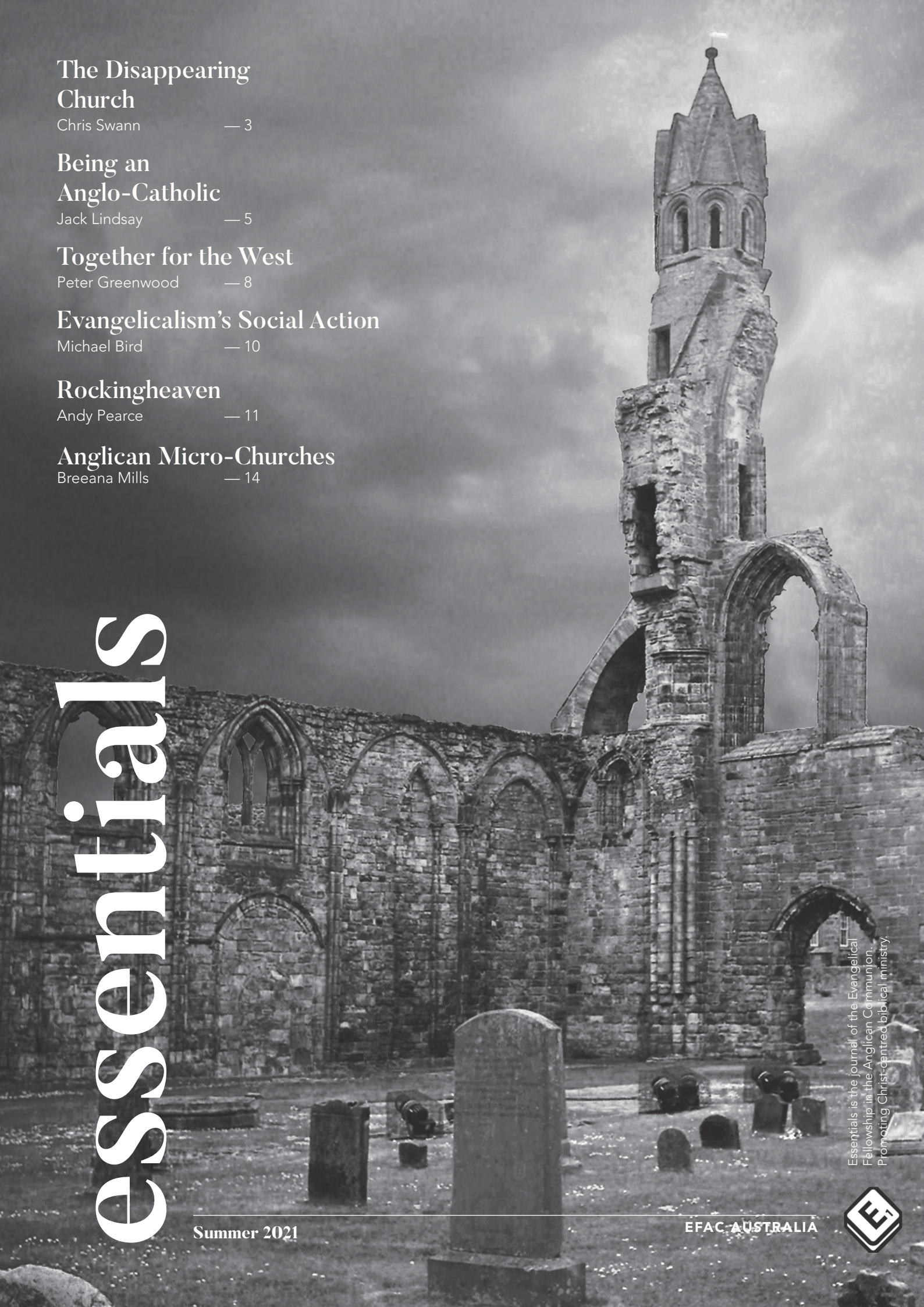

essentials

Summer 2021

EFAC AUSTRALIA

Essentials is the journal of the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion. Promoting Christ-centred biblical ministry.

To some in the Anglican tradition it would appear that the communion that we hold is strained to a breaking point, indeed perhaps a "break glass" moment. All sorts of fractures and rifts appear to have been revealed—and perhaps even exacerbated by COVID—some of which threaten the identity of the church.

However, at the same time the breadth of our communion presents a distinct theological vision of a redeemed community. Imperfect as it may be. But this is often obscured when observing matters from inside our own churches and environments.

My own approach to Anglicanism came out of a strongly congregationalist movement, which was beset by division and discord—and indeed, ungodly dissent. In contrast the breadth of my initial experience of the Church of England, simultaneously spread between St. Paul's Cathedral, London and All Souls Langham Place, showed that theological vision. A vision of a breadth of the church, not always in agreement on many items, but determined to reach the City of London with the gospel.

While the clarity of this vision has waxed and waned over my years as a lay and then ordained Anglican, it is still sorely needed. Perhaps even more so in Australia where the breadth of our ecclesiological expression is more heavily separated.

Therefore this edition strives to reflect on the breadth of our church, and the vision it espouses. Chris Swann muses on the question of the disappearing church and the pandemic. Jack Lindsay describes his own journey as an Anglo-Catholic. Pete Greenwood and Breanna Mills highlight new approaches to missional opportunity. Michael Bird considers the often divisive issue of social engagement. Andy Pearce considers his move from a large contemporary church plant in Melbourne to a local church in Perth. The book reviews also consider this, as Rhys Bezzant considers the end of Christendom, Steve Boxwell reviews church planting in Birmingham, and Karen Winsemius reviews the things that make for a redeemed church.

CHRIS PORTER, EDITOR

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What is EFAC?

EFAC is a group of Anglican clergy and lay people who value the evangelical heritage of the Anglican Church, and who endeavour to make a positive, constructive contribution at local, diocesan and national levels. EFAC Australia is part of the world-wide Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion.

The purpose of EFAC is to maintain and promote a strong biblical witness in and through the Anglican Church so as to advance the cause of the gospel in Australia.

The aims of EFAC are:

1. To promote the ultimate authority, the teaching and the use of God's written word in matters of both faith and conduct.

2. To promote this biblical obedience particularly in the areas of Christian discipleship, servant leadership, church renewal, and mission in the world.

3. To foster support and collaboration among evangelical Anglicans throughout Australia.

4. To function as a resource group to develop and encourage biblically faithful leadership in all spheres of life.

5. To provide a forum, where appropriate: a) for taking counsel together to develop policies and strategies in matters of common concern b) for articulating gospel distinctives in the area of faith, order, life and mission by consultations
and publications.

6. To promote evangelism through the local church and planting new congregations.

7. To coordinate and encourage EFAC branches/groups in provinces or dioceses of the Anglican Church in Australia.

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The Disappearing Church?

REV DR CHRIS SWANN

Rev Dr Chris Swann

pictured

I wonder what leaps to mind for you when you see the question "Is the church is disappearing?"

Perhaps it is the numerous financial, membership, and leadership challenges facing churches after a two-year global pandemic. In fact, you may be experiencing such challenges personally, and I'd by no means underestimate the pain and difficulty of the prospect of this disappearance.

Alternatively, it may be the broader question of the disappearance of the church (heralding its possible reappearance) in the cultural moment in which we find ourselves in the post-Christian, secular West. Whether this disappearance is hailed as a missional opportunity, or something to be lamented and chafed against, all of us have had contact with the way the church and Christian faith seems to be increasingly squeezed towards the margins in Australian society. Here, too, the pandemic is significant, albeit as a revealer and accelerator of existing trends.

However, in this article I want to draw attention to a different disappearance—although one that is, once again, tied to the pandemic. Over the past two years I have noticed something curious. What I have noticed is that the church—and specifically the reality of the church—tends to disappear from the way we talk and think about Christian community by many within the church, including many of its leaders.

This tendency for the reality of the church to disappear from the way we understand and talk about our Christian communities has reared its head every time a lockdown ends or we lurch to the next phase of pandemic management. The current furore over vaccine mandates and "passports" affords an acute example of this.

Where I am in Melbourne, many church members and leaders have raised their voices about the injustice and "overreach" of the State government's decree that only fully vaccinated people, who are willing to disclose their status, can return to full participation in church. Unvaccinated people, or those unwilling to disclose their status, are excluded—or at least their participation is limited to gatherings with tighter restrictions (strict size limits, density quotients, etc.) befitting an earlier stage in the pandemic. Of course, this is part of a broader government insistence that full participation in society and the economy depends on such exclusion—for the present and the foreseeable future. The merit or lack of merit to this broader case can be debated, although that is beyond my scope (and above my pay grade). What is within my scope is the way, in the case of the church in particular, the government's requirement to draw a sharp line between vaccinated and unvaccinated people is often understood to strike at the unity of the church.

It is in relation to this concern with church unity that the reality of the church begins to disappear. It disappears in two ways—one sociological, the other theological.

Sociologically, the reality of "the church of parking lots and potluck dinners", to borrow a phrase from theologian Stanley Hauerwas, disappears when church unity is regarded as threatened by vaccine mandates like those in Victoria. What is understood to be threatened here appears to trade on the notion that church unity consists in everyone who is part of a church—along with any visitors—gathering physically within a single room for a defined duration, participating together in the church service. But this is a far cry from the actual experience many people have of turning up to church even in the best of times.

For example, when my family arrives at many churches, we rarely all get to be present in the room with everyone else for the whole time. If there's a children's program, my children go out—or my wife or I take them out. If there's no children's program, then there is every chance one of us end up outside

or in another space with one or more of my children for at least some of the church service.

Even for those without children, there are all sorts of prosaic reasons why not everyone gets to be in the service at the same time for the whole duration. Some are rostered on various programs or ministries. Some are waylaid speaking with the homeless person who has shown up part way through. While others need to remove themselves briefly for more prosaic reasons.

Moreover, crushing as many church leaders may find it, not everyone engages fully with every word and action in the entire service—including the sermon! People tune in and out. A text message or notification buzzes on someone's phone and they are distracted, even if they don't pull it out and check.

At one point, are the people of a church not all having a uniform and unified experience of engaging with the Lord in the company of his people when they gather? Or, in fact, they are, but in reality, this experience looks and feels diverse—and completely unlike the romantic fantasy of it that we nurture.

Theologically speaking, even on those—vanishingly rare—occasions when everyone is present and participating fully, it is not mere participation, but meaningful—even transformative—participation that we are after. We are after spiritual reality, whether that's expressed in the "outsider" falling down and confessing that God is really among the people in the gathering, or in Christian people being encouraged and built up as they draw close to God in response to all he has done to draw near to us.

Intriguingly, such transformative engagement with God cannot be limited to a singular Christian gathering. We intuitively recognise this. That is why we have small group ministries, promote (with varying degrees of vigour) disciplines and practices for pursuing God individually, and draw people into service of one another and the world. These are the mundane and yet massively spiritually significant realities of church life. And many of these remain more than readily accessible to people no matter what restrictions are placed on our gatherings—just as the challenges remain preventing us from experiencing such engagement in uniform way even when we are entirely unrestricted.

Underpinning all of this is the conviction that the unity of the church is a reality by grace. It is not a

product of human action, either of the church's leader/s or the concerted—even liturgical—action of the group. Rather, it is a gift. It is something we receive. We are of course called to make every effort to preserve it (Ephesians 4:3)—although, in the context this appears to have more to do with the way we show humility and patience in bearing with each other than it has to do with all being under the one roof. And we are to not to neglect "to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing" (Hebrews 10:25)—although, it is doubtful that this contains an expectation about the form in which we regularly gather with other believers to "provoke" each other to live lives of love and good works. Christian communities in the early centuries met in a variety of ways and it was not always possible to gather under one roof at the same time.

Nevertheless, when we confess that we believe in One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, we reflect something about the reality of our unity: this unity does not depend upon us being physically proximate to each other (otherwise, it would be a lie every time we say the words within the context of our geographically and temporally distinct congregations). And we must not let this reality disappear from our rhetoric and thinking about the church.

Being an Anglo-Catholic in Australia. What does it mean, and why on earth do it?

REV JACK LINDSAY

Rev Jack Lindsay

pictured

'Anglo-Catholic'. For many Australian Anglicans, there are perhaps only a handful of other words in the 'ecclesial vocabulary' so guaranteed to raise an eyebrow as this. For some, it has become a distinctly loaded term, conveying images of anything from liturgical fussiness to classist exclusivity, from doctrinal liberalism to papalist pretensions. For others, it may simply be synonymous with something perhaps peculiarly foreign, maybe even rather odd, and certainly 'un-Anglican'. For a large part of my life, it was a blend of all these views that had shaped my perception of Anglo-Catholicism as, at best, rather confusing, and at worst, to be avoided. In this short piece, I intend to present something of an apology – albeit one based solely on personal experience – for that tradition in which I have now found my home, and perhaps explain a little of what drew a cradle Evangelical to the 'other side'.

In preparing this article, I found myself reflecting on how I might define my childhood ecclesial or denominational identity. On the whole, I think it may be best described as 'simply Protestant'. By this, I mean that my family – like so many others, in similar circles – was not especially concerned about whether the church we attended was Anglican, or Baptist, or Charismatic, or just broadly Reformed, so long as there was good Bible teaching, an engaging service, an active children's and youth ministry, and a solid system of pastoral care. Beyond that, most other defining features of a given denomination were, to us, ancillary. This remained the case for me up until the later years of high school when, in the course of experimenting with a variety of church traditions in an attempt to develop my faith and life of discipleship as an increasingly independent young adult, I found myself one Sunday attending a well-known Anglo-Catholic parish here in Melbourne. This was, for the most part, my first real engagement with a tradition that was in some ways so familiar, and in others totally alien, to my childhood experience of Anglicanism. Yes, many of the same prayers were being said, and the broad outline of the liturgy was consistent with what I knew, but the service nonetheless stood out as strikingly and engrossingly unique, in comparison to anything I had seen before.

The first thing that struck me in it all was something I have sometimes referred to as a 'sensory physicality'. By this, I mean that the worship into which one was drawn possessed a remarkable (and emotion-inducing) ability to take up one's whole body into the experience of praise. From the dazzling sight of beautifully adorned vestments and frontals, bright candles and flowers, with the quiet dignity of ordered and calm movements, to the heady smell of incense and rosemary and oil, to the mesmerising sound of voices in harmony and a thundering organ, to the touch of wood and fabric and marble as we stood and sat and knelt, to the rich taste of the bread and wine from the altar; every sense was in some way involved in the act of worship. Perhaps more than anything else, it was this 'sensory physicality' that first drew me in, and sparked what began as a curiosity in, and has since developed into a deep love for, worship in the Anglo-Catholic tradition. And it is this word, 'worship', that is so important here. Because, for all the ceremonial and care taken in every aspect of the liturgy, it is all for naught if it does not first and foremost bring the people of God into a closer relationship with Him. If it exists for its own sake, and not for the sake of the gospel, then it is nothing. However, when done well, unselfconsciously, and 'un-fussily', I find myself most keenly and viscerally able to encounter the Lord, and (as the beloved hymn goes) be "lost in wonder, love, and praise".

It could appear from all this, though, that Anglo-Catholicism is simply a ritualist movement, that it is only concerned with the liturgy. This is, of course, not true. Rather, if we take seriously that typically Anglican maxim, *lex orandi, lex credendi*, then we find that that which is expressed in the liturgy is nothing more and nothing less than a reflection of the theology which underpins it. Without the *lex credendi,* the *lex orandi* would be almost entirely immaterial. It is, therefore, from this 'law of belief' – or, better, theology – that all our practices (should) spring. It is by this theology that they (should) be informed. And it is against this theology that they (should) be checked. Naturally then, all this begs the question: what exactly is distinctive about 'Anglo-Catholic theology'? Is there even such a thing as a single, cohesive, 'established' theology of Anglo-Catholicism.

Well, perhaps slightly frustratingly, yes and no. The first thing to note is that, as I hope the reader will understand, I do not have nearly enough space in this short piece to give a full breakdown of the particulars of Anglo-Catholic theology. That would, and does, quite literally require tomes. And, even then, the author is presented with the decidedly fraught task of attempting to speak on behalf of the entire body of a particular tradition. And this problem is not unique to Anglo-Catholicism. As we will be well aware, one of the great blessings and curses of Anglicanism is its lack of a distinct confessional document, by which the distinctive theology of the denomination is clearly spelled out. Yes, we all have the Prayer Book, and the Ordinal, and the Articles. But, if the past 450-odd years of Reformed Anglicanism have taught us anything, it is that these 'base level' unifiers still leave a great deal of scope for both individual and corporate variation. Accordingly, just as much as there does not exist a single, agreed-upon statement defining Evangelical Anglicanism (in anything more than broad, general fundamentals), neither does such a document exist for the Anglo-Catholics. Nonetheless, in the space remaining, I will seek to present a brief outline of those things which I understand to be characteristic, core elements of Anglo-Catholic theology.

First, and the distinctive feature from which most other beliefs flow, is a high doctrine of the Church. As Scripture tells us, the Church is both the Body of Christ on earth and His Bride. It is both that for which he died, and that into which he poured his Spirit at Pentecost. And, we are promised, it is that which waits expectantly for the blessed consummation of the Kingdom at the Day of Judgement. Further, as we affirm in the Nicene Creed, we believe the Church to be One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic. Accordingly, this great treasure given us by Christ, this Body by which His gospel is spread and into which we are baptised, must be preserved and safeguarded.

While, as Anglicans, this guardianship of the Church is expressed most manifestly by our bishops – those to whom we look as the focus of our unity and pastors in the faith – it nonetheless remains the responsibility of all the faithful to take their part in the ministry, mission, and care of the Church. And it is here that a core element of this high doctrine of the Church may be found. Principally, this concerns how one understands the phrase 'the faithful'. In a commentary on the nature of change in the Church, on matters of doctrine and faith, the great 20th century Anglo-Catholic theologian Eric Mascall wrote: "the voices in the room are never enough." This somewhat perplexing phrase actually goes to the heart of the Anglo-Catholic view of the Church. Namely that, as members in this mystical Body, we here on earth (the Church militant) are but a small part of the Church, and that in worship and mission we are mysteriously joined with all those who have gone before, and now form that great cloud of witnesses (the Church triumphant). We continue, together with them, as active members of the Church of God.

In an Anglo-Catholic context, we believe this mystical union across the ages to be most keenly displayed in the Eucharist, wherein we join our worship to that of heaven, and trust with confidence that our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving may be one with theirs. We believe that, as we partake of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Sacrament, we do so, and are joined into one Body, with the saints who have gone before. As such, Anglo-Catholicism has historically had a tendency to lean towards conservatism; in a nutshell, given this view of the Body of Christ as united through the ages, there has to be a pretty convincing argument in favour of changing the received wisdom and (tried and tested) practice of our forebears in the faith. This is, of course, not to say that change must be avoided! That would be totally antithetical to our Anglican principle

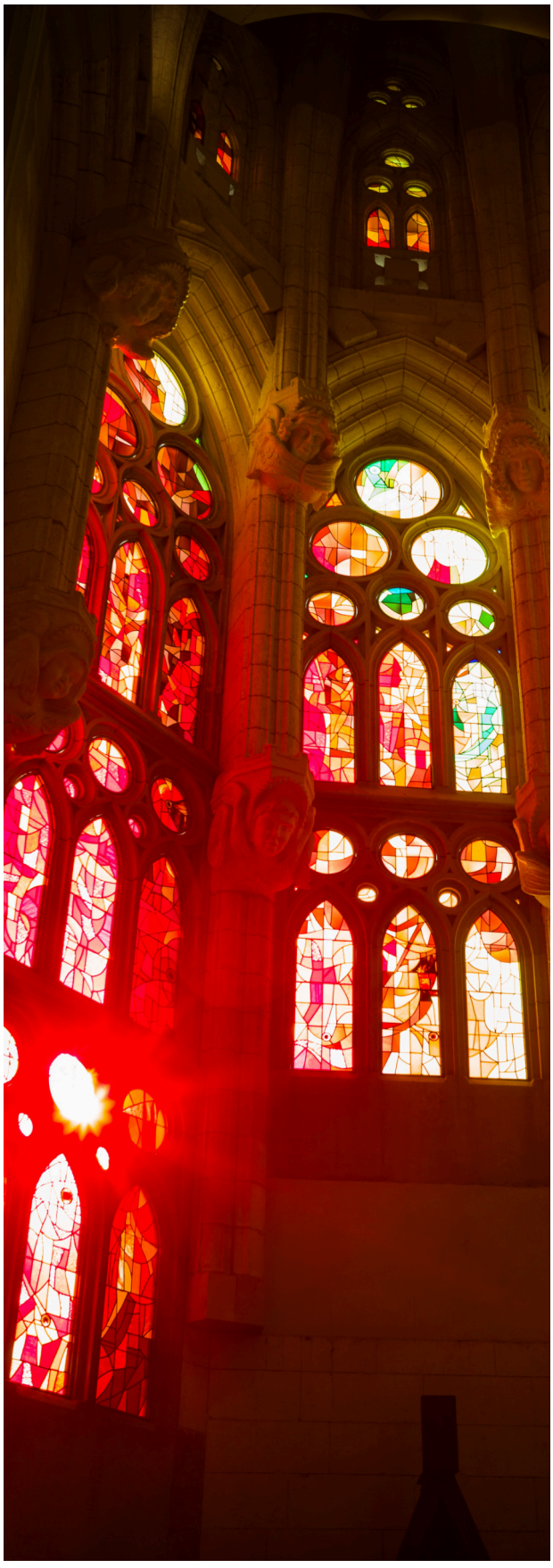
of *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda secundum verbum Dei*. Rather, it simply stresses that change (particularly on matters of doctrine and polity) must be done cautiously, prayerfully, and with appropriate discernment.

It is through this 'lens' of a high ecclesiology that the rest of characteristically Anglo-Catholic theology is, and must be, viewed. From the belief in the real presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, while not presuming to try to explain how this occurs, to our trust in the Holy Scriptures as the authoritative Word of God, to the grounding of church life in the sacramental system, to asking for the prayers of the saints (especially, the Blessed Virgin Mary), to a high view of episcopacy and the sacred priesthood within the threefold order; all these, while but a few of those views typically identified as 'Anglo-Catholic', arise ultimately from the high doctrine of the Church, discussed above.

At a personal level, it was precisely this particular ecclesiological outlook that turned my heart to this tradition. Yes, the 'sensory physicality' I mentioned earlier, and the intention to express liturgically something of the beauty of God's holiness, are those things that first caught my attention and drew me in. But it is quite particularly this high ecclesiology that helped me sit most comfortably within this tradition. For me, the knowledge that my attempts to live as a disciple of Jesus (however faltering they may be), and the struggles I face in living out the Christian life, have not only been experienced by a numberless host before me, but that those same witnesses who dwell with the Lord pray for me to Him (and, I hope, cheer me on, every now and then), touches my heart so deeply and gives me more consolation than I can ever express.

I began my life as an Evangelical, and the Holy Scriptures were at the heart of everything. I have discovered that the embracing of the Eucharist as the central action of my life has taken me closer to Scriptures. For, of course, both flow from the same Word who was made flesh.

This is why I am an Anglo-Catholic.



Together for the West

REV PETER GREENWOOD

Rev Peter Greenwood

pictured

Earlier this year I had the opportunity to ask a senior Melbourne evangelical leader a question. He had just spoken on the theme of church leadership and repentance, and I was curious. "What would you see as a characteristic sin of the Melbourne Church? His answer came quickly, and was not a particularly surprising one. Tribalism. As a whole, Melbourne Christians stick to their denominational and theological groups, and have little time for others.

I came to Melbourne in 2010 to study for ministry at Ridley College. Since then I've heard the same diagnosis made countless times. Sometimes accompanied with other words to the effect that they would love things to be different, at other times with the unspoken sentiment that this is just the way it is and things won't change.

Not once have I ever heard someone posit a solution.

Of course 'ecumenicalism' - cross-denominational relationship - has always been a thing. There are pastors networks all over the city doing good work in encouraging each other and occasionally collaborating together. But I think it would be fair to say they are not making much dent in changing the tribalistic culture of Melbourne.

A few years ago I was at a conference hosted by City to City Australia. The speaker was Neil Powell, a pastor from Birmingham, UK. Ten years ago Birmingham had few healthy churches, and no culture of church planting. A random meeting between Powell and John James, pastor of a charismatic church just a short walk away from Powell's church, led to a conversation about what would happen if dozens of churches across denomination and tribe began partnering together in a new way for the sake of the city. From that conversation came a church planting movement -

2020Birmingham - and a book - Together for the City.

Powell's story really captured my imagination, and got me thinking about my own context. I planted a church in the inner west of Melbourne in 2015, and I soon realised how under-resourced the western suburbs are when it comes to Gospel ministry. Churches are few and far between and there are some newer suburbs that do not have a church at all. Pastors I met were generally unaware of what other churches are doing to see the Gospel go out, and there is very little communication outside of denominations

Inspired by Neil Powell, in late 2019 I decided to email every western pastor I knew and invite them to a meeting. Eighteen turned up, some of them people I didn't know, from churches I didn't know existed. That meeting sparked something we now call Together for the West - a movement of pastors, planters and leaders with a clear vision to see 20 new churches, 20 renewed churches and 1000 new Christians in the western suburbs by 2031. Currently we meet weekly to pray for revival in the west and look for ways to partner together for the sake of the Gospel. We deliberately put aside issues of secondary disagreement to build genuine friendships out of a commitment that so much will not happen, unless we do it together.

Tim Keller, founder of Redeemer Presbyterian Church and Co-Founder of Redeemer City to City, has said on numerous occasions that it takes a movement to reach a city. Movement is a buzzword at the moment, but in Keller's definition no single church, network or denomination can be a movement. A movement of the Gospel happens when the churches of a city move from being in ignorance and competition to cooperation and collaboration. It's when the Holy Spirit convicts us that, far more important than our differences, is what we share in common - the same God, the same Gospel, and the same Mission.

The church is the Body of Christ - made up of many members with essential gifts. This is true, not just of the universal Church, nor just of the local church, but also the church of a city. We count Presbyterians, CCCVAT, Churches of Christ, Australian Christian Churches, Gideons, AFES, Anglicans and FIEC as members of Together for the West, and each one adds something unique and wonderful to the movement. Yet we are not satisfied, we long to welcome members of all tribes who share our vision for the West.

Perhaps tribalism is not just the way things are. And perhaps the solution is not actually that complicated. It can start with a coffee, or with an email, or with a Zoom call. To quote Andrew Katay, CEO of City to City Australia, it starts with the dangerous question, "What won't happen if we don't do it together?" Then it continues with a determination to chase after a razor sharp vision of what God just might do if we do do it together.

Evangelicalism's Social Action: The Temptation of Political Tribalism

REV DR MICHAEL BIRD

Rev Dr Michael Bird

pictured

Evangelicals have traditionally been socially engaged, in faithfulness to biblical requirements to do justice and to show compassion for those suffering, and as a missional necessity, to demonstrate that we have good works to match our faith. A faith that is lived out, among and for others, is what it means to be a Christian. Evangelical faith is Christological in that Christ is proclaimed as Saviour and we do everything we can to save persons in body, mind, and soul and to bring into the warm embrace of Christ himself. This is why we do things like advocate for action on climate change, run Alpha courses, support refugees, have a Church Missionary Society, oppose the predatory gambling lobby, fund City Bible Forums, and have Anglican Overseas Aid. So, for us evangelicals, our evangelistic energy goes hand in hand with our social concerns, advocacy, and programs.

One problem is the temptation to focus on one or the other. To be an Alpha-Church or a tearfund church. To focus on the evangelistic side or to go all in on social action. A false dichotomy if you ask me, but the temptation is real for either side.

But even for those of us who believe in a healthy balance, declaring the word of the gospel while donning the apron of a servant, even our social advocacy/actions face the temptation of being politically partisan.

For me, personally, my two social action passion projects are advocacy for destroying the gambling lobby and advocating for religious freedom. The former aligns neatly with the political left and the later sits more squarely with the political right. It means I get some curious glances from people.

My tearfund friends love my opposition to the gambling barons but look at me with confusion and disgust as if I might be a quasi-fascist if I retweet an Australian Christian Lobby article about religious freedom. By the same token, my Australian Christian Lobby friends incorporate my voice into the religious freedom debate but look at me with suspicion that I might be a Marxist sympathiser if I post on Facebook critical of the Liberal party's stance on refugees and climate change.

I think most evangelicals are committed to a program of social action, and we each have our own pet causes, the one's that burn our hearts with righteous rage or fill us with pity for those suffering. The temptation is that our interest in social action is exercised partly as an outworking of Christian faith, but partly as a way of aligning ourselves with particular political tribes. The temptation is then, that our social ethic becomes tied less to the Christian church and more to the political tribes that we resonate with.

My thesis is that our social engagements, balanced with our promotion of the gospel, must never be neatly aligned with any political tribe, whether conservative or progressive. Otherwise we run the risk that our social action becomes more an act of political affiliation than Christian action.

We are compelled by the love of God to proclaim the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. And it is our Lord himself who tells us to care for the poor, to show mercy, and to act justly. Social action and social justice are a necessity. But let us not get fall into the temptation of engaging in the social action that is trendy on social media or presages our status in a political tribe.

Let justice roll down like a river, irrespective if those rivers break towards the left or to the right.

Michael Bird is Academic Dean and Lecturer in New Testament at Ridley College

Rockingheaven

REV ANDY PEARCE

Rev Andy Pearce

pictured

It's January 24th 2021 and I, my wife Kim, and our five boys are sitting in a church we have never visited, living in a house we have never visited, in a city we have never visited, in a state we have never visited, meeting the people we are about serve for the very first time.

We are 50km south of Perth at St Nicholas's Anglican church, Rockingham for our first Sunday. People are looking at us inquisitively; the way you look at exhibits in a museum or animals in a zoo. The repeated questions on their lips: "Do you know what you've signed up for? You know this church is very different from your previous church?"

And they were right! It was very different from City on a Hill Melbourne. It was physically 3500km away and the culture even further. This small quaint 80s building - furnished with stained-glass, sanctuary light and matching aumbry - was home to 100 mostly retired saints; one of whom had actually met Graham Kendrick. It was quite different to our large inner-city Anglican church that gathered millennials in a cinema, sang to a rock band and where smart dress was a lumberjack shirt and box-fresh sneakers.

But yet, there was a warm familiarity and beautiful similarities. There was the same commitment to the living and active Word of God. The same heritage of, and hunger for, engaging, faithful bible teaching. The same desire for people to encounter, and be disrupted, by the glorious gospel of Jesus. And above all, a very familiar warm and infectious love for Jesus that showed itself in a generous and practical love for the Pearce family.

Both Kim and I have never felt so called to a place than we have to Rockingham. God had convicted us to move from our big network church and serve Jesus in a local church. So, we started to pray for an open door into a local church that had an evangelical heritage, was close to a major city and had an ambition to innovate and reach the lost for Jesus. Rockingham ticked all those boxes and after some pretty miraculous answers to prayer, the Archbishop of Perth invited me to be the Rector of the Parish of Rockingham-Safety Bay aka. St Nic's.

Since my commissioning in February, I have tried to keep my leadership approach simple and faction free;

attempting to love people, invoke joy, build trust and see what God is doing in the church and the community. This season has seen my longest week-to-week preaching stint since leaving bible college. I conducted more funerals in my first month than my entire ordained ministry. I have tried to strengthen the strengths, note the blind spots and identify low-hanging missional opportunities; very conscious that I stand on the shoulders of some fine evangelical ministry.

Through it all my prayer has been for God to give me a fresh delight in Jesus that would continually shape me and radiate from my preaching as I embrace God's people with Christ's love.

By God's grace we have seen immeasurably more than we could ask or imagine. We have seen joy and warmth envelope a full church each Sunday; with newcomers arriving and staying. We have seen people give their lives to Jesus, had baptisms on the beach and seen a wonderful new boys' gardening ministry called 'Sprouts' start at the local primary school.

One highlight has been a young guy - in his 20s - who came to trust Jesus for the first time recently. Before arriving at St Nic's, Murray had never been in a church or opened a bible. On his first visit, someone gave him a bible and told him to start in Matthew and work his way forward. He could not put it down! By Wednesday

he was half way through Luke and after a month of questions, listening and wrestling with God's Word, Murray bowed the knee to Jesus as his Lord and Saviour.

Mike McKinley wrote that church planting is for wimps. Well, I don't know about that, but taking on an existing church you have never even visited is certainly not for the faint-hearted, but one that has given me much joy and a fresh delight in the sovereignty and goodness of our wonderful God.

We are excited to see what God does in Rockingham as we trust Him to build His house and serve our Father as His devoted labourers. What a privilege that is.

Breaking Down Walls

REV DR CHRIS PORTER

Rev Dr Chris Porter

pictured

"I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism" Acts 10:34

In the book of Acts, Luke repeatedly recounts situations where social boundaries and barriers are broken down by the gospel that is rapidly spreading throughout the Levant. But within the narrative these boundaries are not so easily dissolved, and one particularly pernicious division repeatedly returns to the early church: the distinction between Jew and Gentile. Readers first encounter this distinction and subsequent dissolution of the barrier in Acts 10 and 11, as Peter entertains a visitation request from a Gentile God-fearer—Cornelius—and is subsequently challenged in Jerusalem.

Indeed, this first encounter provides a good paradigm for how social boundaries are broken down, and it occurs at two levels. First, at a human level, the degree of inter-group prejudice is confronted at a personal level and reduced from inter-group interaction to inter-personal interaction by face-to-face contact and conversation. Peter dares to enter Cornelius' house and eat with him—in transgression of the law (Acts 10:28).

Second, at a level out of human control, the dissolution of the previous inter-group boundary is initially challenged by Peter's dreams and then confirmed by the presence of the Spirit. We read that just like the other disciples the Spirit was poured out on these Gentile believers (Acts 10:45-46). Subsequently the dissolution of the inter-group boundary is further confirmed by group witness and consultation (Acts 11:15-18).

While one of these tiers—the sending of the Spirit—is clearly out of human control, the other provides a helpful paradigm for reducing inter-group conflict and boundaries in our world, especially for Christians as we are called to be peace makers and to love one another. This is particularly valuable in this time with the increase of social media silos and ongoing interpersonal isolation from pandemic lockdowns. Truly, it appears that our societies are going to emerge from this pandemic more fractured than united.

The paradigm for reducing social conflict that Acts sets forth is helpful here, and indeed it is strongly reinforced by a series of studies on inter-group conflict and prejudice reduction from Matthew Hornsey and Michael Hogg (1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c).

But what does it look like in practice? One approachable example comes from the Boogie-woogie singer and pianist Daryl Davis, who found himself as a lone African-American in close friendship with many members and ex-members of the Klu Klux Klan—despite his obvious Blackness.

In *Accidental Courtesy*, a documentary on his life, one poignant moment comes when he talks about his motivation for cultivating friendships with Klansmen. There the overriding question he asks is "How can you hate me if you don't even know me?" From sitting down in a bar with Klansmen, to being invited into their home, this question—and the associated interpersonal interaction—drives the conversation at hand. The results show how successful it is, as Davis displays a wardrobe full of Klan robes that were given to him after members had left the Klan.

Daryl Davis follows the pattern set out in Acts, of reducing inter-group prejudice to the level of personal interaction.

As we engage in evangelism with friends and neighbours, we too can follow the pattern of Acts in interacting with others as individuals, rather than as group representatives. Perhaps even more critically we can interact with members of other traditions as individuals as well, to understand them and their motivations rather than caricaturing them as a stereotype

We—above all—are called to be peacemakers in our society fractured by social media silos and isolation, and to love one another as Christ has loved us. By this everyone will know what we are His disciples.

Will we embrace Anglican micro churches?

REV. BREEANA MILLS

Rev Breeana Mills

pictured

Anglican priest John Wesley was convicted of the need to preach to English miners who were not engaged in local churches. These gatherings drew the poor and marginalised in every town, seeing many choosing to follow Jesus. So, Wesley created different structures of classes, small bands, and societies, to facilitate discipleship and evangelism within these people groups. So began the Methodist revival.

Mary Sumner experienced the difficulty of motherhood in 19th Century England, where Christian values were coming up against the industrial revolution. Driven by a conviction to support mothers, she gathered women from different social classes together to encourage them in motherhood and faith. Women with no church connections came to faith, worshipped together, and sought to reach other mothers. These meetings multiplied throughout England and were in 9 countries within 7 years. Mother's Union was born.

Simple forms of church are not new. They have been happening for generations and bringing revival to the traditional church in different ways. Some we have embraced; some we have cast aside. Today's movements of missional communities, micro churches or simple churches are no different. The question is, will we embrace or case aside such expressions of church?

Long before language of micro church became prevalent, missiologist Lesslie Newbigin offered two critiques of church structures of his times. Firstly, that the fundamental ecclesial unit was too large, and secondly that the current structure of the church emerged from an undifferentiated society, which is no longer descriptive of our modern society (Goheen, 2018, 123–126). Missiologist Ralph Winter also noted in the early 1990's that the majority of American churches currently exists for the middle class, and a cross-cultural mission approach will be need to reach the "unreached peoples" of America (Winter, 1990, 98–105). It follows that we see new and different forms of church emerging within the Anglican communion to reach unreached Australians. Throughout history the Anglican church has adapted to changing circumstances, and in a post-covid world this will be no different.

Recently, the Archbishop of Canterbury faced a similar question with the rise of many fresh expressions with the Church of England. Instead of resisting these new expressions, the Archbishop of Canterbury suggested:

"

It is clear to us that the parochial system remains an essential and central part of the national Church's strategy to deliver incarnational mission. But the existing parochial system alone is no longer able fully to deliver its underlying mission purpose. We need to recognize that a variety of integrated missionary approaches is required. A mixed economy of parish churches and network churches will be necessary, in an active partnership across a wider area, perhaps a deanery (cited in Cray, 2009, x).

As we look through scripture it's clear that *ekklesia* did not designate a single form, the focus is instead on a gathering of people. It is used in scripture to refer to larger public gatherings, such as in Solomon's colonnade (Acts 5:12) as well as household gatherings, such as those who met at Priscilla and Aquila's house among others (1 Cor 16:19, Phil 2, Col 4:15). Both approaches were held together in the early church, where believers met in the temple courts and in their homes (Acts 2:46). Paul's letter to the Corinthians also demonstrates that these house churches often came together for larger gatherings (1 Cor 11:17, 22). While some may be tempted to see a modern church and small group network in these two structures, Paul is clear that both were a place of discipleship and evangelism (Acts 5:42). The early church used a variety of structures as needed in their context. Perhaps once again, in a post-covid world it is once again a fitting season for a movement of small Anglican churches?

So, what is a simple church or micro church?

Thom Rainer defines a simple church as "a congregation designed around a straightforward and strategic process that moves people through the stages of spiritual growth." (Rainer, 2006, 60) Brian Sanders defines church

as a "worshipping community on mission," a group of people engaging together in regular rhythms of worship, community and mission, seeking to be a blessing towards a particular network or neighbourhood (Sanders, 2019, 34). These forms of churches are stripped back and simple. They are accessible not only to the dechurched, but predominately to the unchurched. Like John Wesley and Mary Sumner, these churches seek to take the church to the people, rather than asking the people to come to church. They seek to make disciples, and to multiply disciple-makers. While many of today's churches seek to grow larger in number, these churches seek to go wider in reach, remaining small by continuing to multiply.

Micro churches are Jesus-centred communities, birthed when a small group of disciples collectively sense a call from God to love and serve a particular community in their area. Whether this is a geographical space or an affinity network, everything they do comes from a genuine desire to love this particular community. Yet, unlike a typical small group or even some house churches who engage together in times of worship and fellowship in community, a micro church also engages regularly in mission together. It's a part of their identity, they exist for a missional purpose. This purpose shapes the way they engage in worship and fellowship as a community. Their worship still includes regular Anglican practices of the Lord's Supper, baptism, confession, and intercessory prayer, but seeks to do so in a way accessible to those within their missional focus.

Micro churches seek to be a community conformed to the image of Christ. Graham Hill rightly suggests that the greatest issue in the Australian church today is our lack of conformity to Christ (Hill, 2020, 22). While it may be possible to hide within a larger community, within a smaller group, discipleship or the lack therefore becomes evident quickly. Jesus said people would know we are his disciples by the way we love one another (John 13:35). Micro churches believe that this is an essential part of their witness. As micro churches reach out into the community, they seek to demonstrate Christ and make disciples, multiplying into every corner of our nation to the glory of God.

Finally, these communities are called to unity and collaboration with the mainstream Anglican church. In the early church it's evident that there is partnership between house churches, and city-wide churches. As a church we are called to unity, but not necessarily uniformity. Our unity should transcend differences in practices, music, and structures, while holding tightly together to gospel truths. The Spirit is equally at work in

the mainstream church, as in the many Anglican micro churches already in existence across Australia.

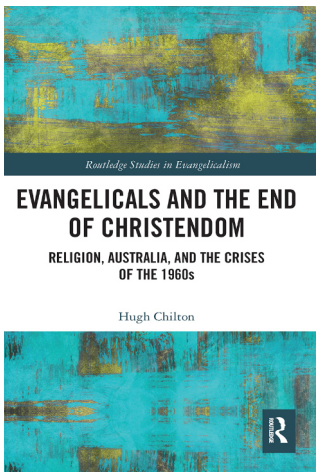
Today as micro churches are becoming more prominent within and alongside our churches, the question is will we embrace them?

The micro church movement, by God's grace, has gained increasing interest, traction, and fruitfulness throughout the pandemic. Whether the Anglican church chooses to accept these expressions or not, they will continue to engage in gospel-centred, Kingdom-focused ministry, taking the church to the unreached peoples of Australia. My hope is that in the future we would see them do so as representatives of the Anglican church of Australia, and we would partner with them as they go.

Recently, a small traditional Anglican church in Melbourne's east has entered a partnership with a new micro church network church plant. The partnership is hoping that this church plant, primarily of young adults, will learn from the maturity, traditions, and experience of the existing Anglican church, while the existing church will be invigorated by the missional fervour of the church plant. While it is still very much in its infancy, it provides a picture of a possible way forward for the Anglican church of Australia. Micro churches and mainstream churches working together for God's glory.

Chilton, Hugh. Evangelicals and the End of Christendom: Religion, Australia, and the Crises of the 1960s.

REVIEWED BY REV DR. RHYS BEZZANT



With the soundtrack of the 1960s and 1970s as some of my earliest musical memories, I heard them again (metaphorically not literally) when reading Hugh Chilton's magnificent book Evangelicals and the End of Christendom: Helen Reddy's "I am woman," Whitlam's "It's time" jingle, and "Leaving on a jet plane" by the trio of Peter, Paul and Mary. Indeed, the period which Chilton investigates will not only bring back ear-worms like these, but for some readers difficult debates, lost opportunities, perhaps even a sense of gratitude. These were decades in Australia that witnessed the rapid dismantling of the British Empire, Cold War conflicts in south-east Asia, a new sense of national purpose in Australia impacted by multicultural migration, and technologies which changed our quotidian lives. How evangelical Christians responded to or contributed to these tumultuous changes is Chilton's goal in this book, which in other words is to summarise the place of evangelicals in the story of Australia at the end of Christendom. These are highly contested categories, but when they are placed here within the concrete framework of Billy Graham's visits to Australia in 1959 and 1968-69, and 1979, they gain in clarity. If Graham is seen as a leading representative of post-war evangelicalism, reactions to him are a kind of bellwether, signalling a change of wind direction.

Indeed, concrete exploration of six leading figures in this period constitutes the substance of the book. Chilton has not begun with an ideological frame of reference into which these historical figures are shoe-horned, but rather he allows for complexity and nuance in the story he tells. The six chapters treat Fred Nile and the (youth movement) World's Christian Endeavour, Han Mol the Presbyterian sociologist of secularisation, Billy Graham and Australian engagement with the American pseudo-empire, Archbishop Marcus Loane in the context of the 1970 Cook Bicentenary, the Christian counter-culture and the Jesus People of the 1970s, and the substantial contribution of Bishop Jack Dain and Athol Gill to the Lausanne Congress, its backstory and impact (the self-consciousness of indigenous Australians is an especially important dimension here). The introduction to these chapters expound the secularisation thesis in the light of the rupture of the 1960s, and the conclusion provides a bird's eye view of the whole, important when there are so many layers to the story. Firstly, how evangelicals have positioned themselves in the nation, secondly how they have pursued an international network, and thirdly how they have managed tensions on the home front are the three dimensions to the presentation (p205).

This book, though not uncritical of the sins of the movement which reflect the sins of the nation, is however a respectful account of the part evangelicals have played in our national narrative focussed on the 1960s as a window into that story. To tell the story, Chilton takes up Bebbington's language of conversionism, activism, crucicentrism and biblicism which have proved so enduring as markers of evangelical identity, but he is not beholden to them. Many commentators disconnect them from any longer narrative and therefore disconnect them from eschatology. Not so Chilton. In fact, he implicitly critiques their reductionism when he describes evangelicalism not merely as a set of abstract theological commitments, but sets these commitments within the bigger story of populist protest against nominal Christianity since the 1730s. Evangelicalism promotes vital piety as a protest against the notion of establishment Christianity and navigates

themes within the mental map of national understanding, therefore reflecting providential themes as well.

Indeed, evangelicals have been nation builders and agents of cultural renewal. We have found ourselves engaged with the life of the nation when we have accepted the conditions of British imperial advance, or defined ourselves over and against Roman Catholic immigration, or taken sides during the Vietnam War. Our place in constructing modern Australia is not easy to narrate, nor is the contribution of evangelicals without tensions, but resoundingly our involvement has not been marginal, even when it has suited our temperament or theological convictions to speak prophetically from the edge. Evangelical Christians have been carriers of modernity as well as leading opponents, which reminds us that our movement, one of the most vital in the Christian world today, is not merely defined by Trump activists or hyper-spiritual separatists. It maintains a tradition of significant spiritual stature and philosophical pedigree.

Some surprising facts. After the Lausanne Congress of 1974, The Australian ran a four-page spread on the event, paid for by the Evangelical Alliance. Chilton notes – perhaps needlessly – that this is well-nigh inconceivable today (p186)! Church attendance per month in Australia is double the number of people who attend all kinds of football (p213). Billy Graham heard of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jnr in 1968 while playing golf in Brisbane, so his tour was shrouded by a sense of crisis in the US (p83). In an address in the presence of the Queen during her visit in 1973, Sir Marcus Loane amended Psalm 137:5 by replacing the word "Zion": "If I forget thee, O England, may my right hand forget all her skill" (p133). Australia has perhaps the longest running survey of Christian beliefs in the world (p56). A global youth ministry network, the Christian Endeavor organisation was perhaps "one of the largest voluntary associations in the world" (p27) in the first half of the twentieth century and profoundly shaped the leadership of Fred Nile. The march on Canberra in 1973 by the Jesus People gathered under the banner of "Kairos," meaning the appointed time, to rival Whitlam's election slogan (p143). This book does double service by addressing questions concerning the metanarrative of Western history and by sifting through the granular details of personalities and events, a witness to much time and effort spent in archives. No wonder with so much fresh material, and with Chilton's sure prose, this book is stimulating to read.

Now with this panoptic account in our hands, many other articles or books can now be written, taking up Chilton's framework and exploring other people or moments. I would have liked to see some exploration of the work of David Penman in this period during his time labouring for the CMS and the IFES in the Middle East, given that his work in Pakistan especially was to influence his later ministry as Archbishop of Melbourne. The work of the Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students in the 1960s and 1970s is worthy of much further historical attention, as would be the impact of new assumptions concerning authority on theological education. How church-planting fared at the perimeters of our cities after the boom of the 1950s is surely a doctoral dissertation in the waiting as well! This wish list aside, there can be no denying the value of the breadth of the material included in this volume, along with the groovy photos to anchor the text. I dare you to read and not find something to sing along to.

Together for the City by Neil Powell and John James

REVIEWED BY REV STEVE BOXWELL

Wouldn't it be great if the body of Christ in a particular area was a bit more coordinated! If our deaneries were more purposeful, if our minister's fraternals were more strategic? Wouldn't it be great if we could hear of the success of a church down the road or a church plant in the suburb along without an ugly defensiveness rising within us?

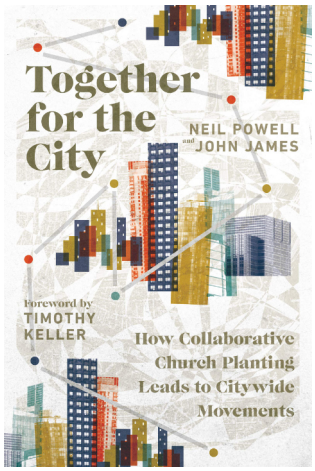
If you've got a fire in your belly to see more churches grow and be planted in your region; if you've got the uncomfortable sense that your church floats a foot above your locality and your people aren't burdened to see your specific town/suburb/city reached for Jesus; and if you've got an inkling that this is a project that is going to need a vision bigger than any one parish, or even (perish the thought) any one denomination, then this is the book for you.

Together for the City is a book best read with a group of like-hearted pastors. It claims to be provocative. I found it provocative in the way that the smell of fresh-baked croissants in my kitchen provokes me out of my bedroom in the morning.

Neil Powell and John James both share that rarest of characteristics – people who can both do something well and explain how they did it. The book, in part, gives the narrative of how 2020Birmingham came to be with their vision to see 20 new churches planted by 2020, now extended to 30 planted by 2030 and 100 in their lifetime. But in laying out this story, they're also offering a guidebook for how we might establish similar networks in our context to attempt the gospel goals that we couldn't achieve working on our own.

The book breaks up into three sections, the first paints a vivid picture of the scale of the task before us, suggesting it's akin to the Dunkirk evacuation of WW2. But rather than leaving us feeling exhausted before we've begun, it also suggests that the gospel not only requires, but enables collaboration across difference.

The practical meat of the book comes in the middle as they lay out a framework for the 'how' of collaboration using the equation: core + cause + code = collaboration. That is, although we may share a theological affinity with another church (core) that, in and of itself, is not



collaboration. Collaboration comes when churches in a locality who share a gospel core also share a theological vision for what could be achieved in that area (cause) and flesh out a shared DNA (code) that energises a movement and carries it to action.

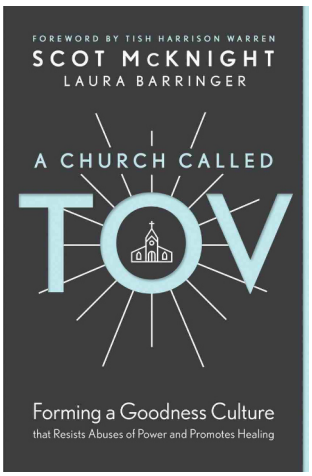
Having laid this all out, the third section offers several case-studies in the UK and abroad. It's hard not to be excited reading this section, imagining similar partnerships and collaborations emerging in one's own context.

It's fair to say I came to this book suspiciously. "Are you asking me, a convinced Anglican, to give up my distinctives and plant churches with the [insert denomination I find disagreeable here] church down the road?" I protested. "I'm really busy – like Covid busy – and I'm not sure this is a good use of my time!" I complained. But at each turn I found both the argument and the narrative utterly disarming. They showed that they *weren't* arguing that we plant churches together, but 'to be together as we plant churches' which is a masterful difference. It means that we can genuinely celebrate God doing new things in our area without experiencing threat or competitiveness. They also make the strong theological case for prioritising this work and can bear witness to how it has been life giving for pastors in collaborative partnerships around the world.

I hope there are many editions of *Together for the City*, and that with each the case studies section swells with stories of pastors who bravely worked together and, therefore, achieved what they couldn't have alone for the cause of Christ in their region.

A Church Called Tov by Scot McKnight and Laura Barringer

REVIEWED BY REV. KAREN WINSEMIUS



My name is Karen. Chances are that you know someone called Karen.
But over the last few years, Karens have had a bit of a raw deal. Because Karen is no longer just a name. Karen is particular person. There is 'Karen who wants to speak to the manager'. Bunnings Karen. Karen from Brighton (It should be noted that that particular Karen moved to Queensland). Karen is a bossy, entitled woman. She wants everything to go her own way, even if it puts others out. How did one name come to represent so much? And what do all the rest of us Karens do?

The cultural phenomenon that is 'Karen' is fascinating, and I'm sure someone will write a PhD in years to come on why our generation feel the need to associate certain characteristics with particular names. In the meantime, as I have been reading 'A Church Called Tov' by Scot McKnight and Laura Barringer, I couldn't help but ponder certain similarities about the challenges the church faces, albeit on a much larger scale. As I and other Karen's seek to reclaim their name as standing for good, so must the church.

McKnight and Barringer seek to pull apart and investigate this Goodness Challenge in their book. They explore the Hebrew word *Tov*, meaning 'good' or 'goodness', found in the scriptures, pointing back to the goodness of God as the primary example, highlighting the many examples of *Tov* promises, and offering hope as we look forward to redemption. *Tov* is not a one-time act, but an ongoing, sustaining, beautiful characteristic of God, and one that we as Christians should emulate, both individually and as the church.

However, the church hasn't and doesn't always get *Tov* right. McKnight and Barringer take time to acknowledge the pain that so many of us have experienced in the church. They are honest in their naming of the hardship, dysfunction, abuse and toxic relationships that have been allowed to fester and wound so many. This dysfunction has torn apart relationships, and broken apart churches. It has even led to people walking away from Jesus, assuming that the abuse they have experienced is what Jesus must be like as well. McKnight and Barringer offer words of insight into how these unhealthy church cultures form, and helpfully give many practical tips and advice on what signs to look for that a church culture might be unhealthy.

But they don't stay in a place of dysfunction, or despair. They move to a place of *Tov*, of nurturing habits of goodness, and encouraging churches to put these into practice. McKnight and Barringer identify seven key elements of a *Tov* culture:
- Nurture Empathy (and resist a narcissist's culture)
- Nurture Grace (and resist a fear culture)
- Put People First (and resist institutional creep)
- Tell the Truth (and resist false narratives)
- Nurture Justice (and resist the loyalty culture)
- Nurture Service (and resist the celebrity culture)
- Nurture Christlikeness (and resist the leader culture)

We can't do all of this in our own strength, and yet we're reminded in 1 Peter 2:9 that, 'you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.' We are called to be God's people, to serve as ambassadors for Jesus in the world and as members of one body, the church. On our own, this is overwhelming, but with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we can work out this calling, living out a *Tov* life in our own lives and in the churches we worship in.

What I enjoyed most about 'A Church Called Tov' is how encouraging it is. It points us forward, gives us hope; that the church can develop a healthy *Tov* culture. Both in its theology and its practice, 'A Church Called Tov', gives us the big picture and the next step to get there.

Let us be a *Tov* people, practicing goodness each day. And when you next see your friend Karen, give her a high five of encouragement – she is also working on redeeming her own name for good too!

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