

# 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

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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

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# 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

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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

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

**Farrell, B. Hunter and S. Balajiedlang Khylllep. *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 Khylllep 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

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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.

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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

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# 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



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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.

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# 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

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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.

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# **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.

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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

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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

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# 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

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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.

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# 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.

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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.

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## 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.

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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

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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)

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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

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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.

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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.

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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

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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



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

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

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<sup>46</sup> Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991.

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development in ways beyond even that of NGOs and FBOs<sup>47</sup>" (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

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<sup>47</sup> 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."

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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,

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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

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