

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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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