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

Evangelical Essentials

In this issue we really do touch on evangelical essentials: evangelism, prayer and meditation on God's Word. If evangelicals are to be about anything, and known for anything, let us hope it is that we are known for being thoughtful and active in sharing the gospel from the Scriptures and trusting in God's power to save—even despite our hesitancy and doubt! Let us hope that we are prayerful, confidently, intentionally and habitually prayerful. Let us hope that we are engaged with the Scriptures, seeking in them to hear from and be made wise, made strong, made holy as we read, mark learn and inwardly digest them. So, in this spirit, David Ould shares a story of God's unexpected power to save, bringing people to understanding, faith and repentance even from seemingly unpromising texts; Don West lays the theological foundations of prayer to the God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and Allan Chapple makes the case for meditation—reflection of the works and words of God—as a healthful and essential activity for the faithful Christian. It is always good to return again to ponder the basics of the life of growing and enduring faith.

We do not neglect to consider the world around us, and our own communal church life either. *Essentials* returns to the so-hot-right-now world of gender issues with Ben Smart's exhortation to understand gender dysphoria sympathetically and properly, so that we can get our response to it right—so that we can properly love and properly speak truth in love when we encounter people affected by distress over their experience of incongruence between their bodily gender and their sense of their inner gender. Tony Nichols tells the wonderful story of the fruitful and persevering life of an Indonesian Christian friend of his, converted from a Muslim background as a university student in Sydney. And in the Caboose, Stephen Hale send us off with a call to think about our theology of church buildings. Why are we slow to renew our church facilities compared to how readily we might renovate homes or renew school facilities? What will help and what will hinder our mission and ministry when it comes to investment and re-investment in church buildings?

Before that, James Macbeth leads us to reflect on the world of risk and venture that God has made in his Bible Study on Ecclesiastes 11, and we have book reviews on books about rural ministry, pastoral care of traumatised people, transgender issues and Jordan Peterson's best-selling and widely talked about 12 *Rules for Life*. I hope you find it all an edifying and encoraging read. Do write and let me know your thoughts.

Ben Underwood, Editor
essentialsed@gmail.com

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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.
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Editorial Team: Dale Appleby, Ben Underwood, Adam Cetrangolo, Bishop Stephen Hale
Panel of reference: Graeme Goldsworthy, Robert Forsyth, Peter Corney
Layout: Marsha Dale

Editorial correspondence
Ben Underwood, Editor
c/-114 Onslow Road, Shenton Park WA 6008
essentialsed@gmail.com

To notify of a change of address, contact
Rev Chris Appleby
20 Gordon St Fairfield VIC 3078
T. 9489 7127 M. 0422 187 127
cappleby@cappleby.net.au

Subscriptions, memberships and donations
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The Word of God at work: lessons in evangelism

David Ould

David Ould went from nervous misgivings to astonished joy when a seemingly unlikely scriptural text brought an old man to new birth. David is Senior Associate Minister at St John's Anglican Cathedral, Parramatta, NSW

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.'
1 Thess 2:13

In May 2013 I took up a new ministry position. I went from one of the most affluent suburbs of my city to a place whose name was synonymous with crime and unrest; we switched from an area of tertiary-educated white-collar professionals to equally hard-working tradies. I soon learned it was a place where no-one else used words like 'synonymous'.

After a while I set my mind to giving evangelism some structure. I grew up on Christianity Explored, leading tables in the enormous basement hall of All Souls' Langham Place in London where the course itself was developed. It was very clear to me early on that one white upper-middle class man introducing DVDs featuring another white upper-middle class man was probably not the best way forward.

So I looked around at a variety of different options and finally settled on a different course out of England; the Good Book Company's *Jesus and You*. The course has lots going for it—it's only four weeks and so in a low-commitment culture the ask is minimal. Even better, each week can stand alone as a gospel presentation so there's not the same gap in understanding that can happen in other structures. The presenters come from a similar blue-collar background; a nice contrast to the posh Englishman pressing play on the DVD. Finally, there was more than one rotation of the course—Tales of the Unexpected, Close Encounters and The King and I—so people who were still interested could come back for another round of new material to engage with.

We ran the course over four weeks, morning and evening. There were still some aspects I was uncomfortable with, most particularly the choice of texts. The local stockist only had Close Encounters on hand when we began but when I looked over the material I had my doubts. Week 1 was great—Luke's account of the paralytic lowered through the roof. I could work with that! But week 2 I wasn't so sure about—we were being asked to work our way through the complicated Parable of the Strong Man. It wasn't even the simpler version recorded in Matthew and Mark but the full-blown Lukan retelling (Luke 11:14-26). The course booklet included a chart for participants to work through comparing the demon-possessed man, Jesus and Beelzebub with the various characters in the parable. It was a chart that I wish I'd had the first time I tried to work out this intriguing teaching of Jesus. It's fair to say that I wasn't confident going into that week. I thought the text was too complicated, I had no confidence that it would be understood and I wondered what on earth had possessed (no pun intended) the authors to include

this Close Encounter when there were so many better options.

My quiet despondency was only increased when at 10am on Tuesday morning there was just one person there. Robert (not his real name) had been in church all his life. He sat in the same place every Sunday morning and was friendly without ever fully engaging in things. But he wanted to come along and here he was with his booklet and a quiet anticipation. I was the opposite. Frankly, because of my misgivings over that week's text I was glad that only one person was there.

Over the next hour we read the Bible together. We saw Jesus cast out a demon and then declare that he was master over even the great Beelzebub, prince of demons. Then we turned the page to our chart and mapped out how Satan might be a strong man but that Jesus was far stronger. We discovered that it isn't enough to have the house of our life cleaned out once; we need Jesus to stand permanent guard at the door.

And then, a few minutes after 11 o'clock in the morning, Robert had gentle tears running down his cheek. Well into his 70s, he quietly declared that he had spent his whole life unsuccessfully trying to keep his own house in order and it was time to ask the stronger man Jesus to do the job instead. He moved from darkness to light and I was both ecstatic and deeply ashamed in equal measure. It's not the text that I would have chosen to declare the gospel but it was, in God's good timing, exactly what Robert needed and so we prayed right there and then that he would stop trying to clean up his own life and let someone far better and greater do it for him.

And because God is so good (not least in humbling us) he did it again that evening. We had 6 people there and began with me asking what people had made of the previous week with the story of the paralytic lowered through the roof. As we worked our way around the small group there were various comments about how interesting it was, how they were surprised and so on. And then we got to the last person, a young lady whose life had already been complicated enough to prepare her to understand how good grace is when she stumbled across it. She looked up and gently said, 'I went home last week and prayed the prayer'.

A few months later she and Robert and a number of others stood in front of a packed church building and publicly declared their faith as we held baptisms and confirmations. All because of the powerful word of God. And all despite my lack of confidence.

Prayer: its foundations

Don West

Don West reflects on the essentials of prayer as established for us in the gospel of Christ. Don is the Principal of Trinity Theological College, Perth

To draw near to God in prayer, to express our wonder and to bring our concerns to him, is a joy and privilege. I know this. What's more, Holy Scripture is filled with examples and teaching on prayer in all its facets and applications. I know this too. But it is not the knowing about prayer that is my challenge, it is the doing of it. In preparing and writing up this article, I have prayed that I will be moved to pray more regularly and more freely. I have come to see that this prayer will be answered by God the Father as his Spirit moves my heart before the meekness and majesty of Jesus Christ as he is presented to me in the gospel.

Prayer is Grounded in the Gospel

Prayer is the means by which we turn to Christ at our conversion:

> *[9] If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [10] For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. [11] As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame." [12] For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, [13] for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10:9-13)*

Note the outer and inner aspects of prayer involved in receiving the salvation offered by God in Christ: declaring (or confessing) with the mouth that 'Jesus is Lord,' and believing in him with the heart. Note too that 'calling' upon the name of the Lord (Jesus) implies both confessing his status (i.e., praising him) and crying out for his salvation (i.e., petitioning him; asking for help).

Faith in Jesus Christ as Lord—the faith that is expressed through prayer and that saves us from God's just condemnation—arises from the proclamation of the gospel:

> *[14] How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? [15] And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (Romans 10:14-16)*

In short, from the beginning of the Christian life until its end, prayer is a work of the Spirit whereby we 'dig up by prayer the treasures that were pointed out by the Lord's gospel, and which our faith has gazed upon' (John Calvin, *Institutes* 3.20.2).

Do you remember the day you turned to Christ? Do you remember when you prayed for the first time and knew that God was listening to you? Have you been with another person when they 'prayed the prayer'? Do you remember the wonder, the relief, the joy of knowing that your sins were completely wiped away at the cross, that you had been transferred from darkness to light, from being condemned to being justified? True prayer never leaves this spot.

The Spirit Enables Us to Call God 'Father'

> *[14] For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. [15] The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." [16] The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. (Romans 8:14-16)*

Here Paul draws upon the imagery of the redemption of God's 'son' Israel out of Egypt. The psalmists apply the same image when they 'cry out' to God to rescue them from the hands of his enemies. When we cry out to God the Spirit moves us to call him 'Father,' following the pattern of his one and only Son (see Mark 14:36). Moreover, when we call upon God as our Father, the Spirit of adoption moves us to do so from the deepest part of our person. In prayer we express our new identity as God's children.

Our understanding and expectation of intimacy is heavily influenced by our experience of relationships as broken, flawed people in a world that seeks things that do not last. We find it hard to imagine what real closeness should be like. To be able to address God as our Father is to be given the privilege of coming before him with boldness, knowing his readiness to hear us and grant our requests out of his lavish generosity.

The Son Gives Us Permanent Access to the Father

In prayer we bring our concerns into God's very presence.

> *[14] Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. [15] For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. [16] Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:14-16)*

In the Old Testament, God's presence or glory was associated with the tabernacle and temple—this is where his 'name' dwelt. Access was available to ordinary Israelites only by sacrifices offered by appointed priests. It is here that Moses talked with God 'face to face' (Exodus 33:11) and David sought God's 'face' in prayer (e.g., Psalm 27). In 1 Kings 8, Solomon asks God that the temple be the place towards which the Israelites could pray

with confidence of being heard when in distress. Although God could be approached in prayer at the place where he dwelt, distance had to be maintained.

According to the writer of Hebrews, because Jesus has 'ascended into heaven'—and so 'always lives to make intercession for us' (Hebrews 7:27), and because he is fully able to 'empathize with our weaknesses,' we don't have to hold back before God. Moses' 'face to face' conversation with God at the tabernacle in the wilderness was a mere shadow of what we may enjoy.

In John's Gospel, Jesus promises his disciples repeatedly that whatever they ask in his 'name' will be granted to them (John 14:13, 14; 15:16; 16:23, 24, 26). His name guarantees our being heard by the Father because it stands for his complete obedience to the Father, ultimately seen on the cross.

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling [tabernacled] among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Where to from here?

In this brief article I have been laying down the main foundations of Christian prayer. When I teach these truths to myself, or am reminded of them, God often moves my mouth and heart toward himself. I begin to thank and praise him for who he is and all that he has provided for me in the Lord Jesus; I become more confident to bring my concerns and fears to him, knowing again his tremendous love for me. The only remedy I know of for a lack of prayer is to start to pray.

Meditation? I'll think about it.

Allan Chapple

Allan Chapple makes the case that ongoing personal meditation on the words and works of God is an integral part of the Christian way of life, and teaches us how to approach it. Allan is Senior Lecturer in New Testament at Trinity Theological College, Perth.

More and more I find myself the odd man out. Whether it's on the bus or the train, or even walking down the street, more often than not I am the only one not gazing in silent adoration at a shiny flat rectangle over which the head is bowed reverently. However, I don't mind being an oddity here, because I still enjoy thinking! What does trouble me is the fact that all of the devotees around me don't seem to do any. Somewhere at the back of all this, mixed up with the old fogey within, is the awareness of how much importance the Bible attaches to thinking—enough to expect that I will do some every day.

Willing to be persuaded, you pull out your much-thumbed concordance and look up 'think'—only to find that the first two New Testament entries say 'do not think …' (Matt 3:9; 5:17)! So where do we find this alleged biblical imperative to put thinking on the daily agenda? Have look at Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1:2, where it is hard to miss 'day and night'! And then look at Psalms 77:11-12 and 143:5: in company with remembering and considering, 'meditation' has to be a kind of thinking. This means that the Bible is heading in a very different direction from mystics of all stripes, for whom meditation means stilling the mind and even shutting it down in order to experience a deep inner reality beyond cognition. The Bible, by contrast, is talking about a way of filling the mind and stirring it up to do its job, so that I live my life every day with God and to honour God.

So what thinking does meditation involve? The Bible wants us to be recalling and reflecting on the works of God (Ps143:5; 145:4-6): primarily what he has done to save his people (Ps 77:10-15, 20), but also his work as creator and ruler of all (Ps 104:34, referring to the whole Psalm). I am also to remember and consider God's word. This is made especially clear in Psalm 119, which can be read as an extensive meditation on meditating. Because there are so many riches waiting for you there, I won't spoil it by telling you what they are—but I will list where the Psalm focuses, with each item in the list needing another careful read through all 176 verses to find everything it says on that topic. Psalm 119 registers the fact that God speaks words of many kinds, all of them important; it gives many reasons that make meditating on these words necessary; it identifies how I will come to regard them as a result and also what else I should be doing with them every day; it refers to a range of benefits I will receive by meditating on them; and it alerts me to the various ways this will shape how I respond to God.

This is obviously important, especially if I should be doing it daily—but how does it work? How do I go about meditating? Here is a method I can't recommend:

'Alarm clock exploded dead on 5.30 a.m… Crawled downstairs and knelt, bleary eyed, in the sitting room. Put my watch on the floor in front of me so as not to carry on past seven thirty. Started contemplating eternity at exactly 5.34 a.m. Kept my eyes shut and tried to concentrate on things going on for ever and ever. Not easy. Found my thoughts drifting off to holidays, and why don't you see those wicker waste-paper baskets any more … I remembered what I was

supposed to be thinking about. Clenched my mind and tried really hard. After about an hour, opened my eyes to check the time. It was 5.44 a.m.[1]'

So where can I go to get the help I need? One possibility is to look to the Puritans, who published many guides to meditating on the works and words and worth of God.[2] While usually full of good things, these are often so thorough they can make it seem too complex and daunting for a novice. Then what about the Bible? If it tells us what meditation is, does it give us any tips on how to do it? Indeed it does—but before we go there, we must first make an important correction. It is the mystics who offer training for novices; the Bible does not need to do so because there are no novices: we have all been thinking for a very long time! What we do need to learn is where to direct our thinking and how to stay focused—and that brings us to the first tip the Bible gives.

We find it in Joshua 1:8, where meditating goes hand-in-hand with keeping God's words on our lips. The Hebrew word behind 'meditate' here is the most frequent of the three the Old Testament uses. It refers to the sounds made by lions or doves, and also to human speech, especially muttering or talking to myself. In a world where silent reading was unknown, Joshua would mutter as he read God's words of instruction to himself and also when he recalled and repeated them. Your meditating could be as simple as that: thinking your way into God's words by muttering them so that you slow down enough to register them and consider them. But you might be someone who gets more clarity and depth in your thinking by writing it all down—or by both muttering and writing. Some of us will focus best on God's words by looking at them in our Bible, while others will do better by seeing them on our inner screen with our eyes closed. What matters is not how we fasten onto God's words but that we do so—and do so frequently. But why is this important?

It needs to be done so God's words can get to work as they should. When I am reading the Bible, and when I am hearing it read and explained, I am like a cow grazing. This is essential—but there is no point in making the trip to the milking-shed unless the cow goes from grazing to chewing the cud. And that is what meditating is: digesting the words I have taken in so that I am nourished by them—because God's words give me life (Deut 8:3). The best way of chewing on his words is to question them, not like a sceptic determined not to believe but like a barrister intent on getting at the truth. Once I have understood the meaning of the words, I need to grasp their significance—so I will be asking such questions as these: Why does the Bible say this? What implications does this truth have? How is it meant to impact me? What changes should it make—and where should they happen? And perhaps most important of all, What should I be saying to God in response to these words of his?

While every believer needs to be doing this, it is especially important for the preacher—and it means that I should expect to prepare my sermon over two separate sessions rather than at one go.[3] In the first, I find out what the passage means, and in the second, I work out how to preach it—and in between these sessions, I need to give myself at least a day to chew over what I have discovered. I do this by asking the significance questions we have just looked at. If I don't do so, my sermons will impart lots of raw biblical data without showing why this truth matters and how it should shape us and change us. To prepare and preach a good sermon I need to preach the passage to myself first—which happens as I am meditating on it, taking in what I found out by doing my exegesis.

One last question: Is meditation really that important, when there are less than 20 references to it, and all of them are in the Old Testament? Since people who know and believe 2 Timothy 3:16-17 won't have any difficulty in accepting the Old Testament as our tutor in Christian devotion, I think the question must mean, if meditation were important, wouldn't the New Testament put it on our agenda? It would—and does, although it never uses this word. Here are some of the ways it does, with plenty more to be found once you see how to look for them.

Meditation is what Paul expects Timothy to do when he tells him, 'Reflect on what I am saying' (2 Tim 2:7). The 'for' that precedes the assurance that follows—'the Lord will give you insight'—indicates Paul's awareness that Timothy's meditations are the means by which this insight will be given to him.

Paul has the same expectation of the readers of Ephesians. When he tells them what he asks God to do for them (Eph 1:17-21), it is clear from all of the words and ideas the two passages have in common that the primary way they will gain this enlightenment is by chewing on what he has just said about the riches of God's grace (1:3-14). He does not come right out and say it, but there is no doubt that his words to Timothy apply here as well: Paul prays for them because God will give them the understanding they need, and he teaches them because their meditating on his words is the primary means by which God will answer those prayers.

Meditating is also what Peter wants his readers to do. He is writing to remind them of crucial truths they must remember—and go on remembering (2 Pet 1:12-15). And remembering is not important for its own sake but because it leads to considering, the major part of meditation. Why, then, is Peter so concerned that his readers remember—and consider—what he says? They need to do so because the consequences of forgetting are very serious (1:8-11), because false teachers are bound to spread their poison among them (2:1-3, 18-19), because meditating on his teaching—'wholesome thinking' (3:1)—will enable them to be stable and persevering in the face of ridicule (3:1-4, 11-14), because they need to keep growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus (3:17-18)—and because all that they need for doing so has already been given to them (1:1-4), and the way they appropriate those riches was by returning to Peter's teaching again and again, recalling and reflecting on all that said about the grace and glory of their great Saviour.

Where does all of this take us? It is just too important to leave off my agenda every day, but if I am to spend time thinking—thinking with God about God, in order to live for God—I will probably need to put that shiny flat rectangle in the bottom drawer for a while.

[1.] Adrian Plass, *The Sacred Diary of Adrian Plass* (37¾) (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1987), 89-90.

[2.] You will find information about these guides in chapter 11 of my book, T*rue Devotion: In Search of Authentic Spirituality* (London: Latimer Trust, 2014).

[3.] I have made this case in my book, *Preaching: A Guidebook for Beginners* (London: The Latimer Trust, 2013).

Understanding and responding to gender dysphoria

Ben Smart

Ben Smart is keen that Christians disentangle the strands in transgender issues, so we respond well to struggling people. Ben is on staff at St Matthew's Shenton Park, WA

Transgender issues have increasingly become part of our cultural conversation, and they're not about to go away. This means that all Christians—and especially Christian leaders—need to work hard at thinking through these issues and responding to them with truth and grace. We need to hold firmly to what the Bible teaches and speak its truth, but we also need to do so in a way that is gracious, compassionate, and loving. The Diocese of Sydney recently published a very helpful document called *A Theology of Gender and Gender Identity.* It makes many helpful points, and I want to draw attention to one in particular. In the first two paragraphs, it highlights a distinction between two phenomena that often get blurred together in our thinking on this topic. The first is gender dysphoria (or gender incongruence), and the second is non-binary gender theory (the idea that gender is a spectrum, etc.). The former is a psychological condition. The latter is an ideology. A person can suffer from the former without believing in the latter. Paragraph 1.2 explains;

> *'It is important, therefore, to disentangle these two discussions. This will help us to make a wise and compassionate response to those who experience genuine gender incongruence, without having to embrace the claims of contemporary Gender Theory.'*[1]

My hope in this article is to help us understand gender dysphoria so that we are better equipped to give that wise and compassionate response.

What is gender dysphoria?

Strictly speaking, 'gender incongruence' and 'gender dysphoria' are distinct but related terms. Gender incongruence is a feeling of mismatch between one's perceived gender identity and their biological sex. A mismatch between mind and body. Gender dysphoria, on the other hand, refers specifically to the psychological distress that stems from that feeling of incongruence. This feeling of distress can range from mild and periodic, to severe and debilitating. Exact numbers are hard to determine, but best estimates are that approximately 1 in 10,000 men (0.001%) and 1 in 20,000 women (0.0005%) experience gender dysphoria. For as many as 80% of children who experience gender dysphoria the condition resolves itself by adulthood without intervention. But for others it remains throughout their life and is deeply traumatic.

What causes gender dysphoria?

Gender dysphoria is not something anybody chooses. In his helpful book on this subject,[2] Mark Yarhouse surveys the main theories of what causes gender dysphoria and examines the evidence put forward to support them. The two main strands of thought are the brain-sex theory, which points to biological factors in the brain, and the psychosocial theory, which point to a person's upbringing. Essentially, these two theories are nature (it's how their brain is wired) and nurture (it's because they were raised in a certain way). But the evidence shows that neither of these fully account for gender dysphoria. After surveying all the claims and data, his honest admission is this: We don't know what causes gender dysphoria (p. 79). You will hear many people confidently state that it's simply a person's upbringing that causes it (sexual abuse for example), but the evidence does not support that claim at all. The cause is quite mysterious, and undoubtedly a combination of many factors.

Despite this mystery, it is clear that gender incongruence and the dysphoria that follows is not something people choose. Who would choose deep psychological distress? People don't choose to go through all the pain and difficulty of gender dysphoria. That might seem obvious, but it's a point that needs emphasising. For just as Christians have (wrongly) claimed that people simply choose to be same-sex attracted, Christians today may believe that people simply choose gender incongruence and dysphoria. But when we believe this, we will not only fail to listen to those who are experiencing these struggles, but we will add to their pain by blaming them for the distress they're facing. Yarhouse shares the story of a 16 year old girl named Ella who came to him with her parents for consultation:

> *'Both her parents expressed dismay at their daughter's claim that she was born the wrong sex. They did not know what to make of her statements that she was a boy. In a private meeting with Ella, I was talking to her about theories about the etiology of gender incongruence. At one point I shared, "I don't think you chose to experience your gender incongruence. It sounds like you 'found yourself' with these experiences of incongruence at a fairly young age, and that your experience of dysphoria has increased in recent years." She was stunned. I asked her about her blank expression. Ella shared, "My mom and dad have taken me to three pastors. All of them said I chose this—that I was sinning. All three said this gender thing was a sign of my disobedience. You are the first person I've talked to who said I didn't choose to feel this way."' (p. 58)*

We can well imagine how difficult, confusing and shameful the lead-up to this moment must have been for Ella. Instead of helping her come to grips with the psychological distress she was facing and offering support to her in walking through it, Christian leaders told her she was sinning and that she chose this. This kind of response will silence people with these struggles, or chase them away from the church. Jesus has hope to offer those with gender dysphoria, but if we shame them into silence, we will never be able to walk with them and show them what that hope is.

This is not an 'us verses them' issue

The reality is that there are people in our churches who are struggling with gender dysphoria. When we talk about transgender issues primarily as a 'culture war' and 'us vs. them' issue, it can make it extremely difficult for these people. It may make them feel even more ashamed and confused, and isolate them. It's true that there are people who want to transform society and eliminate God's good design of gender. There are those who argue for non-binary gender theory and want to impose it on the rest of society. But they are a vocal minority. Yarhouse has counselled many people who struggle with gender dysphoria, and he points out that,

> *'most transgender people I know are not in favour of a genderless society. Quite the opposite: they favour a gendered society, but they long for a sense of congruence in which their mind and body align. Most are not meaning to participate in a culture war; they are casualties of a culture war.' (p. 42)*

We can respond compassionately to those who struggle with gender dysphoria (the psychological condition) without embracing the claims of contemporary gender theory (the ideology). We need to disentangle the two from each other so we can care for those who struggle with genuine gender incongruence.

So how can we do a better job at loving people in this situation? We can start by taking the time to learn about gender dysphoria, being willing to listen to those who struggle with it, and not to blame them for their situation. Churches need to be places that are safe for people with gender dysphoria to talk about their struggles. Jesus said that he didn't come for the healthy, but the sick. So Jesus' church will not be for people who have it all together—because none of us do. We all experience brokenness and the reality of living in a fallen world in different ways, whether we're gay or straight, cis or trans. We're all just as in need of God's grace, and we're all just as loved by him. So we need to work hard at loving those who suffer gender dysphoria.

Taking up our cross and following Jesus

Just to be crystal clear, I am not in any way saying that loving those who struggle with gender dysphoria means embracing contemporary gender theory. On the contrary, I believe the most loving thing we can do is point them to Jesus and to God's good design of humanity as male and female. Following Jesus is never easy, and for those who struggle with gender dysphoria—just as for the rest of us—following Jesus means taking up our cross, denying ourselves, and looking to him to find our identity rather than looking within ourselves and how we feel.

If you want a more thorough explanation of a Christian response to transgender issues, I highly recommend *God and the Transgender Debate* by Andrew T. Walker (reviewed in this issue of *Essentials*). But hopefully this article has been a good starting point so that we are better equipped to respond wisely and compassionately to those who struggle in this area.

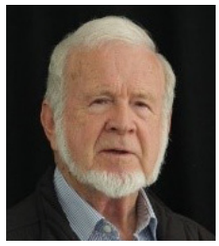
If someone shares with you that they are struggling with their gender identity, please don't assume they have chosen it or are sinning simply by having this struggle. Have compassion on them, listen to them, love them, and keep pointing them to Christ. Experiencing gender dysphoria is not easy, and they're going to need your help and encouragement to persevere in taking up their cross and following Jesus.

[1.] www.sds.asn.au/sites/default/files/ATheologyOfGenderAnd GenderIdentity (SydDoctrineCommission).Aug2017.pdf?doc_id=NTQ3NjY%3D

[2.] Mark A. Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 2015).

The story of Peter Soedojo (1933-2006)

Bishop Tony Nichols



Tony Nichols remembers the remarkable life of an Indonesian man he met as a student in Sydney, and who, having become a Christian under John Stott's mission preaching, lived a life of fruitful witness and ministry in Indonesia.

Soedojo came to Australia from Indonesia in the mid-fifties as a Colombo Plan student. The Colombo Plan was a centrepiece of Australian foreign policy which aimed to strengthen relations with Asia. Thousands of Asian students studied in Australian universities, hastening the dismantling of the "White Australia" policy. I personally formed many lasting friendships. Considering the prevailing attitudes at that time, my parents were remarkable in their hospitality to the Chinese and Indonesian students that I brought home from Sydney University to Bulli on the South Coast of NSW.

Indonesian students, compared with those from Singapore, Malaya or Hong Kong, were disadvantaged in their studies. Not being from the British Commonwealth, they had little language or cultural preparation for survival in Australia. The friendship of Australian students who helped get accurate lecture notes and shared their lives was mutually beneficial. Soedojo, although a very traditional Javanese and a Muslim, learnt to play tennis and began to read the Bible.

Then in mid-1958, the S.U. Evangelical Union organised a Mission to the University led by the Rev'd John Stott, the young Rector of All Souls Langham Place, London. For a week, we attended lunchtime expositions of the Sermon on the Mount, the like of which I personally had never experienced – clear, systematic, unemotional explanations of Jesus' teaching. The final Sunday night meeting, in the Great Hall, attracted hundreds of students and lecturers. The weary missioner's usually distinct tones were reduced to a croak. Nevertheless, about seventy students stayed behind for counselling. Soedojo was one who that night confessed Jesus Christ as Lord.

In his baptism at St. Barnabas, Broadway (where I was his sponsor), Soedojo took the name Peter. Subsequently, while completing his Master's degree in Physics, he regularly attended Chapel services on Sunday nights at Moore Theological College. We parted company at the end of 1959. I was sent to teach Latin at Temora High School in country NSW. Peter returned to Java.

Communications with Indonesia in the sixties were difficult. It was even harder from British North Borneo where I was posted by the Church Missionary Society in 1962. President Sukarno had declared Konfrontasi against Britain and its proposed Malaysian Federation.

I was teaching at St. Patrick's School, Tawau, on the border with Indonesia. Until the British brought in the Gurkhas, we were under constant threat from Indonesian guerrillas and gunboats. There was no contact with Soedojo for twelve years. Some friends believed that he had been sent to the Soviet Union for further studies and that he may not have returned because of the failed Communist coup in 1966.

Then in God's strange providence, after study and teaching at Moore College, and my marriage to Judith, CMS sent the Nichols family to Muslim Java in 1972, to teach at Satya Wacana Christian University in Salatiga. We shared with some of our prayer partners the desire to find Soedojo and began to make enquiries of Javanese colleagues. The quest was daunting. Indonesia's population was almost 200 million, most of whom lived on the island of Java.

There followed one of those spectacular answers to prayer with which the Lord occasionally encourages His people. Suffice it to say that within two months of our arrival in Salatiga, Soedojo turned up on our doorstep. He was a visiting lecturer at Satya Wacana! In his pici (the national black cap) and sarong, he was hardly distinguishable from the millions of other Javanese among whom we lived. But it was him all right - older and thinner; the same smile, the same manner - self-effacing, yet quietly dignified. Over the following nine years, we were also able to get to know his wife, Tien, their three irrepressible boys and daughter. Gradually, we were able to piece together a remarkable story.

Soedojo lived about 100 kilometres from Salatiga, in Bantul, near Yogyakarta, the cultural heartland of Java. On returning from Australia, he had been appointed tutor in the Science Faculty of the prestigious Gadjah Mada University. Like most public servants in the Sukarno era, he was driven by soaring inflation to supplement his income from other sources. His parents relied on him to finance the education of his seven younger brothers and one sister. The standard practice would have been to solicit bribes from students seeking to guarantee their progress. Soedojo chose to work as a part time teacher in high schools.

For three years he had no contact with a Christian congregation. There was none in his area. He did, however, begin to invite some students and neighbours to join him in the study of the Scriptures. The Javanese were almost totally Islamic, though often, under the surface, older monistic beliefs persisted.

However, in the late sixties, Christian movements occurred after the traumatic events following the attempted Communist coup in which over half a million were killed. Thousands of suspected Communist sympathisers were placed in detention camps. The notorious Buru Prison Island had twelve thousand exiles.

Perhaps in reaction to both communists and vengeful Islamists, the membership of our local Javanese church and its outposts in Salatiga had grown to 28,000 by 1972.

In the same period, Soedojo's home group in Bantul had become a congregation of the Gereja Kristen Jawa with 300 members and five outcentres. A Christian school had also been established. At Christmas and Easter, Soedojo took teams out to evangelize surrounding villages, using the indigenous Wayang puppets. The pastor was one of two young men whom Soedojo had nurtured and encouraged. This information, like so much else, came to light incidentally. I had noted that his meagre library did not include the New Bible Dictionary that I had given him. He explained that the Christian books brought back from Australia had been divided equally between his two proteges when they had begun their studies at the seminary in Jakarta.

Within his own family circle, it seems that Soedojo did not face any great opposition, perhaps because he was an exemplary son. His father had passed away and he was the main breadwinner of the family. He did not marry until he was 35. He took his position as head of the family very seriously and after his siblings scattered, he visited them at least once a year. Some were already better off financially. Two were officers in the military and one a doctor. Four had become Christians.

We were able to meet the minister and members of his church, including the police chief, a recent convert from Islam. All testified to the influence on their neighbourhood of one godly Christian home.

At the State University, Christians, whether staff or students, had to tread very circumspectly. Discrimination was real, especially against those who had converted to Christianity (as distinct from those who came from Christian families). Former students who became lecturers at Satya Wacana told us of their respect for Soedojo. He was said to have a rather dull delivery and to be too encyclopaedic in his treatment. However, he was set apart from his colleagues by his attendance record, his honesty, and his kindly interest in his students.

Our contact with Soedojo was diminished in the 1980 s, after CMS asked the Nichols to leave Indonesia for a new ministry at Nungalinya College, Darwin, training Aboriginal leaders. We heard that Soedojo had been appointed Associate Professor at Gadjah Mada University, having been awarded a doctorate in nuclear physics by the Vrije Universiteit of Amsterdam. Apparently, he had been keeping records of radiation in water for decades. Visiting Dutch professors were impressed and persuaded him to write up his findings.

Our subsequent ministries at St. Andrews Hall, Melbourne (1989-91) and in the Diocese of North West (1992-2003) meant that visits to Indonesia were rare. But after retirement, Judith and I were able to fulfil requests from the Bishop of Singapore to spend time at the Anglican Institute in Bandung, training pastors for new church plants. Visits back to Central Java were possible.

Then on the 27th May, 2006, we heard that a massive earthquake had struck the heavily populated Yogyakarta region. The epicentre was Bantul. A million people were homeless and over 6,000 dead. The Vicar of All Saints Jakarta, Dale Appleby, helped me contact the Synod office of the Gereja Kristen Jawa. From there I was able to contact the Pastor of the GKJ church in Bantul. Soedojo's family were believed safe, though the district was completely devastated. I flew down to Semarang and was met by Daniel Nuhamara, a former student (now Professor), who organised accommodation in Salatiga and a taxi to take me across Java to Bantul.

My Muslim taxi driver was pessimistic about the prospect of finding Soedojo. All buildings had been flattened, he said. Only the Christian church was still standing!

The driver's report was not quite true. Among the acres of ruins, a few scattered houses were still standing, including Soedojo's. He and his wife were sitting in front of their home awaiting my arrival. Their son, Stefanus had relayed the news of my coming.

There followed a joyful reunion. Soedojo, however, was in poor health and awaiting serious surgery. But I learned how God had continued to use him, not least in supporting a new Christian university in Yogyakarta. I saw some of the textbooks that he had written and the manuscript of a book to help Muslims to come to Jesus.

Most memorable was his clear recollection of his baptism and confirmation in Sydney almost fifty years before. He recited in English the verses preached on at both services. At his baptism, Howard Guinness had spoken on Philippians 1:21 – "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain". At his confirmation a few months later, Bishop Marcus Loane had expounded Revelation 2:7 – "*To him who overcomes I will give to eat of the Tree of Life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God*".

Peter Soedojo now enjoys the reality of those promises. He was called home a few months after that reunion, aged 73 years.

Have a go

Ecclesiastes 11:1-6

James Macbeth

'Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.' Ecclesiastes 11:4
James is Minister for Community Care and Family Church at Christ Church St Ives, NSW

Our kids spent the first 7 years of their lives at St Bede's Drummoyne with a brilliant back yard and even larger church grounds out the front of the rectory. They explored every hidden space under bushes, climbed every tree, learned to ride on the long drive and held many parties on the lawn. There was undoubtedly a certain physical security in the fact that the area was well fenced, but they played and explored primarily under the security given by mum and dad. They knew that we were never far away. They knew we would come out to patch them up if they fell, share in their new discoveries—and give them a roasting if they were doing the wrong thing or going where they shouldn't. They were free to have a go within the safe bounds of our sovereign parenting.

Ecclesiastes 11:1-6 addresses us in the same terms. If we have imbibed the wisdom in the whole book of living 'under the sun' with the Son, remembering our Creator and his Lordship over this and all our days, then we have a garden with boundaries in which to live, explore, fail, be forgiven and flourish as best we can in our time. The traditional language of vv 1 and 2 is strange to the modern ear—*casting bread* and *giving portions*. It can sound playful, like kids on a beach, throwing bits of bread in to see if some will be eaten or which pieces will float back. A more recent translation gives it adult weight:

'Ship your grain across the sea;
after many days you may receive a return.
Invest in seven ventures, yes, in eight;
you do not know what disaster may come upon the land.'

Here is the call to be active in using what is to hand, make preparations for hardship and explore possibilities, without any guarantee of success. It is a call to act, knowing that in a broken world, disasters and hard seasons can come—but we remain under the sovereign hand of a trustworthy Lord who has made everything 'beautiful' or 'fitting in its time' (3:11).

Verses 3-5 press home the need to be active and humble. Verse 3 just states the basic, immutable principles of rain and gravity—clouds full will bring rain and a fallen tree stays down—yet it follows in v. 4 with another basic principle and challenge:

'Whoever watches the wind will not plant;
whoever looks at clouds will not reap.'

At some point observation needs to turn into action, for without it, there can be no harvest. Are there parts of your life where you need to act—where you keep putting things off to your detriment and that of others? Are you persistently waiting, watching, worrying….? It might be in matters of the Lord or church—perhaps in your key relationships at home—or matters of work or retirement or money.

At the end of Ecclesiastes, after a poignant and grave reminder to get into life while we have sufficient youth and vigour (11:7-12:8), the author refers to the 'making of many books' and 'much study wearying the body'. (12:12) Here is an implied call to shut the books at some point, get up and live! If I read the journals I wrote as a younger man, I hear a youth frequently bemoaning the lack of a girlfriend or a prospective wife. I might have had one earlier if I'd stopped writing about it and spent more time with actual people! Are you frightened to act because you can't be sure how it will go? Are we turning in anxious circles, staring at the clouds, watching the wind, because we can't know or control the future? Kevin de Young, in his brilliant little book, *Just Do Something*, makes the following observation:

'Anxiety is living out the future before it arrives. We must renounce our sinful desire to know the future and to be in control. We are not gods. We walk by faith, not by sight. We

risk because God does not risk. We walk into the future in God-glorifying confidence, not because the future is known to us but because it is known to him. And that's all we need to know. Worry about the future is the sin of unbelief, an indication that our hearts are not resting in the promises of God.'

Don't be paralysed by what we don't know; be liberated and encouraged by what we do know. In verse 5 the teacher states yet again the necessary limits of our knowledge

'As you do not know the path of the wind,
or how the body is formed in a mother's womb,
so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things.'

We are not God. Accept the mystery of matters, but rejoice that we have a God who is at work. Remember that your life, this day, the world and history is pregnant with his purposes. He remembers his word, he is fulfilling his promises and all is headed for a birth—a day when he will bring all things in heaven and on earth under one head in Christ Jesus (Eph 1:9,10). Knowing this, let us act in our day and place:

'Sow your seed in the morning,
and at evening let your hands not be idle,
for you do not know which will succeed,
whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.'
(v. 6)

Here is an echo of that Genesis 1 command to be deliberate, muscular, creative stewards of the garden—to have a go under the sovereign security of God as father. Not everything is going to work, and all of us have no doubt learned a lot from mistakes, but some things will flourish, and much else is a work in progress. Cast your bread upon the waters. Don't be paralysed by what we don't know or the fear of failure. Be encouraged into godly action by what we do know of our Lord and Saviour.

The Anglican Future Conference 2018

September 6-8, 2018,
Planetshakers Church, Southbank, Melbourne.

A conference for lay and ordained members of your church, to explore gospel and culture in our mission. Two flyers for this conference are included in this edition. We recommend you pass them on to someone and encourage them to attend. Further details of the conference can now be found at www.anglicanfuture.org.au

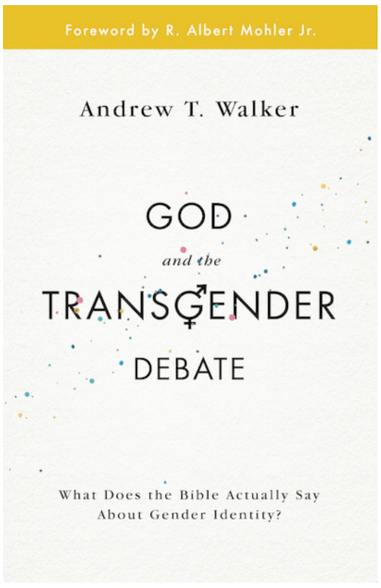
Keynote Speakers

The Revd Frogg Orr-Ewing,
Latimer Minster, Beaconsfield UK
Frogg recently planted a 'minster' church as a resource hub for mission and church planting in rural areas. He is strong on evangelism and apologetics, and has a PhD in missional church planting.

Ms Justine Toh,
Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Public Christianity, Sydney.
Justine worked at Fairfax Digital before completing her doctorate in Cultural Studies at Macquarie University. She speaks and writes about freedom and individualism, the body as a project, and other trends in contemporary culture.

The Revd Dr Wesley Hill,
Associate Professor of New Testament at Trinity School for Ministry, Pennsylvania, USA.
Wes seeks to help his students understand how attention to Scripture formed the church's creedal heritage and, likewise, how that heritage can now help us to read Scripture afresh as the word of the Triune God for us today.

AFC | GRACE & TRUTH IN UNCERTAIN TIMES
Anglican Future Conference 2018



God and the Transgender Debate:

What does the Bible actually say about gender identity?

Andrew T. Walker, The Good Book Company, 2017

As Christians think about how we respond to transgender issues, many have fallen into two opposite errors. On one extreme, many have forsaken the truth of the Bible and let go of God's good design of humanity as male and female, affirming things that we ought not to affirm. On the other extreme, many Christians have forsaken the grace we find in the Bible, and have affirmed biblical truths but done so in a way that is unloving and out of line with the gospel of grace. Both of these extremes are dangerous because real love requires both truth and grace. It requires that we speak truth, even when that truth may be hard to hear. But it also requires that we speak it with grace and compassion, with kindness and genuine love for others. So when it comes to conversations around transgender issues, how can we engage with both truth and grace? One really helpful place to start is *God and the Transgender Debate* by Andrew T. Walker. In this book, Walker shows us that it is possible to steer clear of both extremes, helping us to hold firmly to the truth of the Bible and what it has to say about gender, but doing so in a way that exudes compassion, love, and an understanding of how difficult struggles with gender dysphoria can be.

Compassion Without Compromise

One of the most striking and praiseworthy features of this book is that it is saturated with grace. Sharing about how writing this book was a transformational and eye-opening experience for him personally, Walker reflects,

> *'I think Jesus's compassion and gentleness are especially needed when addressing a topic like this, because the testimonies of people who experience these conflicts demonstrate real distress… While I'm not afraid to share a strong opinion, if it can't be mediated through a tone of compassion, mercy, and gentleness, it may not be an opinion worth sharing.'*

This perfectly sums up the approach of this book. The opening page (and whole opening chapter) sets the tone for the whole book by pointing us to Jesus, who was known for spending time with 'sinners' and invites us to come to him and find rest (Matthew 11:28-30). When it comes to conversations around transgender issues, he asks, 'What would Jesus do? He would listen to us, and he would love us, and when he disagreed with us, it would always and only be out of compassion.' (p. 15)

This book demonstrates that it's possible to have compassion without compromise. And it demonstrates that loving others doesn't mean letting go of the truth of the Bible, even when those truths can sometimes be hard to hear.

The Bigger Picture

Walker spends a good chunk of the book looking at what the Bible has to say, helping to place transgender issues within the bigger picture of God's redemptive story. He not only looks at individual verses that speak to issues of gender, but also helps us see the importance of the broad sweep of creation, fall, redemption, and new creation. Creation shows us that God's design of humanity as male and female is deeply good. The Fall reminds us that our experience of this good design is marred and imperfect – though God's blueprint remains. Redemption shows us that Jesus has saved us and paved the way for the world to be made right again – though in the meantime we continue to struggle as we take up our cross and follow our Saviour. The New Creation shows us that we can have hope, because one day we will be freed from the effects of the fall and everything will be made right.

Walker argues that experiencing gender dysphoria is not something people choose, but rather a result of the fallen world we live in. At the same time, he points out that we do sin if we act on those feelings in such a way that rejects God's good design of gender. These are truths that are no doubt very difficult for many people to hear. But time and time again Walker points us back to the hope that we find in Jesus, even amidst the struggles and pain that this life may bring.

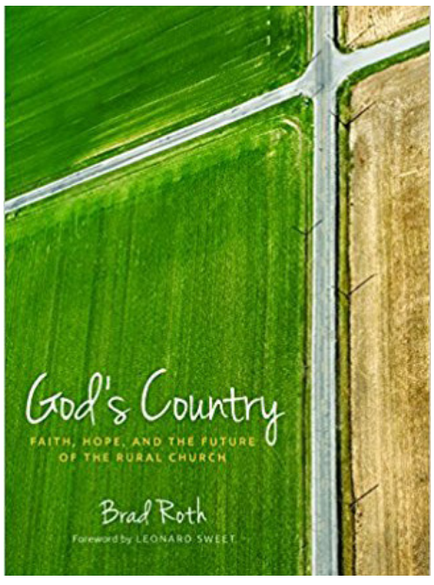
Tough Questions

Another reason to commend *God and the Transgender Debate* is that it is intensely practical. It has a chapter

devoted to 'Tough Questions': How should we think about pronouns? What about people who are intersex? Is taking hormones to manage dysphoria ever appropriate? Can someone be transgender and Christian? Walker provides helpful answers to all these questions (and others) with love and wisdom. He's also got a whole chapter on 'Speaking to Children', helping us think through in very practical ways how we have conversations with the next generation about transgender issues. Rather than keeping the discussion in the realm of theory, Walker does a great job at bringing things down to earth. He has lots to say in challenging the church about how we respond to transgender issues, and what we can do to engage more lovingly. He has a whole chapter on what it might look like for someone who struggles with gender dysphoria to follow Jesus. So if you're looking for a practical guide on responding to transgender issues as a Christian, you can't do better than this book.

As Christians, we need to work hard at engaging with the transgender conversation in a way that is saturated with truth and grace. And if you want to be equipped to do that better, *God and the Transgender Debate* is a great place to start.

Ben Smart, WA



God's Country:

Faith, Hope, and the Future of the Rural Church

Brad Roth. Herald Press 2017

Sometimes myths get in the way of mission. In the opening chapter of *God's Country*, US Mennonite pastor Brad Roth asserts that 'all too often, rural people and places become objects of our cultural mythmaking, the focus of our fear or pity, meant to be saved or gawked at.' That tallies with my observation of the Australia scene. Stereotypes such as the bush as hapless victim of natural disasters and economic change or the bush as the bastion of cultural backwardness and prejudice are neither accurate nor a helpful basis for faithful and fruitful Christian ministry. That is why theologically informed and pastorally realistic accounts like Roth's are vital. Notwithstanding the cultural translations that need to be made at times, the book makes stimulating reading for anyone concerned to reach the millions of Australians who live outside major population centres.

Roth's book contains a brief but important discussion of what constitutes the essence of rurality. He concludes that what makes a location 'rural' is neither the presence nor importance of agriculture but the way people experience the world: *'The defining difference may be that rural communities are marked by knowing and being known. We know our neighbours and they know us.' (p27).*

For the Australian scene at least this conclusion would need to be qualified. There are communities in the bush, particular those with a mining or lifestyle component, which have quite high levels of transience. Even in more stable farming communities there is often a disconnect between long-term residents and those who've moved to town more recently because of relatively cheap housing.

Roth's catalogue of the structural challenges facing rural communities—the industrialisation of agriculture, declining and aging populations, the removal of government and other services—is consistent with the Australian experience, particularly outside major regional centres. More searching is his examination of the challenge of *acedia* (literally 'without care'), which he describes as 'a boredom that anchors its gangly roots in the belief that God is not present or at work in the places or life situations where we find ourselves.' (p41) His antidote is a commitment to praise God wherever we are, recognise and name the signs of God at work and abide in situations of challenge rather than give in to the temptation to flight.

Roth then explores the practicalities of ministry in a rural setting. He explores the process of discerning a community's structure, working with rather than against its yearly rhythms and nurturing intentional evangelism that grows out of a commitment to sit with people and listen carefully to their stories. A particularly interesting suggestion is that rural churches express an intentional vocation to a ministry of focussed prayer, precisely because the challenges they face should encourage a deep dependence on God.

Roth's book offers a vision for rural ministry that is both wholistic and hopeful. There are certainly points at which I felt his case needed to be strengthened or supplemented. For example, there seems to be a tension in his theology of place. Sometimes he seems to suggest that rural locations have a unique relation to God; at other points their significance lies more in what they share with every other part of God's creation. This tension is resolved to some extent in the final chapter when he develops the rudiments of a biblical theology of the rural church as a community located both in present realities but also in relation to God's promise of a new heavens and new earth. It would have been good to have this perspective worked back through some earlier material. I also had some questions about the implied reader of

the book. In most sections this appears to be an ordained pastor who has come to a rural community from elsewhere. Perhaps this is not surprising given the actual readership of ministry books! But given the importance of local, long-term leadership in many rural settings I thought it would be valuable to address them more directly. It's one thing to think through what it means to abide in a rural community when you have the choice of accepting a call to a city church, another when re-location is not even an option because of the ties of family and work.

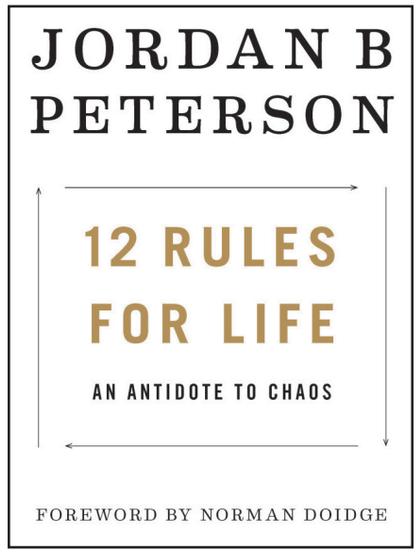
Notwithstanding the above quibbles this book inspired me to pray and dream about God's work in our rural and regional places. It's also challenged me with the need for similar resources that engage more directly with the Australian context—a challenge that I hope BCA and others will answer in the years to come.

Mark Short, Bush Church Aid.

12 Rules for Life:

An Antidote to Chaos

Jordan B. Peterson, Allen Lane, 2018



I don't know about you, but suddenly I can't move without bumping into Jordan Peterson, the Canadian professor of psychology who has become a public intellectual almost overnight it seems. He is a polarising figure, who has been involved in controversies over the use of newly-coined transgender pronouns, and whose online interviews and lectures are viewed and listened to by millions. He is outspoken in his intense dislike of the ideological left, and the feeling is mutual. He was recently in Australia, and his conversation with former deputy prime minister John Anderson is at the top of Peterson's youtube news feed as I write this review. The conservative side of society feel Peterson has cut through in articulating many objections they have to the ways we are being encouraged to think and feel about ourselves, our history and others in a post-modern, politically correct world.

Beyond his controversial profile, Peterson seems strongly motivated to help people live more satisfying, successful lives, and as a psychologist and intellectual he has ideas about how to do that. He is influenced by Jung, Nietzche, Dostoyevsky, the Bible and the Tao. He believes in the wisdom of the past, expressed in stories, myths and cultural practices passed down over millennia. His first book was an academic work on the psychology of religious belief. His second book, *12 Rules for Life*, is the top selling book on the Amazon nonfiction charts in the week I write this review and aims to convey what Peterson believes will help people live well. The place to live well, according to Peterson, is on the straight and narrow path between order and chaos. For Peterson it is primary to say that chaos is a threat to life, and hence we need order, routine, tradition, discipline (and so the book's title and subtitle). But something else also needs to be said, that 'order can become excessive, and that's not good' (p. xxxiv). Chaos is also needed for exploration, creativity and transformation. The individual lives well by living on the boundary of order and chaos, in the zone of their fruitful intersection.

12 Rules for Life is a self-help book with a polemical edge, a critique of a certain current sensibility, rooting for taking responsibility for yourself, burying envy as a motivation, aiming at the good without seeking to be avenged upon the world for its unfairness, and sitting at the feet of tradition expecting to be schooled well, amongst other things. Peterson is unusual in his great respect for and extensive use of Biblical episodes and texts like Genesis 1-4, or the Sermon on the Mount. The twelve rules are cast in the form of wise advice, sometimes quirkily expressed. Rule 5 is 'Do not let your children do anything that makes you dislike them' and rule 12 is 'Pet a cat when you encounter one on the street'. Each rule gets a chapter, and the chapters wend their way towards the rules (which are the closing words of each chapter), covering a rich variety of topics and life issues. Chapter one is about hierarchy and dominance, the second about the necessity of sympathetically and realistically taking responsibility for yourself, the third about the company you keep, the fourth about what to pursue and why, the fifth about parenting, the sixth about responding to the outrages of the world, the seventh about sacrifice, evil and meaning in life, etc. Chapter 10, 'Be precise in your speech' has a lot about marriage in it. Peterson is bold, bracing and strident as well as sympathetic, careful and hopeful. He advocates living for meaning rather than happiness, and thus regards suffering as not merely unavoidable, but potentially the place of productive and meaningful growth and action. He is for the pursuit of the transcendent good, and against the reduction of human life to a contest of self-interested power. He is for the real distinction of masculine and feminine, and against artificial measures aimed at equality of outcome for all without distinction. He has a hard face, a sometimes aggressive twitter feed and huge doses of charisma. He has gotten lots of people talking. What shall we make of him and his ideas?

It seems to me that Jordan Peterson is for law. He is about recognising the non-negotiable realities of human existence. Instead of destroying yourself and your culture by resentfully and misguidedly going to war with the way things are, Peterson recommends living creatively and meaningfully according to the rules that lead to success in the midst of inevitable suffering. Jordan Peterson is not preaching gospel. His exposition of Biblical texts contains none of the notes of grace that a Christian might point out. This is not to say that Peterson has no mercy or compassion in him, it is more to say that for Peterson, Being (the way things are) is practically synonymous with God. The figure of God stands in at points for all the things (encompassing both chaos and order) that we must accept with awe and humility, and be reconciled to as what stands sovereign over us and cannot be changed.

But since Christians make a momentous distinction between God and the World, the Law of Being is not the final reality in our lives. There is the possibility of divine help coming to us that is utterly different to self-help, or to any other help offered by another. Help offered by another who is not God will take the form of instruction, guidance, counsel, listening and conversation to accompany what is ultimately self-help, a process started, carried out and concluded through an individual's courage, resolution, reflection and action. Such help is not to be sneezed at, but God in his grace may help us in a fundamentally different way. His help can come to us as new birth, as regeneration, as life from the dead, as justification by faith, as conversion. I have not found in Peterson this gospel note. As far as I can see, for Peterson, Jesus is a teacher and an ideal, archetypal human being, but he is not the Risen Saviour who pours his Spirit upon his disciples and in whose name forgiveness of sins is proclaimed.

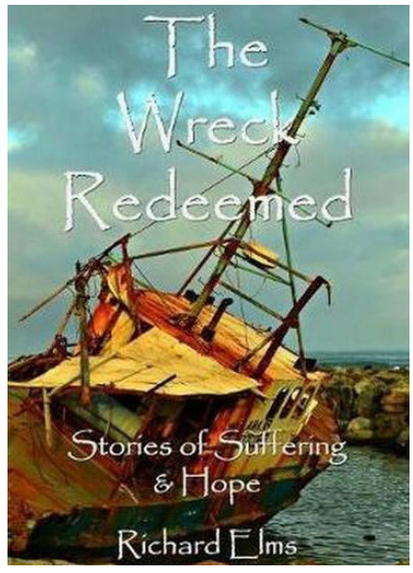
Still, Jordan Peterson has cut through. He has struck a great chord in our culture. To some it is beautiful, half-forgotten music. To others it is an ominous, dark and unwelcome sound. Christians may find what he has to say illuminating, and we may enjoy the respect he accords the Bible as a popular intellectual with a rather different angle on religion and Christianity than Richard Dawkins or Christopher Hitchens and their ilk. Peterson may catalyse a softening of militant atheism and a revaluation of the Bible in our public discourse, and that would be a welcome development. Beyond that hope, we may also pray that some Christian, some preacher of the Gospel, might cut through and strike a mighty chord in our society in the way that Peterson has, and that the Spirit would blow our way and bring new birth, even to those who are old. For law is not our salvation.

Ben Underwood, WA.

The Wreck Redeemed

Stories of Suffering and Hope

Richard Elms , Richard Elms, 2017



Richard Elms is a Mental Health Social Worker who has worked in a variety of settings as a therapist, trainer and consultant. He is deeply embedded in the Australian context, working in New South Wales. He also provides supervision to others who work in the field and draws on a rich and varied range of clinical examples to answer the questions relating to suffering and hope in the modern context.

Elms presents a picture of the work of narrative therapy and gives insights into the use of this approach in working with those who are broken as the result of abuse. He cites the work of the father of narrative therapy, Michael White and gives a detailed explanation of how the use of 'storying' can bring hope to victims of abuse and to those who have experienced a troubled pathway in life. Elms identifies as a Christian with his motivation and understanding of his work deeply influenced by his faith and God's word, the Bible. In a series of case studies and explanatory chapters, he links the work of narrative therapy and the practice of telling our stories to the Bible. The story of the Bible is linked to many of the stories in the book and he makes useful references to God's story and his work of redemption in his Son. The case studies are not for the faint hearted as they depict many of the situations that present in a clinical setting and are sad and heartbreaking. They are many of the struggles that ordinary Australians live with and have experienced. There are also clear links to a Christian response to such suffering.

In Elm's use of narrative therapy he gives the reader an introduction to the stages of work with individuals, couples and families. As people tell their story he examines the story with them, sharing his reflections, seeking to understand, repositioning the story and the person's view of their part in the story, developing a new story and in the process building hope. He seeks to work with those who have experienced trauma to develop a fuller picture of their story that incorporates their experiences of suffering but is not limited to them. He uses concepts such as creating a map for life, the social and cultural context of stories, deconstruction

of the story, creating alternative stories, multiple listening and the place of community in providing support to those who have suffered. Each of these concepts is introduced and explained with reference to a case study and the detail of an individual's struggle to overcome the suffering they have experienced. God's story in the Bible is threaded through *The Wreck Redeemed*. Elms provides helpful explanations and linkages from the stories in the Bible, the work of the apostle Paul and the Holy Spirit, and ultimately the work of Jesus Christ.

Many of the case studies outline the struggles that those who have been abused and suffered trauma have had in their understanding of God. Elms provides a number of excellent accounts of conversations with those he is working with as they have struggled to understand their experience in the context of a loving God. The first case study with an indigenous child sets out his preparedness to work through all her questions and seeks to help her understand her cultural context and her current circumstances. He demonstrates how to be responsive to her particular situation and is not afraid to enter into the realm of what are often difficult questions relating to spirituality and how abuse can affect our understanding of God. Elms works at her pace seeking to find links that are relevant to her life experience to help her build a story of hope. In this case study and many others in the book, a child or young person presents with very difficult behaviour. Elms' use of narrative therapy provides an understanding of how our emotions, behaviours and overall mental health are affected by our history and need to be understood in this context. Many of the situations presented will be experienced in the life of a parish. Elms shows the need for expertise in managing these situations on a clinical level, however also provides excellent insights and models a way of approaching each individual that is helpful for anyone involved in parish life or any other kind of ministry. Many will find this book helpful.

The Wreck Redeemed is packed with insights from a career spent responding to those who have suffered. It gives some very specific instruction as to how people function and how those who have suffered can find a pathway through to hope. It is also very clear about the kind of work that those who have harmed others need to do in order to repair their relationships. He offers insights into what is happening in a person and in a society that results in the vulnerable suffering. He also provides a biblical understanding as to the origins of such behaviour and the distortions that have led to oppression and suffering. At a time when the church has a reputation to rebuild, many of Elms' insights provide a pathway to restoration of relationship and hope. I would have found this book very helpful when starting out on my career as a Social Worker and would recommend it as a helpful addition to any reading list.

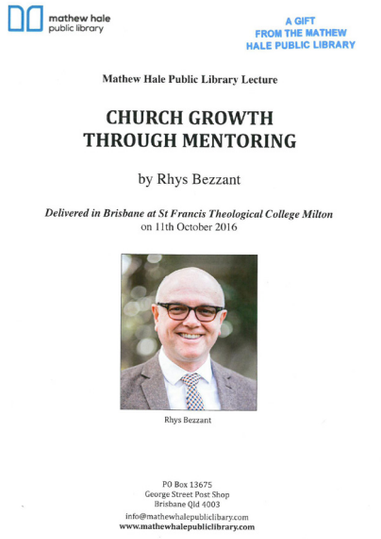
Pauline Dixon, WA.

Church Growth Through Mentoring

Rhys Bezzant

The Mathew Hale Library Public Lecture for 2016

Available from http://mathewhalepubliclibrary.com/book-sales/



'Our country has never been wealthier, we are one of the most stable democracies in the world with little to fear from the state, yet the church is losing ground' writes Rhys Bezzant. We are asking 'how we find children's workers or youth workers, how we get people to come to church every week.'

In this lecture Bezzant wants 'to encourage church growth through the particular strategy of intentional personal work, one on one work, mentoring work'. He points to the success of this strategy in Methodism, the Chinese underground church and other places.

He identifies impediments and distractions that may prevent us undertaking this work: the burden of compliance with increased regulation, the growing loss of traction Christian evangelism and a Christian outlook is experiencing in our society, disempowering church leadership and dejected Christian leaders.

He reflects on Paul's example in 2 Timothy 2:2 'What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others also', and expounds Paul's strategy as relational, visionary and having theological content.

I am myself involved in trying to see a new congregation grow, and it is slow, long work, but one of the things which is making an impression is the patient, persistent personal work being done by my assistant minister among the people of this congregation.

Bezzant gives us a good reminder that we cannot do Christian ministry from a height or a distance, but we need to spend purposeful time alongside people, passing on, not just ideas, but attitudes, aspirations and ways of living that are shaped and energised by knowing God through Christ and that seek to serve the fruitfulness of the gospel of Christ in the lives of others.

Ben Underwood, WA.

Our trouble with church buildings

Stephen Hale

Bishop Stephen Hale is the Lead Minister of the St Hilary's Network, and Chair of EFAC, Australia.

In 2017 I had a curious experience. My mother had passed away and the funeral was held at the church of my childhood and youth. The ministry and pastoral concern of the church was faultless and the service went incredibly well. Why was it curious? The facilities were more or less the same as when I last regularly attended nearly 40 years ago.

I've been at St Hilary's for 8 and half years and we are just in the process of lodging plans for the redevelopment of the Kew Site in our Network of three sites. It has been a slow and at points painful process to get to this point. Our facilities have had very heavy usage over an extended period of time and it's a joy that we have at last reached this point with strong support. Along the way we have had people leave because they in conscience can't support a capital program.

These two stories illustrate the tension evangelical Anglican churches seem to have with renewing their facilities. For a range of reasons we seem to baulk in this area. We all know that the church is the people and the building is there to keep the rain off and we could easily do church in a rented space. Yet we have hundreds of buildings and they each are a statement or testimony to who we are and what we value. It strikes me that to visit many of our churches is increasingly a discontinuous experience for many non-churchgoers. Everywhere else they go in their life they go to fresh contemporary spaces that are fit for purpose and easily accessible. When they come to our churches they will often come to places that look tired and dated and are freezing in winter and an oven in summer. It is said that independent schools renew their facilities every 25 to 30 years. For churches it is seemingly every 50 or more years.

In one sense I've been spoilt, as I was Curate in a brand new church complex at Castle Hill and Vicar at a near new renewal at Diamond Creek. This shapes you. As Bishop I was involved in several processes that led to the closure and sale of some churches. Leading services of deconsecrating a church is a challenging experience.

If we want to connect in the contemporary era we need to give careful and active consideration to what sort of facilities we currently have and the best way we can renew and refresh them. Most of us do that in our own homes, why not the church? Most of us have leveraged off the generosity of previous generations for many years yet are reluctant to commit to the renewal of those facilities. Many churches have had ministers who were involved in the deferral of maintenance from one generation to the next and the cost of catching up is now considerable.

Perhaps we have a theological problem here? Perhaps our theology of church has flaws. In every generation the church has been involved in building buildings to meet in and we marvel at the best examples of these when we play tourist in many parts of the world. Would any of us be bold enough to build something grand and dynamic in our day? Visiting Barcelona a few years ago it was striking the impact on the waves of tourists entering the Sagrada Familia Basilica. They almost all fell silent and were awed and touched by being in that remarkable space.

Why should children participate in dynamic and interesting spaces at their school and then rattle around in dreary halls on Sunday? Do we need to reflect on how we think abut buildings in more than just functional terms. Are they in fact special spaces that enable worship, community and outreach? I've always said that it doesn't seem to matter whether you're hyper-liberal or hyper-reformed people seem to have an emotional attachment to their church and it's buildings. Equally it doesn't seem to matter if the building looks like a Telstra sub station built in the 1960's or a beautiful gothic building built in the 1860's people are still attached to the spaces.

In the new mission era we're in we need facilities that are open and accessible. Facilities that can be used for all sorts of activities in all sorts of ways. Worship spaces that are flexible yet retain a sense of the sacred. We need a new culture of openness and generosity to enable our existing facilities to be refreshed and renewed as a matter of course rather than deferring it to the next generation. We need to refresh our theology of buildings.

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