culture:

critiquing, conforming, challenging, contradicting?

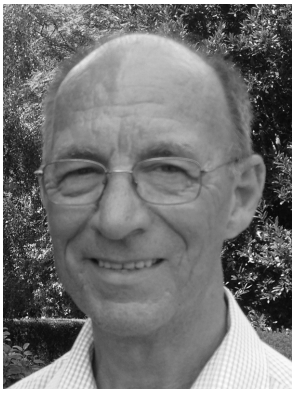
ESSENTIALS AUTUMN 2014

Editorial

This issue of *Essentials* features a series of challenges to a range of 'cultural' issues we are enmeshed in. Following on from Joy Sandefur's review of Peter Sutton's book last issue, **Peter Corney** develops a broader critique of our society's confusion about cultural relativism.

Glenn Hohnberg critiques our own failure to adjust to changing community behaviours thus undermining our evangelism, while **Nicholas Lockwood** reviews a book that outlines some of the sociological factors involved in the spread of early Christianity. **Elizabeth Culhane** critiques two books that describe how literature impacts the writer's faith and sense of self. **Stephen Hale** outlines how he and St Hilary's are grappling with making some of the changes needed to connect again with their community, and **Peter Smith** (with the help of Thomas Cranmer) challenges some cultural confusion in our worship.

Katrina and Jonathan Holgate review an important book of essays about sexual abuse in the church. **Ben van der Klip** digs up some riches about the rich man of James while **an EFAC retreat team** encourages us to slow reading and reflective prayer.



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Christianity's radical challenge to Cultural Relativism

Peter Corney builds on some of the insights in Peter Sutton's book (reviewed last issue by Joy Sandefur), critiques the cultural relativism of our society, and suggests ways in which Christianity challenges it.

A couple of years ago I read the most profoundly disturbing book that I have read for a long time: *The Politics of Suffering: Indigenous Australia and the end of the Liberal Consensus*, written by Peter Sutton, one of Australia's leading anthropologists and an expert on Aboriginal culture. I recommend it to anyone who wants to try and understand why the results of our public policy on indigenous affairs have become such a tragic mess.

Peter Sutton speaks from the inside and he cares passionately about Aboriginal people, but he is deeply critical of the failure of many of our policies since the 1970s. One of the reasons he states has been the unwillingness to name and tackle a number of very negative practices and values embedded in Aboriginal culture that have been exacerbated by colonial conquest. One of the reasons for this is the influence of a romantic view of indigenous cultures that took hold in the early 1970s and the pressure of political correctness that protected it from any critique and has allowed it to go unchallenged until recently. This view is an example of 'cultural relativism'.[1]

This raised a bigger issue for me and that is the wider influence of 'cultural relativism' today on Western culture generally.

In this article I want to try and explain what 'cultural relativism' is and how it has become a belief and value system that is now very influential in our public policy and popular values. I then want to explain how Christianity presents a radical challenge to this idea and belief.

Cultural relativism is an approach to the nature and role of values in a specific culture. 'It is the view that the values and behaviours of people in one culture should not be judged according to those of another, but understood in terms of the culture concerned.'[2]

As a technical principle within the science of anthropology it is an important and useful tool. But it has escaped from that discipline into the wider cultural discourse and morphed into a philosophical idea and moral value, an unquestioned belief that has significant influence on public policy and our society's value system.

As Peter Sutton points out, it has had significant impact on our indigenous affairs policy. But it is also very relevant now to how we embrace and manage the new wave of immigrants and refugees from non-Western cultures to Australia. Remember that most of our post World War 2 migration was from Europe, people with a similar worldview and value system to the majority of Australians. The migration caused by the Vietnam War included a large percentage of Christian refugees. This is no longer the case with our current situation.

In its popular form cultural relativism is closely related to ethical relativism which views moral truth as variable and not absolute. 'What constitutes right and wrong is determined solely by the individual or by a society. Since truth is not objective there can be no objective standard which applies to all cultures. No one can say if someone is right or wrong; it is a matter of personal opinion, and no society can pass judgement on another society. Cultural relativism sees nothing inherently wrong (or nothing inherently good) with any particular cultural expression.'[3]

All cultures and social systems have moral values, but sometimes they differ widely and are often in conflict with those of other systems. How do we determine which ones are the true or higher values, good or bad? For example the status and treatment of women differs greatly from one culture to another, all the way from oppression to equality. Or take the rigid caste system in India; it would be completely unacceptable in Australia.

When cultural values clash, how do we determine which should prevail?

There are broadly three alternative answers:

1. *Allow parallel systems of values to coexist.* This can and does work at the level of certain personal values, but in terms of fundamental social values like human rights it breaks down and divides a society. It would be very difficult to allow, say, the Sharia legal code or certain indigenous laws to operate alongside the Western legal system. Parallel development at the level of fundamental social and political values can lead to forms of apartheid, to ghettos, to conflict and fragmentation.

[1] On the romantic view of indigenous cultures, consider Rousseau's idea of the 'Noble Savage'. See Marcia Langton's second Boyer Lecture 2012 (*The Quiet Revolution: Indigenous People and the Resources Boom* [Harper Collins, 2012]; podcasts via *www.abc.net.au*).

[2] Peter Sutton, *The Politics of Suffering* (Melbourne University Press, 1st ed. 2009), 216.

[3] *www.gotquestions.org* (2002–2012).

2. *Adopt or agree on a common set of core objective values,* such as Judeo-Christian values or a charter of human rights by which cultural values are judged.

3. *Resolve the issue by power:* The majority impose their values on the minority, or a powerful leader or group imposes their values on others.

As Christians in Australia today we now live in a pluralist liberal democracy that is multicultural and multi-faith. Historically many of its liberal values have been significantly shaped by Christian values, but they are now muted and heavily modified. We now have a multi-value situation. While we share a number of general social and political values common to most Western liberal democracies, there are at other levels considerable differences among subgroups. The current debate about marriage, gender and sexual intimacy reveals this.

All societies need a certain level of social cohesion to work and survive. Social cohesion depends on how much value-difference we can tolerate and the level of agreement we can achieve on major social and political values like universal suffrage; the status of women, marriage and family; how conflict is resolved; how the legal system should work; honesty in business and government; freedom of speech and religion; equality of access to education; etc.[4]

Cultural relativists are not consistent. They claim that there are no true, good or bad values, but in fact believe in and support a range of value-laden views. For example, many secular liberals who are cultural relativists have very strong views on women's rights and status in society, and yet this is an area of cultural values where there is great difference between various cultures.

Cultural relativism 'is the view that the values and behaviours of people in one culture should not be judged according to those of another.'

Another example is the recent investigation into the corrupt payment of bribes by Australian officials for Iraqi wheat sales and the Reserve Bank's note-printing business. It is well known that bribing officials and politicians is an accepted cultural practice in parts of Asia, Africa and the Middle East—but it is illegal under Australian law. Bribery happens here too but it is socially unacceptable and illegal and you go to jail if you are caught. There are few if any liberal secular journalists or cultural relativists standing up to defend this practice! Why? Because they actually believe in an objective value at this point: that bribery is wrong and corrupt. They also assume that this belief should be accepted as a vital transcultural value in a globalised business world.

During the last Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s, a widely respected Australian economist said that one of the reasons why the crisis got so out of control was the endemic corruption in the Asian and Indonesian banking system and their lack of prudential controls. This is a cultural issue but few if any in Australia would defend its continuance on the basis of cultural relativism.[5]

Christianity's radical challenge to cultural relativism

The first challenge comes from the Bible's teaching about the kingdom of God. The kingdom, or final uninterrupted reign of God, is looked forward to by the Old Testament and is inaugurated by Christ through his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension and return as Lord of all. The New Testament teaches that all other kingdoms and cultures are ultimately subject to Christ's reign and the values of his kingdom.[6]

(It should be noted that the kingdom and the church are not the same. The church is to proclaim the kingdom and to be a witness to it in word and life, but they are not one and the same thing. The kingdom of God is a much bigger, more encompassing reality than the church. The church has often failed in its witness to the kingdom.)

Now, in 'this age', there are no perfect cultures; they are all formed by fallen people and so are a mixture of good and bad, constructive and destructive, positive and negative practices, values and attitudes. They are all subject to the critique of the values of the kingdom of God. These values are found in the Scriptures and supremely in the life and teaching of Jesus.

Once a person by faith and baptism has entered the community of Jesus, the values of all the other communities that have shaped and influenced them come under its critique and are subject to its values which are the values of the kingdom of God. We become dual citizens, citizens of the kingdoms of this world and citizens of God's kingdom. When a clash of loyalty arises our first duty is to the kingdom of God. Our confession is that 'Jesus Christ is Lord', not Caesar. The New Testament expresses it this way: 'Here we have no enduring city'; 'Our citizenship is in heaven'; we are 'fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household'.[7]

The second challenge to cultural relativism is the great central aim and vision of the mission of God in the world. Through Christ God is bringing the fractured and fragmented world back into unity with himself: people with one another, tribe with tribe, culture with culture, men with women, and humanity with the exploited creation.

The New Testament makes the ultimate goal crystal clear:

> For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (Christ), and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross.
>
> (Col 1:19–20)

[4] See the article by Tim Soutphommasane, political philosopher at Monash University and member of the Australian Multicultural Council, on 'Multiculturalism', *The Age* 24 September 2012.

[5] Professor Ian Harper, Access Economics.

[6] See Mark 1:14–15; Phil 2:5–11; Col 1:15–20; Rev 11:15–17; Isa 9:6–7; Luke 14:15–23; 22:14–30.

[7] Phil 2:11; Heb 13:14; Phil 3:20; Eph 2:19. Bible quotations in this article largely follow the NIV2011.

> You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:26–28)

In Ephesians 2:11–22 the model or template for the future unity of all things is described in the breaking down of the barrier between Jew and Gentile through Christ: 'God's purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace.'

From Isaiah to Jesus, all the great biblical visions of the final consummation of the kingdom of God—the final result of God's act of salvation—use the metaphor of a great banquet where all the nations of the world are gathered together in peace and unity and joy in a great celebration in the renewed creation, the 'new heavens and the new earth', the messianic banquet! Here is the prophet Isaiah:

> On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death for ever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces. (Isa 25:6–8)

It is Jesus' favourite image of the fully realised kingdom of God. It features in three of his parables, and when he inaugurates the Lord's Supper he explains it as an anticipation of the messianic banquet. The Scriptures end in the book of Revelation with the picture of the marriage supper of the Lamb.[8]

Liberal democracy's utopian dream of a united, peaceful, multicultural society is really a longing for the biblical vision that has been planted in our hearts by God, but it will only ever be fully achieved in Christ. That does not mean of course that we should not strive to create our political approximations of it now. But we should not be too disappointed by our partial successes or failures, or naïve about the threats to the dream that we carry in our fallen natures. Utopian political endeavours do not have a great track record, especially in the twentieth century. We can see the difficulties today as we watch the struggles of the European Union with its current challenges—not only financially, but socially with large flows of immigration from vastly different cultures.[9] In multicultural Australia we need to be very realistic and practical as we identify the common values that have served us well, and as we determine the key building blocks of social cohesion that we want to maintain and strengthen in the midst of our present social challenges.[10]

When Barack Obama was running for the US presidency, on 24 July 2008 he spoke to a crowd of 200,000 people in Berlin near where the wall had stood that divided East and West Berlin for over forty years. In a stirring speech he said: 'We must build a world that stands as one. The walls between races and tribes, natives and immigrants; Christian and Muslim and Jew cannot stand. These are now the walls we must tear down.' He has found that easier to say than do.

There are no perfect cultures; they are all formed by fallen people. They are all subject to the critique of the values of the kingdom of God.

The disunity and confusion which followed the Tower of Babel is only finally and fully resolved in the unity and fellowship of the great messianic banquet. This is the hope the Christian faith offers to the world.

In a quote sometimes attributed to Augustine in the fifth century, we hear that 'Adam lies scattered over the earth…he has fallen, and having been broken to pieces, as it were, he has filled the universe with his debris and disunity. However God's mercy has gathered together from everywhere his scattered fragments and by fusing them in the fire of his love, he has reconstituted their broken unity.'

The fire of God's love is focused in the cross of Christ (Eph 2:14–18; Col 1:20).

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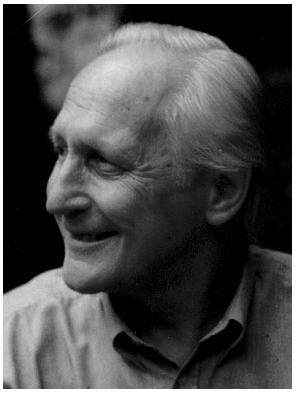


[8] Luke 14:15–24; 22:7–30; 15:22–24; Matt 22:1–13; Revelation 19.

[9] See the recent book by Stefan Auer, *Whose Liberty is it Anyway? Europe at the Crossroads* (Seagull Books, 2012).

[10] See also the article 'Christianity and Islam: alternative visions for society and government' (2012) at *petercorney.com*.

For a number of years now, a group of Melbourne evangelical Anglicans has been hosting quiet days and overnight retreats with the purpose of introducing and sharing prayer practices that are anchored in God's word. The discipline of creating time and space dedicated to prayer has been welcomed by all who have come.

One of the methods that many have found very helpful is that known as *lectio divina*, a way of reading short Bible passages slowly and prayerfully. What follows is an introduction to this. May it bring life to your prayer relationship with God.

Chewing the Cud of Scripture

> 'Let us ruminate and as it were chew the cud, that we may have the sweet juice, spiritual effect, marrow, honey, kernel, taste, comfort and consolation of them.'

These words about meditating on Scripture from Archbishop Thomas Cranmer remind us that many of us have lost the art of the slow reading of Scripture which was well-known to our forebears.

Cranmer described the Scriptures as 'the fat pastures of the soul', a place to graze and nourish ourselves. He invites us to 'as it were chew the cud' or, if we prefer a carnivorous image, to feed on 'heavenly meat'. 'Night and day' he invites us to 'muse and have meditation and contemplation in them'.

The sacred reading or *lectio divina* approach was developed in the early Christian monastic communities as a way of praying Scripture. In its five steps we are invited to *read* the Scripture text, *reflect* upon it, then *respond* to God in prayer. We can *remain* quietly soaking in the love of God before *returning* to our everyday life to act upon what we have read. *Lectio divina* is not a replacement for other forms of Bible study, but is another way of digesting and applying God's word.

Some guidelines for slow reading of Scripture

Preparation

Choose a quiet place and begin with prayer or a time of silence. Take a minute or two to put aside distractions so that you can focus on the Lord. Some use a notebook for reflections and prayers.

1. Read (*lectio*)

Read through the day's text slowly, attentively and prayerfully. Note anything that particularly stands out to you or draws your attention. You may find it helpful to read the text aloud, or to read it through several times. The slow reading of Scripture is best suited to short passages (up to ten verses).

2. Reflect (*meditatio*)

Take a few minutes to think over the text. This is the 'chewing' stage of your reading and reflection. Mull over it in your mind and heart. What questions does this text raise for you?

3. Respond (*oratio*)

Talk with the Lord about what you have read, and about your reflections and responses to the text. Ask for a deepening relationship with him, for insight, for courage and strength to follow and serve him.

4. Remain (*contemplatio*)

Spend a minute or two in the presence of God, soaking in his love for you. You might recall a phrase or idea from your reading. You could play a track from a CD or sit in silence. An upright posture may help you to sit comfortably, or you may prefer to lie on the floor.

5. Return to daily life and gospelling (*ruminatio* and *evangelizatio*)

How will this text and your reflection and prayer impact your daily life? Returning through the day to a short phrase or image may help you to carry your insight or experience out into your everyday world.

Jill Firth, Libby Hore-Lacy and Tanya Costello are part of the EFAC planning group that has been offering quiet days and retreats in Melbourne since 2008. Quotes are taken from Thomas Cranmer, 'A Fruitful Exhortation to the Reading and Knowledge of Holy Scripture' (1547) and 'Preface to the Bible' (1540).

Rethinking Reaching Australia

Glenn Hohnberg challenges our practice and thinking about evangelism in this first part of last year's Mathew Hale Library lecture. Part 2 follows in our next issue.

Are we reaching Australia with the gospel? According to 2012 McCrindle research, 1 in 4 Australians attended church in 1966. In 2013 fewer than 1 in 14 attended church. The population of Australia has doubled since 1966 and yet there are a million fewer people going to church now than then. Even if a significant amount of church attendance in the 1960s was dead nominalism and a culture of church-going rather than true belief, what the numbers show is that we are certainly not reaching Australia with the great news about Jesus.[1]

This begs the question as to why. The gospel is the same and God's power is the same and yet we seem to be going backwards in reaching Australia. This article proposes that there have been profound changes in Australian culture in the last thirty years driven by changes in our working lives which our evangelistic strategies fail to reflect. But this is not the only difficulty. Coupled with this is a failure in our church culture to devote ourselves to the evangelising of Australian adults. And so we are failing to reach Australia.

We will begin by looking at culture changes driven by working changes in the last thirty years and then our church culture. In the next issue we will look at some ways forward for reaching Australia.

Our working life dictates relationships

The first culture shift to explore is the hours that Australians work. Most Australians have the impression that we work longer hours than ever before. But, surprisingly, when you crunch the numbers we don't. On the whole we are working the same hours as thirty years ago.

The issue here is that we work way too much and this is systemic to our culture. If work/life balance is given the most weight, Australia becomes one of the worst developed nations in which to live. OECD reports show that more than 14% of Australian workers put in more than 50 hours a week, well above the OECD average of 9%.[2] Or, looking at it another way, the proportion of workers who worked more than 50 hours a week is currently 1 in 7 workers. This is what it was in 1979. The proportion working over 60 hours a week is 1 in 14 workers. This number has also stayed about the same.[3]

The reason this matters when it comes to evangelism is that it means many Australians don't spend large amounts of time near where they live. They spend much of their time at work and in relationships at work. This must be recognised, for it is a key reason that it is difficult for Christians to be in strong relationships with the people we live near. It is not a new problem but one that has been with us since the 1970s.

The question is: have our churches recognised this? When church leaders say 'invite your neighbours to church', they generally mean the people we live near. But we don't see them because both the Christian and their next-door neighbour are at work.

Busy and more disconnected from where we live than ever before

If raw working hours haven't changed, why does Australian society feel busier and more disconnected in the last 20 to 30 years? Many things have changed, but there are four very significant changes in our work lives that have shaped every aspect of our lives and so impact the way we do evangelism. These are:

1. The way our work time is spent
2. More women in the workforce
3. The time spent commuting
4. Neighbours are less likely to want to get to know each other

[1] *mccrindle.com.au/the-mccrindle-blog/spirituality-and-christianity-in-australia-today*

[2] *www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/still-the-lucky-country-but-some-work-too-many-hours-20130528-2n9nt.html*

[3] *www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/1370.0~2010~Chapter~Hours%20worked%20%284.3.5.5%29*

1. work time

An international workplace survey conducted in Spring 2007 revealed that over 60% of Australians surveyed work more than one weekend a month. 25% sacrifice one weekend every month and a further 37% put in two weekends or more per month.[4]

The impact of this weekend work on relationships is very significant. Weekends afford the largest continuous slice of time in which relationships can be formed and deepened. And yet even the keenest, evangelistically minded Christian is going to struggle to see and get to know the people they live near when either they or their neighbour is consistently away at work. The effect of this is cumulative, because even if the Christian is home on a particular weekend the neighbour very well may not be because he or she is at work. And this doesn't take into account other weekend activities that we travel to such as sport, shopping and entertainment.

We work way too much. If work/life balance is given the most weight, Australia becomes one of the worst developed nations.

It is no wonder the Christian doesn't evangelise their neighbour. They can't. It is hard to speak the gospel to someone you never, or rarely, speak with.

2. more women working

The second very significant factor is that more women than ever before are working in paid work, both in single-parent and two-parent households. Women's participation in the labour force since 1961 has almost double.

On a suburban street in 1961, 3 out of 10 women were working (full-time or part-time). In 2011, 6 out of 10 women on a suburban street are now working (full-time or part-time). And this is in the age range 15–74.[5] When you narrow the age range to 20–65 years, 7 out of 10 women are now working. This means most of their relationships are in the workplace and not on the suburban street. It is hard to overstate the significance of this in terms of where women form relationships, whom they should evangelise, and even the nature of local communities.

But it goes further. This is why society feels a lot busier: because it is. The factors here are again cumulative. Now with mum *and* dad leaving the house for work, or just a single mum or dad, it leads to:

- drop off at long-day childcare before school for either mum or dad
- less time or rare time at the school gate
- shopping after work, on weekends or home delivery
- getting home for school pick-up for one or both partners

In other words, the men are now even busier, but not with paid work. They are busier juggling family responsibilities before and after work so that their wife or partner can work.

Again, the effect here is multiplied in terms of making it hard to be with those we live near. Perhaps the Christian family has opted for the wife not to work and to cope with the financial implications of this. However, the next-door neighbours still are not there; nor are many of the mothers spending time at school, because 7 out of 10 of them are at work. And we haven't even added into the picture the turnover in housing or the way in which we commute our children from the same street to different schools.

What does all this mean? It means it is very, very slow work getting to know the people we live near. Not impossible but very slow. But it also means that if we as Christians focus on the relationships primarily with those we live near and not those whom we work with, we are failing to recognise the vast opportunity for real and deep relationship in the workplace.

However, it isn't just the work. It is the travel to work that affects our relationships where we live, negatively.

3. the commute to work eats away at local community

Research from the Australia Institute, *Off to Work* (2005), showed that Australians commute a lot.[6] Each week in Australia over 10% of parents in paid employment spend more time commuting than they do with their children. This matters because the analysis shows that the more time employees spend commuting, the less frequently they socialise with friends and relatives and the less likely they are to be active members of sporting groups or community organisations. In other words, commuters don't connect easily with their local community. This is an issue in Brisbane because the average weekly commute in Brisbane is four hours per week or about 25 minutes per trip.

It could be proposed that the commute itself creates opportunity for relationships and evangelism. However, the Australia Institute report also showed that commuters are either stressed employees, doing unpaid work on mobile devices, or passive consumers of entertainment and advertising. And so commuting does not build up friendships and communities.[7] This is another reason why we are disconnected from the relationships where we live.

4. our neighbours don't want to get to know us

There is one more cultural shift that almost seems like the final nail in the coffin of relationships with the people we live near. It seems more and more of our neighbours don't want to get to know us even if we want to get to know them. KPMG demographer Bernard Salt notes that many people prefer to talk to their workmates across the office partition rather than chat to their neighbours over the fence.[8] Many don't even know their neigh-

[4] *apo.org.au/research/working-hours-global-comparison*

[5] *www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features30Dec+2011#changing*. For one age bracket, 45–54, this reaches almost 8 out of 10 women!

[6] Michael Flood and Claire Barbato, *Off to Work: Commuting in Australia* (The Australia institute, April 2005), *www.tai.org.au/documents/downloads/DP78.pdf*. See also this research from Sweden for the impact on relationships of commuting: *usj.sagepub.com/content/early/2013/08/06/0042098013498280.abstract*

[7] Flood and Barbato, *Off to Work*, 8–9.

[8] *www.news.com.au/finance/work-colleagues-are-the-new-neighbours/story-e6frfm1i-1225816834965?from=public_rss*

bours' names. If you want proof of this then just observe how many houses now have a six-foot high colourbond fence between them and their neighbours. This near-ubiquitous fence is ironically called 'The good neighbour' by one company. Your neighbours are good because you can hardly see them over this fence.

In summary

We don't know the people we live near, our classic neighbours. We don't see them and they don't see us. We spend little time with them. We don't have energy to invest in them. They don't have the energy to get to know us. And they may well not want to get to know us. And yet this seems to be where most of our evangelistic efforts are focused, to the neglect of other opportunities.

We do know and spend many, many hours with the people we work with. These are our primary relationships (outside family) in the twenty-first century, for men and women. These are relationships that cross political, culture and even social divides. And yet on the whole we Christians and our churches neglect evangelism in our workplaces. We rarely talk about or pray for our workplaces in church, or talk about how to love people in them with the gospel. We need to rethink this. The gospel usually comes through relationships and this is where our relationship are (see Part 2 next issue).

Christian factors that we need to rethink to reach Australia

However, it isn't just changes in our culture that are inhibiting us reaching the people around us. It is our church practices. I fear this is going to be controversial because it challenges our current practices. But we need to be prepared to rethink practices in order to reach Australia.

We allocate church resources so that evangelism doesn't happen

I cannot tell you how many times I have heard this statistic or something like it from Christian leaders: 80% of Christians become Christians when they are under 20 years old.[9]

Why is this? Firstly, you have to become a Christian at some point. At some point everybody has to decide to become a Christian. This means youth groups and Sunday School are evangelistic by definition, because at some point someone has to decide to become a Christian. Putting it another way, every Sunday School is full of potential Christians.

We don't know the people we live near. We don't see them and they don't see us.

This is so obvious that it almost could go without stating. But it is very important because the statistic regarding the conversions of children includes those from Christian families. If we are evangelising these children, under God, you would hope that our rates of success are high. However, when we consider reaching those under 20 outside Christian families how do the statistics change? Would we start to see that the numbers of *pure* outsiders reached above and below the age of 20 are much closer?

But this isn't the only issue. The statistic is misleading in another very important way. The statistic is only relevant if an equal amount of resources (time, money, relationships, etc.) has been invested in reaching those above the age of 20 *and* those under 20.

Consider the resource of time. Many churches put a considerable amount of time and energy into Sunday School, kids' programs and youth groups. Young people are encouraged, skilled and equipped for teaching and growing kids and teenagers. In contrast, how much time and resources and training is provided for evangelism to adults?

Let me flesh this out with an example. Imagine two Christian leaders, aged 24 or 25, who are leading a high-school youth group for 15–16 year olds. They could easily devote 200 hours to this youth group. If two or three members of the youth group are not Christian and the leaders are any good, a significant amount of this time will be evangelistic. This is a great thing.[10] But, in contrast, how many churches encourage and equip two Christian leaders to devote 200 hours to evangelising two or three friends their own age, investing time not only together but praying, thinking and being trained in evangelism?

You can see my point. If the first scenario is played out, evangelism to those under 20 is successful. If the second scenario doesn't happen then it is hard for it to be successful. And, yes, unfortunately often the time devoted to youth group or Sunday School as a priority means that the time is not devoted to evangelising friends. In our scenarios the two leaders are so busy with leading the youth group that they don't have time or energy to be with their friends.

My proposal is that the reason more people are converted before the age of 20 than after is simply because this is where we allocate most of our resources. But why doesn't the second scenario happen? Why isn't the evangelism of adults in a deliberate and planned way part of the program? Why isn't it a systematic part of our church culture?

The problem here is very significant because it is compounded. Since we are devoting resources to evangelising youth group children and Sunday School children and not adults, we have to wait until they grow up to have new leaders, teachers or evangelists. Thus we continually have a limited number of adults both to serve as leaders for youth group *and* to evangelise their peers. It is a self-perpetuating cycle.

When we consider other resources allocated we discover a similar pattern. Consider staff energy as a resource. What percentage of the average church staff member's time is directed toward evangelism: either training others, organising evangel-

[9] For a recent US example: *www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/196-evangelism-is-most-effective-among-kids#.UoGQaifiQUY* (retrieved 12 Nov 2013)

[10] 200 hours is simply five hours a week for 40 weeks. It might consist of two hours each week with the youth group, two hours a week in preparation, and an average of one hour a week over a year of other activities such as hanging out, a weekend away, special nights, time at church, etc.

ism or doing it? Or think about the average church budget. How much of it is actually allocated to evangelism? Asking the question sharply: are we allocating resources such that evangelism to those over the age of 20 does not happen?

More people are converted before the age of 20 than after because this is where we allocate most of our resources.

This isn't an unbiblical way to think. When Jesus was talking with his disciples in John 4 about the fields being white for the harvest, it was because 'Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.' The disciples are reaping because the gospel was sowed over hundreds of years through the Old Testament prophets. If we are not sowing by evangelising those over the age of 20, how can we expect to reap?

Now comes my next controversial point. The other reason that much of our church evangelism fails is that, even when we do allocate resources toward it, we plan for the evangelism not to work.

Many churches plan for evangelism not to work

Many of our churches pivot their adult evangelism around one-off evangelistic events or a short course. Here is how it generally pans out in a local congregation (if your church is different I'm very glad to hear it):

- start of the year, put evangelism event on church calendar
- minister picks speaker and event because they know the speaker and the event
- six or four weeks beforehand the minister holds up a flyer or shows a PowerPoint slide regarding the event or course
- two weeks beforehand a reminder is announced
- one week beforehand comes an e-mail and perhaps prayer for the event in Bible studies

This model assumes a few things. We'll explore two. First, it assumes the heart of the Christian is fully formed with evangelistic convictions, competence and character. Rarely do the staff meet with individual congregation members or small groups and talk through whom they might invite and how they might do this. And rarely is the congregation member consistently encouraged and challenged in their prayers for the person they are hoping to invite. Perhaps this ought to happen in Bible study groups, cell groups and the like. However, my experience is that this is also rare. This means that the most vital evangelistic work is left to the congregation member without support, encouragement or training.

Second, this assumes ownership of and confidence in whatever the evangelistic endeavour is. However, my experience has been that if a congregation member has *any* uncertainty or any doubts—such as not knowing the speaker, being unsure about how the event will work, or a myriad other things—invitations are not made and the event isn't utilised. This is understandable; we are asking them to risk a friendship when they are not confident it is worth the risk.[11]

[11] This may explain why evangelistic events organised from the ground up, such as those organised by women's Bible study groups, seem to be often much more successful in having unbelievers attend.

In short, if the adult evangelism in our churches is carried out more or less along the lines above we are not planning for evangelism. Rather, we are planning for evangelism to fail. The problem here isn't with event evangelism. It is that evangelism is treated as an event rather than worked at systematically and deeply with the event as the outworking of evangelistic discipleship with Christians.

Now, if this isn't bad enough there is an even worse problem for our churches.

Is the ultimate problem that we don't believe our Lord?

In Romans 1 Paul said, 'I'm not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation for all who believe.' He believed that the word of God was profoundly powerful and able to save.

If we have given up on evangelising people over the age of 20—that is, we have given up evangelising Australian adults—then our actions show that we don't actually think there is any power in the gospel. We don't really think it will convert the people to whom it is proclaimed. But Paul thought the gospel pierced through to adults. He did *not* enter towns and go to the Synagogue Sunday Schools and to the Yiddish youth group. He preached the gospel to adults in their workplaces, synagogues, public squares and homes. And this is because Paul believed in the power of the gospel.

Have we lost confidence in the power of the gospel to convert people to Jesus? Is this the very thing we must rethink?

In conclusion

We are not currently reaching Australia and we need to rethink our evangelism. Churches must recognise the reality of relationships. They are no longer primarily with the people we live near. They are much more likely to be with those we work with. Unless churches recognise this and respond appropriately, especially in the training and equipping of Christians for evangelism, we shall keep failing to reach Australia. But we will only start to respond appropriately if we start to devote ourselves to the evangelising of adults in Australia in a way that hasn't been happening for many, many years. We need to rethink how to reach Australia because, if we keep doing the same thing we've been doing for the last thirty years, we are likely to get the same result.

Glenn Hohnberg has worked with the City Bible Forum in Brisbane for six years. Glenn grew up in bush NSW, lived in Sydney and trained at Moore Theological College, but now lives in Southside Brisbane. Glenn is married to Kathryn and has four young boys.

Stephen Hale is the Chair of EFAC Australia and the Lead Minister of St Hilary's Kew/ North Balwyn in Melbourne

Five Challenges for Local Churches

Stephen Hale explains some challenges and opportunities facing the church he leads.

As the Lead Minister of a larger Anglican church, we're seeking to work through a number of major challenges. Chances are if we're facing these challenges others might be as well.

These are five big challenges/opportunities we're wrestling with:

1. Regional/Local

We're a classic gathered church where people come to us from all over the place. We have a great reputation and offer a full range of ministries for families, youth and young adults. We don't have to work hard to get people, they just come to us. While we rejoice in this unique opportunity, we're seeking to work out what it means to be a local church. We recently visited our neighbours in Kew and they told us:

- we've heard you're a great church
- we don't know what you do
- you should advertise more
- no one is creating community around here

As a church we're seeking to reconnect locally at our two centres and to be a centre of community once again.

2. Gathered/Scattered

Most of our people are busy professionals. Our overall Mission is about discipleship. We're working hard to help people to think about what it means to be a disciple in all of their lives. As part of our new Vision we want 'to support each other to serve and witness wherever we live, work, study and recreate.' It is easy to enunciate such a vision but hard to make it a reality. It is a big shift in orientation for those of us who preach and teach as well as for our small groups.

3. Boomers

We have several hundred boomers at St Hilary's and it is both a challenge and an opportunity. Our biggest congregation is a family congregation. The dominant group in the congregation (if they all turn up) are couples who have adult children. Many are moving to retirement. We see this both as a unique opportunity and a big challenge. We're seeking to develop a pathway to help people to find opportunities to serve and use their gifts for the sake of the kingdom. We have also appointed our first Seniors Minister.

4. Generations

In 2014 we're working towards creating one new department to resource our children, families, youth and young adults ministries. We want to have a more integrated team approach and a more flexible model to resource our multi-site future. This also relates to having a more active partnership with parents in the discipleship of their children and young people.

5. Network

We're currently a dual-site church. It is likely we will be a tri-site church within twelve months. We're actively exploring how best to be a network of congregations and centres. We'll offer strong oversight and governance and administration while giving the congregations/centres freedom to do mission in all sorts of creative ways. At the same time we'll offer good resourcing of our specialist areas of ministry.

I don't know if any of this rings true for you. Part of what EFAC can do is to help each other to grow healthy and growing churches.

Reflections on Contemporary Anglican Worship

Peter Smith challenges some aspects of contemporary worship and commends Cranmer's way of encouraging the faithful.

The Anglican Church of Australia has undergone a profound liturgical revolution since the turbulent days of the 1960s.[1] Whole dioceses and local churches right across Australia have been working towards more meaningful forms of corporate worship. For most, the innovations are driven by a desire to make the experience of church more engaging.[2]

Sadly, much of what passes for *vital* Anglican worship today would be described by our Reformed Anglican forebears as Arian or Pelagian. Rather than helping people to feel good, the effect of many of the new service forms undermines Christian assurance. What is more disturbing is that churches once proud of their Anglican heritage have swept away the Reformed Anglican liturgical heritage. A style of worship that reflects the doctrines of the medieval church period is flourishing today, including dioceses that pride themselves as orthodox.[3]

This is what passes for Reformed worship in some contemporary Anglican churches today: The believer comes into the gathering ready for a worship time. After a vibrant time of singing the notices are given, then the children and young teens leave the gathering for their time of teaching in a nearby hall or room. A short passage of the Bible (usually from the New Testament) is read and the preaching follows. During the sermon the congregation is exhorted to live the Christian life. Bread and wine may then be consumed as an act of remembering the death of Christ. A part of being devoted to God also means giving money —so the offertory bag is passed around during a 'worship' song. Finally, having fulfilled her duty to God, the believer goes out into the wider world where her worship continues as an offering of service to him. The great emphasis is on what we do in order to worship Christ.

The Roman Catholic Mass of the sixteenth century expressed a similar human-centred approach to engaging with God. By the human (priestly) act of re-offering Christ (bloodlessly by the breaking of bread and wine) the medieval church believed she could procure merit and thus open the way to communion with God.[4] Holding up the host and making the daily re-offering of Christ was intended to stir up emotion and create by human activity a contrite heart. This was done in preparation for a fresh infusion of grace. Regular 'top-ups' were designed to give sinners greater assurance.

In the medieval church the agents of worship were the priest and the elements of bread and wine re-offered by him day in and day out. The act of worship for a lay person involved coming to the church and adoring Christ under forms of bread and wine in the Roman Mass. In the words of the Catholic Bishop of Winchester, Stephen Gardiner, Cranmer's theological opponent:

> The Catholic doctrine teacheth not the daily sacrifice of Christ's most precious body and blood to be an iteration of the once perfected sacrifice on the cross, but a sacrifice that representeth that sacrifice, and sheweth it also before the faithful eyes, and refresheth the effectual memory of it; so as in the daily sacrifice, without shedding of blood, we may see with the eye of faith the very body and blood of Christ by God's mighty power, without division distinctly exhibit.

Whilst the form of many modern services is very different, the means of approaching God expresses a similar intention as the pre-Reformation rite: to get into a mood or state of feeling so God's grace might be experienced again. Cranmer came to recognise that the priestly act of offering the bread and wine and the act of adoring bread and wine were human acts that denied the work of Christ and undermined Christian assurance.

Cranmer learnt (through Christ and St Paul) that all human actions were hopelessly inadequate for procuring any kind of merit before God; 'because all men be sinners and offenders against God…no man by his own acts, works, and deeds can be justified and made righteous before God.'[5] He saw as clearly as Luther and Augustine, who both learnt from St Paul, that 'every man of necessity is constrained to seek for another righteousness.'[6] Cranmer could say, 'We be justified by faith in Christ only.'[7]

[1] Charles Sherlock, 'A Prayer Book for Australia (APBA)' in *The Oxford Companion to the Book of Common Prayer* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 324–332.

[2] In this article our focus is on the subset of worship that is the gathering of God's people. Worship encompasses all of life which includes especially the gathering of God's people who come together for worship. James Torrance says that 'When we, who know that we are God's creatures, worship God together, we gather up the worship of all creation. Our chief end is to glorify God, and creation realizes its own creaturely glory in glorifying God through human lips' (*Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* [IVP, 1996], 13).

[3] See the confessions of the Experimental Sydney Services, the legion of Anglican prayer books that have their roots in the 1928 Prayer Book, the *APBA* Second Order and Third Order Holy Communion services that were approved by the General Synod of Australia in 1997, the standard Anglican fare on offer at Sunday evening church gatherings, and that at charismatic, pentecostal churches and independent churches. Broad generalisations, yes, but experienced by the author over the past year in a variety of contexts.

[4] John Rodgers, 'Eucharistic Sacrifice: Blessing or Blasphemy?', *Churchman* 78/4 (1964), 248.

[5] Thomas Cranmer, 'The Homily of Salvation', *Writings and Disputations of Thomas Cranmer* (Cambridge University Press, 1844), 128.

[6] Cranmer, 'Homily of Salvation', 128–134.

[7] Cranmer, 'Homily of Salvation', 132.

For Cranmer, any kind of 'offering' prior to receiving the bread and wine was a blasphemy. The traditional rites had obscured Christ as the only agent of worship. With crystal clarity Cranmer set out to redesign a prayer book (1549, 1552) that reflected the nature of true worship. To be sure, Cranmer believed that there were appropriate responses to be made—but they were always based on the finished work of Christ. Thanksgiving is one such sacrifice. The offering of oneself to God wholly in life is another. Cranmer recognised that such sacrifices were not limited to the Lord's Supper but that worship was the ongoing activity in the whole of life.

Conclusion

One constant in the history of communion with God is the desire to 'feel good' about oneself before God. Whether it be heartfelt songs, listening to engaging sermons, praying to God, or partaking of the sacrament, all human acts done in order to approach God come to nothing. They lie about the means of entering into fellowship with the Trinitarian God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When they are made the basis of worship, assurance is undermined and the gospel of grace is denied.

Cranmer's liturgical genius was to demonstrate that God is approached through union with Christ—a union completely initiated and sustained by him. Cranmer's prayer book services (and especially the very small changes he made to the 1549 Prayer Book) have been substantially retained in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. The BCP remains the standard of life and doctrine for the Australian Anglican Church. It guards against false worship and promotes heartfelt and extended praise in a way that a human-centred approach will never do.

Planning for contemporary church services (services of praise, prayer, Holy Communion) that capture the nature of true worship is no mean feat. It makes me wonder why we don't return to the words and prayers of Cranmer's liturgies in updated prose and revive the hymns (in modern form) that celebrate the cross and the finished work of Christ. People will have solid ground on which to stand before God in the bliss of fellowship with Father, Son and Spirit. There will be a deep gladness and real feelings of assurance.

In order to promote God's glory by declaring the gospel of grace, we are required to make our services cross focused—not fixed on the 'do' of human activity. For the glory of God our services must be an expression of the finished work of Christ, lest we express Pelagian or Arminian worship—which is no worship at all. It is not enough to assume that our congregations know the gospel and the nature of the gospel response. Church history tells us that the default position for all humans is self effort. We do well to keep learning from Cranmer and use the structure and words (albeit updated) of his well thought out liturgies.

Peter Smith is Rector of St Lawrence's Dalkeith in Perth and the Chair of EFAC WA

Essentials in print and online

Thank you to those who responded to our survey (the online poll on the EFAC website is still open). As you might guess, opinions varied. So we will continue with the print edition for the time being as well as provide Essentials *online. You can read or download* Essentials *online as a PDF or an Issuu document, and also read individual articles as web (HTML) documents. For the latest edition, members need to log in to the EFAC website with their login ID and password. New readers should complete the registration form online. Questions about login and registration should be addressed to* cappleby@melbpc.org.au *or* admin@efac.org.au.

BIBLE STUDY

Who was that Masked Man?

Ben van der Klip sheds light on an interesting aspect of the letter of James.

The aura of mystery surrounding the Lone Ranger left people asking, 'Who was that masked man?' An aura of mystery also surrounds the identity of the rich person in James 1:9–11; is the rich person a Christian or an unbeliever?[1]

A literal translation of the Greek of James 1:9–11 would look something like this:

> [9] And let the humble brother boast in his high position,
> [10] but the rich man in his humiliation, for like a flower of grass he will pass away. [11] For the sun rises with the scorching wind and withers the grass and its flower falls away and the beauty of its face perishes; likewise also the rich man will disappear in the midst of his activities.

[1] Dale Allison opts for a unique solution in his recent commentary on the letter of James, arguing that the rich person is a brother (a member of the same Jewish diaspora community) but not a Christian; see Dale Allison Jr, *James* (ICC; Bloomsbury, 2013), 204–206. I am not persuaded that the letter is written to a combined Christian/non-Christian audience so I don't find Allison's conclusion as to the rich person's identity convincing.

There are a number of exegetical issues tucked away in these verses, but I will focus here on the issue of the rich person's identity. The question of the rich man's identity arises because James doesn't explicitly identify the rich man as a 'brother'.[2]

To begin with we observe that the first clause of verse 10 lacks a verb: what does the rich man do in his humiliation? Most scholars are agreed that the same verb as in verse 9 should be supplied so that we understand verses 9–10 like this: 'And let the humble brother boast in his high position, but *let* the rich man *boast* in his humiliation…'

Clearly there's a measure of irony in the rich man boasting in his humiliation. But how ironic does James intend to be? Is it caustic irony, as if to say, 'Boast in your eternal damnation'? Or is it gentler, something like, 'Boast in the loss of your worldly status that you lost when you became a Christian'?

According to Drake Williams, James has Jeremiah 9:23–24 in mind, where the rich are told not to boast of their riches but to boast in knowing the LORD. Williams observes that the Jeremiah passage is directed towards the people of God, the Israelites, and concludes that James speaks similarly. Much of the force of his argument is lost, however, when we notice that Jeremiah 9 is directed to a people so unfaithful that the LORD's judgement is going to fall on them.[3]

Determining the nature of the rich man's humiliation will aid us in understanding the way in which the rich man is meant to boast. The rich man's humiliation is contrasted with the humble brother's high position, and it's a lop-sided contrast: James contrasts a humble brother with a rich man. The contrast isn't between a *poor* brother and a *rich* man, or between a *humble* brother and a *proud* man.[4]

On the basis of James 1:12 and 2:5 we can follow Hort in understanding the humble brother's high position as referring to the possession of the kingdom of God; hence a present reality as well as a future one.[5]

Understanding the rich man's humiliation is more difficult. Those who identify the rich man as a Christian identify a number of possibilities including spiritual humbling and forfeiting material possessions, either upon death or as a result of trials. If the rich man isn't a believer then presumably James has his eternal condemnation in view.[6]

James adds the explanatory clause in verse 10: 'for like a flower of grass he [the rich man] will pass away', recalling Isaiah 40:6–8 which contrasts fleeting human life with the enduring word of God.[7] James expands upon the illustration in verse 11. Those who consider the rich man to be a believer argue that this is not the language of eschatological judgement.[8]

Yet it's instructive to consider Psalm 49 in this regard, for this psalm refers to wicked deceivers who boast of their riches (49:6)—to people who, despite their 'wealth' (NIV2011) or 'pomp' (ESV), do not endure but perish like beasts (49:12). The psalmist contrasts these people, who remain in the realm of the dead, with those whom God will redeem from the dead (49:15).

So even if the language of eschatological judgement isn't present in James 1:9–11 the passage is still consistent with the idea that the unbeliever has no part in the age to come (or, in other words, in the kingdom of God). If we're correct in understanding the humble brother's high position as referring to having a part in God's kingdom then it's reasonable to understand James as saying that the rich man's humiliation consists of his passing away and not inheriting the kingdom.

Deciding whether the rich man is a Christian or non-Christian is highly involved and complicated by a variety of factors, as we've seen; the scholarly debate continues. Somewhat strangely, Blomberg and Kamell suggest that the trials in James 1:2 involve economic exploitation of impoverished Jewish-Christian peasants by rich non-Christian landlords but then conclude that the rich man in verse 10 is a Christian believer.[9] For me the non-Christian interpretation is slightly more convincing.

The letter of James is often regarded as straightforward and practical. Closer examination shows considerable depth to the text and the need for careful exegesis to determine what James is really saying. And this is not merely academic for, as Stulac observes, two very different applications (and sermons) arise out of James 1:9–11 depending on whether the rich man is identified as a Christian or a non-Christian.[10]

Ben van der Klip is the rector of St Mary in-the-Valley, Kelmscott, in Perth. He has an interest in the letter of James and ought to take out shares in his local Dome coffee shop.

[2] I have not provided an inclusive translation, as the inclusive rendering of pronouns complicates the exegesis. I take James the brother of Jesus to be the author of the letter, but the question of authorship doesn't affect my argument here.

[3] H. H. D. Williams III, 'Of Rags and Riches: The Benefits of Hearing Jeremiah 9:23–24 Within James 1:9–11', *Tyndale Bulletin* 53/2 (2002): 273–282. While there are resonances between the passages, there are significant differences too, so I am not persuaded that the Jeremiah passage is as foundational for James as Williams suggests.

[4] According to Luke Johnson, the Greek word translated 'rich' refers specifically to material wealth while the term translated 'humble' can include a sense of poverty as well as humble status; see Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James* (AB; Doubleday, 1995), 184–185.

[5] Cited in Johnson, *James*, 184.

[6] Craig L. Blomberg & Mariam J. Kamell, *James* (ZECNT 16; Zondervan, 2008), 55–56; J. H. Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of James* (ICC; T&T Clark, 1991), 145–146, 148.

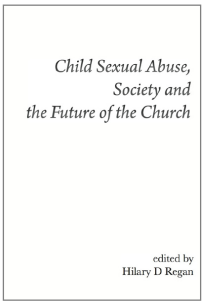
[7] The translation '*it* will pass away' is grammatically possible, but in context verse 11 makes it clear that it's the rich man who passes away; see Johnson, *James*, 186.

[8] e.g. Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James* (PNTC; Eerdmans/Apollos, 2000), 67. The question of whether to translate 'the sun rises with the scorching wind' or 'the sun rises with burning heat' in verse 11 doesn't affect the argument here.

[9] Blomberg & Kamell, *James*, 43–44, 46.

[10] George M. Stulac, 'Who Are "The Rich" In James?', *Presbyterion* 16/2 (1990): 91–92.

Book Reviews



Child Sexual Abuse, Society and the Future of the Church

Hilary D. Regan (ed.), ATF Theology 2013
ISBN 9781922239242, 131 pages

This book is a collection of nine essays about this highly sensitive and emotive subject, largely from the point of view of the Roman Catholic Church but with a number of lay and other essays from other denominations. This review explores a number of these essays, which vary from a broad overview of the subject through historical descriptions past and recent, theological discussions and onto personal opinions about the dysfunction of the church and the effects of celibacy. The authors include ordained and lay, and academics and knowledgeable onlookers.

In the opening essay Michelle Mulvihill gives a brief account of her childhood in a rural NSW town in an Irish Catholic family. She recounts the weekly influx of very naïve young Irish Catholic priests imported into her diocese who had Sunday lunch at her family home. She continues giving a ten-point list of impassioned suggestions she feels that the church must do to rectify the current parlous state of affairs. These include statements such as: (1) churches need to break the silence about the abuse within their own congregations; (2) public displays of atonement are urgently needed; (3) the silence of religious women has sadly been very loud; (5) it is time for the churches to hand over all information relating to criminal and other matters; (8) clearly public agencies must handle current and future complaints. Mulvihill finishes with a brief description of the subsequent essays in this book.

In 'Towards the Theology of the Child' Alan Cadwallader of the Australian Catholic University gives a theological discussion about how he feels 'the child' has been misstated in recent understandings of the Bible and how a reinterpretation will help 'the child' become a more Christological category and move toward 'the child' being honoured as actual children rather than an indirect concept as he suggests is currently used and most probably misused (not at all like Jesus did).

Ann Drummond uses her experience in the Uniting Church to discuss two classes of adult-to-adult sexual abusers: the 'serial perpetrators' and the 'wanderers'. Emphasising the church's all-too-often poor response, she highlights that serial perpetrators have, in the past, been shifted from parish to parish by the church hierarchy—shrouding their misdeeds and giving them the opportunity to continue in their predatory behaviour. Drummond briefly discusses current church disciplinary action and suggests that, because the role of minister in the church is no longer considered to be prestigious, sexual predators are not as attracted to the church as they were. When discussing the 'wanderers' she suggests that they should be classed differently, not reducing the punishment but noting that people who wander off the 'straight and narrow' on a single occasion need to be treated somewhat differently than those who time and again perpetrate sexual misconduct.

Chris Geraghty speaks from the point of view of an ordained Roman Catholic priest and the effect of that on understanding human sexuality. This is a personal reflection on the problems he encountered as a young man who went straight into the priesthood from school and so had very little real insight into what human sexuality was. His views of the subject were clouded by the traditions and stricture of his training and seclusion from society in general. He points to various historical texts that diminish the value of women as an example of some of the discolouration that is or has been applied in the discussion of women from the point of view of Catholic priests in their insular and celibate world. He balances this by pointing to the life Jesus lived and how Jesus 'associated freely' with women ignoring the customary Jewish taboos and that they were part of his active ministry. His final statement is 'It is time to find a way out of the bog, back to the gospels.'

Michael Kelly SJ discusses past failings of the Roman Catholic Church and the shame felt by countless Catholics about the abuse that has been exposed within the church. He discusses how the Roman Catholic Church seems unable to manage its own affairs and that this external intervention is not the first that has occurred. He suggests that the church has not learnt enough from past interventions and hopefully this intervention will lead to 'greater accountability, due process and a greater respect for the natural rights of individuals at all levels of governance, an attentive listening and a readiness to make changes to achieve better outcomes'.

An interesting, though academic, subject discussed by Laira Krieg and Paul Babie was the effect of anti-discrimination legislation on religious freedom in Australia. This brought out the broad effects of the different types of anti-discrimination protections provided in Australia and the effects of the different treatments. This discussion is very thorough and gives much cause for thought, and is summarised in a quotation from Patrick Parkinson:

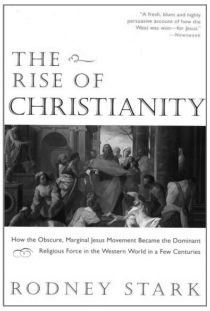
> Like all rights, the right to manifest belief is subject to limitations but not to abnegation. A winner-takes-all approach to the conflict between conservative religious beliefs and gay and lesbian rights would be a loss for human rights generally. No amount of soothing talk about 'balancing' can disguise when one right is allowed to eradicate another.

The main thoughts being discussed here are (1) that of religious freedom in Australia, and (2) making space for religion in the Australian context. The essay also highlights the need for caution when granting 'privileged position' on the grounds of religious belief: such privileges may have contributed to the current need for the Royal Commission under discussion in this book!

In the final essay Bernard Treacey OP writes from Dublin about the Irish Catholic experience. Over the last decade a number of major enquiries have been held with senior judicial oversight. The result of this has been the exposure of very serious failings within the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland and the start of the redress process based on these findings. Various reports to government have resulted in a number of changes and a monetary redress mechanism for some of this. The Irish Catholic Church has until recently had an outsider (from the Presbyterian Church) acting for six years in a senior role overseeing the National Board.

These few words cannot give a full insight into this book or this subject, and it is important to recognise that the current Royal Commission into *institutional* child sexual abuse specifically excludes abuse within a familial environment—which accounts for approximately 80% of child sexual abuse. Consequently, it cannot be said that this book covers the subject fully, and some of the essays could be said to be off at a tangent. However, anyone wanting an alternative view to that seen in the media is encouraged to dip into this book. A major point could be that the church in general has not provided Australian society with a good example of Christian living. Also that the external scrutiny now imposed upon the church is a good thing that will hopefully force previous poor (if not reprehensible) practices to be rectified and the perpetrators and those protecting them to be brought to book.

Jonathan & Katrina Holgate worship at St Alban's Highgate WA where Katrina is the assistant minister



The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries

Rodney Stark, Princeton University Press 1996
ISBN 9780060677015, 272 pages

This book has been around for a number of years now, but it's well worth revisiting in case it isn't familiar to you. It is one of those fantastic books that ought to be required reading—and indeed seems to be just that—among people connected to church planting/growth networks.

Stark is a well respected sociologist who decided, as a short-term hobby, to turn his tools and expertise towards engaging with the question of how the obscure, marginal Jesus movement became the dominant religious force in the western world in a few centuries. In the preface, he says of himself:

> I'm not a New Testament scholar and shall never be. Nor am I a historian... I am a sociologist who sometimes works with historical materials and who has, in preparation of this volume, done his best to master the pertinent sources... What I am trying to contribute to studies of the early church is better social science—better theories and more formal methods of analysis, including quantification wherever possible and appropriate.

Whilst acknowledging his indebtedness to many theologians of various disciplines who assisted him in his choice of hobby, one read through this book reveals that he is guy who knows what he's on about. His fresh perspective, the tools of his science, his keen interest in the subject and his easy writing style make this book a brilliant and worthwhile read for anybody, regardless of how learned (or not) they may be. Moreover it's a book that many could read in a couple of sittings or over a couple of afternoons.

Personally I found it encouraging for two reasons. The first is my concern with the liberalisation of traditional Judeo-Christian ethics in both the world and the church. Stark does a brilliant job in describing what the Greco-Roman world was likely to have been like to live in and how the radical otherness of the church—essentially a maintenance of traditional Jewish ethics—actually brought transformation and life into a world suffering deeply from the consequences of its own ideologies.

The second reason I found this book encouraging is because of my current role in planting a new church. I appreciated Stark's reflections on how cults, sects, and religions grow through networks of relationships that continually remain open. I also appreciated his reflections on the theological, historical and sociological realities and events that meant that Christians maintained these open networks of relationship. A further point that I found particularly encouraging was his assertion that, for the church to grow from 300 in the upper room in AD 33 to the suggested 56% of the population in AD 350, the church only needed to grow at a rate of around 40% per decade. For a church planter whose current congregation is around 12 or so, it's encouraging to know that if we see God convert four people in the next decade, we'll be well on the way to seeing the West largely reconverted!

The Rise of Christianity remains an absolute gem for anyone who has an interest in the early church, in sociology, in the early church's mission to the Jews, in the ethics and life of the early church and of the ancient Greco-Roman world, in the role of women, and in many other factors and emphases—sociological, political, historical, ethical and theological—that contributed to the obscure, marginal Jesus movement becoming the dominant religious force in the Western world in only a few centuries.

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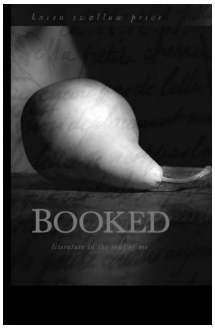


Booked: Literature in the Soul of Me
Karen Swallow Prior, T. S. Poetry Press 2012
ISBN 9780692014547, 220 pages

By the Book: A Reader's Guide to Life
Ramona Koval, Text 2012
ISBN 9781922079060, 256 pages

Spiritual autobiography is a prolific field, from Augustine's *Confessions*, C. S. Lewis's *Surprised by Joy*, *The Hiding Place* by Corrie ten Boom, and *Traveling Mercies* by Anne Lamott.

Seventeenth-century England saw the height of the genre. Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* is perhaps the most famous example. A plethora of offerings established similarities in narrative structure: a sinful young person begins to reflect on the spiritual, and develops a corresponding angst about their soul's future. They repent, but soon commence a cycle of sin, repentance, then a return to sin. A 'road-to-Damascus' experience eventually transpires, compelling a definite conversion. Life thereafter remains difficult, but many of the protagonist's emotional anxieties are quelled through knowing God and being known by him. As Protestant works they reject a notion that Catholicism overemphasises otherworldliness, to highlight God's immanence in the mundane of the everyday.

In contrast to her seventeenth-century peers, Karen Swallow Prior's *Booked: Literature in the Soul of Me* refrains from employing sin-cycles on which to hang her narrative. Instead, each chapter reflects upon a work of literature in a warm, sometimes colloquial voice, exploring its themes and effect on her life and faith.

Her first chapter, 'Books Promiscuously Read: John Milton's *Areopagitica*', is her best. Recounting how reading 'promiscuously' led her not away from God but towards him, she draws on Milton's work to mount an argument for evaluating books on form as much as content. Challenging the cherished compulsion towards censorship touted by many Christians, Prior highlights that it was a conservative Puritan who argued against the censorship laws supported by his own faction. 'Let [truth] and falsehood grapple', quipped Milton. Reading *Areopagitica* corrects Prior's view of a God of book-blotting, one who promotes a dichotomy between following him and the life of the mind. She finally sees that the God of the Bible is the God of freedom. She can know the truth and it will set her free.

In this chapter Prior follows Bunyan in affirming the role of the everyday in spiritual formation: for her it is particularly the power of books, which for most of her life she loved 'more than God' without 'discovering…that a God who spoke the world into existence with words is, in fact, the source of meaning of all words' (p.11). Such a depiction of the God who affirms semiotic communication and provides its meaning speaks of the simultaneous transcendence and immanence of the Word who became flesh. Following Augustine, Prior acknowledges that God is present in our words (and books) about him and gives our words meaning, but he simultaneously exceeds description by human semiotics.

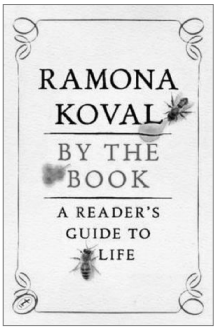
After this first chapter, Prior's narrative takes a non-linear path. Through reflection on various books and life events, the reader is sometimes granted access to glimpses of her faith journey but is left to piece together the available fragments (for the absence of a discernible faith reflection entirely, see chapter 3). At times the attention to detail about the young Prior's life is overwhelming and more akin to an autobiography of an already well-known figure; some particulars are only later discussed in relation to works of literature. While the introduction convinces readers of *Booked's* teleological movement—we know that Prior will eventually submit to the lordship of Jesus—a mass of minutiae in a non-linear narrative may leave the reader wondering, for example, why Prior is intricately describing her relationship to farm life. Finally (twelve pages later, in fact) all is revealed: this chapter's primary focus is the power of words to shape others' perceptions of ourselves, and our own, particularly through reference to *Charlotte's Web* (cf. pp.40–41).

Nevertheless, Prior sometimes unexpectedly interrupts one's pleasant meander through her work, pointedly challenging preconceived ideas and emotions about matters of life and faith. One such example is her vivid recounting of Joe's never-failing love for Pip in *Great Expectations*. Her retelling is so powerful that a cool heart may thaw in the midst of this tangible sign of grace. She then writes of the silenced, emotion-struck responses to this passage from some of her university students, all the while recalling a story she wrote as a young girl where she aspired to be a teacher: one who scatters 'food for the gathered' (p.70). One cannot help but be moved.

Prior's convincing reflection on the introspective 'search for the self' or 'creation of the individual' as hallmarks of modernity and a corresponding development of a form which could give voice to these themes—the novel—is also worth noting (cf. pp.79–80). Hence, she argues, choosing an orphan for one's protagonist is an obvious choice in many of these works. Divorced from the more obvious influences of community, the orphaned individual is granted even greater scope for autonomously forming their own unique identity. Furthermore language, Prior argues, is the key tool used to create and defend this identity. In modernity, one's 'voice' is not merely the sound produced by one's vocal chords, but the way we make our sense of self known, both to others and ourselves (p.82).

However, missing from these excellent reflections is a meta-analysis from the author on her own practices of writing. For Prior is undertaking a process of 'social dis-embedding' (to use the sociologist Peter Wagner's term) and self-construction at the very moment of writing about it in other works. She dis-embeds herself from her evangelical Christian upbringing and forms a narrative where literature helped her (remember that words are key in modern self-formation), through God's grace, to become the person she is today. *Jane Eyre* and other books allow Prior to learn life lessons in her process of self-creation, culminating in her realisation, with the assistance of Miss Brontë, that true freedom is 'the freedom to be true to the self she knows she has been created to be' (p.87). There is some confusion in this section over the nature of one's 'nature' (is

Eyre's true 'nature' sin-ridden and hopeless? or to be a child of God? or both? This may lead theologians to recall a certain Augustinian versus Thomist debate). Surely that line, with its seemingly contradictory support for self-construction and its opposite—an identity given by something outside oneself—calls for reflection on the nature of postmodern literature-based autobiography. Even the name 'autobiography' might need questioning. It supposes we can write our own life story.



In contrast to Prior's Christian focus, Ramona Koval's *By the Book: A Reader's Guide to Life* is a secular account of the role of books in the life of this Australian writer, journalist and broadcaster. Koval is probably best known for her former role as presenter of ABC Radio National's *The Book Show*. The differing titles and publisher descriptions of these texts immediately alert you to one of their main differences: Prior's work concerns literature's (inward) influence upon her soul and spiritual life; Koval's story, as the publisher's description touts, is more outward-focusing as a 'reader's guide to life' and reflection upon the 'authors that have written themselves into her life'.

The power of books to ignite the imagination and grant readers a passport to other worlds is quickly established as one of the central themes of Koval's narrative (cf. p.5). The reader will soon share Koval's delight at the novel worlds in arctic exploration, Andersen fairy tales, science fiction and Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, amongst others.

Like Prior, Koval reads 'promiscuously', both by happy and unhappy accident. For example, the eight-year-old Ramona snatches a glance at some photos of Auschwitz in a magazine bought by her father before her mother seizes the publication, screaming in Polish for hours afterwards. She later learns that her parents are Jewish Holocaust survivors. And as a ten-year-old, Koval takes herself to the local library and, attracted by its 'slim volume', borrows Kafka's *The Trial*.

Like Prior, book-learning does not always immediately translate into life-learning. Koval dryly remarks early in her fourth chapter: 'I found myself married and pregnant at twenty to a young doctor… [T]he warnings of Emma Bovary and the enticements of Colette were not at the front of my mind' (p.45). From here reference to different works of literature come thick and fast, with increasing vagueness about their relationship to Koval's own life. Perhaps this is understandable for a recognised public figure who does not want people to know too much too soon. But there are a handful of exceptions. She succinctly reports her experience of having an abortion at eighteen, with a doctor who wore 'black-and-white platform shoes'. But the discussion soon turns to feminist literature and consciousness-raising groups: a not-unexpected outcome for a young woman who now sadly views herself as 'damaged goods' (p.88).

Koval's reading increasingly reflects her interest in science, which includes James Watson's *The Double Helix: A Personal Account of the Discovery of the Structure of DNA*. But her 'waxing lyrical' upon the 'beauty and profundity' of biochemical analysis leads her professor to ask if she has considered an alternate career in journalism (p.103). Here is the power of naming and being named identified by Prior, but no such philosophical reflection is offered by Koval, who after a few cursory comments moves onto another annotated inventory of an impressively diverse series of books. This tendency to avoid extensive reflection is also demonstrated in her discussion of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. She states that she read it, offers a brief thought or two, including the classic 'had I become a woman through simple biology or had society made me one?' (p.84), before hurriedly moving on.

Koval's Jewish heritage forms a significant, yet only sporadically discussed aspect of her story. Perhaps this is due to its association with almost unspeakable pain. During the war her mother spent six months learning to disguise herself as a devout Catholic, terrified that she would be betrayed by her own subconscious by speaking in her sleep the Yiddish she forcibly removed from everyday usage. The adolescent Koval reads *The Gulag Archipelago* and *Cancer Ward* but never discusses them with her mother, 'perhaps…because they were too close to the novels about Nazi concentration camps that I knew existed elsewhere but not in my house' (p.61). Throughout her childhood Passover is observed but not celebrated, for her parents cannot forget previous Passovers with family members who were later sent like innocent lambs to the slaughter.

Later in life, a set of dusty Jewish prayer books holds much beauty for Koval but, not surprisingly, she believes that the words within them are unable to bring life. They are 'silent' and 'seemingly without the power to comfort those who dutifully recited their words or served the soup and matzo balls' (p.191). It seems she treasures her Jewish heritage but its failure to bring life during and after the war killed many people's faith in Yahweh in the everyday messiness of life. It is an inheritance that is more at home on the unread section of one's bookshelf than in a living, active word nestled in the core of one's being.

Ultimately, Koval's tale presents books as travelling companions on the road of life, whereas in Prior's they serve to convict, rebuke and encourage her into greater faith in the Word who tabernacled amongst us. This Word holds out his scarred hands in the midst of our suffering and came that we may have life and have it to the full. Whilst both works speak of literature's power, only one tells of its ability to reflect the God in whom we live and move and have our being.

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