

Ighofose, Carol S. and Joyphen Henry et al. *Dementia and the Church: A Practical Guide*. Dementia.uk, 2023, 162 pages.

Christian ministry with people living with dementia is experiencing real growth in terms of the number of books being published. *Dementia and the Church: A Practical Guide* (DC) is an important new offering from the United Kingdom.

Indeed, it is the first book in this context to be written from a Pentecostal Christian perspective. While other key Christian dementia authors come from a range of denominational backgrounds (e.g. Elizabeth Mackinlay is an Anglican minister, John Swinton is a Presbyterian Minister and Kenneth Carder is a retired United Methodist Bishop), their denominational perspectives are not dominant in their writing. The only other significant Christian denominational dementia resource I am aware of is *Dementia: Hope on a Difficult Journey* by Adrian Treloar, which has a strong Catholic flavour.

The other significant contribution of DC relates to its authors. Specifically, seven of the eight contributors are female, though this is unsurprising as most of the world experts on dementia spirituality are female. DC also accurately notes women are more impacted by dementia both in terms of diagnosis and caring for loved ones living with dementia. What is perhaps more important is that all the authors are black. Again, as DC correctly notes, people blessed with significant melanin are more likely to develop dementia than their paler peers. Therefore, a black perspective on dementia and faith is a critical one. Certainly, John Swinton, the preeminent dementia theologian, is of African-Caribbean descent. However, John does not normally write from this perspective and his multi-author works have typically had contributors from multiple races, although John is currently working on a project focused on dementia amongst African Caribbean people, which is exciting.

DC has an easy reading style, clear chapter heading and, at 135 pages, is short. This makes it ideal for its intended audience: church members, families and caregivers.

I enjoyed and was challenged by 'Introduction: Dementia has no boundaries', chapter 1: 'An overview' and chapters 6a and 6b 'living with someone with dementia' which were basically biographies. 'Chapter 5: The law and dementia', covered an important topic

but some of the material is not easily transferable outside the United Kingdom as different laws apply.

My biggest concerns were that DC did not engage with the literature about dementia spirituality, and while Bible verses were found throughout the text, they were more in the form of memory verses rather than detailed exposition. A less significant 'problem' is there were three books titled 'Dementia and the Church' published in 2024; thankfully they all have different subtitles. I believe DC is the best of the three.

Overall, I think DC will be core reading for people interested in a Black Pentecostal Dementia theology, and particularly in the United Kingdom. I would also recommend it as an introduction for churches looking to start engaging in dementia ministry.

Ben Boland

Seniors Living Chaplain (Churches of Christ in QLD)

Lapa, Charles Nombo and Janet Dickson. *Searching for Paradise: A Story of Chiefs, Gangs, Prime Ministers, and the God beyond the Clouds*. Resource Publications, 2024, 214 pages.

I was absolutely underprepared for just how deeply this story would move me. What began as a slow introduction to village life, in what is now known as Papua New Guinea, ended with tears streaming down my face as I considered the power of the Holy Spirit to transform people's lives. While *Searching for Paradise* by Lapa and Dickson is something of a memoir, the stories contained within have something to offer to those who are working with minority groups and/or cross-culturally.

The first part of *Searching for Paradise* describes the somewhat idyllic village life that Lapa enjoyed as a child. The village life in the highlands of Papua New Guinea was guided by traditions that bound them as a community and gave them peace and hope for the future. Even when there were tribal wars, these still had a sense of tradition and structure to follow. They looked after one another through, "valuing the common good and community above individual acquisitiveness" (p. 22), through caring for the balance of their ecosystem by being careful not to overhunt, and through a truly democratic "system of tribes and chiefs ... leading through discussion and consensus rather than by force" (p. 51). Their attitudes reflected Christ before they encountered him (Matthew 20:6; 24-28).

This idyllic village life is then interrupted in part two, when the villagers meet "white men", never even being aware of their existence until the 1960s. These colonisers took their tribes and country by force and without consent, using fear and weapons to intimidate them into obedience. Police officers and missionaries alike acted in ways that treated them as sub-humans. Part three shows the reader just how truly damaging these actions were: where chiefs experienced humiliation, broken spirits, loss of dignity, breaking down their communities and stripping them of their culture that gave them identity. Young men formed gangs to find once more a sense of purpose and identity in a close-knit community. They were looking for their tribe, finding it in violence. They did violent things to women to feel powerful; they killed their enemies in ways they had learned from Wild West movies.

Lapa then recounts that amid this violence, confusion, and displacement, he encountered the Holy Spirit. Radically transformed by this experience, Lapa brought the transforming gospel of Jesus to gang members, but also to their victims, and taught them by example the way of forgiveness, grace, gentleness and peace. Part four of the book closes off the story by showing how this transformative gospel even transformed the government who would respond to violence with prayer, repentance, and forgiveness.

The fact that *Searching for Paradise* is a memoir might preclude some from considering the book to inform their ministry. It is not written in the typical western format in that it jumps around and was at times hard to follow. The beginning of the story was slow to begin with, and at first, I was worried at the theology of the writers when they described their encounters with missionaries. It appeared that they supported the questionable tactics of the missionaries, for example, when missionaries declared that Lapa's whole tribe had been converted simply by receiving gifts from them, this was described without critique. However, I was soon corrected, and so I suggest to any reader to persevere through these concerns, persevere through the slow beginning, and persevere through a different style of storytelling, because the big picture of the memoir offers context to the transformation in later parts and a lot to the contemporary ministry practitioner.

Reading this book challenged me on a deeper level to understand the impact of colonisation. Lapa and Dickson give a gentle critique of the actions of the colonisers – respecting the individuals while describing the deep and devastating impact of their actions. One could read this book as simply a history lesson, but the reality of the matter is that indigenous peoples are still affected by colonisation to this day – in Australia too, as a very current reality. Lapa and Dickson show that when people who represent majority groups work with an ethnocentric mindset, the consequences are dire.

Not only does Lapa and Dickson's writing offer some description of harmful ways of working, but it also offers some ideas of how tribal traditions and Lapa's own practice exemplifies effective ministry with vulnerable groups. This is clearly relevant to working with minorities and vulnerable groups, but it could also be relevant whenever ministering in a position of power. Lapa's ministry exemplifies keeping the

transformative power of the gospel central, ministering from a place of humility, service, and consultation rather than presuming to have all the answers.

Searching for Paradise is an excellent book for anyone to read before or during ministry with those who have less power. It illuminates the damage done by thoughtless ministry and building one's own sense of prestige, power and importance, or by seeing those we minister to as somehow inferior and ourselves as their saviour. It shows the way towards how decolonising ministry can be transformative and powerful, and the power of ministry done alongside rather than over others. But it also moves us to remember the power of God in the lives of those who fully surrender to him.

Timothy A. Mullen

Lecturer (Acknowledge Education) and Editor (Journal of Contemporary Ministry)

Mackay, Hugh. *The Way We Are: Lessons from a Lifetime of Listening*. Allen & Unwin, 2024, 358 pages.

Hugh Mackay will be known to many of us through his numerous books. He has always written in a way which accurately reflects patterns and trends in contemporary society. His style is accessible and he manages to convey profound themes in a readable manner. This book is a little less descriptive than some of his earlier books. Alongside some observations of society, much of the book is dedicated to exhorting people to embrace his ways of overcoming the problems that beset our society. As always, his exhortations make a lot of sense.

Mackay begins with the simple observation that Australians are lonelier than they have ever been. This is driving the epidemic of mental ill-health in Australian society, the domestic violence, and the social fragmentation that is occurring. It is rooted, he argues, in the fact that the number of people living together is shrinking and that more than 50 per cent of households in Australia consist of just one or two people. This contributes to a second factor, which is the high rate of relationship breakdown with between 35 and 40 per cent of all contemporary marriages likely to end in divorce and where there is a lot of disruption in families, friendship circles, neighbourhoods and communities. This is accompanied by high rates of mobility both in terms of people moving home but also in terms of people travelling widely. People are relentlessly busy: too busy to stop and listen to each other or engage with each other's interests. He also notes the sharp decline in religious faith and practice which, he says, has had a huge impact on the character of our society.

However, one of his major concerns is about the impact of information technology, in particular social media. It promised to make us more connected than ever. He argues that it has utterly transformed the ways in which we live, work, socialise, gossip, and inform (and misinform) ourselves. He says the internet "feels like social interaction but isn't" (p.25). Even the personal Zoom conversation is not the same as a face-to-face meeting. He argues that the crucial element of human interaction is missing: eye contact. "You can't make eye contact with someone on a screen, no matter how much you might try to trick your brain into thinking you can."

The result of all this is that we have developed a 'me-centred' culture which is less cooperative and more competitive and narcissistic. The result is a culture in which there is widespread anxiety, depression, hypertension, inflammation, sleep deprivation, and vulnerability to addiction, which can all contribute to a lower life expectancy.

Part of the problem is being drowned in information, a lot of which is misinformation. There is a plethora of 'fake wisdom' for any crazy theory you might want to propose. Indeed, he suggests that some of the widespread opinions are fake. For example, he rejects the ideas that there are distinctive 'Aussie values', that the mass media are more powerful than we are, and that social media can satisfy our need to belong. He argues that it is fake wisdom that to change people's behaviour, you must first change their minds. No, we need to change the social and physical environment in which people are operating. Behaviour causes attitudes rather than the reverse, he holds.

In the third chapter of the book, Mackay begins his exhortation to a different world. He begins by arguing for true gender equality: where women and men are treated equally. He wants us to move not only beyond male supremacy which he argues is bad, ugly and stupid, but also beyond female supremacy too. "We need to become gender-blind in politics, in employment, in academia, in the arts, in religion and in the culture more broadly", he writes (p.149), and this involves recognising that gender should be conceived not in purely binary terms as once thought, he suggests.

He argues that poverty is a major issue in Australia and is a problem for us all. It is a problem rooted in inequality in the families and social contexts into which we are born, and in under-employment and the housing crisis. Our social systems including our education system institutionalise poverty.

Fundamental to our psychological and physical health is kindness which he defines as "anything we do to show other people that we take them seriously" (p.260). Kindness needs to be nurtured. It is time to hone our listening skills, he says: not just hearing, but really listening. And this is not something we can really do online. It comes down to the ways in which we manage our personal relationships: within the workplace and beyond it. "We are born to cooperate, communicate, connect and contribute" he says, and it should start in our street.

While he appeals to a wider public than those who attend a church, I believe his descriptions of the problems of Australian society are, by and large, accurate and should be considered carefully by all church leaders. And his solutions are inherently reasonable and very much in line with the Christian Gospel. They should be considered by all of us.

Philip Hughes

Emeritus Professor (Alphacrucis University College)

Pearcey, Nancy. *The Toxic War on Masculinity: How Christianity Reconciles the Sexes*. Baker Books, 2023, 352 pages.

I first heard of Nancy Pearcey and her recent book *The Toxic War on Masculinity* (TTWM) on a podcast interview with former Australian Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson, where she challenged the cultural emasculation of men. Helpfully, she approaches the controversial discussion with a “show, don’t tell” approach, which blends historical and sociological facts with personal stories and anecdotes.” Pearcey's thesis is that masculinity itself is not “originally or intrinsically toxic” but that true masculinity is a gift from God, whereas toxic forms of masculinity are sins that need to be repented of. I agree with her and find it to be liberating, empowering, and a breath of fresh air, as have many who have read it upon my recommendation.

TTWM has three parts, which are bookended by an informative introduction and an encouraging epilogue that gives “a tribute to manhood.” The three parts are titled as follows:

1. The Good News about Christian Men.
2. How the Secular Script Turned Toxic.
3. When Christian Men Absorb the Secular Script.

Each part cascades into the next, with a logical flow and legible progression in thought. Part two is the most comprehensive portion of the book, containing nine of the fourteen chapters. It is within this part that Pearcey takes the reader on an “excursion into history,” starting with the pre-Industrial period, “to ask why the secular world gets masculinity so wrong.”

Coming from a Christian home and personally being involved in various levels of pastoral ministry, I have observed the tendency for Australian churches to disempower and berate men. This creates a culture that devalues their role as men and fathers, producing passivity and ungodly behaviour. Pearcey addresses this phenomenon at regular intervals throughout the book. As an Aussie, I would propose that this is part of the reason why, as of 2021, only 39% of the Australian church are men (NCLS). I would echo Pearcey by saying that, generally speaking, we’ve succumbed to the secular script on masculinity, forgetting that manhood is a gift from God and that toxic forms of

masculinity are the result of sin, not masculinity itself. Making the distinction between masculine ontology and sinful behaviour is a major theme in TTWM.

From a practical ministry perspective, education in this historical progression will significantly impact how we approach our men's and young adult ministries. Education on this matter for pastors and those in ministry is of utmost importance. If we can shift our language and the way we approach discipleship with our boys and men, then I believe we'll begin to see a revival towards healthier men and stronger Christian families. We must counter the secular script with God's narrative to do this. Insightfully, Pearcey notes that "Men will be drawn back into family life only when they realise that being a good husband and father is a manly thing to do; that paternal duty and compassion are not female standards imposed upon men but are integral to the male character as it was created by God." TTWM is a brilliant book that includes many biblical and historical Christian insights that can help us, who are in pastoral ministry, orient ourselves towards this vision.

As an Australian, one minor critique is how Americanised the history and sociological observations are. Granted, this is written by an American scholar, but it does lead to some dissonance when reading as Australian culture among men is different in many ways. From my observation, Australian men are generally more passive and less likely to be given to dutiful action than Americans (something unheard of a century ago). Having said this, the American portrayal within TTWM is not so far removed from our Australian experience that the insights are left devoid of value or relevance.

In sum, TTWM offers a readable, logical approach to these three questions: "(1) What is the God-given pattern for manhood? (2) How did the Western culture lose it? And (3) How can we recover it?" I have and will continue to recommend this book to every Christian man of any age group. It offers a thorough examination of the culture we are in and therefore, most importantly, I recommend pastors to read it. Ultimately, if we can move our Christian communities away from the secular view of masculinity towards God's redemptive view, I believe that we'll see a revival of men in our nation.

Josiah D. Trigg

Pastor at Church One, Gold Coast.

Prilleltensky, Isaac and Ora. *How People Matter: Why it Affects Health, Happiness, Love, Work and Society*. Cambridge University Press, 2021, 332 pages.

This book does not mention Christian ministry. Indeed, it is written by people with a Jewish background. However, it has profound implications for ministry and should be read by anyone involved in Christian ministry.

The authors are social psychologists, now working in Miami, USA, but originally from Argentina and Israel. They lived in Australia for a while and the book makes specific reference to Australian contexts. The book is built on the growing field of psychology around the notion of 'mattering'. In order to find a sense of meaning, people need to feel that they 'matter' to others, that they are valued, appreciated, respected and recognised. And they need to feel that they add value, that they are making a contribution to the lives of others and making a difference in the world.

The book maintains that there are four major areas in which people need to feel that they are valued and in which they feel they add value: in the self, and in relationships, work and community. After examining the psychological theories of mattering, much of the book is devoted to describing how 'mattering' applies to these areas of life. While acknowledging that we have limited time and energy to invest in each area, they argue that, because these areas are interconnected, people need to be involved in all four areas. Incidentally, 'work' includes voluntary as well as paid work. And community includes small local communities such as churches as well as the wider society.

The psychology of mattering is helpful in terms of describing why and how some people find a strong sense of meaning in life while others do not. The Prilleltenskys note how a sense of personal wellbeing, self-worth and sense of security is related to the earliest personal attachments which children form with their parents or guardians. It is developed through the relationships that people form in which people feel that they are valued and in which they add value to others. This material is important for counsellors and psychologists.

Of great importance to those in leadership in small groups or large churches is the material on mattering in work and community. In these interpersonal contexts, leaders need to seek to build relationships in which people feel that they are valued and that they can add value. They advocate for building a SER culture which is Supportive,

Effective and Reflective. They describe a supportive culture as one which recognises, affirms and appreciates people. It involves creating a psychological climate of safety and acceptance in which people feel they can be honest, that they can make mistakes and can be forgiven, and in which there is trust in which feedback can be given and received. It is a culture in which people are treated fairly and equally, in which no one is excluded, rejected, or devalued. Bullying and mistreatment are particularly corrosive. My experience is that while most churches would claim to create such a culture, there are many churches where in councils, boards, small groups, or in the church as a whole, the culture is far from being supportive for many people involved.

Secondly, the culture needs to be effective in having clear objectives and plans. The traditional language in many churches is having a clear sense of mission to which people are committed. To develop such a culture, people need to listen to each other and make shared decisions. They need to be aware of each other's needs, roles and perspectives. Within that environment, people are invited to play a part, but with some autonomy in shaping the role and responsibility so that it is consistent with their interests, skills and levels of competence.

Thirdly, the culture needs to be reflective in terms of recognising people's contributions and rewarding them in an appropriate way. It is also a culture in which people reflect on what has been achieved and on mistakes which have been made. This culture allows people to own their mistakes and people who make mistakes are treated with compassion. It is a culture in which there are opportunities to grow and learn.

Ultimately, the book is about creating a human world in which there are social systems in which there is equality, respect and dignity. It is a world in which resources are shared in ways which are fair, where people build on each other's strengths for the good of all. The book talks a lot about creating a 'We' culture rather than a 'Me' culture, in which the corrosive barriers to racism, sexism, and populist nationalism are overcome.

To me, their vision sounds very much a contemporary picture of the Kingdom of God for which all Christians should be striving. In this book, that vision is rooted in the theories of contemporary social psychology and the understanding of basic human drives. But it shows how in small and large ways, the ways in which we relate to each other can be

extended to creating a better world. While it is a book which is essential reading for all ministers, pastors and leaders in churches, it is book which I would recommend to every person who wants to contribute to a better world ... and that should include all of us.

Philip Hughes

Emeritus Professor (Alphacrucis University College)

**Ringma, Charles. *In the Midst of Much-Doing: Cultivating a Missional Spirituality*.
Langham, 2023, 570 pages.**

Charles Ringma's *In the Midst of Much-Doing: Cultivating a Missional Spirituality* could be a landmark work for those involved in Christian mission, potentially doing for mission spirituality what David Bosch's *Transforming Mission* did for mission theology. Though rich in diverse wisdom, it's also strikingly personal, offering guidance that is as practical as it is deep. Here is a wellspring of inspiration for anyone looking to live out an active, resilient life of Christian discipleship and mission. Ringma's book feels like a journey alongside a seasoned guide who has walked the path of mission spirituality before us and has returned to show us where the treasures can be found. In his gentle and wise way, he invites readers to engage with a spectrum of voices from church history and Scripture, connecting us with profound thinkers, mystics, and practitioners who can help shape a spirituality resilient enough to sustain mission in today's world.

Ringma insists on the integration of our inner and outer lives. He challenges the assumption that mission work should be preoccupied with evangelistic goals or social justice victories. Instead, he draws attention to the spiritual practices and rhythms essential for sustaining wholistic mission over a lifetime, pushing against the cultural tendencies toward busyness and burnout. His chapters on Bonhoeffer and Radical Evangelicals, in particular, serve as a mirror, prompting a reflection on how many of us might have focused so much on the demands of our tasks that we've neglected the spiritual depth needed to carry that work forward sustainably. He reminds us that without deep wells of spiritual resource, we risk falling into despair, cynicism, and burnout—issues that have impacted an entire generation of Christian leaders.

Through this book, Ringma critiques the "management and marketing" approach to Christian leadership, urging readers to step away from a fixation on metrics and outcomes and instead cultivate a spirituality that is rich, reflective, and life-giving. This is not a call to withdraw from the world; rather, it is a call to engage more deeply and sustainably by drawing from a broader set of traditions and practices. His approach is one of drinking from "diverse fountains"—learning from ascetics, mystics, and theologians whose wisdom provides both a refuge and a challenge for those on the missional journey.

I started reading this book on Kindle, but got bogged down. At times it feels repetitive, but actually we are circling around themes and going deeper every time we encounter them again. The paperback version helped me move back and forward a bit more. It is also the kind of book you can read just one chapter, mull over inspiring quotes and slowly let it all sink in.

Ultimately, *In the Midst of Much-Doing* is more than just a book; it's an invitation. It calls us to slow down, to integrate our inner and outer lives, and to root our work in a spirituality that can withstand the challenges and complexities of the world we seek to transform. This book isn't only timely; it's necessary for those who long to leave a lasting legacy of compassion, justice, and peace. With Ringma as a companion, we can begin to cultivate a mission spirituality that is sustainable, joy-filled, and deeply rooted in God—a spirituality capable of releasing shalom into our local communities and carrying the next generation forward in faith, hope and love.

Ash Barker

Founder and International Director, Seedbeds.

Selvaratnam, Christian. *The Craft of Church Planting: Exploring the Lost Wisdom of Apprenticeship*. SCM Press, 2022, 284 pages.

During the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century, many books were written on church planting. There were good reasons for this outpouring of literature. First, there had come a realisation, particularly in the Church of England, that church planting was more effective in reaching unchurched people than the expansion of existing churches. Second, a distinction was made between Church Extension, which was the provision of facilities for the faithful, and church planting which did not necessarily emphasise the initial provision of buildings or even full-time clergy. The literature helped to awaken Christian leaders to the possibilities that church planting in this new framework could offer.

So, the arrival of a new book on church planting is an intriguing prospect. Christian Selvaratnam tells us that the focus of his ministry lies in the areas of “...leading in evangelistic mission, developing new leaders and starting new churches.” That is what Christian is well known for in England. He is also an excellent speaker, teacher and writer.

Two caveats before we explore the book itself. First, the book has a focus on England and, in particular, the Church of England. That does not mean that others can't learn from this particular source, but it is a very obvious feature of the book. Second, Christian writes that, “This book is based on study which formed part of my Doctor of Ministry research at Asbury Theological Seminary.” The book certainly feels like an academic treatise with all the strengths that academic research provides. It also means that much of the book is intended to inspire thoughtful reflection as compared with immediate action.

Christian tells us that the book is divided into five parts. The first three parts deal with issues such as his personal journey, biblical background, theological frameworks and wisdom from church history and what he calls “craft guilds”. In many ways, his reflection around craft guilds goes to the heart of what he is trying to explore, namely, how do we adequately recruit, prepare and sustain church planters so that the whole exercise of church planting might be more effective?

Speaking as someone who has attempted to train church planters, this strikes me as a crucial conversation. When church planting first emerged as a new movement, particularly in the 1990s, there was an assumption that people could learn the theory and then go and do it. To some extent that was a reflection of what we had done for decades in terms of training more generally for ministry. However, what we have learnt in recent years is that a post Christendom context for mission and ministry requires a much stronger emphasis on apprenticeship.

For apprenticeships to work, we also need those who are skilled craftsmen who can shape the apprentices, not just through telling but by demonstrating practice, and walking alongside those who begin the journey of putting theory into practice. This requires formation, not just teaching. In turn that implies the creation of communities of practice, not just schools of teaching.

Christian suggests that a community of practice will take account of how we recruit the right people, develop appropriate training, select trainees for suitable roles and continue to support them as they enter the mission field. All of this is a long way from the traditional training models of many denominations, although one could argue that the Church of England has attempted to include many of these aspects in their recruitment and formation processes for traditional clergy roles, such as an emphasis on the importance of curacy. However, we are currently in a situation where resources are under pressure so developing these kinds of systems for church planters is not likely to be straightforward.

This is where parts four and five of Christian's book are so helpful. Chapters ten to fifteen contain most of the practical application of all that Christian is suggesting in terms of the master/ apprenticeship approach. He has conducted research into the qualities that a "master" needs in order to work well with an "apprentice". Interestingly, his research reveals that male and female leaders highlight the importance of slightly different personal qualities. Given that training in the past has almost always been dominated by men, it is refreshing to receive the insights of women.

He offers six models for applying his approach, which essentially feature different sizes of groups, and then goes on to explore actual training models as well as making

recommendations for networks and denominations. Perhaps his final observation is the most crucial. Christian notes that all denominations would benefit from the creation of church planting networks as the location for the development of appropriate master/apprenticeship models.

In summary, this can be a challenging read in parts and is not a simple “how to” manual but it seems to me that it is an essential read for leaders who are shaping mission strategy and training systems. That can be at a denominational, regional or local level. Christian has offered some original thinking reinforced with careful research.

Martin Robinson

Moderator Emeritus of Fellowship of Churches of Christ, UK