



## Editorial

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### **Christian Critical Thinking and Contemporary Ministry**

In our first issue of this journal, I emphasized the need to assess and support our hunches about ministry and church life with proper research. It is too easy for ministers and lay people alike to “jump on bandwagons” and naively accept the reports or strategies for ministry they hear at conferences from “big name” speakers or worse, second-hand versions of these. Not that such speakers are deceitful or wrong but it’s too easy to generalize from personal experience, especially if it’s the experience of successful ministry, and overlook the unique circumstances involved.

Many years ago the Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote: “To criticism everything must submit.” This was part of the Enlightenment view that all legitimate thinking must be justified before the bar of human reason alone. For many such thinkers, reason was in a struggle with tradition and revelation, especially the Bible and the teachings of the Christian church. Christians always found Kant’s line of thinking hard to swallow because they trust the Bible as a source of truth and wisdom. However, the advent of postmodernism has also cast deep doubt over the whole Enlightenment project and its faith in reason. Postmodernists are more likely to insist that there is no unadulterated form of human reason; we all see things from a particular perspective and our judgement is skewed by the kind of person we are (Male/female, black/white, etc). So all criticism must begin from a starting point that is not neutral (maybe even a tradition!); this applies to the study of theology and ministry as much as any other discourse.

So where does this leave Christians? And what are the implications for the study of contemporary ministry?

First, we need to read our Bible carefully before we accept the common accusation that believers are (or should be) gullible or irrational. Think of Adam and Eve in the Garden. They were called on to trust what God had said to Adam about the two trees and not try to work it all out for themselves. But on that basis, they were expected to critically assess the suggestions of the serpent about eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. God’s word was the starting point from which they were to be critical of any other voice. It was their gullible acceptance of the serpent’s message that brought about their downfall.

Second, we need to develop what the Bible calls “discernment.” Paul calls on his readers to “test everything” (1Thess. 5:21) and to “weigh” the words of prophets (1Cor. 14:29). 1 John calls on its readers to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (1Jn. 4:1). John praises the Ephesian church for testing would be apostles (Rev. 2:2) and calls on the believers in Thyatira not to uncritically accept the words of prophets (Rev. 2:20-23).

In other words, the Bible does not endorse a Christian thought that is unthinking or uncritical. When we hear claims about ministry, therefore, we have the right, even the duty, to assess those claims. We need to ask for evidence before we accept a particular line of thinking about ministry.

And third, we need to apply ourselves to study/research and ask questions, including questions that have not been asked before or for which we have a fresh approach. This is what the *Journal of Contemporary Ministry* is all about: reasoned, evidence-based conclusions that do not reject criticism as such, but come from a stance of faith in God.

A year has gone by and we are publishing Issue 2 of the *Journal of Contemporary Ministry*. I have learned so much about journals, journal articles, and editing over the last two years. I’ve also been blessed and encouraged by readers of our first issue and by the number of new authors who are submitting material to us.

As I reflect on the submissions to the first two issues, the papers presented at the Harvest Research Conference and research projects being undertaken by our new DMin candidates, a few points stand out:

1. There remains so much more research to do. Just when we think it has all been said and done, we find that there come new questions, new perspectives, new ways of looking at old issues and brand new issues as well.
2. There are new voices emerging into the scholarly study of Christian ministry. They are not always as experienced or skilled as the learned “old men” but they have fresh insights to bring to the table.
3. People are finding creative ways of researching topics that might have seemed impossible, or inappropriate, in the past.
4. It takes a lot of effort and thought to produce a quality research article. For every article published in this journal, there are at least as many, which have not reached the standard expected (yet), or are still being developed, or were never started, even though someone had a great idea and even presented it somewhere. Even the papers at the Harvest Research Conference mostly do not become articles in this or any journal, for example.

Let me introduce our authors for this issue and their articles.

As is our practice, we begin with **four articles** that have withstood the rigours of “double blind” peer review and been approved as ready to read. You may not agree with what these authors say but you can at least be assured that they have been read critically by two scholars who didn’t know whose work they were appraising as well as by me and others in our editorial team. Some of these articles have been “back and forth” between the author and me many times before they were ready for publication. An article of this kind must not only be academically credible but also relevant and readable.

**Rev Dr Angelo Cettolin** is a senior lecturer in theology and ministry and Dean of Faculty at Eastern College Australia. Earlier in his career, he practised law and he has over thirty years of Christian ministry experience as a church planter, senior pastor, missions team leader, and Bible college teacher. He has served in various leadership roles with Australian Christian Churches/AOG, where he holds ordained ministry credentials. He has been a church development consultant and recently embarked on planting a new inner city church in Melbourne, Australia where he is co-lead pastor with his wife Robbie. His article “The Power of Integration: Challenges in researching Pentecostal/Charismatic spirituality” is based on the research he did for his Doctor of Ministry with the Australian College of Theology. In this article, Cettolin probes common ideas about the current state of Pentecostal spirituality in Australia, looking for real evidence about what has happened. He also discusses the issues involved in doing such research into an area as “nebulous” as spirituality.

**Pastor Astrid Staley** is an adjunct lecturer at Harvest and finalising her doctoral studies at Melbourne School of Theology in the area of Postvention care of those bereaved by suicide. Astrid has published a comprehensive pastoral resource, *The Pastor's Handbook: A Complete Theological & Practical Response to Suicide, Entering the World of the Suicide & the Bereaved*. She has also developed Suicide Prevention, Intervention & Postvention Care workshops based on nationally recognized best practice, which are delivered Australia-wide and overseas to Christian audiences. Her article “The Phenomenon of Disenfranchised Grief Experienced by Those Bereaved by Suicide: A Contemporary Pastoral Response” addresses a “hot button” topic. It’s a real challenge to the church to face the pastoral issues raised by this rampant problem in many countries, not least Australia.

**Dr Darin Freeburg** is an assistant professor in the School of Library and Information Science at the University of South Carolina, USA. He has an MA in Theology and a PhD in Communication and Information. In his research, he applies principles of Knowledge Management and Information Behaviour to churches in an effort to understand the characteristics of religious knowledge and how churches can be creators, rather than simply disseminators of this knowledge. His article “Trust and Tithing: The Relationships Between Religious Social Capital and Church Financial Giving” explores another issue that pastors find it hard to talk about - money! This article is grounded in strong quantitative research and, while technical in detail, leads to some interesting conclusions, which have the potential to enhance church life and ministry.

**Rev Dr Adrian Turner** serves as a Relationship Manager with Compassion Australia and is an adjunct lecturer with Harvest. He has over forty years’ experience in pastoral ministry, including church planting, senior pastor, and other ministry roles. His article “Creative Tensions Inherent within Contemporary Ministry”, based on research he undertook for his Doctor of Ministry with the Australian College of Theology, explores some of the dynamics of seeking to lead people to transformation within local churches.

Our **pastoral reflection** for this issue comes from the pastor of one of Melbourne’s larger churches. **Pastor Rohan Dredge** has spent the last two decades in full-time ministry in only three different roles. Starting his professional life as a high school teacher, he developed a care for young people, which eventually led to a role as Youth Pastor. He then served at the same church for over eleven years, where he concluded his role as Senior Associate. Subsequent to this, he balanced a combination of ministry and

corporate work, which continues today. In 2009, Rohan accepted the Senior Ministers position at Careforce Church (now Discovery Church) and has led that community through generational transition and cultural change. His pastoral reflection is based on those years of Christian ministry experience.

Our outstanding **student paper** for this issue has also been written by an experienced pastor. **Pastor Mike Keating** is currently the lead minister of a medium sized yet growing church in Kelmscott Western Australia, having spent over 25 years serving in various roles within the Assemblies of God including State Vice President for a decade. He wrote this essay on “‘Care’ Fullness” as part of his MA studies with Harvest in “The Minister’s Personal Development”. As a pastor, he wrestles with the dangers to the emotional health of Christian ministers in western countries.

We are fast building two important resources for readers and students in the area of contemporary ministry: **book reviews** and lists of relevant **theses** from around the globe. Reading these sections of our journal will help you keep abreast of developments in this and related fields of enquiry.

I commend all the contents of this issue to you as discerning readers.

In closing, I also want to thank my editorial team - Kerrie Stevens, Astrid Staley, and Clayton Coombs - for all their effort in making Issue 2 happen.

(Dr) Jon K. Newton

Editor