

Editorial

Vol 1 No 2 Dec 2007-10-28

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This second issue of the Australian Journal of Mission Studies has come together well. There is a wide variety of articles. In the future we hope to publish journals with a particular theme to offer a more in depth discussion of an issue; but this is a non-thematic issue to allow contributors to explore issues close to their hearts.

It is for this reason that included in this issue are two reflections on ministry as distinct from articles that have been peer reviewed.

Being an Australian Journal I am greatly excited by the first contribution from Geoff Leslie. He explores the Australian Farming scene and seeks to find principles, which may prove helpful in guiding and developing the farming community towards wholesome spiritual maturity. In this time of worldwide drought supporting our farming communities as well as guiding farmers into areas of spiritual growth becomes a great pastoral concern for an effective church. Geoff also concludes that traditional rural social values such as loyalty, compassion and fairness should also be encouraged and brought into play to balance the economic arguments. I would encourage others working amongst Australian farmers to continue this discussion.

A very different article comes from Ennio Mantovani but is still connected to the land. The gardeners of Papua New Guinea, who see everything coming from above, challenge the extreme attitudes to providence that expects God to only do the miracles. Ennio concludes; the planters challenge us not to base our faith in how Providence has been described and witnessed to in the past, but to discover God's action in our daily life.

Darren Cronshaw looks at the emerging church and its relationship and definition of mission. Darren explores the current literature in the churches of the west, concluding that it is important to understand our context when considering our mission. The struggle of the gospel in a postcolonial context is to seek God's justice for all people alongside reconciliation with God and one another.

Ruwan Palapathwala has explored the relevance of Tillich's theology for mission studies. As we engage in mission today in a world of religious pluralism Ruwan encourages us to consider the contribution that Tillich makes to the way we think and engage in mission.

Continuing with the theme of a pluralistic society, Michael Raiter considers the place of the Uniqueness of Jesus. He does this by examining the preaching of Peter especially in Acts 4:12 to consider if it has passed its "use by" date. In the next journal we hope to include a second article from Michael on the uniqueness of Jesus in the preaching of Paul.

Two reflections follow that reflect on two different areas of mission. Rowena reflects on mission and city churches; a reflection on mission in Vietnam is by an author whose name is suppressed for safety reasons. Learning to live in Dialogue among people from other cultures is as important as taking up mission opportunities in new ways in one's context. Both these reflections challenge us to see mission in new ways.

We have five book reviews for your consideration and encourage you to read the books.
God Next Door – an Australian book on neighbourhoods as the forgotten place for mission.
Encountering New Religious Movements - encourages us to look for incarnational living among those who are seeking.
Stirrings of the Soul – explores evangelicals and their relationship to the new Spirituality.
The New Believers – looks at ways people are reshaping their thinking about God.

Concepts of Mission – describes the development of Roman Catholic mission theory in the twentieth century.

I would like to thank those who have contributed to this journal and those who have helped with the editorial process.

Owning and Farming Land in Australia

Geoff Leslie

Geoff Leslie has pastored the Koondrook-Barham Baptist church on the bank of the Murray River in Southern Australia for 14 years, bringing up 4 children in a small rural town with his wife Debbie. Before that, he ministered in more urban places, so that his coming to the country was always considered to be cross-cultural mission requiring a humble attitude of listening and learning. His wife coaxes him into serious involvement in music and theatre in the community, and he also aspires to be an amateur naturalist and birdwatcher, all of which help him gain entry into the issues and opportunities of rural life. He also enjoys the study of the biblical languages and loves to give seminars on rural ministry to anyone who asks.

Australian farming communities have many things in common with rural and agrarian people everywhere. For instance, most rural people are more likely to live long-term in stable communities than most urban people, and their lives are connected to and affected by the weather and natural conditions more directly. Yet there are unique features in Australian rural life that call for careful thought and reflection if one is to assist the farming community pastorally.

The agrarian legislation of the Pentateuch, the aphorisms for rural life of the Wisdom literature and even the eschatological ideals of the Prophets, all presuppose that the rural life consists of simple, peasant farming in which the first goal is to grow one's own food, and secondarily, decide what to do with any surplus. By contrast Australian farming is largely agribusiness. Twenty-first century farmers buy their food from supermarkets like non-farmers for their work is a profit-producing business. Most Australian rural produce is exported – about 80% - because production is huge and our population is relatively small. Whether this approach to farming is desirable or not, it is the reality of rural communities.

Effective ministry to Australian rural communities must understand the ethical and pastoral issues, which they face and give a theological perspective, which will clarify their mission as farmers and help them become sustainable. Sustainability is a vogue word for agriculture, but the issues of spiritual sustainability, of community, family and personal sustainability need to be added to the important pursuit of environmental sustainability.

I wish to consider the issues of land ownership and management, browsing the OT data, produced for peasant farmers, and seeking to find the principles which bear translation into our context and may prove helpful in guiding and developing the farming community towards wholesome spiritual maturity.

I. Acquiring Land

A. Nature of Ownership

The Bible seems to assume that in the original purposes, people should share the land and resources of planet earth in some measure of equality. The earth, finally, is the Lord's (Ps 24:1) but it has been given to humanity for our home (Ps 115:16) and various understandings have subsequently arisen as to how we 'own' it. Ownership is inevitably temporary; the earth remains long after its 'owner' passes on, and the Western concept of absolute private possession can give people unwarranted hubris about their land rights.

Some states – under Communism, or even like modern Israel – assert that the land belongs to the nation and farmers only lease it. Roy May has urged that in South America, the peasant farmer operates with a gentler perspective:

For the peasantry, land is never private in the capitalist sense of an autonomous right to use or dispose of it for private accumulation. Rather, each family receives perpetual right to use the land as a trust from the whole community.¹

In ancient Israel, the newly-conquered lands were distributed as inalienable allotments by an 'allocation committee' through the casting of lots (Num 33:54; 34:13), and this resulted in a sense of

land as an inalienable inheritance derived from God and symbolic of God's blessing and salvation, as exemplified by Naboth in 1 Kings 21.

Any such understanding has to be better than a system, which allows land to be a commodity for speculation, profit and capital investment. Poverty, oppression, inequality, and injustice will inevitably follow where land trading and use is unregulated or encouraged for the purposes of capitalistic growth.² Throughout history, land reform has often been the first and greatest step towards social reform, and it remains so today in many places.³

The Bible seems acutely aware of the importance of land ownership as the basis of a righteous society, and the Jubilee legislation of Leviticus 25 goes to great lengths to return to each clan land that has been lost, sold, or re-allocated during each cycle of 50 years. The purpose of the legislation may be to preserve the peasant farmers on their acquired land, as Habel and others have argued,⁴ but I propose that there may be at work a secondary principle that 'the person who works the land should be the one who owns it'. The reversal of land sales, cancellation of debts and debt-slavery arrangements, all put the land back into the hands of the smaller farmer. On a broad scale this principle makes sense – a world of small farms is more sustainable, more just, keeps humanity in touch with the earth, provides employment and food for all, and would reverse some of the crass consumerism and waste of the modern world. It rejects the development of huge estates run by serfs, and latifundialism, which also is decried in Isaiah 5:8:

Woe to those who accumulate house to house and join field to field until there is no small landholding and you have become possessors of land all by yourselves in the midst of the land.⁵

But one notes that many other land-owning arrangements are found in Scripture, and Jesus' parables about absentee landlords demanding returns from tenants and workers are usually taken to be uncritical of the arrangement.⁶

Wendell Berry is a strong advocate of the family farm and the owner-operator.⁷ He argues that 'industrial agriculture' destroys the soil, the lifestyle, the family, and the community, and causes the loss of what he calls 'agri-culture' – the spirituality of accumulated agrarian wisdom which goes along with love of and linkage to the soil.

I have written similar things to my community in my weekly newspaper column, but I have heard from some readers a contrary opinion. In our district many of the smaller holdings have amalgamated into larger ones, and many farms in recent years have been bought by 'outside money' – rich people from other places who then appoint a manager to run the farm.⁸ Larger farms and richer people can afford better fences and equipment, and best-practice treatment of soil, animals and crops. It is true that when an absentee landlord is ruthless about profit taking and regards the farm merely as a commercial operation, a mine for resources, much damage could be caused for which there is much evidence and grief in the developing world.

However, locally, I have observed that sometimes the larger farmers are generous, and support smaller neighbours by loaning equipment, sharing expertise and sometimes financial support. For a small farm to conserve a hectare of native vegetation means fencing off a larger percentage of their land than for a large farm, and consequently richer farmers can better afford to practise conservation. On the other hand, sometimes they flout regulations and use dubious practices. The size of the farm seems less important than the morals, ethics and ecology of the persons responsible for farm management.⁹

B. Attachment

Even though Australian farmland is privately owned, and available for speculative trading, it retains many of the peasant-farmer qualities that are evidenced in the OT. Farmers often feel a strong attachment to their land, and a sense of generational connection and responsibility. There is a glory and pleasure in owning dirt, in being planted, of having a place, which city people do not know except for faint stirrings in the communal memory.

Psalm 16:4-5 attests to this with language which links the family farm to God's very self:

Yahweh is the lot of my portion and my cup; you ensure my allotment; the boundary ropes fell to me in delightful places, indeed the inheritance delights me. (My translation)

Translators and commentators (city-based?) play down the literal identification of land here, despite six synonyms for the inheritance of land. Seeing it as metaphorical and personal or spiritual.¹⁰ It is richer than that for rural people, who experience the blessing of YHWH precisely in the gift of land and its abundance. Salvation is inseparable from the soil.

In my work with farmers in drought I ask the question why they continue to farm when it proves so unprofitable and heart breaking. The peasants of other eras may have spoken of necessity, of the satisfaction of growing one's own food, of the immediacy of God's provision for people on the land. These barely apply to the modern farm business. Yet as one man put it, "it's in your blood, it's madness but farmers can't seem to get off the land"; and another said, "it scares me, I would feel lost and insecure if I had no land."¹¹

A pastor wishing to engage in ministry with farmers needs to understand this. To a city person, to an economist or accountant, the lunacy of farm indebtedness, the amount of work for the small return, makes no sense. A dairy farmer in drought times may be spending \$60,000 a month on stockfeed for a return of about \$40,000 in the milk cheque, thus adding to the bank debt each day. Logic seems to scream that there would be more profit selling out and getting a steady wage, spending the money on shares or an investment property, retiring and living on interest, but these alternatives mean abandoning one's heritage, land, and property. So although in Australia, land is regarded as a commodity for sale, the nature of farming brings out that ancient sense of connectedness, especially when the farm is passed down the generations.

C. Relinquishment

When a farmer is forced from the land through bankruptcy, or decides that selling is the best alternative, any person wishing to provide pastoral support would do well to explore this connection, these feelings. For farmers, such a transition is more traumatic than for people of other occupations undergoing loss or change. In a poem entitled "Rain from nowhere" by Murray Hartin, the farmer in drought who fears he will have to lose the farm entertains 'bad thoughts':

*Geez, great grandad bought the place back in 1898,
Now I'm such a useless bastard, I'll have to shut the gate.
Can't support my wife and kids, not like dad and those before,
Crikey, Grandma kept it going while Pop fought in the war.*¹²

It was precisely such a sense of generational responsibility that must have made the Jubilee provisions of Leviticus 25 for return of the *hljn* (inheritance) so utopian and hopeful.

This sense of generational responsibility is also present in the story of Naboth (1 Kings 21) who cannot conceive of letting down the ancestors by selling the family inheritance. Simon deVries says that accepting even a large amount of money for the vineyard would have deprived him and his descendants of a means of income. "With the loss of land would have gone the loss of position, and before long Naboth and his posterity would have been reduced to the status of royal pensioners."¹³

Such is clearly not the case for Australian farmers. It almost seems as if the landowners are at a disadvantage compared with landless wage earners, especially when they must accept drought relief payments from the government, and are subsidised by taxpayers.¹⁴

But DeVries suggests that Naboth's refusal is *legal* as well as *financial*. He translates the crucial v.3 as "It is forbidden me by YHWH to give you the inheritance of my forefathers", suggesting that Naboth is claiming divine authority for his refusal. I am inclined to see the reference to YHWH as an intensification, or an oath, rendering it 'Far be it from me, by YHWH, my giving the inheritance of my fathers to you.' This would suggest that the idea of transition from landed to landless, or of separation from his bounded inheritance, was not so much forbidden as unthinkable for a grounded Israelite like Naboth. It is not an economic bond, not a legal bond but an emotional bond. At this point, Naboth epitomizes the man born to the land.

D. The Gospel Source of Hope when Land is Lost

In discussion with farmers who have sold their farms¹⁵, they have told me of their sense of guilt for letting the ancestors down, the sense of grief when the cattle which had been milked twice a day for years were sold off sometimes to less salubrious situations, and of the need to at least plant a vegetable patch or maintain a good garden to keep some land connection. But given the difficulties of farming in drought conditions, they have said they made the right choice and only just in time. "I wanted to get out while I could still see daylight above the hole I was digging myself into." "I didn't want to be the last person out the gate," said another, meaning that the dairy industry was entering an unviable state and those who left early would suffer less.

However, another stream of theological or pastoral importance is that farmers more easily make the adjustment if they feel that God is guiding and caring, and that the alternative form of employment they get into was provided by God. Like Israel in exile, they need to be sure that God was not tied to the land, but equally present and sovereign on the other side of transition. As Jeremiah exhorted the exiles in his letter in chapter 29, they need to accept the new situation and, though they may have arrived there unwillingly, they must work for the good of the place where they have found themselves, for "in its shalom, you will find shalom"(v.7).

Contemporary Christianity has very little place for or emphasis upon a theology of land or of place. Notions of 'sacred space' are disparaged by many in my tradition¹⁶, and an other-worldly, heavenly eschatology diminishes the value of godly farming as I will explain later on. It is difficult therefore for contemporary Christians to maintain a sense of godly vocation in farming, and preachers and pastors need to assert the contrary, encouraging Christian farmers to relish the bonds they develop with their land, but also showing sympathy to the pang of land loss.

II. Limitations of Ownership

Land owning is always a complex matter. The assertions of Leviticus 25 that "the land is mine" (v.23) and that "the people are my servants" (v.55), are the foundation for the biblical laws that impose limitations on absolute land ownership in Israel and obligation on landowners towards the other residents of the district.¹⁷ The modern world also recognises the value of some limitations and responsibilities but naturally seeks a secular basis for it. Karl Marx sought it in collective ownership; modern Israel has decided to go with a limited system of land tenure, in which 93% of the land is government owned and leased out for various lengths of time, based on an ideology of national ownership¹⁸.

Australia's economic system has no such basis, and the history of aboriginal dispossession, squatting and selecting was not as orderly and regulated as we would like to think, involving a lot of bullying and land-grabbing which the passing of time has legitimated. Furthermore, the government has reserved the right to make endless regulations about land clearing, about use of creeks, rivers or channels on the farm, collection of rainfall, planting of crops, use of bore water, treatment of animals, conservation of native species of birds, animals, plants and habitat, and so on. This is often a great source of frustration for farmers who at times feel such restrictions are an impediment to free trade, a hindrance to their work, and evidence that the nation does not esteem its agricultural sector.

Should the church support the farmer's right to farm? Or should it endorse civil obedience unquestioningly? Should it reject the State's right to interfere? Or should it impose another layer – the biblical laws based on "the land is God's"?

One of the superb conclusions of Brueggemann's seminal study on *The Land*¹⁹ is the concept that owning land is a gift, and in the end it is a conditional gift, depending upon the people's obedience to Torah, and trust in God. He argues that attempts to secure the land, like Solomon did with wealth, bureaucracy and armies, led to the loss of land. Instead, recognising the land as gift and responsibility created the proper attitude to it and its inhabitants.

This is taken up by Wright also in an entire Second Section of his book *God's People in God's Land* which spells out landowners' rights and responsibilities.²⁰ Wright argues that these form a paradigm for other societies like our own.

A. Views of Land-owning

Leonard Weber discusses the clash between philosophies of land owning that he sees in contemporary America²¹. The 'Traditional Ethic' encourages individuals to seek their own economic self-interest through private ownership with minimum interference from government. The land is an economic resource over which the owner has four unrestricted rights: the right of *use*, the right of *income*, the right of *transfer*, and the right of *alteration* or *development*.²² The 'Communitarian Ethic', as advocated by the Catholic human rights tradition, for example (and the quotation at footnote 1 above), considers that "private ownership has to be subordinated to common use. The resources of the earth exist for the benefit of all...No one has a right to claim for his or her exclusive use more than is needed when others do not have enough to meet their essential needs".²³ A third philosophy (and he admits there may be others that he has not yet labelled or defined) is the 'Ecological Ethic'. This view sees the land as an entity which one can no more own or use than we would now consider we can own and use another human being (slave). It calls for a partnership (working *with* the land, not *using* it) based on respect and preservation, putting back as well as taking from.²⁴

One rarely finds Australian farmers articulating such a range of philosophies. They do not seem as resentful of government interference as their US counterparts (no doubt, for historical reasons), and are more ready to suffer government regulation – though with occasional resentment. The communitarian ethic is virtually unknown here in my experience, but may lie behind the acceptance of governmental regulation, taxation and the controls imposed by various agricultural and growers' bodies such as the Rice Growers' Association or the Citrus Board. Farmers sense that the government, representing the people of the nation, has a right to impose limitations on their ownership 'in the national interest', and in the case of growers' groups, they impose limitations upon themselves.²⁵

B. A Consideration of the Ecological Ethic

The Ecological Ethic, which Weber considered a minority view in 1985 that "has not had much impact on public policies, economic decisions, or even on life-styles"²⁶ has become an influential philosophy, widely embraced by urban people, the Green movement and the mainstream left-wing, some of whom seem to attack the entire farming enterprise as morally dubious.

The Ecological Ethic has been embraced by eco-theologians of various colours; it is declared to be more 'feminine' than the 'masculine' theology of the scholastics and reformers. The roots of the approach appear sympathetic to pantheism and native religions, and exalt nature as a benevolent force, with strong denunciation of human interference. It can be criticised at various levels, for example:

1. While critical of human interference in nature, proponents benefit from paper, wood and food wrested by humanity through manipulation of the natural environment.
2. On close inspection, nature is not so benevolent but can be cruel and capricious.
3. Are humans a part of nature? If so, how can nature be approved but human behaviour criticised when it, too, becomes cruel and destructive?
4. No one seems tolerant of certain natural creatures, such as the smallpox bacillus, or the AIDS virus.²⁷

Psalm 104 describes all the world of nature living in harmony, and surprisingly the bucolic description seamlessly includes humanity's part (ships – v.26, workers – v. 23), as well as lions (v.21) and Leviathan ("formed... to play in the sea" – v.26) without fear or criticism. The only jarring note is the longing for the removal of sinners and "the wicked" (v.35) which suggests that humanity may live harmoniously with nature except when, under the influence of sin and evil, a counter-force moves us in a clashing direction. At this point, Psalm 104 seems close to the ecological ethic but differs in that nature reflects but stands apart from God, its wise and generous Creator, and is tolerant of human interference except when it is discordant, though no clue is given as to what the psalmist considers the 'wickedness' might be.

Much more could be said about the conundrum of the relationship between humans and the land, but I will restrict my discussion to the theological observation that when humanity recognises God as creator and rightful owner of creation, two things follow.

First, there is a sense in which God is present in, with and under the things of earth in a kind of sacramental presence. Heaven and earth overlap at many points and the nature-lover finds that 'Christ plays in ten thousand voices', as Gerard Manley Hopkins put it.²⁸ This creates a reverence and affinity with all non-human creation that restrains human practice.

Secondly, there is an equally strong sense in which God in heaven is distinct from the earth, putting forward ethical demands as our and all creation's Sovereign, Lord, Lover and Judge. Some have claimed that this authority has been delegated to the creature created in God's image, but that does not change the sense that we are accountable to our God for our activity on earth.

These principles are sufficient to guide farmers in their relationship with the State and its demands, with the wider community and ecology of which they are part, and with their ability to see themselves as God's servants participating in God's mission towards bringing all things under the reign of Christ.

As a consequence, a proper way to regard landowning is to recognise that whatever system or ethic the State may permit, before God the landowner has obligations to the land and creation, to the community who depends on it as a resource, and to God who holds us accountable as stewards²⁹.

I believe we can safely contend that governmental regulations regarding native vegetation and animals, land forming, water harvesting and the like are theologically legitimate in principle, in that landowners must operate in a way that reflects their threefold obligation. Government regulations only embody perhaps a small proportion of these but are important symbols and test cases. Christians should support and observe them.

In a recent case a leading, active church member, who has a record of convictions for environmental breaches, ploughed the last remaining patch of remnant native vegetation on his own land, despite warnings and clear instructions regarding both the necessity to conserve this patch, and the damage to his farm's health if he were to destroy it. The vegetation was a black box swamp habitat and most are long gone from the district. However, it is now known they play an important role in preventing salinity build-up in natural depressions.

The native vegetation has been removed, and recent rains have caused the newly ploughed area to become waterlogged. It is doubtful whether the crop sown there will do well and quite likely that salinisation will result, rendering the land of little value for anything.

A distressed neighbour, who is a committed Christian and leading environmentalist in the district, has asked the local Shire Council and the relevant government department if they intend to prosecute this farmer for his flagrant breach of law and environmental responsibility. They replied that the farmers, through their Farmers' Federation, have a large 'war-chest' of money to employ the best barristers and fight attempts to impose penalties in the courts. They could not afford to risk the costs incurred should they lose. The complainant noted that the Shire was hardly likely to take action when some of its own councillors had done similar things.

In my opinion, the church should regard a matter such as this as an issue for their concern. The church leadership should be theologically and ecologically informed so that they can give teaching and instruction which support the secular laws and regulations where they are appropriate or challenge them where they are not. People who flout proper behaviour should be treated in the same way as gossipers, adulterers, or embezzlers. Will this ever happen? Probably not.

When this particular farmer committed a previous violation, his pastor supported him during a legal hearing. The church member will probably continue to vandalise the environment, and be honoured in his church for his youth leadership or held up as an example of one who 'witnesses for Christ' in his work because he talks freely to others about 'God's way to get us to heaven'. God's concern for this earth and relationship to it is evidently of no importance.

III. Land and Water

Having taken some time to outline a theological ethic for living with the earth, ethical environmental issues such as irrigation can be tackled.³⁰ In irrigation farming, nature is re-ordered. Instead of the

naturally arid environment of our district (which averages about 12 inches [300mm] of rain), a citrus orchardist, for example, artificially supplies an extra 40 inches (1000mm) equivalent by irrigating. This has been accomplished by damming the rivers, creating channels, and flooding the ground. It calls for drastic modification to river flow regimes, and creates consequences good and bad for forest, soil, wildlife, native plants and human population. On the good side come the productivity and prosperity of farming and support of human life; on the negative come the robbing of water from forest and wetland, salinity build-up, and interference with river-based ecology. An eco-radical will find the latter sufficient reason to oppose irrigation; economists and farmers see the former as more than adequate benefits to compensate any 'small' disruptions to nature.

In Australia, in 2004/05 the gross value of Australia's total agriculture production was \$35.6 billion. Irrigated agricultural land comprised 0.5% of all agricultural land in 2004-05, but at \$9 billion, the gross value of irrigated agriculture production represented 25% of the total gross value of agricultural production.³¹ Without irrigation it is likely that our district, which currently supports a population of many thousands, may only be able to support 5 or 6 families on huge acreages as it was a century ago.³²

Irrigation as it is practised today requires a high-technological, expensive, capital-intensive infrastructure. The government claims that the cost of this has never been borne by the farmer, and that it purposefully made these investments in the past to promote closer settlement of the drier inland districts. They also suggest that on the small irrigated allotments where mixed farming is practised, most of the annual incomes are below the poverty line, the handling of the water is environmentally careless and the present arrangements are not sustainable.³³

Irrigation reform is in the wind, and the only way forward that seems to be contemplated is *more* expensive infrastructure, *more* expensive technology, and a system of free market water trading that will steer the precious commodity toward those who use it profitably and can afford to pay for it. The arguments are too complex and the literature too extensive to be discussed here.

Given that water is an unearned, God-given resource, can we not say of it as we said of land above, that the *water*-owner has a responsibility to the water itself – to preserve its quality and conserve it, to the community who depends upon the resource, and to God for its stewardship? Allowing it to become a commodity for speculation and profit is unlikely to provide just solutions.³⁴ The Cochabamba declaration declares as inviolable rights that “1. Water belongs to ... all,...2. Water ...should not be commodified, privatised or traded...; and that, 3. Water is best protected by local communities.”³⁵

I hear sentiments like these among the irrigation farmers of my district, except they acknowledge that on a long river, some higher body needs to take authority over the use of the water because local communities tend to be self-seeking.

Before leaving this topic, I propose these questions that would be helpfully considered by people seeking to be faithful and wise in rural areas: Is irrigation overly destructive of the land, forests and waterways? How do we find balance between changing the environment for good and damaging it leading to loss of richness and biodiversity and health? Are there less 'thirsty' crops or animals to grow that will feed our nation with much less water³⁶? Can the free market ever provide just solutions to resource distribution? Do we really want a nation where huge industrialised, highly capitalised farming businesses grow all the food and use all the land? What are the rest of the rural people to do or be? Serfs? Tourism operators?

IV. Animals and Plants

An arresting feature of the biblical law is the large number of laws prohibiting cruelty. The admonitions to kind treatment of animals are extended even to consideration of trees. It is worth a brief listing of these precepts:

They were urged to take back straying animals, or agist them if the owner is not known, and if a donkey has fallen down under a heavy load, they must help the owner lift it up. The concern for the animals of your 'brother' (Deut 22:1-4) is, surprisingly, also offered to the enemy's in Ex 23:4-5.

No ox must be muzzled while threshing wheat (Deut 25:4)
No young of cow, sheep or goat was to be separated from its mother for 7 days after birth (Lev 22:26-7) not even for a sacrifice to the Lord.
A cow or sheep and its young cannot be slaughtered on the same day. (Lev 22:28)
Three times comes the warning not to cook a kid in its mother's milk (Ex 23:19; 34:26; Deut 14:21).
When taking eggs or young from a bird nest, they must not kill or harm the mother. (Deut 22:6) [In my experience as a birdwatcher, birds will usually lay again readily if eggs are removed]
The animals are to enjoy the Sabbath rest (Ex 20:10; Deut 5:14)
Wild animals are considered as beneficiaries in the fallow year (Ex 23:11; Lev 25:7).

These laws are not necessarily for the welfare of animals (a dead kid does not know whose milk it is cooked in) but seem designed to encourage compassionate feelings for nature, particularly those that refer to animals and their young. The treatment of wild animals – encouraging them to eat from the paddocks during fallow, and not taking the parent bird – have no imaginable economic benefit except the secondary one – now widely advocated by ecologists – that productive farming systems are found in healthy natural ecosystems. When the ecosystem is degraded, the land loses some of its generative capacity. This is perhaps what lies behind the words of Deuteronomy: ‘...be sure to let the mother bird go, so that it may go well with you and you may have a long life’ (22:7). An attitude of concern, of preservation, of gentle co-habitation is called for and when this flows on to all the local ecology,³⁷ farming will indeed be better. This has universal application to all people in all times and places.

Proverbs 12:10 summarises the relationship with animals by using the loaded terms righteous and wicked with respect to their treatment:

*A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal,
But the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel.*

While this refers to domestic animals, one can see that *knowing* (dy) your animal's needs in the ancient world led to *caring*. There was a strong sense that knowledge implied responsibility and that understanding brought sympathy. So I have observed that people who understand animals, or plants or natural ecology, rarely act as heedlessly as those who are ignorant.³⁸

The instructions about trees are not as detailed but fruit trees were not to be harvested for the first five years (Lev 19:23) nor to be cut down during a siege (‘Are the trees in the field human beings that you should make war on them?’ Deut 20:19 or as the KJV translates the same phrase ‘For the tree of the field is man's life’). One can sense a similar thoughtfulness and concern for trees to that enjoined for animals and birds.

Conclusion

A pastoral theology for Australian farmers must first of all be supportive. Farmers often feel embattled and criticised, when; instead, their noble calling to be custodians of earth, growers of food, servants and stewards of the global garden should attract the support and appreciation of all, especially of the church.

The theology should secondarily be a source of guidance, pointing out the directions for positive growth and initiative. But thirdly, as my essay has often revealed, there is a need for restraint and consideration in the farming enterprise. In the Bible times, the puny efforts of humankind to farm and eke out a safe existence were a battle against wild nature that seemed to have little effect. Now, technology has so enlarged the power of the human arm, wild nature has almost had the vigour beaten out of it. Farming must be carried out with consideration for all creation, monitoring the consequences of our actions. Traditional rural social values such as loyalty, compassion and fairness should also be encouraged and brought into play to balance the economic arguments.

These three guidelines are all-plentiful throughout the Bible's discussions of rural law and life, and will continue to make the Word of God a powerful guide and source of wisdom for the agricultural community today.

Endnotes

1. Roy H. May, Jr., *The Poor of the Land: A Christian Case for Land Reform* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991, 57
2. Ulrich Duchrow and Franz J Hikelammert, *Property for People, Not for Profit: Alternatives to the Global Tyranny of Capital*, trans. By Elaine Griffiths et al, Geneva: WCC Publications, 2004.
3. May, *The Poor of the Land*, focuses on the inequities in Latin America of this nature.
4. Norman Habel, *The Land Is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, 105.
5. Translation by D.N.Premnath, "Latifundialization and Isaiah 5:8" *JSOT* 40 (1988) 49-69.
6. A contrary view is taken by William R Herzog II in his book *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed*, Kentucky: Westminster, 1994. Herzog suggests that Jesus never intended approval of or divine comparison with the master/owner figures in the parables, but was affirming rebellious action against them.
7. A farmer/author/poet/theologian from Kentucky, Berry advocates these things in all his works. See his classic *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* 3rd ed. Kentucky: Sierra Club Books, 1996 (orig. 1977).
8. This was also the practice of the squatters – the earliest settlers – in the mid-19th C. See my article 'The Unsettling of Australia' www.ruralministry.ms11.net/unsettling/.
9. Many anecdotes could be told of both generous, careful behaviour, versus rapacious and arrogant behaviour by large and small farms.
10. Eg Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary Vol 19, Waco, TX: Word Publishing, 1983, p. 157.
11. I wrote down these quotations during a 10-week survey of drought-affected farmers, March - May 2007.
12. Murray Hartin's poem was read on the ABC and can be found on the Internet at <http://www.abc.net.au/victoria/stories/s1881675.htm>
13. Simon J. deVries, *1 Kings*, Word Biblical Commentary Vol 12, Waco, TX: Word Publishing, 1985, p.256
14. Though I hasten to add that unlike many countries, notably the USA and European Union, Australian farmers receive no subsidy for their farm production. Drought relief and some tax rebates are the only government assistance.
15. Two farmers in my church have sold dairy farms in the last seven years. I am thinking of their thoughts and feelings in this section, as revealed to me in pastoral discussions.
16. John Inge has written a work against the flow seeking to make a case for some recognition of sacredness in material things and places. Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, (Hampshire, UK: Ashgate, 2003), as has Geoffrey Lilburne, *A Sense of Place: A Christian Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989). Anabaptist tradition has been less likely to admit the relevance of OT civil law than Calvin or Luther and is more radical about 'the rule of Christ' taking pre-eminence over such this-worldly concerns as vocation, heritage, or tradition. See C.J. Wright, *Walking in the Ways of the Lord: the Ethical Authority of the OT*, (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 1995), p 79f. The Baptist notion of separation of church and state which has become such a catch-cry has often meant something like: keep God out of ordinary life, don't let your religion affect your work except in superficial ways such as witnessing or avoiding vulgar language.
17. Moshe Weinfeld, "Justice and Righteousness – the expression and its meaning" in *Justice and Righteousness: Biblical Themes and Their Influence*, (JSOT Supp 137, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 230.
18. See "Israel's Land Ownership Policies", http://www.palestinefacts.org/pf_1991to_now_israel_land.php
19. Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press:, 1977).
20. Christopher J.H Wright, *God's People In God's Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament*, (Exeter, England: Paternoster, 1990), 119-166.
21. Leonard Weber, "Land Use Ethics: The Social Responsibility of Ownership", in *Theology of the Land*, Bernard F. Evans and Gregory D. Cusack, eds, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1985), (Papers Presented at Theology of Land Conference, St John's University, 1985) 13-40
22. *Ibid.* 37

23. *Ibid.* 30
24. *Ibid.* 19
25. One farmer said to me, "If the community or the government want us to preserve the environment they should pay us for doing it."
26. Weber, "Land Use", 19
27. Some of these points are well made by Stephen R. L. Clark in *How to Think About the Earth: Philosophical and theological models for ecology*, (London: Mowbray, 1993) p.38ff. Clark is a philosopher from Liverpool University
28. Gerard Manley Hopkins' breathtaking poem *As Kingfishers Catch Fire* explores this theme and contains this line.
29. I have largely avoided the word 'steward/stewardship' because an extensive theological/ecological debate has hovered around it. See the essays in *Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspectives – Past and Present*, ed by R. J. Berry, (T & T Clark: London, 2006). The chief complaint seems to be that it is toothless – the steward's accountability seems to make too little difference. I think it is useful if it contains the idea of 'trustee, agent, companion, priest' (Berry, p. 1), and the idea of an authority higher than local law (or lore).
30. Irrigation is mentioned twice in the OT: in Egypt, Deuteronomy 11:10, and Solomon's garden works Eccl 2:6. Both are somewhat negative but the former because it was hard work, and the latter because it was pointless.
31. "Water for Agriculture", Australian Government Department of the Environment and Water Resources, <http://www.environment.gov.au/water/agriculture/index.html>
32. I speak of the white settler families on large holdings. The aborigines of course knew how to survive in larger numbers without irrigation, but they needed to be nomadic to avoid times of drought and flood in the unregulated river environment.
33. Scott Keyworth, "Sustainable Irrigation in the Murray-Darling Basin" in *ATSE Focus*, No. 90, January-February 1996, www.atse.org. Keyworth is a government adviser for the Murray-Darling Basin commission. Farmers reply to this by asserting that the government sells water to them which it has acquired for nothing!
34. Horrendous accounts of oppression that follow upon the forced privatisation of water supplies in countries where the World Bank imposes 'economic restructuring' are told in Duchrow and Hinkelammert, *Property*, p.173f.
35. Duchrow and Hinkelammert, *Property*, p. 228 for the full text. Cochabamba is a city in Bolivia that reclaimed its water back from privatisation by public protests and action.
36. This is the view put to me by Bruce French, Tasmanian Baptist minister and world expert on edible plants who has compiled a database of over 4000 edible Australian plants – I have a copy of it on disc. Australian animals and plants are well adapted to our dry continent as distinct from the crops and animals we have imported from wetter climes.
37. On the other hand, of course, the ancients had little sympathy for savage beasts (Lev 26:6; Ezek 5:17; 14:15, etc) predators like wolves, bears and lions were not viewed sympathetically until the visions of Isaiah 11 and 65, where –along with vipers and cobras (11:8) – they are included as co-habitants of the farming community which cause no harm, and are not harmed 'because they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea' (11:9). This striking passage granting amnesty to the traditional enemies of humankind is not matched by Ezekiel in whose utopian vision the people can 'live in the desert and sleep in the forests in safety' only because God promises to 'rid the land of wild beasts' (34:25)
38. Unfortunately some scientific knowledge has been reductionist, overly objective (=objectifying), leading to cruelty.

Providence and Evolution - Dialoguing with Primal Melanesian Religions

Ennio Mantovani is a priest member of the Divine Word Missionary Society. He was born in Italy, studied philosophy and theology in Vienna and in 1962 obtained a doctorate at Gregorian University in Rome with a specialisation in Phenomenology of religion. In 1962 he moved to Papua New Guinea to work for fifteen years as a bush missionary in a newly opened area of the highlands. In 1977 he joined the Melanesian Institute in Goroka, researching and lecturing on Melanesian cultures and religions. Since 2002 he has been resident in Australia, lecturing at the Yarra Theological Union, Melbourne, on issues of culture and Christianity

A. Introduction

This paper is a reflection on Providence motivated by a challenge coming from a specific type of religious experience: the gardeners of Papua New Guinea. In their stories, rituals, and behaviour they expressed a different experience of what Christians would call Divine Providence, but they now respond to that experience in ways radically different from those they used before the discovery of planting. Planting and gardening, according to these gardeners, was not a human discovery, but a special revelation, a free and unexpected gift by a More-Than-Human who cared for them.

Biblical Foundation

The basic assumption underlying this paper is that God created everything in God's own image. Genesis 1:27 refers only to humans as the image of God, but in a world where we recognize that we do not come from the biblical dust of the earth but from the star dust which evolution speaks about; in a world where we realize that we evolved over billions of years from the original matter of the Big Bang, we need to extend that image of God to the whole creation of which we are part. Evolution proves beyond any doubt the drive to survive in everything that exists and,¹ against all the odds in the process of evolution, life has won. Scientists stress the randomness of evolution, the fact that nature is not under constraint on how to develop but that it has developed to the present state over a great length of time giving the chance to the best adapted forms to survive. This randomness can be seen as an aspect of the freedom of creation, a reflection of God's image in creation.

This biblical insight might be aided by a philosophical reflection. God being perfect can create only something, which is perfect as far as anything created can be perfect. God being perfection itself could create only what is similar to Godself; could create only in God's own image. Key aspects or symbols of this God-likeness are life and freedom. God's image in creation has degrees, and the reflection of that image is further limited by the capacity of each recipient to respond.

The Reality of Evil in Creation

The fact remains that earthquakes and tsunamis do happen, sometimes killing thousands of people and causing great grief in those who have lost loved ones. Natural catastrophes do take place, epidemics do break out; violence, torture, and injustices are daily global realities. Faith in God's Providence must live in tension with these facts. One way of understanding this reality is that God's love, which respects my freedom, respects also the freedom of the whole creation.

On the other hand, faith tells us that Providence and creature's freedom can and do work together, but, so far, the 'how' remains a mystery.²

For a Christian the teaching of Jesus on Divine Providence is basic as it reflects his teaching on the love of God for us. Jesus gave his disciples a program of life and prayer in the "Our Father." Our life and prayer have to be based on the conviction that there is a Father who cares for us. This Father is in heaven, meaning, he is as different from the earthly father as the blue sky is from the muddy ground on which we walk. Our earthly father is hindered in his love and care for us by the limitations of his created nature, while the heavenly one has no limitations yet respects the dignity and the created freedom he gave every creature and us.

This care is experienced and expressed, as the Bible states, through creation.³ Given the fact that creation is perceived through the tinted glasses of one's own culture, one can say that one

experiences God's Providence⁴ through the filters of that culture. Moreover, a person will use one's daily experience to express this inner experience of being cared for; and will use symbols taken from one's daily life to point to something which cannot be communicated through words that can be repeated, but as interior experiences which defy words.

To show the relation between faith in Providence and daily life as shaped by culture, I will use the religious experience of the people of Papua New Guinea (PNG) where I have worked for over forty years. I will look at the relationship between the symbols and the daily life of these people in regard to the experience of being cared for by Someone who is totally different from us humans.⁵

Papua New Guinean Cultural History

To understand the religious changes, which took place in Papua New Guinea, one needs some understanding of the cultural changes, which occurred on those islands.

It seems that the main island has been populated for over forty thousand years by people who most probably came from South East Asia while the seas were low and the stretches of water relatively narrow. There were subsequent migrations, one of them bringing the pig which was to take a very prominent role in society and religion.

The first inhabitants were foragers, people who utterly depended on nature for survival. They collected, fished, and hunted what nature provided. This situation continued for over thirty thousand years, a period long enough for a tradition to have taken solid roots.

This situation continued until about ten thousand years ago when New Guineans discovered planting. (Most probably they were among the first in the world to make that discovery.) One no longer needed to go looking for food where nature might have put it; now humans were able to decide where the food would grow, what kind of food, when and how much. It was a tremendous experience and, in spite of all its inherent limitations, caused what scholars call the Neolithic Revolution.⁶ It affected all aspects of human life: the economy, society, worldview, and religion.

Religious World of Papua New Guinea

There are two basic types of religion in PNG: one which reflects the situation of the foragers, and the other, that of the planters. I call the first 'theism', because a key figure in it is the 'One-Up-There' who provides for people and, to a certain degree, watches over their behaviour. The 'One-Up-There' has the attributes of the one we Christians call God, *Theos* in Greek.⁷

The other type of religion, that of the planters, centres on the wonder of growth and fertility as experienced especially in and through the gardens. Their main concern is life in all its expressions: biological existence, growth, success, health, wealth, wellbeing, happiness, and so on. This life is shared by the whole world around them; it is cosmic. Because of this concern for a cosmic life I call this type of religion bio-cosmic, *bios* standing for life and *cosmic* stressing the interrelatedness and interdependence of the whole world.⁸

The description of these traditional religions is based on the stories – the mythology – that have been handed down. When dealing with the religion of the gatherers we are faced with a serious problem: today Papua New Guineans are gardeners and they have been so for several thousand years. All the stories collected since outsiders first had contact with the people and were interested in recording their traditions have been narrated by the people of today. Thus, how far can they be accepted as records of the distant past?

A good answer, in my opinion, could be derived from a structural analysis of these records. If what the records say fits with the other aspects of the cultural system – the economic, the social, and ideational realms – then, most probably, the records are reliable and can be used as a valid statement about the past. Examples from other places where people are still living as gatherers help to clarify the structure.⁹

Providence within the Culture of the Gatherers

The typical story of the gatherers is the creation story: Somebody who lives 'up there', who is totally different from humans, and provides everything that is needed for the survival and wellbeing of

people. The stories never say that the "One-Up-There" is totally different from humans; it is the analysis of the text that shows the radical difference. The 'One-Up-There' – always a male – knows about the needs of the people while they themselves are not even aware of them. He knows how to go about solving the problem- something humans cannot do - and he has the power to bring about change. Not only has he the knowledge of what is missing and the power to bring it about, but he wants to do so. He does not profit from his deeds; only people profit from them.

A problem in assessing these stories is the possible influence of the Bible and Christian teaching on them. Those who narrate these stories today are Christians, or at least people who have grown up in a milieu strongly influenced by Christians. However, there are certain stories which seem not to have been influenced by Christianity because they are very different from the Biblical stories used by the churches, and would have been regarded as false and been rejected by the Missionaries, who, especially in the past, were rather strict in the use of the Bible.¹⁰

The following is one of the stories that I was told by people from the Madang area:

Long ago there were no men but only women. When the women were of age they married flying foxes and had children with them, either girls or flying foxes. A more-than-human saw this situation and thought: this is not right; I must fix it. And so he created men and since that time women marry men and have children, both girls and boys.¹¹

One is reminded of the second creation story in Genesis 2: 7-23, where at first only men were created. The possibility of the above story being influenced by the Bible is very remote to say the least. What the story tells us is the experience of Someone who is concerned about human happiness, more than mere existence, than simply life; he is concerned about a full life. He knows that this is possible and has the power to change things. He is interested enough to do just that, and He does so, though He does not profit from it.

If one takes the myths as a statement about reality, about how things were, are, and will be, then this myth affirms the belief that there is Somebody who knows about the human situation and is concerned about it; who knows what is good and has the power to bring it about, and who does so without expecting anything in return. It is both the expression of a religious experience and a statement of faith: "So it is."

Here I am talking at the level of ideals; whether the people of the past or of today live by this faith, is another matter. The same question, by the way, can be raised about any ideal in human life, be it cultural or religious; Christianity is no exception.

The response of the people to the kind of experience that is expressed in these stories consists in acknowledging the fact through an action with or without accompanying words. If present cultures are any indication of the past in the sense that they build on it, actions in Papua New Guinea take the place of words; one expresses basic feelings and relationships through actions more than through words.¹² One does not 'say' thank you – the term does not exist in the various local languages – one 'does' thank you through an action. The action which recognizes the fact of the gift from the One-Up-There is what we call the primatial offering, where the first fruit of a tree, the first fish of a catch is left behind, or is given away, and the one who finds it does not consume it.

Kasprus, a missionary among the people of the Middle Ramu reports:

Foodstuffs of any kind falling to the ground are never eaten but picked up and thrown into the bush as if they were dirty and contaminated. Whenever asked why they do not rather feed it to the animals, which are roaming around, hungry, they answer: "It is his food." At the mention of the unknown "his" their faces assume an expression of serenity and awe. Whether "his" refers to an ancestral spirit or some higher deity, which still receives some "stinted sizing", could not be ascertained. Only one among all the unbaptised grown men volunteered his opinion on this practice by saying, that it might be the "Big Master on Top" about whom we are teaching them, to whom they throw the food.¹³

One cannot easily deduce the past from the present however; yet this primatial offering, fits very well into the mindset of the gatherers as expressed in their creation stories.

Yet here we face an even greater problem. These reports and actions are by the people of today who are not gatherers but planters. Do they express what happened with the gatherers?

As a matter of fact people say that even today they do not collect the first fruit of a new tree and that, after the harvest, they leave the food in the garden until next day, "because it is his", it belongs to the One-Up-There. It is a way of recognizing the origin from above of even the fruit in the gardens that they themselves planted.¹⁴

However, these practices are either regarded as superstition by the churches or have not been encouraged by them; hence, the possibility of them being the result of Christian influence is very remote indeed.

Providence within the Culture of the Planters.

The term 'Neolithic Revolution' has been aptly chosen, since the discovery of planting brought a radical change in the way people lived, and how they organised all aspects of their lives.

Whilst in the past only a small band could survive due to limited food supplies, more food enabled many more people to live . . . This larger groups now needed to cope with the manual work involved in cutting the forest with the stone axes, clearing the ground, digging, planting, weeding, and harvesting; Thus nomadic band of the past gave way to the larger clan living in a settlement near the garden.

New structures had to be developed to regulate life within this new social reality. Besides, tensions developed between the sexes¹⁵ and so structures evolved to cope with them.

Because of these developments, the way the people saw the world changed and so did their religion. From now on, to ask the One-Up-There for food would be silly: people had received the necessary knowledge and power to produce what they needed and they should make use of it. What was needed was trust in the more-than-human advice, and hard manual work. The 'free' gift of food – or anything else for that matter – did not apply anymore; human cooperation through prescribed work was absolutely necessary for anything to happen.

What was true for food became the rule for everything else. The knowledge and power to obtain what was needed in daily life had been freely given. Gratitude and trust in the giver is shown by following exactly the way prescribed to obtain the result. If the prescribed action does not bring the expected results, one must examine his or her conscience for having hindered the effect. It is not the prescribed way that has to change, but the human actor. The one who prescribed the way is always right and to be trusted; it is the human actor who spoils things and hinders the help from above from getting through.

Theological Reflections

God does not take back God's gifts. Humans and creation in all their limitations strive for survival and are free to choose, even if it turns out to be the wrong way for survival. Belief in God's respect for the freedom of God's creation is basic for the understanding of this paper: Providence cannot be understood to deny the 'freedom' of creation, to diminish its birthright.

This might help us understand that passage, "in the fullness of time," when human intellect had developed to the point of being able to influence the future of life on earth, God became a human being to show us the only way to survive; calling on our freedom and showing us the only way to safeguard the life for which we have been created. The Incarnation, then, is an invitation, which respects our human freedom.

The experience of being cared for by somebody who is more than human, by somebody who is totally different from humans, has not changed in the two different types of culture and religion in PNG; however, the way they are experienced, the symbolism they use, and the worldview they create, have changed radically. The change has been so radical that, in the ways in which they are expressed, one system or religion seems to contradict the other.

These different experiences are based on the daily lives of the people. Gardeners need to work and work hard day in and day out to get their daily food. To forget this daily experience in their relationship with the Ultimate would make that relationship unreal- detached from life. The stories are not the cause of this religious attitude but their expression.

As a consequence of being rooted in the present, the way of the past is forgotten. It is not denied; it is simply no longer relevant. Now, there is no Providence that provides before one asks, that gives you food ready on a tree. Now one must cooperate with Providence in a new way; one has to do his/her part of hard creative work. In this situation to pray without getting involved through hard work does not help. Theologically, prayers of petition would amount to a reproach to the Provider- that he should go back to the old ways and provide freely, without people needing to work.

This religion was not based on what the One-Up-There, the *Theos*, had done in the past but on what the More-than-Human¹⁶ was doing in the present stage of human evolution. It was a great religious discovery, it discovered what Providence was doing in the present, allowing people to be shaped and guided by this new experience. The evolution, even the revolution they were experiencing, did not question their faith in Providence – to use Christian terminology – but was an incentive to see Providence in a radically new way. The More-than-Human was treating his/her children as grownups, giving them the knowledge and the power needed to help themselves. The fact that the children were not waiting for the More-than-Human to spoon-feed them was not a sign of unbelief, of a lack of trust, but a sign of gratitude, trust, and obedience.

Once one of my PNG friends surprised me by telling me: when I am sick, sometimes I go to a traditional – ‘pagan’ – healer and sometimes I go to a Western doctor. We get sick because we sin.¹⁷ However, God is our Father and, though we deserve the punishment, He does not like us to suffer and therefore showed us the way to cure ourselves. He showed your ancestors how to discover penicillin and other medicines. But He did not forget our own ancestors and showed us too how to cure ourselves. Therefore, when I am sick I go either to the traditional healer or the Western doctor and, when I am healed, I thank the Father because it was neither the healer or the doctor who cured me, but the Father who gave them the medical knowledge.

This is a powerful testimony of the religious experience of present-day planters in Papua New Guinea. However, according to the teaching of the churches I should have reprimanded him, telling him that by going to the ‘pagan’ healer he was sinning against the first commandment, that he was lacking in trust in the Father and was following sinful superstitions and magic.

I must admit that up to the time of my experience in Papua New Guinea I had a very secular view of medicine, regarding it as a purely human achievement; something to be proud of but not necessarily something to thank God for as an expression of his Providence. Since that encounter I see medicine and other human achievements as God’s Providence, as God’s care for us.

To be sure, the ideal presented by such stories and rituals is counterbalanced by the religious reality. In present-day traditional religion prayers seem to have disappeared. If the knowledge and power to obtain what one needs has been given, there is no use asking for it. A certain pragmatism seems to have taken over; a process of secularization has begun. The stories that deal with the gift of specific knowledge have lost their sacredness, and people miss their religious relevance. From the phase of experience we have moved to the phase of application.¹⁸ This reality, however deplorable it may be, should not blind us to the ideal of which the reality is only a pale reflection, if not a distortion.¹⁹

Conclusion

Humankind has moved from gathering and planting to agriculture, and more recently to industrialization, and today we are in the age of communication. Natural sciences have progressed by leaps and bounds; our understandings of the world in general and of human nature through biology and medicine have been completely revolutionized. The understanding of Providence, however, is still largely based on the worldview of the Biblical herders who, in this field, share much of the PNG gatherers’ worldview: “Everything comes directly from above.”

The extremes of this attitude make news when certain Christian groups refuse particular types of medical treatment even in cases of life and death. They put all their trust in God's immediate intervention and regard the use of that type of medicine an affront to God's Providence and care. The religious experience of the planters of Papua New Guinea challenges not only this extreme attitude of certain groups, but the general understanding of Providence among Christians. It challenges Christians to see and expect God's Providence not only in the direct gift, as among the gatherers – in the 'miracle' – but in the gift of intelligence, of science, and of knowledge. Humankind is of age and must take responsibility for itself; it must see the progress of the sciences as a gift of Divine Providence today.

The planters did not base their conviction of being cared for on the traditions of the past but on the reality of their present. They recognized Providence in the human discovery of planting and based their whole spiritual life on it, dropping the traditional symbols as irrelevant for their daily life. The planters challenge us not to base our faith in *how* Providence has been described and witnessed to in the past, but to discover God's action in our daily life. This challenges us to discover our human responsibilities: we humans are part of God's Providence towards others and towards ourselves.

Endnotes

1. I am referring not only to the cosmic fine tuning necessary for life to exist, e.g., that "A change in the ratio of the gravitational forces to the electromagnetic force by as little as 1 part in 10^{40} " (See Rodney D. Holder, *God, the Multiverse, and Everything* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004) would have made life impossible, but also to the fact that randomness, the 'freedom' of creation, could have equally led to failure.
2. See Arthur Peacocke for a good reflection on this issue in *Theology for a Scientific Age. Being and Becoming – Natural, Divine, and Human* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).
3. See Rom 1:19-20; Acts 14:16-17; Jn 1:1-5.
4. I use these theological terms with reluctance. Melanesian languages are very poor in universals and rich in symbols expressed in stories. In trying to express what those stories say, one cannot avoid using concepts; however, theological concepts especially are loaded with history one might project into those stories.
5. 'Humans' is taken in a wider sense than usually in the West. In the holistic worldview of Melanesia there is no sharp distinction between humans, animals, and so-called spirits. When I say 'human' in this article I take it in the wider sense of what we Westerners would call 'creature.'
6. E.g. Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 37.
7. A specific theistic symbolism is the vertical one: residing in heaven, on high mountains, etc. This name is often secret and only a few groups remember and/or use it. He is, as far I could ascertain, always addressed as male.
8. Aloysius Pieris calls all the religions of the tribal people cosmic religions. My experience in PNG demands a further subdivision between Theo-cosmic and bio-cosmic religions. They are quite different and need to be kept separate also in the names.
9. One thinks about places like Central Africa with the Pigmies, Tierra del Fuego at the tip of South America, or other parts of the world.
10. What I mean is that the missionaries took the word of the Bible very literally and were not open to allow people to change the biblical stories. Even adaptation, if accepted and practiced, had its clear limitation: one did not change anything in the Bible.
11. There are other versions in which the women married other animals – dogs – and others in which there were only males.
12. See Ennio Mantovani, *Traditional and Present Day Melanesian Values and Ethics. Occasional Papers of the Melanesian Institute, No 7*, (Goroka: Melanesian Institute, 1991).
13. According to Aufenanger (*The passing Scene in North-East New Guinea* St. Augustin: Anthropos Institute, 1972) even today some planters follow the same ritual of primitival offerings from the produce of their gardens.
14. Aloys Kasprus, *The Tribes of the Middle Ramu and the Upper Keram Rivers* (North-East New Guinea) *Studia Instituti Anthropos* Vol. 17, (Sankt Augustin: Anthropos Institut, 1973). 145.
15. See Ennio Mantovani, *Male-Female Relationship in Melanesia. Occasional Papers of the Melanesian Institute No 8*, (Goroka: Melanesian Institute, 1991)
16. The identity of the Giver has changed in the experience of the people and the previous symbols do not fully express it. He is not the generous father anymore and that symbol fades away

and also the vertical symbolism loses on relevance. Social relations have changed and the woman, as discoverer of planting, gains in status, though causing a negative reaction in the males. The 'more-than-human' is not necessarily a male anymore; on the contrary often that figure is the mother or the sister. Sometimes, however, gardeners attribute the growth of the gardens to the "One-Up-There" and thank him for his gifts (Henry Aufenanger, *The Passing Scene in North-East New Guinea* St. Augustin: Anthropos Institute, 1972).

^{17.} Melanesian world-view. See footnote 3.

18. For these concepts see A. E. Jensen, *Myth and Cult among Primitive Peoples*. (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1963).

^{19.} We proceed the same way with Christianity: the abuses of the Christians, even of the leadership – see the Inquisition and the burning of the so-called witches – do not invalidate the ideals given by Christ that are obscured and even denied by the abuses.

In Search Of An Emerging Missional Paradigm: Post-Christendom, Post-Modern, Digital Age And/Or Postcolonial?

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The emerging church movement is listening to and joining the conversation about mission to the Western world. This article introduces some of the literature and inspiration of the emerging church movement and the ways they describe the historical context for mission for churches in the West; from scholarly missiologists Lesslie Newbigin and David Bosch through to popular North American emerging church writers Alan Roxburgh and Brian McLaren and Australian emerging missional church leaders Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch.

When it comes to this literature that emerging church leaders write or read, there are different options for describing the current cultural milieu. Some writers introduce the need for changing structures by describing how we need to move on from Christendom models of church and mission. Others emphasise the move from modern to postmodern approaches to truth(s). Some writers are beginning to emphasise the implications of an increasingly digital age and its communication challenges. Yet others are drawing attention to the justice issues of postcolonialism and the need for global equity and global theologies. This article considers the helpfulness of these four frameworks for understanding the context of mission to the West.

1. Post-Christendom mission to the West

A fundamental aspect of our cultural context is the recognition that the Western world is a post-Christendom mission field. In the apostolic era all Christians had responsibility for witness in what was a hostile environment. In the centuries after the conversion of Emperor Constantine in 313 CE, the church expanded its interests to include everything in the Empire and the missionary frontier was removed to far-off lands and left to professionals.¹ Some argue this was a victory of Christianity or at least a contextually appropriate understanding of the church and its relationship to the Empire. But emerging church writers join some historical critics in claiming that Christendom sold out the gospel and exchanged a dynamic and grassroots movement for an arrogant and elitist institution.² The appropriateness of Christendom may be debateable, but regardless of how history is judged, Christendom has declined over the last 250 years and is not a reality today – except in parts of the church's imagination.

Many Christians today still see mission as far-off, ministry as the job of the professionals, congregations as having their 'turf' and laypeople as having little responsibility for mission.³ During the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century, the church in the Western world had a huge missions push to the 'ends of the earth'. But this downplayed the need for a domestic missiology, which is becoming all the more urgent with the rise of religious pluralism and declining church attendance in the West. Fortunately, churches are rediscovering the ministry of the laity or the whole people of God and the need for global mission that starts at their front door.

An influential advocate for mission to the West was British missionary Lesslie Newbigin. Newbigin was a missionary in India for nearly forty years and when he returned to England analysed modern Western culture as a post-Christian pagan mission field: 'the most challenging missionary frontier of our time'.⁴ Twenty years on his conclusions are still worth hearing about the need for dialogue, 'decleralised' theology, local ecumenical efforts, looking at cultures with outside perspectives and communicating truth that ultimately cannot be proven within modern scientific frameworks. Since

Newbigin the world has moved on, but he foresaw how the world was changing and modelled a commitment to exploring gospel and culture issues.

Another influential missiologist was South African David Bosch who wrote the seminal *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*.⁵ It offers a critical discussion on many contemporary factors in global mission including ecclesiology, inculturation, justice and evangelism, the mission of the whole people of God and dialogue. He described mission history in six eras and paradigm shifts from the apostolic era through till today's emerging post-modern and ecumenical paradigm:

1. The apocalyptic paradigm of primitive Christianity
2. The Hellenistic paradigm of the Patristic period
3. The medieval Roman Catholic paradigm
4. The Protestant (Reformation) paradigm
5. The modern Enlightenment paradigm
6. The emerging ecumenical paradigm.

He follows the historical-theological periods of Hans Küng,⁶ who in turn followed Thomas Kuhn's theory of 'paradigm shifts'.⁷

The Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) in North America was inspired by and is building on Newbigin and Bosch's work on mission to the West. They focus their reflection on the North American setting, what the gospel addresses in this setting and the church's missional identity. GOCN's central book is *The Missional Church*.⁸ Darrell Guder and an ecumenical team of missiologists discuss how religion has been privatised and churches have been dislocated from their prior roles. They suggest the answer to the crisis will not be found at the level of method and problem solving, but in clarifying the churches' identity and task. Missional leaders are not priests of Christendom, teachers of Reformation truth or professional counsellors and managers, but need a more apostolic or missional identity. Rather than being a voluntary association, a chaplain to society or vendor of religious goods and services, the church is an alternative community that witnesses by living differently. The theme throughout GOCN books is the missionary identity of the church in the West and how this affects the church's shape, message and engagement with culture.⁹

A strength of GOCN books for churches in Australia is that they focus on mission to the West (of which Australia is a part). A weakness is that they focus on North America where the relationship between church and culture has been different from Australia. While the United States is grappling with the decline of civil religion, and Canada is experiencing rapid secularisation, Australian churches have never had as close a relationship with government and general culture.¹⁰ Thus, much of GOCN's work needs translating from North America to Australia. Yet the anthropological tools for critiquing culture are still important in Australia, where we often ignore culture (and fail to contextualise), or else adopt it uncritically (and so overcontextualise).

Post-Christendom is the preferred category Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, and the Forge Mission Training Network they founded, use to describe the current socio-cultural context of the church in the West. Influenced particularly by Bosch and the GOCN writers, they explain the dominance of Christendom from Constantine's influence in 313 CE and the fact that, although Christendom is now dead, the church largely still presumes Christendom frameworks: 'Constantine, it seems, is still the emperor of our imaginations'.¹¹ They tend to welcome the end of Christendom as an opportunity to freshly imagine how to express mission.¹²

Alan Roxburgh similarly argues that congregations in the West need to learn to live the gospel from the margins rather than to expect public prominence.¹³ He examines Victor Turner's work on liminality,¹⁴ relating it to the church's experience of marginalisation, and says liminality offers a model for missional engagement for our radically changing times.

We have left the long stable period of Christendom behind. We have entered a liminal place, a place of transition between two worlds, one that is rapidly passing away and one that has not emerged. Confused and uncertain, the Church struggles to know how to think about itself and its place, normative in the transition of change.¹⁵

In a post-Christendom world where the Western world is a mission field, the church needs to reshape itself and develop new expressions.

2. Postmodernism and competing for truth(s)

A second related feature of the context and impetus for emerging churches is postmodernism and its approach to truth. Emerging churches are seeking to relate to the emerging postmodern culture and their leaders base many of their methods on their perceptions of the place of postmodernism in society. Dan Kimball's introductory book *The Emerging Church* begins by analysing the anti-Christian, anti-church and post-Christian seeker, and the epochal changes of postmodernism. He describes his journey away from seeker-sensitive worship services that downplay any sense of sacredness, to 'vintage Christianity' worship gatherings that display spirituality so people can experience Jesus. Kimball maintains vintage Christianity is more appropriate for postmodern people and their desire for experience.¹⁶

Although there is no debate that this is a time of social transition and epochal change, there is debate over both the fact and the terminology of postmodernism. North American theologian Stanley Grenz defined postmodernism as 'an intellectual mood and an array of cultural expressions that call into question the ideals, principles and values that lay at the heart of the modern mind-set' and postmodernity as the emerging epoch where postmodern ideas and values increasingly shape society.¹⁷

The Enlightenment mindset that birthed modernity and believed in the inevitable progress of science, technology and economic growth has been abandoned. This was no surprise after the Depression, wars and collapse of colonial imperialism in the twentieth century. But it opens huge questions in terms of faith, religions and relativism.¹⁸ Kevin Ford asks, 'How will you reach this post-modern generation – a generation that cannot conceive of objective truth, cannot follow your linear arguments, cannot tolerate anything (including evangelism) that smacks of religious intolerance?'¹⁹

The response of Christians to postmodernism has been varied. Some are scathing in their critique, such as Douglas Groothuis who attacks the relativism and lack of confidence about truth inherent in postmodernism.²⁰ Some question its relevance, such as David Wells, who argues the church needs to contend not mainly with postmodernity but with the final stages of modernity,²¹ or Martin Sutherland, who suggests that too much is invested in postmodernity as an inadequate category.²² Others are prone to accept it uncritically, and in an attempt to engage culture ignore the shortcomings of postmodern thought.²³

Fortunately, some writers are engaging critically with postmodernism and reflecting on its implications for mission. Sympathetic to the postmodern critique, Middleton and Walsh believe a gospel stripped of its modern trappings relevantly communicates hope and transformation to our chaotic culture.²⁴ Grenz begins to suggest where postmodernism should be challenged (for example, in rejecting metanarrative) and also where it can be welcomed as healthy critique (for example, moving on from excessive individualism, rationalism and dualism).²⁵

Perhaps the world's best-known emerging church leader, Brian McLaren, has reflected extensively on the ministry implications of the modern-to-postmodern transition.²⁶ McLaren has crafted a trilogy that sets themes of the modern/postmodern transition into a narrative genre or philosophical dialogue.²⁷ Neo, the postmodern-aware ex-pastor, helps his pastor-friend Dan understand the origins of modernity and the implications of the postmodern era. The characters engage in dialogue and struggle with issues of faith, science, prayer, suffering and death. For a new world, McLaren urges a new kind of Christian, new ways of doing church, new theological frameworks and new approaches to evangelism and leadership training. In the words of his character Neo, McLaren's call is to say boldly, "invest your lives not in keeping the old ship afloat but in designing and building and sailing a new ship for new adventures in a new time in history, as intrepid followers of Jesus Christ".²⁸

Don Carson's critique of the emerging church and its approach to truth is particularly scathing of McLaren.²⁹ Carson appreciates the desire of emerging churches to engage popular culture and to reach those outside the church. Yet he suggests some writers are too quick to dismiss the contributions of modernity and confessional Christianity and too eager to uncritically accept postmodernism. Though his critique is noticeably selective it is worth considering. Churches need a

firm commitment to truth and Scripture as well as experience and cultural engagement. However, it is questionable how important it is to start the debate with the assertion of absolutes when seeking to connect with postmodern people.

A conversation (usually over time) may involve discussion of absolutes, but for postmoderns it is better to start with experience of God rather than rely on a well-reasoned approach to truth. Gary Bouma describes how culture is shifting its emphasis to now prefer experience and emotion as a basis for authority rather than tradition (as in pre-modern times) or reason (as in modern times following the Enlightenment).³⁰ Similarly, David Tacey says he hears a common critique from his La Trobe students: 'There is plenty of God talk, but no God presence in religion'.³¹ Tacey urges churches to observe how God is communicating with people outside church circles and, echoing Rahner, seek to draw it out of people's lives rather than striving to pump it in.³²

Some church leavers attribute their pilgrimage to an experience of churches that dismissed their questions or insisted on absolutes that seemed non-essential to them. New Zealand pastor and sociologist Alan Jamieson researched why people leave their evangelical/ Pentecostal/ charismatic churches, not always leaving their faith behind but often disillusioned with simplistic faith. He relates their journeys to James Fowler's stages of faith development theory and says we need leaver-sensitive churches and liminal groups (like some emerging churches) where 'leavers' can explore their questions and emotions safely.³³

Emerging church leaders want to understand how postmodernity affects people and the way they want to express their stories, questions and doubts. New churches or renewed existing churches need to take into account the changing ways of relating, leading and communicating. One of the most significant changes for postmodern worship and mission is in the area of communications as we enter an increasingly digital age.

3. Digital age communication

Communication media have become increasingly more complex. Three thousand years ago people mostly communicated only really with speech and occasional symbols or signs. Then the development of writing revolutionised the world and the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century made available literature on a never-before-seen scale. Last century the introduction of film and television introduced other media of communication. More recently, computers and telecommunications have further revolutionised the world and how we process information. Gerard Kelly asks:

How will screenagers, newly exiled from the Gutenberg galaxy, treat this "book of God" that has been so much a part of print culture? Does the end of the age of print signal the end of the Bible's authority? ... How will the shift to postliteracy change *what we believe about the Bible* [and] *the way we engage with the Bible*?³⁴

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the church is still only starting to grapple with engaging and communicating in an electronic and increasingly digital culture.

At one level, Christians are engaging with contemporary communication media and connecting gospel themes and popular music or films.³⁵ But at another level it is important to understand how digital technology changes the way people think and relate. Tex Sample explains how the electronic culture of the generations born after 1945 involves a whole different way of experiencing and knowing the world. Sample says meaning now comes from images, sound as beat (evidenced in music especially rock), and visualisation (so that teenagers today can aptly be called screenagers). He is not hesitant to critique the dehumanising elements in electronic culture, and he argues for the ongoing use of traditional patterns of worship. Yet he models an approach to worship that seeks to transform culture from a place of incarnation within it.³⁶ If people today process information differently because they use images, beat and visualisation, then it is imperative that churches explore how to communicate with these forms.

In an attempt to communicate and worship in contemporary ways, some emerging churches have experimented with 'alternative worship'. It is a postmodern inculturation of worship, integrating the stuff of everyday contemporary life (technology, media, secular music and images) with the traditions

of the church.³⁷ The alt.worship movement has influenced churches in the United Kingdom, North America, New Zealand and Australia.³⁸

Rex Miller argues that communication eras are the most helpful way of understanding history and today's context. His Millennium Matrix, building on McLuhan, proposes that the way we store and distribute information changes our worldview.³⁹ Miller explores the implications of the oral culture of Jesus' time (the birthplace of the liturgical church), the print culture ushered in by Gutenberg's Bible (the birthplace of the Reformation church), the broadcast era of television (home of the celebration church) and the emerging digital culture that is rushing to meet us. Here Miller suggests we will meet the 'convergence church' that will bring together aspects of previous eras but also engage the changes that are inherent in the digital age. In this transition time between broadcast and digital communications, our sense of time, truth, space, identity, spirituality and even art and music is changing.

Stephen Hinks draws on Miller's categories to suggest the following table contrasting emerging digital age churches with churches centred around other communication media:

Table : Comparing church in different eras of communication

	Print	Broadcast	Digital
Leader credibility	credentials	charisma	connection
Worship program	ordered/liturgical	crowd/entertaining	personal/experience
Music style	hymns	praise & worship	faith stories
Symbol	a pulpit	a stage	a chair
Discipling	head knowledge	head & emotion holistic	
Danger	intellectualism	experience	superficiality

Hinks predicts that in the still emerging digital era church will be more connecting, experiential and holistic. The danger he identifies is superficiality.⁴⁰ Interactive approaches to the life and worship of the church have potential to enhance the mission of the church, but they potentially avoid depth of reflection and interaction.

Whatever appropriate response the church makes to the context of mission in the West, it must include readiness to minister from the margins rather than a privileged Christendom position. Whatever an appropriate response to a postmodern world involves, it must include change as we move on from a familiar culture that glorified reason and deified science (as in Star Trek) to the relatively uncharted terrain of critically engaging an MTV and Next Generation culture.⁴¹ And whatever response the church makes to an electronic and digital world of communication, it must consider how the digital age is changing how people learn and believe and grapple with using different media of communication in worship and evangelism. Moreover, there is a growing awareness of a post-colonial struggle for justice that emerging churches are addressing.

4. Post-colonial struggle for global justice

Another significant feature of today's global context is postcolonialism and the associated struggles for global justice. In the centuries leading up to the twentieth century, European nations colonised the majority of the non-Western world.⁴² They monopolised trade, enslaved peoples and enriched themselves with the resources of other countries. Positively, they brought medical, educational and religious institutions. Yet the negative effects of the intertwining of colonialism and Christian mission are still being felt and unravelled. Postcolonial literature and theology are raising the need for new frameworks for a world that is emerging from and moving on from colonialism. Post-colonialism raises issues that are intricately involved with mission including independence and self-determination, partnership and mutuality, and restitution and justice.

After centuries of the 'cross' and the 'flag' moving together and conversion occurring alongside conquest, mission has had to redefine itself. After centuries of unequal power in mission relations, it is an appropriate post-colonial shift for Western missionaries to go first to serve rather than lead, and first to listen rather than teach.⁴³ Rather than importing dominantly Western frameworks, it is a helpful shift to recognise the importance of local theology, and how other cultures can help Christians in the West alleviate our poverty of community and spirituality. It is fitting to recognise the West as a mission

field, and that we in the West have much to learn from the reflection and critique of Christians from other parts of the world.

A big part of the post-colonial struggle in mission circles is to recognise that mission involves global partnerships rather than a one-way flow from the West. Paul demonstrated the reality of love and mutual exchange among the early churches with the offering for needy believers in Jerusalem (Rom 15:22-33; 2 Cor 8-9). The best model for global missions in a postcolonial era is a network of mutual exchange and support between multiple centres of mission.⁴⁴ In Australian lingo, it is an arrangement between mates rather than a charity program for the needy. In the global church we need one another's insights and support. I have studied with a Korean family preparing to serve among Aboriginal Australians, and have appreciated the insights of Indonesian missionary colleagues. Vinoth Ramachandra, Sri Lankan missiologist, appeals for cross-cultural and ecumenical mutuality: 'A partnership that involves thoughtful, mutual listening among Christians from every tradition and culture within the world-wide Church is indispensable for faithful witness to Jesus Christ'.⁴⁵

Part of the sad history of injustice against Australian Aboriginal people is that white Australia has been slow to recognise the value of indigenous culture. Fortunately, Aboriginal leaders are realising they have important insights to contribute.⁴⁶ Pope John Paul II affirmed Aboriginal people:

You are part of Australia and Australia is part of you. And the church herself in Australia will not be fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be until you have made your contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others.⁴⁷

Australia does not have a good track record of respect for Aboriginal culture, land and claims for justice. Contrary to white (idealised) versions of the past, Europeans invaded the continent, exploited Aboriginal labour, spread disease and waged undeclared war.⁴⁸ Some church people supported Aboriginal people in their struggle for justice but many more remained paternalistic.⁴⁹ Australia has made some progress with better relations with Aboriginal people, but their position in society is still far from equitable.⁵⁰

The circumstances of indigenous peoples brings into question the term 'postcolonial'. Most countries may be post-colonial in terms of their historical period and political independence, but many are still affected by the imperial process and its contemporary consequences. How can Australia be postcolonial with her indigenous people still unequal? To use 'post-colonial' as if colonialism's consequences are past history is false. But to use postcolonial to refer to resisting and transcending colonialism and its aftermath is appropriate. It may not be the reality that Australia (and elsewhere) is thoroughly postcolonial, but it is a hoped for direction and 'anticipatory discourse'.⁵¹

The other reality of the global context is that although the world is not divided up by European military control, some argue colonialism manifests itself in other forms.⁵² Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri assert that the new global form of sovereignty that they call 'Empire' is not territorial but based on economic and cultural relations in which no nation can form the centre of imperial power.⁵³ Others want to more harshly critique the imperialist neo-colonialism of the United States.⁵⁴ We cannot assert that 'postcolonial' is a reality as if there is no longer any colonial influence.

In emerging church circles, there are voices calling for attention to the importance of postcolonialism. For example, McLaren, drawing on conversations with Christian leaders in Africa, contends that postcolonialism is a more important framework than postmodernism because it focuses discussion on justice.⁵⁵ A postcolonial framework is useful because it focuses not on matters of history and structure (as post-Christendom does) or philosophy (as postmodernism does) or communication (as the digital age does) but on justice. Modern theology divorced orthodoxy (right beliefs) from orthopraxy (right behaviour), while postcolonial theology reminds us that both are needed. This is a praxis framework that theology is not just about knowing universal information but acting on it locally.

McLaren focused attention on appropriate postcolonial action when he argued that *Hotel Rwanda* was a more important film for Christians to see than *The Passion of the Christ*.⁵⁶ Terry George's film about the tragedies of Tutsi and Hutu fighting in a cycle of fear and aggression, and the Twa 'little people' who suffer in the crossfire, is a reminder of the suffering and brokenness that Jesus came to reconcile. The story of the heroism of a Hutu hotel manager who saves more than a thousand Tutsi refugees from Hutu-led genocide evokes the compassion for people, whatever their religion or tribe,

that Jesus modelled and died to demonstrate. The current passion of Christ is for justice for these people and for Christians to reflect his passion in the world.

If postcolonialism is 'anticipatory discourse' whose reality is still being uncovered, McLaren and others engaging in the postcolonial conversation are prayerfully anticipating and actively advocating a postcolonial world more in line with the Kingdom of God. The struggle of the gospel in a postcolonial context is to seek God's justice for all people alongside reconciliation with God and one another.

It is important to clearly understand our context. In Australia the church and its mission is shaped by particular cultural influences. In the Western world in general the context we find ourselves in can be described with the blunt analytic categories of post-Christendom, postmodernity, digital age and post-colonialism. These are the most popular categories that emerging churches use to understand their context. Understanding these factors helps us understand why mission and innovation are important categories for the twenty-first century church. The literature on mission to the Western world and emerging churches, from Newbigin to McLaren, has begun to explore the implications of our changing context.

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The Relevance of Paul Tillich's Later Theology for Mission Studies in the Context of Religious Pluralism

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Introduction

Nearly half a century has lapsed since systematic theology had to grapple and address the issue of religious pluralism. At large, the ecclesiastical academic communities and the practitioners of Christian missionary endeavours across the globe have remained either disinterested or only partially aware of the implications of religious pluralism on systematic theology and the church's understanding of its missional vocation which theology informs and shapes.

Paul Johannes Tillich (1886-1965) is one of the greatest religious thinkers of the twentieth century whose thought has a significant contribution to make in this respect. In this article I will argue and demonstrate how, in the face of religious pluralism, Tillich's re-thinking of the status of systematic theology – its Christological and logocentric foundations – presents some major conceptual and practical considerations that are imperative for mission studies in the 21st century.

Religious pluralism contributed to the re-thinking of the foundations of systematic theology of a significant thinker like Tillich, and so invites us to revisit the bases on which mission studies are thought about in the present.

This article will introduce Tillich's challenging contribution to mission studies by way of discussing how his engagement with religious pluralism had an impact upon the main propositions of systematic theology such as Christocentricism and logocentricism which have a direct bearing on the way in which mission studies are conceptually framed. In doing so, this article will highlight the necessity to re-think some of the fundamental propositions of systematic theology which resource the missional vocation of the church.

To argue the thesis of this article, I will outline the two main events which contributed to the transformation of Tillich's theology between 1955 and 1965, and the major conceptual shifts which resulted from it in his systematic theology. First, his realisation that the period in history to which systematic theology was addressed had undergone radical changes, and secondly, his consideration of religious pluralism which became an issue for systematic theology in the post-war era in the 1950's for the first time.

To argue the case in this article the clarification of three terms is in order. Firstly, "the Protestant era"; the phrase Tillich uses to describe the period during which systematic theology had its effect. Following World War II, with vast changes continuing to take place in the intellectual and socio-political climate especially in Europe and America, Tillich believed that this era had come to an end and that the West had stepped into a confusing period. Secondly, "the Protestant principle" is another phrase Tillich's uses. It represents his interpretation of the Pauline-Lutheran doctrine of justification:

The Protestant principle is the judge of every religious and cultural reality, including the religion and culture which calls itself "Protestant."....¹

In the same spirit of describing the "Protestant principle" Tillich also uses the expression "Protestantism" to describe the manifestation of the "true relation between the unconditional and the conditioned" in a historical context without necessarily identifying that manifestation with historical Protestantism.

Further, to argue the case here, it is also important to point out a fact concerning Tillich's *Systematic Theology 3* which is often referred to out of context as his final word on missions, pneumatology, and eschatology. As I have argued elsewhere, this assumption is wrong; Tillich wrote *Systematic Theology 3* only with a view to complete his *system*. His real concerns for the future of theology received attention in his lectures and writings on the encounter of religions and religious pluralism. Since these developments took place alongside writing his *Systematic Theology 3*, I have described the *corpus* of his work relating to religious pluralism here as Tillich's "parallel project"²

Lastly, the expression "religious pluralism", a phrase with many definitions, needs clarifying. To encompass the different facets of Tillich's understanding of it, in this article it is used both descriptively and prescriptively. Descriptively, it is taken to "describe contemporary religious realities with regard to the diversity of religious traditions and the increased contact with them."³ And, prescriptively, it is taken to outline "an ideal situation in which there are perfectly harmonious relationships between different faiths, based on tolerance, dialogue, and mutual understanding."⁴

Tillich's lectures on the issue of religious pluralism started with the 1958 Matchette lectures and ended with the lecture entitled "The Significance of the History of Religions for the Systematic Theologian," given at the Chicago University Divinity School on 12 October, 1965.⁵ This lecture witnessed the stage at which Tillich's thought had finally arrived in relation to theology and religious pluralism. Following this lecture, his career ended when he died of a heart attack on 22 October.⁶ Although we may never know exactly in which ways Tillich's theology may have developed, one of my claims in this article is that it was far from being developed from the Christocentric propositions on which his three volumes of *Systematic Theology* – which are celebrated even to this day – were written. Hence, from a Tillichian point of view, the two questions which remain to be answered in this article are: If systematic theology is supposed to have ended with the Protestant era what value it has in the present for contemporary mission studies? and, "What are the implications of religious pluralism for contemporary mission studies? These questions are answered here in four steps: an outline of the historical circumstances of change and Tillich's framework of systematic theology; Tillich's encounter with religious pluralism; significant conceptual shifts in systematic theology which resulted from this encounter; and, the implications of these shifts for an appraisal of contemporary mission studies.⁷

The Context and Systematic Theology

Briefly, Tillich's theological development could be divided into four major phases: i) the pre-World War One period during which he attempted to deal with the issues created by the Enlightenment project (1904-1918); ii) the post-World War One period during which "a sociologically based and politically oriented philosophy of history"⁸ was attempted (1919-1937); iii) the period in which Tillich assumed the role of a church theologian, following World-War Two (1939-1950's); and, iv) the last phase of his mature thought which was characterised by his engagement with religious pluralism and its relevance for theology (1955-1965). The two most relevant periods for the purpose of this article are the last two.

With another war imminent, the turning point of Tillich's understanding concerning the new stage in history came in 1937 with his conviction that the Protestant era had come to an end. In the opening paragraphs of an article he wrote:

The end of the Protestant era does not mean the end of Protestantism. It means the end of the realization of Protestantism in mass churches and a culture permeated by Protestantism.⁹

According to Tillich, there was no point in making attempts to continue the Protestant era because they have "nothing to throw into the scales but the dead weight of a great tradition."¹⁰ His initial response to the 'new era' into which, he said, Protestantism must enter, was marked by his 'apologetic theology' which was, like many systematic theologies of the twentieth century, Christocentric and logocentric in its presentation.

Tillich's Encounter with Religious Pluralism

Tillich's knowledge of religious pluralism and its impact on theology developed at two levels. ; At one level, it was a series of personal encounters with other religions and personnel, and at another level, it

was a significant intellectual engagement with the implications of these encounters for theology, its propositions and methodology.

As available evidence suggests, Tillich's meeting with the prominent Zen Buddhist scholar, Daisetz Suzuki (1870-1966), in 1951 should be considered the first milestone in a series of events, followed by: his appointment to Harvard University in 1954; his meeting with Hisamatsu Shin'ichi in 1957; freedom from a seminary environment; and extensive travel – including his momentous trip to Japan in May 1960 as these were all significant. His move to the University of Chicago in 1962, where he conducted joint seminars with Professor Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) in the fall of 1964, is another significant event. His trip to Japan for nine weeks must be considered the turning point – his experiences there gave him the opportunity to assimilate the significance of the events and experiences prior to and after the year 1960.

Tillich was stimulated by discussions which he had with the Japanese Buddhists, Christian theologians, philosophers and religious leaders whom he met in Japan. He was appreciative of the Shinto and Buddhist scholars and priests who opened the mind of the East for him. He visited Buddhist temples, joined in their ritual ceremonies – and was attracted to Buddhist mysticism, Zen Buddhist painting and Buddhist architecture.¹¹ Following this trip, Tillich affirmed that “they [experiences in Japan] have confirmed my theological conviction that one cannot divide the religions of mankind into one true and many false religions.”¹² The influence which this trip had on Tillich is clearly reflected in the “Informal Report” which he wrote to his friends in August 1960. Except for some excerpts, this report has not been published in English.¹³ This report stands as a witness to confirm the shifts in his attitudes and outlook on Asian cultures, their religions and values. He concluded his “Informal Report” with the following words:

For a long time I was undecided whether the trip to Japan was justified, especially at my age and with the heavy obligations to my other work. Any doubt in this respect has been removed by the actual experience. I cannot formulate what it has meant before all the impressions have settled down in me; and even then probably others will notice the influence of Japan more than I myself. But I know that something has happened: no Western provincialism of which I am aware will be tolerated by me from now on in my thought and work, and I am grateful to the Japanese friends who worked for a long time to make my trip and this insight possible. I can tell them that I have learned to love Japan and her people.¹⁴

The statement concerning Western provincialism is significant, because it is the context in which, starting from European provincialism, Tillich's work *Systematic Theology* evolved and came to fruition. That it was the trip to Japan which caused this transformation is further clarified when he asserts how the experiences there contributed to strengthening his perspectives on religious pluralism.

I have observed that when narrow-minded Christians, even Christian theologians, first meet a Buddhist or a Mohammedan, or even a Jew, on a level deeper than the merely social, that these realities cease to be “– isms –” Buddhism, Judaism. Suddenly they become a part of the reality of a human being, and not only one human being, but of millions, and in the course of history, of billions of human beings, some of whom live on the highest levels of spirituality. I wish that every narrow-minded Christian layman or Christian theologian could experience such personal encounters with representatives of other religions. I think of particular persons whom I have met and who suddenly revealed to me that though their spirituality was not mine, nevertheless it was a high and often superior spirituality to my own.

... Buddhism, Taoism ... Confucianism, ... Are these three religions or not? I would not hesitate for a moment to call them great religions. If nothing else would have convinced me of this, my travel to Japan last year and two and a half months of lecturing and discussions, mostly with Buddhists, would have. To say that Buddhism is not a religion would have been an impossible narrow-mindedness.¹⁵

As far as the evidence goes, the radical methodological shift in Tillich's thought in response to religious pluralism happened in 1955. There is an occasion at Harvard University which Grace Calí, Tillich's secretary, reports about Tillich dictating the essence of his theology as follows: “Professor Tillich builds his theology on the method of correlation between questions arising out of the human predicament and the answers given in the classical symbols of religion.”¹⁶ It is interesting to note that

the first statement Tillich dictated had the phrase *classical symbols of Christianity*, which Mrs. Calí says, Tillich immediately had requested to be changed to the *classical symbols of religion*. This change is extremely significant and is a very clear departure from the methodology in his *Systematic Theology*.

The Major Shifts

In their biography, the Paucks comment that Tillich had agonised over *Systematic Theology 3*, “grown bored with it; had continually wished to change and nearly failed to finish it.”¹⁷ They record also that Tillich had said on more than one occasion that his “entire system had to be rewritten in the light of his new visions of the ancient and Eastern worlds.”¹⁸ In a letter to friend, Tillich wrote “I am worried more than ever. The system crumbles. What shall I do? Shall I collect fragments? Declare that the attempt failed? Try it again – which I probably will do.”¹⁹

Along with the impact of the experiences in Japan and his seminars with Eliade, it is clear that he had also begun to see the significance of the Protestant principle in the new context. As expressed in Tillich’s maiden lecture on the encounter of religion, the Protestant principle is reflected mainly in the self-critical and self judging attitude which he places on all religious traditions, including Christianity:

A new church, many new churches, developed and they are again under the judgement and under the sharp judgement of the prophetic spirit and if they don’t accept this judgement they will fall down. No Christian denomination has a promise to last for ever. But only that which does not claim ultimacy has the denomination (i.e. can be denominated) to be God himself. ... And with this in mind we must keep ourselves, and can keep ourselves, open for the world religions, not as curious phenomena, not as interesting problems, but as realities which stand as we ourselves do under the judgement of the Protestant principle, meaning under the judgement of God.²⁰

Since the Protestant principle is also “the protest of religion against religion within religion in the name of God,”²¹ in his Lycoming College Lecture, Tillich says:

... Christianity must acknowledge that it also is a religion and as a religion stands under the judgement with which it judges all religions. On the other hand, Christianity must manifest that in the Christ, particularly in the Cross of Christ, it has a principle which transcends religion, which is the end of religion. In this tension Christianity stands.²²

Tillich’s idea of Christianity’s judgement of itself and other religions with its own criteria must be taken as a significant point, for he it has shifted the exclusive, universal and all-encompassing status of Christianity in the history of religion in *Systematic Theology 1* to a conditional and relative status. Therefore, the most important function of the Protestant principle in the present is its radical criticism of what occidental Christianity has become at present, and its questioning of the finality and uniqueness which it has reserved for itself in that process.

Logocentricism and Christocentricism of Theology

In *Systematic Theology 1* Tillich claimed that Christian theology is *the* theology because it is said to be based on the “Christian doctrine that the *Logos* became flesh, that the principle of the divine self-revelation has become manifest in the event ‘Jesus as the Christ.’”²³ The Christological foundation of the entire system is such that there is no theology other than Christian theology. Now, when these ideas are compared with the implications of the parallel project which Tillich presents, it can be shown that a significant conceptual shift in Tillich’s thought has taken place in relation to the logocentric and Christocentric theological framework in *Systematic Theology*. With each shift, two things are apparent; first, an attempt to overcome Western provincialisms – thus there is a discontinuity of old propositions – and second, a move to subject them to an implicit or explicit criticism in the name of the Protestant principle. As ideas are challenged, they are transformed – and are thereby formed into the paving stones which constitute the pathway to the continuity of thought beyond *Systematic Theology*. Hence, when the obvious clues given in the ‘project’ are elaborated in perspective, the points at which discontinuities and continuities have occurred in Tillich’s thought can be demonstrated.

In a significant way, the doubt concerning the *Logos* appears in two Bampton lectures and the Lycoming College lecture. With regard to the two Bampton lectures, it is reflected in Tillich's emphasis that Christianity is universal not because it claims that the *Logos* became flesh in Jesus the Christ, but because its essential message is a negation of religion.²⁴ With regard to the Lycoming lecture, the doubt concerning the *Logos* is expressed in the claim that there is no *exclusive* Christian revelation – that is, the exclusive claim that the *Logos* became flesh, which is “the decisive fulfilling, unsurpassable revelation – that which is the criterion of all others.”²⁵ Revelation underlies all religions, and all religions are subject to demonization. Therefore, the Protestant principle, Tillich said, should point to a principle which transcends religion.

In many ways, the Lycoming College lecture prefigures his radical doubt which appears in the final lecture concerning the ‘central event in history.’ However, the basic understanding of the nature of revelation in this lecture is the same as his earlier position in *Systematic Theology*.

... , religious revelation is not divine information. God is not a teacher and he does not teach pupils who are sitting in their chairs and receiving divine dictation as teachers in a college unfortunately have to do. This is not God's way. What appears in revelatory experiences is not information about divine things. They are self-manifestations of the divine itself in the mind of someone who is grasped by it.²⁶

What is significant, however, is the acknowledgement that participation in the ecstasy created by revelation makes people adherents of different faiths:

We do this and this is what makes us Jews, or Christians or Buddhists. We participate in the original revelatory experience and without such ecstasy there is no religion. Ecstasy is wherever the divine spirit is mentioned in all the Biblical books, in the Old and New Testament, always a being elevated beyond the ordinary pattern of our being.²⁷

The content of revelation is “ultimate reality” or the “mystery of being” which is manifested in religious symbols.²⁸ In the above statement there is a clear variation from what Tillich meant by “final revelation” in *Systematic Theology 1*. In *Systematic Theology* it is established that final revelation is the event in which the *Logos* became flesh. “Universal revelation”²⁹ is really that “which occurs in the period of preparation.”³⁰ Any identification of universal revelation with ‘natural revelation’ is said to be a misunderstanding. Universal revelation does not mean that revelation happens always and everywhere – because if it is taken that way, it denies “the existential character” of revelation and would “make the final revelation impossible.”³¹ With a disclaimer for an exclusive revelation, the position held in *Systematic Theology* has changed, and it marks a significant shift in Tillich's thought.

Christianity and Other Religions

In the second and fourth Bampton lectures, world religions are viewed from a Christian point of view. The discussion in the lectures implies an admission of the negative attitude of Christian thinking and acting towards non-Christian religions in the general history of Christianity. In the second Bampton lecture Tillich points out that in the past the attitude of Christianity towards other religions had been a kind of rejection in a “dialectical union of acceptance and rejection, with all the tensions, uncertainties, and changes which such dialectics impl[y].”³² Then he comments that Christianity in its essential character, as witnessed by Jesus himself and the early church, was all-inclusive. Hence the “all-inclusive” idea is taken to establish what he calls the “principle of conditional exclusiveness.”³³ This idea is employed to survey the evolution of Christianity and to recover the all-inclusive outlook of Christianity towards world religions.

In the last Bampton lecture, it is shown that Christianity has the openness to accept all religions and a self-judging attitude, which is given in the event on which Christianity is based. It is “... the appearance and reception of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, a symbol which stands for the decisive self-manifestation in human history of the source and aim of all being”.³⁴ Although the Christ is the “source and aim of all being,” the openness of Christianity is not presented as a possibility for its development into a world religion.

Then Tillich goes on to say that a self-judging attitude could be developed by one being grasped by the spiritual power of the event “to evaluate the witnesses, the traditions and the authorities in which

the *same* spiritual power was and is effective.”³⁵ The reference to “the same spiritual power,” is a direct allusion to the New Being which, Tillich claims, is present in all religions. Hence, Tillich’s position is that the meaning of this event was not, though it followed unavoidably, to provide a “foundation for a new religion with a particular character.”³⁶ He shows that Christianity continues to develop to the present day because in the process of its development, it judged, was judged and accepted judgement. Christianity is presented as a tremendously open religion because its foundation itself is not a religion – it witnesses to the Absolute.³⁷

Tillich’s understanding concerning the doubt that “Jesus is the *Logos*, as the Christ” which was raised in the Wesley lecture, is re-emphasised in the last Bampton lecture when the possibility of either “a mixture of religions or the victory of one religion, or the end of the religious age” is negated:

We answer: None of these alternatives! A mixture of religions destroys in each of them the concreteness, which gives it its dynamic power. The victory of one religion would impose a particular religious answer on all other particular answers. The end of the religious age ... is an impossible concept. The religious principle cannot come to an end. For the question of the ultimate meaning of life cannot be silenced as long as men are men. Religion cannot come to an end, and a particular religion will be lasting to the degree in which it negates itself as a religion. Thus Christianity will be a bearer of the religious answer as long as it breaks through its own particularity.³⁸

It is on this basis that Tillich comes to disagree – with Toynbee to start with, in his first 1958 Wesley lecture – and then with some significant contributors who shaped his thought in the formative years – Kant, Hegel, and Harnack. In the final lecture, their various programmes are mentioned: Kant’s as expressed in his book *Religion within the Limits of Pure Reason*, Hegel’s progressive history of religion, Harnack’s idea of Christianity’s embracing elements of all religions, Toynbee’s union of the great religions, and Teilhard de Chardin’s divine-centred consciousness. Although Tillich says that he feels “very near in so many respects” to Teilhard de Chardin,³⁹ he disagrees with him on the point that there can be a “temporal fulfilment”⁴⁰ in the historical process. In contrast to all these programmes, Tillich proposes his dynamic typological approach, which does not assume that there is progressive development towards a universal religion. He expresses dissatisfaction with that method too, but thinks it is helpful if the history of religions is taken seriously.⁴¹

This discussion confirms that a significant transformation has taken place in Tillich’s thought when compared with the fundamental Christological position held in *Systematic Theology*. The universality and the uniqueness of Christianity maintained in *Systematic Theology* on the basis of the *Logos* are now seriously questioned. Against these changes, it is now acknowledged that a particular religious answer, namely the Christian answer, cannot be imposed on all other particular answers. This is the exact opposite position from that which Tillich had maintained in *Systematic Theology*. The emphasis is now that Christianity can be a bearer of the religious answer in the same way in which another religion could be, provided that each religion has broken through its particularity. In an article Tillich wrote in 1958 entitled “Beyond the Usual Alternatives” he concludes with the following revealing words:

A last point I want to make is the future encounter of Christianity with the other great religions. I do not think this encounter, which becomes more concrete and existential every day, has been taken seriously enough in Christian theology, including my own system. *The statement that Jesus is the Christ and therefore the incarnation of the universal Logos of God is a matter of continuous testing, not only in view of secular culture but also in view of the other world religions.* It is a task of theology to make this test theoretically, while Christian missions, supported and possibly guided by a theology of missions, must make it practically.⁴² (italics added).

Jesus the Christ – the Central Event in History

A further comment must be added to Tillich’s emphasis on the “central event.” It is predominantly an apologetic, and a statement of historical relativism. Tillich said that historical relativism “belongs to man’s existential finitude that he cannot escape ... He can only take the risk and the danger of a decision for that which is for him the absolute in history: that is what I term the ‘centre of history.’”⁴³ In

Systematic Theology 3 Tillich states also “for the followers of a world religion, the event of their foundation is the centre of history.”⁴⁴

This leads to a more specific issue concerning the ‘final revelation’ as the central event in history. The logocentric framework which is maintained in the whole of *Systematic Theology*, and which is questioned in the project, comes to be expressed in the final lecture. In outlining important propositions for affirming the significance of the history of religions, this doubt is asserted:

... There may be – and I stress this, there *may be* – a *central* event in the history of religions which unites the positive results of those critical developments in the history of religion in and under which revelatory experiences are going on – an event which, therefore, makes possible a concrete theology that has universalistic significance.⁴⁵

The “central event” referred to here is the revelation of Jesus as the Christ,⁴⁶ for, in *Systematic Theology 1*, Tillich had claimed that “the event of final revelation establishes itself as the centre, aim, and origin of the revelatory events which occur in the period of preparation and in the period of reception.”⁴⁷

With Tillich’s doubt concerning a “central event in history” reference is made to many *kairori* in the history of religions in which the “religion of the concrete spirit is actualized fragmentarily” and such critical moments, it is said, “can happen here and there.”⁴⁸ This discussion clearly underlines the fact that, while Tillich never doubted the validity of the revelation in Jesus as the Christ, the present encounters of religions are such that the Christian message cannot be based on a logocentric framework. That these shifts are marked by the acceptance of the relative position of Christianity and application of the Protestant principle is obvious when Tillich asks, in the Lycoming College lecture:

... can Christianity change its position? Can it acknowledge that it itself, although based on revelation, has also become a religion and that we, Christians, are all in the situation of belonging to a religion alongside all the other religions? Is it humanly possible? ... Is it possible to live in a particular revelatory experience on the one hand, and at the same time apply the same criterion against oneself that one applies against the other religions? Can a human being live in the tension between upholding the Protestant principle, or the prophetic principle if you prefer, which maintains that nothing human can claim to be ultimate, and on the other hand say that you uphold this principle in the name of this criterion and the event in which this criterion came irrefutably to life?⁴⁹

Tillich believes it is possible – possible with the self-judging attitude;

Were I a missionary I would not approach the Japanese people and say, as I did not in my many speeches and discussions, “Become Christian, become a Methodist or Lutheran or Roman Catholic or whatever you want.” That might happen voluntarily of course. But I would say, “*We don't want to bring you another religion. We want to point to a criterion, which is the criterion over and against all religions, including our own. If you accept this criterion you may judge yourselves as much as you judge us and perhaps we can unite in the acceptance of this criterion, because this criterion is nothing other than the majesty of the divine or Holy itself over against any particular form in which it appears.*” In this way we stand on our basis, as Christians, as Protestants, and on the other hand we are wide open, for the other religions do not want replacement. They want to be witnesses to that which is greater than we are, not only we as human beings but also we as Christians and Protestants.⁵⁰ (Italics added)

These are all examples, which contribute to the dissolution of the logocentric and christocentric framework of *Systematic Theology*. Then, with religious pluralism in view, the Christian message is – with the supreme example of Jesus himself and the witness of the early church – which Christianity can point out to every religion that self-criticism enables it to negate its particularity and affirm that which is the essence of religion – non-religion.

Tillich’s Final Word

There also some notable points made in Tillich’s final lecture in which he repeats most of the main thoughts which had gradually developed in the ‘project’ since the fifties – and prior to that. The

significance of the final address is, however, that Tillich formulates these ideas into a framework in which he hopes to articulate a theology for the future. The lecture serves also to summarise both the tremendous journey, which Tillich has made beyond the confines of *Systematic Theology* and the limitations, which in spite of progress, he was not able to overcome to the very end of his life.

In introducing the lecture, by direct implication, Tillich presents himself as a theologian who has *accepted* the subject, “The Significance of the History of Religions for the Systematic Theologian” and has taken it seriously. He indicates that this requires making two basic decisions explicitly or implicitly. The decisions are that “he has *separated* himself from a theology which rejects all religions other than that of which he is a theologian” and that “he has *rejected* the paradox of a religion of non-religion, or a theology without *theos* (also called a theology of the secular).”⁵¹ Tillich openly criticises these two propositions by stating that they have a long history and that they have contributed to the present chaos.

The most important proposition which is questioned again in this address is that which questions the central event in history. He says: there may be “a central event in the history of religions which unites the positive results of those critical developments in the history of religion in and under which revelatory experiences are going on – an event which, therefore, makes possible a concrete theology that has universalistic significance.” Tillich does not say whether it is the theology of the “new form of Christianity” which he anticipated, or whether it is a theology based on the ‘religion of the concrete spirit’.

Apart from acknowledging it as an enigmatic phrase, there is no general agreement among Tillich scholars as to exactly what this concept refers. Tillich himself said very little about it. The inner *telos* of the history of religions is said to become this religion. However, the concrete spirit is not “a mere futuristic expectation.” Rather, “it appears everywhere ... as a fight for the religion of the concrete spirit, a fight of God against religion within religion”.⁵² It is this fight of God against religion within religion, which Tillich says, has been expressed in the appearance of Christ – and in the cross, which provides a criterion *for us Christians*. Reiterating what he had said concerning the Spiritual religion in two of his undated fragments, Tillich hesitates to identify the religion of the concrete spirit with any actual religion, not even with Christianity as a religion. The religion of the concrete spirit can be interpreted as a concept, which affirms the Protestant principle in the present.

In its context, this interpretation corresponds to Tillich’s earlier interpretation of Protestantism as negating form. He has pointed out that the relationship between Protestantism and the secular is such that the secular is the “corrective against the temptation of every religious sphere and every ecclesiastical system, to identify itself with the unconditional to which it points.”⁵³ In this instance, by not identifying the religion of the concrete spirit even with Christianity, Tillich seems to be seriously affirming the formative power of Protestantism not only in secular forms but also in all religions, provided that they subject themselves to self-criticism. In the present, it can affirm its appearance only fragmentarily in all the religions, and thus provide the possibility, as Tillich stated, for “the structure of religious thought” to “develop in connection with *another* or *different* fragmentary manifestation of theonomy or the religion of the concrete spirit.”⁵⁴ Therefore, it must be concluded that the religion of the concrete spirit is not historical Christianity – in its essence, it can only witness to it.

Conclusion

From a Tillichian point of view if systematic theology is supposed to have ended with “the Protestant era”, the period in which we are called to study theology and resource the missional vocation of the church is certainly the “post-Protestant era”. All the same, Tillich had affirmed the end of “the Protestant era” is not the end of the Protestant Principle; the end of missions in Christendom is *not* the end of the missional vocation of the church. In the same way that the Protestant Principle has a different manifestation in the present, the missional vocation of the church too must have a different manifestation in the world today. Resourcing those who are engaged in mission studies to think of missions in new ways is the contribution Tillich’s later theology has to offer. As I have demonstrated in this article, Tillich has achieved it in two main respects: encountering the reality of religious pluralism and, with a view to understand how the Divine Spirit manifests itself in the present, proposing significant conceptual shifts in systematic theology to engage with the challenges it presents with courage, faith and academic honesty. In these ways, his re-thinking of systematic theology and its

relevance in the post-war post-Protestant era is a notable contribution to appraise contemporary mission studies.

In the main, as a theological enterprise which was formed, tested and reformulated in the midst of the turbulent years which witnessed the collapse of the modern project and the shaking up of the Enlightenment ideals, Tillich's later theology is significant. As I have demonstrated, its significance is predominantly philosophical to the extent that it invites us to re-examine the most fundamental theological propositions – the Christology and its logocentricity – which shapes the understanding of the missional vocation of the church and its aims.

Tillich's mature theological thought is also significant in that it questions the superior triumphalism the church had assumed across the globe since the European Enlightenment of the 18th century along with the various endeavours of colonisation. As the experiences of many colonies testify, it is a fact that the missional vocation of the church was influenced by the ideology of the Enlightenment. Elsewhere I have argued that globalisation and its older brother – capitalism – through certain historical anomalies, are associated with the forms of Christianity prevalent in the West.⁵⁵ While quite clearly the world has stepped onto a stage fondly called “post-Christian” one could see that the residues of Christendom have not totally disappeared – they continue to live in the legacies of capitalism, neocolonialism, and neoliberalism – other names for globalisation – and the worldview they propagate through media, advertising and also through political agendas to democratise the non-western world. It is a challenge for missiologists to detach themselves from this predominant worldview which is cultivated in the cultural sub-conscious of the West and the rethink the matrixes of theology which are influenced and altered by these forces. I believe that Tillich's mature theology is of significance in this regard too.

In the light of the argument presented in this article, a comment on the mission studies curricula of the present is in order. At large, evangelisation being the primary objective, while world religions as religious phenomena and religious pluralism as historical fact receive attention in many mission studies curricula, they are often studied from a comparative religions perspective. At best, some contemporary mission studies are also framed within systematic theology. Even in such instances, the world's living faiths are treated from the perspectives of the German school of thought known as the *Religionsgeschichteschule* (the School of History of Religions). Along with a few others, Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923), a representative of this school, promulgated the idea that Christianity represented the highest form of religion in the development of religion throughout history.⁵⁶

In his final lecture, Tillich gave a hopeful clue to the future of theology when he said “the structure of religious thought might develop in connection with another or different fragmentary manifestation of theonomy or of the religion of the concrete spirit.”⁵⁷ This clue invites us to both value and genuinely understand the other religions of the world, and also to explore the implications of this understanding in fulfilling the missional vocation of the church.

While this article has provided sufficient insights concerning what philosophical and conceptual issues need to be brought into this conversation, this essay would not be completed without suggesting the practical fronts on which this dialogue can begin. The points of departure for a fruitful dialogue with world religions – especially the Asian-born ones – may be discerned by seeing how they provide a commentary on the world's religious situation and how the teachings of these religions are perceived: as an antidote and cure for the unbearable saturation of materialism, consumerism and individualism being experienced at present in the West; as an alternative to a civilisation tainted with blood spilt over “religious and political” wars; as offering “non-theological” practical answers to these ills; as a guide through life without placing any metaphysical importance on God (Who is wrongly blamed for the demise of the Enlightenment ideals); as an alternative to scientific naturalism and the loss of the sense of mystery; as a means to revitalise the depleted spiritual sap of the Western civilisation; and as a market place from where a meaningful and moral belief system could be put together.

In the face of both globalisation's taking a firm grip on the globe and former colonial powers working through indirect means to maintain control of their former colonies, the students of mission studies are called forth to rediscover the missional vocation of the church in a new climate of the world. In this sense, the present time in which religious pluralism has become a historical reality is *kairotic* – a divinely appointed moment in our history and a decisive factor in fulfilling the missional vocation of the Church and the theologian in the twenty-first century.

End Notes

1. Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era*. (1951), pp. 239-240.
2. See Ruwan Palapathwala, "Beyond Christ and System: Paul Tillich and Spirituality for the 21st Century." (2001/2002), pp. 205-219.
3. Paul Morris, "Judaism and Pluralism". (1990), p. 179.
4. Ibid.
5. The lecture was originally published in Jerald C. Brauer, Ed. *The Future of Religions* (1966, pp.80-94), and most recently in Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions*. (1994).
6. Pauck and Pauck, *Life & Thought*, pp. 282-283.
7. Most of the information presented in this article has been drawn from my extensive research of Tillich's published and unpublished hand-written manuscripts at the Tillich Archive, Andover Library, Harvard University Divinity School and Harvard University Archive. The full content of a few lectures on religious pluralism exists only in tape-recorded form in private possession, and they also have been consulted for this article. Furthermore, I have corresponded with Mrs. Grace Calí, Tillich's secretary at Harvard University who has provided me with first-hand information which indicates Tillich's re-thinking of systematic theology in the light of religious pluralism.
8. Paul Tillich, *On the Boundary*. (1967), p.54.
9. Paul Tillich, "The End of the Protestant Era." (1937): 49.
10. Ibid., p.56.
11. Tillich Archive.
12. Paul Tillich, "On the Boundary Line." (1960): 1435.
13. "Informal Report on Lecture Trip To Japan – Summer 1960," Tillich Archive.
14. Unpublished Report, Tillich Archive.
15. Paul Tillich, "Christian and Non-Christian Revelation (1961)," in Terrence Thomas, (Ed). *The Encounter of Religions and Quasi-Religions*. (1989), pp.60-61.
16. In Mrs. Calí's published work (*Paul Tillich First-Hand, A Memoir of the Harvard Years*. 1996). the above event appears as having occurred in 1958. However, her personal correspondence has confirmed that the event took place on October 10, 1955. Personal Letter, 30 September 1997.
17. Pauck and Pauck, *Life & Thought*, pp.244-245.
18. Ibid.
19. Cited by Rollo May, *Paulus*. (1974), p.71.
20. Paul Tillich, "The Meaning of Religion and the Protestant Principle" (1958a)," in Terrence Thomas, (Ed). *The Encounter of Religions and Quasi-Religions*. (1989), p.17.
21. "The Meaning of Religion ... (1958a)," p.15.
22. "Christian and Non-Christian Revelation (1961)," p.72.
23. ST-1, p.18.
24. In Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions*, pp.1-32.
25. "Christian and Non-Christian Revelation (1961)," p. 64.
26. "Christian and Non-Christian Revelation (1961)," p.64.
27. Ibid., p.65.
28. See also ST-1, p.123.
29. This concept has a close affinity to the philosophy of nature which Tillich learnt from Schelling. He saw the philosophy of nature as the "application of the principle of identity to nature." See *The Construction of the History of Religion in Schelling's Positive Philosophy*. (1974), p.53.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid., p.154.
32. Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions*, p.19.
33. Ibid., p.20.
34. Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions*, p.51.
35. Ibid. The emphasis is mine.
36. Ibid., p. 52.
37. Ibid., p.53.
38. Ibid., p. 61.
39. Ibid., p. 75.

40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., p. 70.
42. Christian Century. (1958), p. 555.
43. Paul Tillich, "Answer – Reply to Interpretation and Criticism". (1982), p. 392.
44. Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology – 3. (1964), p. 392.
45. Tillich, Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions, p.65.
46. See also Victor Nuovo's "Translator's Introduction" in *Mysticism and Guilt-Consciousness in Schelling's Philosophical Development*. (1974), p. 28.
47. ST-1, p.153.
48. Tillich, Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions, p.73.
49. "Christian and Non-Christian Revelation (1961)," p.73.
50. Ibid., pp.73-74.
51. "Christian and Non-Christian Revelation (1961),"p.63. (italics added).
52. Tillich, Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions, pp. 72-73.
53. Tillich, *The Protestant Era*, p. 214.
54. Tillich, Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions, p. 76.
55. Ruwan Palapathwala, "The Ethic of Interfaith Dialogue". (2006): 45-60.
56. See Ernst Troeltsch, *The Absoluteness of Christianity*. (1971) and "The Place of Christianity Among the World Religions" (1980), pp. 11-31.
57. Tillich, Christianity and the *Encounter of World Religions*, p.76.

NO OTHER NAME! (Acts 4:12) - Jesus' Uniqueness in Peter's Preaching

By Michael Raiter

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Introduction: Shopping in a Spiritual Supermarket

In today's pluralistic society most people are simply confounded that Christians can claim that Jesus is the only way to God. It is perplexing to many that one faith should arrogate to itself a seeming monopoly on religious truth. The model for contemporary spirituality is the supermarket. Supermarkets provide a variety of products, with different brand names, all pandering to people's wants and needs. The supermarket invites customers to browse, and find there the product "just right for you". In a similar vein, most Australians would be happy to have Christians put their product alongside all the others in the spiritual supermarket. Jesus has a right to be there. But what deeply offends most people is that some Christians are not satisfied for Jesus simply to be there. Some Christians insist that there is just one genuine product. Some Christians affirm that for the spiritually thirsty there is only one person who satisfies; for the spiritually hungry there is only one bread of life, and for those who long to connect to God, there is one mediator between God and human beings, man, the man Christ Jesus. This is the great offence of Christianity in the modern world.

One of the most vigorous and important debates in recent years has been over the uniqueness of Jesus, and in particular the necessity of a verbal expression of faith in Him as a means to obtain the salvific benefits that he won for us by his atoning death and victorious resurrection. A number of recent books, most notably *Who Can Be Saved*¹, have attempted to argue for a more inclusive understanding of salvation while maintaining Christ's ontological uniqueness. This important book has been commended by many leading evangelical missiologists. Indeed, it would be fair to say that an exclusivist or restrictivist view of salvation is now the minority evangelical position.

This paper will attempt an examination of one of the key texts for the church's understanding of both the nature of its mission, and the content of its message, namely the Acts of the Apostles. As best we can we will seek to understand the presuppositions and assumptions of the apostles regarding the extent and means of salvation through this early witness to their life and preaching.

1. The Pluralistic Context of the Apostolic Church

It is important to remember that the Graeco-Roman world in which Paul and the other Christians first preached was every bit as pluralistic as our Western context today. The New Testament documents addressed multi-racial and multi-cultural communities. The range and variety of different religious groups and cults in Corinth alone have been well-documented². The world of the first century was a veritable smorgasbord of religious commodities³. There was the officially sanctioned imperial cult and the sanctuaries to the widely worshipped gods of Neptune, Apollo and Artemis. Throughout the empire there were various expressions of the worship of the gods of the Egyptians, Isis and Serapis. Mystery cults abounded in the Mediterranean world. There was a cult relating to Black Aphrodite, who only came out at night; also the healing god Asklepios, the mother goddess Cybele, the goddess Atergatis and her male consort, Hadad. Further, sacred rocks and mountains were objects of worship. Apart from all this, virtually every city and people had their own patron deities and these were by no means all of Greek or Roman in origin.

It is clear then, that when the apostolic authors of the NT made pronouncements about the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus and spoke about the character of other religious expressions, they were speaking from an informed standpoint. They may not have been cognizant of every variety of religious experience, any more than many of us are, but they had observed and experienced sufficient breadth of the current religious phenomena to make pronouncements that were informed and applicable to each and every religious manifestation.

How then did these early Christian proclaimers interact with their own multifaith context? Without, wittingly or unwittingly, reading the modern debate back into the 1st century, can we discern the attitude of the apostles towards those to whom they ministered who had never heard the gospel? To answer this question we now turn to examine some key texts in the Book of Acts where the apostles are affirming the uniqueness of Christ as the way of salvation in the context of alternative religious commitments.

2. Acts 4:12 No Other Name

The importance of Acts 4:12 for the whole debate about the uniqueness of Christ cannot be underestimated. The text explicitly states that salvation is only found in Christ, and implicitly it seems to suggest that only a faith response to an encounter with this Christ is the means of appropriating this salvation. However, many question whether such a restrictivist interpretation is exegetically justifiable, and so one needs to carefully examine this pronouncement by Peter as Luke presents it to us, paying due attention to the context in which it is found.

The Context and Interpretation of Acts 4:12

Acts 4:12 is part of a longer passage which, most scholars agree, runs from 3:1 - 4:31. The passage begins with the account of the healing by Peter and John of the lame man beside the Beautiful Gate near a main entrance to the Temple in Jerusalem. Upon being healed the man begins "walking leaping and praising God." The allusion to Isaiah 35:6 is clear and intended. The prophet spoke of the day when "the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come with singing to Zion" (35:10) as a day when, as part of the return from exile, the blind would see, the deaf would hear, and the lame leap like a deer. This is the great day of salvation and deliverance for God's people. It is the testimony of Luke in his two-volume work that this day has arrived with the ministry of Jesus. The healing granted to this man through the name of Jesus, and his joyful, active responses testify that this age of salvation has dawned. Later, when Peter preaches, the man is said to have received "wholeness" (v.16) as a result of this miracle. In other words, his restoration is more than just physical; it is also social and spiritual. That which was implicit in the miracle is now made explicit as Peter preaches a sermon in which he points out to the Jewish crowd the theological implications of what they have just seen.

Firstly, Peter points out the continuity between what they have just seen, and the saving acts of God in the Old Testament. The one responsible for this miracle is the "God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors" (v.13). Peter and John are not proclaiming any new deity, but the one who has revealed himself to them in the Law and the Prophets⁴. Without hesitation Peter reminds the crowd of the promise of God, spoken through Isaiah, that his servant would be rejected by people, but vindicated and glorified by God, a clear and unambiguous reference to Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12. The prophecy of Isaiah has been played out on the stage of history with the Jewish rejection and execution of Christ and God's raising him from the dead. Peter then announces that it is by faith in this one's name, that this lame man has found healing.

The 'name' (*onoma*) is an important theme throughout the Acts narrative. The term first occurs in Peter's sermon at Pentecost where, quoting the prophet Joel, the hearers are instructed that "everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved" (2:21). In the Scriptures, to call on the Lord's name is to invoke the power and authority of the one who stands behind that name; it is not a magical or superstitious thing. The term operates in the same way here in Acts 3⁵.

Having explained that it was through Jesus' power that this man has been restored and that this Jesus was God's holy one, now raised from the dead, Peter then makes the logical application of this truth to the lives of his Jewish audience. Explicitly he tells them, "Repent, therefore, and turn to God so that your sins might be wiped out, so that times of refreshing might come from the presence of the Lord" (vv.19-20). The people will enjoy salvation on the condition that they turn away from their sins, and turn towards God. From the context it is clear that the chief sin is the supreme one of rejecting and crucifying Jesus. Repentance, therefore, is firstly and fundamentally expressed in accepting Jesus as Messiah and submitting to his authority. This is initially expressed in a faith-response to him as the one who brings this salvation. Peter makes it clear that this salvation is ultimately a future event (v.21) but it can be appropriated in the present. Indeed, the healing of the lame man indicates that, in part, the blessings of this salvation can also be experienced in the present. Further, this salvation is ultimately the fulfilment of the paradigmatic promise that God made to Abraham, "in your

descendants all the families of the earth will be blessed" (v.25). Peter is reminding the Jews that this promised salvation ultimately has as its focus the incorporation of both Jews and Gentiles into the people of God, "so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (3:20).

The chief point that Peter is making throughout his address is that it is through faith in Jesus the Messiah that everyone will have their sins wiped out, will experience the promised restoration of all things, and receive the blessings of God. The healing of the lame man in response to his expression of faith is a physical and tangible example of a salvation that ultimately embraces every part of the human personality, and ultimately all of creation itself.

Luke goes on to record that Peter and John were arrested, held over night, and then brought before the Sanhedrin. We are told that Peter "was filled with the Holy Spirit" as he spoke. In other words, like the prophets of old he is prompted to speak forth the very words of God⁶. If before this day ignorance on the part of the Jewish people could be excusable (3:17), from this point on any rejection of what God is doing through Jesus is now high handed and culpable. Peter then proceeds to clearly identify Jesus as the source of the power, which effected the healing of the man. Having again reminded the Jewish leaders of their sinfulness in rejecting the Christ, he then affirms that "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved." (4:12). Both in his Gospel and in his account of the acts of the apostles Luke, from time to time, uses the word *soteria* to describe any act of rescue, spiritual or otherwise (e.g. Acts 27:31). However, with the coming of the eschatological Spirit the emphasis is placed more and more on salvation as involving the forgiveness of sins⁷. C.K. Barrett rightly notes that Acts 2:40 provides the paradigmatic meaning of salvation in the writings of Luke: those who are saved are saved from this perverse generation and from sharing its fate; they are no longer perverse and will not experience the punishment of perversity. On the positive side, they will attach themselves to the restored people of God. Barrett concludes,

Thus the primary meaning of salvation is detachment from the world of the believing and disobedient and attachment to the true people of God of the last days, the ecclesia, the community which is constituted on the one hand by its loyalty to Jesus, and on the other hand by the gift of the Spirit, which makes possible a new life conformed to the new loyalty⁸.

This is the salvation that Peter affirms, and it is explicitly found in no one else but Jesus. The fact that he has just reminded the Sanhedrin of the death and resurrection of this same Jesus, indicates that the granting and obtaining of this salvation is somehow made possible by these twin acts, although he does not explain at this point the mechanics of this. However, he stresses that Jesus, and Jesus alone, is the instrument of this salvation. To further emphasize the point he announces that there is no other name under heaven by which this salvation can be experienced. The repetition of the term 'name' draws us back to its earlier use, both in the previous chapter, and earlier during the speech at Pentecost. On these occasions, explicitly and implicitly, it was a name that had to be believed on and its authority appropriated for the promised salvation to be received and its blessings experienced. Here, too, the inescapable implication is that the name of Jesus must be believed on. The strong imperative, *Dei*, points not so much to the necessity that someone be saved, but the necessity of finding salvation in *that* name. Peter could not have expressed more strongly or unambiguously that if anyone is to experience the eschatological wiping away of sins and times of refreshment it must be in this way, namely faith in the name of the one sent from heaven, Jesus the Messiah.

An Inclusivist Interpretation of Acts 4:12.

Such a reading of Acts 4:12, which implicitly suggests that there is no salvation for people who have not put their faith in Jesus Christ, has been rejected by some as being a misinterpretation of the text. For example, Clark Pinnock has attempted to read Acts 4:12 in such a way that is true and faithful to what the text does affirm while dismissing what, he claims, it does not affirm⁹. In brief, Pinnock notes that this passage makes three assertions: Jesus has introduced the long awaited messianic salvation into history; secondly, this salvation is holistic; and thirdly, this salvation is available only through faith in the name of Jesus. Pinnock then moves from exegesis to interpretation and argues that this means, "there is simply no other name *with the kind of power* to save that the name of Jesus has"¹⁰. In other words, the authority and power of Jesus to save is quantitatively different from that of other sources of power but, says Pinnock, this is not to deny "that there have been and are lesser instances of saving power at work in the world where Jesus' name is unknown"¹¹. Further, Pinnock wants to

stress that this text is *not* addressing either the issue of the eschatological fate of unevangelized people, or the status of other religions in God's plan of salvation.

Is Pinnock right that exclusivists have read into this text assumptions it was never addressing? Firstly, Pinnock has taken Peter's words to imply a *quantitative* difference in Jesus' power to save people (he has more power to save than the lesser powers like Moses and Buddha), whereas we have seen that Peter is emphasizing the uniqueness and *qualitative* difference of Jesus' power to save¹². If salvation could be found in other names, which fundamentally is what Pinnock believes, then Luke's use of the emphatic imperative *Dei* would be not only superfluous, but misleading. And indeed, the expression *Dei* in Luke-Acts carries with it all the force of divine compulsion¹³. With respect to the other two issues Pinnock raises, it could be conceded that, by itself, this text does not give a comprehensive answer to the question of the fate of the unevangelized. Nevertheless, by way of response two points need to be noted. There is a general and universal application of Jesus' saving work to all people implicit even in this text, for there is no other name "under heaven". Peter is emphasizing not just the necessity of those within Israel, who have received God's special revelation, of placing saving faith in Jesus, but every person under heaven. Secondly, one cannot read this verse in isolation from all that has preceded it in both the earlier chapters of Acts and the Gospel. The Gospel of Luke concluded with Jesus' commission to the apostles that, "repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name *to all nations* beginning from Jerusalem" (24:47). The opening chapter of Acts records that Jesus reaffirmed this command when, immediately before his ascension, he said, "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea, and *to the ends of the earth*" (1:8). This very activity of bearing testimony to the risen Jesus, with the accompanying call to repent and have faith in Jesus' name, is what we see occurring from the moment the Spirit is sent to the church. While initially the preaching is directed to Israel, in accordance with the command of Jesus (and indeed the OT prophets¹⁴) the ultimate focus is the whole earth. In the light of this, Pinnock is clutching at straws when he suggests that the text casts no light on the question of the eternal destiny of the nations.

3. What About Cornelius? Holy Pagan or Godly Believer? Acts 10:1 - 11:18

The Roman centurion and God-fearer Cornelius is an important person for the discussion on the uniqueness of Jesus as the object of saving faith. Luke describes him in the following terms:

...A devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God. (10:2)

Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation. (10:22)

...(The angel said) 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been Remembered before God'. (10:31)

I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears Him and works righteousness is acceptable to him. (10:34).

For inclusivists the case of Cornelius is paradigmatic. Pinnock maintains that he "is the pagan saint par excellence of the New Testament, a believer in God before he became a Christian¹⁵."

However, Pinnock's use of the word 'pagan' to describe Cornelius is inaccurate and misleading. Elsewhere Pinnock describes him "as one of those men of faith outside the covenant communities of Judaism and Christianity"¹⁶. However, Luke tells us that this man "is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation". He is clearly a believer in YHWH, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The alms he gives and the prayers he offers are in the context of Jewish faith and worship. As a God-fearer he has clearly attached himself to the covenant community. In short, he is no more a pagan than Abraham or Moses!

Nevertheless, even though Peter acknowledges that Cornelius has some awareness of Jesus, although it may be scanty (10:36), he is clearly not a Christian. Pinnock and others conclude from this that he stands as a model for any unevangelized person, of any religious tradition, who fears God and lives a life marked by righteous conduct. The preaching of Peter enables Cornelius and his family to share fully in the blessings of knowing the risen Jesus, but it did not effect for him a saving relationship with God which he previously had not experienced. As John Sanders comments, "Cornelius was not hell bound before Peter arrived, and neither are unevangelized believers"¹⁷.

Is this, though, a right way to interpret Acts 10? Was Cornelius saved before Peter preached the gospel to him? Once again, we must examine the wider passage and not just focus on a few statements. After Peter has preached and baptized the household of Cornelius, having seen both their faith and the coming of the Spirit made evident in the speaking of tongues, the apostle reports this strange event to the other believers in Jerusalem. He recounts that the angel had told Cornelius a man would come with a message, "by which you and your entire household will be saved" (11:14). The use of the future tense suggests that the preaching of Peter brought to this household a salvation that they had not, up until that point, known or experienced. While the New Testament often does speak of salvation as a future reality, the most likely reading of the verse in context is that, upon Peter's arrival and announcement of the gospel, salvation has come to that household. Further, Peter's message to Cornelius concluded with the words, "All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (10:43). We have already noted in our discussion of Acts 4:12 that for Luke the forgiveness of sins is at the heart of the experience of salvation. If the gift of forgiveness is received when someone believes on the name of Jesus then, presumably, Cornelius and his household did not have this salvation experience before Peter preached the gospel to them. Finally, in 11:18 Luke records the joyful response of the other believers on hearing of Cornelius' conversion because "God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life". Once again, the clear implication is that until then the Gentiles had not received such repentance.

But what of those verses which describe Cornelius' righteousness and acceptability to God? John Stott suggests that the term 'acceptable' cannot refer to justification in any sense of a right standing with God, but is a more comparative term pointing to the fact that "in everybody God prefers righteousness to unrighteousness, and sincerity to insincerity"¹⁸. This sincerity in a sense disposes God to bring to such a person the saving message of Jesus Christ. In a similar vein, John Piper says,

Cornelius represents a kind of unsaved person among an unreached people group who is seeking God in an extraordinary way. And Peter is saying that God accepts this search as genuine and works wonders to bring that person the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹⁹

However, such an interpretation of Luke's description of Cornelius is exegetically unconvincing and seems, rather, to be driven by a prior theological commitment to an understanding that such a person could not be in a right relationship with God.

We have already noted that Cornelius is clearly presented as a worshipper of YHWH.. He is not a pagan sincerely searching for God. He is a godly believer who has heard about God, has put his faith in him, and lives a life pleasing to him. Whatever we make of his relationship to God salvifically, he is not in the same category of people, then or now, who have never been the recipients of divine special revelation. What is more, Cornelius is described as 'righteous' (*dikaios*), a word with strong Old Testament roots. The term is used to describe men like Noah, Job, and Abraham. It is the term for the faithful people of God. Significantly, Luke uses this term to describe the parents of John the Baptist, Zechariah and Elizabeth and, interestingly, old Simeon. The former are described as being "righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments" (Luke 1:6). In terms similar to those used of Cornelius, Simeon is called "righteous and devout". Given that there is such an overlap in the terminology, it seems quite unwarranted to draw any distinction between the faith and character of any of these people. Further, Luke notes that Cornelius literally "works righteousness" (10:35). . This term, *dikaiosune*, is a covenantal term, expressing the performance of those deeds which are required by God of his covenant people (cf. Lk 1:75). It is in the light of this that we understand that Cornelius expressed his righteousness in his almsgiving and his life of constant prayer.

What does all this mean for our understanding of Cornelius' standing before God? In short, as a devout God fearer, he stood on the same level as any other righteous covenant-keeper. What is true of Abraham, Noah, Daniel and the countless other righteous men and women amongst the chosen people of Israel, and what is true of the righteous who lived in the time of Christ, like John the Baptist and his parents, Anna, Simeon and others, is true of this man. What strikes Peter is that this man is a Gentile. This should not have surprised him because during the course of Jesus' ministry, other Gentiles met the Saviour and were clearly incorporated into the covenant people of God (e.g. Lk 7:9).

We seem, then, to have two inconsistent streams of thought in this passage. On the one hand, Peter affirms that with his coming to the home of Cornelius and preaching the gospel, this Gentile and his family received salvation, the forgiveness of their sins. On the other hand, Cornelius stands alongside all the other faithful covenant-keepers of God's people who, surely, were inheritors of the kingdom of God. Indeed, Peter explicitly describes Cornelius as "acceptable to God". In context, such an expression must reflect God's welcome and embrace of such a person. How, then, are we to reconcile these two lines of thought? Was Cornelius saved before Peter preached to him?

We have just observed that Cornelius must be seen in the same category as faithful Jews like Simeon. Simeon saw the Messiah and announced, "My eyes have seen your salvation". Simeon witnessed something he had previously only hoped for. In a sense, then, it could be said that, prior to holding the Christ child in his arms he had not seen, nor could really be said to have experienced, God's salvation. In the same vein Zechariah's prayer extolled God who would give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins" (1:77). These faithful covenant keepers had the sure hope of the forgiveness of their sins, but it could not be properly experienced until the day of salvation had dawned, which occurred with the coming of the Saviour. Now that Christ had come, it was appropriate to speak of people being saved. Speaking salvation-historically it was anachronistic to use such terminology of believers under the old covenant. However, the salvation word-group could be used by the Gospel writers to speak of people who experienced the holistic salvation of Jesus, although the term is used proleptically of this salvation that really only became available after the death, resurrection, giving of the Spirit, and ascension of the Lord Jesus.

This in no way diminishes the fact that Noah, Abraham, David, Elizabeth, Simeon, and Cornelius were all acceptable to God; that is, were members of his covenant people. The realization that Peter comes to is not that the righteous are acceptable to God - that would be tautologous - no, it is the fact that race is no barrier to being in a covenant relationship with God.

In summary, Cornelius is a worshipper of God (or YHWH) who, having heard about the Lord, has come to put his faith in the true God of Israel. He is what Paul describes in Romans 2 as a true Jew, one who is a Jew inwardly, who has received the real circumcision, which is circumcision of the heart, spiritual and not literal (vv. 28-29). Inclusivists are wrong to draw any implications for the destiny of the unevangelized from the experience of Cornelius. Their positions are in no way analogous.

Pre-Messianic Jews and the Unevangelised

An inclusivist may well concede that the description of Cornelius as a pagan is invalid; nevertheless, have I not conceded that a person can be acceptable to God and in a right relationship with him, apart from any knowledge of Christ? Even allowing that Cornelius is really a Jew, is there not an analogy between faithful Jews prior to the coming of Christ, and faithful pagans? Both are people of faith. Both express this faith in righteous living, and both do not know about the atoning work and victorious resurrection of Christ. In short, both have faith without full knowledge. Since the former are acceptable to God, surely then God's mercy would similarly extend to the latter. Space permits only a brief response to this question. I will make just three remarks.

Firstly, the Jews received special revelation from God. God had revealed his character and saving purposes to this people. They knew the identity and character of this God and how they ought to respond correctly to him. It is therefore inaccurate to portray them as having faith without knowledge. Certainly, they did not have the full revelation of the mystery of God which came with Christ, but Paul tells us in Galatians that the gospel was preached to Abraham, and 1 Peter tells us that the Old Testament prophets "made careful search and enquiry" about salvation and, through the Spirit of Christ testified concerning his suffering and glory (1:10-11). While they did not know the details of this salvation, their faith in God and confidence in their salvation was based on knowledge. Indeed, while their knowledge was deficient in that the full revelation which is in Christ had not yet come, these Jewish believers had the fullness of God's revelation *up until that point*. Of all that God had revealed of himself until the coming of Christ the Jewish believers lacked nothing, and it was in responding to this revelation in faith and obedience that they could be confident of obtaining all that God had promised.

Secondly, much is often made of the so-called 'holy pagans' of the OT, people like Job, Jethro and Naaman. Yet, again, these are not pagans as, in each instance, the faith of every one is in YHWH ,

the God who has specially revealed himself. How did these people come into a saving relationship with God? In many cases we are not clearly told, although the evidence points in the direction of special revelation. When Jethro meets Moses he is simply described as a priest of Midian. However, upon witnessing God's great saving acts for the Israelites over the Egyptians, he confesses, "Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods, because he delivered the people from the Egyptians" (Ex 18:11). Naaman learns of the Lord, firstly through the testimony of his Jewish servant girl, and then through his encounter with the prophet Elisha. Then he testifies, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel" (2 Kings 5:15). We are not told how Job or Melchizedek came to know the true God, but the God such men worship and serve is YHWH. They are not disenchanting idolaters. The Biblical evidence points strongly in the direction of the necessity of a special revelation from God in order for sinners to come into a saving relationship with this God. Certainly, God saved 'pagan' nations like Nineveh, but he did so when they repented at the preaching of the messenger of God. If an analogy from such people is to be drawn to the unevangelized of today it must be that God will similarly have mercy on all, both Jew and Gentile, who repent and believe the message of those whom God sends.

Thirdly, we cannot and must not divorce faith in God from belief in Christ. It is argued that in the Bible God is the object of faith, and so by implication knowledge about the person and work of Jesus is not essential²⁰. But we cannot create such a dichotomy between the Father and the Son. God is triune. True worship of God is worship in Spirit and in truth. The truth about God is that truth revealed by Jesus and focused on Jesus. The Spirit of God who reveals God to people, is the Spirit sent by the Father and the Son, and sent primarily to glorify the Son. Jesus said, "Believe in God; believe also in me" (John 14:1).

Endnotes

1. Terrance L. Thiessen, *Who Can Be Saved: Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2004.
2. See for example B Winter, 'Theological and Ethical Responses to Religious Pluralism - 1 Corinthians 8-10', *Tyndale Bulletin*. 41 (1990), 210-215, and Perry Wiles, 'Paul, Pluralism and Preaching: A Study in 1 Corinthians, in *Ripe for Harvest* ed. R.G. Gibson. Adelaide: Open Book, 2000.
3. David W.J. Gill has identified something of the variety of the religious and cultic groups of the early Christian centuries. David W.J. Gill, 'Behind the Classical Facade: Local Religions of the Roman Empire', in *One God, One Lord in a World of Religious Pluralism*. Eds. Andrew D. Clarke & Bruce W Winter, Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1991.
4. C.K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*. Vol.1. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994, p.194.
5. While it is sometimes argued that the faith expressed here is the faith of the apostles (e.g. Barrett, *Acts*, 200) this is almost certainly not the case. At Pentecost it is the hearers who are called upon to exercise faith in order to appropriate the blessings of salvation. Implicitly, it must be the faith of the paralytic that has enabled him to appropriate his wholeness.
6. Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998, p.193.
7. See Witherington, *Acts*, 143-144.
8. Barrett, *Acts*, 231.
9. Clark H. Pinnock, 'Acts 4:12 - No Other Name under Heaven', in *Through No Fault of Their Own*. eds W.V. Crockett & J.G. Sigountos. Grand Rapids, Baker, 1991, pp.107-115.
10. Pinnock, 'Acts 4:12'. Emphasis mine.
11. Pinnock, 'Acts 4:12', p.111.
12. On this point see further Michael Raiter, 'The Only Hope' in Peter Jensen et al, *The New Millennium: Christians and Hope*. Sydney: Aquila, 1999. pp. 63ff.
13. On the significance of *Dei* in Luke-Acts see William P. Loewe, 'Towards an Interpretation of Lk 19:1-10', *CBQ* 36 (1974), pp.325-326.
14. On the salvation-historical priority of the gospel being preached first to Israel so that the restored nation might then be a light to the nations, in accordance with the prophecy of Isaiah see Andreas J Kostenberger & Peter T O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2001, chap.6.
15. Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992, p.165.

16. Pinnock, *Wideness in God's Mercy*, p.95.
17. John Sanders, 'Inclusivism', in *What About Those Who Have Never Heard?* ed. John Sanders. Downers Grove: IVP, 1995, p.40.
18. John Stott, *The Spirit, the Church and the World: The Message of Acts*. Downers Grove: IVP, 1990, p.199.
19. John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993, p.146.
20. E.g. Sanders, 'Inclusivism', p.36.

Mission and City Churches – the Trained Scribe with Treasures Old and New

And Jesus said to them: “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.” Matthew 13:52

Rowena Curtis is the Senior Minister of Collins Street Baptist Church in Melbourne. She and her husband Andrew spent six years in urban ministry at the House of the Gentle Bunyip (an intentional Christian community based in the inner city suburb of Clifton Hill, Melbourne.) in the 1980s. She continued her theological studies in Sydney and co-ordinated Scaffolding, a network of people and churches involved in urban ministry. In 1994 she took up the position of Pastor of Woolloomooloo Baptist Fellowship. Rowena was the first woman to be ordained as a Baptist minister in NSW in 1999. She received a call from the Collins Street Baptist Church to be their Pastor, in 2000. In 2006 she was appointed Convenor of the Melbourne City Churches in Action. Rowena and Andrew have two adult sons.

This paper considers present and potential mission opportunities for city churches based on a sample of central city churches in the United Kingdom.¹ City churches can be likened to a “trained scribe” (Matthew 13:52) when they engage in relevant and effective mission. City churches have a unique heritage of ‘old treasures’, and unique opportunities for renewal or ‘new treasures’. Old treasures include location, history and premises; new treasures include vision, people, changing populations and new partnerships. City churches are challenged to use both the old and the new treasure to develop their potential for mission. Their unique mission is dependent on a willingness to build on their ‘old treasure’ while at the same time discerning and embracing their ‘new treasure’.

The ‘Old Treasures’

Location

Location is a key ‘old treasure’ for mission. City churches were usually built in a prominent location in the centre of the city. Often there was a clear purpose in the choice of a city location. Bloomsbury Baptist was specifically built between the poor end and prosperous end of London and was intended as a bridge between these two communities. Today Bloomsbury is still in that strategic position between Soho to the south and the University to the north. As John Rackley suggests:

The city centre is the heart of any city, the hub of the wider community and region. Historically it is the place where the earliest settlement was founded and where the subsequent development left its mark. It is the public face of the city, revealing its character. It is the location for key commercial, retail, administrative, welfare, educational and leisure activities. It is where large numbers of people work whilst at the same time it is a refuge for some of the poorest. The modern city centre has been going through slow change since the Second World War and is still trying to respond to the post-modern consumer led style of living that characterises life in our land today.²

History

In the United Kingdom city churches have a history of mission reaching back many centuries. The histories of city churches include times of stability and growth, and times of decline and renewal.

Times of growth often coincided with longer pastorates. Rev James Hinton was in ministry at New Road Baptist Church, Oxford, for thirty-five years. During this time the church was enlarged twice, a Sunday school was started, and new chapels were commenced at Woodstock, Littlemore, Eynsham, South Hinksey, Charlton-on-Otmoor and Headington. Another long pastorate began with Rev James Dann. The church was enlarged again and a new schoolroom built, and three more chapels linked with New Road were established. In this time the church began to have an influence in civic and university affairs that has continued into the present.

When the history of a city church is examined as a “tradition” composed of “a patchwork of earlier revivals”,³ it becomes clear that city churches have an opportunity in every generation to incorporate treasures old and new.

St Martin-in-the Fields’ tradition of welcome and hospitality dates back several generations. During the First World War Rev Dick Sheppard opened the crypt of St Martin-in-the-Fields for soldiers on their way to and from the front. He had a vision that the church could be a place that anyone could call home. This established an ethos of the ‘open door’. The present generation is reminded of their history of mission by a sign that reads: “The church of the ever open door.”

History and tradition provide a sound basis for city churches. Recognising the life-giving aspects of tradition and building on them is crucial, and incorporating them is also crucial. Just as important is to discern when to challenge and change an aspect of tradition that is hampering mission in the present. It is also important to discern when to challenge and resist an aspect of renewal that is not suitable. Stephen Holmes argues:

“Our historical particularity is a part of the way God has been pleased to create us, and so something to be celebrated rather than escaped from. Just so, any attempt simply to recreate or preserve the church of the apostolic age, or indeed of any other, is theologically mistaken. Rather the church exists as a historical entity ...the faith and practice of the church are passed on from generation to generation, and from culture to culture, and they are re-expressed to meet the particular needs and address the particular sins of each new context...Receiving the faith as it has come down to us, it is our task to hand it on again, with errors corrected, truths cemented, and the whole shaped to bring the unchanging truths of the gospel to bear on each new context...a church whose practices are never renewed, and a church whose practices are wholly new, are alike failing to be the church God intends them to be.”⁴

All of the churches visited had experienced long periods of decline, particularly in terms of those attending worship. However, all of them were addressing this decline and appeared to be at least in the beginning stages of renewal and growth.

This has required a willingness to embrace renewal to meet the challenges of the present. “The centre of Oxford is forever changing despite the continuing presence of so many historic buildings in the city. The move towards it becoming a 24-hour city will be something our forebears could not have imagined. However, just as they met the challenge of the need for a distinctive Baptist witness in the villages and developing communities, amongst children and in the new industrial part of the city, so we, enabled by the Holy Spirit, must be ready and willing to meet the challenges of our day.”⁵

Buildings

City church buildings are ‘old treasures’. In some cases the buildings have been somewhat neglected as a key mission resource; some are quite run down and additions over the years have not been well integrated creating a degree of inaccessibility, particularly in providing access for disabled people or young children in prams. Horfield Baptist Church is currently considering how to modernise and improve its premises for present day needs, whilst retaining its historic value.

Bloomsbury Baptist, improved their premises in a Reconstruction Scheme launched in 1962.. The basement was transformed into the Friendship Centre. Major refurbishment was again undertaken in 1998-1999.

In 1984 New Road Oxford re-opened its buildings after a major redevelopment of the site. Four floors of new halls, a new foyer that opens onto the Church’s café, and a sensitive renovation of the chapel space has made the church and its facilities more welcoming and aesthetically pleasing. At the same time the new development has been integrated with the 17th Century building overlooking Bonn Square.

The ‘New Treasures’

A Vision for Mission

The central place of the city church in many ways shapes its mission as John Rackley argues:

“A city centre Church is more than a local church. We are more than our denominational background. We are catholic Christians. We respond to more than personal needs. We reflect the cultural, social, worldwide dimensions of life today and work on an engaged spirituality...We do not exist only for ourselves. We exist because God has not left the city-centre - only Christians do.”⁶

The church can be a vital part of the city. This is true of St Nicholas in Durham, now widely known as “The Church in the Marketplace”. In the early 1980s Rev George Carey had a vision of the church as an oasis – a place of hospitality and welcome to visitors and the local community, and a place to find the resources of God’s love and grace. While the church retains its historic exterior, the inside is distinctly contemporary. The church is open for most of the day. A visit provides information about its ministries. There are clear and attractive notices of what happens in and through the church week-by-week, beautiful contemporary art works of the major symbols of faith, a chapel for prayer, a bookstall and the Gateway World Shop. It has an atmosphere of peace, refreshment, nourishment and vitality right in the centre of the city.

Many of the churches visited had discerned and developed a vision for mission through a process of rigorously scanning and understanding the needs of those who surrounded them. Adelaide Place has a Vision that has been effective for 20 years and is currently being revised through a Baptist Union consultation process. They expect new ideas to emerge for future mission, which can build on their existing ministries. Bloomsbury Baptist’s vision now includes the needs of international students living locally. St Martin-in-the-Fields is developing a Vision and Strategic Plan for all aspects of its ministry and mission. In particular it is embarking on an extensive £34 million project of building and renovation called “At the Heart - The Renewal of St Martin-in-the-Fields”. This type of renewal, at the very centre of the city, has required high level consultation and engagement with city stakeholders and all levels of government, ensuring that, while St Martin-in the Fields remains true to its traditions and purpose, it engages with the ever changing needs of the city to remain relevant and connected.

People and changing populations

Mission may be discerned and embraced when new people join the congregation. This is particularly the case when new people represent demographic changes in the city.

One of the clearest demographic changes in many cities is the increasing number of international students living and studying in the centre of the city. Manvers Street Baptist in Bath recognised that the nearby university was attracting both undergraduate and post-graduate students from all over the world. They also recognised that some of these students were worshipping in their congregation. They now run a ‘students Together’ group. This group has people from Ghana, Zambia, USA, Taiwan, Japan and China. Some of the students have become members of the church whilst others particularly from China remain atheist and are equally welcome. St Nicholas Church, Durham runs “Amigos” a meeting for international students at the church.

City churches are responding to a larger transient proportion of people in the congregations. This group includes business people on a short-term placement for their company or students attending the local University for two or three years. Bloomsbury attempts to get people involved as appropriate, even if they are only staying for six months. ‘New Road’ has started to involve this group more successfully in the life and mission of the church by inviting them to become members knowing that their membership will be for a relatively short time.

Bloomsbury Baptist intentionally works on integration of business people from several different cultures and particularly a larger group of Philipinos. They do not encourage cultural groups to be separate, as this tends to stress the primacy of nationality rather than Christianity.⁷ The church is also includes economically disadvantaged people. Homeless people are included in worship and a congregational lunch held every Sunday. Grove Road Baptist Church welcomes asylum seekers and disadvantaged young people within the worshipping community.

Horfield Baptist Church in Bristol noticed an increase in young families moving into the area and so they now provide three ministries for young families. 'Mum's the Word' is a group for young mums with babies up to six months, and 'Chatterbox' is the toddler group for children from 6 months to school age and their carers. Parenting Courses are an opportunity to discuss life with a growing family, to learn new skills and gain greater confidence in dealing with children at different ages. Adelaide Place runs a nursery for children aged 6 weeks to 5 years old, and provides childcare for parents who work in the city.

City churches often attract 'thinking people of faith'. People seek out city churches because questions about God and the Bible, life experience and social issues are taken seriously. City churches provide places where people undergoing difficult experiences are taken seriously and not fobbed off with simplistic answers. For example business people in Adelaide Place Baptist Church and two other city churches initiated the 'Business in Glasgow' project. It offers people in the corporate, government and community sectors opportunities to engage with their faith and work practice. One of their activities is a monthly lunch with a guest speaker. Issues such as: "How do I help a friend or relative or colleague who has suffered bereavement?" are addressed. Recently Abbey National Building Society has taken an interest in the project and encourages their staff to attend.

The greater diversity of a city church congregation in terms of age, ethnic background, theological views, and economic background enhances the potential for mission to the diverse population of the surrounding city.

In addition, city churches have the opportunity to develop mission to visitors and tourists. At Bloomsbury Baptist they find a number of visitors to London come to talk to a minister during the week - "needing to offload to someone, a long way from home." The renovations whereby the church was opened up to the city changed the mission of the church. Now they have church members keeping the church open during the week as they recognise the importance of a ministry to people in need. They say: "Get ready for anyone coming through the doors!" Two churches developed a Visitor's Kit for every visitor.

Creating spaces for Mission

Many city churches reach out to the people working in and visiting the city centre through opening their buildings for music and concerts. Bloomsbury Baptist holds 24 lunchtime concerts a year on Wednesdays during the months of October and November, February and March, and May and June. There is free admission and the performers and administrative volunteers give their time freely. Occasionally evening concerts are held to raise funds for charities such as Christian Aid. St Martin-in-the-Field has a concert series every Thursday, Friday and Saturday evening. These concerts charge an admission fee. The lunchtime concerts held three times a week are opportunities for young musicians to perform in this world-class venue. These concerts are free or a donation may be made.

Several of the city churches have created new spaces to operate a café as a primary form of contact with people in the city. Grove Road Baptist Church has the Conservatory Café on one side of the sanctuary. It is highly accessible and clearly visible from the street and the supermarket. It also provides easy access to the sanctuary space.

The café ministry at Manvers Street Baptist Church is described in a brochure:

"The Open House was set up by the members of Manvers Street Baptist Church... It exists because Manvers Street Baptist Church believes in hospitality. We live in a society that can feel very inhospitable. Open House is a place of welcome...It exists because next door is a place of prayer. The door into the sanctuary is always open. People gather there each Sunday to worship God. However, it is not only for use on that day so that is why the door is open. The congregation believes in the power of prayer and invite you to use the sanctuary for your own prayer. No one will bother you. There are materials there to help you pray."

A common response from people coming to the Manvers Street Café is: "This is what the church should be doing."

Several churches have created small spaces for a stall selling Traidcraft goods. These goods include tea and coffee, which have been fairly traded and pay a fair wage to the workers. This establishes a

link between the church and workers and craftspeople in the developing world. This link was extended at Horfield Baptist Church when they held a fashion show demonstrating the clothing made and printed by co-operatives in Zimbabwe, Thailand and Indonesia. St Nicholas Church Durham offers fairly traded goods through its Gateway World Shop.

Many city churches were either built with side chapels or have set aside space for side chapels during renovation works. At St Nicholas Church Durham a side chapel has been created behind a glass screen. This space is set aside for quiet and prayer. Brian Haymes at Bloomsbury Baptist, noted that “Every day people come in and use the word ‘sanctuary’ as their way of describing the space of peace and quiet they find at the church.”

The trained scribe – utilising treasures old and new

The common challenge facing city churches is the decline in congregational numbers over the past four or more decades. This has meant that the resources available for mission and maintenance have dwindled. The smaller congregations cannot meet the cost of running the church from offerings alone. The declining congregations also means a lack of volunteers to ensure the ministry and mission of the church can continue to meet the needs and to take up the opportunities of the present. There have been times in the lives of some of the churches where the resources were so low they felt they had no future.

This was the case of Grove Road Baptist church in Darlington. Fourteen years ago it had 20 people attending. The building was run down and they were trying to work out what to do. They worked with the Baptist Union of Great Britain and came up with three options: amalgamate with another Baptist church, move to a smaller building, or join an ecumenical project. At the members’ meeting someone stood up and said: “I think we should call a minister.” They called John Elliston who thought that his task would be to move the congregation to a smaller building. When he looked in the basement that was in great disrepair and full of rubbish he thought, “This would make a great youth club.” This was despite the fact that there were no young people in the church and no connections with the young people in their location. He started to realise the value of the building and its location, and came to a decision to stay and concentrate on rebuilding the church congregation and its ministry.

To this end John Ellison established several independent charities to work in close partnership with the church. These partnerships were an important asset for developing mission in the city of Darlington. A clear connection and alignment with the church was maintained through each charity’s governance structure with the church pastor holding the position of chair of each of the charities. This has proven a very successful way to address the needs of homeless people in Darlington. The relationship between the independent charity and the church is further integrated through people enjoying the café and basement ministries of the church and volunteers from the church assisting in the charities – these church volunteers have been trained to refer people to other agencies.

Partnerships may break down for various reasons. Adelaide Place had a viable informal partnership with a nearby music school resulting in students attending worship at the church and contributing to the music. A “missionary” from America joined the church and took this group and other young people out of the church to form an independent ‘church’. This then led to the end of the relationship with the music school.

This was a time of great confusion and pain for the church and the partner organisation. This seems to be especially so if the church has ‘birthed’ the partner organisation, that over time becomes independent of the church. This independence may be a structural and legal independence or independence in thinking and action.

The John Bunyan Baptist Church was the birthplace of Kaleidoscope, now a large charity working with people suffering from substance abuse. The charity gradually took over the site and redeveloped it, including the worship space. As a result the church has very little identity in the local community apart from being a support to Kaleidoscope. It has also meant that the church is less visible and accessible for people in the local area. The minister, Ken Walker said: “People in Kingston don’t really know there is a church here – there is no outside entrance to the church, people have to come through the project in order to enter the church.”

Another area in which churches are becoming clearer about their mission relates to the use of their forecourts and other outside areas for drug dealing, substance abuse, other crimes and a sleeping area for homeless people. In the case of New Road the council advised that it was not benefiting homeless people to take up residence at the front of the church. The church has put in gates at the front of the forecourt and has begun working with the council to develop a green area around the church available to the full range of people in the city. The challenge for city churches facing these issues is neither naïve acceptance nor forceful rejection. Working to provide appropriate alternatives remains a mission challenge where people who are homeless are not offered de facto 'safe' places to sleep, but are offered genuine pathways out of homelessness and addictions.

City churches – unique mission

City churches have a unique mission in the global church. It is a strategic mission not always appreciated or recognised by denominational leaders, or advocates of other models and forms of church.⁸ Neither is this strategic mission always clearly understood by the membership of the city church. Thus the mission potential of the city church may be hampered by a lack of understanding and support from without and within. The strategies that prove successful in other locations or with other target groups will not necessarily be so in the city. The city church needs its own specific set of mission strategies.

City churches will develop relevant and effective mission in the city as they build on their tradition – the 'old treasures' - and embrace renewal – the 'new treasures'. This is affirmed by a statement in Bloomsbury Baptist's Welcome kit: "Bloomsbury will be here for many years to come, a vital place of worship, witness and welcome in the heart of London."

End Notes

1. This paper is based on the author's visits to city churches in the United Kingdom in July 2005.
2. John Rackley, *The Church in the Centre*, unpublished report. Baptist Union of Great Britain.
3. Stephen R. Holmes, *Tradition and Renewal in Baptist Life*, (Oxford: Whitley Publications, 2003), p.4.
4. Stephen R. Holmes, *Tradition and Renewal in Baptist Life*, pp.4-5
5. *A Brief History of New Road Baptist Church*.
6. John Rackley, *Church in the Centre*.
7. The Afro-Caribbean black churches have grown very rapidly in parts of the UK along national lines. There has been little attempt to integrate and it appears that not much thought has been given to the needs of the second generation who want to be part of the main culture.
8. The strategic role of City churches is often not supported by Christian leaders concerned with 'church growth' models. Brian Haymes noted that denominational leaders did not believe that what Baptists call 'church' allows for serious engagement with the city's centre of power, influence, and culture. So no denominational funds are made available for ministry in and to the city centre.

Living and Working in Dialogue and Prophetic Witness¹

* * *

A reflection on Life and Ministry in Vietnam

"The author is a religious missionary priest who was born in New Zealand, trained in Australia, and is presently serving in Vietnam. His name is withheld in order not to jeopardize his person or his ministry."

Introduction and Background

The author is an ordained minister and member of an international Catholic religious missionary order, who chose Vietnam in 1997 as a mission posting. In those days, even though *Doi Moi* ('change and renewal') had been adopted by Vietnam's communist government as public and economic policies for eight years, there was still an attitude of caution evident in the lives and activities of the few religious living and working amongst the Vietnamese people. Foreign priests could have no parish ministry, and only limited contact with other priests and religious was advisable. Meetings with seminarians and other members of their own religious orders had to be arranged and conducted cautiously. In those days, there was an all-pervading sense of one's movements being watched, and of one's activities being monitored. There was freedom on the surface, but just underneath there was control: mail was regularly opened, parcels were torn open in the presence of the recipient and inspected for counter-cultural material, and e-mail was often delayed for some days while it was read – and possibly copied. One lived and trod carefully.

By contrast, the gregarious and hurrying people of Ho Chi Minh City were welcoming and friendly. In spite of Vietnam's historical experience of oppression and war, at no time did I experience any animosity towards myself as a foreigner. Because the charism of our congregation is one of genuine 'crossing over' to other cultures and language, learning the culture is the first basis for understanding and relating. So, after a year of study of Vietnamese, I was able to make friends amongst the people, and found myself accepted by them. However, because of the suspicions that would be raised if a foreigner was seen to be living with local Vietnamese, I could not live with the seminarians or the Vietnamese members of our congregation. Instead, I could only rent a small house, in the heart of one of the city's crowded residential areas. Moreover, because I could not live and work openly as a priest, I needed to have a public face, a reason to be living in Vietnam.

As a qualified English teacher, I readily obtained a teaching job in one of the foreign language centers of the National University. Teaching thus became my public ministry, and it still is today.

It is important to note here that my primary purpose in Vietnam was not to be an English teacher, but to be one of a small formation team of men from overseas, to assist in the support of the missionary congregation in Vietnam of which I am a member, and to promote the on-going development of our young men in formation for religious missionary life. Fortunately, because of the importance of the English language in mission today, my teaching skills have become the basis of fostering this development. Being an English teacher has therefore given me the possibility to live and work in Vietnam, not only to help ordinary university students reach their goals, but also to help achieve the goals of our religious congregation.

Living in Dialogue.

The concept of dialogue, for us as an international religious missionary order, does not carry the simple dictionary meaning of 'talk' or 'discuss,' which implies a formal moment. Rather, 'dialogue' invokes concepts of presence to and understanding of the other, through frameworks that accept the differences of other cultures and faiths as complimentary to one's own, rather than in opposition. In adopting dialogue as a means of integration into other cultures, we embrace three embedded aspects: the dialogue of life, of action, and of prayer and religious experience. In doing so, we acknowledge that these aspects, whilst having spiritual, scriptural and theological foundations, are not so much studied and learned, as lived.

The dialogue of life.

Living in a rented house, creating and sustaining relationships with neighbours, learning to use Vietnamese for daily communication, were my first experiences of the dialogue of life. Renting a

house and teaching English meant that my public profile was different to what it would be for a priest or religious in a Western country. In living amongst ordinary people instead of in a religious community, I learned new ways of relating to others in a cross-cultural context. This, in itself, became both gift and challenge. The gift was acceptance by others, social relationships, progress in language and cultural understandings. The challenge was that of wearing two hats: to be a teacher of English in the morning, and when meeting seminarians for teaching and discussion, a religious in the afternoon. In the evening I reflected on my life, on what had transpired during the day, and what might come tomorrow.

Yet 'two hats' implies a certain separation of these aspects of a lived life. In fact, from my point of view, there has always been an integrational dynamic. The Asian concept of the Yin and the Yang might be more appropriate: each complimenting the other, a unity in diversity, and one in dialogue with the other. Regardless of the model, the task remains to live different lives fully, yet also to balance them, without one becoming dominant over the other. In a busy Asian city, with ever more demands being made on time and availability, this has become a continuing challenge.

The dialogue of action.

Action in the context of the ordinary can be a powerful witness to the authentic Christian missionary life; in other words, a life lived as a follower of the Christ of the Gospels. Pope Paul VI, in referring to this value in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, connected social action firmly with evangelization.² In Vietnam there may be impediments to being a Christian missionary in public, but there are no impediments to Christian action. The conditions encountered on the streets of the main cities of Vietnam often demand that action be the missionary's first choice as a compassionate response to poverty. Although Vietnam boasts an economic growth figure of almost 10%, trickle-down is barely evident in real terms, and poverty continues to be one of the most serious, all-pervading limitations to the development of the country and its people.

Because all social work in Vietnam is under government control, 'Action' as response to poverty means helping at the level of individual need. The government does have an expansive social network to help people with HIV, for example, and the Catholic church contributes to these good works through volunteers and finances, but for the foreign missionary, an effective way to help is through the life-dialogue of action in the lives of others.

Although in the area where I live there are families and individuals earning a variety of incomes, nonetheless there are some whose fortunes are so low, that only with the help of the community can they make it through the day. Even given the generosity of local communities, though, resources for helping are usually limited.

Part of my work in Vietnam, in addition to teaching, has been to identify families in the immediate area whose children are in need of 'educational assistance' – paying the first month's school fees at the start of the school year, buying a school bag, shoes, notebooks and pens for the children to begin their studies.

We have had this action outreach for many years, with funding facilitated by generous contributors. Neighbours and local officials are not suspicious of such activities; in fact they are warmly welcomed. Vietnamese place a high value on generosity, and any foreigner, missionary or otherwise, who is willing to help address the needs of local communities, will soon find him or herself trusted and accepted by others.

Other projects on a larger scale are run by our congregational mother house, and include identification of needy families in poor towns and villages, providing health and educational assistance to them, scholarships for promising students from minority ethnic groups such as the Cham, HIV support projects, running an orphanage for 50 young people, and so on. This form of action as a dialogue with the needs apparent in the lives of the poor authentically follows the *modus vivendi* of Christ, whose healing removed shame, raised the social status of the individual and restored marginalized people to participation in their communities once more.

The dialogue of prayer and religious experience.

Leading an active life in one of Vietnam's busiest cities demands dedication and energy. Teaching in a language centre, the work of formation of young seminarians and the necessity of social outreach – not to mention a social life – all place demands on energy and resources. A life of activity balanced with prayer is therefore necessary if burnout is not to become a reality.

Apart from the regularity of morning prayer, I have found that a time of reflection on the events of the day in the quiet of the evening to be an absolute necessity, if the meaning of one's encounters with people and life is not to be missed. Any book on theology, missiology, spirituality, etc. can provide an appropriate framework for this inner work. In this way, one can learn to become one's own spiritual director, and by bringing the needs of neighbours and friends, associates and strangers into this time, one will readily find resolutions to their needs and the questions they raise. Insights will come into the great question of how to lead one's life. One must know how to dialogue with one's self if effective dialogue with others is to take place.

From a wider point of view, the government of Vietnam takes care to publicize the fact that people are free to follow a religion, or to choose not to follow. Certainly, a tour of Catholic churches on a Sunday morning will reveal crowded congregations, and on religious feast days, pagodas are so jammed that entry seems almost impossible. Therefore in Vietnam, a country wherein 90% of people would claim to follow Buddhism, one is surrounded by signs and symbols of a religious nature. Pagodas and temples outnumber churches and chapels, shrines are evident along city streets and village tracks, and most (if not all) houses would have a family altar or shrine, on which are placed pictures of the ancestors, with offerings of flowers, fruit and incense. At any time, one can be invited to accompany friends or neighbours to a religious event of some sort: a Buddhist celebration (the Buddha's birthday or the mid-August festival, for example), a Catholic wedding, or a Buddhist funeral.

Buddhist funerals are quite public, and are possibly the most accessible form of religious experience that a missionary (or any foreigner) can participate in.³ Buddhist funerals are generally noisy, and the celebratory mourning period will last for three days, before burial or cremation on the morning of the fourth day. If a neighbour has died, one is free to approach the family house (where the coffin is placed) and offer condolences, usually in the form of incense and a donation, and to participate in the final farewell ceremonies. The dead will be remembered formally for three years on the day of passing away, with a gathering of family and friends, at a remembrance meal. With many families, the anniversary will continue to be celebrated every year after that, to which one will most surely be invited.

To be invited by a Vietnamese friend, family or community to participate in cultural celebrations such as a wedding or a funeral is a marker of liking and friendship, and is highly indicative of the quality of dialogue that has taken place prior to the invitation, and to its effectiveness. However, it can be a challenge for the missionary to accept, within him or herself, for the spiritual dimension of the Buddhist funeral is as deeply meaningful for Buddhists as the Catholic funeral is for Catholics, and to participate in it accordingly, with respect and acceptance, rather than to view it from a distance, through a lens of the comparison of differences is necessary. One needs to be a multiculturalist, a pluralist and an anthropologist all at once!

There are many forms of religious experience that the missionary can encounter as single events. Although Vietnamese society seems not as sacralized as in Thailand or the Philippines, it has been my privilege as a missionary to discover, through dialogue with prayer and religious experience, traces of the sacred that exist in this culture and which permeate all life, regardless of being designated 'religious' or not. In ten years I have come to know the Vietnamese as a spiritual people, whose daily connection with the sacred indicates clearly to me that Christ lives and walks amongst them.

Living in Prophetic Witness.

The Catholic bishops of Asia have expressed the view that mission in Asia needs to be done in three-fold dialogue: with the poor, with culture, and with other religions.⁴ For myself as a missionary, living and working in Vietnam, these three resonate accordingly. In my life and work, I am daily surrounded by and immersed in these three aspects of the one society. The missionary and the visitor can be distinguished by their response to these: the visitor comes briefly, observes them as different – 'not like what we have at home,' – and goes away. The missionary comes and lives these three aspects,

makes them his or her own, and stays. In accepting what is challenging and different, the missionary witnesses in a prophetic way that what has been found in another land is actually complimentary to what is already known and valued.

In living the life of dialogue amongst the people of another culture, the missionary proclaims and witnesses to Christ, already present in the culture, and to the kingdom of God, coming about and yet to come, as a transcendent reality:

In sharing the life of the poor, and by acting in whatever way reduces poverty, the Christian missionary witnesses to its evil nature, and speaks out against the structures that perpetuate it. In living amongst ordinary people, the missionary brings to local communities a ministry of presence, through living a simple life of integrity and faith. Such a life can be, for others roundabout, a witness in opposition to consumerism and greed, to indifference and to selfishness.

By participation in local religious ceremonies, the missionary accepts what is sacred to the community. He or she therefore acknowledges and witnesses to the sacred that is present in all faiths and cultures.

It is my belief that as a missionary who happened to choose Vietnam as a place to live and work, I have been privileged to have found, circumstantially as it happens, a way of living in service amongst ordinary people that has been fruitful, life-giving and missionary. It is my hope that one or two others might come to join us in Vietnam, to take up a new paradigm of witnessing to the life of Christ, not through the known frameworks of parish-based mission, but through the unknown context of a rented house down a crowded alley, and to allow the Spirit – the principal agent of the Good News, according to *Evangelii Nuntiandi* – to speak through the witness of their lives.

End Notes

1. These terms can be found and explored further in Bevens, S. and Schroeder, P. "Constants in Context – a Theology of Mission for Today." New York: Orbis Books, 2004.
2. Here I refer to evangelization not according to the commonly understood definition of proclaiming in order to convert, but having the meaning of the original Greek: 'to announce the Good News' by imitating the words and deeds of Christ. See Bevens and Schroeder above, p.352.
3. Wedding invitations will be more numerous than funerals, but because the public aspect of Buddhist weddings is a social celebration only, and not religious, I have not included them here. Catholic weddings, however, are always religious celebrations.
4. Bevens, S. and Schroeder, R. (2004). Op cit, p.349.

Book Reviews

God Next Door: Spirituality & Mission in the Neighbourhood

By Simon Carey Holt

Published by Acorn Press, Brunswick East, Australia, 2007

God Next Door is very much an Australian book. Its immediate context is suburban Australia, particularly Melbourne, but its thesis is applicable anywhere people live in groups.

Simon Carey Holt teaches in spirituality and practical theology at Whitley College, a recognised teaching institution of the Melbourne College of Divinity. He has a particular interest in the theology of neighbourhoods. In *God Next Door*, he explores the concept of neighbourhood in three ways:

1. Neighbourhoods in Australia now – how they have changed and how they have formed their current traits of urbanisation, privacy and refuge, and mobility (constant moves by neighbours).
2. Neighbourhoods in the Bible – the call to neighbourliness and the call to neighbourhood.
3. Neighbourhoods and Mission – practical steps (“disciplines of engagement”) for individuals and churches to seeing local neighbourhoods as places of mission.

His thesis is that mission is encapsulated by the two commands of Jesus – “You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength” and “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Luke 10:27). He sees neighbourhoods as the forgotten places of mission. The book is a book of encouragement to any Christian to look anew at his or her neighbourhood as a place for mission, not just a place to live.

The author holds firmly to the view that God is everywhere (“revealed and encountered in *place*”) and is therefore in our neighbourhoods, and it is the Christian’s task to bring God to the surface of the neighbourhood. The book encourages both individuals and church communities to look at their local surroundings in this light and to take appropriate action. He contends that individual Christians and churches largely ignore their neighbourhoods and their needs because of preoccupation with where we are going rather than where we are. This ignorance needs to be addressed, and can be addressed. We need to learn to see God in places like our neighbourhoods where we don’t normally look. His practical “Exegetical Walk”, whereby readers are invited to walk round their neighbourhoods noting its features using a list of questions as a guide, is an excellent starting point in this regard.

The author has a gift for writing clearly and for organising his material logically. Refreshingly, he avoids esoteric theology and has produced a book of encouragement, especially for the person in the pew as well as ministers and pastors. Each of its three main sections has a concise introduction and summary, and the book follows a logical sequence. The book is pastoral and practical. It is studded with appropriate everyday anecdotes from the author’s daily life and experience – anecdotes any reader can identify with.

It is not a book pushing for house churches in every street. The author believes that Christian communities need to be varied and suited to the specific needs of individual places - no one model of Christian community is the answer to mission. What the author does push for, however, is renewed neighbourhoods, and suggests that renewal comes from naming (or owning) our neighbourhoods, helping our neighbourhoods to celebrate, nurturing our neighbourhoods, and using our neighbourhoods to point the way to Jesus.

The extensive endnotes and recommended reading list contain very useful references for further reading.

My only (minor) criticisms of the book are that I think more emphasis could be placed on the vital role children can play in creating cohesion in neighbourhoods, and the increasing need for neighbourly inter-faith interaction.

This book is a fine example of ‘grass-roots’ theology, beginning where people are. It is positive, encouraging and inspiring. It should have wide appeal and has much to say to ministers, church

administrators, missiologists and people in the pew. It is a worthy addition to the growing number of books on Australian theology and mission, and makes a great Australian companion to Sri Lankan Wesley Ariarajah's book on neighbours and mission – *Not Without My Neighbour*.

Ross Mackinnon
Yarra Theological Union
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Concepts of Mission: The Evolution of Contemporary Missiology, by Francis Anekwe Oborji (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006) pp.xvi,240. Bibliography, Index.

Francis Oborji, a Nigerian diocesan priest, is professor of missiology at the Pontifical Urban University in Rome. This is an edited version of his doctoral thesis.

It is a clear and comprehensive description of the development of Roman Catholic Mission Theology since the beginning of the 20th century. In the first section the author identifies some of the basic issues in contemporary Catholic Mission Theology, briefly describing the contribution Vatican II. He also indicates the directions in which theologians seem to be going. He also addresses the role that missiology can play in theological education. The presentations are clear and helpful.

The second part of his book offers historical perspectives on Roman Catholic Missiology (it should be mentioned that he does address developments in Protestant missiology, but only minimally and one might almost say in passing). He identifies these as: mission as conversion; mission as church planting and church growth; mission as adaptation and inculturation; mission as dialogue with religions; and mission as *missio Dei* and service of God's reign. The strong points in these sections are two. First, it is obvious that he has read widely in the writings of the early Catholic Mission Theologians in their original languages, whether that be German, French, Spanish or Italian, and has summarized the thought of these pioneers in a very clear fashion. For any student of missiology who wants to know about the early development of Catholic Mission Theology no better text than this could be recommended. He acknowledges the contributions of even some very minor authors, almost as if he did not want to leave anyone out. Second, he presents these developments as a continuous one, not sharply dividing them between before and post Vatican II. Therefore he is able to locate some of the post-Vatican II theologians in the "traditional schools". However, this does not work well for all of his categories. The developments in inculturation, dialogue with religions, and *Missio Dei* are too dependent on the Vatican II and post-Vatican II sources to suggest that there is a continuity with earlier mission theology.

In the third part of his book he addresses new perspectives. He identifies two: mission as ecumenical dialogue, and mission and the contextual theologies. The chapters are well done. However, while mission definitely has to be carried out ecumenically and therefore be accompanied by ecumenical dialogue, this reviewer found it difficult to identify mission itself with ecumenical dialogue. Also one cannot help wondering if contextual theologies are not the result of mission rather than the task of mission.

This is a very useful book, and this reviewer found himself underlining passages for future reference. But he hopes that the author will consider rewriting this book in a number of years, identifying the trends more clearly and leaving out the abundance of unnecessary detail, needed in a thesis but not in a book. He would also hope that the priest-worker movement in France (*Mission de France*) would be recognized for the important contribution that it made to Roman Catholic Mission Theology in the 1950s and 1960s. It is interesting to note that Timothy Yates in his *Christian Mission in the Twentieth century* (1996) sees the worker-priest movement as one of the most significant missionary movements in the Catholic Church in the 20th century, yet it does not even rate a mention in this volume.

Larry Nemer, SVD

Larry Nemer, SVD, has been teaching Missiology since 1962 in theological schools in the U.S.A (Chicago), Vietnam, Philippines, the U.K. (London), and Australia. He served as President of Missionary Institute London from 1998 until 2004. He currently lectures at Yarra Theological Union.

Reviewed by Darren Cronshaw

Encountering New Religious Movements: a Holistic Evangelical Approach,

Irving Hexham, Stephen Rost, & John W Morehead II, General Editors, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004

Another evangelical but more explicitly missiological approach to new spirituality can be found in some of the articles of *Encountering New Religious Movements*. The authors are North Americans and Australians who are engaging apologetically and missiologically with new religious movements. The North American writers provide introductory and methodological chapters and a chapter on cross-cultural mission to Latter-day Saints. The Australian chapters include Harold Taylor's discussion of contextualised mission in history (especially in Celtic and Muslim missions) and then most of the practical applications.

Philip Johnson and John Smulo discuss reaching Wiccan and Mother Goddess devotees – seeing them as a subculture with their own customs and traditions to understand, and John Smulo similarly works toward a contextualized apologetic to LaVeyan Satanism. Ruth Pollard explores sacred oils and the gospel (a good chapter for anyone interested in arguments over complementary medicine). Philip Johnson evaluates the festival booth ministry of Community of Hope with new age and do-it-yourself seekers, explaining their change from an adversarial and dismissive approach to one of dialogue and cultural understanding. In another chapter Philip explores the challenges of reaching a Bible-based group like the Christadelphians. Ross Clifford reframes a traditional apologetic to reach “new spirituality” seekers, arguing for the centrality of the resurrection, debunking myths that new spirituality seekers are not interested in factual discussion and metanarrative, and engaging rather than dismissing culture.

The paradigm shift the whole book espouses is to move away from being confrontational and aggressive with what has traditionally been called ‘the cults’, and seek to incarnationally and sympathetically understand the culture of people in what is better termed ‘new religious movements’. Rather than basing ministry on mainly refuting heresy and asserting correct doctrine (as in Walter Martin's *The Kingdom of the Cults*), the authors espouse an approach that includes cross-cultural missiological methods including worldview analysis and cross-cultural communication.

The world is shrinking and innovations in travel and communication (let alone religious consumerism) bring a smorgasbord of religious options. The challenge is not just to hold up the cross to protect the church and our children, but to take the cross to this variety of cultural groups in evangelism. There is plenty of room for further development of these ideas and their missiological application to other new religious movements.

Darren Cronshaw is a student and teacher of practical theology and trains leaders with the Baptist Union of Victoria and Forge Mission Training Network.

Reviewed by Darren Cronshaw

Stirrings of the Soul: Evangelicals and the New Spirituality,

Michael Raiter, Sydney: Matthias Media, 2003

Michael Raiter, newly inducted Principal at Bible College of Victoria, uses a biblical lens to analyse the new spirituality that he sees pervading not just alternative spirituality festivals, secular bookshops and the internet, but also the rising popularity of charismatic and mystical Christianity. He explores the Australian religious and cultural context including our consumer culture, stressed-out generation and postmodern era. He explains the appeal of the new spirituality in terms of contemporary hunger for relationship, thirst for experience and desire for a non-judgmental, inclusive, therapeutic and inner-directed spirituality.

From a Reformed Anglican perspective, Raiter disagrees with viewing festival attenders and other religious shoppers as 'seekers' (preferring to stress their nature as 'hidiers' from God because of sin). He focuses on a call to a word-based spirituality that is discerning about charismatic or mystical variants. For Christians who are longing for something more in their spirituality, he cautions against any suggestion that certain well-proven guidelines are the way to know and feel God's presence.

The writer levels critique as his own branch of the church too, for example its lexical preoccupation with 'the gospel' and 'Bible teaching' as a kind of shibboleth for authentic ministry (rather than focusing on Jesus that the gospel is about and Christian maturity that Bible teaching is directed towards). He comments: 'I suspect that for many of us there is a certain emotional security in talking about a set of propositions, and an accompanying emotional unease in talking about a waiting Father, a loving Saviour and an indwelling Spirit' (p.231). This is part of what I consider is the best and final chapter on 'Thirsty evangelicals' where he honestly asks whether there is something about evangelicalism that contributes to spiritual dryness. He makes courageous critiques of dry intellectualism and/or emotional manipulation, meaningless repetition of choruses and/or emotionless stoic hymn-singing, and ignoring the Bible and/or preaching it without excitement. He urges a balance of Bible and experience, suffering and joy, prayer and doctrine, and emotion and intellect. He stresses that spirituality, at least for Paul, is more about living a life of righteousness than preoccupation with inner reflection.

I would have loved to have read more on Jesus as a model for spirituality and the connection of true spirituality with mission and justice. The new spirituality can become so inward and personal that outward implications are seen as optional. Raiter reminds his readers of the relevance of Pauline spirituality for sanctification, but how spirituality relates to following Jesus in mission is just as pressing a need. Understanding the unsatisfying influence of new spirituality on my neighbours is a helpful start, but I am looking for other creative, Jesus-centred and authentically spiritual approaches to engaging them with the fresh living water of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is terrific that *Stirrings of the Soul* gets us thinking in those directions.

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Reviewed by Darren Cronshaw

The New Believers: Re-Imagining God,
Rachel Kohn, Sydney: HarperCollins, 2003

Rachel Kohn has taught religious studies in universities but is more well known for her religious documentaries on ABC TV and her weekly Radio National program *The Spirit of Things*. Her book *The New Believers* explores how a diversity of spokespeople and religions are reshaping their spirituality and conceptions of God. The myriad of opinions she draws on are from mainstream religious leaders (priests, rabbis, gurus, psychotherapists and theologians) and non-institutional expressions of people interested in higher aspirations and values. She discusses how these 'new believers' are re-imagining God to embrace Westernised Buddhism, environmentalism, the arts, the self-help movement, spiritual psychotherapy, scientific discoveries and/or new readings of the Bible. Recognising that old ways and rigid formulas are not working for many, especially women, she generally applauds experiments and fresh questioning as an aid to renewal:

The most significant ingredients in all the trends that are represented by the writers, researchers and thinkers whose ideas are discussed here is their open critique, their unfettered research and their daring exploration into new expressions of faith, all of which contribute to the richness of our religious culture. It is not only the challenge that they pose to the individual which is to be valued, but also the wake-up call they send to the religious establishment, which often can be impervious to the currents of change affecting its congregations and perplexed by demands it has not foreseen (p.194).

Nevertheless Kohn is discerning about the undermining of morality and the danger of religious extremism. For example, she questions the dismissal of morality in Neale Walsch's popular *Conversations with God*. She argues it is imperative Islam changes its approach to *jihad*, *shariah* and honour killings. And she condemns the catastrophe of sexual abuse in churches and domestic abuse in Jewish households. Rather than holding back out of a misguided sense of political correctness or sensitivity, she contends we need to call religions to account for their shortcomings as well as celebrate seeds of renewal.

Darren Cronshaw is a student and teacher of practical theology and trains leaders with the Baptist Union of Victoria and Forge Mission Training Network.