerned about the use of narratives in this debate. Narratives affirming homosexuality are celebrated and applauded. Narratives of people who have ‘come out’ of the gay lifestyle are often suppressed, if not ridiculed, and taken down from media platforms. This book includes excerpts from, or summaries of, such stories that support the idea that change is possible.

Perhaps the main goal of this book is to help pastors and leaders of ‘non-affirming’ churches provide appropriate pastoral care for Christians who are same-sex-attracted or who have relatives who are same-sex-attracted. This requires a fresh look at singleness by pastors who have promoted marriage to the detriment of single Christians. As the author argues,

> while some heterosexual people will continue to hope for a marriage, for many same-sex attracted people this option is unlikely. Depending on the focus of the church toward singleness, these people will either feel included or isolated.

Based on the research the author had done, certain pastoral strategies emerged that same-sex-attracted Christians found most helpful. These included teaching on spiritual disciplines, one-on-one mentoring or friendship (with all the challenges this can bring), listening to people’s stories, helping people focus on God (and experience Him) rather than their own identity or needs, small group fellowship, and loving acceptance,

combined with clear standards in relation to leadership, help in overcoming sin and consistency in discipline.

Same-sex-attracted Christians interviewed for this research wanted their churches to have a clear ‘non-affirming’ position on this area and be willing to explain, defend and implement it. This would include resisting active pro-gay campaigners trying to influence the church. More complex issues such as those related to legally married same-sex partners or their children are also addressed by the participants in the research.

Not all pastors will want to embrace the argument of this book but those who remain committed to a ‘non-affirming’ stance on homosexuality will find support and useful advice here, especially that based on what people in their churches have said.

Jon Newton

Alphacrucis University College Melbourne