Issue No. 9
2024

ISSN 2205-0442

JCMIN JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY MINISTRY

JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY MINISTRY

Special Edition: Religion and Society

CRA
CHRISTIAN RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

The Journal of Contemporary Ministry **is published by the Christian Research Association, 90 Albion Street, Box Hill, VIC 3128.**

Email: admin@cra.org.au.

The aim of the Christian Research Association is to provide up-to-date and reliable information about religious faith and church life in Australia. It is directly supported by nine denominations and theological colleges which are Senior Members and entitled to have members on the board. Many other organisations, churches, schools and individuals are Associate Members.

The Journal of Contemporary Ministry acts as a place for reporting research and discussing issues related to contemporary ministry, including related theological and biblical questions. Its goals are to:

- Stimulate informed discussion regarding issues faced by contemporary Christian churches and ministries worldwide.
- Encourage research, including empirical research, into diverse forms and contexts of contemporary ministry and the practical, theological and biblical issues that arise from ministry practice.
- Enable students and graduates in postgraduate Ministry programs to speak to a wider audience.
- Build the credibility of Ministry as a field of study and research.

The Journal of Contemporary Ministry provides a specific forum for post-graduate students in accredited colleges and universities in Australia and other countries, to publish the results of their research.

The Journal of Contemporary Ministry contains these kinds of material:

1. Scholarly articles on topics related to contemporary ministry. These are subject to “double blind” peer review by two relevant scholars. Usually 4 of these will be included in any issue of the journal.
2. Book reviews on recently-published books in the field of contemporary ministry. These will be subject to review by the book review editor.

3. Student essays from post-graduate students in accredited colleges and universities in Australia and other countries (generally only one of these will be published in any issue, subject to the editor's discretion).
4. Pastoral reflections of a thoughtful, informed nature about issues related to contemporary ministry grounded in the pastor's or minister's own experience (generally only one of these will be published in any issue).
5. Research notes on current research projects in the field.
6. Short summaries of recent doctoral theses in the field of contemporary ministry.

Materials for The Journal of Contemporary Ministry may be submitted at: www.journalofcontemporaryministry.com

ISSN 2981-801X (Print Edition)
ISSN 2205-0442 (On-line Edition)

Table of Contents

Editorials

Kaya

It is a pleasure to say ‘hello’ in the Whadjuk Nyoongar language, the language of the land I work and live on: Boorloo, also known as Perth. It is also a pleasure to introduce myself as the incoming Editor of the *Journal of Contemporary Ministry*. I feel incredibly blessed, a great deal of honour, and a sense of reverence in being entrusted with this role. It is a significant thing to be handed the baton of this journal, with its nine-year history under the care of the outgoing Editor, Jon Newton. I wish to honour Jon and the previous eight years under his care, his and others’ hard work and persistence in overcoming challenges to produce, edit, promote, and disseminate this high-quality work. I pray that I may be able to continue what they have started.

I come to this journal with various experiences in ministry, and in academia. After I graduated from high school, I felt called into service as a school Chaplain. So, I began by studying a Bachelor of Social Science with a major in Youth Work. This passion for young people would come to define my career for the years to come. After my undergraduate studies, I began what would become ten-years in school Chaplaincy across various primary and high schools in Perth. At the time I was also serving in my

local church's youth group, helping facilitate activities as well as mentor a group of boys from age 12 until they finished high school. I am proud to have seen where they are now, and to perhaps have been part of a positive influence on their lives. While I loved being part of the journeys of these young people, as well as part of the journeys of the student and staff member at each school, towards the ten-year mark I began to feel as though my time in Chaplaincy and youth group was coming to an end.

After a stint doing ministry cross-culturally in South East Asia, it became clear to me that God was calling me into something new. I took a step of faith, and began my Masters of Social Science with Edith Cowan University. As a Higher Degree by Research, I conducted a phenomenology into why young people leave and stay in the Baptist church. While the research and the degree took me in a direction I did not expect, it was a formative experience and it has opened many doors for me. I was offered a job as a lecturer in Youth Work at Tabor College by one of the examiners of my thesis, a role which I enjoyed for 3 years. It was because of my role there that I began to do my PhD, and I am grateful for their support to do this.

I am now privileged to be working in *Excellence and Innovation* and *Domestic Partnerships*, at Sheridan Institute of Higher Education in Perth, an *Australian Baptist Education* initiative. I am involved in quality assurance, accreditation, process

improvement, building Sheridan's network, as well as lecturing in Sociology. This role has given me opportunities to continue working on my PhD, where I am researching how churches in Perth do youth ministry, and how these programs are perceived by the young people participating in them. It has also given me opportunities to share my knowledge with others through conferences and presentations, but it is also because of Sheridan that I was connected with Christian Research Australia and consequently offered this role of Editor.

I am excited about this journal, because I am passionate about equipping those in ministry with the tools from research, as well as new resources, concepts, and ideas from others in ministry. May this journal continue to be part of the great cloud of witnesses who cheer you on, dear reader, to keep running with perseverance (Hebrews 12:1).

Tim Mullen

Editor

Guest Editorial

One of the most significant events recorded in the Hebrew Testament is Samuel's appointment of the first king, Saul. It marked the beginning of the division between the political and spiritual leadership of the young nation. Similar processes were

happening in other parts of the globe with the formation of Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Confucianism in the period now referred to as the Axial Age. Prior to this time, there had certainly been individuals who had focussed more on the spiritual dimension, such as the sharmans, while others focussed on the political activities of their societies, but it was only in the Axial Age that separate political and religious institutions began to appear.

The existence of separate political and religious leaders has meant that one institution could critique the other. In general, religious institutions have provided a moral critique of the political and social world. At many times, the political institutions have co-opted the religious institutions to help maintain order by teaching moral behaviour, or co-opted them to strengthen their own power. Indeed, that was true at the start of European settlement in Australia. The British government paid for religious chaplains to accompany the troops and the convicts. Some of those early chaplains also performed the role of judge, handing out punishments to those who transgressed the moral code.

There have been times, however, when the co-option of the religious institutions by the political institutions has led to the popular rejection of the religious institutions. The alignment of the Catholic Church with the kings of France, led to the widespread rejection of religion and the inauguration of the Age of Reason at

the time of the French Revolution. Partly because of the French Revolution, it was determined in the formation of the United States and later in Australia, that ‘church and state’ should be kept separate. A similar process to France occurred in Russia, where the alignment of the Russian Orthodox Church with the Russian Czars contributed to the repression of religion in communist Russia.

In many countries around the world, the influence of the religious institutions is fading. One of the major mechanisms for this decline is referred to by sociologists as ‘differentiation’. Part of modernisation has been the rise of distinct spheres of society, each with its own areas of expertise and to some extent, its own language and systems of thought. These have arisen independently of religion and have excluded religion from these areas of society. As industry has taken on the role of producing clothes, constructing sophisticated means of travel and building technically sophisticated buildings, so religion has disappeared from these areas of life. One of the articles in this collection, “Cross-cultural ministry among women in northeast Thailand in the context of modernisation” describes how this process has occurred even in recent decades as religious rituals have, to a large extent, been replaced by technological and scientific processes in agriculture and in the processes of child-birth. The

effect has been to confine religion to the areas of personal and family life.

While differentiation has weakened the place of religion in many societies, the process has been sharpened by the loss of confidence in religious institutions. Over the last two decades, this has been evident in the cases of sexual abuse, particularly of children, conducted by clergy and other employees of church institutions. While cases of sexual abuse have occurred in many institutions in society, the fact that they occurred in those institutions which were meant to give moral leadership has been particularly shocking. The fact that religious institutions have tried to cover up such cases because of their concern for their own reputations has, in fact, been especially damaging to their reputations. As a result, in many countries, the state has stepped in to uncover these moral failures of institutions which were expected to be moral leaders. In Australia, this had led to Commissions conducted by the political institutions, and resulted in a range of regulations which have intruded into the life of the churches. Institutions which have seen their role as moral leadership have found themselves chastised by the wider society for their moral failures. This story is told in the article by Leonie Bird.

Gradually, the process has also affected personal and family life with sharp declines in people attending religious services and

identifying themselves with religious traditions. The overall pattern in Australia has been analysed using recent survey data on religious behaviour and attitudes by Philip Hughes in the article “Why People are Ceasing to Attend Churches and to Identify with Religious Institutions”.

However, there is another side to this story of the decline of religious institutions. Religious institutions have long been centres for care and have contributed to the wellbeing of their societies. While the political institutions have taken control of many aspects of this care through its systems of health and welfare, there are still gaps which are being filled by local churches. Local churches are finding ways, not only to provide aid, but to create supportive local communities through their welfare activities. Fleur Creed tells this story in “Why Churches Should Consider the Formation of Social Capital in the Design of their Welfare Programs”. The article emphasises the importance of doing more than providing welfare, and acting in ways that professional bureaucratic organisations cannot, to enhance community life in many parts of Australia.

Another example of religious institutions finding new ways of serving their communities is that of chaplaincy. Chaplains are active in many areas of society, providing spiritual care in forms which do not involve detailed doctrines or require specific religious behaviours. They walk beside people through the ups and downs of life, providing support at both personal and

communal levels. The story of sports chaplaincy in Australia and its effectiveness from the point of view of members and administrators of sporting clubs is told by Stephen Reid in “Ministry on Their Turf: The Roles and Functions of Christian Sports Chaplains in Contemporary Australian Society”.

The place of religion in society is undergoing very significant change. No longer is religion providing significant moral support to the political institutions of Australia. Indeed, many of the traditional values of the religious institutions have been rejected, particularly in the area of sexuality, where the value system has moved to a focus on personal freedom to find personal fulfilment in whatever ways do not cause harm to others. However, religious institutions continue to administer many major institutions providing care and welfare assistance, through hospitals and aged care homes, and through a great variety of social programs. They also continue to fund many schools. Many of these welfare and educational institutions are largely or partly funded by public money channelled through the government and through the fees of those who use them. Regulations help ensure that this use of public money is done in line with the interests of the public as a whole.

Apart from these institutions, the care given by local religious groups and individuals still plays a very significant role in society. It has been calculated recently that volunteering for the sake of

the wider community is enhanced by the networking that occurs through religious services and through the motivation that religions provide, contributing billions of dollars of worth to the wider community.

As detailed in this volume, care also occurs through sports and other forms of chaplaincy and through the small and local initiatives of local churches. While facing pressures from the wider society, there are continuing roles for religion in contemporary society.

The articles in this volume, apart from my own, represent a total of more than 30 years of doctoral studies. I have had the privilege of accompanying each of the authors from the inception of their studies to their successful conclusions. In each case, the completion of the work has come at great personal cost and with much persistence, rising above the frustrations and challenges to complete the work. I am honoured to be able to present these essays here as tributes to their very considerable efforts.

Philip Hughes

Guest Editor

Peer Reviewed Articles

Journal of Contemporary Ministry

Peer Reviewed Articles

Modernisation and the Importance of Rituals in Isan for Cross-Cultural Missions

Dianne Sue

Email: diarsue@icloud.com

Dianne and her husband Wolfgang, have been volunteering in Isan, northeast Thailand, since 2014, as fieldworkers for Australian Christian Churches International. Dianne has worked as a general nurse, midwife, dairy farmer and social worker during her working life. Her one passion in life, apart from family, is to see the women of Isan come into a loving relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Abstract

Based on recent sociological research in Northeast Thailand, this article reflects on the impact of modernisation on the religious roles of Isan women in Northeast Thailand. The transformation to modernity has occurred rapidly in Thailand due to globalisation, industrialisation and urbanisation. These changes have affected the socioreligious roles of women. A brief discussion of Western secularisation theories and their applicability to an Eastern setting

is undertaken. Secularisation theories were explored in relation to three groups of women to determine if modernisation had impacted women's attitudes towards the supernatural realm within their lives. The qualitative research determined that secularisation occurred in some aspects of women's religiosity. However, the belief in karma, merit-making, demerit and ancestor veneration remained as essential principles in women's lives. At the same time, the expression of these principles is shifting amongst educated women. New sectors of society have emerged with no religious connections; therefore, the impact of religious influence and authority has decreased. Nevertheless, the place of ritual and ceremonies is essential in the women's worldview. Rituals reflect the women's understanding of their cosmology and must be incorporated into any gospel message brought into Isan by cross-cultural missionaries.

Keywords: Animism, Buddhism, Cross-cultural missions, Isan women, Rituals, Secularisation

Introduction

This article draws on a qualitative study investigating the changing religious environment in northeast Thailand in 2019. I had been working as a missionary with women in northeast Thailand for some years. I observed how the younger women had much higher levels of education and were using modern

technology more frequently than their mothers and grandmothers. Many young women moved from the villages to urban areas to access more economically lucrative careers. I wanted to explore how modernisation processes had impacted women's religious beliefs and practices and understand what these changes meant for cross-cultural missions.

Northeast Thailand is rapidly moving from an agricultural-based society to an urban-based society due to modernisation through industrialisation, urbanisation and technological advancements, according to Nuttayai and Promphakping (2014, p. 1455) and Rambo (2017, p. 217). There has been a significant shift from agriculture as the primary means of production to the industrial production of goods exported worldwide (Asian Development Bank, 2015, p. 1). The population of Thailand in 1965 was 30 million people, while in 2022, the population was over 69 million people (Worldometer, 2023) as the standard of living improved and as mortality and morbidity rates declined through the provision, in part, of better health practices and services and better economic standards. The Northeast region of Thailand is commonly called 'Isan' and comprises almost one-third of Thailand's land mass (Keyes, 2014, loc. 397). Isan contains one-third of Thailand's population, with the lowest income per capita (Lao et al., 2019, p. 7) in Thailand. As Bangkok needed labour to develop industrial factories and increase economic production,

many working-aged people left Isan villages. They relocated to Bangkok or other major urban cities to work in factories and industry. Allister McGregor stated that “the considerable economic growth that the country has experienced resulted in changes in the economic structure of the society and has been accompanied by rapid social and cultural change” (2008, p. 2). Over recent years, there have been significant advances in education, the introduction of modern forms of communication, advances in agriculture and industry and other forms of technology in Isan. Urbanisation has also been rapid, with some major cities providing universities, well-equipped hospitals and many other modern facilities. Modernisation has occurred in Isan.

Modernisation

For the purposes of this article, the definition of modernisation, is based on Michael Saler’s definition of modernity for clarity. Saler’s broad description of modernity covers many changes:

> Modernity has come to signify a mixture of political, social, intellectual, economic, technological and psychological factors, ….which merged synergistically in the West between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. These factors include (but are not exhausted by) the emergence of the

> autonomous and rational subject; the differentiation of cultural spheres; the rise of liberal and democratic states; the turn to psychologism and self-reflexivity; the dominance of secularism, nationalism, capitalism, industrialism, urbanism, consumerism, and scientism.... There is one characteristic of modernity, however, that has been emphasised fairly consistently by intellectuals since the eighteenth century: that modernity is disenchanted (Saler, 2006, p. 694).

This leads to consideration of the point: Has modernisation in Isan led to some forms of 'disenchantment' for local women? Moreover, if modernisation is accompanied by secularisation in some form, what does that mean for missionaries who come to work amongst women? To further our understanding, we first discuss the current religious environment for Isan women.

Religiosity in Isan

Theravada Buddhism is professed by most Thais and is considered the national religion (Taylor, 1999, p. 3). Thai identity is closely aligned with being Buddhist, with many Thai political leaders promoting Buddhism and Thai identity for political gain

(McCargo, 2004, p. 156). Religiosity in Thailand is a very public matter, with outward appearances vital to Thai identity. The public performance of respect to various religious authorities is a necessary social trait learnt from earliest childhood. Religion is a shared community experience, rather than a private affair, part of the 'cultural framework' (Hughes et al., 2008, p. 369) that Thais live amongst. Acts of reverence, rituals and ceremonies are a public demonstration of allegiance to the various religious deities and codes. There appear to be two forms of Buddhism: the official state-sanctioned institutional form (Larsson, 2019, p. 306) and the local folk or popular form of Buddhism (Zeamer, 2008, p. 40). Religion for the women of Isan is a mixture of the official institutional Buddhism found in the temples and cited in canonical teachings and local animistic practices and beliefs, superstitions and magic, as well as many other spiritual influences that have made their way to Isan over the centuries (Saiyasak, 2007, p. 17). Religiosity is part of the everyday fabric of life, not a compartmentalised facet of life.

Chanasome Saiyasak, a Thai pastor and scholar, stated that the three primary sources of religion for the Isan people were animism, Buddhism and Brahmanism (Saiyasak, 2007, p. 13), with each fulfiling different roles within the Isan cosmos. Animism, with its belief in invisible spirit entities, dealt with aspects of life and provided people with ways of dealing with "felt needs for survival,

safety, security and prosperity" (Saiyasak, 2007, p. 94). With its monks, scriptures, philosophies and temples, Buddhism dealt with rules and behaviours for attaining freedom from suffering and merit, making a way to heaven, and allowing connections to loved ones to continue after death (Saiyasak, 2007, p. 69). "The notions of karma, merit, reincarnation and sin" have resulted in a "value system that is merit-oriented and karma-conscious" in the minds of the Isan people (Saiyasak, 2007, p. 69). This led to daily decision-making within a moral framework. According to Dhammananda, "a religion of cause and effect or karma, is based on the principle of self-help and assumes that the individual alone is responsible for his or her own happiness and suffering as well as salvation" (Dhammananda, 2002, p. 336). Theravada Buddhism teaches the law of karma: that there is a moral cause and effect for every action or thought a person has. The belief in karma is a universally held truth for the Isan women I interviewed. They believed good fortune or circumstances were evidence of good karma.

In contrast, unfortunate circumstances, illness or disability are perceived as evidence of bad karma from a previous or present life. The women interviewed, both young and old, all adhered to the Buddhist philosophy of karma, 'do good and receive good, do bad and receive bad'. This philosophy appeared to underlie all actions. Several women spoke of different versions of this belief.

For instance, one woman said: ‘If we give and then we will receive’ (78-year-old village woman). Another woman said, “We need to do good things and give away things. This is best. The temple needs to exist; it is the centre of everything. It is best to give to the temple” (53-year-old worker). Another 59-year-old businesswoman stated: “I believe that when we do good things, life will be good….I do not depend on others. I depend on myself, diligence and hard work. I take care of myself… When we are born, we are alone, and when we die, we are alone”. Buddhist women have a faith system centred on actions and doing rather than correct doctrine. One woman in the study stated,

> We give offerings, we give food, we listen to monks preaching and chanting and we receive a blessing. These are the things women have to do to be a good Buddhist – go to the temple, listen to the monks, give offerings, clean the temple and make merit.

Merit-making is one of the most essential actions or rituals that Isan women perform. Saiyasak stated, “merit-making is the central ingredient in the religious experience of the Isan of Northeast Thailand” (Saiyasak, 2006, p. 1) and “merit-making is a way of life” (Saiyasak, 2006, p. 5). Merit-making (good works) is undertaken for various reasons, as an individual, family, or as part of a community or whole-community activity. Those individuals

who do not participate or contribute to the village's merit-making efforts are perceived as "disrespectful to ancestral traditional customs and would likely be ….ostracised by the villagers" (Saiyasak, 2006, p. 12). The significance of and subsequent effects of merit-making, as seen by Saiyasak, are:

> It gives psychological security; builds a peaceful state of mind; provides behaviour control and incentives for good behaviours; provides a secure and stable community; establishes family and community solidarity, communicating respect and gratitude for parents, elders, and ancestors; offers mobility within the hierarchal system; and creates access for status, power, and wealth (Saiyasak, 2006, p. 14).

The function of Buddhism in society, inferred from the interviewed women, was to give a fundamental sense of identity and a set of rules that governed their morals, beliefs and understanding of the world around them. It provided a basic meta-narrative of life. Buddhism answered all the big life questions for the women interviewed. It allowed the women to understand why they were born, where they are going and why things have happened to them as they have. The idea of merit and demerit is associated with every action in their life and governs the women's behaviour

with those around them. Futhermore, it provided a means of obtaining a sense of inner peace. Buddhism encouraged good moral and altruistic behaviour to gain a better life in this life or the next one. Moralistic behaviour ensured the smooth running of society and allowed women to accept their lot and position in life. It governed relationships and the expectations individuals have towards each other. Buddhism in the women's lives helped facilitate harmony in all areas, elucidate community mores and values and affirm identity and belonging. Magico-animistic practices functioned as a power play to bring good luck, protection, prosperity or health to them and their families. Animism and magic, alongside Buddhism, encompassed the religious grounding of Isan women.

Animism

Animism is a belief system that sees all the world, including animate and inanimate objects, as having spiritual associations with beings and forces that influence people's everyday affairs. These beings can include spirits of ancestors, gods, ghosts, lost souls, demons or mischievous spirits, and many other spiritual forms. Animism is related to power and the engagement with those powers, where possible, for the person's benefit. Animism underlies most religious daily activities and beliefs in Isan. According to Van Rheenen, a definition of animism is,

> The belief that personal and spiritual beings and impersonal spiritual forces have power over human affairs and, consequently, that human beings must discover what beings and forces are influencing them in order to determine future action and, frequently, to manipulate their power (Van Rheenen, 1991, p. 20).

Animism is believed to be the earliest form of religion and is transactional, meeting the every-day felt needs of its adherents. It does not need a person to be morally good; as long as the correct rituals are performed with the correct postures and formats, spirits can be influenced to do as one requires. All areas in an Isan village are gendered (Sparkes, 2005, p. 31), with associated male or female spirits tied to the activities performed in different areas. Several spirits are associated with the household and extended family compound. Women are responsible for performing many of the rituals and ceremonies (Trankell, 2003, p. 137), including the daily offerings of food, drinks, flowers or candles to the spirits at the spirit houses (Reichart & Khongkhunthian, 2007, p. 1) or places of spirit habitation. Women also perform the duties and obligations concerning ancestral spirits. Animism is part of the everyday world of Isan women and is closely associated with many daily rituals, ceremonies, superstitions, magic beliefs and

icons of their world. Lisa Battaglia, writing about Thai women, stated that: “popular religion in Thailand emphasizes orthopraxy over orthodoxy: the importance granted to ritual and ceremony outweighs the importance granted to beliefs and theology” (Battaglia, 2007, p. 81). Orthopraxy is one of the most essential components of women’s religious understanding. Isan women engaged in practices that they believed would give them power in their daily lives, especially in times of uncertainty or crisis.

Rituals

As an individualistic philosophical pursuit of happiness and peace, Buddhism adjusts well when modernisation occurs. Theravada Buddhism is constructed on the efforts and promotion of self and the journey of self-improvement. Religions, such as folk Buddhism and animism, based on rituals and ceremonies (orthopraxy) rather than correct beliefs or orthodoxy, withstand modernisation and accompanying secularising processes better. Isan women consider themselves less religious if they can only attend the temple occasionally. For the women, their religiosity is based on the frequency of practice – the more times they attend the temple, the more often they give alms to monks, and the more times the women do meritorious services, the more religious they consider themselves. Their religiosity is not based on an understanding of institutional Buddhist doctrines but on the frequency of their

meritorious actions. Karma, merit and demerit and ancestral veneration are the guiding Buddhist principles of their lives. However, these principles are understood through the rituals and ceremonies performed to honour them.

Tambiah described the ritual as having the capacity to construct social reality, with the effect of “creating and bringing to life the cosmological scheme itself” (Tambiah, 1985, p. 129). Ritual is a vital part of the Thai cosmological viewpoint, full of physical acts and behaviours that others can discern rather than an intellectual undertaking for most women at the village level. The behaviours and acts that form the ceremonies and rituals are taken-for-granted as normal and effective. Animism and popular Buddhism are amoral, based on right actions and postures rather than the right thoughts or beliefs. Rituals can be performed in one’s own company as an individual, as part of the family unit or as part of the greater community at the temple or in the streets of the village or town. Rituals are described as physical acts of respect, worship and honour in ceremonial form through a series of actions that may or may not be accompanied by words or chants performed in strict order and manner. As a social construction, each woman constructs her version of the ritual and her thoughts and emotions embedded into it. There are set patterns of rituals passed down by women teaching daughters and granddaughters to perform the rituals. As such, the ritual is a living link between

families that is not easily broken. As it is a performative action that is undertaken to alter the state of affairs within the women's world, women engage in rituals regularly.

Secularisation

This section introduces a brief description of secularisation theory. Most early sociologists believed that the rise of modernisation in society meant the declining power and influence of formal and informal religions and religious structures. This is commonly defined as secularisation. Historically, secularisation, as a theory, has been strongly contested and debated in various forms since the nineteenth century when sociologists, such as Auguste Comte, anticipated that the influence and power of religion in society would lose ground as scientific knowledge and rational thinking through education and advancement increased (Jones, 1998, p. 41). Early sociologists of the nineteenth century debated the place and importance of religion in society as societies modernised. Industrialisation, urbanisation, technological advancements and socioeconomic stability changed the landscape of society. Religion (and superstitious beliefs) were seen to oppose modernity and societal advancement. The concept of secularisation emerged from Northern European sociological thinking, and there has been widespread debate about its applicability in other parts of the world. The theories of

secularisation have undergone much debate and have changed drastically, with some sociologists such as Peter Berger, who initially supported the secularisation thesis in the 1960s as an "inevitable by-product of modernisation and … religion was slowly fading out of society" (Reaves, 2012, p. 11) but later reversed his thesis to "the world today ….is as furiously religious as it ever was" (Berger, P. (ed.), 1999, p. 2).

It should be noted that many secularisation theories have focussed on the decline in institutional forms of religion. However, Volkan Ertit, a Turkish sociologist, has argued that secularisation can be more generally conceived as a decline in the influence of the supernatural realm and thus is relevant to animism and Buddhism. Ertit's definition of secularisation was:

> The relative decrease in the social prestige and social influence of the dominant metaphysical realm, i.e. that is, religions, folk religions, religion-like mechanisms, and supernatural beliefs, within a defined period of time and in a particular place.… secularisation is not the description of a situation but the definition of a process (Ertit, 2017, p. 46).

By including the broader definition of the supernatural realm in discussions about secularisation, the concept of secularisation as a process can be applied to other societies where religion combines many different religious orthodoxies and orthopraxis. As the belief in spirits, amulets, omens, and various superstitions is important in Isan, Ertit's theory was relevant to studying women's religious thinking and roles in Isan. Changes in the importance or influence of substantive or functional forms of religious structures, beliefs, behaviours or influence within Isan society were examined utilising secularisation theories. Two of these theories are discussed in subsequent sections.

The Research Process

For many Isan women, the world centres around family, both the living and the dead, friends, earning merit by doing good works every day, earning income to support the family and educating children. Religion is an integral part of women's daily lives. In 2018, after living in Isan for approximately five years, I began a PhD thesis by reviewing sociological literature associated with religion, secularisation and modernisation. Likewise, literature on Thailand, Buddhism, women and education, urbanisation, social structure and social values in Isan was examined. This led to the formation of the research question, 'Is modernisation in Isan leading to transformations in the roles that religion plays in the

everyday lives of Isan women and the attitudes/beliefs that Isan women hold?' The question was posed to determine if secularisation was occurring within a Buddhist setting and what it occurring would imply for future missiological endeavours in Isan. Various theories of secularisation were utilised to assess if secularising processes were occurring in a Buddhist environment in the continuation of modernising processes. From the research question about social and religious change in Isan, specific hypotheses were formulated about the impact of particular social changes. After the literature was examined, the research question proposed, and the hypotheses formulated, the interview questions were devised to fill the perceived gaps in the literature. The hypotheses were then tested against the research findings gleaned from the interviews.

The research aimed to discover the relationship between women's higher socioeconomic standards, levels of education and urbanisation and to investigate if changes in these domains had led to transformations in how women were engaging with the supernatural realm compared with the recent past. The research aimed to explore if this was a reflection of the following forms of secularisation:

1 Higher levels of education lead to rational thinking and less religious participation,

2 greater individualism in religious behaviour and attitudes of women and
3 to more secular social values altering women's religious and gender roles and
4 in general terms, to changes in religious practice within Northeast Thailand.

The objectives of the research were to explore the dominant religious discourses of different groups of women in Northeast Thailand. It endeavoured to discover if there was a relationship between emerging religious narratives and social changes as an indicator of secularisation in an Asian location. The findings of the research would hopefully assist in cross-cultural ministry in Isan.

Methodology

The qualitative research was conducted in 2018-2019 after gaining official approval in Thailand and ethical approval in Australia. Two insider assistants were appointed to gather data and ensure cultural appropriateness and understanding of the research process. Interviews were a core part of the research approach. It allowed the women to speak about their attitudes and thoughts regarding the spiritual dimensions of their lives and their reasoning for practices associated with those attitudes. Data was gathered from fifty-nine participants regarding their age, occupation, economic status, level of education and the structure

of their families today and when they were children. The research used a qualitative, deductive approach to gather data on the thoughts and religio-social attitudes of groups of women via in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Three different research sites were chosen to give a small cross-section of different groups of women in Isan society. The three groups in the study were twenty-four older village women (aged 52-86 years old drawn from two different villages), fifteen older urban women (aged 52-86 years old) and twenty younger women (aged between 25-47 years old). The urban women mainly adhered to Theravada Buddhist teachings, while the older village women were inclined to be folk Buddhists, and a few were Christian. The urban women were generally educated and living in a major city in Northeast Thailand, while the other older women lived in villages surrounding that city. The younger women lived mainly in large urban centres. Educated women consisted of those women who had attained post-secondary qualifications at university, while lower-educated women had received primary or some secondary school education.

Based on the the literature review, a series of questions were framed to gather responses in five key areas, including household and kinship, religion and religious practices, sociocultural practices, employment or farming activities, and education. Each section consisted of open and closed questions to generate

information or opinions from the participants. For example, one question was, "Would you have liked to attend school for a longer period? If so, what prevented you?" "How has education changed since you were a girl?" Another question regarding societal changes was, "How are the women of today different to your mother's generation?" A question on religious change was, "Do you think you are more or less religious than your mother? In what ways? What is the reason for the change?" The questions were asked to make more apparent any changes in women's lives in recent times. All interviews were conducted with at least one research assistant and generally with two women at a time. Data was gathered with the invaluable assistance of two research assistants who were educated Isan women. All the data were analysed using the CAQDAS (Computer-assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software) program NVIVO. The limitation of the research was that the sample was from a small group of women at a particular time and place, and the findings cannot be generalised to all of Thailand.

The following section discusses two hypotheses formulated to answer the research question. Each hypothesis is articulated, and responses to the hypotheses are briefly noted.

First Perspective of Secularisation Theory - Hypothesis One: Educated Women are Less Religious

Classical Secularisation Theory proposed that increasing secularisation is associated with the progression of modernisation and the advancement of scientific thinking. The first approach to secularisation theories explored changes in women's thinking regarding their religious selves in relation to increased levels of education and knowledge, particularly scientific knowledge. The hypothesis presumed that as Isan women have become more educated over the last forty years, their thinking and behaviour patterns will have changed. Superstitions, magic, animistic behaviours and beliefs should be decreasing in significance in the lives of educated women while remaining important to women with no or little formal education.

The study revealed that modernisation was occurring in Isan, with today's generation of young women being far more educated through school attendance than their mothers. The mothers of the older cohort of women in this study had little or no education, as previously, only boys were taught at the local temples in the villages as education was the province of the temple, monks and men. One village woman stated, "The older generation finished school after Primary grade 4. It was difficult to continue on". A village woman said, 'Children in mother's generation - became

monks so they could stay at the temple and learn, but mother didn't go to school as she was a girl'. An older nurse said, "Mum studied for two years (primary school), and father studied for four years at primary school. There are lots of changes, now I can study for 12-16 years. My siblings all have bachelor's degrees". Modernisation has occurred in education, with many young women studying to gain university or vocational qualifications. However, increased educational levels were found to have had little impact on underlying Buddhist beliefs in karma, merit and demerit.

Older, educated women spoke of merit-making similarly to older, uneducated women. One retired teacher stated, "I make merit in my home. I invite the monks to my house to do a ceremony. I then give them food to eat". Regardless of a woman's formal educational level, women in Isan believe in the efficacy of merit-making to improve one's karma. A primary school teacher believed in both merit-making and karma. She said:

> I have been a nun three times. I did not cut my hair. I wore a white uniform. I had eight rules to follow, and I had to stay at the temple. I slept on the floor. I only ate two meals a day and meditated. I had a car accident before, and the monk said I had bad misfortune, so I went to be a nun to

> change my karma. When I was a nun and meditated, that was a good thing. I believe the ghost or spirit was fighting me, or I had done something bad in my past life. I do meditation to forgive them and give them some good things. It is both a Buddhist and a natural belief; you receive what you do for many past lives, whomever you are born.

However, the study found that younger, educated women had less involvement with local temples or monks due to several factors. They were time-poor due to work, family or educational commitments, but the attitudes of some women were also changing. A young science graduate said:

> It [temple going] is not that important. I offer food to the monks, also water and medicine. It is not important to do, and I do not do it often, maybe once a year. We have a big ceremony in my family for ancestors.

This woman also said:

> I go to the temple less now than when I was a child. I am not into going. I am into thought. You do not have to actually go there. It is the idea rather than the actual

ceremony. I listen to a monk preaching on Youtube before bed.

The study found that urban, higher-educated, young women were the least likely to attend the temple regularly, followed by urban, lower-educated young women, which supports the first thesis. Village women attended the temple at least every month, though usually every week or fortnight, regardless of age. Forty per cent of urban, lower-educated women attended the temple at least weekly or fortnightly. In contrast, among higher-educated urban young women, only twenty-two per cent attended the temple weekly to monthly. Education and urbanisation have impacted the frequency young urban women attended the temple in this small sample.

Some animistic rituals and ceremonies persisted in older women's lives, irrespective of their education levels, especially ancestral rituals. Isan women are responsible every day for making rituals, ceremonies and offerings to those spirits who inhabit their world. Usually, older women make offerings for the household as they are traditionally spiritually responsible for the family and household. As one Isan woman said, "It is important to make offerings because it makes me comfortable, and I ask for blessing and protection of my family and children". Another woman explained it this way,

> I give offerings. I give flowers, candles and incense. I have a Buddha room in my house where I pray every day before I go to bed. Also, I perform a water ceremony, pray and spread goodwill to the spirit. I believe the spirit follows us for revenge, so I pray to them so they do not harm us. I pour water. Water is like a bridge or a sign that connects spirit to a person. I give something and do something.

For Isan women, the spirit world is closely connected to the physical world, and the women believe that the spirits of their deceased relatives are living in another realm and waiting for the women to make offerings of food and merit so that the relatives can have a good afterlife. An older woman said,

> When I miss a person and want to honour them, I pick their favourite food and give it to them at my house. I do the '*gruad nam*'[1]

[1]*iti Gruad Nam Yatha* (water pouring ceremony) is an ancient ceremony that most women in Isan participate in, regardless of their social standing and education. The ceremony is thought to transfer merit to a spirit of a deceased person from the person making the ceremonial offering. The notion is that water is poured from one receptacle to another or from a receptacle onto the ground, usually at the temple, while chanting the *'Yatha'* (prayer*)*. It is often performed in the presence of a chanting monk. The ceremony is of Brahman origin but is also thought to be associated with animist ancestor practices and its associations with

> ceremony and pour water out. I share with others, especially I offer for my dead ancestors. I collect merit for my ancestors. I need to offer them food to collect after they are dead. Every day, I need to give food. I believe that in the next world, they still eat, especially their favourite food. I offer food to monks to store up [merit] for the next life, to save for the future, or I can share with others already dead. All living and dead live together; the dead have some authority over the living. They can receive the food through merit, to nourish their spirit.

Educated women continued to practice *Piti Gruad Nam Yatha* (water pouring) ceremonies. One 42-year-old Master's degree holder stated:

> At *Songkran*, I use perfumed water to clean my ancestor's bones, and I invite monks (to my home) to do a small ceremony for them. Then I give money to the monk. I go to the temple to make merit and think of my ancestors. The monk is the bridge to my ancestors.

mother earth and nature.

She said, “I need to get food and happiness to my relatives. I especially offer for my dead ancestors to collect merit for them. I need to offer food after they are dead. Every day, I need to give food”. These beliefs were similar between older and younger educated and uneducated women. Education has not changed either ancestor beliefs or merit-making beliefs.

Isan women maintain religious beliefs, but the expression of these beliefs is shifting among educated women. Younger educated women are changing their folk beliefs and practices, as judged by fewer spirit houses on the land cared for by the young urban women. However, younger, uneducated women maintained traditional religious beliefs. Younger educated women were less engaged with and more critical of the monkhood, had more individualised spiritual practice and were centred on self-improvement, for instance, through meditation, healthy living or caring for the environment. Therefore, their merit-making focused more on individual acts than on merit-making in association with the monks at temples. Modernisation in Isan is leading to transformations in the roles of religion in the everyday lives of some interviewed Isan women and the attitudes/beliefs that some Isan women hold. In the study, there was some support for hypothesis one that educated women were more likely to be less religious than uneducated women. However, education itself had not significantly impacted the underlying attitudes and beliefs of

Isan women. Hypothesis one was partially supported by the evidence presented in the interviews/opinions of the Isan women regarding the decline of some animistic practices and beliefs. However, belief in karma and the spirits had yet to be entirely replaced by scientific ideas. They remained an essential part of their world.

Second perspective of Secularisation Theories - Hypothesis Two: Society is more complex and Religion is personal

A second approach to the secularisation theses focused on changes in the structure of society. Nations modernise through technological and scientific development, urbanisation to meet the labour demands of industrialisation, economic development and capitalism. As modernisation progresses, it involves increased complexity of society and the development of distinct sectors, each with its areas of knowledge or specialisation, with the accompanying loss of religious influence in some sectors. For example, the healthcare sector has its source of medical knowledge and its experts and, to quite a large extent, has pushed religion out of its operations and knowledge base. Hence, religion has tended to be pushed into the personal and family areas of life where adequate healthcare exists.

According to Belgian sociologist Karl Dobbelaere, as society becomes more functionally differentiated and specialised, religion becomes another subsystem competing alongside other subsystems, thereby losing its dominance and influence on other subsystems (Dobbelaere, 1999, p. 232). According to Dobbelaere's theory (1999, p. 230), there are three levels of secularisation. Firstly, there is a loss of religious power and influence in society at the societal or macro level as state and religious powers separate. Society differentiates as religion becomes more privatised and other private organisations take over functions previously undertaken by religious institutions (Ng, 2013, p. 512). Secondly, secularisation can occur within religious organisations and their practices where religious practices or thinking adapt to societal changes over a given time period. This is considered the organisational level of secularisation. The third type of secularisation that can occur is the micro or individual level, where religious thoughts and practices become less frequent in the lives of individuals, or individuals turn away from previously held religious practices, behaviours or beliefs. Religious beliefs and practices retreat to the private sphere (Ng, 2013, p. 523).

Dobbelaere argued that religion survives at the level of private beliefs and behaviours, whereas it does not survive at the societal or organisational level. Dobbelaere stated that as modern

societies are primarily differentiated along functional lines, subsystems developed different functional domains, each with their own communication forms, values and norms (Dobbelaere, 1999, p. 230). Dobbelaere (1999) defined secularisation as:

> A process by which the overarching and transcendent religious system of old is being reduced in a modern functionally differentiated society to a subsystem alongside other subsystems… As a result, the societal significance of religion is greatly diminished (Dobbelaere, 1999, p. 232).

> Today, Isan society is more complex than in the 1980s, when education for women became more widely available. Urbanisation and industrialisation have changed the lives of Isan people. The space religion occupies in society is under competition from other contesting systems, which have differentiated, rationalised and specialised systems within the framework of Isan society. Secularisation in this perspective suggests that society becomes increasingly rational, scientific and based on impersonal roles and skill sets (Dobbelaere, 1999, p.

> 233) rather than relationships or virtue. However, Thailand's workforce encompasses a patron-client system, which alters some aspects of this theory as many advancements within employment sectors are relationship-based within the workforce.

In the research, the second hypothesis was: 'With modernisation in Isan, there has been an increase in the complexity of systems in society, resulting in increased competition for religion. Therefore, religion has been removed to a more private and individualised sphere of life with an accompanying decline in the authority of religious institutions'. This hypothesis was explored by asking the women questions regarding their working lives and thoughts.

Within modernisation, the choice of occupation in Thailand has expanded many-fold. Women can gain employment in new sectors in developing businesses in Thailand. For instance, one 27-year-old woman gained employment working for a large telecommunications company in a large urban city. Her job was to help people with problems with their mobile phones. This new field of employment was unheard of forty years ago. This young woman, who was not university-educated, had moved to a large city from her village to gain employment. She accessed the internet to learn to speak English by watching English language

movies and YouTube clips on learning how to speak English. She was self-taught and became proficient in English. She gained employment for a telecommunications company helping foreigners in Thailand troubleshoot problems with their internet services for their phones, computers and televisions. This woman gained suitable employment in a large company in a newly developing business sector by having regular access to the Internet by visiting urban coffee shops and places where they offered free Internet services. This business sector was outside the influence of the religious domain.

The choices for Isan women today no longer adhere to traditional roles for women. One 42-year-old teacher said:

> My mum's generation did not have a lot of choices like me. Mum had to stay at home, be a good housewife and take care of the family. However, I am single; I can do anything, and it is very easy. I do not have to marry.

Modernisation in Thailand is bringing in a new range of social subsystems. Education, economics and business, justice and governance, infrastructure and resources or science and technology (food, water and environment) and telecommunication sectors have broadened immensely in Thai society, counteracting

the religious domain, which is shrinking into ever smaller compartments (Nuttayai & Promphakping, 2014, p. 1455). Religious influence is still apparent in ceremonies and rituals on special occasions or societal events. However, the daily running of society, including commerce, law, health and science/technology sectors, now exists outside the sphere of religious regulation. Instead, religion is concentrated in other spheres, such as personal practice or ceremonial symbols for important occasions or formalities. Religion maintains a façade of authority within these developing sectors as monks are an intricate part of all ceremonial occasions within social life in Thailand. The *Sangha* (monastic order) gives authority and authenticity to commercial undertakings by blessing the new business or formulating auspicious times for grand openings but has no particular authority in directing future commercial transactions and development. Business owners look to the *Sangha* for their blessing and the prestige it gives their business affairs. However, within the complexity of the business or commercial world, there is little religious authority.

Many facets of the lives of younger women were no longer associated with religion. Previous generations of women who grew up in villages had lives centred on religion and religious practices. If a young person became sick, natural village healers were called upon to make prayers and supplications to ancestral spirits to

heal the child or prayers from the monks were sought. Many ceremonies and rituals were performed to improve the health of the child. However, today, if a woman gets sick, she attends the local doctor at the nearest hospital for medicine which will improve her health. This has nothing to do with religious practices; medical science has shown that it is more reliable and trustworthy than previous religious rituals. The young women grow up knowing that medical science is better at helping sick people than religious rituals. Thus, religious beliefs and practices are playing less of a role in this area of life. In this study, many women responded to the question, 'What happens if you or a member of your family becomes sick?' by saying they would go to a medical doctor. Seven women said they would pray first (either to Buddha or God) and then seek medical care. The older woman, who said she was a natural healer, said:

> I go to the doctor (if I am sick). I used to be a '*mor phii*', a 'spirit healer' to cast away bad spirits. People who were possessed came to me, and I told it to go, then the bad spirit went. I do not do it much now.

All forty-two women who responded to this question said they would seek medical care in the first instance or pray and then seek medical care. Young women are not relying on old wives' tales, prayers or incantations to prevent pregnancy and sickness.

They were relying on medical knowledge and pharmaceutical companies. The health system is a good example of a component of society which has emerged through modernisation, which includes little if any reference to religion and is, in part, replacing some previous functions of religion and religious practitioners.

Childbearing is another sector that has changed dramatically with increased knowledge and improved scientific advances regarding reproduction. Childbirth occurs in hospitals and has become a medicalised procedure that requires the intervention of specialists like doctors and midwives to achieve good outcomes for mother and baby. Modern women trust the medical system more than older rituals and ceremonies, as most babies are born in hospitals. Many religious practices, rituals and beliefs were associated with pregnancy and childbirth, but these are fading due to a lack of usage amongst younger women. Previously, childbirth was a precarious time for mothers and babies. Before, the *kwan* rite '*sukwan maemaan'* was a ceremony performed in the village with the mother-to-be and female relatives to counteract the dangers of childbirth. There were many local traditions around birthing and child-rearing. One elderly woman spoke about childbirth and the many babies she helped deliver in the village. The burial of the afterbirth was a critical part of this process as it had to be done quickly, soon after birth, to prevent the baby from being adversely affected by malevolent spirits. She stated:

> Babies are not born in the village anymore; they go to the hospital. I am a midwife and help with massage for a mother having a baby. The method we used is this - if the mother is having a contraction, we tell her not to move as otherwise, the baby will hit her heart, and it could be a problem for the mother. With the knife, I sterilise it with fire to cut the cord. After we bury the afterbirth, we use a leaf of a special tree to cover it all to prevent any spirit from getting the blood from the placenta. If the spirit drinks the blood, the baby will die.

These practices and beliefs are no longer practised in the village. Some other practices are adhered to, such as the smoking ceremonies for women in the postpartum period, where new mothers are required to lay beside a fire so the smoke can purify them. Today, this is done more for health reasons than spiritual reasons. Urban women have a lying-in period where they are cared for by female relatives for up to four weeks postpartum, but many urban women do not have the ‘smoking’ element today.

Society has changed, becoming more complex and demanding in terms of negotiation and time management; as a result, religion is no longer as central to the lives of some groups of women.

Hypothesis two was supported by the evidence from the interviews/opinions of the women that society is much more complex and technologically advanced than life before the 1980s when most women resided in villages. Isan society is more multifaceted than ever, resulting in smaller spheres of influence for institutional forms of Buddhism. Modernisation in Isan is leading to transformations in the roles that religion plays in the everyday lives of Isan women, as religion is not as relevant in many areas of life.

Discussion and Significance for Cross-cultural Missions

Earlier, the questions were asked, “Has modernisation in Isan led to some forms of ‘disenchantment’ for local women? Futhermore, if modernisation is accompanied by secularisation in some form, what does that mean for missionaries who come to work amongst women?” In response to those questions, modernisation in Isan has led to some forms of ‘disenchantment’ for local women as women have adapted readily to the changing socioreligious environment. Urban women are becoming more educated, individualistic and self-determining in their lives. They are less likely to attend a local temple and less likely to engage with institutional forms of Buddhism. Village women continue to be more traditional in their religious practices and roles. Some

animistic practices and beliefs are vanishing because they are often less required due to ‘modern’ innovations and practices such as in the health care field. As these processes occur, what does that mean for missionaries?

In the particular context I have been working, the need is to create different ways of connecting the gospel of Jesus Christ with the heart of the Isan women. Missiologists such as Kraft (1996), Hiebert (2000), Van Rheenen (1991), Hovey (2019), Tippett (1987), Shaw and Burrows (2018), and scores of others have approached the issue of the gospel within the indigenous culture from different perspectives. The issue of how to bring the gospel so local people can understand it and formulate their encultured Christianity needs to be carefully worked through with local people, local church leaders and local believers. According to Hibbert and Hibbert, “As both missionaries and local leaders depend on the Bible as their authority, biblical practices can be identified and corrected, and authentic leadership patterns that result in healthy, multiplying indigenous churches will be nurtured” (2019, p. 250). Extending these principles to all aspects of working cross-culturally in Isan, missionaries need to engage with locals and local church leaders to discover the biblical principles for the churches in Isan that can be implemented as the Isan develop their brand of Christianity. Some parts of Isan culture can be utilised to bring the gospel appropriately to the Isan

people. For instance, honouring and respecting parents is a deep core value for Isan people that can be utilised as an example of the relationship between God and human beings. Hibbert said, “Each culture reinforces some biblical values, opposes others and includes many other values which appropriately vary from one culture to another. This results in differing expressions of the same biblical principles in different cultures” (Hibbert & Hibbert, 2019, p. 243). Each culture will bring a different flavour of what it is to be Christian to Christianity.

Charles Kraft stated, “We give solid attention to developing Christian functional substitutes for the customs traditional people practice in the exercise of spiritual power” (Kraft, 2016, p. 329). Kevin Hovey, referencing Tippett’s concept, “uses the term ‘functional substitute’ to describe the new replacement elements that the local people apply in order to meet their felt needs and maintain a sense of cultural cohesion and integration …” (Hovey, 2019, p. 255), when traditional practices are realigned with biblical Christianity. Using functional substitution principles as a tool for working in animistic-based cultures allows the replacement of practices that are opposed to biblical principles with culturally-appropriate biblical practices. It is initiated from the ground up and fulfils the needs of the local people in all areas of their lives – spiritually, emotionally, physically and intellectually. Hovey stated:

> Functional substitutes, when understood well and applied effectively by local people as they innovate the cultural change brought about in their lives by the gospel, provide the means to enable Christianity to fit into their culture in the same spiritually, emotionally and psychologically satisfying way, and to do this without theological compromise (Hovey, 2019, p. 255).

For this to occur effectively, it needs to be a local initiative, not forced by outside evangelists/missionaries (Hovey, 2019, p. 256), so that it is "the people themselves who determine what is truly satisfying to them" (Hovey, 2019, p. 260). Indigenous churches need to develop culturally appropriate ways of being Christian rather than importing Westernised ways that do not transplant well into Isan soil. Lim, Spaulding and De Neui (2005, p 158) suggested that "a rational or apologetic approach may not work well with the majority of Thai people but an intuitive, feeling or affective approach, seeing Christ as the 'man for others' and the one who can deliver them from all fears… for the Thai, religion is felt emotionally, not rationalized cognitively (Lim et al., 2005, p. 158).

Missiology – thoughts of Isan

Working across cultures to bring the gospel's message to a new people group, and place is described as 'mission', but what is missiology? Missiology is, according to Marvin Newell, an American missiologist, "The reflective discipline that undergirds and guides the Church's propagation endeavours as it advances the knowledge of the gospel in all its fullness to every people everywhere" (Newell, 2019). As an interdisciplinary field of research, Missiology originated from Western missions using some aspects of several social science disciplines, late in the nineteenth century (Kim, 2019). In other words, missiology is the reflective study of the methods used to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ in different cultural contexts. Culture, according to Paul Hiebert, is "The more or less integrated system of ideas, feelings and values and their associated patterns of behaviour and products shares by a group of people who organize and regulate what they think, feel and do" (P. G. Hiebert, 1985, p. 30). Culture guides the standards for what is acceptable and understood by a group. It is vital that missionaries, who leave their familiar culture to travel to new places and people to share the gospel, are aware of their impact on their new world through the culture and belief systems they bring with them. The awareness of their impact is necessary as sometimes missionaries unintentionally or

intentionally bring behaviours, attitudes and cultural beliefs that are inappropriate in a new cultural setting.

Cross-cultural missions can be challenging, learning to live in new places, learn new customs and language and be polite and non-offensive in society while grappling with eating new foods in a strange environment. For Evangelical and charismatic traditions from which I come, missiology entails first knowing God and the Bible. A missionary must understand their message and the biblical basis for their ‘missions’ before they embark on the journey. The Bible informs all actions undertaken, and as a missionary, I need to understand the biblical foundation (from Mathew 28: 18 -20) for being ‘sent’. One of the tasks of the missionary is to understand the local culture, language, belief systems and everyday social interactions between different groups of people that make up that society. According to Van Rheenen, “missionaries who communicate God’s eternal message in the contemporary contexts of the worlds people cannot base that message on Western cognitive domains because they cannot assume that all people accept these domains” (Van Rheenen, 1991, p. 57). Culture is a social construction that continually restructures in response to influences and events within and around that culture. As a missionary, knowing the changing social milieu and values is important to respond biblically to new thoughts, habits or trends. Research completed recently in Isan in

Northeastern Thailand shows that women aware of modernising processes in their society are changing some of their religious behaviours in response to modernisation. Transformation is occurring in Isan society, so I need to understand how that affects the local religious beliefs of the women I work amongst.

Before reaching others with the gospel, missionaries need to know and experience God and hear His voice to follow him. Training must be undertaken pre-missions regarding working in different cultures and minimising bringing 'cultural baggage', expectations and assumptions into the field. Bringing Western behaviours and practices into an Eastern cultural setting and rigidly enforcing their usage has led to numerous problems historically for local Christian identity and the formation of a thriving Christian presence. David Johnson states that for "missionaries serving in Asia, whether from the West or elsewhere, this means taking the time and making the effort to learn history, culture, and language of their host culture" (Johnson, 2020, p. 86). Johnson stated that "theology must address real issues" and that people have pre-existing worldviews that are in place when they become Christian (Johnson, 2020, p. 85). The challenge for missionaries is to find aspects of that pre-existing worldview that can be drawn on to link the gospel to local culture and to challenge other aspects of the worldview that need changing to align it with the gospel. Missionaries must understand the local culture intimately by

knowing the local language, participating in daily life over extended periods and having an in-depth understanding of local customs and lore, leading to honest and honourable relationships with local people. As Johnson has said, “He [Paul] adapted his presentation of the gospel message to the worldviews of his audiences without compromising that message or removing the offense of the cross” (Johnson, 2020, p. 85). Missionaries will be seen as irrelevant if they fail to answer the local people’s real heart-felt issues (Johnson, 2020, p. 85). Using the example of Paul preaching to the Athenians (Acts 17: 22 -32), we need to establish a relationship with the local culture and people and use aspects of that to bring the gospel message in a culturally contextual manner.

In past times, missionaries were agents of secularisation by bringing Western thinking into their new fields. Providing medical services, educational facilities, scientific or technological development and infrastructure, modernising agricultural practices and introducing new knowledge, all accompanied by different religious viewpoints and agencies, contributed to secularising processes. Missionaries established schools and hospitals as a means of social engagement with local people, which imported Western knowledge focusing on healing sickness and disease or educating people and where religion played a secondary function. Secularisation was a side-effect of dividing

knowledge and service from religious underpinnings and community sensibilities. By bringing pluralistic ideas about religion to Thailand in forms that were separated from the communal life of the villages, missionaries contributed to general trends in secularisation. Kraft stated that “without our intending it, our strategy has been to secularise in order to Christianise” (Kraft, 2016, p. 229). This occurred not just historically but also in the contemporary context. After the Indian Ocean tsunami affected Southern Thailand in 2004, it was alleged that some Christian organisations offered aid in the recovery period in exchange for ‘conversion’ to Christianity (Falk, 2015, p. 146). As Falk has stated:

> It was believed that the motivation for conversion was the aid and financial support they received. My informants found it strange that those who converted were forbidden to listen to the Buddhist monks and partake in Buddhist ceremonies. The conversion had created divisions within the village and lack of trust between the villagers.

As missionaries, it is necessary to be sensitive to local beliefs and practices, especially in times of disaster. Understanding underlying purposes and intents needs to be scrutinised by the

'outsider' before entering new cultural contexts and relationships. Genuine relationships and living together in community are necessary to understand the surrounding culture as a first step for the introducing the gospel.

Conclusion

Missionaries who come to Isan to bring the gospel message need to be aware of the different functions of Buddhism in Isan society and understand that practices and thinking that hold in Western countries do not necessarily hold for practices in a Theravada Buddhist environment. Working cross-culturally means being aware of your host culture as well as being aware of your prejudices and assumptions. Secularisation is occurring within institutional forms of Buddhism for some groups of urban women in Isan, but the underlying deep-seated Buddhist philosophies continue. The rituals and ceremonies that the women perform are important indicators of their underlying belief systems. For women, it is more important that a ritual is undertaken to the right god or spirit in the proper manner using the correct postures and accompaniments at the correct times and places. It is not about rational deduction or thinking but rather about 'doing'. Local women, alongside missionaries and local Christian leaders, need to develop Christian rituals and ceremonies that reflect their

love of God, their love of community and the church that reflect Isan women's love and understanding of ritual.

For many Western Christians, religious faith is about correct beliefs and creeds in the one true God of the gospels. However, faith for Isan women is about doing things considered religious. Missionaries coming to work amongst the women of Isan must understand the importance of rituals and ceremonies in the life of Isan women. The ritual is an essential element to the Isan cosmology, and performing rituals ensures the correct behaviour, attitude or respect for family and God. When missionaries come to Isan with a Western mindset of teaching and preaching the gospel, the gospel does not always take root. The gospel message needs to be contextualised to a 'doing' or active gospel. A gospel based on biblical orthopraxy and orthodoxy has to resonate with Isan women expressing relevant biblical truths. For women, the correct manner in which a ritual is performed is significant. As a Christian worker in Isan, understanding the local women is essential in enabling the gospel to spread in Isan. The undertaking of the ritual reinforces the Isan women's cosmology and beliefs. We need to preach the Jesus of the Bible, accompanying that word with Christianised rituals. Ceremony and rituals need to be developed and incorporated into the Isan Christian practice. Education and rational thinking do not alter underlying belief systems in Isan. There must be the development of teaching

grounded in rituals and ceremonies that reflect the gospel and the power and goodness of God.

References

Asian Development Bank (Ed.). (2015). *Thailand, industrialization and economic catch-up: Country diagnostic study*. Asian Development Bank. https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/178077/tha-industrialization-econ-catch.pdf

Battaglia, L. J. (2007). *Women who have gone forth: Gender and religious identity among Buddhist nuns in Thailand.* (UMI3328500) [Doctoral thesis, Vanderbilt University]. USA.

Battaglia, L. J. (2007). *Women who have gone forth: Gender and religious identity among Buddhist nuns in Thailand* [Ph.D in Religion, Graduate School of Vanderbuilt University]. https://search.proquest.com/docview/304805574?pq-origsite=primo

Berger, P. (ed.). (1999). *The Desecularization of the world: Resurgent religion and World Politics*. Ethics & Public Policy Centre & William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Bruce, S. (1999). Modernisation, Religious Diversity and Rational Choice in Eastern Europe. *Religion, State and Society*, *27*(3–4), 265–275. https://doi.org/10.1080/096374999106476

Bruce, S. (2011). *Secularization: In defence of an unfashionable theory*. Oxford University Press.

Dhammananda, K. (2002). *What Buddhists believe* (4th ed.). Buddhist Missionary Society. http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/whatbelieve.pdf

Dobbelaere, K. (1999). Towards an Integrated Perspective of the Processes Related to the Descriptive Concept of Secularization. *Sociology of Religion*, *60*(3), 229-247. https://doi.org/10.2307/3711935

Ertit, V. (2017). *Secularization of Alevis in Turkey. An Extension of Steve Bruce's Secularization Paradigm and Its Application to Alevi Communities in Turkey* [Doctoral thesis, Radbound University], Nijmegen. https://repository.ubn.ru.nl/handle/2066/168473

Falk, M. L. (2015). *Post-tsunami recovery in Thailand: Socio-cultural responses*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Hibbert, R. Y., & Hibbert, E. (2019). Defining culturally appropriate leadership. *Missiology*, *47*(3), 240–251. https://doi.org/10.1177/0091829619858595

Hiebert, P. G. (1985). *Anthropological insights for missionaries*. Baker Book House.

Hiebert, P. G., Shaw, R. D., & Tienou, T. (2000). *Understanding folk religion: A Christian response to popular beliefs and practices*. Baker Books.

Hovey, K. G. (2019). *Guiding light: Contributions of Alan R. Tippett toward the development and dissemination of twentieth-century missiology*. Pickwick Publications.

Hughes, P., Suwanbubbha, P., & Chaisri, J. (2008). The Nature of Spirituality among Young People in Australia and Thailand. *Social Compass*, *55*(3), 359–372. https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768608093697

Johnson, D. (2020). How Cultural Anthropology Informs and Enhances Doing Theology in Asia. *Journal of Asian Evangelical Theology*, *24*(1), 69–86.

Jones, H. S. (Ed.). (1998). *Auguste Comte Early Political Writings*. Cambridge University Press. https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/

comte-early-political-writings/3E94590F4B6E9448A02C28E700A44AB3

Keyes, C. (2014). *Finding their voice: Northeastern villagers and the Thai state*. Silkworm Books.

Kim, K. (2019, February 26). Blog. *What is Missiology?* http://www.missiology.org/blog/What-Is-Missiology-Kirsteen-Kim#:~:text=Missiology—or%20sometimes%20“mission%20studies,for%20more%20than%20two%20millennia.

Kraft, C. H. (1996). *Anthropology for Christian witness*. Orbis Books.

Kraft, C. H. (2016). *Issues in contextualization*. William Carey Publishing.

Lao, R., Parks, T., Sangvirojkul, C., Lek-Uthai, A., Pathanasethpong, A., Arporniem, P., Takkhin, T., & Tiamsai, K. (2019). *Thailand’s Inequalities: Myths and Reality of Isan*. The Asian Foundation. https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/TH_Isan_report_2019_re.pdf

Larsson, T. (2019). Secularisation, secularism and the Thai state. In *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Thailand* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Lim, D., Spaulding, S., & De Neui, P. (Eds.). (2005). *Sharing Jesus effectively in a Buddhist World*. William Carey Library.

McCargo, D. (2004). Buddhism, Democracy and Identity in Thailand. *Democratization*, *11*(4), 155–170. .

McGregor, J. (2008). Wellbeing Development and Social Change in Thailand. *Thammasat Economic Journal*, *26*(22), 2–27. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/304007297_Wellbeing_Development_and_Social_Change_in_Thailand

Newell, M. (2019, January 9). What is missiology [Mission Nexus]. *What Is Missiology*. https://missionexus.org/what-is-missiology/

Ng, K. S. (2013). Religious Economy theory revisited: Towards a new perspective of religious dynamics in East Asian Settings. *Research Journal of Graduate Students of Letters, Hokkaido University.*, *12*(20), 511–530. . https://eprints.lib.hokudai.ac.jp/dspace/bitstream/2115/54090/1/030_NG.pdf

Nuttayai, P., & Promphakping, B. (2014). Alternative Welfare in Rural Thailand: A case study of Khon Kaen Province. *International Review of Mangement and Business Research (IRMBR)*, *3*(3), 1454–1467. https://www.irmbrjournal.com/papers/1409663666.pdf

Rambo, T. (2017). The Agrarian Transformation in Northeast Thailand: A review of recent research. *Southeast Asian Studies*, *6*(2), 211–246. https://web-s-ebscohost-com.alphacrucis.idm.oclc.org/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=73e4bd9a-fe96-4660-863a-3c8b5f1b92f3%40redis

Reaves, D. (2012). Peter Berger and the Rise and fall of the Theory of Secularisation. *Denison Journal of Religion*, *11*, 11–19.

Reichart, P., & Khongkhunthian, P. (2007). *The Spirit Houses of Thailand*. White Lotus.

Saiyasak, C. (2006). The meaning and Significance of Merit Making for Northeast THai Buddhists. *Paper Presented at the PhD Colloquium at Evangelical Theological Faculty, Heverlee-Leuven, Belgium*. https://www.academia.edu/4769060/THE_MEANING_AND_SIGNIFICANCE_OF_MERIT_MAKING_FOR_NORTHEAST_THAI_BUDDHISTS

Saiyasak, C. (2007). *A Study of the Belief Systems and Decision Making of the Isan People of Northeast Thailand with a View Towards Making Use of These Insights in Christian Evangelism* [Doctoral thesis, Evangelical Theological Faculty of Heverlee (Leuven)], Belgium. https://www.academia.edu/4093969/A_Study_of_the_Belief_Systems_and_Decision_Making_of_the_Isan_People_of_Northeast_Thailand_with_a_View_Towards_Making_Use_of_These_Insig

Shaw, R. D., & Burrows, W. R. (Eds.). (2018). *Traditional ritual as Christian worship: Dangerous syncretism or necessary hybridity?* Orbis Books.

Sparkes, S. (Ed.). (2005). *Spirits and souls: Gender and Cosmology in an Isan Village in Northeast Thailand*. White Lotus Press.

Tambiah, S. (1985). *Culture, Thought, and Social Action: An Anthropological Perspective*. Harvard University Press.

Taylor, S. C. R. (1999). *A Study of the Relationship between Christian Education and the Belief System of Thai Christians*. International Theological Seminary.

Tippett, A. R. (1987). *Introduction to missiology*. William Carey Library.

Trankell, I. (2003). House and Moral Community among the Tai Yong, Northern Thailand. In S. Sparkes & S. Howell (Eds.), *The House in Southeast Asia. A changing social, economic and political domain* (p. 271). Routledge.

Van Rheenen, G. (1991). *Communicating Christ in animistic contexts*. William Carey Library. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=2334231

Worldometer. (2023). *Thailand's demographics*. https://www.worldometers.info/demographics/thailand-demographics/#google_vignette

Zeamer, E. E. (2008). *Buddhism 'Updated': Technology, Technique, and Moral Imagination in Urban Thailand* [Anthropology, Harvard University]. https://search.proquest.com/docview/304602527/fulltextPDF/360628CADCA74754PQ/1?accountid=44543

Journal of Contemporary Ministry

Peer Reviewed Articles

The Lawyer's Question, the Law of Negligence and the Parable of the Good Samaritan

Leonie Bird

Email: leoniebird@vicbar.com.au

Leonie Bird, BA,LLB, MA (Theology) is a PhD candidate (University of Divinity) and a current member of the Victorian Bar and former Judges Associate in the County Court of Victoria.

Abstract:

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is associated with the modern law of negligence. There is a distinction between the strict limits of the law of negligence, to the expansive Great command to love your neighbour. The Samaritan Parable tells of the outsider Samaritan who shows mercy to the wounded stranger and the Levite and the priest who pass by the unknown victim. It is argued that secular state through its inquiries into child sexual abuse showed the compassion that was shown by the Good Samaritan, an outsider to the religious authorities. The religious organisations that ignored or silenced child abuse victims mirror the Levite and the priest of the Parable who, in the past, failed to show

compassion to those victims. The Parable encourages us all to seek the whole healing of those who have been wounded.

Key Words: child abuse, law of negligence, the Good Samaritan, religious organisations, neighbour, compassion.

Love of Neighbour and the Lawyer's Question

Love of neighbour is derived from the second part of the Great Commandment that is repeated throughout the New Testament: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself”, although expressed in a variety of ways (Mark12:31; Matt. 7:12; John 15:12.) The Gospel of Luke demonstrates the breadth of love of neighbour in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, (Luke10:25 – 37). The narrative introduces the parable followinging a question by a lawyer to Jesus (Luke 10:25). Matthew's gospel also includes a lawyer as Jesus’ interrogator in the context of loving God as the greatest and first Commandment (Matt.22:34-35).

The lawyer asks Jesus, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus’ answer is to ask a question in return. He asks the lawyer what is the law? The lawyer's answer introduces the idea of “neighbour”. The parable narrative leads to Jesus putting a final rhetorical question. He asks the lawyer which of the three do you think was a neighbour to the wounded suffering victim and the powerful answer is “the one who showed him mercy” (Luke10:37).

The Law of Negligence and the Parable of the Good Samaritan

Terry Veling (2005, pp.38-39) argues that scriptures can be repeatedly read without exhausting their significance. The Parable of the Good Samaritan is associated with the legal formulation of the modern law of negligence. This legal principle was first enunciated in the landmark case of *McAlister* (or *Donaghue) (Pauper) –v– Stevenson* and more particularly in the judgement of Lord Atkin in what is now known as the “neighbour principle". In his landmark judgement Lord Atkin stated inter alia:

> But acts or omissions which any moral code would censure cannot in a practical world be treated so as to give a right to every person injured by them to demand relief. In this way the rules of law arise which limit the range of complaints and the extent of their remedy. The rule that you are to love your neighbour becomes in law, you must not injure your neighbour and the lawyer's question, Who is my neighbour? receives a restricted reply. You must take reasonable care to avoid acts or omissions which you can reasonably foresee would be likely to injure your neighbour. Who then is my

> neighbour? …… persons who are so closely and directly affected by my act that I ought reasonably to have them in contemplation as being so affected when I am directing my mind to the acts or omissions which are called in question. (AC 1932, 562, 580)

Since 1932, the law of negligence has expanded using this fundamental principle including the doctrine of vicarious liability at common law.

Although this landmark judgement refers to the moral imperative contained in the Great Commandment, the legal neighbour principle strictly limits the ambit of care for neighbour. It is not love of neighbour that the law requires but the duty not to injure your neighbour. It is not all who suffer who may seek a legal remedy, but only those who may be closely and directly affected by an act or omission by someone who has a relationship of proximity to someone who is injured. This legal principle involves those who are reasonably considered to be affected when someone is choosing to act or choosing not to act.

While *Donaghue –v– Stevenson* sets out the principles from which the modern law of negligence has evolved, subsequent legal cases confirmed the limits of that legal duty of care. In the Australian High Court case of *Hargrave –v– Goldman*, Justice

Windeyer referred to the judgement of Lord Atkin in *Donoghue –v– Stevenson* and acknowledged the interaction between the Gospel and the law. He stated:

> Lord Atkins' well-known generalization explains the scope of a duty of care, that is to say it states who can complain of a lack of care when an obligation of care exists … it is a mistake to treat it as providing always a complete and conclusive test of whether, in a given situation, one person has a legal duty either to act or to refrain from acting in the interests of others. The very allusion shows that this has not this universal application. The priest and the Levite, when they saw the wounded man by the road, passed by on the other side. He obviously was a person whom they had in contemplation and who was closely and directly affected by their action. Yet the common law does not require a man to act as the Samaritan did. The lawyer's question must therefore be given a more restricted reply than is provided by asking simply who was or ought to have been in contemplation

> when something is done. The dictates of charity and of compassion do not constitute a duty of care. The law casts no duty upon a man to go to the aid of another who is in peril or distress not caused by him (110 CLR 40 (17)).

There is a clear distinction between the legal duty of care and the theological duty to love your neighbour as you would love yourself.

The Parable begins with a lawyer's question to Jesus, "Teacher what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25). The lawyer's statement of the Great Commandment is confirmed by Jesus. "You shall 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 your neighbour as yourself" (Luke 10:27). The Parable narrative establishes a call for compassion to an unknown wounded stranger and concludes with a question from Jesus to the lawyer, "Which of these three do you think proved to be neighbour to the man who fell among robbers?" (Luke 10:36). Finally Jesus commands the lawyer, "go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37).

The Parable forms the basis of the modern law of negligence. A tension exists between the Parable's standard of care to the wounded unknown "outsider" and the legal "neighbour"

recognised by the law of negligence. The Parable symbolises the exclusion of outsiders from the call to Israel to care for suffering strangers, and thereby establishes the identity of the outsider Samaritan and the marginalised in God's redemptive plan. The wounded victim in the Parable is both a stranger and an outsider to the nation of Israel. The marginalised and dispossessed are the central concern of the Parable.

Wonchul Shin and Elizabeth Bounds (2017) argued that damage caused by the degradation and humiliation of sexual abuse are experienced as “forms of aggression, conveying detrimental symbolic messages of exclusion, rejection, and inferiority linked with the damage to wellbeing and self-esteem” (2017, p.161). They argued that “moral repair” aims to restore the moral harm of disrupted, distorted or damaged moral relationships and that there are certain groups of individuals who are “structurally located in an unprivileged, marginalized or unequal position in society” (Shin and Bounds, 2017, p.58). They referred to Christopher Marshall's characterisation of the Good Samaritan as the “marginalized outsider" and the ‘hated enemy" and as the one who upholds covenant commitments, fulfils the love commandments and who exemplifies divine compassion (Shin and Bounds, 2017, p.164).

The Parable was intended to be provocative by introducing violence and the contrast between the response of Jewish leaders

to a wounded “stranger" and that of a despised Samaritan outsider. The analysis of “neighbour" in the Parable is derived from the Hebrew Bible (Deuteronomy 6:4) and (Leviticus 19:18) and links to the Great Commandment of love of neighbour in the New Testament. Luke's account of the Great Commandment, that uses the Parable, is the only gospel narrative that links the love of God with love of neighbour. The gospels of Mark, Matthew and John do not include the Parable. However, in contrast to contemporary Jewish Mosaic law, the Parable in Luke's gospel establishes the new breadth of love of neighbour required by Jesus (Luke10:25–37).

The Parable in Luke's account of the Good Samaritan arises from a lawyer's question (Luke 10:25). Arland Hultgren (2017) suggests the “lawyer" is an expert in Mosaic law and this hostile encounter is a “test" for Jesus. Hultgren argues that, inherent in this lawyer’s interrogation, is the question “Who is my neighbour?” Michel Gourgues (1998) analysed the Parable according to the social-religious order of contemporary Jewish society and the Old Testament formulations of priests, Levites and the Jewish people. The Priests and Levites were upper members of the post exilic Jewish society. These were “law observant people" aware of the sanction of being defiled by contact with a dead man. The Parable introduces the unexpected Samaritan “outsider" to demonstrate to whom the duty of love of neighbour is owed. There are no

separate categories of people to whom love of neighbour is directed, and no separate categories of people to whom a duty to love a neighbour is owed (Hultgren, 2017, p.75). The central challenge posed by the Parable is not “who is a neighbour”, but that care and mercy should be extended to anyone in need. The Great Commandment links the care of neighbour to the duty to love God. This seamless ethical obligation links love of God to love of neighbour and creates the distinction between the secular legal obligation and the ethical obligation of love of neighbour.

> The law of negligence defines a neighbour as “those persons who are so closely and directly affected by my act that I ought reasonably to have them in contemplation as being so affected when I am directing my mind to the acts or omissions which are called in question.” (*McAlister* (or *Donoghue) (Pauper) –v– Stevenson* (1932) AC 562. Atkins J.)

The neighbour in the Parable is the unknown unnamed wounded stranger to the outsider Samaritan.

A critical issue in the Parable is the legal limits placed on the gospel “love of neighbour" command. As understood in contemporary Jewish society the love of neighbour was limited to

priests, Levites, and “true members of Israel" and thereby excluded the outsider Samaritans (Gourgues, 1998, p.713). According to Hultgren (2017, p.76), the Parable demonstrates that there is no limit to the extent of love of neighbour and the Parable demands the crossing of religious and ethnic barriers.

The Wounded Strangers: Child Sexual Abuse Victims

The comparison between the Levite and the priest who “pass by" the wounded stranger, mirrors the responses by some faith-based organisations to child sexual abuse victims. Child sexual abuse victims were treated as “outsiders" of diminished importance compared to the reputation of churches and individual clergy. The Final Report of the Royal Commission (2017, p.55) states:

> In some cases, it is clear that leaders of religious institutions knew that allegations of child sexual abuse involved actions that were or may have been criminal, or perpetrators made admissions. However there was a tendency to view child sexual abuse as a forgivable sin or a moral failing rather than a crime.... Many leaders of religious institutions demonstrated a

> preoccupation with protecting the institutions “good name” and reputation.

There are a variety to reasons for the failure to recognise and prevent child sexual abuse in the past. Eileen Munro and Sheila Fish (2015, p.7) point out the factors that influence child safety within the culture of an organisation. There is the problem of constantly “maintaining vigilance to combat the activities of predatory abusers”. The challenges for the effective prevention of child sexual abuse include the ability to conceal predator abuser activities, the reluctance of victims to ask for help, and vulnerable worker decision making. A detailed investigation into all the cultural factors that contributed to the concealing of child sexual abuse is beyond the ambit of this examination. There is little explanation why, upon the discovery of such abuse, cultural factors encouraged the cover up of the offending in faith based organisations.

Despite statements setting out child safe policies, Palmer, Feldman and McKibbin (2016, p.11) pointed out “the difficulty of transforming high level policies into regular daily work routines and that this requires a continuous process to improve the detection and responding to child sexual abuse”. The ongoing compliance with new child safe regulations in day to day parish practice remains an ongoing challenge.

In terms of the Parable, the secular investigations conducted by the Royal Commission and the Victorian Betrayal of Trust inquiry constitute the “outsiders" to churches. These state sponsored inquiries conducted an exercise of monumental pastoral care listening to the voices of the injured child sexual abuse victims whom religious organisations had “passed by". The Victorian Betrayal of Trust Inquiry and the Royal Commission acted as outsiders to the church in the journey on Luke's “road to Jericho" (Luke 10:30). The spirit and influence of the Parable is enlivened in hearings, findings and recommendations of the Royal Commission and the Victorian Inquiry. It is the Royal Commission and the Victorian Inquiry that acted as the caring “outsiders" and the neighbours of the victims of child sexual abuse, and who contributed to the nurtured “recovery" of child abuse victims in the spiritual sense of the word.

The recommendations flowing from both state sponsored inquiries stimulated the far reaching Victorian statutory reforms that established organisational liability for child sexual abuse and extended the ambit of liability in common law negligence and vicarious liability. There are parallels that exist between the Parable and the Victorian statutory reforms that allowed improved access for child abuse victims to seek legal compensation for such abuse.

First, the wounded stranger of the Parable, being naked and nearly dead is a silent victim (Luke10:30). He is stripped of social identity indicating a mark of humiliation (Knowles, 2004). The silence is inflicted by unknown robbers. Similarly the silence of victims of child sexual abuse and the associated shame for such victims has been well documented. As Helen Blake (2018, p.38) stated, “the imposed coercive silence is always a transaction between a powerful agent and a weaker subordinate”. Secondly, within the Parable narrative there is a profound inequality of bargaining power between the silent, wounded stranger and the priest and the Levite. The respective status of individual child abuse victims and religious leaders is decidedly unequal. One is a powerless marginalised silenced victim, in contrast to the priest and the Levite. who hold higher social positions and hold superior bargaining power. Third, the priest and Levite “see" the silent wounded victim, and “pass by" the victim (Luke 10:31-32).

The Royal Commission (2017, p.53) concluded there was “insufficient consideration of victims at the time they disclosed child sexual abuse, frequently responding with disbelief, denial or attempts to blame or discredit the victim”. Timothy Jones argued that for some time there existed a general denial of the phenomena of child sexual abuse and victims of such abuse were silenced by the internal social pressures in some churches. Jones (2015, pp.237, 254) stated:

> The silence of the age of Anglican bishops' governance of sex offenders might thus equate to what Cohen termed "interpretive denial": not a denial that offences took place, but that they involved children.... Anglican bishops did act to surveil, discipline and treat clerical child sex offenders.

Citing Stanley Cohen, Jones (2015, p.241) pointed out that the "sociology of denial" is a way of not knowing, including interpretative denial that denies facts and includes "denial being individual, official or cultural". The grades of denial are the modern demonstration of "passing by" a silent victim by the people vested with the power and authority to act with the compassion demanded by the Parable. Blake (2018, p.39) pointed out that the Royal Commission has broken an enduring silence surrounding child sexual abuse within institutions.

The elements of silence and outsiders are prominent in scripture. It is through the medium of an "outsider" that the nature of Christ's sacrifice accompanied by his silence is expressed in Acts and Isaiah. "As a sheep is led to the slaughter or a lamb before its shearer is dumb, so he opens not his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7). In his humiliation justice is denied to him. Luke's narrative of the eunuch stranger in the Acts of the Apostles invokes Isaiah's suffering servant to guide the "outsider" towards baptism. (Acts 8:32-33).

In both accounts, silence is at the heart of suffering, but the quality of silence is different. Jesus' silence is a personal sacrificial choice. Isaiah's servant suffering arises from an imposed silence.

Silence is a theological element at the heart of the church's response to allegations of child sexual abuse. The silencing of child abuse victims identified by John Harrower (2018) in discouraging reports of abuse and the failure to listen, forms a category of coercive silence that echoes the priest and Levite who "pass by" the silent wounded stranger in the parable. Except that in the case of victims of child sexual abuse the victim is known yet remains ignored, disbelieved and "by the roadside".

Diarmaid MacCulloch (2014) examined silence in terms of "categories of silence". These include events or things that are casually or deliberately forgotten and of institutions that "create their own silences at the expense of people when the individual needs are outweighed by institutional needs" (MacCulloch, 2014, p.203). MacCulloch argued that the concealing of child abuse is an "act of forgetting". He suggests that their silence can be the result of justified shame either because they have realised at the time that shame is appropriate, or because they have come to realise it later (MacCulloch, 2014, p.191).

Similarly, Walter Brueggemann (2001, p.22) wrote about "imposed coercive silence" meaning silence between "a powerful

agent and a weaker subordinate, a transaction between the powerful and the powerless.” He referred to Judith Lewis Hermann as she argued that recovery from trauma is related to speech in a safe context which is the only way to get past brutality (Brueggermann 2001, p.23). All three commentators examined silence as a pastoral issue. MacCulloch (2014, p.191) argued that for victims of child sexual abuse, “silence was an act of deliberate forgetting arising from shame, (and) that the Church is not living up to its own standards of truth and compassion”.

It is not only churches that have been silent on this issue. In a report to the Royal Commission dealing with the history of Australian inquiries into institutions providing child care, Shurlee Swain (2014) concluded that there was an inability or unwillingness to recognise child sexual abuse by state sponsored inquiries dating from the mid nineteenth century. There was evidence of “blindness to sexual abuse" in earlier investigations. Swain pointed out, from about the 1980s, there was a shift in inquiry methodology that sought survivor testimony, rather than institutional self-reporting. This was accompanied by a willingness of victims to speak out. Although, institutional “blindness" is the reason for ignoring criminal actions, it is not an excuse for the legal and spiritual failures by some churches. That cultural failure is associated with the ecclesiology of the Anglican Church and the structure of power and authority within it. In terms of the Parable,

it is the outsider Samaritan who shows mercy to the silent wounded stranger. Likewise, it is the secular state organisations, (the Royal Commission and the Victorian Inquiry) that are the “outsiders" to Australian churches and demonstrate the compassion to listen to the silent victims of child sexual abuse.

Martyn Percy (2018, p.103) stated:

> the most striking thing, as always, is the inability of the church to listen, to see, to feel. The Royal Commission has listened, it has seen; it has felt. It has noted those things that for years were hiding in plain sight. In that sense the Royal Commission's work is properly prescient and prophetic.

The state inquiries gave child abuse victims a voice whereas faith-based organisations, by engaging in the cover up of such abuses, “passed them by". The secular state inquiries acted as “outsider Samaritans" that exercised compassion for victims of child sexual abuse and refused to “pass by" the suffering that had been traditionally denied, suppressed or silenced by church organisations. The exercise of listening with compassion occurred within the private sessions of the Royal Commission, the commissioning of research reports, the conduct of public case

study hearings and the extensive recommendations for legislative reform.[2]

The Parable sets the measure of care due to the silent wounded stranger. The Samaritan, bound up his wounds, pouring oil and wine, then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn and took care of him (Luke:10:33-34). The Samaritan handed over ten denarii and instructed the innkeeper to “take care of him and whatever you spend I will repay you when I come back” (Luke 10:33-36). The Samaritan's personal cost for the care of the unknown silent victim is limitless. The Samaritan's compassion is measured by the restoration of the unknown victim to full health. The Samaritan's compassion is the measure by which compensation or redress for victims of child sexual abuse should be ethically determined. It is a formidable challenge for churches.

John Harrower (2018, p.60) stated:

> The consequences of child sexual abuse in the life of a survivor are lifelong and no amount of compassion drawn from a bishop would be able to restore the life opportunities lost. I was to learn that compensation was not possible for victims of

[2] Part 5A Reportable Conduct Scheme. Part 6. Division 1 Monitoring, *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act* 2005.(Vic). Enforcement and Compliance with Child Safe Standards.

> child sexual abuse. Nothing could ever compensate for the suffering and damage done to lives from childhood to adulthood.

Robert Greenleaf (1977, p.36) suggested that the full meaning of healing is “to make whole" and that “implicit in the compact between servant-leader and the led, is the understanding that the search for wholeness is something they share”. The acknowledgement of the extent of the suffering of child abuse victims is the starting point to measure the ethically based compassion. It is in stark contrast to the legal response in the case of *Trustees of the Roman Catholic Church for the Archdiocese of Sydney –v– Ellis* (2007, 70 NSWLR 565.).

It is the ethical measure to make a victim whole again, by which the *Ellis* defence is to be judged. In a claim for compensation arising from a priest's sexual abuse of John Ellis when he was a child, Ellis was denied compensation on the basis that he could not establish tort liability against an unincorporated association. Applying the standard of compassion set by the Parable, the defendant church in the *Ellis* case was legally entitled to refuse compensation for the child sexual abuse suffered by John Ellis. The Levite and the priest in the Parable were legally entitled to “pass by" the silent wounded stranger. The *Ellis* case mirrors the “passing by” of a wounded victim by a religious organisation. In contrast, the legislative response to this case reflects the spirit of

the Parable. The state legislature acts as the outsider Samaritan that provides an avenue for compensation and healing to a victim of child abuse previously denied by the law.

The Victorian statutory response to the *Ellis* defence is contained in the *Legal Identity of Defendants (Organisational Child Abuse) Act 2018* (Vic) (*The Legal Identity Act*). In a child sexual abuse proceeding, this legislation allows a court to order, if there is no defendant capable of being sued (as in the *Ellis* case), that trustees or an associated trust of a charitable organisation (including a church), be added as a proper defendant in the proceeding. The legal commentaries of these reforms are comprehensive (G Blake, 2020; Joachim and Field, 2020; Geary, 2020a; Geary, 2020b; Landrigan, 2020; Griffen and Briffa, 2020).

Recent Victorian statutory reforms echo the ethical influence of the Parable that sets the standard for compassionate response to victims of child sexual abuse. It is the secular legislation and its interpretation and implementation by the courts that act as the outsiders to churches and church based organisations. Pursuant to the *Child Safety and Wellbeing Act 2005* (Vic), the Commission for Children and Young People is the statutory authority that administers the Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme and the amended Victorian Child Safe Standards (Landrigan, 2020). This Act requires the reporting of allegations of child sexual abuse to this statutory body and authorises this Commission to establish

and monitor Victorian Child Safe Standards for any organisation charged with the supervision of children.

The "*Ellis* Defence" arose because the Roman Catholic Church is an unincorporated association with fluctuating membership. Tort liability cannot be established against an unincorporated association. The property trust that holds the assets of the Roman Catholic Church was not liable for child sexual abuse suffered by John Ellis, as it had no responsibility for an offending priest (*Trustees of the Roman Catholic Church for the Archdiocese of Sydney –v– Ellis* (2007) 70 NSWLR 565.). Despite the legal recognition of the *Ellis* defence, it is the state, through legislative reform and the courts empowered by reforming legislation, that now act as secular outsider Samaritans for child sexual abuse claimants.

The actions of the Royal Commission and the Victorian Betrayal of Trust inquiry marked a monumental broadening of the "continuum of care" reflected in the Parable. The findings and recommendations from both state inquiries are the driving force behind the Victorian statutory reforms designed to prevent child sexual abuse and to encourage the creation of child safe organisations. The recommendations stimulated the reform of civil litigation in relation to child sex abuse (ss 90 & 91 *Wrongs Act*, and Part 5A *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic)) and established the civil organisational liability whereby any

organisation that is responsible for the supervision of children must take reasonable precautions to prevent child sexual abuse within an organisation.

The Parable demands a broadening of the narrow legal Mosaic call to love of neighbour in Deuteronomy and Leviticus. Likewise the state sponsored inquiries and consequent statutory reforms, constitute a broadening of legal responsibility through the reversal of the onus of proof in a child abuse claim against an organisation. Both inquiries are reminiscent of the powerful role “outsiders" played in the history of Israel and their prominence in Christ's ministry. In addition there is a transformation in the church state relationship and the consequent transformation in the ethical authority of churches.

The theological themes of shame, lament, the exercise of power, and the power to silence were evidenced in the reporting of historical child sexual abuse in the Royal Commission's Final Report. The exercise of power by leaders within some churches is directly associated with the failure to care for child abuse victims. It is the nature of this leadership response in terms of the Gospel that is examined.

State Authorities and Ethical Leadership

One consequence of the recent Victorian statutory reforms is that Australian churches are no longer regarded as "special institutions" that are entitled to exemptions from human rights legislation (McPhillips, 2020). The churches and church based organisations are now subject to civil and criminal penalties for child sexual abuse. The assumption that standards of ethical behaviour are set by churches no longer holds true. In the case of child safety, it is state organisations that set the standards of behaviour and consequently the ethical standards for child safe organisations.

In part, this role now belongs to the Victorian Commission for Children and Young People that supervises the standards for child safety and monitors compliance with Working With Children Check Cards.[3] There has been a transformation of the church state relationship that echoes the transformation of the roles between the outsider Samaritan and the priests and Levite in the Parable. It mirrors the direct influence of the Parable on the development of the modern law of negligence and hence its ongoing influence in the organisational liability created by s 90 of the *Wrongs Act.*

[3] Part 6 Division 1, *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*. (Vic) established Child Safety Standards. Division 3 s 26 *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*. (Vic) empowered the Commission for Children and Young Persons to monitor and enforce compliance with Working With Children Check Card regulations

In 1932, the case of *McAlister* (or *Donoghue) (Pauper) –v– Stevenson* represented a major redirection in the then existing law of negligence. Likewise, the Parable signalled a profound challenge to the then existing legal boundaries inherent in Jewish mosaic law. Likewise, the landmark judgement in *Donoghue –v– Stevenson* marked a revolutionary legal change in the relationship between the remote acts of individuals and someone suffering loss and damage caused by those acts. That transformed legal relationship continues to develop to this day. The reference to the term “love of neighbour" in *Donoghue –v– Stevenson* used the cultural authority of the Great Commandment and the Parable to add persuasive authority to the judicial expansion of the then existing negligence law. It acknowledged the authority and social value of the Parable whilst reformulating a new legal duty of care that formed the basis of the modern law of negligence. It is the restricted measure of the legal “neighbour principle" that acts as a limit to legal liability and transforms the principle of “love your neighbour" to “do no harm to your neighbour". Similarly, s 90 of the *Wrongs Act* constitutes a reformulation and redirection in the common law of negligence, vicarious liability and non-delegable duty regarding child sexual abuse.

Section 90 of the *Wrongs Act cr*eates a statutory organisational liability that builds on the principle of the legal duty of care in common law negligence. It establishes a statutory duty to prevent

the child sexual abuse by any individual associated with a relevant organisation. That is organisational liability that arises out of an omission or failure to act in addition to the commission of a negligent act.

The recommendations of the Royal Commission to the reform of civil litigation relating to child sexual abuse, led to re-balancing the inequality of bargaining power between individual victims of child sexual abuse (the silent wounded victim) and the church organisation within which child sexual abuse occurred. The effect of the recommendations of the Royal Commission and the Victorian Betrayal of Trust Report have caused a major transformation in the church state relationship.

The Transformed Church State Relationship

A theological reflection requires an Australian church to “read the signs of the times” and interpret those signs in the light of the gospel (Flannery, 1966). What are “signs of the times” that are relevant to the Australian church in the first quarter of the twenty first century? The church state relationship has been transformed by the increase in secularity, the accelerating decline in the numbers of Christian believers, and new power and authority for secular institutions (Hynd, 2022). These institutions include the Courts and the Victorian Commission for Children and Young People that now have the power to critically examine the internal

affairs of religious organisations. Further, it is the function of Victorian state legislation to establish the legal standards through statutory Child Safe Standards and by imposing an ongoing duty to improve child safe standards within organisations that are responsible for children.[4] Inherent in these legal standards are ethical standards now required for organisations in relation to child safety. The churches no longer hold a unique social licence to set ethical standards for the Australian community. That authority was diminished by the findings of the Royal Commission.

A further sign of the times is the recent steady decline in church attendance in Australia. The Australian 2021census, indicates that the number of Australians identifying with a Christian denomination has declined from 12.2 million people in 2016 to just over 11.1. million people in 2021: a decline of 8.6 percent (Hughes, 2022). Those people who identified as Christians are ageing with more than one quarter aged over sixty five years. Some commentators argue “too many people have found religious faith irrelevant or antagonistic to their way of life” (Hughes, 2022, p.11). Hugh Mackay (2016, p.51) observed, “as in most comparable Western societies churchgoing is simply off the agenda for the majority of contemporary Australians”. Mackay (2016, p.86) stated:

[4] Part 5A Reportable Conduct Scheme. Part 6. Division 1 Monitoring, *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*. (Vic). Enforcement and Compliance with Child Safe Standards.

> Child sex abuse scandals, more than any other single form of institutional corruption, have tarnished the reputation of the church to the extent that many churchgoers have either drifted away in disgust, or now either don’t attend church or adopt a rather cynical less respect for the clergy.

The Victorian statutory reforms, are evidence that the church state relationship has been transformed. It is suggested that this transformation is partly caused by the destruction of the moral standing and authority of churches. The title of the Victorian Betrayal of Trust Report sums up the parliament's judgement on the incidence of historical child sexual abuse and the coverup of that abuse by churches. Douglas Hynd (2022, p.xvii) suggested the churches’ position of privilege and entitlement was taken away while they weren’t looking.

The direct intervention of the state, through the statutory right to scrutinize and evaluate internal church procedures, transforms the state and the courts into the arbiters of not only the legal standards but also the ethical standards inherent in those legal standards.

The starting point for a betrayal of trust is associated with the reasons people are primarily drawn to faith based communities.

Whatever the personal reasons for coming to an Australian church there is an implied understanding that the spiritual welfare of people of faith is paramount. That promise of spiritual safety, was relied upon by the victims of child sexual abuse. To those who have suffered harm arising from the abuse of authority and power within an Australian church the liturgy becomes an empty rhetoric. The Parable viewed in the context of the documented history of child sexual abuse, by the Royal Commission is the starting point for the betrayal of trust experienced by victims of child abuse. That betrayal is concurrent with the self-destruction of the church's integrity, arising from “the corporate responsibility for the harm that has happened in the Church's name”.

Conclusion

This analysis examined the transformation of the church state relationship. The state now sets the ethical standards for child safety and child safe organisations. A theological reflection used the Parable to demonstrate the outsider Samaritan status of the Royal Commission and the Victorian Betrayal of Trust Inquiry, and how they assisted those who had been abused, but who had been left “by the side of the road" by churches, similar to the actions of the priest and the Levite in the Parable.

There is a distinction between the ethical standards derived from scripture which command “love of neighbour" and the legal duty

of care that requires to do no harm to one's neighbour". It is argued that the churches, no longer enjoy the exclusive right to set ethical standards in relation to child safety. The state, through legislative reforms and statutory bodies such as the Commission for Children and Young People, now sets the ethical standards for child safety and child safe organisations. Ethical standards underlie the statutory reshaping of the law of negligence, to create organisational liability for child sexual abuse under ss 90 and 91 of the *Wrongs Act.*

The Parable calls the churches to a higher ethical level in seeking healing and wholeness for those who have been abused and damaged. As the Samaritan paid the innkeeper for the care of the wounded unknown stranger, so the churches are ethically bound to provide the physical, psychological and spiritual healing of those who have been harmed. Indeed, the ethical responsibility of the churches is not just the avoidance of future harm, but the building of a child-safe environment through which children will find the fullness of life offered by the gospel.

References

Blake, Garth (2020). “Civil Liability for Child Sexual Abuse”. Conference Paper presented at the 1st Annual Law of Religious Institutions Conference. Melbourne. July 2020. 29-30.

Blake, Helen (2018). “Finding voice: What it means to “be the church” after the Royal Commission”. *St Mark’s Review* 245 (3): 38

Brueggemann, Walter (2001). “Voice as Counter to Violence”. *Calvin Theological Journal* 36: 22.

Flannery, Austin (ed) (1966) *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents.* Dublin: Dominican Publications.

Geary, Luke (2020a) “Current Issues Civil Law Claims for Historical Sexual Abuse”. Conference Paper presented as a webinar at the 2nd Annual Law of Religious Institutions Conference.16 September.

Geary, Luke (2020b) “Permanent Stays and Setting Aside Settlement Agreements”. Paper presented as a webinar at the *Legalwise Seminar. Civil Claims for Institutional Abuse: Settlements, Stays and Damages*. 21 October.

Gourges, Michel (1998). “The Priest, the Levite and the Samaritan Revisited: A Critical Note on Luke 10:31-35. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117 (4): 710-713.

Greenleaf, Robert K. (1977) *Servant Leadership. A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness.* New York: Paulist Press.

Griffen, Laura and Briffa, Gemma (2020) “Still Awaiting Clarity: Why Victoria's New Civil Liability Laws for Organisational Child Abuse are Less Helpful Than They Appear”. *University of New South Wales Law Journal* 43 (2): 452-483.

Harrower, John (2018). “How Australian Churches might respond individually and collectively to the Royal Commission and its findings”. *St Mark's Review* 245: 56-71.

Hughes, Philip (2022) *Australia's Religious and Non- Religious Profiles. Analysis of the 2021 Census Data.* Box Hill, Victoria: Christian Research Association.

Hultgren, Arland (2017) “Enlarging the Neighborhood: The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37)”. *Word & World* 37(1): 72.

Hynd, Douglas (2022) *Community Engagement After Christendom*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books.

Joachim, Dietrich and Field Iain (2020) “Statute and Theories of Vicarious Liability”. *Melbourne University Law Review* 43 (2): 515-544.

Jones, Timothy (2015) “Sin, Silence, and States of Denial: Canon Law and the “Discovery” of Child Sexual Abuse”. *Australian Feminist Law Journal* 41 (2): 237-251.

Knowles, Michael (2004) “What was the Victim Wearing? Literary, Economic and Social Contexts for the Parable of the Good Samaritan”. *Biblical Interpretation* 12 (2): 145.

Landrigan, Mitchell (2020) “Ellis: A post Royal Commission Analysis”. *St Mark's Review* 252: 38-62.

MacCulloch, Diarmaid (2014) *Silence. A Christian History.* London: Penguin Books.

Mackay, Hugh (2016) *Beyond Belief*. *How we find meaning with or without religion.* Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia.

McPhillips, Kathleen (2020). “Religion after the Royal Commission: Challenges to Religion- State Relations”. *Religion* 11(44).

Munro, Eileen and Fish, Sheila (2015). *Hear no evil, see no evil: Understanding failure to identify and report child sexual abuse in institutional contexts*. Sydney: Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Percy, Martyn (2018).“Risk, Responsibility and Redemption: Remembering our Future”. *St Mark’s Review* 245: 99-115.103.

Palmer, Donald, Feldman, Valerie, and McKibbin, Gemma (2016) *Final report: The role of organisational culture in child sexual abuse in institutional contexts*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

Shin, Wonchul and Bounds, Elizabeth (2017) “Treating Moral Harm as Social Harm: Toward a Restorative Ethics of Christian Responsibility”. *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 37 (2):153-169. (https://www.jstor.org/stable/44987556).

Royal Commission Into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017) *Final Report. Preface and Executive Summary*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

Swain, Shurlee (2014).*History of Australian Inquiries reviewing Institutions providing care for children.* Sydney: Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. October.

Veling, Terry (2005) *Practical Theology. On Earth as It Is in Heaven*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis.

Table of Cases

Bishop Paul Bird –v– DP (2023) VSCA 66.

Ermogenous –v– Greek Orthodox Community of SA Inc. (2002) 209. CLR 945.

Hargrave –v– Goldman 110 CLR 40.

Hollis –v– Vabu Pty Ltd (2001) 207 CLR 21.

McAlister (or Donaghue) (Pauper) –v– Stevenson (1932) AC 552

Prince Alfred College Incorporated –v– ADC. (2016) CLR 258.

State of New South Wales –v– Lepore and Anor. 212 CLR 511.

Trustees of the Roman Catholic Church for the Archdiocese of Sydney –v– Ellis (2007) 70 NSWLR 565.

Chronological Table of Victorian Statutes.

Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005.(Vic).

Legal Identity of Defendants (Organisational Child Abuse) Act 2018 (Vic)

Wrongs Amendment (Organisational Child Abuse) Act 2017.(Vic)

Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic)

Journal of Contemporary Ministry

Peer Reviewed Articles

Why People are Ceasing to Attend Churches and to Identify with Religious Institutions

Philip Hughes

philipjhughes1@optusnet.com.au

Philip Hughes was the senior research officer with the Christian Research Association (CRA) from its foundation in 1985 until 2016. More recently, he has worked at Harvest Bible College, assisting with the development of the Doctorate of Ministry program, and then at Alphacrucis University College where he taught research methods and supervised doctoral candidates. He is now an Emeritus Professor at Alphacrucis at Alphacrucis University College. He is also an honorary research fellow with the University of Divinity and with the National Centre for Pastoral Research. With postgraduate degrees in philosophy, theology and education, he is particularly interested in the relationship between Christianity and culture, and has written many books on religious faith in Australia, on ministry and on religious education.

Abstract:

The 2021 Australian Census showed a marked increase in the numbers of people giving responses to the question on religion

which were not associated with religious institutions. These responses included ‘Christian’ (as distinct from aligning with a denomination) and ‘my own beliefs’. The huge increase in those ticking the ‘no religion’ box is also indicative of people disassociating themselves from religious institutions. Drawing on the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2018), various hypotheses are tested that may explain the decreases both in identification with a religion and in religious attendance. These include the rejection of religious beliefs, the decline in confidence in religious institutions, the weakness of socialisation processes in pluralistic societies, and the rejection of pro-fertility values promoted by religious institutions. While analysis of the surveys cannot show cause and effect, the strongest factors associated with religious decline are the decline in confidence in religious institutions and the rejection of religious beliefs. The belief that one must provide one’s own meaning in life is associated with people ceasing to attend religious services. The patterns offer significant challenges to ministry in an increasingly non-religious society. However, the decline in confidence in religious institutions is something over which religious institutions have some control.

Introduction

The first Australian census after I started sociological analysis of religion in Australian society was in 1986. It showed that:

- 73 per cent of Australians identified with one or other Christian denomination;
- 13 per cent said they had no religion.
- 12 per cent did not answer the question, and
- 2 per cent were associated with other religions (Hughes et al., 2012; Hughes, 2022) .

That year, Bouma and Dixon published the results of the 1983 Australian Values Study Survey which found that:

- 27 per cent of Australian attended religious services monthly or more often;
- 24 per cent attended at least annually; and
- 48 per cent never or almost never attended. (Bouma and Dixon, 1986, p.7).

Thus, at that point, three quarters of all Australians identified with a particular “official” Christian system of beliefs and half of all adult Australians attended a religious service at least occasionally. Up to 1974, more than 80 per cent of all marriages were celebrated as a religious rite by a religious celebrants. By 2000, less than half of marriages were performed by religious celebrants (Bentley, 2005). In 2021, just 19 per cent of marriages were celebrated by a minister of religion (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

Religious identification has changed significantly since 1986. In 2021, the Census showed that:

- 41 per cent identified with a specific Christian denomination;
- 3 per cent just said they were Christian;
- 39 per cent said they had no religion;
- 10 per cent identified with other religions; and
- 7 per cent did not answer the question or gave another response (Hughes, 2022).

At this time, the proportion of Australians attending churches monthly or more often, according to the Australian Survey of Social Values (2021) was 11 per cent of the adult population, with 3 per cent attending the services of other religions and 30 per cent attending the services of Christian or other religions annually or more often.

The question with which sociologists and church leaders have been grappling is why the decline, both in terms of identity with a religion and with attendance. In relation to identity, the actual question asked in the Census is one of identity with institutions. “What is your religion?” is followed by a list of institutional forms of religion from which respondents are asked to choose: Anglican, Baptist, Buddhist, Catholic, and so on. Thus, when people are saying they have ‘no religion’ are they simply saying that they do not wish to identify with a religious institution? Thus, is ‘no

religion' a statement about religious institutions or is it also a statement about the loss of religious values and beliefs?

The proportion of the population identifying in the Census with almost all of the Christian denominations fell between 2016 and 2021. There was just one exception: the Oriental Orthodox Christians, who continue to grow through immigrants from the Middle East. On the other hand, there was also growth in the proportion who wrote 'Christian' into the Census, rather than ticking a box indicating a specific denominational identity (Hughes, 2022). Between 2011 and 2021, the proportion writing in 'Christian' grew by 46 per cent, while the proportion identifying with a Christian institution declined by 15 per cent, with nearly 700,000 people (2.7% of the population) writing in 'Christian' in 2021 (Hughes, 2022, p.48). This could be another indicator of people no longer wishing to identify with religious institutions, while still holding to religious traditions.

Another, even more explicit response which indicated this disconnect with institutional forms of religiosity were the people who wrote in 'my own spiritual beliefs'. Others wrote in that they held beliefs from a variety of religions, or that they were theists. A few others noted their spiritual beliefs using other terminology. In total, 45,791 people responded to the Census in this way, a growth of 17 per cent from the 39,180 who responded using these terms in 2016. While these people are a tiny fraction of the

population – just 0.2 per cent – they are people who explicitly chose to write in a response (Hughes, 2022, p.116).

Is the change in which people are filling in the Census all about the rejection of institutions and the rise of individual approaches to spirituality and to meaning? Or are there other factors involved?

Literature Review

Since the early decades of the 19th century, many authors have written about the decline in attendance at and identity with the churches and other religious organisations. Recent books such as *Religion's Sudden Decline: What's Causing It and What Comes Next* by Ronald Inglehart (2021) and Kasselstrand et al., *Beyond Doubt: The Secularisation of Society* (2023) argue that it is a world-wide phenomenon. I will focus on four authors who have taken somewhat different approaches to religious decline in order to provide us with some specific hypotheses that can be tested.

Luckmann

According to Thomas Luckmann's classical book on the changing nature of religion in contemporary society, *The Invisible Religion* (1967), the institutionalisation of religion has always had some inherent weaknesses vis-à-vis the individual. Luckmann argued

that institutional religions develop systems of doctrines, liturgies and social ethics, (1967, p.74). These systems must find their correlation in the subjective beliefs of the individual if they are to be maintained. Luckmann argued there was always the potential danger of the subjective plausibility of the "official" model, that the model would not line up with the individual's sense of what is of "ultimate" significance. Indeed, Luckmann suggested that there will never be perfect socialisation of the individual into the "official" model of religion.

He argued that this danger was enhanced when religion was not pervasive in all areas of social life. It was easy for religion to become a set of specific requirements in specific circumstances: for example, in the festival of Easter. But there was more likelihood of religion not relating to what was of "ultimate" significance in other places and contexts. He said:

> Matters of "ultimate" significance, as defined in the *official* model, are potentially convertible into routinized and discountinuous observances (or approximate observances or nonobservance) of specific religious requirements whose sacred quality may become merely nominal. Thus the specifically religious representations may cease to function as integrating elements of

> the *subjective* system of "ultimate" significance (1967, p.76).

Luckmann argued that the problem of the relationship between institutionalised religion and the lives of individuals had grown with the increased complexity of society and with increased spheres of society which have little or no connection with religion (1967, p.72). As this had occurred, institutionalised religion had had to identify its own sphere, which Luckmann suggested, was primarily that of private life and of the family.

Increased pluralism in society regarding that the nature of the cosmos was also problematic for religion, according to Luckmann (1967, p.80). When there are competing official models, the individual is forced to make choices. Religious institutions then compete with each other through their flexibility, but also by claiming their superiority, perhaps in terms of a higher degree of purity.

Social change also puts pressure on religious institutions (1967, p.82). Social changes can influence what people consider to be of "ultimate" significance. It is not easy for religious institutions to change to counter these social changes if their roots are frozen in sacred texts, doctrines or rituals.

Thus, one might expect in today's context of increased pluralism and complexity in society, the gap between individual's subjective

sense of what was of significance and official religious models would widen. Luckmann used the term ‘sacred cosmos’ for the set of symbols representing the hierarchy of significance underlying the world view (1967, p.70). Luckmann saw the potential for the ‘official’ sacred cosmos, consisting of beliefs, rituals and ethics, to become increasingly problematic in the lives of individuals in modern societies.

Giddens

Approximately 25 years later, Anthony Giddens, approached the issue of the decline of religion indirectly as he described how the nature of the self and self-identity was changing in modern societies. Giddens argued that there has been a recent change in the Western world in that individuals had come to see themselves as putting life together, even in the personal and family domain, rather than accepting the traditions into which they were born. In *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (1991), Giddens summarised his argument as follows.

> In the post-traditional order of modernity, and against the backdrop of new forms of mediated experience, self-identity becomes a reflexively organised endeavour. The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously

> revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems. In modern social life, the notion of lifestyle takes on a particular significance. The more tradition loses its hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical interplay of the local and the global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options (1991, p.5).

Giddens proceeded to note that there were ‘standardising influences’, for example, in the forms of capitalistic commodification, but personal identity had developed in such a way that in modern societies, people felt that they had to make their own choices in relation to the varieties of possibilities and authorities for life, rather than simply accept the traditions of the past. Religious and other institutions continued to exist, but they no longer determined how individuals live. The institutions offered choices which some accepted but many others rejected. The individual was in control. Later in the book, Giddens noted that religious institutions offered ‘authoritative’ ways of living, but the individual had to choose to submit to these (1991, pp.194-195). In

the Western world, at least, religions could not control the population.

In the introduction to *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics,* Giddens put the change of the formation of identity into an historical context. He argued that the enlightenment did destabilise traditions in some ways, but the influence of traditions remained strong. However, since the 1950s, there has been a 'dissolution of tradition' (Giddens 1994, p.6). People have demanded more autonomy than ever before, and there has been a huge expansion of social reflexivity, which has affected not only religion, gender, family, but also the workplace, politics and bureaucratic systems.

In a post-traditional age, people make their own meaning, rather than being socialised into a world of accepted traditions, Giddens argued. However, he noted that such a world gave rise to fundamentalism as an explicit rejection by a minority of people of this model of engagement with the world. Thus, religion was rejected in contemporary by many people partly as an expression of the individualist responsibility to make their own lives.

Voas

The main process where by culture and language are handed from one generation to the next is that of the socialisation of the child.

As part of that process, religious faith has been handed from one generation to the next over the millennia. The question is why is that not happening in contemporary Western societies as it has happened in the past?

The major explanation, according to David Voas (2003, 2007), draws on the fact that societies have become increasingly pluralistic, a point noted by Luckmann. Voas has argued that pluralism leads to more people marrying outside of their religious group. People who marry outside of their own religious tradition are less likely to pass on their own or any religious tradition to their children (Voas 2003). In other words, the process of socialisation is the major process whereby religious identity and behaviour patterns are passed on from one generation to the next. That socialisation process is weakened when the two parents are different in their religious identity or in their religious behaviours. This is more likely to occur when there is greater religious pluralism.

However, one might also add a note here in line with Giddens. It has been noted that in religiously pluralistic societies, some parents encourage their children to think for themselves and make up their own minds about religious faith. Thus, the aim of socialisation is autonomous and reflexive thinking in relation to religious identity and behaviour (Hennig and Gärtner 2023). Hence, such forms of socialisation are likely to lead some children

to take different paths from their parents, even if the parents are unified in their approach to religious identity and religious involvements.

Inglehart

Thirty years after Giddens, Inglehart wrote *Religion's Sudden Decline: What's Causing It, and What Comes Next?* In this book, Inglehart (2021, p.6) argued that the popular movement towards a 'no religion' identity began in a substantial way across the world after World War II and was primarily a movement away from the values of religions. He noted that the scientific challenges to the nature of the world which began with Galileo and continued through to Darwin did not, in fact, lead to widespread secularisation as many philosophers and other thinkers expected (2021, p.22).

He posited an alternative account of secularisation, which he called 'evolutionary modernization theory' (2021, p.63), as occurring around values rather than around religious beliefs. He argued that religions around the world had supported pro-fertility values, which included the prohibition of sexual and other activities which would not contribute to procreation, including homosexual activity and sex outside marriage, and gendered roles in society in which women were expected to focus on child-bearing and child-raising. Abortion was also prohibited. According

to Inglehart, these pro-fertility values have been dominant in most societies through human history in order to ensure the continued existence of societies (2021, p.1).

However, a number of social changes starting in the Western world after World War II made these values less important. Inglehart pointed to the fall in the rate of infant mortality, which meant that more children survived to adulthood (2021, p.7). A second factor was the development of state welfare systems which meant that people did not feel that they had to depend as much on family at times of sickness, old age or financial hardship (2021, p.107). One might also add the change in the reliability of contraception made it possible to separate sex for pleasure and sex for procreation. These social changes led to a focus on values of personal fulfilment rather than pro-fertility duties. With the focus on personal fulfilment, the prohibition of sexual activity not associated with procreation became meaningless to many people.

Inglehart argued that, through much of human history, religions have had a major role in giving moral justification to the pro-fertility values (2021, p.9). In recent years, religions have not changed their values and continued to emphasise the pro-fertility values and the accompanying prohibition of sexual activity outside of procreation. They also continued to emphasise gender-based roles and prohibited abortion. As people focussed on personal fulfilment and, at the social level, on the tolerance that

supported people in finding that fulfilment in ways appropriate to their personalities and circumstances, they left the religions, often becoming antagonistic to them because of their continued insistence on pro-fertility values. Inglehart argued that such social changes and changes in values can be detected in most societies around the world, although they are much more prominent in the Western world (2021, p.97 for example). Indeed, in some of the poorest countries such as Sudan, Yemen, Afghanistan, and others, the future of society is seen as being in jeopardy and they continue to place great emphasis on women's duty in child-bearing and child-raising, and on prohibiting sexual activity that does not lead to procreation.

In Australia, this contest of values between the pro-fertility values and personal fulfilment values was very apparent in the debate regarding same-sex marriages. Such marriages were opposed by almost all Christian churches and some other religious groups. On the other hand, the majority of the Australian population affirmed same-sex marriage in the plebiscite that occurred in 2017 (Wikipedia 2023). It has been one of the issues which has highlighted the division between the official line of the churches and the Australian culture.

Rejection of the Institution

Apart from the rejection of religious beliefs and the rejection of religious values, another possible explanation for the rise in no religion is the rejection of religious institutions. It is possible that the rise in 'no religion' is an expression of the lack of confidence in religious institutions. In this regard, the concern about child sexual abuse occurring within church contexts and carried out by clergy may certainly have added to a decline in confidence in the churches and a decline in church attendance.

The Catholic bishop, Geoffrey Robinson, wrote in *For Christ's Sake: End Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church … for Good*:

> Millions of good Catholics have been deeply disillusioned, both by the revelations of widespread abuse, and even more by what they have perceived as the defensive, uncaring and unchristian response on the part of those who have authority in the Church and claim to speak in God's name. The effects on the Church have already been massive and the poison will continue to eat away at the very foundation of the Church for as long as the issue remains (2013, pp.2-3).

Such opinions have been expressed by many others. Francis Sullivan, who was a spokesperson for the Catholic Church, at the time of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to the Sexual Abuse of Children, has recently written:

> I have been too slow to call out the sexist and homophobic attitudes of bishops and other clergy and spokespeople. I have been too slow as well to join in the rage over the way women are mistreated in the Church, the secret double lives of some clergy and their arrogance in presuming that they can still preach about behavioural and moral standards … These days I find myself angry with the inertia of the institution and its intolernace of differences and the demonising of sincere dissent. My impatience for changes that seem all too obvious, even common-sensical, does corrode my confidence in the Church leadership (2023, p.27).

Dixon (2023, p.41) reported that a survey in 2016 showed that 58 per cent of Catholic attenders agreed that the cases of sexual abuse by priests and religious had damaged their confidence in Church authorities. And these were the people still attending

Catholic churches. For many others, that damage to confidence has led them to cease attending.

Summary

In summary, then, there are five major hypotheses in the literature reviewed offering explanations of the movement of people from attending Christian churches and identifying with religious institutions to ceasing to attend and identifying themselves as having ‘no religion’. These are:

1. Based on Giddens, individuals are taking the process of making meaning into their own hands in a socially reflexive world, and rejecting the meanings offered to them traditionally by the churches;

2. Based on Luckmann, individuals are rejecting the whole ‘sacred cosmos’ offered to them by institutions as not fitting their life experience in pluralistic and complex societies;

3. Based on Voas, increasing plurality in society means that parents more frequently have different religious identities and behaviours, weakening religious socialisation in their children;

4. Based on Inglehart, religion is becoming functionally irrelevant as the focus of values has moved from pro-fertility values (which Christian and other religious traditions have supported) to

personal fulfilment values which include individualised patterns of sexual fulfilment and equality of gender;

5. Based on the literature around the sexual abuse issue and its cover up by some religious institutions, people are rejecting the religious institutions for their moral failures and failure to change.

Methodology

The 2018 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes contained a number of questions which assists in the further exploration of these hypotheses. The survey which was conducted by the National Social Science Data Archives associated with the Australian National University contained a wide variety of questions about religion. This survey was distributed randomly across the adult population of Australia and obtained a sample of 1,287 people. The survey is widely used by social scientists in Australia and is highly regarded as a reliable national survey of Australian adults (ACSPRI).

In the survey, people were asked “Do you belong to a religion and, if yes, which religion do you belong to?” Thus, there was a specific measure of whether people identified themselves as having no religion or not. Another question asked “Apart from such special occasions as weddings, funerals, etc., how often do

you attend religious services?" The responses which could be ticked ranged from never to several times a week.

The survey asked similar questions about the respondents upbringing: "What religion, if any, were you raised in?" This provided a way of measuring change in identification. Another question asked "And what about when you were around 11 or 12, how often did you attend religious services then?" which provided a way of measuring change in attendance. There were also questions about the religious identity and attendance of the respondent's father and mother, providing a way of testing Voas' hypothesis about the comparative weakness of socialisation when parents do not have the same religious identity or practice.

A specific question asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement "Life is only meaningful if you provide the meaning yourself". This was specific indicator as to whether people saw the development of meaning as a personal activity or as something which was given, for example, by religion. That statement was placed among other statements about whether life is meaningful only because God exists or whether life does not serve any purpose.

Another question asked people whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement "I have my own way of connecting with God without churches or religious services". This statement also

indicated whether religious faith itself was seen as something which an individual could pursue outside of institutional involvement.

A set of questions asked people about their religious beliefs: belief in God, heaven, hell, life after death, and miracles. It was found that the responses to these questions correlated quite highly. They formed a scale with a high level of reliability, as indicated by the Cronbach's Alpha of .93

Another set of questions asked people about the sorts of values noted by Inglehart as being 'pro-fertility' and as being rejected by many people in the movement to a focus on personal fulfilment. These questions asked about attitudes to sex with people apart from one's partner, sex among partners of the same-sex, about abortion and about gender-based roles within the family. Again, the responses to these questions correlated positively and a scale was created for them with a Cronbach's Alpha score of .69

Two questions asked specifically about attitudes to the churches and other religious institutions. The first question was about the levels of confidence people had in such institutions. The second question asked "Do you think that churches and religious organisations in this country have too much power or too little power?" The responses ranged from 'Far too much power' to 'Far too little power'. The responses to these two questions correlated

highly and again created a reliable scale of the lack of confidence in religious institutions with a Cronbach's Alpha score of .78.

Most of these questions were asked a comparable version of the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes in 2009. Thus it is possible to make comparisons between the two surveys, shedding light on trends between 2009 and 2018.

Analysis involved an examination of whether those who identified as no religion had a significantly different score on each of these scales from those who identified with a religion and those who attended religious services. Then, to examine the relative weight of each of these factors, regression analysis was used: linear regression in relation to attendance, and logit regression in relation to whether people identified as no religion or not. Logit regression was appropriate because the dependent variable, whether people identified as no religion or not, was a dichotomous variable.

Results

Initial Analysis

Table 1 presents the responses regarding a range of measures of religiosity in 2009 and 2018.

Table 1. Responses to Various Questions about Religion in the Australia Survey of Social Attitudes 2009 and 2018 (Percent of respondents)

	2009	2018
Identifying with a religion	55%	43%
Attending religious services monthly or more often	16%	13%
Believing in God without doubts	25%	21%
Having a great deal of confidence in churches and religious organisations	21%	11%
Religious organisations have too much power	37%	49%
Agreeing that life is only meaningful if we provide the meaning ourselves	55%	55%
I have my own way of connecting with God	42%	37%

Source: Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2009) and (2018).

Table 1 shows that in every measure of religiosity, there was a change between 2009 and 2018. A smaller percentage of the population identified with religion, attended services and believed in God without doubts. The levels of confidence in churches and religious organisations fell and more people felt that religious organisations had too much power.

The 2018 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes asked respondents about whether they were raised identifying with a religion and whether they attended religious services when they were around 11 years of age. This means that one can identify the people who have changed since they were children. It found that 45 per cent of the total sample had reduced their involvement either from monthly or more often to occasional or never, or from occasional to never attending. It also found that 33 per cent of the respondents had changed from identifying with a religion to having ‘no religion’.

There was evidence that the change in identity was more frequent when mothers and fathers had different identities. If the parents shared their religious identity, then 71 per cent of the children maintained their religious identity from when they were growing up and 29 per cent of children changed their religious identity. For the 38 per cent of respondents whose parents had different religious identities, 58 per cent of the children maintained the identity with which they grew up, and 42 per cent changed. Thus,

there was greater maintenance of identity when the parents shared their religious identity.

The 2018 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes also asked about the parents' frequency of religious attendance. Again, the theory of socialisation being stronger if the parents had similar levels of attendance is applicable. There were 301 cases in survey in which both parents were recorded as attending at least monthly. In these cases, 38 per cent of their children maintained their level of attendance, but 62 per cent reduced their attendance. There were 146 cases in which one parent went frequently but the other did not. In those cases, 33 per cent of the children maintained their attendance, but 67 per cent reduced their attendance.

Values also changed over that period as shown in Table 2. While most Australians continue to believe it is always wrong for a married person to have sexual relations outside of marriage, there has been a significant liberalisation in attitudes towards same-sex relations. In 2018, fewer people felt that abortion for economic reasons was wrong, and that roles in family should be associated with gender.

Table 2. Responses to Questions on Pro-Fertility Values in the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes 2009 and 2018. (Percentages)

	2009	2018
Always wrong for a married person to have sexual relations outside of marriage	65%	62%
Always wrong for sexual relations between two adults of the same sex	33%	23%
Always wrong for a woman to have an abortion if the family cannot afford more children	19%	14%
Agree that husband's role is to earn an income and the wife's role is to look after home and family	17%	12%

Source: Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2009) and (2018).

Tables 3 and 4 provides the responses to people about the two statements about the individual, meaning and religion.

Table 3. Percent of Australian Adults Agree or Disagree with the Statement that 'Life is meaningful if you provide the meaning yourself' by Frequency of Attendance of Religious Services and Identity as 'No Religion'

	Agree	Not sure / Cannot choose	Disagree	Signifi-cance
Monthly attenders	32	14	54	.000
Never attend	63	23	14	
Identify as 'no religion'	65	22	14	.000
Identify with a religion	49	21	30	
Total population	58	21	21	

Source: Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2018).

Table 3 shows that the majority of Australian adults (58%) considered meaning to be something that they must develop themselves as individuals. This was particularly true among those who never attend religious services (63%) and those who identify as having no religion (65%). It is notable that among those who attended religious services monthly or more often, many (32%) also considered meaning to be something that they had to develop themselves as individuals.

Table 4. Percent of Australian Adults Agree or Disagree with the Statement that 'I have my own way of connecting with God without churches or religious services' by Frequency of Attendance at Religious Services

	Agree	Not sure / Cannot choose	Disagree	Signifi-cance
Monthly attenders	38	18	44	.000
Never attend	29	31	40	
Identity as 'No Religion'	24	34	42	.000
Identify with a religion	59	19	22	
Total population	41	27	32	

Source: Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2018).

The responses to the statement about having one's own way of connection with God shows that many (38%) of those who attend religious services monthly or more often felt that they could connect with God without churches or religious services. Religious institutions were not necessary for their faith. Again, that points to a form of individualism among attenders. However, the question did not work for those who never attended religious services or for those who identified as having 'no religion'. A large portion of them disagreed with the statement, but not because they rejected

an individualised approach to God. Rather, they disagreed or could not choose an answer because they did not believe in God, and thus they could not connect with God, with or without religious services.

Table 5 describes the characteristics of the scales of rejection of beliefs, values and institution by whether respondents described themselves as having 'no religion' or not.

Table 5. Characteristics of Scales Measuring Rejection of Beliefs, Values and Religious Institutions

Scale	Minimum Maximum Score	Midpoint in scale	Mean for Monthly+ Attenders	Mean for Never Attend	Mean among 'No Religion' respondents	Mean among for those identifying	Significance of differences in means
Rejection of beliefs	5 - 22	13.5	6.4	17.6	18.3	10.3	.000
Rejection of values	4 – 17	10.5	8.0	12.8	12.9	10.2	.000
Lack of confidence in religious institutions	2 - 10	6	5.3	8.5	8.6	6.4	.000

Source: Australian Survey of Social Attitudes 2018.

There were statistically significant differences in the mean scores on all three scales between those who attended religious services

monthly or more often and those who never attended (with the F scores significant at greater than 99.999 per cent likelihood that the results were not a product of chance). The respondents who did attend religious services generally affirmed the religious beliefs, and, to some extent, the pro-fertility value statements, and expressed some confidence in religious institutions. Their mean scores were below the mid-point in the scale for beliefs, the value scale, and the scale of lack of confidence in religious institutions.

Similarly, there were differences at a similar level of significance (99.999 per cent likelihood that not a product of chance) between those who identified with a religion and those who did not, although the means were not as far apart as between those who attended and those who did not. Those who identified with a religious institution were over the mid-point in their lack of confidence in religious institutions.

Regression analysis allows us to bring these various scales and measures into one equation to see which of the scales and measures is most significant in predicting the change in identity from a religious identity to ‘no religion’ and as predicting people who have reduced their attendance from monthly to occasional or non-attendance of religious services. Regression analysis does not prove causality, but, by allowing us to look at all the variables in the one equation, it is indicative of what may be having an affect

and provides a measure of the relative weight and significance of each of these scales in relation to having no religion. In the follow equations, both variables are treated as binary. In other words, those who have dropped religious identity were defined as 1 while those have retained religious identity were defined as 0. Those who declined in their attendance were defined as 1, while those who maintained monthly attendance were defined as 0. Because these dependent variables are binary, logit regression is the appropriate form.

In these equations some demographic factors have been added in order to ensure that there is control of these factors. Thus, the equations have included the levels of education of the respondents, their age (as measured by the year of birth), whether the respondents are male (who are known to be more strongly represented among those who are no religion), and those who are overseas born (who are known to be more strongly represented in church attendance).

Table 6. Logit Regression on Changing Identity from Religious When Aged 11 to 'No Religion'.

Scale	Exp (B)	Significance
Rejection of religious beliefs	1.36	.000
Rejection of pro-	1.01	.896

fertility values		
Lack of confidence in religious institutions	1.82	.000
Must make meaning yourself	1.02	.860
Parents having different religious identity	1.33	.317
Education level	1.02	.689
Male	.911	.742
Year of birth	1.00	.840
Born overseas	.383	.005

Cox & Snell R squared for the model as a whole: .493

Table 7. Logit Regression on Decreased Attendances of Religious Services from Frequent Attendance When Aged 11

Scale	Exp (B)	Significance
Rejection of religious beliefs	1.53	.001
Rejection of pro-fertility values	1.16	.133
Lack of confidence in religious institutions	2.18	.003
Must make meaning yourself	1.59	.037
Parents with different religious identity	1.84	.470
Parents with different levels of attendance	1.91	.444
Education level	.830	.041
Male	.639	.778
Born overseas	.999	.999
Year of birth	.977	.096

Cox & Snell R squared for the model as a whole: .464

Tables 6 and 7 shows that the model as a whole is powerful in explaining associations with change in identity as ‘no religion’ and dropping out of attendances of religious services, accounting for a relatively high proportion of the variance. The Cox and Snell R squared statistic provides a measure of the goodness of fit for the totality of the factors, and, for this sort of model, a measure above .4 is considered relatively high. The Exp(B) refers to the exponential value of B which is a measure of the predicted change in odds for a unit increase in the predictor. Thus, values over 1 mean that for every unit in the scale being measured there is an increased expectation that there is a drop in identification or decline in attendance. Of the four items, the strongest in its association with changing identity to ‘no religion’, when all prediictor variables taken into account, was the lack of confidence in religious institutions with an Exp (B) score of 2.18. This lack of confidence was also the strongest factor in ceasing frequent attendance of religious services with an Exp (B) score of 1.82. In other words, the odds of a person who has no confidence in religious organisations ceasing to attend religious services and ceasing to identify with a religion were approximately twice the odds of a person who continued to have confidence in religious organisations.

Thus, the hypothesis is confirmed that the dropping of religious identity and the ceasing to attend religious services frequently is

most strongly associated with the lack of confidence in religious institutions. This rejection may occur because of the perceived failures of those institutions. One of the items in this scale is agreement with the statement that churches and religious organisations have too much power, the implication being that they have misused their power (Hughes, 2023).

The second strongest factor in ceasing to identify with a religious tradition is the rejection of religious beliefs. This was also a strong factor in ceasing to attend religious services. When people cease to hold the beliefs that are propounded by the religious institutions, there is a strong tendency to cease attending religious services and also to cease identifying with the religious tradition irrespective of the level of confidence in religious institutions.

While people who cease attending and who drop their religious identity reject the ‘sacred cosmos’ of the religious institutions, they do not necessarily lose all spiritual beliefs. Looking closely at belief in God, for example, 42 per cent of those who identified as no religion said they did not believe in God (the atheist position) and another 21 per cent said they did not know whether there was a God or not but did not believe there was a way to find out (the agnostic position). Another 23 per cent said they did not believe in a personal God but did believe in a higher power of some kind. However, 14 per cent said they did believe in God, at

least some of the time. Of those who identified with no religion, 30 per cent affirmed the statement “I don’t follow a religion, but I consider myself to be a spiritual person interested in the sacred or the supernatural”.

However, there was another strong factor in ceasing to attend religious services which was not significant in the change in identity. That was the affirmation that one must provide one’s own meaning. It seems likely that this factor is not important in ceasing to identify as there are many people who value the traditions and identify with them who hold that one must provide one’s own meaning, but it is a factor in ceasing to be involved in religious institutions.

The factor associated with the strength or weakness of socialisation as measured by whether the parents had similar or different religious identity appeared as a relatively strong factor. However, it did not achieve statistical significance. It was also a strong factor in ceasing to attend religious services, but again did not achieve statistical significance. This suggests that the strength of socialisation is a complex phenomenon that may well vary according to the extent to which children identify with their parents and the extent to which their own patterns of behaviour are supported by their peers.

The same applies to difference in the frequency of attendance among the parents. In relation to ceasing to attend religious services, this was a strong factor, second only to the lack of confidence in religious institutions. However, again, it did not achieve statistical significance, perhaps because of the variability in the outcomes of parents' attendance patterns in their children.

The other demographic variables were not strong. Significantly, those who had high levels of education were less likely to cease attending religious services than those with lower levels of education, but education made no difference to change in religious identity.

Being born overseas made it less likely that a person would cease to hold a religious identity, but it did not have any impact on ceasing to attend religious services. No other factors were significant: gender, age or where one was born. The rejection of religious beliefs and the lack of confidence in religious institutions were much more significant.

The third hypothesis, as proposed by Inglehart, was that people reject religion because of its values. This hypothesis was not supported significantly, either for ceasing to attend religious services or for changing one's identity from a religion to no religion. Close analysis suggests that one of the reasons it did not strongly predict whether people had 'no religion' or not is because

the differences in values between the ‘no religion’ group and others were not strong.

Table 8 looks at the responses to the specific items in the scale of pro-fertility values.

Table 8. Rejection of Religious Values by Adult Australians (Percent Affirming by Religious Identity and Religious Attendance (Monthly or More Often)

Affirmed as not wrong at all or wrong only sometimes	**Identify as No Religion**	**Identify with a Religion**	**Attend religious services monthly+**	**Never attend religious services**
Sex with people other than spouse	12%	5%	0%	12%
Sex between adults of the same sex	86%	52%	24%	84%
Having an abortion if cannot afford more children	90%	59%	25%	89%
Rejection of gendered roles in the home	74%	59%	48%	74%

Source: Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2018)

Table 8 shows that few people either among those who identified as no religion and among others accepted the idea of sex with a person other than one's spouse. For most people, whether they are religious or not, sexuality outside marriage is still unacceptable. Thus, there is little difference between the religious and non-religious.

The picture is different in relation to homosexuality. Most Australians identifying as 'no religion' affirmed sex between adults of the same sex as ***not*** wrong. Half of those identifying with a religion made the same affirmation. Similar patterns were present in relation to abortion. Abortion was affirmed as not wrong by more than half of those identifying with a religion.

On the other hand, attenders of religious services tended to have quite different attitudes on homosexuality and abortion. Indeed, almost half (48%) of all people holding that abortion is always wrong attended religious services frequently.

Gendered roles within the home are not accepted by most people who identify as having 'no religion', but also by the majority of those who identify with a religion. Half of all religious attenders see gendered roles in the home as unacceptable.

Overall, however, these pro-fertility values did not distinguish clearly those who had 'no religion' from those who identified with a religion. Many people who identified with a religion rejected the

traditional pro-fertility values. Indeed, some of the Christian churches, such as the Uniting Church, have not officially rejected same-sex marriages (although the Uniting Church has not officially affirmed same-sex marriages either) and have rejected the gendered roles both within the home and in the church.

Other research (Bohr and Hughes, 2021) has suggested that homosexuality, in particular, has been an issue which has led many people to leave the churches or cease identifying with a religion. For some people, this has been associated with the lack of tolerance in some churches for different lifestyles and for people finding personal fulfilment in their own patterns of relationships.

A more common issue is that of sex before marriage. Most people now live together before marriage. This remains unacceptable in many churches and can often become a catalyst for people moving out of the churches. However, this issue was not canvassed in this survey.

Discussion

The strongest factor in describing oneself as having ‘no religion’ is the lack of confidence in religious institutions and one part of this is the affirmation that religious institutions have too much power. Neither Luckmann nor Giddensforesaw the widespread moral

failures of some Christian churches in the sexual abuse of children being enacted by clergy and the attempted cover up. The abuse and cover up have undoubtedly had an impact on the levels of confidence in religious institutions in recent years beyond the rejection of tradition and the sense that meaning in life was something for which one was personally responsible.

However, the lack of confidence in religious institutions is not the only factor in moving to no religion. The results of the survey analysis showed that a separate and additional factor is the lack of acceptance of traditional beliefs in God, heaven, hell, life after death and miracles. There is widespread doubts about the whole ‘sacred cosmos’ among Australians. Most of those who have moved to ‘no religion’ no longer accept the details of that traditional ‘sacred cosmos’. Again, this is something that sociologists have been expecting for a long time. Luckmann and others have suggested that the ‘sacred cosmos’ was moved into the private sphere over the last couple of centuries. However, even in the private sphere, there was always the possibility that the conflict in views of the world between the religious and the scientific would come to a head and this is now occurring on a large scale in Australian society. Even at the personal level, the ‘sacred cosmos’ means little to most Australians. The rejection of belief is a strong factor for explaining the lack of attendance at religious services and is a little stronger at that level than with

ceasing to hold a religious identity. Some people still identify with a religious tradition, but do not attend religious services because they cannot accept the ‘sacred cosmos’ as the religions describe it.

Inglehart’s hypothesis that people are moving to no religion primarily because of the change in values from pro-fertility values to values of personal fulfilment is more weakly affirmed than the two other hypotheses. Nevertheless, it is significant apart from the rejection of religious beliefs and is even more significant in explaining why some people still attend religious services while other people do not. Many people who attend religious services maintain pro-fertility values rejecting homosexual relationships and abortion.

It remains possible that the clash in values, rather than beliefs, has been a major catalyst for people moving to no religion, as Inglehart has argued. Sex before marriage and same-sex relationships are acceptable in the wider culture, but not in most churches. As people move into such relationships, they move out of the churches and often out of identity with religion as a whole.

The 2021 Census data showed that 30 per cent of all people who identified as ‘no religion’ were in a a de facto relationship and 2.4 per cent were in a same-sex relationship (Hughes 2023, p.90). This compares with just 13 per cent in de facto relationships and

0.8 per cent in same-sex relationships among those who identified as Christian (Hughes 2023, p.50). The proportions were lower again among Hindus and Muslims. It is possible that people who have ‘no religion’ feel free to enter such relationships. It is also possible that entering such relations, they cease to identify with religious groups.

Longitudinal census data from 2006 and 2016 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2023) showed that between those years a little over 4 million Australians who identified as Christian in 2006 moved into a relationship in those ten years. Just 5 per cent moved into de facto relationship. Among those who did, 13 per cent moved from identifying themselves as Christian to identifying themselves as no religion. Among the vast majority who moved into a married relationship, just 5 per cent ceased to identify began to identify as no religion. Thus, while movement into de facto relationships may increase the likelihood of dropping religious identity, it does not appear to be a large factor.

There is strong support in the survey as a whole for the fact that most Australians believe they must put their own lives together reflexively, finding meaning for themselves. This factor did not quite reach statistical significance at the 95% confidence level in relation to identity as ‘no religion’ because there are many people who identify with a religious tradition who believe that they must put their lives together. They see religion as something they

choose rather than being a community into which they are born and which is given to them. On the other hand, it was significant in relation to lack of attendance. People who attend religious services were more likely to reject this idea, being ready to accept the meaning that the religious traditions offered to them.

Conclusion

Overall, the results suggest there is something of a progression in moving out of attendance and then moving out of identity with religion. People who cease to attend have generally ceased to accept the ‘sacred cosmos’ of their religion and the values. They also believe that they must make meaning for themselves.

In the 2021 Census, 54 per cent of Australians identified with a religion, even though only 14 per cent connected attend worship services monthly or more. Many Australians identify with a religious tradition although they are not involved. While they may not agree with all its teachings or values, these people still value the religious tradition in some way. However, this analysis suggests that the lack of confidence in religious institutions is a major factor in taking the further step of ceasing to identify and to say they have ‘no religion’.

Australians now live in a largely secularised culture where most people feel that they must find their own sense of meaning. Just

one person in seven connects frequently with a religious community. Just one in five people feel confident that there is a God. Just one person in three accepts what most religions condemn in same-sex relationships (Wikipedia).

There is no one explanation for the movement away from religion. There is support for all the theories examined in this paper. Support for the ‘sacred cosmos’ of religions has been eroded, both in terms of its beliefs and doctrines and its values. There is a widespread acceptance that people have to provide their own sense of meaning in life. And there is little confidence in religious institutions. There remains the issue of what is cause and what is effect. Do people cease to attend religious services because they reject the ‘sacred cosmos’, or does ceasing to attend lead them to reject the ‘sacred cosmos’? Probably there is an interaction which works both ways. This paper has not identified what are the primary catalysts for change.

From the perspective of ministry, this is indeed a worrying senario. There is no one solution to re-engaging people in ministry. There are two factors which are, at least partly, in the control of the religious institutions. The first is the levels of confidence in such institutions. While it is tempting for the religious institutions to look inward and seek to preserve the structures and the people who are still committed to them, confidence will only be built as they seek to serve the wider

community and do so without discrimination or judgement. The second is the strength of socialisation processes. Strong socialisation into a community which supports faith is more likely to lead to its continuity over generations, but it certainly does not guarantee it.

References:

ACSPRI (undated). The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes. (https://www.acspri.org.au/aussa accessed 1/8/2023)

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022) Marriages and Divorces, Australia, 2021. Australian Bureau of Statistics. (https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/marriages-and-divorces-australia/latest-release accessed 22/12/2023)

Bentley, Peter (2005) Marriages celebrated by religious rite in Australia: Over 30 years of decline, *Pointers*, 15(3).

Bohr, Mark, and Hughes, Philip (2021) Why Gen Y Are Leaving Hillsong and Other Pentecostal Churches *Journal of Contemporary Ministry 5*, 10–30.

Bouma, Gary D. and Dixon, Beverley R. (1986) *The Religious Factor in Australian Life*. MARC Australia.

Dixon, Robert (2023) Growing dissatisfaction: Mass attenders' attitudes to the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church. In Robert Dixon and Mary Eastman (Eds) *Encountering God: Practical Theology and the Mission to Heal*, Coventry Press. (pp.33-52).

Giddens, Anthony (1991). *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford University Press.

Giddens, Anthony (1994). *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics*. Stanford University Press.

Hennig, Linda and Gärtner, Christel (2023). Transformation of Religious Practice and Belief in Transmission in Germany. Unpublished paper delivered at the conference of the International Society for the Sociology of Religion, Taipei. 5th July 2023.

Hughes, Philip and Fraser, Margaret, and Reid, Stephen (2012) *Australia's Religious Communities: Facts and Figures*. Christian Research Association.

Hughes, Philip (2023) *Australia's Religious and Non-Religious Profiles: Analysis of the 2021 Census Data*. Christian Research Association.

Hughes, Philip (2023) Re-Building Confidence as a Prelude to Ministry. *Journal of Contemporary Ministry* 7, 7-30.

Inglehart, Ronald (2021). *Religion's Sudden Decline: What's Causing It, and What Comes Next?* Oxford University Press.

Kasselstrand, Isabella, Zuckerman, Phil and Cragun, Ryan T. (2023) *Beyond Doubt: The Secularisation of Society*. New York University Press.

Luckmann, Thomas (1967). *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society*. Macmillan Publishing.

Robinson, Geoffrey (2013) *For Christ's Sake: End Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church ... for Good*. Garratt Publishing.

Sullivan, Francis (2023) And now! Being Church after the Royal Commission. In Robert Dixon and Mary Eastman (Eds) *Encountering God: Practical Theology and the Mission to Heal*, Coventry Press. (pp.25-32).

Voas, David (2003) Intermarriage and the demography of secularization. *British Journal of Sociology*, *54(1)*, 83-108.

Voas, D. (2007). The continuing secular transition. In D. Pollack & D.V.A. Olson (Eds), *The role of religion in modern societies* (pp. 25-48). Routledge.

Wikipedia (undated), 'Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey'. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australian_Marriage_Law_Postal_Survey, accessed 1/8/2023)

Data Used

Note that all percentages and other calculations are the responsibility of the author of this paper.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023) Australian Census Longitudinal Dataset, 2006-2016. Accessed via TableBuilder: https://tablebuilder.abs.gov.au/webapi/jsf/tableView/tableView.xhtml.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021) 2021 Housing and Population Census. Accessed via TableBuilder: https://tablebuilder.abs.gov.au/webapi/jsf/tableView/tableView.xhtml

Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2009) was obtained from the Australian Social Science Data Archives: Evans, A. (2009). AuSSA_A_religiosity.sav (computer file), *The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes,* Australian Social Science Data Archives, The Australian National University, Canberra.

Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2018) was obtained from the Australian Social Science Data Archives: Evans, A. (2018). aussa2018wave1234-issp.sav (computer file), *The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes,* Australian Social Science Data Archives, The Australian National University, Canberra.

Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2021) was obtained from the Australian Social Science Data Archives: Evans, A. (2021). 2_AuSSA_2021_SPSS_100095_GENERAL.sav (computer file), *The*

Australian Survey of Social Attitudes, Australian Social Science Data Archives, The Australian National University, Canberra.

Journal of Contemporary Ministry

Peer Reviewed Articles

Why Churches Should Consider the Formation of Social Capital in the Design of their Welfare Programs

Fleur Creed

Contact: fleur.s.creed@gmail.com

PhD (Alphacrucis University College), MCouns (Christian Heritage College), Grad Dip (MIECAT), BSocSc (CHC), Dip Comm Serv (MH & AOD), Cert IV Comm Dev.

Fleur Creed has recently completed a PhD on the topic, 'Australian churches building social capital in their local communities'. The below article draws heavily on this thesis. She has worked and volunteered as a counsellor and support worker with marginalised groups for a number of years in both church and community settings. Fleur is currently attached to the University of Divinity through St Francis College in Brisbane.

Abstract

Christian churches have been known for their works of charity in the community over the centuries, and while government and

non-government organisations now perform many of these tasks, the local church still has a vital role to play in the well-being of the communities in which they exist. The framework of social capital is one which would be useful for churches to adopt in the planning of their activities, from the perspective that it measures the benefits: building trust and communities of mutual support, while not diminishing the recipient in the ways that either the distribution of charity or the provision of professional services can do. In research conducted in churches of several denominations, characteristics which were evident in the building of social capital included passionate leaders who were facilitators rather than doing everything themselves, encouraging others to become involved. These leaders (who may not formal leaders) need to have a vision for making a difference, and also, along with the church community, for creating something sustainable. A key factor is that both the leader and the volunteers involved should have a respect for all people, not just church members, as equals, made in the image of God, and a sense of trust in the community. Programs developed should bring people together and encourage people each other and promote an atmosphere of trust.

Key Words: Social capital, social welfare, communities, trust, congregations

Introduction

Many churches do valuable work in their local communities in the form of social welfare, alongside their core functions of worship, prayer, teaching and other spiritual activities. The change in perspective that is required from a short-term model of delivering charity to a longer-term view of holistic transformation, empowering individuals, families and communities to live fulfilling and meaningful lives supporting each other, is congruent with Christian beliefs and values. The concept of social capital can be a useful tool to change this perspective as churches seek to move from working in isolation to achieve their goals to developing networks of trust in their communities.

While it is also recognised that churches typically build social capital within congregations, this study focuses on the social capital built between congregations and their local communities.

Social Welfare

Churches are uniquely placed to deliver services in a distinctive fashion as they are informed by the teachings of Jesus Christ to be caring and compassionate to the disadvantaged and vulnerable (Ayton, Carey, Keleher & Smith, 2012; Davies-Kildea, 2007; Hugen & Venema, 2009; Judd, Robinson & Errington, 2012; Winkworth & Camilleri, 2004).

The Christian faith teaches the dignity and worth of every person, as well as creating a sense of community and belonging (Ayton et al, 2012; Mendes, 2003; Jeavons, 1992). Father Peter Norden, of Jesuit Social Services, gave expression to the distinctive characteristics of church-related welfare organisations when he stated:

> We are not just a welfare service; we are also a Christian ministry. So, we choose the young people we work with on the basis that they're most likely to fail, the most in need. You don't measure your success on numbers but what you're actually communicating to this person, a sense of care, respect and belonging (Norden 1993, cited in Howe & Howe, 2012, p.330; Gallet, 2016, p.27).

These same beliefs also inspire Christians to advocate for a fair and just society, including challenging social structures and political systems that disempower the poor and marginalised (Begent, 2014; Berthon & Hatfield Dodds 2004; Bouma, 2012; Cleary, 2012; Howe, 2002).

The traditional role of churches in creating a sense of belonging and building community has contributed to the development of social capital (Berger & Neuhaus, 1977; Cleary, 2012; Howe,

2002; Howe & Howe, 2012; Putnam, 2000b; Schneider, 2006). This involves subscribing to values and norms that separate them from business and the market (Cleary, 2012; Howe, 2002). (Gallet, 2016, p.28). In government-funded church programs, distinguishing features may include providing services that extend beyond the specific dictates of government or contract requirements to meet the particular needs of vulnerable individuals (Davies-Kildea 2007; Winkworth & Camilleri 2004). While businesses and governments acknowledge the role of social capital in healthy communities, and strive to create environments where it will flourish, churches have long provided a base for community involvement.

Social Capital

Several social commentators have pointed to the role of churches in creating a sense of belonging and building community that has contributed to the development of what is known as social capital (Howe, 2002; Putnam, 2000b; Schneider, 2006; Smidt, 2003). One of the experts in the field of social capital, Robert Putnam, (2000b, p.19) proposed that "the core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value". In his Saguaro Seminar speech, Putnam (2000a) stated that:

> Houses of worship build and sustain more social capital - and social capital of more

> varied forms - than any other type of institution…. Faith gives meaning to community service and good will, forging a spiritual connection between individual impulses and great public issues. That is, religion helps people to internalise an orientation to the public good. Because faith has such power to transform lives, faith-based programs can enjoy success where secular programs have failed.

Unruh and Sider argued that “congregational social capital can contribute to civic benefits in three main ways: i) by empowering corporate social action; ii) by encouraging social engagement by individual members; and iii) by facilitating the sharing of resources within and beyond the congregation’s relational network” (Unruh & Sider, 2005, p.219).

American political scientist, Corwin Smidt, concluded that the social capital generated by people in religious organisations may be distinguished from other forms of social capital in light of its:

1. Quantity: Social capital generated though religious means may exceed levels of social capital generated through other means in society;

2. Durability: Religious motivation based on values and commitment sustain efforts;

3. Range: Religiously inspired social capital reaches people across a wide variety of backgrounds, particularly including the marginalised and the voiceless;

4. Capacity to nourish social capital: Through its transcendent values they have an ability to foster norms of reciprocity more than secular sources (Smidt, 2003, pp.217-218).

While Smidt's conclusions are based on observations in the United States, where religion plays very different roles in relation to national identity and social welfare compared with religion in Australia, his suggestions form useful hypotheses when examining social capital in the Australian context.

What Is Social Capital?

While various theorists have developed their own models of social capital, a clear definition of the concept is that provided by Alejandro Portes in 1998, "Whereas economic capital is in people's bank accounts and human capital is inside their heads, social capital inheres in the structure of their relationships. To possess social capital, a person must be related to others, and it

is these others, not him (or her) self, who are the actual source of his or her advantage" (Portes, 1998, p.7).

A definition that may be useful for churches is that of Janine Nahapiet and Sumantra Ghoshal (1998). "The sum of the current and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit. Social capital thus comprises both the network and the assets that may be mobilised through that network."

Whichever definition is used, it should be recognised that the basic pre-requisite for social capital to occur is for social interaction to take place. Falk and Kilpatrick (2000, pp.20-21) concluded that:

> … a precondition to building social capital is the existence of *sufficient numbers* of interactions *of a particular quality*. Both quantity and quality of interactions therefore have a role in the development of social capital.

Characteristics of Social Capital

Recognised characteristics of social capital are trust, reciprocity, networks, shared norms, and social agency (Onyx & Bullen, 2000).

It is therefore both structural (social networks) and cultural (social norms and trust) (Hooghe & Stolle, 2003, pp.1-18; Coffe & Geys, 2006, pp.1053-1072). The first, and most essential characteristic of social capital, however, is *social exchange*. For social capital to be created, social exchange must occur.

Social Exchange or Reciprocity. Social exchange is a concept recognised in the disciplines of anthropology (Firth, 1967; Sahlins, [1972] 2017), social psychology (Gouldner, 1960; Homans, 1958; Thibault & Kelley, 1959) and sociology (Blau, 1964a). Theorists have agreed that social exchange involves a series of interactions that generate obligations (Emerson, 1976). It is simplified in Blau's definition, "Social exchange as here conceived is limited to actions that are contingent on rewarding reactions from others" (Blau, 1964b). Social Exchange Theory proposes that relationships evolve over time into "trusting, loyal, mutual commitments" when participants follow certain "rules of exchange" (Emerson, 1976, p.351).

The norm of reciprocity, relating to the balanced exchange of giving and taking, exists in all cultures (Leonard & Onyx, 2003, pp.5-6), and some evolutionary anthropologists have suggested that it may have very early origins, bred into the nature of human behaviour as necessary for the survival of the species (Klein, 2014, pp.73-92). Taylor (1982) described reciprocity as a combination of short-term altruism and long-term self-interest,

while Alexis de Toqueville (1835) called it “self-interest rightly understood”. In longer-lasting, closer relationships, these exchanges may be based on duty, whereas with weaker ties they may be based on empathy (Degenne, Lebaux & Lemel, 2004, p.47).

Anthropologist Marshall Sahlins (2017, pp.170-171) emphasised that reciprocity implied “action and reaction” between two parties, noting that reciprocity does not necessarily suggest balance, as in an “unconditional one-for-one exchange”, but rather encompasses a whole range of exchanges. *Generalised* reciprocity refers to the altruistic concern for others in which it is expected that if one does good to others, then others will do good to you, whereas *negative* reciprocity is the breakdown of effective exchange, including those characterised by the self-interest of those with greater power (Sahlins, 2017, pp.173, 175). *Balanced* reciprocity implies fair and equitable exchange and mutuality, including the currency of “everyday kinship, friendship and neighbourly relations” (Sahlins, 2017, pp.175-177; Reohr, 1991, p.50).

Political theorist Romand Coles rejected traditional Christian forms of generosity, suggesting that, when separated from reciprocity, they tend to lead “one-sidedly toward paternalism, arrogance, and varieties of imperialism” (Scott, 2017, p.127). Coles rather proposed an ethics of ‘receptive generosity’, motivated as much

by giving to others as by receiving from them (Coles, 1997, p.105). Thus, he suggested that the giver resist the notion of being a giver only, but be prepared to actively receive from the vulnerable other. Coles also proposed that receptive generosity "is a matter of actively cultivating the uncomfortable openness to the ways and thinking of others, cultivating receptivity to unlearning the privileges of historical power and the knowledge presumptions that go with it" (Scott, 2017, pp.127-128). Whatever the form of reciprocity, it is a characteristic of the social exchanges which constitute social capital.

Trust. A 'general level of trustworthiness' is necessary for all social capital networks. Putnam (2021), in fact, stated that the key component necessary for the creation of social capital is trustworthiness. Faith is required in the honesty and reliability of others to help overcome perceived risks (Buskens, 1999; Paxton, 1999, p.98). Sabel (1992, p.225) defined trust as "the mutual confidence that the other party to an exchange will not exploit one's vulnerabilities".

Trust is considered by some, including Coleman, to be a source of social capital, while theorists including Putnam, Fukuyama, and Narayan and Cassidy (2001), view it as a dimension. Uslaner distinguished between two forms of trust, that of generalised trust, relating more to morals and faith in others, and

particularised trust, based on specific information and experience of individuals (Uslaner, 1999, 2002; Patulny, 2004).

Putnam (2000b, pp.136-137) used the descriptors of ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ trust. Thick trust is the form embedded in dense networks of close personal family and friendship ties, known as bonding social capital, while thin trust exists in the loose ties of occasional contacts, and professional and acquaintance networks, generally referred to as bridging social capital (Williams, 1988, p.8). The thick trust found in bonding social capital is often generated by people of the same class or ethnic background, where the community is more homogeneous and exclusive, and able to exercise sanctions (Coleman, 1988, pp.105-108). Thin trust is evident in bridging social capital.

Anthony Giddens (1991, 1992, 1998) proposed that in pre-modern societies, trust resided in families, community, and religion built through personal interactions, whereas in modern societies, people often do not personally know the people with whom they interact, and they must place their trust in science and in expert systems. As he explained (1990, p.22), individuals may trust a friend to help out in times of difficulty based on past experience, but may also exhibit trust in those with technical accomplishments or professional expertise that the individual may lack. The Australian population has shown a marked lack of confidence in churches and religious organisations since

revelations of the extent of abuse of children in their care has been made public through the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2015-2017), and similarly with the Forgotten Australians Report (Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 2004), which focused on those who received institutional or out-of-home care as children, with many of the institutions in question having been run by religious organisations (Hughes, 2023).

Shared Norms. Both Putnam (1993) and Coleman (1988) referred to shared social norms as a characteristic of social capital. Social norms provide a form of informal social control whereby shared understandings exist for patterns of behaviour in a given social context. Serageldin and Grootaert (1997, p.13) proposed that social capital derives from “the social and political environment that enables norms to develop and shape’s social structure”. Shared values and norms develop over time, along with trust. Leonard and Onyx (2003, p.7) stated that “Shared norms may be assumed in bonding social capital. However, the wider the social distance bridged the greater the likelihood of a clash of norms”. In groups and organisations, shared values and norms serve a structural purpose, alleviating the need for more formal methods of control.

Types of Social Capital

Bridging capital creates relationships across social divisions, including those based on race, class, or religion. This bridging capital is essential in addressing social disadvantage, as it is rare that one bonding network can resolve the multiple needs that people may experience (Wuthnow, 2004, pp.57-61). Bridging capital requires a range of less dense networks than that of bonding capital (Lockhart, 2005, pp.46-47). Bridging social capital is less intense than bonding capital, with weaker ties and thinner trust, mostly occurring between those who come together for a common purpose for business, study, or common social interests. They may include friendships between work colleagues, in clubs and schools, and with casual acquaintances. Bridging relationships may develop into bonding relationships if enough trust and reciprocity develops (Hughes, Black, Kaldor, Bellamy & Castle, 2007, pp.64-65). In the words of Granovetter, “those to whom we are weakly tied are more likely to move in circles different from our own” (1973, p.1371). Some of the thinnest forms of social capital are in those acquaintances you occasionally see in public places such as shops, in professionals who provide a service, and in friends of friends who have areas of expertise. Putnam (2001, p.2) saw value in these ‘nodding acquaintances’, believing that they are more likely to assist in an emergency than a total stranger, therefore showing that social capital does exist.

Moreover, these networks provide a wide range of services and assistance as required.

Social capital also has a vertical dimension, as individuals are given opportunities to 'reach out' and be 'scaled up' (Uvin, 1995, pp.495-512). This vertical dimension is referred to as linkages. The capacity to leverage resources and information from formal institutions beyond the community is a key function of *linking* social capital, a concept developed by Woolcock (1998). Linkages are the relationships between people and the organisations and structures within the community. These organisations and structures provide both information on, and access to, products and services in the community. All individuals, but particularly disadvantaged members of the community and those in crisis, need access to these resources and may need assistance to form these linkages (Hughes et al, 2007, pp.83-84).

Different combinations of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital help people obtain the resources they need to succeed in life. What is effective in one community may be less effective in another situation or geographical location. Ethnic and religious groups, and members of poor communities may have strong bonding capital (De Souza Briggs, 1998, pp.177-221), but less access to bridging capital (Barr, 1998; Narayan, 1999). These groups may have little linking capital to enable them to negotiate access to institutions such as courts, banks, and insurance

agencies (Woolcock, 2001, pp.11-17). Newcomers to an area may have bridging capital, with many acquaintances, but poor bonding capital, often consisting of immediate family only.

Churches are facilitators of the three main types of social capital: bonding in the form of close networks based on strong or 'thick' ties such as family and friends, and in the case of churches, home groups, cell groups or teams who meet regularly; bridging in the form of inclusive networks based on weaker, 'thinner' ties with those either inside or outside the church, those of other denominations, religions, cultures, ages, social groups; and institutional or linking, in the form of collaborative networks between other churches, public institutions, and community groups (Putnam, 2000b; Grix, 2001; Patulny & Svendsen, 2007; Durston, 2008). Churches are therefore generators of all three types of social capital. It therefore follows that they cannot build this *full-scale* social capital without effective partnerships with other organisations in the local area (Cart, 2008).

Benefits Resulting from Increased Social Capital

Social capital is a concept that has been noted to have an impact in the following areas,

- public health (Coulthard, Walker & Morgan, 2001; Subramanian, Lochner & Kawachi, 2003),

- reduction in experiences of loneliness (Charles & Wolfer, 2018)
- improvements in mental health (Kawachi & Berkman, 2001)
- benefits to physical health (Song, Joonmo & Lin, 2010)
- improvements the social wellbeing and educational attainment of children and young people (Aldridge, Halpern & Fitzpatrick, 2002; Israel, Beaulieu & Hartless, 2001),
- increased employment opportunities and job progression (McDonald & Elder, 2006),
- reduced levels of crime (Halpern, 2001),
- improved government functioning (Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti, 1993),
- social and economic prosperity (Kawachi, Kennedy & Glass, 1999; Putnam, 1993), and
- more resilient communities in times of disaster (Nakagawa & Shaw, 2004).

Social capital is therefore of potential interest to churches as they seek to have an impact on the wellbeing of their communities.

Methodology

My recent PhD research investigated the social capital built in communities by local churches through their activities in those communities. In this qualitative research project, ten case study congregations were selected across several Christian denominations, including Anglican, Uniting, Baptist, Salvation Army, Churches of Christ, and Pentecostal churches of varying sizes, in urban and regional locations, across the three eastern states, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. These congregations were also chosen because they had differing forms of engagement with the wider community beyond their spiritual activities. Congregations were selected as a representation for generalisability, and also to ascertain the differences between the engagement of various faith traditions in different contexts.

Most of the activities conducted fell broadly within the definition of 'social welfare', including meals and services for the homeless, services for those experiencing family violence, food and meal provision for those living in hostels, drug and alcohol recovery groups, and support for families of those experiencing hospitalisation. Other activities included craft groups, community gardens, mentoring programs, and various other groups and classes. In each case, semi-structured interviews were conducted with paid staff, volunteers/church members, and, in some cases, users/guests. Observations were also recorded.

Data was transcribed, and through a process of reduction was encoded into themes which were then related to either the presence, or absence, of, the characteristics and types of social capital. This was a qualitative study, and while social capital was not measured, evidence of different types of social capital; bonding, bridging and linking, was noted.

This study was limited by the small number of congregations in the study, and by the absence of rural, Catholic and Orthodox churches. This research is also limited by the fact that it was a point-in-time study, so is not able to measure the long-term effects of the social capital created.

Findings

Church social welfare programs bring church members in contact with community members where bridging social capital may be built, as do many other formal and informal volunteering opportunities. The following activities were utilised in the case study congregations, and showed evidence of social capital, with the development of social exchange, levels of trust, some shared norms, and forms of civil participation.

Mentoring was one of the programs used by some churches, as a way of relating to individuals and/or families, building bridging social capital over time, with connections formed by regular

personal interaction between the mentor and mentee over an extended period of time. While there is an imbalance of power in the relationship, the nature of discipleship is such that it provides for ongoing reciprocity, whereby those who have been mentored may in turn, at some point, help or mentor others.

Missional Communities were common to several of the case studies, although in different forms. Each consisted of a core group of church members with a specific focus in the wider community, who prayed for, and organised the program or activities for that group. Examples included: families of children with additional needs, families of adoptive and foster children, home-schooling families, families of patients in Intensive Care, surfers, the lonely, and numerous others. These missional communities supported those in the wider community with a particular need, often provoked by those in the church with a similar need. In my research I found that each of the missional communities that I visited had been started because someone in the church had that need, and realised that others in the community would benefit from mutual support. This, therefore, met the criteria for building social capital, as there was much social exchange and reciprocity, in sharing experiences and mutual support, plus trust was built over regular meetings and sharing of experiences.

Small Groups and Courses were often used by the churches, some short-term, others ongoing. While short-term courses may provide opportunities for making contacts and learning new skills, such as budgeting or parenting, and sometimes leveraging linking capital, longer-term groups allow for bridging and potentially bonding capital to be created. An example of this was the craft group in one of the congregations, that had been meeting for several years. While new members continued to join, some had been present from the beginning. This group consisted of church and community members, people from Australia and other countries, able-bodied and disabled. It was welcoming to all. It was advertised as a craft group, so people could either bring their own craft, or the group worked on either items for a homelessness service at a nearby church, or items for indigenous children in out-of-home care. The members enjoyed a bring-and-share morning tea, and more conversation was often had than craft was done, according to the members. Members offered each other lifts to the group, met each other for coffee at other times, and supported each other outside group times. There was therefore evidence of social exchange and reciprocity, mutual trust and shared norms.

Shared Meals were a part of many, if not most of the activities, whether just refreshments at morning or afternoon tea, or a full meal. Churches are known for their fellowship, even just over a

cup of tea and a biscuit, and it cannot be underestimated how important this is for building connections. All of the case studies had some form of food involved in their activities. One of the Pentecostal churches had built a café onsite, which was not only used for social activities after church services and during the week, allowing church and community members to connect, but also as a place of training in hospitality for young people in the area. All of these are opportunities for building bridging social capital across the generations and across church and community, which was obviously occurring. This church also had a food mart, where locals with limited means could purchase cheap groceries. This also gave the opportunity for church volunteers to interact with members of the community whom they otherwise may not, such as those recently released from jail, those who have lost children to Child Services, or those experiencing severe mental illness. These are real experiences of building bridging social capital with others unlike ourselves.

Similarly, two of the case studies, located in different states, had homelessness services, both offering hot meals during the day. One also offered a take-away sandwich and a piece of fruit for the evening meal. For the homeless, these meals were more than just food, as they made comments regarding being pleased to see the familiar faces of the volunteers. Social capital was present in these places as it was not uncommon for those who did find

accommodation to come back and help out as volunteers. One of the churches made extra efforts to treat the people well, calling them ‘guests’ rather than clients, and this was reciprocated, as these guests ensured there was never any swearing or trouble, and they also helped to clean up.

Leadership, whether formal or informal, was key to the formation of social capital in each of the churches. In each place or activity, one person was identified as a motivator, or broker of social capital, and this was not necessarily the team leader or ordained person, but a person whose personality or connections enabled bridging capital to be built. In the craft group mentioned above, it was revealed that one woman, a retired clergy wife, had invited most of the members of the group, including those from the church, some from her exercise class, her neighbours, and anyone else that she thought might need a friend.

In another case, at one of the homeless centres that had been running for 30+ years, one woman had been a volunteer from the church when they first started providing hot meals for the homeless. She continued to volunteer, but as the congregation aged, and church volunteers dwindled, she started inviting her friends from outside the church to help, and now many of the volunteers participate as a result of her invitation.

The missional communities epitomise this concept, with someone experiencing a need, and having the passion to act and bring others on board to help others with the same need.

Sometimes the person may be the ordained leader who has the vision, the motivation and the individual social capital to enact successful activities and programs connecting others with resources, and the leadership skills to encourage others to participate. One of the ordained leaders in the study was also an Emergency Services chaplain, and when severe flooding was experienced in the area, he was able to coordinate goods for those who needed them due to his connections.

Another leader of one of the case study congregations was passionate about the marginalised and provided meals to hostels in the inner-city area, with a weekly meal and clothing give-away in his church. He also offered addiction-recovery and domestic violence courses, and offered a street outreach into a local park with a barbecue on a weekly basis. This pastor also regularly spoke on Christian radio, so had connections to support with courses and related professionals where necessary. This pastor was able to use his own social capital for the benefit of his extended congregation.

Facilities are something that many churches have in communities, and they are often located centrally, especially in

regional areas. In the past they may have been the hub of social life, with parish halls hosting debutante balls, fêtes, flower shows, and many other occasions. They may still be used by the local community when rented out by community groups. This can be a way of building social capital with the wider community. In other cases, these halls have been remodelled to be used by the church as cafés, counselling centres, op-shops or homeless day centres. All of these options provide opportunities for the church to build social capital with members of the wider community.

Discussion

The research found that themes in the study of congregations used by Carroll, Dudley and McKinney (1986) of programs, processes, social context and identity were significant in the creation of social capital.

Programs

When congregation members see their mission to relate equitably to others, rather than offering charity or doing good works, connecting with others and learning about their lives, they offer the foundation for social capital to be created. Social welfare in its many and varied forms is usually productive of bridging social capital, or sometimes linking capital, as community or church

members are assisted in their linkages with professionals to achieve their needs and goals.

Some activities appear to be particularly beneficial in the building of social capital, especially those which included the sharing of meals or refreshments. Longer-term programs which enabled relationships to be built were also more likely to result in the formation of social capital, as trust was formed over time in same interest small groups, or in on-going services.

Processes

Certain factors relating to processes were relevant to the creation of social capital. Churches are voluntary communities comprised of people of different ages and backgrounds, with varying knowledge and skills, who come together regularly and have a common reason to help others.

An important aspect of churches is that they are predominantly a voluntary community who assemble regularly, and are able to adapt to the needs of their local community. Many have skills and knowledge from past or present employment, or other life-skills they can utilise for the benefit of the community. The church community comprises people of different ages, genders, educational backgrounds and often ethnicities, who may work, socialise or study in the local community. The church is one of the

few organisations that is comprised of this diversity, and it is also a self-replenishing organisation, with many of the churches in this study (and their programs) having existed for decades in their present location.

Leadership, both formal and informal, is an important aspect for churches creating social capital in their local communities. If leadership is averse to the idea of building connections and meaningful relationships with individuals and organisations in the wider community, they will not create opportunities for the congregation to do so, nor will they preach with this attitude in their messages. Leaders who themselves have social capital, as in the case of the clergyperson who was an Emergency Services Chaplain, or the former clergy wife who invited neighbours and others to the craft group, are well-placed to assist others as brokers in building social capital. These leaders needed to have passion for people and for seeing lives changed and transformed.

Other factors related to the frequency and duration of interactions. For social capital to be built, the ideal situation appears to be multiple, dense, regular interactions. People who meet occasionally, for short periods of time will likely have much weaker ties than those who meet frequently, for longer periods of time, and in differing situations, known as multiplexity, giving greater opportunity for trust to be built, and occasions of reciprocity to occur.

Social Context

Many local churches have existed in Australia for decades in their current locations, providing an anchor for their local communities. The one feature which is true of all the case study churches, and all congregations is that they are uniquely self-replenishing. Churches have a sustainability and longevity that other community organisations do not. Some churches have existed in their current locations in Australia for 100 years, some for 150, and many for several decades. Where other organisations may change with government funding cycles, churches can maintain their programs with their volunteers sourced from their members. Many churches also welcome community volunteers to assist in their programs, providing greater opportunities for sustainability of activities, and increased opportunities for developing bridging capital across diverse groups.

Churches are unusual in their intergenerational nature, often providing activities for specific groups, alongside communal services where all ages interact. Many churches are involved in providing programs for the aged and for young children, and in some cases encourage interaction between the two, which has been found to be beneficial to both. This situation also applies to people from different racial educational and socio-economic backgrounds. While it could be said that most churches cater for a specific racial and social demographic, this does not apply to all

congregations, and many enjoy interactions with people very different from themselves. One volunteer suggested that she enjoyed meeting and talking to people from other cultures to learn about other places and ways of life that she had not experienced.

Identity

Those with shared beliefs such as Christians in church congregations may build social capital in their church activities, but they also share common norms and beliefs about life and other issues with people in the wider community which provides common ground for social capital. Church volunteers may volunteer because of their belief that it is right to “Love your neighbour”, or because they believe that “If you help the least of these, you will help me”, or because of the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37.

Community volunteers may have different motivations, including maintaining or learning new skills, wanting to help the less fortunate now they are retired, or even to fulfil obligations to receive government payments.

Whatever the reason, when church and community volunteers work alongside each other, they also build social capital, bridging the differences of faith and perhaps lack thereof, forming a

greater understanding of each other's perspective. As long as the mission of the organisation is clearly articulated to prospective volunteers, and to those seeking assistance, every opportunity for connection between the church and members of the community can be a chance to build social capital and thus strengthen the community.

Conclusion

While churches may differ in their theology and programs, common factors that pertain to success in creating social capital have been identified as:

- A vision for making a difference to the community in the founding leaders or those initiating programs and activities,
- A desire among the leaders and the church community to create something that was sustainable rather than simply provide some immediate solutions to a present problem,
- A sense that leaders should be facilitators and not do it all themselves, especially utilising lay members of the congregation to facilitate the work, and some effective ways of engaging other people to work with them in their programs and activities,
- A deep respect for all people as equals, not just a regard for other church members.

- A sense of trust in the community; that they could ultimately serve each other and together begin to address the needs that the church was trying to address,
- Programs in which people are brought together and encouraged to help each other such as those described above, and
- An atmosphere in which trust is encouraged for volunteers with guests and among the guests themselves.

These then are the significant factors in the effective creation of social capital by churches identified in this study. While some of the factors are structural: having effective leadership that is visionary and facilitative, and which creates ways of engaging other people in appropriate programs and activities, other factors have to do with the ways people see others and seek to relate to them: the presence of trust in the church and beyond the church to people in the community, and a trust that people will begin to reciprocate with each other.

It is important that churches have a theology that respects and trusts people beyond the churches, believing that people can support each other and address their own needs. This is important as the role of the church is not to meet every need itself, nor does it have the capacity to do so. These churches facilitate the community to develop those capacities and also trust the capabilities of other organisations within the community. This

comes out of a theology that believes God is present in the world beyond the church and which seeks to recognise the presence of God in the world. In conclusion, I suggest that churches have a substantial capacity to make an impact on their local communities through the social capital they generate. They are able to bring people together across social and cultural boundaries in ways that other organisations cannot. Unlike schools, for example, they include people of all ages. Unlike sporting clubs, they include both younger and older people, those in good health and those in poor health. Unlike many organisations, they include people across the social and educational spectrums. As organisations with a deep commitment to ‘love their neighbours’ churches are well-placed to create social capital. The case studies in this research have demonstrated how successful churches can be at this, confirming Putnam’s insight.Churches not only provide spiritual care and necessary welfare programs in addition to those provided by government, community and private services, but also offer a relatively stable network of connections with an organisation offering opportunities for bonding capital for sharing, including close interpersonal trust and support, bridging capital with others who are different and can help access information and resources, and linking capital to meet others in positions of power who can help achieve goals and improve life circumstances.

Most churches are resilient, sustainable organisations, located in local communities, knowledgeable about those communities as their members are also part of those communities, living, working, studying, shopping and attending recreational activities in them. When community members use the resources of local churches, attending parenting or budgeting courses, craft groups, men's sheds or community gardens, they not only learn new skills or help teach others and make new friends, but also build social capital within the local community. Similarly, volunteering at, or attending a church homelessness centre, is more than the act of cooking, serving, or, for the homeless, eating a meal. The regular interactions between volunteers from the church, members of the wider community and those who come for a meal guard against loneliness and provide positive outcomes for all involved. The value of these reciprocal interactions of sharing time cannot be underestimated as contributors to social capital in today's society.

Local churches have the greatest resource of all in congregations of people motivated by their Christian faith, recognised by some as spiritual capital, to reach out to others, especially those who are in need, or who are in some way marginalised by society. While some faith traditions are in high tension with the world, in reality leaders of individual churches are guided by their own Christian faith. Many choose to be active in the world, following the example of the Good Samaritan, offering compassion and care

for people in their communities irrespective of race, social status or creed, and encouraging their congregations to do the same. Using the insights of research on social capital can enhance the capacity of churches to have a positive impact on changing the world around them for the better, starting with their local communities.

References

Aldridge, S., Halpern, D., & Fitzpatrick, S. (2002). *Social capital: A discussion paper* [Online]. Performance and Innovation Unit. http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/strategy/~/media/assets/www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/strategy/socialcapital%20pdf.ashx>

Ayton, D., Carey, G., Keleher, H., & Smith, B. (2012). Historical overview of church involvement in health and wellbeing in Australia: Implications for health promotion partnerships. *Australian Journal of Primary Health, 18*, 4-10.

Begent, J. (2014). The Salvation Army and Social Commitment, in J. D'Arcy May (ed.), *Social Justice and the Churches: Challenges and Responsibilities.* ATF Press.

Berger, P.L. & Neuhaus, R.J. (1977). *To Empower People: The Role of Mediating Structures in Public Policy*. American Enterprise Institute.

Blau, P. M. (1964a). Justice in social exchange. *Sociological Inquiry*, *34*(2), 193–206.

Blau, P. M. (1964b). *Exchange and power in social life*. John Wiley.

Bouma, G. (2012). Religious diversity and social policy. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, *47*(3).

Buskens, V. (1999). *Social networks and trust Utrecht*. Interuniversity Center for Social Science Theory and Methodology.

Carroll, J. W., Dudley, C. S., & McKinney, W. (1986). *Handbook for congregational studies*. Abingdon Press.

Cart, M. (2008). America's front porch: The public library. *Public Library Quarterly*, *21*(1), 3–21.

Charles, V. A., & Wolfer, T. A. (2018). Loneliness and congregational social work. *Social Work & Christianity*, *45*(1), 8–23.

Cleary, R. (2012). *Reclaiming welfare for mission: Choices for churches.* Barton Books.

Coffé, H., & Geys, B. (2006). Community heterogeneity: A burden for the creation of social capital? *Social Science Quarterly*, *87*(5), 1053–1072. http://www.jstor.org/stable/42956594

Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, *94*(S), 5–120.

Coles, R. (1997). *Rethinking generosity: Critical theory and the politics of caritas.* Cornell University Press.

Coulthard, M., Walker, A., & Morgan, A. (2001). *Assessing people's perceptions of their neighbourhood and community involvement (Part 1): A guide to questions for use in the measurement of social capital based on the General Household Survey Module.* Health Development Agency.

Creed, F.S. (2022). (Unpublished PhD thesis). *The church as a place for connection: Building social capital across social and cultural boundaries in Australian communities.* Alphacrucis University College.

Davies-Kildea, J. (2007). *Faith in Action: A study of holistic models of care for highly disadvantaged people which have been established in faith-based communities.* The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust and The Salvation Army Melbourne.

Degenne, A., Lebeaux, M. O., & Lemel, Y. (2004). Does social capital offset social and economic inequalities?. Creation and Returns of Social Capital, 9, 38. In H. Flap & B. Volker (Eds.), *Creation and Returns of Social Capital* (pp. 38–57). Routledge.

De Souza Briggs, X. (1998). Brown kids in white suburbs: Housing mobility and the many faces of social capital. *Housing Policy Debate*, *9*(1), 177–221.

de Tocqueville, A. (1835). *Democracy in America.* University of Chicago Press.

Durston, J. (2008). *The emergence of an indigenous social actor in Southern Chile: Mapuche social capital and a contentious social movement in La Araucanía.* (LILAS). University of Texas.

Emerson, R. M. (1976). Social exchange theory. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *2*(1), 335–362.

Falk, I., & Kilpatrick, S. (2000). What is social capital? A study of interaction in a rural community. *Sociologia Ruralis*, *40*(1), 87–110.

Firth, R. (1967). *Themes in economic anthropology*. Tavistock.

Gallet, W. (2016). *Christian mission or an unholy alliance? The changing role of church-related organisations in welfare-to-work service delivery*. Unpublished PhD thesis. University of Melbourne.

Giddens, A. (1998). *The third way*. Polity.

Giddens, A. (1992). *The transformation of intimacy*. Polity.

Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity*. Polity.

Giddens, A. (1990). *The consequences of modernity*. Stanford University Press.

Gouldner, A. W. (1960). The norm of reciprocity: A preliminary statement. *American Sociological Review*, *25*, 161–178.

Granovetter, M. S. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, *78*, 1360–1380.

Halpern, D. (2001). Moral values, social trust and inequality: Can values explain crime? *British Journal of Criminology*, *41*, 236–252.

Homans, G. C. (1958). Social behavior as exchange. *American Journal of Sociology*, *63*, 597–606.

Hooghe, M., & Stolle, D. (2003). Introduction: Generating social capital. In M. Hooghe & D. Stolle (Eds.), *Generating Social Capital. Civil Society and Institutions in Comparative Perspective* (pp. 1–18). Palgrave Macmillan.

Howe, B. (2002) The Church and Markets. In A Nichols & M Postma (Eds.). *The Church and the Free Market: Dilemmas in Church Welfare Agencies Accepting Contracts from Government*. Melbourne, Vic.: Victorian Council of Churches.

Howe, B. & Howe, R. (2012). The influence of faith-based organisations on Australian social policy. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, *47*(3). 319-333.

Hugen, B. & Venema, R. (2009) The difference of faith: The influence of faith in human service programs. *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*, *28*(4), 405-429.

Hughes (2023) Re-building confidence as a prelude to ministry. *Journal of Contemporary Ministry,* 7, pp.7-30.

Hughes, P., Black, A., Kaldor, P., Bellamy, J., & Castle, K. (2007). *Building stronger communities*. UNSW Press.

Israel, G., Beaulieu, L., & Hartless, G. (2001). The influence of family and community social capital on educational achievement. *Rural Sociology*, *66*, 43–68.

Jeavons, T.H. (1992). When the management is the message: Relating values to management practice in nonprofit organizations. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership, 2*(4), 403-417.

Judd, S., Robinson, A., & Errington, F. (2012). *Driven by purpose: Charities that make a difference.* Greenwich, NSW: Hammond Press.

Kawachi, I., & Berkman, L. F. (2001). Social ties and mental health. *Journal of Urban Health*, *78*, 458–467.

Kawachi, I., Kennedy, B., & Glass, R. (1999). Social capital and self-rated health: A contextual analysis. *American Journal of Public Health*, *89*, 1187–1193.

Klein, S. (2014). *Survival of the nicest: How altruism made us human. and why it pays to get along*. Scribe.

Leonard, R., & Onyx. (2003). Networking Through Loose and Strong Ties: An Australian Qualitative Study. *Voluntas*, *14*(2), 191–205.

Lockhart, W. H. (2005). Building bridges and bonds: Generating social capital in secular and faith-based poverty-to-work programs. *Sociology of Religion*, *66*(1), 45–60. https://search.proquest.com/docview/216772422?accountid=44543

McDonald, S., & Elder Jr, G. H. (2006). When does social capital matter? Non-searching for jobs across the life course. *Social Forces*, *85*(1), 521–549.

Mendes, P. (2003). *Australia's Welfare Wars: The Players, The Politics and The Ideologies*. Sydney, NSW: University of New South Wales Press.

Nahapiet, J., & Ghoshal, S. (1998). Social capital, intellectual capital, and the organization advantage. *Academy of Management Review*, *23*, 242–266.

Nakagawa, Y., & Shaw, R. (2004). Social capital: A missing link to disaster recovery. *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*, *22*(1), 5–34.

Onyx, J., & Bullen, P. (2000). Measuring social capital in five communities. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, *36*(1), 23–42.

Patulny, R. (2004). *Social capital and welfare: Dependency or division? Examining bridging trends by welfare regime, 1981 to 2000* (Discussion Paper No. 138). Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales.

Paxton, P. (1999). Is social capital declining in the United States? A multiple indicator assessment. *American Journal of Sociology*, *105*(1), 88–127.

Portes, A. (1998). Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology, 24*(1), 1-25.

Putnam, R. D. (2021, May 21). *A reflection on 30 years of social capital research. YouTube.* [Zoom seminar]. Social Capital Research Group Webinar. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FwGdRNvlWnA

Putnam, R. (2001). Social capital: Measurement and consequences. *Canadian Journal of Policy Research*, *2*(1), 41–51.

Putnam, R. D. (2000a). *Better Together* [Saguaro Seminar on Civic Engagement in America]. John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

Putnam, R. D. (2000b). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community.* Simon and Schuster.

Putnam, R. D. (1993). The prosperous community. *The American Prospect*, *4*(13), 35–42.

Putnam, R. D., Leonardi, R., & Nanetti, R. Y. (1993). *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton University Press.

Reohr, J. R. (1991). *Friendship: An exploration of structure and process*. Garland.

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2015-2017). *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse Final Report* https://www.royalcommission.gov.au/child-abuse/final-report

Sabel, C. F. (1992). Studied trust: Building new forms of co-operation in a volatile economy. In F. Pyke & W. Sengenberger (Eds.), *Industrial District and Local Economic Regeneration* (pp. 215–250). International Institute for Labour Studies.

Sahlins, M. (2017). *Stone Age economics*. Routledge Classics.

Schneider, J. (2006). *Social Capital and Welfare Reform*. Columbia University Press.

Scott, D. (2017). *Stuart Hall's Voice: Intimations of an Ethics of Receptive Generosity*. Duke University Press.

Senate Community Affairs References Committee. (2004). *Forgotten Australians: A report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children*. Commonwealth of Australia. https://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/senate/community_affairs/completed_inquiries/2004-07/inst_care/report/index

Serageldin, I., & Grootaert, C. (1997). *Defining social capital integrating the economist's and the sociologist's perspective*. The World Bank.

Smidt, C. E. (2003). *Religion as social capital: Producing the common good.* Baylor University Press.

Song, L., Joonmo, S., & Lin, N. (2010). Social capital and health. In W. C. Cockerham (Ed.), *The New Companion to Medical Sociology* (pp. 184–210). Wiley-Blackwell.

Subramanian, S., Lochner, K., & Kawachi, I. (2003). Neighborhood differences in social capital: a compositional artifact or a contextual construct?. *Health & Place*, *9*(1), 33–44.

Taylor, M. (1982). *Community anarchy and liberty*. Cambridge University Press.

Thibault, J. W., & Kelley, H. H. (1959). *The social psychology of groups*. John Wiley.

Unruh, H.R., S., R. J. (2005). *Saving souls, serving society: Understanding the faith factor in church-based social ministry*. Oxford University Press.

Uslaner, E. M. (2002). *The Moral Foundation of Trust*. Cambridge University Press.

Uslaner, E. M. (1999). Trust but verify: Social capital and moral behavior. *Social Science Information*, *38*, 29–56. http://www.bsos.umd.edu/gvpt/uslaner/working.htm

Uvin, P. (1995). Scaling up the grass roots and scaling down the summit: the relations between Third World nongovernmental organisations and the United Nations. *Third World Quarterly*, *16*(3), 495–512.

Williams, B. (1988). Formal structures and social reality. In D. Gambetta (Ed.), *Trust: Making and breaking cooperative relations*. Basil Blackwell.

Winkworth, G. & Camilleri, P. (2004). Keeping the faith: The impact of human services restructuring on Catholic social welfare services. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, *39*(3), 315-328.

Woolcock, M. (2001). The place of social capital in understanding social and economic outcomes. *Canadian Journal of Policy Research*, *2*(1), 11–17.

Woolcock, M. (1998). Social capital and economic development: Toward a theoretical synthesis and policy framework. *Theory and Society*, *27*(2), 151–208.

Wuthnow, R. (2004). *Saving America?: Faith-based services and the future of civil society*. Princeton University Press.

Journal of Contemporary Ministry

Peer Reviewed Articles

Ministry on Their Turf: The Roles and Functions of Christian Sports Chaplains in Contemporary Australian Society

Stephen Reid

S.Reid@cra.org.au

Dr Stephen Reid is currently the Senior Research Officer with the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference National Centre for Pastoral Research and the Research Coordinator with the Christian Research Association, where he has worked concurrently since 2007. His doctoral studies investigated the roles and functions of Christian sports chaplains in Australia. He holds additional qualifications in Theology and Applied Social Research. Stephen is an Honorary Research Fellow with Australian Catholic University and with Sports Chaplaincy Australia. He has been married to Jane for 26 years and they have three children aged 23, 20 and 18.

Abstract

While the Australian population has a passionate obsession with sport, there continues to be a significant decline in religious activities and beliefs, as well as negatively changing attitudes towards Christianity. However, over recent years, there has been an increased demand from sporting clubs for Christian chaplains.

Using a mixed methods research approach involving case studies, interviews and surveys, this research explored what clubs seek in the roles and functions of Christian sports chaplains in contemporary Australian society, and how chaplaincy is perceived by the chaplains themselves and by church members. It gathered qualitative and quantitative information about how effective chaplains were in their various roles.

Four major dimensions to a sports chaplain's role were identified. The chaplains saw themselves as involved in the mission of God and the ministry of the churches, expressed primarily through caring for individuals and contributing to the clubs by building morale and culture. For sporting clubs, the care for individuals and building of team morale were of paramount importance. Through these roles, sports chaplains are seen to be highly effective, and are providing a genuine connection between the secular world of sport and spirituality.

Introduction

It is often stated that sport plays a significant role in Australian society and its historical and continuing influence cannot be understated. Though large in geographical size yet relatively small in population, Australia has ‘punched above its weight’ on the international sporting stage (Toohey & Taylor, 2009, p. 387). While Australian’s indigenous population has inhabited the country for tens of thousands of years, Australia as a federated nation is relatively young. However, though young, sport has long played a role in shaping the Australian psyche. As Tyndall has noted, there was a national cricket team before Australia even became a federation (Tyndall, 2004, p. 91), and Australia’s involvement in the modern Olympic Games pre-dates its proclamation as a Commonwealth nation (Howell & Howell, 1988, pp. 5–12).

Juxtaposed against the population’s passionate involvement in sport, recent Australian social indicators provide evidence that Christian identification and practices are in decline. Many Australians who once identified as ‘Christian’ no longer do so and most of those now claim to have ‘no religion’ (Hughes, 2017; Hughes et al., 2012, pp. 5–7). Trust in churches and in Christian institutes more broadly is waning (Reid, 2020b). Regular and occasional church attendance across many Christian denominations has been in decline for some years (Dantis et al.,

2020; Powell et al., 2018, p. 5; Reid, 2020a). For many Australians today, Christian churches are seen to be irrelevant, outdated, and "out of step with the pluralistic post-modernists who believe they are in control of a destiny of their own choosing" (Stewart, 2012, p. 10).

However, in contrast to evident decline in Christian identification and church attendance amongst Australians, the demand for Christian chaplaincy in various settings has seen a steady increase in recent years. One such form of chaplaincy which has seen significant growth in demand in Australia is sports chaplaincy. In Australia, more than 500 honorary sports chaplains are now represented in a wide array of sports and leisure activities, and at all levels, from grass-roots local sporting clubs to semi-professional teams, to state and national institutes, to fully professional national sporting clubs (Butler & Mitaxa, 2016). Indeed, sports chaplaincy can now arguably be seen as a growing phenomenon not just in Australia but in various parts of the world (Parker & Watson, 2014, pp. 74–76; Weir, 2016, pp. 1–2).

One may well ask, as Slater has of chaplaincy in the United Kingdom (Slater, 2012, pp. 307–308), what is it about the current religious and social climate in Australia which appears to be rejecting many aspects of organised Christianity, but is open to the often unstructured role of a Christian chaplain – in this context a sports chaplain? In Australia, the demand for chaplains to

sporting clubs has been strong, prompting one to ask why are those sporting clubs calling out for Christian chaplains while so many local churches are witnessing a decline in involvement? What is it about the ministry of sports chaplaincy – a Christian ministry which most commonly takes place beyond the 'four walls' of a local church building – that is so compelling for people in mainly quite secular sporting clubs? And why is there such demand at a time when identification of and involvement in Christian practices is in such decline?

Certainly, only just a few decades ago, it was not uncommon to see many church teams playing in local sporting leagues, while there were also many Christian sporting associations, usually made up of individuals connected with local church communities. However, although many church sporting clubs still exist, the role of the local church in sport has much diminished. Has this decline of church involvement in sport meant that chaplaincy to secular clubs has become more relevant? Or, relatedly, is sports chaplaincy one successful undertaking the churches have embarked on due to an ever-increasing secular society?

With those broader questions in mind, this research project principally sought to identify the roles and functions of Christian sports chaplains in contemporary Australian society as chaplains, church members, sporting club administrators and sporting club

members perceive them. It asked how effective Christian sports chaplains are seen to be in those roles and functions.

Understanding sports chaplaincy

In order to examine the ministry and mission of sports chaplaincy, one must explore further the definitional understanding of chaplaincy and how it relates to sport. That is, how can one, with an underlying theological basis, clearly define what a sports chaplain is and does in relationship to the mission of the church? Such an exploration is important if one is to investigate a theological framework in which sports chaplaincy works.

Theologically, Steddon described chaplaincy as “guest” theology in contrast to “host” theology. According to Steddon, guest theology asks, “Please may I come to your place and be part of what you do?”, while host theology says, “Come to our place and do as we do” (Steddon, 2010, pp. 11–12). Steddon’s description as it relates to sports chaplaincy provides a firm contention that doing theology in the world of sport must always be invitational.

Waller et al. succinctly defined the sports chaplain as “a lay or ordained member of the clergy who provides spiritual care for athletes” (2010, p. 17). This definition may be an accurate account within the United States sports chaplaincy context, in which Waller et al. wrote, but it is far from extensive enough for

the Australian context and omits many of the complexities of chaplaincy.

The Global Sports Chaplaincy Association, a movement of sports ministries and sports chaplaincy associations from around the world, provided a succinct definition: “Sports Chaplaincy is the provision of ongoing pastoral and spiritual care, by permission, to those of faith or no faith, for the holistic well-being of all involved in the community of sport” (Global Sports Chaplaincy Association, 2021). However, the succinctness in this definition does leave many questions unanswered. Is sports chaplaincy solely about the provision of care? Who is responsible for giving and receiving permission for a chaplain to be involved? What is ‘holistic well-being’?

Rather than discussing a definition for sports chaplaincy, Weir simply placed sports chaplaincy in its rather youthful historical setting by acknowledging the well-established Christian ministries of hospital, military and prison chaplaincy, and suggested that sports chaplaincy developed by adopting and adapting approaches used by these church ministries, often by trial and error, until they found what worked (Weir, 2016, pp. 9–18). Furthermore, the model of sports chaplaincy in Australia was based on industrial and hospital chaplaincy, in which the early founders of sports chaplaincy in Australia, Tronson and Tyndall, were heavily involved; Tronson at the Shell Oil refinery and Tyndall

as a hospital chaplain (D. Tyndall, personal communication, November 12, 2021).

Holm (2009) provided a general, but nonetheless quite helpful, definition of chaplaincy which helps to provide a slightly more extensive position for developing a specific working definition for sports chaplaincy. He stated:

> Chaplaincy is a service or ministry offered in secular settings that are outside normal places of worship, such as a university, hospital, prison, school, or workplace. Although broad in scope, chaplaincy services centre on the intellectual, emotional, social, interpersonal, and spiritual dimensions of life and they seek to assist personal awareness, understanding, growth and integration (Holm, 2009, p. 7).

Sports chaplaincy sits well within Holm's definition of chaplaincy. The ministry generally takes place outside the context of church, although not always. In Australia, sports chaplaincy is broad in scope, and different chaplains adapt their position to suit their talents and skills and their individual sporting contexts (Reid & Hughes, 2013). It can provide many of the services listed by

Holm, although, as will be explored shortly, there are some services offered by sports chaplains not included in this definition.

While one might envisage a sports chaplain doing a variety of tasks in a sporting club, her or his functional role may be quite enigmatic. On the one hand the sports chaplain has a role in the club, yet on the other hand that role can be quite fluid or nondescript. In one context the sports chaplain may be in a role where there are prescribed fundamental tasks, even prior to taking on the role. But in another context the chaplain may shape the role to suit their training, their skills and their personality (Reid & Hughes, 2013, pp. 5–7). Additionally, as Ryan has pointed out, the chaplain's role simultaneously operates as a partnership between "two different organisational structures", that of the organisation they serve and the faith group of which they are a part of (Ryan, 2015, p. 32).

With that in mind, aside from the behavioural aspects of the role, what are the major dimensions of sports chaplaincy in relation to God's mission, in relation to the churches, in relation to the individuals within the club, and in relation to the sporting clubs themselves? How does the chaplain operate within such an ambiguous context, and how can her or his effectiveness be achieved whilst fulfilling the role in relation to each of those major dimensions?

Methodology

In order to maximise the relevance, quality and breadth of data collected pertaining to the roles and functions of sports chaplains, the research was carried out using a mixed methods approach. By utilising both qualitative and quantitative components in the research, the aim was to present a broad and general picture of the extent to which sports chaplaincy is or is not an effective Christian ministry in Australia, as well as provide the more detailed stories about the extent and nature of any such claimed effectiveness.

The data collection was carried out in two sequential stages.

In the first stage, in order to determine the range of issues within sports chaplaincy in Australia, an exploratory qualitative case study approach using semi-structured interviews was conducted. To ensure a broad representation from across the various sporting contexts and locations throughout Australia, a diversity of participants was sought, as it was expected that chaplaincy might vary in each of the contexts. It was anticipated that, in general, sporting clubs in regional and rural areas operate and function differently from those in more urban areas, while it was expected that there would also be diversities in clubs from different states. Furthermore, different sports also operate and function in a variety of ways, while some sports attract more ethnically diverse players than other sports. As such, a diversity of sports, locations

or demographics may reveal a slightly different approach to chaplaincy.

In the second stage, an on-line survey was conducted which targeted sports chaplains, people in sporting clubs in which chaplains served (e.g., athletes, players), key representatives of the sporting clubs and organisations (e.g., coaches, administrators), and people in churches where the chaplains had a connection. A survey methodology was chosen to complement the interviews as it was anticipated that surveys would allow for a much broader account of the sports chaplaincy contexts from around Australia and would provide a deeper investigation of some of the issues arising from the interviews conducted during the first stage of the research.

To ensure there was access to a wide range of chaplains and people in sporting clubs, and to abide by ethics protocols, the researcher collaborated with a number of key leaders at Sports Chaplaincy Australia (SCA), the organisation responsible for the vast majority of sporting chaplains in Australia. As well as being the main connection point for interview participants, SCA assisted with reviewing the online survey and distributing it amongst its network of chaplains and sporting clubs using their contact database.

Overall, 46 separate interviews were carried out, with 49 individuals involved, of whom two-thirds were or had been chaplains. The majority of interviews were conducted between mid-2017 and late 2019, with two carried out in 2020. The interviews were recorded and the data was transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The transcriptions were imported into qualitative analysis software *QSR NVivo*. Very general thematic categories were designed based on the initial interview data. Content analysis of the interview transcripts was then undertaken to identify similar themes arising from each of the participant's interviews. A more detailed analysis of the data using a coding structure was subsequently carried out.

Using the themes developed during the stage one analysis, a survey questionnaire was created. A combination of 'closed-end' questions, 'all-that-apply' questions, 'rating' questions and 'open-ended' questions was used throughout the survey. In an attempt to minimise the administrative work involved in sending out different surveys to different groups of respondents, and to ensure each respondent was asked the most relevant questions according to their individual situation, question 'branching' was utilised in the survey. Data for the survey was collected over 12 weeks during mid-2020. In the end, around 250 responses were received, of whom 85 per cent were current, previous or expected soon to be chaplains, or SCA staff. It is estimated there were

approximately 2,000 email contacts, meaning if all were sent the survey link that there was a response rate of around 12.5 per cent, underwhelming somewhat yet adequate to complement the interview data. Statistical analysis of the quantitative survey data was carried out in *IBM SPSS Statistics* using univariate, bivariate and principal component analysis.

Major roles and functions

In order to investigate the roles and functions of chaplains in sporting clubs, a series of questions in the survey and interviews firstly sought to explore the extent to which people in the clubs valued the chaplaincy.

In the survey of non-chaplains, 90 per cent of respondents agreed to some extent with the statement that ‘It is important for sporting clubs to have a chaplain’.

Many of the non-chaplain interview participants emphasised the importance of having a chaplain in sporting clubs, and many had recommended and promoted it to other clubs. They suggested that often it was after the chaplain had been there a while that they realised the importance of her or his role. On other occasions, such as when a chaplain had come in to assist a club after a critical incident, club personnel realised in hindsight the importance of appointing a chaplain before such incidents occur.

In the same way, a few participants spoke of the importance of the chaplain as being linked to a sporting club's duty of care to provide a safe place for a player or athlete.

For many of the survey respondents and interview participants, the importance and the value of the chaplain was linked to the roles she or he played in their club, which varied from chaplain to chaplain depending on the individual, their level of experience, or the type or level of the sport. For example, an administrator at one club noted the importance of their chaplain's role in the area of player welfare:

> I believe sports chaplaincy plays a pivotal role in player welfare and wellbeing, especially in times where players are at high risk of depression, online bullying and experimenting with drugs. The chaplain is able to walk that line between trying to get the best out of players on the field, by ensuring they are receiving the necessary support off the field.

In both the survey and the interviews, chaplains were asked how they saw their role within the club and the extent to which they spent time undertaking the various functions of that role. The survey questions specifically asked them to identify, over the

course of a regular month, such as during a sporting season, how often they spent time at the club, or with someone associated with the club, doing various activities. Another question in the survey related to the various issues the chaplains addressed. They were asked, again, over the course of a regular month, the extent to which they addressed various issues in their chaplaincy role. The different activities and issues were identified by interview participants as common activities undertaken and issues addressed as part of a chaplaincy role.

Table 1 shows the frequency with which chaplains reported that various pastoral care and club morale and culture issues had been addressed in their role over the course of a regular month.

In regard to pastoral care issues, chaplains noted that over the course of a regular month, they had most regularly addressed issues related to injury or on-field performance issues, with 27 per cent regularly or very regularly involved, and relationship issues, with one-quarter involved at least regularly. Between 14 and 17 per cent of chaplains had at least regularly addressed mental health issues (17%), grief or loss issues (14%) and self-esteem or personal image issues (14%). They had least addressed issues related to racism, physical violence and sexism in their clubs.

In terms of activities related to club morale and culture, chaplains said they most frequently provided practical support around the

club with just over half (51%) doing so regularly or very regularly. Activities related to community building within the club was something that almost one-quarter (24%) of chaplains said they did regularly or very regularly. Building club morale, matters related to club structure or organisation and legal issues were activities which many chaplains found themselves involved in less frequently, although the interview participants suggested that such activities were nonetheless important for the influence the chaplains had within the club community.

Table 1. The frequency chaplains reported that various issues had been addressed or activities they had been involved with over the course of a regular month (percentage for each issue)

Issue or activity	Not at all	Rarely or occasionally	Regularly or very regularly
Pastoral care issues			
Injury or on-field performance issues	18	55	27
Relationship issues	6	69	25
Mental health	6	77	17
Grief or loss	4	81	14
Self-esteem or personal image issues	11	76	14
Conflict resolution	17	74	9

Alcohol or drug related issues	20	73	8
Bullying or harassment	34	63	3
Sexism	42	56	2
Physical violence	43	55	2
Racism	47	51	2
Club morale and culture activities			
Practical support (i.e. help out around the club)	7	41	51
Community building	15	62	24
Club morale	14	73	13
Club structural or organisational matters	41	50	10
Legal issues	52	47	1

Source: Reid, 2020, *Survey of chaplains and people in sporting clubs*.

Principal component analysis of the survey data identified that the roles and functions of chaplains could be broadly grouped into three separate categories as follows:

1. contributing to club morale and culture
2. providing pastoral care
3. providing spiritual care.

Table 2. How surveyed chaplains considered the effectiveness of the activities in their role (factor loading for each of the principal components)

Rotated Component Matrix	Component		
	1	2	3
Contributing to club morale and culture			
Providing practical on-field assistance	0.645	0.351	-0.017
Contributing to the morale of the club	0.850	0.221	0.328
Building a positive culture within the club	0.859	0.214	0.345
Building community within the club	0.861	0.245	0.236
Helping to set the moral tone of the club	0.840	0.114	0.268
Providing spiritual care			
Referring people to appropriate specialists	0.169	0.659	0.179
Providing spiritual care for people	0.186	0.703	0.306
Mentoring	0.334	0.683	0.285
Helping people think about 'big picture' issues of life	0.353	0.649	0.312
Grief counselling	0.090	0.794	0.211
Debriefing after an incident	0.233	0.667	0.305
Providing pastoral care			
One-on-one pastoral care	0.208	0.261	0.758
Building strong relationships with people	0.248	0.214	0.805
Providing a listening ear for people	0.257	0.487	0.639
Encouraging people	0.272	0.296	0.755
Being the ‘presence of Christ’ at the club	0.162	0.420	0.625

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Source: Reid, 2020, *Survey of chaplains and people in sporting clubs*.

Table 2 shows the factor loading for each of the principal components using a rotated component matrix. The factor loading represents the size of the relationship with a component, and ranges from -1.000 to 1.000 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007, p. 608).

Further reliability analysis of scales created from these items showed that each of the three identified components scored highly, as indicated by the following Cronbach's Alpha scores:

1. club morale and culture – 0.898
2. spiritual care – 0.857
3. pastoral care – 0.871.

Whilst the three categories have clear distinctions at a theoretical level, often the distinctions between different roles and functions were not quite so clear at the practical level, and there was an interconnectivity between many of the roles which chaplains addressed. So, for example, many chaplains suggested that a common function was to develop rapport and to build strong relationships with those in the clubs. However, many chaplains also noted that it was only after such relationships were developed that they could also start to provide aspects of spiritual care, such as assisting people to think about the bigger issues of

life. As one chaplain reflected: “You’ve got to earn your stripes. You can’t just walk in and say, ‘Well I’m here now and you blokes . . .’ No. They’ve got to see if you’re fair dinkum, or what you’re about.”

It is somewhat curious that in the principal component analysis, some of the items which seemingly had a pastoral care dimension to them, such as referring, mentoring and grief counselling, had a higher loading within the spiritual care component than within the pastoral care component. This may be because chaplains considered these items as part of the spiritual dimension of their role. So, for example, in grief counselling, as individuals reflect on death and life issues, chaplains may implicitly take on the role of spiritual ‘pastor’, similar to that most commonly provided by an ordained minister, priest or other religious ‘grief expert’. Similarly, mentoring may have been considered spiritual mentoring, rather than pastoral mentoring.

Nonetheless, the three categories provide a robust framework to understand how chaplains and people in clubs perceive the various roles and functions of chaplaincy. Along with additional research findings about the chaplain’s role in relation to mission and ministry, the three categories in the framework above appropriately align with the four major dimensions of a sports chaplain’s role.

The Chaplain's Contribution to Mission

The mission of sports chaplaincy, according to SCA, sees the chaplains as having the role of a spiritual presence in the sporting clubs. However, the spiritual presence function of the role was not interpreted in an evangelistic sense; rather chaplains were there to represent God in the many, many sporting clubs and teams scattered around Australia, "demonstrating Christ's love and hope to them" (Sports Chaplaincy Australia, 2021a).

While some chaplains were particularly apprehensive about their perception as a spiritual presence in their clubs, others were very much aware of the subtleties of the missional aspect of demonstrating Christ's love and hope through the various functions of their roles. This was often framed by chaplains within the rubric of the sharing of their faith, and the many ways in which that was carried out as part of their role.

On the other hand, one of the SCA leaders noted such nuances in the chaplains' roles and the often-misunderstood ways in which they interpreted the sharing of their faith:

> One of the things that marks sports chaplaincy . . . is that it is Gospel-oriented. We do have a commitment to talk about Jesus. It's Jesus-centric. So that then puts a different spin on it because effective

> chaplains will have an opportunity to minister both in deed and word with people, so it's both grace and truth. And I think that some of our chaplains would say that they never get an opportunity to share their faith, but they did 13 funerals last year!

From a public perspective, SCA overtly promotes the fact that the organisation and their chaplains are Christian, although they additionally note the inclusiveness of serving people of any faith or worldview.

When asked, most chaplains were very happy to reflect on how they understood the missional aspect of their role, and how or if they applied it to the various aspects of their role. Often the missional and spiritual terminology was used interchangeably to reflect what chaplains considered they were 'called' to do and be as Christians.

Most chaplains were conscious of overtly advocating the missional or spiritual aspect of their role, although most were not discreet about it either, given that the title and terminology suggested a spiritual or religious dimension to it. Accordingly, there was a fine line for chaplains between making people aware of the spiritual dimension of their role and being seen to be pushing that aspect

of the role too much. Chaplains were much more likely to err on the side of caution and follow the former rather than the latter.

The spiritual dimension became more visible to those in the clubs at certain times, such as when a critical incident occurred, and people reflected on the ‘bigger things in life’, perhaps during a grieving process or at a funeral. Those chaplains who had been through such occasions suggested those times were important moments in connecting with those in the clubs. Many of them noted that through those times, people in the clubs became much more aware of, and positive towards, the missional aspect of the chaplain’s role.

Some chaplains were acutely aware that they were involved in sporting clubs which had members from a variety of religious traditions. A few chaplains indicated they had a small number of Christians in their clubs, while a few others noted they had people from other faith backgrounds. Some of the newer chaplains said they did not know. However, most commonly chaplains observed the lack of any religiosity within the clubs they were involved in.

Within such disparate contexts, in religiously diverse and non-religious clubs, chaplains stressed the importance of ensuring they did not overstep the mark in regard to the missional aspect and spiritual functions of their role. For most chaplains, their role was not to be an evangelist, ‘Bible-basher’ or to push religion.

Many felt that their acceptance would be in jeopardy if they did cross the ‘fine line’.

Overall, there were various ways in which stakeholders perceived the missional aspect of the chaplain’s role. Through undertaking the various aspects of their role, chaplains demonstrated their mission of sharing Christ’s love and hope to anyone they met in the clubs, without partiality and with respect to the religiously and non-religiously diverse individuals they encountered. Some chaplains were explicit in acknowledging that they were responding to God’s call in their lives or as their personal way of fulfilling Christian discipleship. Most saw this as involving a sense of presence in the name of God, rather than being overly evangelistic.

The Chaplain’s Contribution to Ministry

In the interviews and in some of the open-ended questions in the survey, chaplains were asked about how they saw their role as a sports chaplain within the context of the church in Australia and if they saw themselves as having a role in relation to the churches.

Many chaplains saw their role as an important link in bringing the church community and the local community together, which they understood as fulfilling the ministry of the church to the local community. On the other hand, some of the chaplains suggested

there was a disconnection between church and community, and consequently a lack of appreciation for the role of chaplains, which stemmed from a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the Church's mission in the world.

Additionally, some chaplains noted, in general, that those in local churches perceived their role as some sort of an 'evangelist', a person who could bring people from the sporting club into the life of the church, thereby building up the church. There was almost an unspoken expectation amongst people in churches that the chaplain – or their role – was ineffective unless such overt evangelism could be measured. As one long-serving chaplain said:

> And I know some pastors who well expect that if I go to the chaplain, I get a lot more people who come to church! No! Probably none! Maybe one family! Some have seen a few families come to their church. Some have seen people come to Christ. But basically, they're not suddenly going to be coming in, because most of the sport's happening on Sundays anyway.

A number of chaplains discussed their understanding of chaplaincy as a ministry of the local church, and many felt churches were missing an opportunity to engage with local

communities through their sporting clubs in this way because of their limited sense of ministry. Conversely, some chaplains did feel supported by their church, evidenced in practical assistance provided to their clubs when a need arose.

In general, then, sports chaplains saw their role as a ministry of the local church extending out into the local community. However, there were different perceptions of how the ministry of the church should be fulfilled. Many in the churches believed that fulfilment is seen as effective only through being present at worship services on a weekend, while the fact that someone is helped through experiences of trauma or grief is considered less effective particularly if the former is not occurring.

The Chaplain's Contribution to the Provision of Care

According to SCA's public documents and its website, the role of chaplains in the clubs are to "invest in the lives of people: mind, body and soul" through various activities, such as pastoral care, personal support, crisis management, bereavement care, critical incident debriefing and delivery, and referral support (Sports Chaplaincy Australia, 2021b). SCA make it clear that their chaplains are not professional counsellors and that their role is primarily to provide pastoral care around the clubs they served, and many of the other functions they fulfilled extended out from

that main role. However, this main role of sports chaplains is actually seen as the practical expression of the previous two major roles: being the presence of God in the clubs and representing the ministry of the churches.

Chaplains detailed the pastoral care issues they addressed, and often provided the background for how they responded to the various issues. The most common pastoral issues addressed were grief and loss, including illnesses, relationship issues and road accidents or other trauma events.

According to many of the chaplains interviewed, providing pastoral care through visiting people in hospital or at home, or generally caring for injured players or people who were sick, although relatively irregular, was nonetheless, over the course of a year or season, a common and important part of a chaplain's role. Providing such pastoral care was, however, more prevalent in some sports than others. For example, many motorsports have a high level of risk, and accidents at events can be relatively common. Hence, chaplains in motorsports talked more regularly than chaplains in other sports about the pastoral care they provided during and after such accidents.

Being able to care pastorally for people often meant firstly building relationships. Having in-depth conversations, that is,

more than just greeting someone, was one of the most common relationship-building activities chaplains undertook.

Chaplains indicated there were many other pastoral care activities which they undertook in their roles. Some of them were relatively explicit activities, such as being present at games or club functions, providing low-level counselling or connecting with people through social media, while there were other informal activities associated with building relationships. In the interviews, when asked about the main activity of their role, nearly all of the chaplains said that an informal, though significant, part of their role was simply being a presence to those in the club. For some chaplains, there was an intentionality about being available for those around the club by ‘loitering with intent’ and being available through a ‘ministry of presence’. For other chaplains, being present was less intentional, but rather part of being in a role that required you to be a ‘people person’.

In general, the athletes and players, and often other non-administrators within a club, such as club supporters or family members, perceived the chaplain as someone who could provide off-field care and support for them when they needed it. Thus, the chaplain’s effectiveness was linked to whether she or he could provide that care, and indeed, in most of the interviews, provision of support was noted frequently as a significant function of the chaplain’s role.

Many of the chaplains, though, talked more implicitly about their role as pastoral carers. For example, one basketball chaplain understood his role within a Gospel framework: “To me it’s about sharing the good news of Jesus. We do that primarily by loving people well. And that’s what my role is.”

One netball chaplain had reflected on the terminology around pastoral care:

> I am not surprised that non-Christian people . . . they don’t understand the word pastoral care, they understand volunteer carer. So, they understand care. And some of them would do it naturally themselves based on their personality without being Christian. So, they know what caring for someone looks like. And my role gives them a framework.

Another major function chaplains provided as part of their role was in the area of spiritual care. To some extent, spiritual care is an extension of pastoral care and theologically one could argue that there is little distinction between the practical outworkings within a chaplaincy role. However, there were clear distinctions between pastoral and spiritual care in the types of activities chaplain were required or asked to undertake. A number of

aspects of a chaplain's spiritual care role centred around spirituality or religious activities, the most common being prayer with another person.

In some semi-professional or professional sporting contexts which attracted overseas players, such as in rugby league (which frequently recruit Pacific Islander players) or basketball and baseball (which commonly recruit American athletes), there was a general expectation that a chaplain would provide liturgies, Bible studies or prayer for players, as is common in many of the elite level clubs in those countries. As one female chaplain to a semi-professional basketball team stated:

> I thought if I'm going to be a chaplain, everyone knows a chaplain is sort of religious, and even though we don't talk about anything like that, people sort of expect that. And so, the girls all waited for me to give this little prayer before they went out on the court. [But], if they didn't want me to do it, I wouldn't do it.

In a number of contexts, for example in motorsports or Surf Life Saving, it was accepted practice to commence the season with a special liturgical event which included a blessing or a prayer. Sometimes a local priest or pastor would perform such a ritual,

and sometimes the chaplain undertook that role. Moreover, in various motorsports events, whether local or national events, it was common to have a public prayer before each event.

Many of the chaplains indicated they had officiated at, or assisted with, religious ceremonies of people in the club they served, such as baptisms, weddings or funerals, and a number of the chaplains explicitly noted the privilege of being asked to undertake such ceremonies. Although performing ceremonies with those associated with the clubs was mostly an irregular activity as part of their role, chaplains nonetheless understood their involvement in them as indicators of their effectiveness in building relationships.

Many chaplains noted that there was a distinct role for chaplains in sporting clubs which was different from that of experts from other fields, such as psychologists, counsellors or other health professionals, although in some of the contexts the chaplain worked alongside specific health or wellbeing professionals. A few chaplains suggested that, at the grass-roots, community level of sport, most clubs did not have the resources to access professional health experts, so welcomed someone who could perform similar functions for their club members. In fact, many chaplains did have qualifications or experience in pastoral care, counselling or psychology, such as those who were clergy, but

fulfilled such functions in their chaplaincy role in an honorary capacity.

The Chaplain's Contribution to the Prophetic

The church has a prophetic role to play in the world by pointing to the message of Christ in the words it proffers, but also in its transforming actions as it "responds in service, welfare, and the seeking of justice" (Langmead, 2004, p. 234). The Catholic Church understands a lay person's prophetic mission by evangelisation in the proclamation of Christ not just in words but in the testimony of life in the "ordinary circumstances of the world" (Catholic Church, 1993, #905). Similarly, within a sporting club, a chaplain's care of individuals was shown to have a transformational effect on that sporting community as the chaplain's influence often changed it into a caring community.

This 'prophetic' aspect of the sports chaplain's role was understood more generally by the way in which chaplains were able to contribute to building club morale and enhancing the culture of the club in positive ways.

According to the research participants, culture within a sporting club manifested itself in various ways. For some clubs, the chaplain's role was about improving a lack of positive culture which was linked to how people related to or treated each other.

For other clubs, the chaplain's role was to intentionally develop what was already happening in the club, and to raise the profile "about healthy community and what that looks like".

Practical assistance was the most common activity undertaken in this regard, although such assistance took many and diverse forms and was expressed in different ways. For some in the clubs, the chaplain's prophetic contribution was witnessed in the positive ways in which people treated one another. For others, it was demonstrated in the positive values and morality the chaplain had shown and had helped instil in the club, such as assisting the club to adopt more family-friendly attitudes and practices.

One club administrator noted the gentle way the chaplain had influenced the club's culture in relation to mental health and inclusivity, and the positive wider consequences it had brought for the club and the local community.

> But we're really happy with where we're going in this space with [the chaplain], as far as our culture and stuff like that. We're a bit more inclusive now. And it broadens our reach in the community, and our ability to get new players, but also help people in the community. We're very happy with it.

A few of the interview participants from historically male-dominated sports, such as cricket, AFL and rugby league, highlighted the importance of the chaplain's role in transitioning clubs to be much more family-oriented and particularly the inclusiveness of females now playing in many of the clubs. While the chaplains may not have always instigated such changes, club administrators appreciated the positive influence chaplains could add.

Overall, many in the clubs acknowledged that a chaplain added value by their practical contribution, but some explicitly suggested there were additional important benefits in the perception of a chaplain addressing the cultural and wellbeing functions at a club.

Discussion and Conclusions

The practical outworkings and perceptions of a sports chaplain's roles differed for each of the participant groups involved in the research. The lived experience, the research findings indicate, is that the issues pertaining to the chaplain's role are very much shaped by the sporting clubs and how their members perceive and relate to the individual chaplain.

Generally, from a missional perspective, chaplains understood their role as providing a Christian presence and care within a

sporting club. The majority did not see their role as promulgating their Christian beliefs, although most were happy to share them if they were asked. This understanding of their role was closely aligned to the role outlined by SCA, which was not surprising given SCA had responsibility for the recruitment and training of the chaplains.

To some extent there was consensus amongst the different stakeholders in relation to the chaplain's roles and functions, although those roles and functions differed somewhat depending on the type of sporting context. Commonly, the understanding of the chaplaincy role for each of the participant groups in the research was directly related to the actual role the chaplain played and the function she or he provided in the club. It was usual for the initial perception of a chaplain's role to change once an individual witnessed the chaplain 'at work' or became directly involved with the chaplain. In that sense, the change in perception became more closely aligned to the reality of the day-to-day role of the chaplain, which most often led to a more accurate understanding of her or his role.

There were different perceptions between chaplains and those in the clubs as to the main issues addressed by chaplains in their role. While chaplains indicated that they felt most effective in providing low-level pastoral care, people in the clubs indicated that the chaplain's role was similarly effective in addressing

pastoral care issues but also in building club morale and attending to club cultural issues.

Addressing issues to do with spirituality or religion was seen by most as the least effective, although also one of the least regularly addressed functions, of the role. On the other hand, a relatively common related function for a small proportion of chaplains in their role, particularly longer-term chaplains, was to officiate or assist club members with weddings, funerals and other typically religious-type rituals, such as child baptisms or child naming ceremonies.

Overall, the range of pastoral and cultural issues addressed by chaplains was dependent on an array of other factors, and it was difficult to identify which issues were most effective given they were sometimes closely related to other issues. For example, only a few chaplains indicated that they had dealt with problems to do with physical violence, sexism or racism, yet those issues often surfaced through other associated concerns which chaplains dealt with much more regularly, such as mental health troubles or alcohol and drug abuse.

However, whilst occasionally responding to certain issues as part of a chaplain's role can be highly effective, the regularity and mundanity of a chaplain providing practical assistance can be a slow but important key to ensuring a chaplain builds relationships

and develops rapport with those in the club. The practical assistance a chaplain provides, whatever that may be, can often be the necessary connection point which allows players, athletes and others in a club to see a chaplain's role as there to serve without underlying agendas.

Where sports chaplaincy was working at its best, there was a collaboration between the sporting club and the local church, with the chaplain providing the link between the two. Or to use an alternative analogy, the chaplain provided a bridge between two often quite different worlds: the sporting club and the local church. While SCA provides the initial placement of the chaplain, and indeed the training, its ongoing role in the club/church collaboration is solely to provide ongoing support, accountability and development, if and when needed. In that sense, SCA takes a 'back seat' and allows the chaplain to 'drive' the collaborative endeavour.

Certainly, there were contexts in which such collaborative models between sporting clubs and churches existed, and all groups involved benefited from it. In such contexts, the sporting club not only had the chaplain providing the various functions of the role, but also members of the church, who often provided practical support in various circumstances. The church understood its mission as serving the local community, and its members had the

opportunity to truly serve. And the chaplain felt supported by the church and club to positively fulfil her or his role.

Then again, there were numerous examples where such collaboration did not exist, sometimes despite the effort of the chaplain in providing opportunities to make it so. One basketball chaplain, also a church pastor, suggested that it was not necessarily sports chaplaincy that some churches and denominations had an issue with, it was a broader lack of engagement by local churches with their wider communities:

> Being able to be involved [in the local community] is where the church ought to be . . . I think our churches have got a fortress mentality. That's what I'd say. And it's sad to say that. And the pastors especially, but most of the people – because of the pastors – have not got a clue on how to engage with people outside in the community.

Sports chaplaincy in Australia is an example of a chaplaincy ministry which has adapted to operate and grow in a society which has steadily experienced a decline in religious affiliation and activity. Through its inception and its development over the past 40 years, it has understood the important role sport plays in

the lives of many Australians, and it has understood the importance and impact of the Christian faith to society as a whole, even as many may disregard such historical or current influence. In a broad range of communities and contexts throughout Australia, sports chaplains offer an authentic Christian witness and seek to minister to people on “their turf” (Tyndall, 2004, p. 161) by positively contributing to the morale and culture in sporting communities and by providing genuine pastoral and spiritual care to any who may need or call for it, no matter what their religious or spiritual beliefs. At their best, sports chaplains are “culture brokers”, bridging a gap between the two very different cultures of sport and church (Swinton, 2016). Although often tenuous, chaplains provide a link, otherwise broken, between two vital local communities: the local church and the local sporting club.

Whilst at first glance there is an apparent paradox in the fact that very secular sporting clubs are seeking Christian chaplains, the findings of this research somewhat resolve such ambiguity. The demand for Christian chaplains actually offers an insight into contemporary Australian spirituality which shows that people want care and community but do not want it connected with restrictive doctrines nor out-of-date institutional structures which they no longer have confidence in. Leaders in sporting clubs want someone to come into their midst who can care for their

community in ways that they themselves cannot. The people who are currently responding to that demand are Christian chaplains, although clubs might also be open to non-Christians fulfilling that role should the opportunity arise. The paradox, though, also offers an insight into the theological understanding some Christians have towards mission in contemporary Australian society. Such Christians understand that the model of chaplaincy needs to fit the way sporting clubs operate, rather than applying a model of how Christian churches might wish chaplaincy to be. Those chaplains recognise that in order to be accepted within a secular community they must leave their doctrinal beliefs at the door.

If the church is to be a credible and valued institution in Australian society, there is an obligation for it to take its ministries from the 'four walls' of its internal and inward-focused structures out into the every-day world in which its members live. Churches can use the model of sports chaplaincy to ensure their own mission is outward focused and Gospel-centric.

References

Butler, C., & Mitaxa, N. (2016). Sports Chaplaincy Australia. In A. Parker, N. J. Watson, & J. B. White (Eds.), *Sports chaplaincy: Trends, issues and debates* (pp. 44–54). Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Catholic Church. (1993). *Catechism of the Catholic Church.* Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

Dantis, T., Reid, S., & Chee, M. (2020). *The Australian Catholic Mass Attendance Report 2016: A report based on the National Count of Attendance, the National Church Life Survey and the National Catholic Census Project*. Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

Global Sports Chaplaincy Association. (2021). *Definition of Sports Chaplaincy*. https://sportschaplaincy.com/about/

Holm, N. (2009). Toward a Theology of the Ministry of Presence in Chaplaincy. *Journal of Christian Education*, *52*(1), Article 1.

Howell, R., & Howell, M. L. (1988). *Aussie gold: The story of Australia at the Olympics*. Brooks Waterloo.

Hughes, P. (2017). "No Religion" in the Australian Census. *Pointers*, *27*(3), Article 3.

Hughes, P., Fraser, M., & Reid, S. (2012). *Australia's religious communities: Facts and figures from the 2011 Australian Census and other sources*. Christian Research Association.

Langmead, R. (2004). *The word made flesh: Towards an incarnational missiology*. University Press of America.

Parker, A., & Watson, N. J. (2014). Sport and Religion: Culture, History and Ideology. *Journal of Movement & Sport Sciences*, *86*, 71–79.

Powell, R., Pepper, M., Jacka, K., & Sterland, S. (2018). *Vista: Scanning the landscape of local churches in Australia*. NCLS Research.

Reid, S. (2020a). Australians' Changing Religious Practices. *Pointers*, *30*(2), Article 2.

Reid, S. (2020b). Australians' Confidence in Churches and Religious Organisations. *Pointers*, *30*(2), Article 2.

Reid, S., & Hughes, P. (2013). *The Values and Benefits of Sports Chaplaincy in Australia* [Research Paper No. 13]. Christian Research Association.

Ryan, B. (2015). *A very modern ministry: Chaplaincy in the UK*. Theos.

Slater, V. (2012). Living Church in the World: Chaplaincy and the Mission of the Church. *Practical Theology*, *5*(3), Article 3.

Sports Chaplaincy Australia. (2021a). *About Sports Chaplaincy*. http://sportschaplaincy.com.au/about/

Sports Chaplaincy Australia. (2021b). *Become an SCA chaplain today*. https://sportschaplaincy.com.au/Home/Partner-Church/Chaplain_Conversion/Home/Church/

Steddon, P. (2010). *Street Church: Fresh Expressions...and Beyond?* Self-published.

Stewart, G. (2012). The Role of Sports Chaplains in Australia. *Zadok Papers*, *S191*(Winter 2012), Article Winter 2012.

Swinton, J. (2016). Preface. In A. Parker, N. J. Watson, & J. B. White (Eds.), *Sports chaplaincy: Trends, issues and debates* (pp. xvii–xix). Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Tabachnick, B. G., & Fidell, L. S. (2007). *Using multivariate statistics* (5th ed). Pearson/Allyn & Bacon.

Toohey, K., & Taylor, T. (2009). Sport in Australia: 'Worth a shout.' *Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics*, *12*(7), Article 7.

Tyndall, D. (2004). *Evangelicalism, Sport and the Australian Olympics* [Unpublished PhD Thesis]. Macquarie University.

Tyndall, D. (2021, November 12). *Establishing Sports Chaplaincy in Australia* [Personal communication].

Waller, S. N., Dzikus, L., & Hardin, R. (2010). The Collegiate Sports Chaplain: Kindred or Alien? *Chaplaincy Today*, *26*(1), Article 1.

Weir, J. S. (2016). Sports Chaplaincy: A Global Overview. In A. Parker, N. J. Watson, & J. B. White (Eds.), *Sports chaplaincy: Trends, issues and debates* (pp. 9–19). Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Pastoral Reflection

ISSN 2205-0442

JCMin Number 9 (2024)

Journal of Contemporary Ministry

Pastoral Reflection

Reflections on Church Seeding in the Frontier of Suburban Sprawl

Jason Coughran & Amy Coughran

Jason serves as the founding pastor of New City Presbyterian Church in the northern suburbs of Perth, Western Australia, working bi-vocationally as a lecturer and student ministry worker at Sheridan Institute of Higher Education, Perth. Prior to helping New City to seed, he served as the pastor of Horizon Reformed Christian Fellowship in Kingsley. Amy is a faithful and humble ministry helper and a volunteer extraordinaire – both in church and secular life – who occasionally also lectures at Sheridan. Together, they try to capture their ministry aims and outputs for transparency and transmission through The Gospel Seed, thegospelseed.net.

A post on our social feed caught our eye the other day: A satellite image of the growing city of Perth, Western Australia, with a bit of annotation on the side claiming it to be the 'longest linear city in the world' and measuring it at 153km north-south. We are not sure if the first part is true, but the second point is about right: Perth is pushing hard and fast to develop housing all the way from Two Rocks to beyond Mandurah,[5] around 60km north and

[5] Pettitt, B. (2022, July 5). Opinion: Perth is already the world's longest city, and we've dropped the ball on sprawl. *WA Today*. https://www.watoday.com.au/national/western-australia/perth-is-already-

85km south of the CBD, respectively. Until the very recent past, these had long been holiday destinations for Perth folk. Today, they mark the ends of this booming city in the fastest growing state in Australia.[6] A tight squeeze between the Indian Ocean and the parallel hills means that the gaps in the 150km long stretch between those two points will very soon be filled – at the far northern end, for example, where we minister, government modelling signals a planned doubling of the population from 100,000 to 200,000 residents, between 2021 and 2041.[7]

Our ministry heart for that northern zone – from 30km to 65km north of the CBD – is about working out how to seed new church communities into this frenzied development landscape. It is an exceptionally challenging task, not just because of the pace of development but also because of the lack of church zoning or facilities, particularly given the number of residents already there, let alone the number still planned. But we believe it is also a vital task – for the same reasons – and one we hope to encourage

---

the-world-s-longest-city-and-we-ve-dropped-the-ball-on-sprawl-20220704-p5ayy3.html?fbclid=IwAR1zNYxi5gpkL5b2ACh3GLsGk6KZZoduKoEZhrcDWBG_PM-uG0-3RIntBes

[6] McCrindle. (n.d.) *Is a housing crisis a new city opportunity?* https://mccrindle.com.au/article/topic/demographics/is-a-housing-crisis-a-new-city-opportunity/

[7] An increase from a cumulative 90,255 in 2021 to 199,207 projected for 2041, for the ten northern frontier estates of Alkimos, Butler, Clarkson, Eglington, Jindalee, Merriwa, Mindarie, Quinns Rocks, Ridgewood, Two Rocks and Yanchep; See – .idcommunity. (n.d.). *City of Wanneroo: Population Summary*. https://forecast.id.com.au/wanneroo/population-summary

others to consider. To that end, we share some of what we have been privileged to witness, and some of the things the work has revealed.

Church ‘seeding’

Perhaps we should first define what we mean when we say, church ‘seeding’. We would not know if that’s a ‘thing’, or if the language is used of something else, but it’s the language we have settled on to best describe what we are engaged in. Because we’re not really church ‘planting’, in a traditional sense –

- we were not sent (we were ‘called’),
- we did not ‘arrive’ (we already lived here),
- we did not take a core team with us (they came together after),
- we had not meticulously planned everything before stepping into this space (we just knew we had to move), and
- we had no funding or organisational support to start (we have to work towards those things).

Put simply, we felt called to explore how to do ministry in an area of such desperate and distant need. Soon enough, others who were also wanting local church up this way came to join us, with like minds. But it did not unfold in the way churches traditionally ‘plant’ new churches – say, in the

'mother-daughter' mould, where everything from DNA to contingency plans are carefully cultivated beforehand.

What we felt happen, more than anything, reminds us of what Jesus described in his parable in Mark 4:26-29 –

> *And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."*

In short form, our strategy was to simply open the word of God in Scripture, and pray, and then step in, and all three on repeat. And from the outset of that, we have been pedalling as fast as we can to keep up.

We have met and talked with other ministry workers and churches along the way, mind you. We know of several churches working on a mother-daughter idea to plant in our area. But the reality is that planting that way is hard, requires considerable commitment from a large core, and is therefore heavily planned – and so it takes a long time. We have come to see that there is a need for other methods of ministry to get in and start breaking up the ground,

because churches are needed here before all the houses are built. And so, coming on three years in to our task, we are more convinced than ever that ministry in a 'seeding' kind of way is an important part of the mix of putting the gospel in reach of people in this kind of rapid and distant development zone.

Having different strategies will also allow for different kinds of churches to exist. Our desire is to see small, reformed churches establish – simple, humble communities (say, of around 30-50 people) that run deep in the word together. That is not so likely to happen in our context with traditional planting methods – reformed churches in Perth are relatively small in the scheme of things to begin with, so the resources to send out a 'plant' are also limited. Moreover, there are few churches (of any reformed denomination) on the north side of Perth's dividing river to begin with – let alone, whether they are in a position to plant. But when you then add the distance factor, getting a core group of any size to commit to relocating 30km north – from the inner city to the outer dormitory frontier – is a pretty hard ask. Sure, it could be done, but it will not happen often, and it will hardly meet the need: Again, we are talking about a 100,000 jump in population in our zone, within 20 years. Traditional planting methods might need 10 years just to plan one of those plants. But there may not be many reformed churches able to even *consider* planning that kind of move.

Outside our reformed tradition, there are a few churches of the general size and Biblical shape we are picturing that are ministering faithfully in our area, and one that we know of has done well to now spread further afield in

a traditional mother/daughter style plant. We take great encouragement from that: Although inner-city churches may not be able to reach up here, we figure if we can keep working out how to 'seed', it will become viable later to pursue other planting methods from a small to medium church that takes root onsite, so to speak. Indeed, as we write this article, the church we seeded – newcitypresbyterian.church – is about to try stepping into that space. Into its third year now, after being seeded 40km north of Perth, there is an opportunity to begin a new, second Sunday service in a different community, 50km north of Perth. This has always been part of our vision, but it is here much sooner than expected. Our strategy this time may be a little more calculated, but it is still nowhere near a 'traditional' plant: We refrained from planning a core team, or running any kind of 'numbers' (and in most people's analyses, nor would we have the numbers, in any sense of the word). A venue opened up, and we prayed and decided to first step into the space, and then find out. What we *do* have, though, is a clear and growing sense of our own ministry convictions, and a crystal-clear vision for Jesus. And our strategy will again be simple, and just the same – to be willing to step in to the space, and to open the Bible, and to commit it all to Him in prayer. Will it 'work'? That is in the Lord's hands. But there is an estate there that will be home to many thousands of people, and they need a local church. We are available; we are nearby; we are willing to step in and try.

What have we learnt?

We are thankful for that opportunity, and very keen to keep exploring this approach. But the philosophy of 'seeding' church, itself, is not our goal. It is simply the method we have used (and the only method at hand for us so far). But some things we have learned through these few years have become part of our ministry DNA now, that we hope to keep going, and to encourage in others.

i) The value of being small

Small church can be incredibly nimble, flexible, and able to step into niche opportunities[8]… and admittedly, 'risky' opportunities, at that. And we have loved words of caution – they too are important – but eventually the reality calls: to be perfectly blunt, the frontier is going to require some risky thinking from churches, if they are going to meet the urgency and the need for gospel work. Being small lets you innovate ministry, and very quickly so, and this is particularly important for the frontier of development where opportunity is hard to see, and impractical for other models of church to pursue. Moreover, a lot of people really value small church – for various reasons, they struggle to integrate into big gatherings. And in a region with limited church offerings for the sheer volume of people, a lot of Christians have not found a home. We were assuming that we might bring in a lot of unbelievers, but actually many of the first influx were believers who had

[8] O'Brien, B. J. (2010). *The strategically small church: Intimate, nimble, authentic, effective.* Bethany House.

been out of fellowship for different reasons. Now we realise that putting churches into new areas is not just for the 'lost' in terms of the gospel, but for those who are lost just in terms of not having been settled in a church home.

ii) The value of slow growth

Seeding is almost intentionally slow. We are trying to cultivate deep fellowship, and that takes time. So, we are not interested in an 'attractional' model, and therefore the community is developing at a pace that would probably be devastating for other models of church, more dependent on finance and so forth. At the same time, we nevertheless do have a clear focus on growth. The purpose of 'seeding', after all, is to grow towards harvest. And we seek growth both in maturity, and in gospel spread. So while we see the value of small church community, we also want to see the growth of communities across the map, so to speak. If one local community should grow large, we should see that as God's work – and we needn't hinder that kind of growth. So while we think about it often, we can't be hard and fast about church size – but a growing congregation does catalyse the question, of whether and where to plant, or 'seed' again.

iii) The value of clarity in the general call

While we could not have known whether or not the seed would 'take', and if so what exactly it would look like, we were nevertheless very clear about the seed itself: The gospel of Jesus Christ. So too, we spent a few months first figuring out our own personal wiring, and what kinds of contexts we could (and could not) minister into. Thinking further back, solid ministry education and experience for Jason, and the privilege of us both having sat under clear and faithful preaching ourselves in reformed churches over the past 20 or so years, had been formative for this work we are now engaged in. We can see even more clearly today how vital all these things have been towards our clarity in the 'general' aspects of our call, and we are more content with not having all the 'specifics' for ministry as we push forward. To be clear on the gospel, and clear on our theological convictions and framework, and clear therefore on what we can and cannot offer to God's people in ministry, is more the key. Consider Paul and his co-workers, sailing away on a ship or setting out on foot: They must have known very clearly their purpose in going, and the kind of ministry they had been shaped and called to give. But they could not have known what would actually unfold on the ground in front of them. Indeed, we read of the Holy Spirit changing what they planned they might do, in terms of the specifics (e.g. Acts 16:6,7). We are of course no-one and nowhere near them. But the same

principles surely apply – we can know our general call with great clarity, yet we need to be somewhat open and flexible to what the Spirit will actually do.

iv) The value of clear thinking

We have worked very hard from day one on bringing clarity to the ministry work, and to the church. We think through our own convictions and ministry principles all the time, and wise mentors keep us engaged in that task. That helps us put a clear and transparent vision to the church that we 'drip' feed all the time – from church culture to mission strategy, we are always encouraging our people to think clearly (and from Scripture) about their church. Clear vision, beliefs and values were written out in a simple booklet form, that our people have had from the outset (and visitors often take those home to get a clear picture of our church). And we have worked hard at transparency in all that, such as by releasing all our preaching via podcast for external eyes.

v) The value of training

Like any ministry, if this is going to work in the long haul then training is vital. Some might have been tempted to leave this aspect for much later, thinking that training is for bigger or more established churches to do. We strongly disagree. We have

consciously prioritised training to raise up more ministry workers, and trusted that God would supply them. We have taken that on as 'kingdom' training, rather than training up for growing our own church, but creating that training culture nevertheless brings a healthy, missional mindset to our church. It has taught us that a big part of ministry is watching who God brings to us, and stepping back to observe how He is stirring them, and how we can help.

vi) God is Able

We thought we had a sense of the need for church in this frontier, but not like we do now. There is hurt and despair everywhere, and the wider church needs to keep finding new ways to reach out to the downcast and the lost. Yet more than ever, we feel God's hand at work in this ministry – we ourselves are woefully incapable, and this ministry initiative was somewhat lacking in perhaps every aspect – but that only makes it clearer to us that God has been the One driving this work. More than ever, we have come to know that Jesus is building his church, just as he declared as his intent (Matthew 16:18, 28:20).

What have we struggled with?

There have been a few particularly big challenges we have had to contend with along the way, and are still working on now –

i) Eldership

Scriptures like Titus 1:5 make it clear that elders are to be appointed in each church. We wholeheartedly agree. But we also see something else in such a verse – that there may be an earlier phase where that is not possible in a new church. We are getting more comfortable with the necessity of an earlier such phase when churches are seeded: identifying and training and appointing elders is a slow journey that requires patience, and we are sure Paul did not mean that task should be rushed (e.g. 1 Timothy 5:22). But it is hard to seed churches because of this weakness in the opening phase. So too, we have had a clear plan for denominational alignment, but that process is not one that can be hurried along either. What has been vital, in all that, is that one of the first faithful families to join us was led by a man with a reformed ministry degree, and that we have had wise and godly external mentors advising us, since long before we even stepped out.

ii) Finance

Seeding could not have worked for us, were we not bi-vocational, and voluntarily on the ministry side for a good long while. A good employer has therefore been instrumental in this call. We could say a lot about this aspect, but perhaps we should simply point to the recent book by Andrew

Hamilton,[9] another gospel worker up here, who has captured the need for more ministry workers to consider a bi-vocational call. Having an organic group of people come together as a new church is unpredictable in itself, but having them come to a place of trust, to be able to give and support the work of their new church, is inevitably going to take even longer. Seeding church is perhaps not the right line of ministry for those who need considerable or stable financial support. If it were not for 'tent-making' (Acts 18:3, 1 Thessalonians 2:9, 2 Thessalonians 3:8), this church simply could not have been seeded, or kept afloat.

iii) Venue

Once upon a time, governments allocated land to churches. In those days, Perth must have had a radius more like 20km, because today, an 'old' city boundary seems to be marked by the sudden disappearance of traditional church properties. But the subsequent development sprawl that pushed north and south of that historic zone required churches to innovate. About 25km north, a host of big churches set up in warehouses in a popular industrial estate, to which northern Christians could commute. Smaller churches were able to set up in schools and community centres. But a little further along the development timeline, and further out on the frontier now today, things are not as easy.

[9] Hamilton, A. (2022). *The future is bivocational. Shaping Christian leaders for a post-Christian world.* Ark House Press.

Schools are not that interested in having churches meet on their grounds, and community centres are fewer and further between.

But there are opportunities, and they must be taken. Larger churches are managing to hire or even build in commercial or industrial zones. A considerable investment is needed for that kind of plant, but a few bigger churches have now established in our area that way, praise God. But for various reasons, ‘big church’ only reaches some of the population, and with 100,000 more people still coming, more solutions are needed – including, to our mind, a whole lot of small to medium churches, all across the frontier, which will not have the resources to hire space in the new economic zones. For our pursuit, we have been blessed to be able to use a few facilities – by God’s providence, we are quite sure – a public beach-side park, a government-owned community hall, and a privately-owned community hub. We did not start with a ‘home-church’ phase – we have been doing public church, in public spaces, since the day we began. But home church may become important to explore, to keep seeding church communities across this frontier.

Summing Up

Our hopes in writing this reflection on this part of our ministry in recent years have been several –

i. We are big on transparency – so we would love to hear from gospel co-workers who might be able to correct or shape our ministry in line with Scripture. And it is a perfect time for us to get down on paper the 'journey so far', and to hear others' thoughts, as we seed a new community, 10km further north. So too, our eyes are now opening to the rural areas just beyond our suburban zone – where seeding might also be able to bring church to those who are entirely without it right now. We would appreciate all the feedback we can acquire.

ii. We also hope that perhaps 1% of people who read this might give thought to *church 'seeding'* like this – or something similarly small or innovative for the kingdom – to help reach this or other development areas in the world.

iii. And more broadly, we would like to spur other workers with *all kinds of ministry models*, to reach out to these development frontiers – there are areas of rapid growth in many cities of the world where the gospel is desperately needed.

What we are doing will not be for everyone. Indeed it may not fit for very many at all. It is costly; it is risky; it is unknown; it is very hard to plan specifics; it is hard and draining work; and it is hard to know on any day whether it will not all fall apart. In short, it is ministry. And yet it is very doubtful from our reading of Scripture that ministry is supposed to

somehow be comfortable, easy or smooth (e.g. 2 Corinthians 4:7-18, 6:1-13).

It may not even be wise, and it certainly is not failsafe. But we trust and pray that our church seeding efforts would glorify God on this frontier.

On which note, we might finish by saying – together with all of God's servants –

> *Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21)*

Book Reviews

ISSN 2205-0442

JCMin Number 9 (2024)

The Heart of a Chaplain: Exploring Essentials for Ministry

Browning, Jim and Jim Spivey, eds. *The Heart of a Chaplain: Exploring Essentials for Ministry*. Birmingham, AL: Iron Stream Media, 2022, 370 pages.

I ordered *The Heart of a Chaplain: Exploring the Essentials for* Ministry (HofC) because I am passionate about chaplaincy and it certainly both improved my knowledge and challenged my practice.

Structurally HofC has five parts: 1) What is chaplain ministry? 2) Who are chaplains? What do chaplains do? 3) How is chaplain ministry unique? 4)Qualifications and development of chaplains. 5) Chaplaincy types. Each of these parts has a number of chapters, collectively written by thirty-seven authors all of whom are highly qualified and experienced United States Chaplains.

This diversity of voices is the greatest strength and weakness of HofC While collaboration is not unusual in chaplaincy resources (e.g. *Professional, Spiritual and Pastoral Care: A Practical Clergy and Chaplain's Handbook* [36 contributors] and *Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care in Mental Health Settings* [23 contributors]). The

quality, academically and experientially, of the contributors to HofC is amazing. Additionally, the diversity of voices and clear chapter titles make HofC readable both in a cover-to-cover sense (different voices make it more engaging) and allow the reader to read specific chapters at need. I also greatly appreciated that a number of the contributors were brutally honest about their failures which showed humility and was reminiscent of the Gospel writers (and Mark particularly). HofC's articulation, evidence and examples of why chaplaincy is powerfully different to, but not lesser than, local church ministry was also impressive. Finally, the diversity of Christian traditions within the contributors was very helpful.

The major limitation of HofC is the chaplaincy presented is USA-centric. For example, there is significant emphasis on how chaplaincy is informed by the US constitution and the history of chaplaincy skips British chaplaincy. Additionally, HofC repeatedly states that chaplaincy does not including proselytising on the basis of the constitution. While the US constitution is pivotal for US chaplaincy, it is irrelevant for non-US settings. Furthermore, the US focus meant forms of chaplaincy which are critical in other parts of the world (e.g. Sports Chaplaincy) were not mentioned. As an aged care chaplain, I struggled with the designation of aged care as a subset of health chaplaincy, particularly as aged care is

more similar to prison ministry (e.g. the people cared for are ‘in’ for long periods and often express feelings of imprisonment).

In conclusion I certainly appreciated, learnt and was challenged by HofC. Globally people whose focus is chaplaincy will benefit from reading HofC. I suspect it is critical reading for American chaplains.

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

Beyond Doubt: The Secularization of Society

Kasselstrand, Isabella, Phil Zuckerman and Ryan T. Cragun. *Beyond Doubt: The Secularization of Society.* New York, NY: New York University Press, 2023, 242 pages.

In the 1980s and 1990s, one of the biggest names in America in the sociology of religion was Rodney Stark, Professor of sociology at the University of Washington. He wrote a number of books in which he totally rejected the idea of secularisation, for example in *The Triumph of Faith: Why the World is More Religious than Ever* (2015). Stark argued that religion addresses fundamental human needs that are always in demand. Where religion declines, it is because the 'religious firms' have become lazy and are not fulfilling those human demands. He explained that religious firms which have some form of monopoly, such as the national churches of some European nations, have indeed become lazy. This explained the low levels of religious vitality in Europe, he said. Stark's views were supported by a number of other prominent sociologists.

Beyond Doubt sets out to show that Stark and his colleagues were completely mistaken. Secularisation is occurring around the globe

as a result of modernisation. The authors explain that economic surplus leads to the specialisation of roles in society, and the differentiation which the authors define as ‘the separation of religion from various aspects of societies, institutions, or individuals’ (p.25). Along with differentiation is a social process of rationalisation, which they define as ‘the ordering of society based on technological efficiency, bureaucratic impersonality, and scientific and empirical evidence’ (p.26). Modernisation has to do with the extent to which differentiation and rationalisation are occurring in society, and as differentiation and rationalisation occur, so religion is moved out of many processes and institutions in society.

The authors have gathered general evidence for secularisation around the globe. The World Values Survey between 1981 and 2020, and the European Values Survey between 1981 and 2020, show that in almost every one of the 100 countries involved in the surveys, religion has declined over the period measured. They use three measures of religion: belief, behaviour (such as religious attendance) and belonging. Only in a few countries has there been an increase in religious attendance. These countries include a few North African countries, and republics of the former Soviet Union. The authors argued that the increase in attendance in those republics was a result of the previous low levels of religion which had resulted from suppression by anti-religious regimes. In

reality, they said, the underlying trends of modernisation would still lead to secularisation. Case studies of Norway, Chile, South Korea and the United States showed that similar patterns of secularisation were occurring in quite different socio-economic contexts.

The authors argue that human beings are not naturally religious, noting there have always been groups of people who have rejected religion. Increasingly, the authors note, in secularised societies people will not be opposed to religion, but indifferent to it. It will just cease to be a set of beliefs and practices which concern them. It will be something to which people will give no attention, just as we no longer debate whether wagons pulled by oxen are good or bad (p.117). People will raise their children, attend life-cycle rituals, make ethical decisions, and engage in communities without any reference to religion.

Much of the book is well supported by empirical data and shows conclusively that in many countries around the world, there are currently strong signs of decline in religiosity. My major problem with the book is the narrowness of its theory, arguing that the *only* significant factor in the decline of religion, as measured by religious belief, behaviour and belonging, is modernisation as measured by the extent of differentiation and rationalisation. Indeed, the authors make no attempt at empirical measures of differentiation and rationalisation and occasionally revert to Gross

National Product instead. Rather than acknowledge that government regulations, either pro- or anti-religious, can make a difference to religious beliefs, practice and belonging, they suggest such repressions only lead to 'artificial secularisation', which then reverts to its natural state when repression is lifted, as has happened in Russia.

Similarly, they note how in many countries around the world, religion has been linked to ethnicity and used in ethno-nationalistic movements. That is now occurring in Russia, and has occurred in Poland, Ireland, Iran and Afghanistan, for examples. This they explain in terms of de-differentiation (p.142). Yet many aspects of these societies, such as the health system, technology, trade, transport, and so on, remain differentiated, even in terms of the authors' limited account of differentiation.

They admit that the revelations of abuse in religious organisations may have had an impact on the rapid secularisation that has occurred in Ireland in recent decades (p.143). However, they fail to acknowledge that such failures of religious institutions can play a role in secularisation. Indeed, they do not really take seriously the argument put forward by Inglehart that secularisation has occurred because of major changes in personal and social values around personal fulfilment, which are contrary to the traditional values espoused by many religions around pro-fertility. Although they refer to Inglehart's *Religion's Sudden Decline: What's*

Causing it, and What Comes Next, there is no serious engagement here.

Modernisation, in terms of differentiated social systems and rationalised bureaucratic and technological processes, is a major factor in secularisation and has certainly led to many aspects of society emerging which make no reference to religion. It is certainly arguable that such processes have led to religion being focused on personal and family life as Luckmann (*The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society,* 1967) argued in the 1960s. However, the theory fails to explain the quite sudden decline of religion in most parts of the world in the last few decades, a phenomenon better explained by Inglehart (2021). Underlying this failure is the attempt by the authors to spin every example to their theory, rather than acknowledging that religion does play diverse roles in different societies, and modernisation occurs in somewhat different ways, leading to the fact that differentiation and rationalisation are just two of the processes affecting religious decline.

This book is important in refuting Stark and his colleagues, and providing a summary of what is occurring around the world in relation to religion. Its description of a secular society as one in which religion becomes irrelevant rather than being anti-religious is a helpful contribution. As the book notes several times, there is no argument here that religion will disappear, even though it will

diminish in importance. For those in Christian ministry, this book provides no comfort or future directions, but provides the backdrop against which patterns of ministry must be developed. It does shine a light on what many societies around the world now look like. Given that fact that for most people religion is not on their radar, churches are now challenged to find new ways in which we can contribute to the lives of others, creating societies which are inclusive and respectful and in which life is meaningful.

Philip Hughes
Emeritus Professor (Alphacrucis University College)

The Christian Gospel: A Short Account of the Momentous News About Jesus Christ

Payne, Tony. *The Christian Gospel: A Short Account of the Momentous News About Jesus Christ.* Sydney: Matthias Media, 2023, 77 pages.

Australia and Canada share many features in common. Historically, our two countries are profoundly marked by British colonial expansion. Politically, both nations are envied on the global stage as stable, progressive, democracies that serve as middle-powers in their respective regions. Culturally, Australia and Canada are nations of immigrants, with a growing awareness of the impact upon the Indigenous peoples and the need for reconciliation. Ecclesiastically, both countries reflect the legacy of European Christendom spread abroad, and both nations are now experiencing the challenge and complexity of Christian witness in what Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor calls “A Secular Age.”

Tony Payne’s new publication *The Christian Gospel* seeks to speak directly to those impacted by these common features identified above. Payne names a variety of people he knows in Australia who have either grown up in church and drifted away from

Christianity, or those who are born and raised in a secular household now apathetic towards the claims of Christian faith. While reading Payne's work, I found his imagined reader (p.4) to be familiar here in Canada as well, a growing segment of the population missiologists refer to as "nones and dones." Payne invites his reader, who we might call an "affable agnostic neighbour," first to know themselves and the world around them better by appreciating the deep impact of the Christian gospel on Western culture. Second, Payne pushes further to provide both an invitation and a pathway for one to take steps towards faith in Jesus, by building their own lives on this gospel truth.

Beginning with the Creation, Payne invites the reader to consider God's big story of salvation, focusing on the potential and problematic nature of human beings, being human. With humour and contemporary imagery, Payne traces the foundational problem of Sin in the world, as well as the corresponding impact upon human creatures and our relationship with God and one another. Reflecting on God's justice and our own human mortality, Payne nudges the reader towards a longing to resolve this tension of how best to live a meaningful life in a fallen world. Carefully noting the joy and gift of the Old Testament, including the clear love of God from the Hebrew Bible, the reader is then introduced to the paradigm-shifting encounter of the incarnation of Jesus – Messiah, Christ, King. Drawing on Paul's "unknown God" exchange

in Acts 17 with philosophers in Athens, Payne invites the reader to consider the wonder of the resurrection in light of the awesomeness of the knowledge that God created the entire universe. Is resurrection from the dead really that incomprehensible when you stop to consider the One who gave life to everything we see in the world and beyond?

Near the end of his short book, Payne returns to his initial argument that not only should those living in a post-Christendom context have a deeper awareness of the impact of the Christian gospel on the West, but that this same gospel invites us to do something as a result. Payne writes, “The Christian gospel is about the rebellion of every human being against the God who created us, and it’s about what God has done in history through Jesus Christ to completely change the terms of that relationship. And what God has done through Jesus can’t be ignored, as if it didn’t happen. It calls for a response.” (p. 66) Payne confronts the reader with a stark choice – living in response to this gospel either by a Frank Sinatra like “my way” or “God’s way.”

Payne ends his work with a deeper dive on what living in “God’s way” could look like for the reader. Concrete suggestions are made for those interested in walking the road of discipleship including “talking to God (prayer),” “submission to Jesus (conversion),” and “trusting in Jesus (holiness),” as one goes deeper in their relationship with God in Christ.

The Christian Gospel admirably covers a lot of theological ground in a short number of pages. Written in a winsome, compelling, and invitational tone, this evangelistic and apologetic publication would be one that I would happily place in the hands of those who were seeking to know more about the basics of the Christian faith.

Where I would like to have seen more emphasis, however, is in a clearer and deeper sense of ecclesiology throughout the short book. Payne notes that “Western culture lionizes individual freedom” and that “this individualist drumbeat is so relentless in our culture that we barely even notice it anymore,” and yet much of the writing is directed *to the individual* without much reference to the Ekklesia. While commending the church as part of one’s trust in Jesus (p. 76), there is still a carefulness in the wording noting “preconceptions” and “previous experiences” that were not positive. It’s understandable, of course, in light of mission history in the West, but I was left longing for a more fulsome argument of why in a secular and individualistic age, belonging to Jesus means living out the faith in community. While appreciating the caution needed when discussing church and belonging in a post-Christendom context, I was eager to hear reasons why belonging to the local church as the Body of Christ is essential in a spiritual but not religious age.

With these reservations noted, I commend *The Christian Gospel* as a thoughtful and contextual tool for evangelism and

apologetics in Western settings such as Australia or Canada today. Tony Payne's work will be a welcome addition to small group ministries and congregational outreach in equipping their members to articulate their Christian faith in a way that is effective with those where they live, work and play.

Ross A. Lockhart
Dean of St. Andrew's Hall, the Presbyterian Church in Canada's Vancouver college located on the campus of the University of British Columbia.

Dementia and the Church: Creating a Dementia Friendly Church

&

Dementia and the Church: Memory, Care and Inclusion

Rodgers, Jade. *Dementia and the Church: Creating a Dementia Friendly Church*. Maryborough, VIC: JADMA Publishing, 2023, 118 pages.

Cail, Mary McDaniel. *Dementia and the Church: Memory, Care and Inclusion*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress press, 2023, 226 pages.

The World Health Organization says that there are 55 million people living with dementia today and this number is increasing. Dementia Australia explains that dementia is the biggest killer of women in Australia. This is a huge challenge, not simply for those

living with dementia and their loved ones, but for communities and churches.

Many churches and Christians, however, are either unaware of the need to love people impacted by dementia or unprepared to engage in dementia ministry. Indeed, as an aged care chaplain/advocate I believe sharing Jesus with people living with dementia (and older people) will only happen when the church becomes passionate about loving these people. Thus, I was excited to discover that there were not one but two books about Dementia ministry published in 2023.

Confusingly both have the same main title. *Dementia and the Church: Memory, Care and Inclusion* by Mary McDaniel Cail, comes out of the USA while *Dementia and the Church: Creating a Dementia Friendly Church*, by Jade Rodgers, is an Australian offering. Both books are written at a popular level, are easy reading, rightly highlight the importance and challenges of dementia ministry and have some great practical tips. The limitations of each were also shared: there was only a superficial engagement with Scripture/theology and the academic work on dementia spirituality. For example, Rodgers' chapter on Reminiscence did not even mention Mackinlay's pivotal work on Spiritual Reminiscence.

So, what are the differences? Rodgers' offering is shorter (90 pages) and has numerous links to websites. This is an enhancement for people who purchase the e-book edition, but may date it as websites change. I particularly liked the chapters on the sensory impact (sight and sound) of dementia. Theologically I struggled with the suggestion that 'Christian attributes can provide some protection against dementia,' although I certainly affirm the value of prayer, hope and community which are intrinsic to Christianity. There is also some research suggesting social interaction has some protective value regarding dementia which church gatherings provide.

Cail's work is longer (200 pages). Her book's greatest strength is probably also its greatest weakness, in that it is written with brutal honesty and incredible vulnerability. This made for powerful stories, but at times highlighted issues without providing answers. Another key feature of Cail's work was the extensive activities designed to help prepare, educate and equip churches for ministry in the midst of dementia. The effectiveness of this material will vary across readers and churches. In terms of critique, I struggled with the chapter on counselling as I felt it failed to separate counselling, pastoral care and spiritual direction.

Overall, while I am thankful for these authors' advocacy and passion for Christian engagement with dementia, I would not list

either of them as general must-reads. However, eBook readers who are keen to get weblinks to dementia resources will benefit from Rodgers' work while people who want a detailed church program to start to build a dementia program will find Cail's work interesting.

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

The Gender Revolution: A Biblical, Biological and Compassionate Response

Weerakoon, Patricia, Robert Smith and Kamal Weerakoon. *The Gender Revolution: A Biblical, Biological and Compassionate Response*. Sydney: Matthias Media, 2023, 198 pages.

If your teenage daughter tells you she's the only cisgender person in her class and has decided to be agender, how do you show love and understanding? How should your small group care for a man who says he is transitioning and wants to be called by female name and pronouns at church? How should your Christian school respond when a teenage boy starts wearing a dress and using girls' bathrooms and change-rooms? What if the parents of a six-year-old say he is transitioning and teachers must show support?

I've heard many Christians ask these questions. Sunday School teachers concerned for gender-questioning children but feeling unqualified to help. Parents not wanting to meddle or work against health professionals. Pastors not confident to contradict the gender theory, which has so rapidly appointed itself as the only view in polite society, even though it seems at odds with

their Christian worldview, and not wanting to expose the Church to charges of bigotry. Christians in psychology, social work, medicine or education have told me that questioning transgender theory can get you fired and (in Victoria at least) sued, so they keep quiet. Some feel discomfort. Some are trained in mainstream gender theory and say it's hard to integrate that with their Christian worldview.

I've been highly recommending this book as a tool for addressing these issues. It offers compassionate, practical advice on scenarios like the above, having first given a clear explanation of gender and related issues as part of a worldview strongly based on peer-reviewed research and biblical theology. While it deeply challenges the mainstream view, it cites a growing number of respected researchers and government bodies internationally. These scholars also challenge that mainstream, even if they are rarely cited in Australian media, and claim the tide is turning.

This book is not at all from the cringe fringe – readers are in the safe hands of a leading medical doctor / academic sexologist who has directed an award-winning Graduate Programme in Sexual Health at the University of Sydney and published research at the highest level, along with two experienced pastor/theologians with relevant postgraduate qualifications. A major strength of this book is its calm, reasoned style and its authors' obvious empathy and experience in caring for people with gender issues. It clearly aims

to promote understanding and “compassionate care, not censure” (p.159), so that Christians “actively oppose all forms of oppression” (p.14).

The authors say that sometimes “the only way to love others is to speak the truth with clarity” (p.3), and they are frank about what they see as harmful. They argue that transgender theory denies the biological realities of the body as described by objective science. They explain the binary biology of human reproduction, and the things that go wrong in a fallen world with various DSDs (disorders of sexual development), perhaps including the people who Jesus said were born eunuchs (Matthew 19:12). They say transgender ideology denies science and instead promotes “feelings fundamentalism”, in which a person’s temporary and changeable feelings are allowed to define reality. This can lead people to damage “healthy bodies by destabilising their normal hormonal operation, removing perfectly healthy, functional sexual organs and replacing them with cosmetic ones” (p.70) that have serious issues, and beginning a lifetime dependence on pharmaceutical cross-sex hormones.

The authors cite research showing that up to 30% of transitioners later regret it. Many try to de-transition and are traumatised to find their reproductive future, their voice and their appearance have all been irreversibly changed. The research behind the mainstream gender affirmation model (“the Dutch protocol”) has

since been found to have falsely concluded that gender dysphoria disappeared after transition, reported only the best-case outcomes, and not examined risks even though a “significant proportion” of the sample suffered adverse effects.

Yet transgender ideology is urged on children. The authors describe how a child who doesn’t conform to gender stereotypes may be told they are transgender: a girl who likes playing football would once have been accepted as a sporty “tomboy” but is now told she really is a boy. Kids who don’t fit in easily are told that transitioning will solve their problems – and schools, health professionals, media and books for very young children now support this. Children see trans kids receiving instant hero status and attention from teachers or perhaps divorced and distracted parents (p.117). Kids are put on the trans conveyor belt immediately, often without carefully checking for depression, anxiety, autism, or poor self-esteem, which have been found to be deeper causes or “co-morbidities”.

The book describes a staggering twenty-fold increase in the number of teenage girls experiencing Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria (ROGD). A girl may quite sensibly reject our culture’s porn-affected image of what a woman is and does, or dislike the hypersexualised attention she receives from men who have been pornified. Easy solution: don’t be a woman anymore! She may find some aspects of puberty difficult or disgusting, and be told

that puberty can simply be avoided. She hears this from numerous social media with no expertise in medicine or psychology and who do not know her or her situation. Friends may support this, so ROGD often happens in clusters, often called "social contagion" (p.131) Yet research shows that if these children go through puberty, 85% will lose their gender dysphoria and become happy with their sex. Most of the 15% who don't are found to be gay or lesbian, and this has led to tension between the LGB and the T, with LGB organisations calling transgender theory the new homophobia (p.119).

While puberty blockers are touted as safe, the authors show that blocking puberty can negatively affect brain development, bone strength, cardiovascular health and fertility, and disconnect kids from friends who are going through puberty.

Trans activists often use the threat of suicide: "Do you want a dead son or living daughter?" But the authors cite research showing "no strong empirical evidence to suggest that puberty blockers reduce suicidality or suicide rates" (p.105). One Swedish study found transitioning may even increase suicidality, and other research shows doctors and psychologists focusing excessively on suicide may create dangerous self-fulfilling prophecies (p.143).

The authors see two types of trans men. One has genuine discomfort with their gender, usually experienced since childhood,

often by men who are homosexual. The other has autogynephilia, a condition in which a man is sexually aroused by the thought of himself as a woman (p.130).

What does *The Gender Revolution* advocate for the Church to do? Love people, especially the teen who doesn't fit the stereotype. Listen, empathise, understand people's experience, and learn the science and psychology around gender. Encourage "supportive waiting", in which people continue in their biological sex while digging into deeper issues like anxiety, depression, autism, family issues like parental mental illness, or bullying, and addressing those (p.134). Teach that one's identity consists of many parts, including sexuality and gender, but is best found in creation and redemption by a loving God. Look forward to the "glorious body" we will receive when Jesus returns. Encourage a climate of ongoing discussion of all life issues, including sexuality and gender, so that people do not feel singled out when these issues are discussed.

I've found parents, teachers, ministry workers and at least one curious high schooler with gender issues have found this book a fascinating and reliable introduction, and professionals working in the area have enjoyed it and begun following its footnoted sources.

Grenville J.R. Kent
Adjunct Lecturer, Australian College of Ministries.

The Final Lap: Navigating the Transitions of Later Life

Wyatt, John. *The Final Lap: Navigating the Transitions of Later Life*. La Grange, KY: 10 Publishing, 2023, 80 pages.

While growing old happens naturally, aging is not easy. *The Final Lap* by John Wyatt is written to challenge and equip Christians facing later life, in this context being retirement and beyond).

In terms of structure, it has three clear chapters/movements with the title of each being self-explanatory: 'Hitting the Wall: Moving from work to retirement'; 'The Home Straight: Moving from independence to dependence' and 'The Finish Line: Moving from life to death'.

In terms of critique, *The Final Lap* has many more strengths than weaknesses. Its brevity (61 pages), easy reading style and large print all make it highly accessible. I also appreciated its engagement with both Scripture and the aged care literature. The middle chapter was exceptional in dealing with the topic of independence/dependency, which is a major topic given our culture's worship of independence. Spoiler alert: Wyatt emphasises that we are designed to be dependent! Indeed, this

chapter alone justifies the cost of the book, although I did feel $24 for 61 pages is unfortunate pricing.

Two other weaknesses are worthy of note. Firstly, there are three other Christian books which are comparable. *Making the Most of the Rest of Your Life* by John Chapman (Matthias Media, 2007) is another great short resource (57 pages). The major difference between the two is that *The Final Lap* is aimed at Christians while Chapman has an evangelistic focus. The second 'competitor' is *Finishing the Course with Joy: Guidance from God for Engaging with our Aging* by J.I. Packer, which focuses on the Bible and does not engage with the literature as *The Final lap* does. Finally, *Nearing Home* by Billy Graham (W Publishing Group, 2011), differs from both Chapman and Wyatt's books primarily on the basis of length (108 pages). As such, it has the space to cover more material than the others. However, being comparable to offerings from Chapmans, Packer, and Graham is perhaps more of a compliment than a weakness, and I recommend all four of these resources.

My more serious concern was two points of Wyatt's theology. Firstly, his position on joy – 'We should never forget that the race is ultimately all about joy'. Certainly, Piper argues "The meaning of life is to know God, and to enjoy God, and to reflect some of the beauty of God as we know him in Christ, and one day to see him perfectly and unendingly enjoy him." And Packer's focus agrees

with Wyatt. Furthermore, as Wyatt notes, Jesus Himself pursued joy (Hebrews 12). However, I am not convinced Christian life is '**all** about joy' (emphasis added).

More significantly I was concerned by Wyatt's position that 'The Christian faith teaches us that death is an enemy (1 Corinthian 15:26). And therefore, we should never welcome or hasten death'. Certainly, death enters creation as a direct consequence of the fall (Genesis 3) and I do not think we should hasten death. However, I would suggest a more nuanced reading of 1 Corinthians 15 which recognises Jesus redeems, or at least removes the sting of death. Additionally, the gospel accounts of Jesus' death (particularly Matthew 27, Luke 23 and John 19) could be read to suggest He welcomed death. This also reconciles with Paul's longing to die (Philippians 1). However, in both these points, *The Final Lap*'s brevity makes nuance challenging and if nothing else challenged my thinking on these points.

Despite these concerns, I strongly suggest reading *The Final Lap*. If you, or people you are working with, are approaching retirement and beyond, this resource is for you!

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