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# ANVIL

Journal of Theology and Mission

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CHURCH  
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Mission Education

**VOL 36, ISSUE 2**



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# **WELCOME TO THIS EDITION OF ANVIL**

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ANVIL: Journal of Theology and Mission  
**VOL 36, ISSUE 2**

**Cathy Ross**

# THE EDITORIAL

## THE FRUITS OF OUR INTERNATIONAL HUI

**Welcome to this bumper issue on mission education. We are really excited to publish this great crop of articles, all of which (bar one) emerged from our hui in July 2019.** We hosted this hui for around 35 people involved in theological education from around the world. Hui is a Maori word for a particular type of gathering in which not only ideas but also our lives and communities are shared. Had we been in Aotearoa/New Zealand (NZ) we would have all slept in the same meeting room, but, sadly, I did not think we could manage that in this English context! Maybe I was too risk averse? We were from all over – Kenya, the Philippines, USA, Australia, NZ, Scotland, South Korea, South Africa, Germany, the Netherlands and England. The idea was to have a gathering that was not too structured so that, to a great extent, we could create the agenda and content together. So for four days we listened to one another; we dreamed, created, innovated and learned together.

What follows in this issue of *Anvil* is some of the fruit of those four days together. Some reflect on the nature of theological education today, some on the particular contexts for it and some give us examples of their practice. Sadly, we could not include all the presentations given but here is a good selection.

What strikes me on reading all these articles is the untapped potential there is in theological education. We can be so much more creative in our delivery, our content, who is involved and what we even think theological education is! I think currently COVID-19 has revealed that to us. Of course, for many it is a tragedy and has caused loss and suffering, but it is

also an opportunity to reset, to rethink and reimagine our world and how we want to live in it. It is also a fantastic opportunity to rethink what we believe theological education to be and how we learn and teach. Even prioritising learning over teaching might be a good start! As the prime minister of Aotearoa/New Zealand said at a VisionNZ Conference reflecting on the country's future after COVID-19, "Let's build back better." This is what these articles offer us – an opportunity to see, to dream and to begin to "build back better".

The scene and context were wonderfully curated for us by Lori and Richard Passmore, who created four different physical habitats for us to inhabit and ponder. You can read more about how that worked out and the ongoing impact on our gathering in Lori's article.

John and Olive Drane pick up on the theme of space and place in their article, which walks us through a house to explore theology and spirituality. All sorts of theological insights emerge when we wander from room to room and begin to ask questions that emerge from the space of the kitchen, the dining

room or the bedroom. Keeping with the metaphor of home, Jonny Baker and Cathy Ross use the metaphor of theological homelessness as the experience of many pioneer students. They experience a kind of theological homelessness before they can begin to find their way home to their own understanding and expression of theology. This suggests that getting lost may not be such a bad thing as long as there is a supportive environment to help you find your way home again. Anna Ruddick takes this further by exploring the notion of theological accompaniment and where that idea can lead us in our learning together. She advocates for whole-person-in-community learning and uses

**"What strikes me on reading all these articles is the untapped potential there is in theological education. We can be so much more creative in our delivery, our content, who is involved and what we even think theological education is!"**

the delightful metaphor of embrace as a way of experiencing this. Karen Rohrer explores a similar theme by relating her experience of teaching and living out community practices in her church in Philadelphia, USA, where they developed a number of key postures to help them engage with their local community.

René August from South Africa asks some important questions that we would all do well to heed: what kind of theological education can form, inform and transform all who participate in it? How can our reading of Scripture help us relocate our founding and framing narratives into a life of vulnerability, humility and of decentring power? She reflects on these questions in her South African context and suggests some helpful lenses through which to see and begin to unpack these questions. In a very different context, in London, Ian Mobsby offers a critique of mission and evangelism by challenging commodified and business approaches and calling for a more *ancient future* perspective.

Steve Aisthorpe was not at the *hui* but his article is included as it sets the scene for the wider context in the UK. His research is fascinating and is a study of church leavers in Scotland. He found that although many may leave church, they are not necessarily leaving the faith; that for many Christians who have left church, asking questions and exploring doubts is important for their faith. However, they did not find church a welcoming environment in which to do this. This is vital for us to remember in our theological formation – that asking questions, being curious, dreaming dreams, exploring doubts is key to our Christian formation and discipleship. Remaining in Scotland, Sandy Forsyth continues this theme by making a plea for pioneer training in Scotland to be innovative. He hopes that incubators of creativity might renew and enliven the whole church in Scotland.

On the other side of the world, Mark Johnston tells the stories of the “Listening in the Neighbourhood” mission education programme in Aotearoa/New Zealand. This resulted in innovation and incubation in several communities, one of which developed a solar farm and community empowerment project. This led to all sorts of amazing spin-offs including a partnership with a local polytechnic college and funding for a community chaplain and community organiser. James Butler offers three intriguing metaphors for designing a way of training that takes gift, co-creation and dialogue seriously. The metaphors are co-navigators, map-making and treasure chest. The group used these to help them think through how education could be genuinely mutual and reciprocal.

Esther Mombo and Pauline Wanjiru from Kenya write movingly about the centrality of grandmothers in community and family education and of the importance of not only listening to but also learning from them. Henry Mwaniki, also from Kenya, provides us with a fascinating case study of a programme called “Financial Freedom for Families” and how this pedagogical approach has been helpful in the two different contexts of Kenya and Switzerland.

I hope that in the reading of these articles you are inspired, challenged and provoked to try out new things, new ways, new ideas of engaging in theological education. These articles and the ideas explored within them remind us that with creativity, courage, support, perseverance and vulnerability – as well as a willingness to make mistakes – anything is possible. Now we have the opportunity “to build back better” so let’s get on and do just that!

**Dr Cathy Ross** is head of Pioneer Mission Leadership Training Oxford and lecturer in mission at Regent’s Park College, Oxford University. Until 2016 she was the general secretary of the International Association for Mission Studies. She has previously worked in Rwanda, Congo and Uganda with NZCMS. Her publications include *Women with a Mission: Rediscovering Missionary Wives in Early New Zealand*, (Auckland: Penguin, 2006), *Mission in the 21st Century: Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission* (ed with Andrew Walls, London: DLT, 2008), *Life-Widening Mission: Global Anglican Perspectives* (Oxford: Regnum, 2012), *Mission in Context* (with John Corrie, Ashgate, 2012), *The Pioneer Gift* (with Jonny Baker, London: SCM, 2014), *Mission on the Road to Emmaus*, (with Steve Bevans, London: SCM, 2015), *Pioneering Spirituality* (with Jonny Baker, London: SCM, 2015) and *Missional Conversations* (with Colin Smith, London: SCM, 2018). Her research interests are in the areas of contextual theologies, world Christianity, feminist theologies and hospitality.





# CURATING THE SPACE

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Lori Passmore



**Having both been involved in fresh expressions, pioneering and emerging church communities for some years, in June 2019 my husband Richard and I were invited to join a *hui* that CMS were facilitating in Oxford. *Hui* is a Maori word for gathering, a space where participants traditionally come not only to share ideas but also share lives and do community together. Our brief was to create an introductory session for international participants engaged in theological education and learning.**

Our starting point has always been to look at how an idea can be expressed in a creative way. Exploring something from a different perspective offers new insight and engages parts of ourselves we might not always be in touch with – like our imagination. We have planned together a number of conferences so were used to working in this way – but more often with a very particular group of people, usually from a similar cultural context. When we were asked to lead the introductory session for the CMS *hui*, we knew that one specific consideration had to be the international diversity of the participants. How do you create something that transcends language and cultural difference?

We played with the idea of creating different themes for people to engage with such as colours or the elements of earth, air, fire and water but felt these could be restricting, culturally determined and perhaps not accessible enough. We decided instead upon creating a number of habitats or zones. We came up with five we felt would be most relevant and universal: urban, jungle, river/sea, desert and mountain.

To offer breadth, we framed these five habitats as both physical and metaphorical spaces. For example, urban could also be: buzzing, industry, stifling. Jungle: natural, wild, ecosystem. River/sea: refreshment, inspiration, drowning. Desert: hot, adaptation, solitude. Mountain: barriers, adventure, awe. We hoped that these examples would spark ideas and make the habitats multi-interpretational, contributing to the participation equality and shared learning spirit of the *hui*.

We didn't just want these to be cerebral ideas – we wanted our session to also be visually impactful and to physically create these zones within the space, initially envisaging long swathes of fabric pouring from a central point, which participants would encircle. However, fabric is expensive and so with a trip to our local scrap store we found the more cost-effective alternative of ribbons. We also wanted height and so we built a central obelisk from which the ribbons flowed out, a bit like a maypole (see image). We also had painted signposts that identified

each of the habitats. The room we led the session in was large with lots of natural light, which gave plenty of scope for creating what we wanted.

Prior to the *hui* we asked if participants could be invited to bring with them a photo or object that represented a



community they belonged to – either where they physically lived or, for example, one based around a hobby or mission community.

The space was set up in advance. Having that physical, visual impact on entering really helped set the tone – there is theatre and intrigue, and perhaps trepidation. What do people feel when stepping into a space that doesn't look like what they're expecting? It's something we also do when running our annual fresh expressions days in Cumbria; we want to say, "This is not business as usual – expect the unexpected." When this functions really well, this can create a TAZ or Temporary Autonomous Zone. This term, coined by Hakim Bey, expresses the notion of a temporary experience that can effect change, a moment of community.<sup>1</sup> It's not something that can necessarily be tangibly described or pinned down – but it is the creation of a meaningful temporary (shared) experience.

To start the activity, we welcomed everyone and explained the process: that they should introduce themselves, what object/photo they had brought and place it in the habitat where they felt that object best sat and tell us why. The second part of our activity was to give everyone a stone and ask them to place it in a habitat they were drawn to: the habitat/zone they best functioned in or went to when they needed to be

<sup>1</sup> Hakim Bey, *The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1991), [https://hermetic.com/bey/taz\\_cont](https://hermetic.com/bey/taz_cont).

resourced. We asked them to sit with others who had also placed their stone in those habitats and discuss.

The initial activity worked well as an introductory exercise, not only because it introduced the person but also as it gave insight into the varied communities they belonged to. Anchoring this with an object gave focus and also physical presence – at the end we could see where all the objects were placed (see pictures). What really made this experience work were the items and stories people shared. We heard candid stories, insightful stories, personal stories. People made themselves vulnerable – there was a real sense of trust and openness in the room that was very special.



The habitats too worked well – in fact better than we had expected. What was interesting was that people gravitated towards the metaphorical examples we had given rather than necessarily coming up with their own or going for the physical geography of the habitat. Some metaphors had a subsequent influence on the rest of the *hui*; for example, the metaphor of “ecosystem” became a strong theme.

The second part, where people gathered together in the different habitats, helped people to engage with each other with more focused direction. Why had they chosen to sit in that particular habitat? What was it about that space that resourced them? What was it about that habitat that drew them? It helped to flesh out and animate that habitat into a more rounded concept.

This introductory activity could be seen as a catalyst to the creation of a TAZ, not only of the whole event but also the physical space. Whenever we met in that room we were drawn back by the installation, to the stories shared and the metaphors explored.

Bishop John V. Taylor spoke of Jesus’ experience of temptation in the wilderness and identified three kinds of power to resist: the power to provide, the power to possess and the power to perform (or the three Ps). Resisting the three Ps was somewhat negated at the *hui* due to the shared learning nature of the event. The installation was left up for the entirety of the *hui* and was incorporated and used by others in subsequent aspects of the conference. For example, it was used for worship, where we tangled up and cut some of the ribbons. Allowing people space to engage, play, be inspired, take and change your concept is one that should be celebrated and encouraged. Try to hold your concepts lightly.

When we were planning this activity, our hope was that it would provide a different and informative introductory session. In fact it surpassed our expectations, not only in how it set the tone for the *hui* but also how it organically influenced other aspects of the conference. It captured people’s imagination in a way we hadn’t envisaged and allowed them to find language for some of the ideas subsequently generated. We are not saying that if you come up with creative ideas for creativity’s sake, they are all going to work well. Sometimes things just don’t quite translate. But what we would encourage is be playful, push ideas beyond the realms of the expected in the hope that others will journey with you into this new space. Don’t give up; if something doesn’t work once, try again, try something different, listen to other voices.

How you curate a physical space, whether that’s simply how you seat people or more elaborate physical installations, sets the tone – it tells a story or narrative that’s going to lead them, as participants on this learning journey. So thinking about space is important. What size room are you in? How is it lit? Are you constrained by layout? What could you add/change/take away? Where will speakers stand/sit? What functionality do you need – for example, projectors, flipcharts, etc.? Will participants need space for laptops or paper and pens? How many people are there?

At one conference we ran, the physical space was quite dark and we were limited as we could not hang things on the walls, and so instead we projected images onto the ceiling and used artificial lighting to create atmosphere. But it doesn’t have to be that dramatic – how could you change a space with tables and chairs? Cover the table in paper for drawing, wind wool around the chairs, place mirrors on the tables facing participants... the only limit is your imagination – but make it relevant to what you will be exploring, or the theme of the event.

The number of participants can also influence the environment. At the *hui* there was a small enough number that we could work together as a group. In a setting with larger numbers you can create this “small-group” feel by working around tables or grouping

people together either randomly or around a shared interest or learning.

If the room is your set piece, what are the participants? How they interact with the space is what makes it come alive. However, you want to try to resist the three Ps (power to possess, perform and provide) or it could become more about leaders performing and participants spectating. Rather, you want to bring down that fourth wall to envisage a space where the differentiations between spectators and performers are blurred, where all become “spect-actors” involved in both the creation and spectating of the event.<sup>2</sup>

Creating the right activities and asking the right questions will help participants engage with the space in a meaningful way. The introductory session we facilitated at the *hui* worked on two levels; firstly it told us about the participants and where they came from, and secondly it gave a more intimate engagement than the usual “tell us about yourself” slot. As an ice breaker it worked well as we kept it open and simple enough that everyone could feel comfortable contributing, but it also gave a more nuanced insight into the “person”. It gave the activity a cohesive feel where all contributed equally to the process.

Although not intentional, this introductory activity threaded itself throughout the conference, an echo of that TAZ concept. If we had been running the whole conference, we would have done this in a much more intentional way. Having something as an anchor helps to tie everything together and also influence the flow and content. Again, think about what you are wanting to say – don’t try to force ideas to fit a theme; how can

the theme help influence the ideas? An example is a conference we ran called Threads – we played with the idea of untangling, untying the knots, weaving or knitting together. Give your idea enough breadth that it can give you plenty of material to play with.

It doesn’t have to be grand – if this is all new for you, keep it small, make one change to the usual. Look for inspiration in the communities around you, nature, the

internet, social media, art, science – you’ll be surprised how a small “what if” can grow into a fully rounded idea. Think big: even if you don’t use some of it, you can always scale back or think how a big idea – “let’s have a rowing boat in the space” – can become a more practical one – “let’s get everyone to make origami boats out of paper”.

Our experience of curating this space for the *hui* was a positive one, and it gave a real energy to the start of the conference, bringing together a diverse group of people – some of whom knew each other, others not.

We subsequently went on to use a variation of the idea at our fresh expressions day in November. Our encouragement to you would be: if you’ve not tried to do this before – give it ago. If you already do this – share your ideas; it is great to learn from one another. Let’s together create spaces that are pushing us, and participants, out of our comfort zones: as much mirroring a different way of being as creating one.

“How you curate a physical space, whether that’s simply how you seat people or more elaborate physical installations, sets the tone – it tells a story or narrative that’s going to lead them, as participants on this learning journey.”

**Lori Passmore** works for God for All in Cumbria and has been writing creative youth work resources for the past 15 years for various publications. She is a trustee of Frontier Youth Trust and involved in two fresh expressions in Cumbria: Mountain Pilgrims and Maranatha Yoga. She lives with her husband, teenage daughter and lovely views of the fells.



2 Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, 3rd revised edition (London: Pluto Press, 2000).





# THE INVISIBLE CHURCH: *SO WHAT?*

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Steve Aisthorpe

## THE BACKSTORY

**Research emerges from human stories. Studies may sometimes masquerade as detached processes, but the motivation to investigate and develop new understanding comes from somewhere.** In 2007, after 12 years living in Nepal, I returned to the village in the Highlands where I spent my formative years as a Christian in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In the years prior to my departure for Asia, the parish church in this village had been a healthy and vibrant one. In 2007 the congregation continued to display many of the same characteristics as before. However, what struck me after an extended absence was the number of people who, having been enthusiastic members of the congregation in the mid-1990s, were no longer involved. In the months following my return I met many of these people. Most of them still lived in the area and, from our conversations, in most cases, their Christian faith appeared to be central to their lives. Knowing that this church had been through challenging changes of leadership during my absence did not lessen my heartache, but it did provide an explanation for why so many people had disengaged from the congregation.

The following year I began work as a development officer for the Church of Scotland, working with congregations around the Highlands and Islands. It soon became apparent that what I had assumed was a particular local issue was in fact a widespread phenomenon. As someone whose ecclesiology was shaped by Lesslie Newbigin's view of the local congregation as the "primary reality" in terms of Christian influence in society and the "only hermeneutic of the gospel",<sup>1</sup> I felt distressed by what I saw. The much-quoted story of the Victorian preacher Charles Spurgeon visiting a man who said that he was a Christian but did not believe he needed to go to church shaped my concern for the church leavers I encountered. According to that anecdote, Spurgeon removed a glowing coal from the smouldering embers and set it in the corner of the fireplace. The lone coal soon lost its glow. Separated, it cooled and dulled. The message was clear: without regular churchgoing, Christians step onto a slippery slope into diminished faith or apostasy.

## EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE AND LOOSE STEREOTYPES

Deeply troubled, I wanted to understand and began to look for research that might shed light on such a rapid and monumental change in the Christian community and in society. In 2007 Tearfund published their "Churchgoing in the UK" report.<sup>2</sup> This captured the overall pattern of church attendance and produced differentiated data for Scotland. According to this, 39 per cent of people in Scotland considered themselves "dechurched"<sup>3</sup> and the proportion of such people was highest in rural areas.

The excellent Church Leaving Applied Research Project,<sup>4</sup> one of the few serious attempts to understand what one researcher called "a haemorrhage akin to a burst artery",<sup>5</sup> found that two thirds of church leavers in England and Wales continued to practise the Christian faith. Philip Richter and Leslie Francis's first analysis of that project was titled *Gone But Not Forgotten*. However, the situation I was seeing in the north of Scotland might be better expressed as "Forgotten But Not Gone".

Although the Church Leavers Applied Research Project demonstrated that the majority of the "dechurched" remain committed believers, what their faith journey beyond the congregational context looked like remained largely unknown. Others writing from within the church context approached the statistics of declining attendance with an assumption that decreasing numbers in church services constituted an undermining of God's mission and must be reversed. Michael Fanstone expressed his motivation for researching church leaving in terms of being concerned about "leakage" and a consequential "weakening of Christian influence in the nation as a whole".<sup>6</sup>

The quality of some research made my heart sink. One study, reported in *The Times* under the headline "Petty squabbles cause empty pews", portrayed church leavers as petty-minded people who left for trivial reasons: "It is not the big doctrinal issues. Typical arguments take place over types of buildings, styles of worship, youth work. If not that, then they argue over the flower rota."<sup>7</sup> However, examining the methodology behind this influential study (it underpinned a major

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<sup>1</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 227.

<sup>2</sup> Jacinta Ashworth and Ian Farthing, "Churchgoing in the UK: A research report from Tearfund on church attendance in the UK" (April 2007), [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/03\\_04\\_07\\_tearfundchurch.pdf](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/03_04_07_tearfundchurch.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> That is, former churchgoers, no longer engaged with a congregation.

<sup>4</sup> This extensive and rigorous project is reported in two accessible publications: Philip Richter and Leslie J. Francis, *Gone But Not Forgotten: Church Leaving and Returning* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1998) and Philip Richter and Leslie J. Francis, *Gone for Good? Church Leaving and Returning in the 21st Century* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Peter Brierley, *The Tide is Running Out: What the English Church Attendance Survey Reveals* (London: Christian Research, 2000), 236.

<sup>6</sup> Michael J. Fanstone, *The Sheep That Got Away* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 1993), 23–28.

<sup>7</sup> Ruth Gledhill, "Petty squabbles cause empty pews," *The Times*, 25 August 2005.

conference, training materials and a popular book)<sup>8</sup> revealed that it was based on surveying 500 people, 98 per cent of whom “attended church regularly”. What had actually been discovered was the opinions of those who remained in congregations about those who left. The experiences and perspectives of church leavers themselves remained unexplored.

In my search for reliable literature, one of the most helpful studies came from Alan Jamieson in New Zealand.<sup>9</sup> Taking a qualitative approach, Jamieson listened to both sides of the institutional exodus, carrying out interviews with church leavers and church leaders. His approach yielded a rich understanding of the experiences and perceptions of the group he worked with. However, his cohort was limited to people of particular theological traditions (evangelical, Pentecostal and charismatic) and his focus was on a particular age group (70 per cent between the ages of 35 and 45). Also, most of his sample (94 per cent) had been involved in church leadership. Despite these limitations, a strength of this work was the attention paid to the faith journeys of people following their disengagement from congregational life. When his work is considered as a whole (i.e. including the follow-up research five years after the original study),<sup>10</sup> Jamieson made valuable progress towards his stated ambition of developing “a credible framework of understanding in an area where there is much misunderstanding, loose stereotypes, often downright ignorance and sometimes arrogant misjudgements”.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to researchers from within the Christian community, social historians and sociologists were also reflecting on the statistics of declining church attendance. The work of Callum Brown,<sup>12</sup> and Steve Bruce,<sup>13</sup> typifies the work of academics who saw the data of declining church attendance as evidence of a rapid march of secularisation. For them, reduced churchgoing was synonymous with declining Christian faith. However, the only way to test that assumption would be to listen to the people behind the statistics.

## GETTING BEHIND THE STATISTICS: LISTENING TO LEAVERS

By 2012 I was beginning to conceive an exercise in “empirical theology”: I wanted to listen to those who had disengaged from church, better understand their experiences and perspectives and then reflect on the significance of what was happening. The first project, which eventually formed the basis of my doctoral thesis, involved an inductive study of “churchless Christians” in the north of Scotland.<sup>14</sup> Using articles in local newspapers and social media, it was surprisingly easy to recruit nearly 100 people who were Christians and not attending a local church congregation. From these, 30 people, representative in terms of gender, generation, location and experience of church, were selected. Each person was asked to tell their story as far as it related to the Christian faith and their experiences of church. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and the texts analysed for themes using qualitative data analysis software. These themes then formed the basis of theological reflection with a variety of facilitated groups.

This study put human flesh on the statistical bones of previous research. It demonstrated that a revised understanding of the Christian community in the Highlands and Islands was necessary. It highlighted the need to reconsider popular notions about the resilience of faith. It offered new insights into routes into non-congregational faith and the process of church leaving. Themes that emerged strongly from multiple interview transcripts included: a perceived lack of relevance of congregational life to “the rest of life”; the change-resistant nature of some congregations; a missional concern among “churchless Christians” and perception that congregations are sometimes inwardly orientated and resources focused on self-preservation; a hunger for deeper relationships and Christian growth and a perceived superficiality in relationships and discipleship in some congregations.

Other findings from this first study provided a hypothesis for understanding processes of unintentional exclusion in congregations and raised important questions about congregation-centric views of mission. The place of the congregation in

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<sup>8</sup> Ron Kallmier and Andy Peck, *Closing the Back Door of the Church* (Farnham: CWR, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Alan Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith: Faith Journeys Beyond the Churches* (London: SPCK, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Alan Jamieson, Jenny McIntosh and Adrienne Thompson, *Church Leavers: Faith Journeys Five Years On* (London: SPCK, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith*, 17.

<sup>12</sup> Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800–2000* (London: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> Steve Bruce, *God Is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> Steve Aisthorpe, “Listening to and learning from Christians in the Highlands and Islands” (DMin Thesis, Glyndŵr University / University of Wales, 2016), 179.



the traditional orthodoxy of missiology (in Newbigin and Bosch, for example) is primary and central; the congregation is seen as both the agency of mission and the fruit of mission.<sup>15</sup> In the light of such an understanding it may seem paradoxical, even heretical, that “most interviewees [in this first study] implied that, on balance, it was a concern for the missional challenges in their area (and the fact that these had not been adequately met or even taken seriously by the local congregation) that were decisive motivators for their disengagement from the congregation”.<sup>16</sup>

One striking and paradoxical finding of this qualitative study was that, having disengaged from a formal congregation, the first instinct of most of those interviewed was to find fellowship with other Christians. For some this was informal face-to-face gathering; for others it involved long-distance or virtual fellowship. While “congregation” has traditionally been interpreted in terms of an institutional expression of church, most of this study’s cohort, while agreeing with the incarnational and relational imperatives of mission propounded by Bosch and Newbigin, would understand this in terms of “believing community” experienced in small, informal gatherings, virtual networks and dispersed communities. Examples included a growing fellowship centred on eating and walking together; a dispersed group sharing spiritual practices and meeting occasionally in a disused shop; people who had reconstructed their faith life around a rule of life, supported by a long-distance relationship of accountability with an *anam cara* (soul friend); people who saw their business or social enterprise activities in terms of kingdom and mission.

## FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS: GETTING QUANTITATIVE

While that first study provided rich insights into the experiences of church leavers, the small sample size and qualitative methodology meant that it was impossible to assess how representative their experiences were among the wider population. The need for quantitative data led to the 2014 “Investigating the Invisible Church” study.<sup>17</sup> A random sample of 5,523 people was contacted by telephone and 2,698 participated in an

interview in which screening questions ascertained whether they self-identified as Christian and whether they were regular churchgoers. 44 per cent self-identified as Christians not attending church. 430 people who fitted the criteria returned postal or online questionnaires.

Embedded within the survey was a psychometric tool, the Hoge Intrinsic Religiosity Scale (HIRS). One review of instruments for measuring religiosity said that the HIRS “is by far the most accurate measure of what I think is at the heart of religious devotion – relationship with and commitment to God”.<sup>18</sup> Half of the cohort were high scorers on the HIRS, meaning that 22 per cent of the random sample interviewed not only identified themselves as “Christian”, but also showed that their faith was of central importance to them. A foundational article on the concept of religiosity says that people with high levels of *intrinsic religiosity* “find their master motivation in religion. Other needs, strong as they may be, are regarded as of less ultimate significance... It is in this sense that he [or she] *lives his religion*”.<sup>19</sup>

The survey also revealed that it should not be assumed that all “churchless Christians” are “church leavers”. 15 per cent of the cohort indicated that they had never been regular churchgoers. The general picture that emerged was of people who were disappointed with church, but not with God – and who had a sense of belonging to the wider church. Most participants revealed themselves as “contentedly non-congregational”, with only a minority (15 per cent overall and 17 per cent of HIRS high scorers) saying that they would attend church if a different style was available.

Over half (57 per cent) of all respondents reported that they “decreased attendance gradually over time”; about a fifth (22 per cent) said they “left suddenly”. The reasons why churchgoers disengaged was usually a mixture of a few recurring themes. Regardless of age, previous experience of church, HIRS score and gender, about a quarter (27 per cent) agreed with the statement “I used to go to church but felt that I didn’t fit in”. Frustration with a perceived change-resistant culture of churches was a common thread, with just

<sup>15</sup> Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 227. David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 519.

<sup>16</sup> Aisthorpe, “Christians in the Highlands and Islands,” 179.

<sup>17</sup> Steve Aisthorpe, “A Survey of Christians in the Highlands and Islands who are not part of a Church Congregation,” *Rural Theology* 12, no. 2 (November 2014): 83–95. An un-refereed article is freely available at [www.resourcingmission.org.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/Rural\\_Theology\\_article\\_Oct2014.pdf](http://www.resourcingmission.org.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/Rural_Theology_article_Oct2014.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> Harold G. Koenig, *Spirituality and Health Research: Methods, Measurements, Statistics, and Resources* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2011), 229.

<sup>19</sup> Gordon W. Allport and J. Michael Ross, “Personal religious orientation and prejudice,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 5, no. 4 (1967): 434.



over a third (35 per cent) saying that the church needed “radical change”. 35 per cent agreed with the statement “changes that happened within me led to me stopping attending church”. Another key factor for many was issues related to “relevance” and the sense of a disconnect between church and the “rest of life”.

## A RURAL PHENOMENON?

When sharing the findings of these studies, a regular question was “what about the rest of the country?” With that in mind and wondering whether our findings were related to the cultural distinctives and extreme rurality of northern Scotland, in 2015 telephone interviews were conducted with a random sample of people across the rest of Scotland. Contact details were purchased in accordance with postcodes to ensure equal numbers of participants from five representative regions: rural east, urban east, rural west, urban west and (sometimes an outlier in religious statistics) Aberdeen and environs. The question schedule explored similar territory to the research in the Highlands and Islands and callers made calls until sufficient data was collected to be assured of statistical rigour. 815 surveys were completed and revealed negligible differences between the different regions and similar findings to the Highlands and Islands. Reflections on these first three research projects were written up for a wider readership in *The Invisible Church* (2016).<sup>20</sup>

## FIVE YEARS ON

In 2018, 68 people from the original interviews and “Investigating the Invisible Church” survey were reinterviewed or resurveyed in a “five years on” study. Although a small sample, these were people about whom we already knew a lot. Their contributions changed our previous snapshots into a longitudinal study, enabling us to see and better understand the dynamics of their journeys in life and faith.

Among those reinterviewed, most were still pursuing their faith in non-congregational ways. These people described the habits and connections they had formed in order to sustain their well-being and growth. A few had re-engaged with a church congregation during the intervening years. Invariably, these people reported differences in the nature of their relationship with the congregation when compared to times prior to disengaging. Typically, they described being less involved and feeling more on the fringe. Some people described how they had become part of a new faith-based community of some sort. For some this was the outcome of their intentional actions; for others this happened in an almost subconscious way, as they responded to opportunities and found themselves at the nucleus of an emerging group.

“Among those reinterviewed, most were still pursuing their faith in non-congregational ways. These people described the habits and connections they had formed in order to sustain their well-being and growth.”

Those who were resurveyed completed two psychometric questionnaires, the Francis Psychological Types Scales (FPTS) and the New Indices of Religious Orientation (NIRO). The first measures “preferences” in aspects of psychology. A helpful comparison is with handedness. If we are left-handed, we will be able to use our right hand for some tasks but will prefer using the left. For some people a preference will be strong and for others it may be less so.

The FPTS assesses the psychological preferences of people with regard to four pairs of opposites. The first, *extravert–introvert*, concerns the ways in which people gather psychological energy. The second, *sensing–intuitive*, relates to the ways in which people receive information. *Sensing* types focus on the five senses, facts, details and practical realities in the here and now; *intuitive* types are more concerned with meaning and possibilities for the future. The third spectrum relates to the ways in which people make decisions and judgements: *thinking* types make judgements based on objective, impersonal logic; *feeling* types give more attention to subjective factors and personal values, and tend to prioritise harmony. Finally, attitudes towards the outer world are concerned with which process, *judging* or *perceiving*, is preferred. *Judging* types are orderly and decisive and reach conclusions swiftly; *perceiving* types are open,

<sup>20</sup> Steve Aisthorpe, *The Invisible Church: Learning from the experiences of churchless Christians* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2016).

spontaneous and flexible, gathering information for as long as possible before making decisions.

Studies of psychological type in church congregations invariably show an over-representation of people with a preference for *sensing* and an under-representation of *intuitive* types. As explained in *The Invisible Church*, when discussing the tendency for change-resistant cultures to develop in church congregations, this means that the typical congregation is dominated by people whose natural preference is for the conservative and conventional, those who tend to favour what is well known and well established. “Whereas *intuitive* types tend to be open to change and innovation, *sensing* types find the uncertainty and doubt involved to be distressing.”<sup>21</sup> Research shows that *sensing* types are inclined to view traditional expressions of Christianity more positively.<sup>22</sup>

Countless studies also show a dominance of *feeling* types and a relative scarcity of *thinking* types in church congregations. The findings of the “five years on” study are explored in more depth in *Rewilding the Church* (2020),<sup>23</sup> but for our purposes here, a key finding was that among Christians not engaged with a church congregation, a much higher proportion of people demonstrated a preference for *thinking* than would be expected in typical church congregations. This finding among our modest sample reinforces the data from a study with a larger sample looking at the differences between churchgoers and church leavers. That found that all of the types most significantly over-represented among church leavers included a preference for *thinking*. If you are wondering “so what?”, you should know that there is now abundant evidence showing that a person’s psychological preferences make important and tangible differences to how they engage with the Christian faith and community.<sup>24</sup>

Those who have studied the kinds of community in which *thinking* types thrive report that they need an environment that offers intellectual stretching, welcomes logic and encourages questioning.<sup>25</sup> Those

who have investigated the prayer lives of people with diverse psychological preferences observe that those with a *thinking* preference favour an approach to God that is rational and intellectual and are likely to struggle with acts of corporate worship and teaching planned and delivered by people with a strong *feeling* preference.<sup>26</sup> Whereas the majority in church congregations who prefer *feeling* find prayer and worship to be emotional activities, for those relatively rare *thinking* types spirituality has a strong cerebral element.

## RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF QUEST

The other aspect of psychology investigated in the “five years on” research is also important. The concept of “religious orientation” has had a major impact on the psychology of religion in recent decades. Beginning with the groundbreaking work of Gordon Allport in the 1960s,<sup>27</sup> psychologists began to recognise that the essence of people’s religious faith has *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* orientations. *Intrinsic* orientation “regards faith as a supreme value in its own right... A religious sentiment of this sort floods the whole life with motivations and meaning”.<sup>28</sup> People with a strong *extrinsic* religious orientation “find religion useful... to provide security and solace, sociability and distraction, status and self-justification”.<sup>29</sup> As psychologists continued to develop this line of enquiry through the 1970s and 1980s, they found that to better understand the motivations of religious faith it was important to assess a third orientation. This has been termed *quest* orientation. “The quest orientation gave recognition to a form of religiosity which embraces characteristics of complexity, doubt, tentativeness, and honesty in facing existential questions.”<sup>30</sup> For a person with a strong *quest* orientation, exploring questions is at the heart of their faith. These people “display openness to change and a readiness to embrace new perspectives. They freely admit that there are many religious issues

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<sup>21</sup> Aisthorpe, *Invisible Church*, 118.

<sup>22</sup> L.J. Francis and C.F.J. Ross, “The perceiving function and Christian spirituality: distinguishing between sensing and intuition,” *Pastoral Sciences* 16 (1997): 93–103.

<sup>23</sup> Steve Aisthorpe, *Rewilding the Church* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2020).

<sup>24</sup> *Rural Theology* has published several articles that demonstrate associations between psychological type and how people study Scripture and engage with church. For example, Leslie J. Francis and Susan H. Jones, “Searching for the Lost Sheep (Matthew 18:10–14): Do Sensing Types and Intuitive Types Find Different Things?” *Rural Theology* 17, no. 2 (2019): 106–13.

<sup>25</sup> Malcolm Goldsmith, *Knowing Me, Knowing God: Exploring Your Spirituality with Myers–Briggs* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 78–79.

<sup>26</sup> Bruce Duncan, *Pray Your Way: Your Personality and God* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1993).

<sup>27</sup> Gordon W. Allport, “Religious context of prejudice,” *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion* 5, no. 3 (Autumn 1966): 447–57.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 455.

<sup>29</sup> Allport and Ross, “Personal religious orientation and prejudice”: 434.

<sup>30</sup> Leslie J. Francis, “Introducing the New Indices of Religious Orientation (NIRO): Conceptualization and Measurement,” *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 10, no. 6 (2007): 588.

on which their views are still changing”.<sup>31</sup> Doubt is seen by those with a strong *quest* orientation as being fundamental to faith.

To correctly understand religious orientation, it is important to realise that we all display elements of *intrinsic*, *extrinsic* and *quest* orientation. Even if one orientation is dominant, there will still be indications of the others at work. A growing body of evidence supports the observation that “how you score on one component says precisely nothing about how you will score on the other two. The three are independent dimensions.”<sup>32</sup>

What the “five years on” study revealed was that Christians who are not engaged with a local church congregation are often high scorers in terms of *quest* orientation, and for 40 per cent of our cohort *quest* orientation was the dominant component. These are people for whom asking questions and exploring doubts is fundamental to their faith. This data reinforces the previous observation that “when eager disciples cannot find in church the space and companionship they need to explore questions and doubts, they seek these things elsewhere”.<sup>33</sup>

## SO WHAT? SOME REFLECTIONS FOR PIONEERS

It is hoped that readers may be inspired to dig deeper into the data and reflections outlined here. Those with an interest or vocation in mission and pioneering will want to consider how insights from these studies inform an understanding of what God is doing, identify a source of potential pioneers beyond the congregations, and highlight the need for expressions of church that take seriously some of the insights of those who have been “forgotten, but not gone”. The following reflections are offered as starters for those who engage with this research from the perspective of “dreamers that do”<sup>34</sup> and who seek to “find out what God is doing and join in”:<sup>35</sup>

Any simplistic notion of the missional context being

what is sometimes conceptualised as “the 85 per cent” or “90 per cent” or “92 per cent” (according to different denominations and networks) of the population that has no significant engagement with church needs to be reviewed and revised. The evidence is clear that the population beyond current congregational life is far from homogenous in terms of experience of church and attitude to Christian faith. A substantial proportion have considerable experience of church, see themselves as part of the worldwide Christian family and are actively pursuing the Jesus Way.

The search for those with an aptitude and vocation for pioneering mission needs to stretch beyond church congregations. Many Christians with “the gift of not fitting in”<sup>36</sup> have moved away from congregations dominated by “guardians of the status quo”.<sup>37</sup> Others, having encountered the pioneer Jesus outside the setting of congregational Christianity, have chosen to practice faith in a non-congregational way. While it has often been observed that pioneers are to be found “on the edge”,<sup>38</sup> the data suggests that many have moved beyond the edge.

Pioneering efforts, especially those where an anticipated outcome is a worshipping community, tend to focus on populations defined by social categories such as generation, interest group, housing or stage of life. However, insights into psychological type show how some less visible characteristics are highly influential in how people experience faith and community. Indeed, research in fresh expressions of church suggest that these are inadvertently providing environments in which certain psychological types can thrive. Whereas church congregations in general contain a preponderance of *sensing* and *feeling* types, data from fresh expressions shows high proportions of people with psychological preferences that are uncommon or rare in conventional church contexts.<sup>39</sup>

The relatively high scoring on the *quest* religious orientation scale among Christians who are not engaged with a church congregation adds support to the notion that lack of opportunity to “ask questions

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*: 598.

<sup>32</sup> C. Daniel Batson, Patricia Schoenrade and W. Larry Ventis, *Religion and the Individual: A Social–Psychological Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 174.

<sup>33</sup> Aisthorpe, *The Invisible Church*, 67–68.

<sup>34</sup> Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church: Dissent for Leadership* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1993), 7.

<sup>35</sup> Rowan Williams, “Archbishop’s Presidential Address – General Synod, York, July 2003” (14 July 2003), accessed 27 January 2020, <http://aoc2013.brix.fatbeehive.com/articles.php/1826/archbishops-presidential-address-general-synod-york-july-2003>.

<sup>36</sup> Jonny Baker and Cathy Ross, eds., *The Pioneer Gift: Explorations in Mission* (London: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2014), 1.

<sup>37</sup> Baker and Ross, *Pioneer Gift*, 10.

<sup>38</sup> Dave Male, *Pioneering Leadership: Disturbing the Status Quo?* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2013), 14.

<sup>39</sup> Leslie J. Francis, Judy Clymo and Mandy Robbins, “Fresh expressions: reaching those psychological types conventional forms of church find it hard to reach?” *Practical Theology* 7, no. 4 (2014): 252–67.

and explore doubts” is an important part of the “road to post-congregational faith”<sup>40</sup> for many church leavers. Pioneering ventures that create opportunities for asking questions and exploring doubts in non-threatening and non-judging contexts may foster discipleship and community with those who have experienced “unintentional exclusion”<sup>41</sup> in some inherited church cultures.

The majority of church leavers become disappointed or frustrated with inherited modalities of congregational life in general, rather than the worship style, polity or theological flavour (although these things can be important factors for a minority of church leavers and many church switchers). It is not surprising, therefore, that many non-congregational Christians who display an aptitude for pioneering often seem to use their pioneering gifts towards the “community activism/ social enterprise” end of that continuum, rather than as “church replicators” or pioneering adaptations of a recognised model of church – in terms of Hodgett and Bradbury’s “Pioneer Spectrum”.<sup>42</sup>

When mission is understood in terms of the “Five Marks of Mission”,<sup>43</sup> many non-congregational Christians are actively involved in the mission of God. Some of those encountered in the course of the research outlined here are pioneers of loving service, creation care or social action.

While there appears to be a general reluctance among church leaders to ask Christians who are not involved with a local church congregation about their experiences and perspectives, people approached in the course of the research outlined here were invariably pleased to be asked and willing to share. Many reported that it was the first time they had been asked to recount their experiences. The Church Leaving Applied Research Project found that 92 per cent of their respondents had

not been contacted by the congregation they left in the period following their disconnection.<sup>44</sup> Pioneers should be reassured that, when approached with genuine, non-judging curiosity, and offered confidentiality, many people are willing to share their journey in faith – and appear to be blessed by the experience.

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<sup>40</sup> Aisthorpe, *Invisible Church*, 65–69.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 83–86.

<sup>42</sup> Tina Hodgett and Paul Bradbury, “Pioneering Mission is... a Spectrum,” *Anvil* 34, no. 1 (2018): 30–34.

<sup>43</sup> Anne Richards and the Mission Theology Advisory Group, “The Five Marks of Mission,” last modified 29 November 2017, [www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/MTAG%20The%20Five%20Marks%20OF%20Mission.pdf](http://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/MTAG%20The%20Five%20Marks%20OF%20Mission.pdf).

<sup>44</sup> Richter and Francis, *Gone But Not Forgotten*, 145.





# INTRODUCING MISSIONAL THEOLOGY THROUGH EXPLORATIONS IN SPIRITUALITY AND CREATIVITY<sup>1</sup>

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John Drane and  
Olive Fleming Drane

**Back in the day, it was easy to profile the sort of person who would sign up for a course in theology. Male, bookish, socially conforming, somewhat intellectual, perhaps more interested in ideas than in people, and single-mindedly committed to a lifetime vocation in parish ministry.** That's a caricature, of course, but like all caricatures it is sufficiently grounded in reality to be instantly recognisable. Some theological training institutions still cater predominantly for such individuals, and in the context of a mixed economy of church they will continue to exercise an important ministry. Alongside that, however, a renewed awareness of the missional context in which we now find ourselves is leading to a recognition that we need a wider spectrum of theological models if we are to have any hope of connecting with the growing number of people in the wider community who know nothing of the Christian story and have no interest in learning more about it, still less in getting involved in the life of the church. The recognition of pioneer ministries as fully authentic forms of Christian vocation is a step in the right direction, though it has also highlighted the need for appropriate forms of theological education to equip and empower pioneers with understanding of the cultural context, and skills that will facilitate the birthing of new forms of faith communities.

## LEARNING AND TEACHING

Previous generations often joked about the way that new insights emerging on the west coast of the US would take 20 years to make it to the east coast, and as many again to cross the Atlantic and be embraced in a British context. The timescale is much reduced in today's world of instant communication, and in terms of church life, it is no longer the case that the most perceptive understandings are coming from North America, though that is the trajectory for the model we wish to share here. Following the death of our baby daughter, Olive found renewal not in her previous world of physics and medical science but in the creative arts, and specifically clowning, and it was the quest to explore this in relation to Christian ministry that initially took us to Berkeley (California) and the Graduate Theological Union, where Hebrew scholar Douglas Adams had established a unique programme in art and theology, including clowning.<sup>2</sup> While there, we received an invitation to visit Fuller Seminary in southern California to lead a one-off workshop integrating whatever we thought we knew about art, theology and spirituality.

On a warm August evening, some 70 or 80 people gathered on Fuller's Pasadena campus for an experience

that turned out to be life-changing for many of those who attended, and we were subsequently invited to create an entire course module along the same lines. The challenge was deceptively simple: how to craft a course that would be creative, interactive and spiritually formative, with theological integrity and missional relevance – while also being academically rigorous as it would be available to students enrolled in masters' and doctoral programs, some of whom would have no previous formal background in theological studies. For good measure, it also needed to integrate with the professional qualifications offered within Fuller's School of Psychology. While the mix is different, there are many similarities between this and the sort of individuals who are now embarking on a vocation in pioneer ministry.

The two of us brought different skills to this enterprise. John's starting point in theology had been in biblical studies, and while that included classic disciplines like Hebrew and Greek his thinking had never been far from the interface of faith and culture, due largely to the influence of his undergraduate personal tutor, who had previously served as a missionary in India and applied that cross-cultural perspective to studying the Bible. John subsequently gained a doctorate focused on Gnosticism, an ancient pathway that finds many echoes among today's spiritual searchers, who can often be the most receptive to the gospel if only we can work out how to contextualise it into the sort of categories that they find meaningful. So it seemed natural that we would combine all that with Olive's new-found expertise in theology and the arts to develop a course that would serve as an introduction to missional theology while preserving theological integrity and academic rigour in disciplines as diverse as cultural and media studies, missiology, church history, biblical studies, psychology and practical theology – while also being spiritually formative. At the time, some other faculty members at Fuller Seminary were working to develop what eventually became the Brehm Center for Worship, Theology, and the Arts,<sup>3</sup> and they supported us in dreaming dreams, with no fixed expectations of what might emerge.

## REFRAMING THE TRADITION

What did emerge was a course based not on a traditional theological paradigm, but on something familiar to the everyday experience of people everywhere: the image of a house (or home) around which everything else would be arranged. It could be thought of as our own house, or the students' houses, or indeed God's house, and using this model we

<sup>1</sup> See also John Drane, "Learning for Mission," in *Anvil* 32, no. 1 (2016), which sets the scene for much that is discussed here. <https://churchmissionsociety.org/resources/learning-mission-john-drane-anvil-vol-32-issue-1>.

<sup>2</sup> For a more extensive reflective account of all this, see Olive M. Fleming Drane, *Clowns, Storytellers, Disciples* (Oxford: BRF, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.brehmcenter.com/>

decided to inhabit each of the rooms in turn as a way of exploring key themes in contemporary theological reflection within a formative environment. Historically, a house of one sort or another has always been central to intentional spiritual formation, most often as a place of community where students would live together and in which academic learning and personal formation were part of a single residential experience. That can still be found in some places, though more often the commodification of education and the privatisation of spirituality, along with financial constraints, have conspired to separate the two, and as a consequence theological educators often struggle to maintain an appropriate balance between academic learning and spiritual formation. It is easy to lament what has been lost, but turning the clock back is not an option. The reality is that the only point at which many of today's students are going to be fully engaged is in formal class meetings: indeed, for more of them than are willing to admit it, this probably becomes their *de facto* "church". This assumption was built into our thinking right from the start, as we explored how we might combine information and formation as part of a holistic educational experience in such a way that it would create spaces for personal transformation.

This required some fresh thinking about the context for learning. We knew that to create a safe space combining cognitive and affective learning, time would be of the essence – lots of it. We settled for four-hour sessions that could fit into a morning (8 a.m.–12 noon), an afternoon (1–5 p.m.) or evening (6–10 p.m.), which over 10 weeks (or 10 days of intensive classes) gives 40 hours of class time. We planned to visit a different space in the house in each session and with a similar pedagogical model, focused especially on an inductive, interactive and reflective perspective that would be grounded in the participants' own experience. Presentations in various modes would sit alongside other activities designed to explore affective aspects of the topics. These might include music, song, movement, drawing, collage, ritual, mime, play – though not all in the same session! Then there would always be at least one or two breaks for coffee and informal conversations.

## STEPPING THROUGH THE DOOR

“We explored how we might combine information and formation as part of a holistic educational experience in such a way that it would create spaces for personal transformation”

In the rest of this article, we describe in more detail how we have used this paradigm, before offering some reflections on what has been accomplished vis-à-vis more conventional ways of studying theology and some of the challenges it poses to inherited models. Unsurprisingly, the journey begins in **the porch**, where we unpack the baggage we bring with us and the expectations we have. At this very first meeting we will focus on students' experience of the wider culture rather than personal baggage, and then set it all in the context of the bigger picture of cultural change, exploring understandings of modernity, postmodernity and so on – while always asking where God might be found in the chaos (the *missio Dei*). Numbers will always determine how the time can be allocated most usefully, but giving everyone as much of a voice as they need is important for establishing the sort of open ethos that can ultimately enable positive formative experiences.

After the porch, the journey could obviously go in many different directions, though we soon discovered that the order in which we visit different spaces is really important if we are to facilitate a growing sense of safety in the community of the class.

Typically **the living room** might come next, which we describe as a place where we tell stories. This time it will be more specifically our own personal stories, which easily and naturally connects with themes of narrative theology and creative ways to use the Bible, engaging with classic hermeneutical approaches as

well as practical models for working with youth, or older people, or whatever contexts might be most relevant to the members of the group. After that we usually visit **the garden** with themes of creativity, beauty and imagination, starting with God as Creator and the *imago Dei* in relation to humans as co-creators, combined with practical explorations of the place of the arts in ministry and mission in relation to the heritage of whatever denominational streams might be represented in any given group of students. Other questions might focus on who we could meet in natural environments (pagans and other spiritual searchers, perhaps), with some attention then to environmental theology as well as practical missional outcomes such as Forest Church – and often some ritual involving living plants as a reflection on spiritual growth. In an ideal location such as southern California, much of this can happen outdoors at any time of the year. In the UK we might

need to be more creative!

Back inside, **the basement** (or loft or garage, as culturally appropriate) will be next – where we are sorting through the debris from the past and deciding what to keep, what to discard, and what to recycle or reimagine so as to be serviceable in a new context. This might involve our own journeys of faith, maybe an introduction to stages of faith, as well as inherited traditions from our various ecclesial contexts and their usefulness or otherwise in new contexts – often explored through play with some of the discarded stuff to facilitate engagement with topics such as communication in different historical eras. Next comes **the kitchen**, where we might expand on some of these issues, as the place where community happens – a natural introduction to questions that can be problematic for some Christians, exploring the nature of faith and how much (or little) of it is required in order to actually belong in the community of Jesus followers. This frequently involves in-depth examination of some New Testament texts, though other themes can easily feature here such as the relationship between personal temperament and spirituality, and between discipleship as action and theology as reflection, inspired by insights from non-western theology or more broadly the discipline of practical theology and reflective praxis.

## CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY

At this point in a 10-week quarter we would be halfway through the course, and students generally recognise by now that this is a safe space where no questions are off limits – but more than that, their personal vulnerabilities will be respected. So, with a mixture of apprehension and excitement, we head to **the bedroom**, themes of which hardly need to be spelled out but include the whole spectrum of relationships in today's homes. Participants' own stories are especially important here as there will inevitably be many sensitivities and lifestyles that some students might find challenging. In the current Christian environment it takes a good deal of skill to navigate all that, though historical exploration of family structures can help, along with the recognition that different cultures have different relational norms. Pastoral and evangelistic needs and opportunities might be explored alongside narratives that are already present among the group, together with biblical passages and case studies. Whatever happens in this room, the next one is always **the bathroom**. Here we can deal with the inevitable pain that the bedroom invokes, addressing issues of

alienation and embarrassment, invariably focused around the therapeutic potential of mask-making, which not only reflects themes like revealing, washing, forgiveness or cleansing, but also creates a space for having messy fun in the process as well as rediscovering practices of the ancient church that are often lost in some traditions (things like confession, anointing, blessing and so on).<sup>4</sup> We might also include a liturgy of reconciliation between women and men, which can be both scary and liberating, not only for the words but for the format of sitting on the floor with women encircling the men.

Having spent two days in these personally challenging spaces, going into **the study** can be a relief for some. Here we might explore how thinking, feeling and doing relate to one another, perhaps working on our own preferred ways of processing information, along with research on communication and its implications for the church's mission. But the central theme will be around the question of how to reflect theologically, exploring the nature of practical theology as an integration of cognitive and affective understandings of God and spirituality. After the study, we head to **the construction site**, working on what a makeover might look like. Here we will reimagine the (literal and metaphorical) space: drawing the plans as a way of clarifying the meaning of key values such as gospel, spirituality, mission, church and so on; gathering the materials that we need for the rebuilding; dreaming about a renewed community of disciples; and working out how to get from here to there – which will include the nature of diverse ministries, partnerships, giftings, vocation and entrepreneurship.

**The street** outside may be the last call as we leave the house to engage with the wider community and explore what it is like to share faith on non-church territory. This might embrace new atheism or new-age spiritualities along with topics such as the spirituality of sport or (in southern California) life on the beach, set in a context of models from Scripture, history and our own experience – all of it while exploring the relationships between creation, incarnation and mission. Of course, the street need not be the end: the possibilities are limitless, constrained only by the imagination. Others that we have included from time to time are **the entertainment centre** (TV, movies, music, digital media), **the wider neighbourhood** (shopping, advertising, spirituality of place) and **the people next door** (different people groups, celebrities, disability, social and political allegiances).

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<sup>4</sup> See Olive M. Fleming Drane, "Making Masks, healing persons, and teaching Practical Theology," available at <http://www.spiritualjourneys.org.uk/pdf/MTAGOlivespaperwebversion.pdf>.



## LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE

This is only one example of a way in which we might think creatively about theological education, though as an introduction to doing theology through the lens of mission we manage to cover a lot of ground in ways that connect with traditional topics in the theological curriculum – Bible, history/historical theology, hermeneutics, missiology, liturgy – as well as insights from the social sciences, which are essential for effective mission (cultural studies, ethnic and gender studies, art and play therapy among others), all of them combined in such a way as to create a fresh synthesis that enables new dimensions of personal formation to be a natural outcome, as well as helping students to identify subjects that may be worth further exploration in other courses. Following the success of the course described here, we went on to develop other courses that extend many of these concepts, including dedicated courses on narrative theology and storytelling, creative arts and the Bible, theology and culture, and Celtic spirituality, as well as courses on the Old and New Testaments, all of them with the same emphasis on combining in-depth reflection with practical skills for ministry.

In reflecting on the experience, some clear lessons have emerged that have a broader validity and which present alternatives to many of the current pedagogical models in theological education. The first is **time**. Every topic described here is likely to be deeply challenging for somebody, and sometimes for everybody (including the teachers). It takes more than one or two hours to unpack and debrief all that appropriately. We have discovered that four-hour sessions work well, with unstructured informal time always essential, not an optional extra, and not programmed in advance but responsive to the mood of the group. Then there is **space**. Rooms with desks and lecterns are not only unsuitable but actually prevent appropriate levels of interaction and engagement. The course described here will only work in a studio-style space that is big enough for the numbers.<sup>5</sup> If it can be combined with accessible outdoor space, so much the better, and if each room can be set up with props so as to resemble the actual spaces of the house then that is even better still.

Thirdly, there is what for want of a better term might be described as **attitude**. To fulfil an aspiration for a class to be spiritually formative, teachers need to be companions on a journey and not afraid of vulnerability, whether their own or the participants. It is easy to say that “the medium is the message”, but we need to recognise that reality in the way we approach things. Teaching and learning in both church and academy have been so focused on the transmission of information that many people really cannot imagine any other way. It is easy to talk about engagement and interaction but unless we intentionally model what we are talking about, we are not going to make the shift that will also inspire creativity in mission. The aim is not to marginalise or downplay the importance of thinking, but to give people experiences that are so engaging that they actually can’t help thinking about them – something that we would argue is exactly what Jesus did. We could tell many stories about the ways in which some of the most challenging – and apparently crazy – experiences included in here have turned out to be life-changing for those who have engaged in them, which of course is what formation is supposed to be about. In order to accomplish any of this, flexibility and personal openness is essential: teachers who need to work from a fixed script will not find this easy.

There is, fourthly, a **paradigm shift** here that might be described as prioritising the social sciences rather than the humanities as the primary model for missional theological discourse – a topic that is worth exploration in its own right, but which we will need to write about in another article.

## COMING HOME

The concept just described was initially based on hunches and intuitions, and it was only after teaching this way for several years that we discovered others were drawn to the same imagery. Walter Wink highlights the importance of transformation as part of the intellectual quest, describing it as

exploring all the sealed and stale rooms of this God’s house we call our selves, and offering all we find to the real owner for forgiveness, acceptance, and healing... It is discovering the unjust and violated parts of ourselves... a process, not an arriving; we are “transforming”, not transformed. But all along the way there are flashes of insight, moments of exquisite beauty, experiences of forgiveness and of being healed, reconciliations and revelations that confirm the rightness of our quest

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<sup>5</sup> Experience suggests that something like two square metres of floor space for every person is optimal. The largest number we have ever accommodated at one time was just over 60 participants.

and whet our appetites for more.<sup>6</sup>

Not long after we started teaching this course we also discovered Robert Boyd Munger's slim book *My Heart – Christ's Home*, which has been a favourite devotional text for American Christians for some 65 years and which had a particular serendipity in the context of Fuller Seminary as he was one of the professors in its early days. In this book he imagines taking Christ on a visit to nine different rooms in a home, reflecting on what might be found there and how the Lord might react.<sup>7</sup> Then more recently, Samuel Wells has identified improvisation as an essential disposition for effective ministry, something that had informed our pedagogy right from the start, albeit drawn from the world of jazz rather than theology.<sup>8</sup> What we have learned is that a combination of the cognitive, the formational and the pedagogical in a single package has huge potential for not only changing the shape of much that passes for theological education, but it is also a powerful encouragement for those who engage in it to see mission and pioneer leadership in a new way that will also connect with so many of today's spiritual seekers who would otherwise not give the gospel a second thought.


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<sup>6</sup> Walter Wink, *Transforming Bible Study*, revised edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 77–78.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Boyd Munger, *My Heart – Christ's Home* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992; originally 1954).

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics*, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018; 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Brazos Press, 2004).



# THEOLOGICAL HOMELESSNESS: GETTING LOST TO FIND A NEW WAY HOME

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Jonny Baker  
and Cathy Ross

## INTRODUCTION

**In 2010 the Church Mission Society (CMS) began Pioneer Mission Leadership Training, aimed at those who are engaged in doing something new or different with a motivation rooted in mission.** Since then,

our experience with training pioneer leaders, who are developing mission projects and communities in new contexts, is that the paradigms within which they have learned and understood theology have not equipped them well. One striking metaphor that is quite commonly expressed is that they feel like the rug is pulled from under their feet, sometimes leaving them destabilised, unsteady and wondering what happens next. Then the students begin to move from a world where theology is a content to be downloaded, learned and imparted – and perhaps defended – to a world where theology is more like a process with which the community engages together. This shift is challenging but opens up new horizons for the way we all conceive of theology in practice. We have come to think of this process as a kind of theological homelessness that needs to be experienced in order to find a new way home.

It is based on observations from overseeing training pathways, teaching and learning theology together with the students over the last 10 years, as well as on interviews with students. We will intersperse the body of the paper with direct quotations from them to allow the students' voices to be heard. All quotations are anonymised and used with permission.

## THEOLOGY IS...

One of the very first exercises we do with students is to invite them to complete two statements in as many ways as they like and to stick them on the wall. The statements are "Theology is..." and "Theology is not..." Invariably a whole set of negative associations with theology comes up for discussion – it seems to have a bad reputation! Broadly speaking these associations cluster around themes of academic irrelevance, lack of connection with real life, insistence on right belief systems and doctrines and that it is about control and oppressing others. Theology, as many of the students have experienced it, does not seem to be life-enhancing.

L: I guess it's been fairly clear to me that "seminary" training often leaves Christian workers with some kind of theoretical framework, a basic understanding of how to preach three-point sermons, and if you're lucky some basic counselling skills. Most people I've known in ministry felt totally under-equipped for work in a real-life context.

And this is just in the context of church work. In the context of mission outside of a typical church context there seemed to be even less of practical value.

M: The structure was set up so that the lecturer had the power of knowledge and the student was expected to be a sponge...

But as we press into this exercise, another picture begins to emerge that is more aspirational and certainly more hopeful of theology that connects with real life. It can be an adventure or a quest; theology is communal and conversational, and can explore friendship with God and the world. This signals the start of a journey for students, an adventure or a quest to find ways of speaking about God and the world that make sense.

A: Theology is no longer something fixed to be learned but an adventure to be embraced and explored in community – both the learning community of pioneers at CMS and in my own missional community in London.

This journey usually seems to move through several phases. The starting point can be received as a relief – like throwing open the curtains and letting the light in. However, for some the invitation to go on a journey can initially be met with defensiveness and denial as it threatens all that they have known.

L: I came into the course thinking I had the "theology" bit pretty well sorted, and wanted to get lots of "tools for my toolbox"... I thought there was only one way to "do" theology...

Some students experience this reframing as a leave-taking from the familiar and known and the beginnings of a journey of exploration towards the unknown.

## THEOLOGICAL HOMELESSNESS: PARADOX AND AMBIGUITY

This journey to the new, the unknown, involves risks and uncertainties. For some this is liberating, for others more challenging, but for everyone we have found that travelling this journey together as learners within the pioneer community at CMS has been ultimately life-giving.

Leaving home is risky. Sometimes you even have to leave without knowing where you are going. Consider Abraham, who, by faith, obeyed when God called him to leave home: "He went without knowing where he was going" (Heb. 11:8, NLT). Barbara Brown Taylor suggests that the practice of getting lost is a valuable spiritual



practice.<sup>1</sup> She cites Abraham and Sarah as good examples and claims that “the Bible gives no reason for God’s choice of Abraham and Sarah except their willingness to get lost”. We resonate with this idea of getting lost as it forces us to experience discomfort, be open to new possibilities, and it heightens perceptions and encourages us to see things in new ways.

L: I began to realise that in order to do theology in a context, especially a missional context, I was going to have to let go of some stuff and be ready to have some unanswered questions. I realised that as Leonardo Boff once said, I could “number the hairs on the beast’s back, but not realise when I was staring it in the face”.

Getting lost and letting go can be followed or accompanied by a sense of loss and grief and feelings of being unsettled or unsure. We express this using the metaphor of theological homelessness. This can be painful. It may leave us stranded between two or more worlds. It forces us to look at our theological upbringing with new eyes. However, perhaps a certain amount of theological discomfort is a good thing. Certainly the themes of exile, pilgrimage and even homelessness are biblical themes. Our ancestor, Abraham, was uprooted from his home by Yahweh to discover new things about God, the people of Israel were forced to adapt to new cultures and strange ways while in exile and Jesus knew pilgrimage and homelessness while in his mother’s womb. An African proverb expresses it well: “The person who has not travelled widely thinks their mother is the best cook in the world.”<sup>2</sup> While leaving home can be painful, it also sharpens our senses, forces us to ask questions and confronts us with dissonance. We believe that it is in the dissonance and discomfort that authentic learning begins to take place. As students begin to wrestle with new and different ideas that may challenge formerly cherished beliefs, this is when the questions emerge, vistas are opened, horizons expanded.

Learning within the context of CMS also alerts students to the importance of place. Place matters. This means that the metaphor of theological homelessness is a kind of paradox because while theological homelessness may be a valuable experience, it is also important to know where home is; where we have come from.

Theological reflection looks very different when done from a slum in Manila or a multifaith context in Birmingham. Our context also determines our intellectual heritage. While we rejoice in our western intellectual heritage, we work hard at exposing students to theologies from other parts of the world with which they are less familiar. Historically violent events such as the conquest of Latin America, aspects of European colonisation, slavery, apartheid and oppressive dictatorships as well as a range of rich indigenous and aboriginal theologies inform much of Majority World theological reflection. Scholars such as Lamin Sanneh have reminded us that we live in a world of polycentric Christianity and that “world Christianity is not one thing but a variety of indigenous responses through more or less effective local idioms, but in any case without necessarily the European enlightenment frame”.<sup>3</sup> Andrew Walls was alerting us more than twenty years ago to the reality that Christianity is primarily a non-western religion, that our twenty-first century faith will require robust scholarship from the soil of Africa, Asia and Latin America and that the “most urgent reason for the study of the religious traditions of Africa and Asia, of the Amerindian and the Pacific peoples, is their significance for Christian theology; they are the substratum of the Christian faith and life for the greater number of Christians in the world”.<sup>4</sup>

So we work hard at exposing students to theologies and people from other parts of the world. We encourage them to engage in theology as a global conversation and to appropriate a theology without borders.<sup>5</sup> In our own UK context, many of our students are living and working with people on the edges and outside the church. Their journey involves border crossing and home looks very different when you look back from across a border. The world starts to look a lot bigger than they had seen when they were at home and the horizons more expansive. Of course, our faith is a border-crossing faith and is most alive, creative and renewed in the process of border-crossing encounters. If we do not cross borders and remain only in Christian environments, then our faith stagnates, wanes and becomes domesticated and inward-looking.

L: Relating this to theology, I am learning to make “home” in the good that I find in others whom I

<sup>1</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World* (London: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2009), 73.

<sup>2</sup> Ganda (Uganda) Proverb, <https://afriproverbs.org/august-1998/>.

<sup>3</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 22.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew F. Walls, “Old Athens and New Jerusalem: Some Signposts for Christian Scholarship in the Early History of Mission Studies,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 21, no. 4 (1997): 153.

<sup>5</sup> William A. Dyrness and Oscar García-Johnson, *Theology Without Borders: An Introduction to Global Conversations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015).

might have disagreed with before. I am learning to be a guest, as well as a host. I am learning to do theology in a way that holds less important stuff with open hands, but keeps some really key stuff with closed hands. Most of this is stuff all the main church traditions agree on. And I am learning to do theology more collaboratively in my working context, learning to learn, learning to listen.

Hospitality, guest and host are key themes that we explore together. The intermingling and fluidity of guest and host demonstrated in the life of Jesus is vital for us to understand and appropriate. Jesus modelled powerlessness and vulnerability by being a guest in our world, by letting go and being among us in our place and space. This radically changes the power dynamics. So often in mission, the receiving person or culture is seen as needy, vulnerable, in need of help. We try to turn this on its head. We need to be in relationship with them and learn to see the resources and spirituality inherent in that community and context.

We also acknowledge that home can be an ambiguous metaphor. We know that home is not a safe space for everyone. Indeed, it is the least safe space for women in our world so we realise that it can be a difficult metaphor for some. Christine Lienemann-Perrin writes, “We know that in all of our world’s societies violence increases behind the excuse that what takes place in the home is of no public concern.”<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, a further challenge and ambiguity has been that while the student may be starting to find themselves more at home in a new and more expansive landscape, ironically they can now be seen unwittingly as a threat to their sending communities. This may be the most problematic and tricky part of the journey. But like children who have left home and then return as adults, they have to forge a renewed identity and find new ways of relating to their parents as equals, as friends, rather than as a dependent parent/child relationship. And if the world of the student’s parents (or sending community) is more defended, then we suggest that they treat them with love, grace and kindness because they have given much.

S: You grow up in a culture of church that has some assumptions and shared story. As you encounter more of the diversity of the world and the church in other places, you hold more lightly to the truth claims. It might not be the theological themes but even just the assumed implications of that for

us and our culture. You realise that none of that stuff is important. It’s just context that has shaped that over generations. So there is this leaving the comfort zone and leaving of sense of home that must be part of a maturing process that I can relate to. I am actually far more uncertain now...

## UNDEFENDED THEOLOGIES THAT INNOVATE

Living with those outside of church in a new culture or space involves searching for a new language and a way of speaking and being that makes sense both in that context and in the pioneer’s own life. The old language sometimes makes no sense. Part of maturing is not to repeat the posture of theology’s certainty and certitude but to develop an openness and generosity of spirit to others, a humility that holds the emerging local theologies lightly and with respect. Bevans and Schroeder remind us of this posture:

Outsiders need to let go of their certainties regarding the content of the gospel. They need to let go of cherished ideas and practices that have nourished and sustained them in their own journeys toward Christian maturity. They need to let go of the symbols that anchor them in their human and Christian identity and let go of the order that makes them comfortable.<sup>7</sup>

We do not have to look far into mission history to see the damage outsiders have done to the local cultures, customs and context. Outsiders have to practise letting go. This also means practising attentiveness – really seeing and really listening. This takes real self-discipline and means genuinely practising kenosis. We need to let go of our particular ideas and beliefs, our ways of doing things and of seeing reality, our habits and postures for the sake of the gospel. In a sense we have to let go of the gospel for the sake of the gospel. Unless we risk losing the gospel we may never see the gospel become an integral part of the culture nor understood in a way that is meaningful for that community and context. In *Mission on The Road To Emmaus* we put it like this:

The spirituality of the pioneer requires a constant practice of letting go, of shutting up, of resisting taking up power, of really seeing and really listening. It also can practically mean giving up many of the practices that have hitherto fuelled their own faith, especially if they are embedded in resources from another culture (songs, texts, liturgies). And it can

<sup>6</sup> Christine Lienemann-Perrin, “The Biblical Foundations for a Feminist and Participatory Theology of Mission,” *International Review of Mission* 93, no. 368 (2004): 31.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 92.

mean letting go of certainties regarding the content of the gospel itself. The gospel always comes culturally robed so, without this letting go, the gospel will not be free to find new indigenous robes and language.<sup>8</sup>

Simon Walker's work on leadership as "undefended" has proved extremely helpful and insightful for us and we wonder if what we are hoping to nurture in our learning together might be conceived of as "undefended theologies".<sup>9</sup> These are theologies that are open, questioning, exciting, innovative – free to create rather than to defend.

A: Through the course my head and my heart have become more integrated. One is not opposed to the other any longer but the theology enhances and makes sense of the practice. It actually gives me permission to be free to innovate...

We also encourage creativity and innovation. We believe in a Creator God and that we can be co-creators with God. We urge our students to ask questions, to follow their passions, to be seriously and endlessly curious, to steal ideas, to see disruption as potential rather than disaster, to be imaginative, to be bold, to take risks, to reframe failure as experiment, to be undefended about their own ideas and projects.<sup>10</sup> While this may sound like a dream list, it takes courage and some persistence to live like this. We find this easier to do within the context of our CMS pioneer community that is encouraging, supportive, affirming and open to future possibilities and imagining.

## THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Here are a few things that we have learned about learning over the last ten years:

### A safe and companionable space

The learning environment we create is vital – a space that is hospitable, safe, trusting, open and where contributions and indeed people are valued. We could even call it home although we appreciate the ambiguities of this metaphor. The learning quest is one that is welcomed and encouraged. Indeed, those teaching are similarly on a quest themselves. We hope that is done in an undefended manner. Friendship is the way we like to conceive of the relationship between staff and students, as we are all learners together – companions or "alongsiders".

### True north

We have come to use true north as a metaphor for our orientation towards mission. So our quest is not simply a matter of leaving home and doing what you like. This journey is held in a mission community whose orientation is towards joining in with creation's healing, transforming lives and communities, participating in the mission of God. In many ways the leaving is exactly for the sake of joining in with this mission and may happen precisely because the church refuses to cross boundaries and therefore becomes stultified and deadly.

### Artisanal theologies

We resonate with Clemens Sedmak's idea that theology is done by artisans and with the metaphor of theologian as village cook – experimenting with locally available ingredients and always receptive to new cooks who arrive in the village.<sup>11</sup> The focus is around helping people to find some tools with which they can do theology themselves and with their communities. Theology is not taught by individual experts but rather by a team of enthusiasts and is certainly not learned as any kind of system(atic). Rather we seek to relate to people's questing and questioning and we endeavour to point them to the treasures lurking in the tradition(s) that they can explore and discover. Theology is a cultural activity of making and doing creatively. Kathryn Tanner's work helpfully highlights how many theologians working in the area of theology and culture have used very modern and fixed notions of culture that seem to close down possibilities rather than open them up. In contrast, postmodern insights open up a much more dynamic and creative understanding of the constructed and contested nature of culture (and therefore of theology and tradition). She describes theological creativity as the work of

a postmodern "bricoleur" – the creativity, that is, of someone who works with an always potentially disordered heap of already existing materials, pulling them apart and putting them back together again, tinkering with their shapes, twisting them this way and that. It is a creativity expressed through the modification and extension of materials already on the ground... The effects of such tinkering can be... revolutionary.<sup>12</sup>

We also encourage alumni to join us in teaching when appropriate and some of our tutors are in classes

<sup>8</sup> Jonny Baker, "Prophetic Dialogue and Contemporary Culture," in *Mission on the Road to Emmaus: Constants, Context and Prophetic Dialogue*, ed. Cathy Ross and Stephen B. Bevans (London: SCM, 2015), 204.

<sup>9</sup> Simon P. Walker, *The Undefended Leader* (Carlisle: Piquant Editions, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Will Gompertz, *Think Like an Artist... and Lead a More Creative, Productive Life* (UK: Penguin Random House, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Clemens Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology: A Guide for Artisans of a New Humanity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 20.

<sup>12</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 166.

as students so we really are a learning community together. A visiting student from New Zealand was really impressed by this. In his review of his time training, he wrote

J: CMS approaches theological reflection not as an academic exercise, but as a group activity where real issues and experiences are discussed. Then there are follow-up sessions to see how action has been taken in light of the prior reflection. Also the majority of the teachers at CMS were practitioners themselves, engaged in the work of ministry and mission while being teachers. This meant that they were not divorced from the everyday realities of priestly life. Another interesting quirk of CMS was that much of the time people who were teaching in one class would then be a student in another. The learning environment encouraged everyone to learn from one another, rather than a top-down approach. This was refreshing as everybody's opinions and contributions were respected. This in itself helped train people in the realities of ministry where every member of the congregation has an opinion. Perhaps this way of learning teaches people in an "elder" style of leadership, and listening to the whole body of Christ, not just those in power.

We try to offer a range of lenses and perspectives from history and the world church so that there is a depth and range of textures to our theologising. There are so many gifts to uncover!

AM: It's exciting discovering the new – I got into feminist theology and that opened a whole new vista.

L: The thing I came to realise that I was lacking most was a spirituality to sustain me in the everyday of my life and work as a twenty-first century Jesus follower, and a husband and father. I realised I need tools for robustly theologising around the everyday tensions of dwelling among the poor, marginalised and excluded. I never even dared to believe that there was any thinking or writing about this that I could connect with. Thankfully I was very wrong... Another powerful thing has been getting an appreciation for a wider scope of church history, seeing some of the gold in other traditions that I had written off, and discovering some of the uncomfortable truths about my own.

The familiar areas of contextual, local, ordinary and practical theologies along with theological reflection are invaluable.

## Conversations days

We believe in research – there is always more to learn and discover. Every year we hold a day when we invite academics, practitioners and students to reflect together on a theme. So far we have hosted days on "The Pioneer Gift", "Pioneering Spirituality", "Missional Entrepreneurship", "Mission is... Mission is Not", "FuturePresent", "Mission and the Arts", "Church Inside Out". We have published books and a zine as a result of some of these days and hope that this research is a gift to the wider community. We also host an e-journal (*Anvil*) on theology and mission to foster and promote a global conversation around mission and pioneering.<sup>13</sup>

## Dreaming spaces

One of the challenges in a lot of areas of work is that it is so pressurised that there is not enough space to think, imagine and dream. In their book *The Radical Imagination*, social researchers Haiven and Khasnabish comment that the feedback they received from those joining groups to reflect on their work found it hugely valuable. However, they only did it because they were invited into a research group rather than embedding it as part of their regular practice.<sup>14</sup> Theological education suffers from this busyness. So we ring-fence a dreaming space two or three times a year for 24 hours when we go away and explore a theme related to our work. For example, we have explored communities of practice, missional entrepreneurship, engaging with African diaspora community, blended learning. These have produced deeper relationships in the team but also a whole host of creative ideas that we have subsequently incorporated into our wider work. We also invite some students into these spaces to dream together. Similarly, we have a day each year when we invite some external input into our team to stimulate our practice.

## Assessment

We use portfolios and other forms of assessment that enable students to be creative and make connections between their practice and theology. One assessment that elicits wonderfully creative responses is where students are asked to cross a culture and reflect on that community. They then select a piece of Scripture that might resonate with that community and rework it so that the language might connect. For example, we have had a student who visited a pagan community rework Col. 1 with Christ as the Green Man, and a student visiting a Sikh community rework John 1 as follows:

<sup>13</sup> See [churchmissionsociety.org/anvil](http://churchmissionsociety.org/anvil).

<sup>14</sup> Max Haiven and Alex Khasnabish, *The Radical Imagination: Social Movement Research in the Age of Austerity* (London: Zed Books, 2014).



## John 1:1–14

Always! Forever! The Word was.  
The Word was with the Guru.  
The Word was the Guru.  
He sang the divine Music with the Formless One,  
before the universes, worlds and continents were made.

World and Form were created by him,  
All species and colours, iron and fire.  
No speck of dust exists except for him.

Where should we look for True Light?  
In him who is True Life that is light for all.  
Darkness and evil tries to extinguish the True Light,  
Millions of times a day;  
But the light beams out unfettered.

The Guru sent John. A holy saint.  
He testifies about the True Light, ignoring caste.  
He knew and saw and touched the True Light.  
John was pure and devoted to God,  
As a guru he brought light to humanity.  
But he was not the True Light,  
He pointed to the True One.

The True Light that enlightens all men and all women,  
Ignoring all caste and race,  
Was entering into our existence.  
He lived as the True Humble one.  
The Maker of universes was universally unseen,  
By the very eyes he had gifted sight to.  
How could his own world never welcome him in?

Some holy people saw him.  
Some put faith in his True Name.  
They were reborn in God.  
Born, not of gentle mother, strong father or family honour.  
But reborn of, and for, God.

The True Word became clay like us.  
Spotless in moral character.  
Weak as we are.  
Lived not in a palace, but worked alongside us.

What did he look like?  
All the saints saw him,  
Made manifest to us by the Father of all.  
Radiant with Grace,  
Resplendent with Holy Truth.<sup>15</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The journey that students are going on is nothing new in one sense. All good education creates an environment in which deconstruction, unlearning and then finding new articulations and understandings take place. So perhaps we are simply observing and naming an age-old process. But it is exciting nonetheless to see pioneer students so energised by this process of leaving home and finding home in a new way in mission theology. Sometimes it is easy to forget in the church – especially in relation to theology – that Christ has come to set us free and that freedom is at the heart of discipleship. The poet and writer John O'Donohue writes on the themes of home and longing. He concludes the poem “For a New Beginning” with these words, which we hope may be some kind of blessing to those setting off afresh or for the umpteenth time in this quest.

Awaken your spirit to adventure;  
Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk;  
Soon you will be home in a new rhythm,  
For your soul senses the world that awaits you.<sup>16</sup>

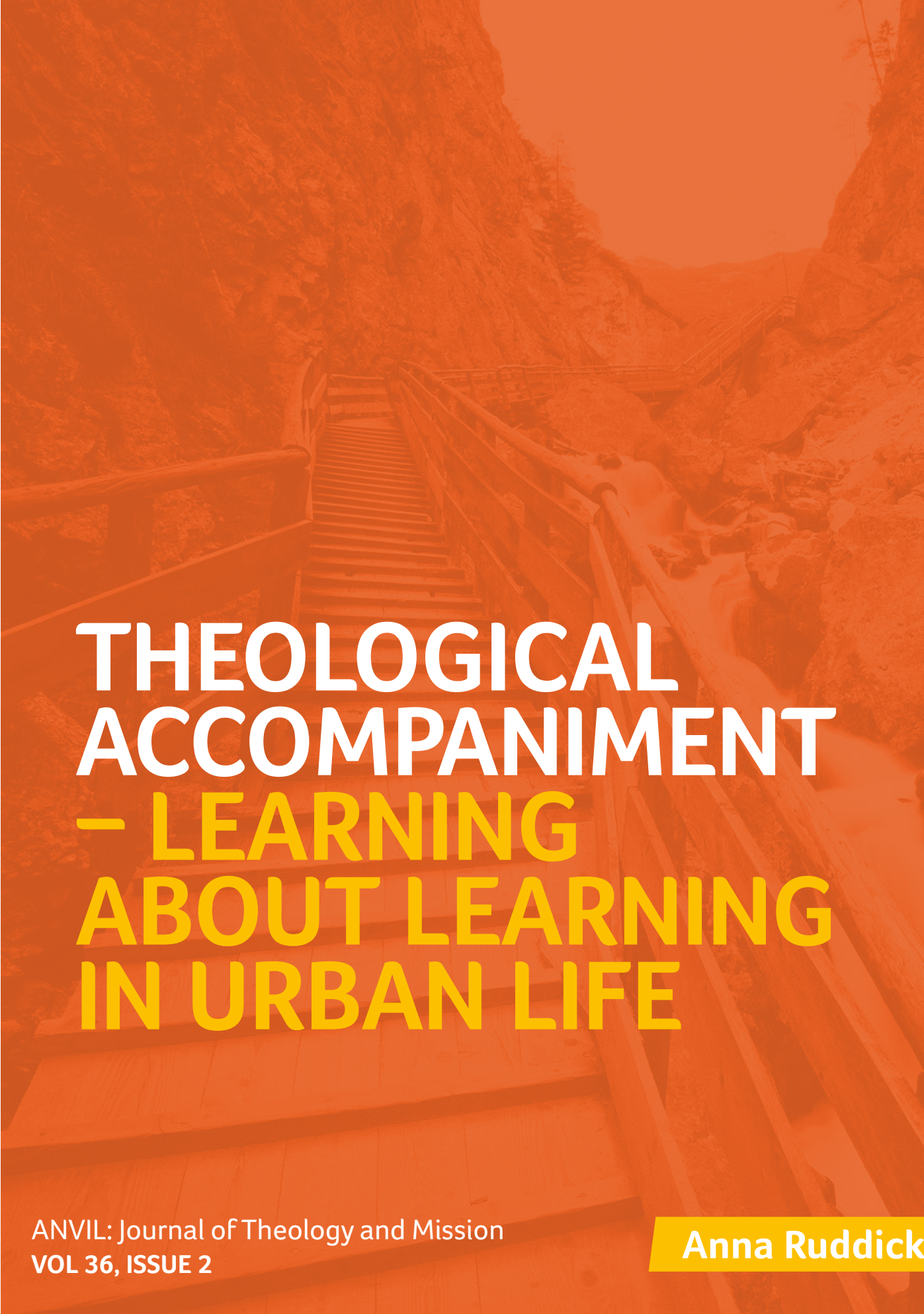


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<sup>15</sup> Kevin Colyer (used with permission).

<sup>16</sup> John O'Donohue, *Benedictus: A Book Of Blessings* (London: Bantam Press, 2007), 32.



# THEOLOGICAL ACCOMPANIMENT – LEARNING ABOUT LEARNING IN URBAN LIFE

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**Anna Ruddick**

**What does it mean to go on a “learning journey” together in mission?**

**How can the way we design learning processes actually embody the ethos and approach to mission and marginality we hope to advocate to participants?**

**Can “learning as life change” be a part of God’s mission to us, just as we seek to be a part of God’s mission in the worlds of our communities?**

These questions among others have floated around Urban Life since its inception and have shaped the way that we have evolved over the last few years. We provide practical, local and accessible training to Christian groups, intentional communities and churches in urban areas and marginalised neighbourhoods. As a small and dispersed team of theological accompaniers we journey alongside individuals, groups, collectives, teams and churches to stimulate reflection on mission practice. This involves devising bespoke learning journeys that weave together the experiences of participants and current academic thinking in order to help practitioners continue to enrich their mission in marginalised communities. Our work ranges from informal gatherings to accredited training at graduate and postgraduate level delivered as part of the Common Awards framework, but each element shares a common approach: helping participants to reflect theologically on their practice.

Urban Life is itself a learning journey, exploring and experimenting with pedagogical styles and as a team encouraging one another to lean into the new, emergent and life-giving threads we discover along the way. While this risks sounding utopian, the reality is fragility, uncertainty, much grappling and a fair bit of discomfort and awkwardness. In fact, part of our discovery, in our team times and in the groups we facilitate, is that it is only when you get to discomfort that the real learning begins. Holding your nerve and staying in the awkwardness gives space for genuinely new insight to emerge; no one said it would be easy.

What has developed through our practice is a pedagogy of “theological accompaniment”. This is the language that has consistently resonated with us in our practising of and reflection on this task. It may be that this is a well-developed field of pedagogical thought and we are just unaware of it (if so we’d love to hear more so please get in touch!), but for us the language of accompaniment carries associations of spiritual direction, friendship and collaboration. It is “alongsider” language, akin to the New Testament idea of the Holy Spirit’s companionship with believers. We, all relating in different ways to missional practice in marginalised and

urban neighbourhoods, are on the journey ourselves. But we have all also sought to take steps back, take a deep breath and allow ourselves to be submerged in our questions and ambiguities. It is from these slightly awkward standpoints of in-and-out that we seek to offer accompaniment that is profoundly theological – about the encounter with God in and through encounter with others and ourselves in mission.

As our theological accompaniment has developed it has taken on a specific character, with four interwoven commitments, which I want to explore in this article:

*Practical theology* – that theology is born of experiences that “matter”

*Ethnography* – a rigorous method and a posture to see human experiences afresh

*Whole-person-in-community learning* – learning is life change and life change involves our bodies, spirituality, emotions, relationships and intellect

*Liberative participation* – that all people are made in God’s image, requiring attentiveness to power and privilege in both learning and mission.

In the course of preparing a session on Miroslav Volf’s much-respected book *Exclusion & Embrace* for our Experiments in Mission programme, I found myself shaping a series of prayer stations using Volf’s four “acts” in the “drama of embrace”: opening the arms, waiting, closing the arms in the embrace itself, and opening them again in letting go.<sup>1</sup> This exercise combined intellectual engagement with a complex theological text, reflection on participants’ current missional experience and an encounter with God. Participants were invited to use 3D glasses to reflect on another’s perspective in the first station, to stand with their arms held open for a number of minutes in the second and to receive God’s comfort in the pain of letting go in the fourth. The stations sought to bring into synergy the cognitive mind, the spirit, the body and the emotions in the process of learning. I use the four acts of embrace in this article as a way to reflect on the four commitments named above, and the prayer stations described above offer an example of the learning approach we are developing: a pedagogy for theological accompaniment.

## **PRACTICAL THEOLOGY – OPENING THE ARMS TO EXPERIENCES THAT “MATTER”**

Practical theology is described by Terry Veling as a verb rather than a noun: not so much a “thing” as a way of

<sup>1</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace, Revised and Updated: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2019), 142–48.



being in the world that acknowledges the theological nature of our daily lives.<sup>2</sup> It is also an academic discipline – two modes that are not often easily blended but which have provided a solid theoretical framework and methodology for my understanding of life, mission and learning.

As a committed and practising Christian, to me the natural blending of theology (my talk about God) with practice (my daily life in the world) simply makes sense. It is a true description of my existence. The acknowledgement that no systematic or theoretical theology is untouched by human experience, and that equally no human experience is unfiltered through our previously held concepts of God, self and other, is hugely helpful to me. Unnerving at times perhaps, but where it destabilises rarefied notions of received theology it calls us to a new self-awareness – to recognise the intertwining of experience and ideas in our own dearly held beliefs and to discern the push and pull of God's Spirit and cultural ebbs and flows in our understandings.

The first stage in Volf's "embrace" is to open one's arms. In this he encapsulates opening our minds and hearts along with our arms to someone or something that is new, unfamiliar, "other" to us. This willingness to be open to the new or unexpected is central to our approach in theological accompaniment. It is an expression of faith in the creativity, presence and otherness of God that we may still, and always, be surprised in our missional practice. Mary McClintock Fulkerson suggests that theology is born of experiences that "matter"; in fact she goes further to say that theology arises when we attend to our "wound".<sup>3</sup> Focusing attention on the "wounds" of missional practitioners often means unpacking questions of success and failure, God's action and seeming inaction, the deeply complex and difficult situations that people experiencing poverty and marginalisation struggle against on a daily basis, and the weariness of remaining in the midst of all this.

While this may appear a disheartening exercise, we find that for participants there is great relief and freedom in turning towards the things we so often try to hide from or deny. It requires courage to face the new, unexpected or unknown and to do the work of naming the tangled threads of inherited theologies, cultural conditioning and experiences of God and others that shape our beliefs and responses. But when we do this work, alongside others also doing their work, we find a

sharpened sense of what is "us", what is "not us" and what "might just be God". Practical theology as a way of being in the world offers this as a path on which we walk; as an academic discipline it also offers some tools with which to practice our craft, which takes us to our second commitment: to ethnography as a method and a posture.

## ETHNOGRAPHY – WAITING IN A POSTURE OF ATTENTIVE OPENNESS

Having opened our arms to embrace what or who we have previously seen as "other", Volf's second stage in the process is to wait. In the moment of opening ourselves we make ourselves vulnerable to acceptance or rejection, and respecting the personhood of the one we seek to embrace requires that we simply extend the invitation, watch and wait.

Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen define ethnography as "... a process of attentive study of, and learning from, people – their words, practices, traditions, experiences, memories, insights – in particular times and places in order to understand how they make meaning (cultural, religious, ethical) and what they can teach us about reality, truth, beauty, moral responsibility, relationships and the divine, etc".<sup>4</sup> They offer a picture of ethnographic research that can in itself be mission, and is characterised by an attentive and unhurried presence with and among people.

For many in the academic and research world, ethnography is a technical and intricate process that generates a huge amount of data and requires extensive analysis and careful interpretation. This provides an excellent foundation for more accessible expressions of ethnography as a *posture in mission*, rather than as a research methodology and method within the academy. The rigour and values base of ethnography requires us to examine our own standpoint in relation to that which we give our attention to. It leads us into a discovery of missional reflexivity – acknowledging our own influencing world views and theologies, along with the impact they have on our attentiveness and our understanding of those we seek to embrace. Ethnography is attuned to injustice and committed to honouring the personhood of those whom it seeks to learn from. In this sense also it expresses Volf's spirit of "waiting" with open arms; as he writes: "Waiting is a sign that, although embrace may have a one-sidedness in its origin... it can never reach its

<sup>2</sup> Terry A. Veling, *Practical Theology: "On Earth as it is in Heaven"* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 13.

<sup>4</sup> Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen, eds., *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics* (London: Continuum, 2011), 16.



goal without reciprocity.”<sup>5</sup>

Incorporating an ethnographic posture into our learning processes usually involves developing participants’ observational skills in their missional work. We take noticing walks and encourage mini “experiments” in mission in which participants try out a different kind of activity, such as crossing a boundary they have never crossed before (one participant decided to go to the local bingo hall and discovered that unadvertised changes in opening times and membership requirements meant that accessing the bingo community could be as difficult as joining a new church!). We then reflect together on these new experiences, drawing out the questions and insights they might offer. We also work on developing our reflexivity – self-awareness in relation to our positions and roles in mission and in the theologies that shape our understanding of mission and expectations for its outcomes. Inevitably this requires a “whole-person” engagement with the learning process – we don’t leave our emotions at the door – and calls us into supportive community as we learn together.

## WHOLE-PERSON-IN-COMMUNITY LEARNING – EMBRACE, COMING TOGETHER AS INDIVIDUALS

Learning changes us. I often ask group participants *how* they learned the most formative lessons of their lives. Their answers rarely involve a classroom or a lecture. They talk about hard won perspectives on themselves or others that came about through significant experiences and gradually over time became consolidated as valued learnings. Sam Ewell quotes Trevor Hudson as saying, “We do not learn from experience; we learn from reflection upon experience”; this distinction is helpful and in the big sweep of our life stories that reflection often happens in diffuse ways, over time, and with much repetition.<sup>6</sup> Our aspiration is that our learning processes facilitate that reflection on experience by inviting a whole-person engagement and by offering a relational and conversational space in which the “experiences that matter” can come to light; and, in the telling and retelling, we can learn the lessons they have to share with us.

This conversational space wherein whole persons meet each other finds resonance with Volf’s third act in the drama of embrace, that of closing the arms. For Volf this

necessarily involves two participants, equally choosing to close their arms around the other, both active and both passive. Furthermore, this embrace must be gentle – not an oppressive “bear-hug” with one party seeking to dominate the other, nor acquiescent with one party allowing themselves to be absorbed into the other.<sup>7</sup> A true embrace requires that the full personhood of both parties is honoured and brought to the encounter.

Both aspects of this understanding of embrace help us to shape learning processes that enable life change. Firstly we seek to invite and offer space for the full personhood of participants to be brought into the learning experience. This happens by engaging with body, mind, spirituality and emotions in a mix of activities that *blend* visual and kinaesthetic craft and creativity, grappling with academic texts, self-reflection, group support and various forms of prayerful practice. Taking this approach means that we echo some of the research about learning styles but are doing so with a more holistic perspective. We are not simply aiming to engage different types of learners, although that is important; we are aiming to help all types of learners to explore a subject with their whole being and to do so in community so that their learning is not simply either “head” or “hands” but is integrated into their world view and muscle memory and therefore, we hope, into their missional practice.

## LIBERATIVE PARTICIPATION – LETTING GO

The final act in Volf’s drama of embrace is simply the opening of the arms again, a letting go. In this he expresses the importance of difference and the fallacy of seeking entirely to eradicate it. For Volf, embrace is the mutually chosen coming together of two distinct persons, who both share a common humanity while remaining distinct persons within it. They come together, embrace and then, crucially, part again to go “about their own business for a while” with a standing invitation to embrace again, thereby creating a circular movement.<sup>8</sup>

Another way of framing this tension of difference and togetherness is to recognise that all people are made in God’s image and therefore have revelation to share. In the foundational theological idea of *imago Dei* we find a respect for the distinct personhood of every human *and* an invitation to come together to learn of God from one

<sup>5</sup> Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 145.

<sup>6</sup> Samuel E. Ewell, III, *Faith Seeking Conviviality: Reflections on Ivan Illich, Christian Mission, and the Promise of Life Together* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 146.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 147–48.

another. For a pedagogy of theological accompaniment, as for mission, this letting go and acknowledging the *imago Dei* in one another is a challenging but vital commitment: challenging because it flies in the face of much of our teaching and learning culture within the UK (read western, developed, twenty-first century) context, and vital because much of this education system is exclusive.

For most people education is equated to school, college and university; the classroom, not daily life. And it is imparted by teachers and lecturers, experts in their fields who pass on their knowledge, largely, although increasingly this is changing, through audiovisual means focused on the cognitive mind. It is by its very nature hierarchical and primarily cerebral. This overwhelmingly favours white, western, middle-class people with strong cognitive skills. In doing so it misses out on the richness of the “whole-person-in-community” kind of learning that I have outlined above, and it systematically mitigates against a mutual embrace with those we have previously seen as “other”.

For us as an Urban Life core team, our entry point to the questions of power and privilege has been mission in urban and marginalised communities: building relationships of mutuality with people who struggle against poverty and prejudice in many forms, and in the process developing our self-awareness of the dynamics of privilege and marginality in our own lives. As a result addressing such injustices has become foundational to our understanding of *mission* and this has naturally led us to be attentive to power and privilege in shaping our learning contexts.

We aim to be “participative”, which means acknowledging that in every room we each have a share of the wisdom. We *facilitate* sessions, enabling the participation of all, and ourselves participating along with the group in the learning journey we are on together. We may all start in different places and have different areas of insight to bring but we are all equally valuable and share in responsibility for our own and the group’s learning process. We also aim to be “liberative”, acknowledging the voices and faces who are not present in the room and asking how we can hear their perspectives in order to more fully encounter

God together. We are a work-in-progress in this; swimming against the tide culturally, pedagogically and missionally can be hard and uncomfortable work, and awakening our self-awareness is always the first step towards change.

## CONCLUSION

Contained in the commitments described above is an attempt to illustrate, articulate and model an approach to mission, not just an approach to learning. In the current world of theological education, context-based training is ubiquitous but often simply means training while working for a church as opposed to the deeply integrated engagement with missional experiences that practical theology and ethnography invite. Among those feeling a call to situations of marginalisation, to community-based mission and ministry, to pioneering, to forms of experimental and incarnational presence in the world, there is a hunger for more holistic learning spaces and for room to bring the ambiguities of power, injustice, and the surprising presence of God that their missional practice has brought to the fore. This is the hunger that we have felt ourselves and that we are gradually, and sometimes falteringly, learning how to nourish in theological accompaniment.

Taking a pedagogical approach defined by practical theology, ethnography, whole-person-in-community learning and liberative participation, we are being stretched and drawn into new encounters with God and others. In addition, finding that this pedagogy can bear fruit in both accredited and non-accredited settings, for informal journeying with missional teams and for master’s-level study, points to its potential for a genuinely inclusive and accessible theological educational environment. We have so much more to learn, and the gift is in the learning process – that through it we are all being changed.

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A background image showing a person in a warehouse setting, with a large, dark, textured object (possibly a piece of machinery or a large bag) in the foreground. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent olive green filter.

# CREATIVE AND EMERGING EXPRESSIONS OF THEOLOGICAL/ MISSIOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT:

REFLECTIONS FROM THE WAREHOUSE,  
IN CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

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René August

**“There’s really no such thing as the ‘voiceless’. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard.”<sup>1</sup> – Arundhati Roy**

Articulating voices from the margins is the work of every disciple of Jesus. Within our own sacred text, the Bible, we find each author seeking to do just that: be it the nomads Abram and Sarai; Joseph, the son sold into slavery; the nation that Pharaoh enslaves in Egypt (Gen. 47:13–26); the wilderness refugees in the desert; Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute; Ruth, the refugee woman who marries Boaz; the exiles in Babylon; the prophets like Amos who wrote laments and poems; or the internally displaced working-class carpenter, betrothed to a teenage peasant girl, Mary, who gives birth to Jesus in a feeding trough for stinking animals in Bethlehem, Palestine. The Bible, for us, remains the single most significant body of literature written by and for “people on the margins”. Most importantly, at least two thirds of the world live in the so-called margins, which makes the life and witness of these disciples central and not marginal to all we do. No hermeneutics and theological framework can lead us into faithful discipleship unless we are able to enter into their perspectives and their praxis.

At The Warehouse, this has become some of our most important work. We find ourselves asking: what kind of theological education can form, inform and transform all who participate in it? How can our reading of Scripture help us relocate our founding and framing narratives into a life of vulnerability, humility and decentring power?

This has taken us back to look at the incarnation: the life and example of Jesus.

## **FIRST, OUR WORK IS THE WORK OF RELOCATION:**

The incarnation begins with a relocation of God. As we read the stories of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany, we find God, being relocated... from “heaven” to earth. This happens with a few significant points of contact.

### **1 Geography**

Heaven can be conceived as a place without limitations, pain, disease, suffering, hunger, poverty, homelessness. In the story of the incarnation, Jesus LEAVES this place of heaven. Jesus leaves the place of seeming “unaffectedness” to enter into, to be affected by, to have a place in and to be in spaces with all the things that can and do affect us.

### **2 Proximity to pain**

The location of this incarnation happens to be on land that is contested to this day. Bethlehem, in Palestine, remains far from seats of power, far from thrones and political influence. When the magi come to seek for the king, they go to Herod, to the place of power, or influence, of “people in the know” and there they find nothing. It is in a place of foreign occupation that they find Jesus: the son of a labourer, born into a poor family with no land.

### **3 New lenses**

We cannot understand this kind of reorientation and the implication of this relocation outside of relationships. We need to listen to and learn from those who share life experiences with Jesus: the economically poor, the politically oppressed, the geographically displaced, the socially excluded, and those whom Arundhati Roy calls the “preferably unheard”. Most importantly, our reading of the Bible needs to use these lenses as tools that provide us with new spectacles through which to read it.

### **4 Systemic and symptomatic change**

A surface reading of the story of relocation could leave one feeling warm and comforted about the love of a Saviour who chooses to “come to me”. The location of the incarnation story is a sobering reminder that if Jesus were born today, in a poor, rough neighbourhood, among animals, to a poor family, and became a refugee, many of us would not even have noticed, not bothered to visit him for healing. The location of the incarnation, and every miracle of Jesus, not only deals with healing and sin, but disrupts and exposes the sin in every system of oppression and injustice that the characters in the stories had suffered and endured. Each one has a symptom of pain and the cause of that pain is highlighted and transformed by the presence, power, actions and words of Jesus.

## **SECOND, OUR WORK IS RELATIONSHIPS:**

We believe that the building of good, healthy, diverse, loving relationships IS OUR WORK.

### **1 Who we learn with determines what we learn**

I was running a four-day training programme for church and community leaders. The same course was run in various cities across South

1 Arundhati Roy, “Arundhati Roy – The 2004 Sydney Peace Prize Lecture,” *The University of Sydney* (4 November 2004), accessed 18 June 2020, <https://www.sydney.edu.au/news/84.html?newsstoryid=279>.



Africa. The manual and content were identical. On the second day, we would read Jer. 29:1–4 together. We would give some background to the letter and then ask what we thought this story was about, what it looked like for us today and what God’s prophets may be saying to us as we listen. Each group, each city and each context offered a different response to the text: a different insight and even a different “message from God”. This may be a simple illustration, but it remains true in all our work. When you read the story of Jesus healing a man born blind, and you have a blind person in the room, what you learn will be different to what you learn if you only ever read it with and listen to people who have sight. Similarly, when you read that Jesus was poor – that his parents had brought the basic minimum as a thank offering to the Temple – with people who have very little to bring as a thank offering to God, you will learn new things too.

## 2 Where we learn shapes the conclusions that we reach

I have taken groups to read Scripture in many different places. One such time we read the passages about God’s response to slavery in a museum called the Slave Lodge in Cape Town. Visiting the places where people were enslaved, spending even a few minutes in the torture chamber, or a prison cell where people were held, and reading Scripture in that place both creates a new lens through which we “see” the story and brings new insights and conclusions.

## THIRD, OUR WORK IS THE WORK OF DECOLONISATION:

Colonisation involves many things, but for the purpose of our work, I pay attention to leverage points... and this requires me to focus on power. The work of colonisation and decolonisation then becomes the work of reorganising power. As an example, when the Dutch and the British came to colonise South Africa (and many other countries), among other things they reorganised power. That experience included the reorganisation of **social** power, **economic** power, **religious** power, **political** power, **geographical** power and what I call “**narrative**” power.

They imposed meaning and value by commodifying each of these entities. Today, the power of these narratives runs so deep and is so intertwined in Christian homogeneity that it almost feels heretical to reframe them. They so significantly shape our hermeneutics that it makes it difficult to try to apply different lenses to the reading of Scripture. The theologising is considered with hyphenation, like womanist-theology, contextual-theology, public-theology, black-theology,

integral-theology... but there is no hyphenation for white, Eurocentric, minority-world theology. All theology is contextual and the work we do is simply to relocate ourselves and Jesus in our geographical, economic, political, religious, social and racial constructs and realities.

In order to “decentre” Eurocentric perspectives, we simply ask different questions of the Bible and of Jesus. Upon reflection, these questions highlight the details of these realities in such a way that it gives us new **lenses** through which we read and reinterpret the personhood of Jesus and the love of God in the world.

These lenses become the new perspective through which we can notice the words and sounds and feelings in the Bible. Doing this work in the community and not in isolation gets us closer to how Scripture was first shared. God’s word was heard and shared and not only read.

These lenses help us deal with the issues of power. For example, a UK audience might like to consider these questions:

- 1 What is the movement of power in the stories of the Bible? The movement of geographical, economic, political, religious, social and racial power?
- 2 How does the location, words and life of Jesus reorganise these powers?

These lenses put back into focus the audience that Jesus spent most of his time with. For example:

- 1 When we read the Bible, which people seem to benefit most from God’s intervention and action?
- 2 When we read the Gospels, who are the people that gain the most from Jesus? What kinds of power do they have?
- 3 Who are the people who gain the least from Jesus? What kinds of power do they have?
- 4 Where are they located geographically, in terms of whom Jesus centres and who is “on the margins” of God’s activity in the world?
- 5 How do we ensure that we too, like Jesus, stay in contact with and listen to those on our margins?

These lenses help us to see diversity and inclusion as part of the work of God in the world, and not only a human rights issue. For example:

- 1 In Matthew, Jesus is introduced as a descendant of Abraham and David, but the genealogy includes Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute, Ruth, the Gentile, and Mary. Three women give Jesus his “credentials” as the Messiah.

- 2 The Canaanite woman with the sick child, fishermen, tax collectors, prostitutes, the Samaritan woman, the Roman centurion who has great faith, the angels sending a sign from God to shepherds working in the fields, Nazareth, Bethlehem... All these places, races and characters reflect a clear intention and the inclusive agenda of God.

religious, sociopolitical and socio-geographical power are the people in the centre. They are in the centre of the stories of God, they are central characters thought out the holy scriptures, they are the focus of God's action and, indeed, even the ones through whom God acts in the world. Articulating these voices requires me to share my power, my platforms, my attention and be transformed from glory to glory.

These lenses help us move closer to one another with stories of difference instead of seeking "unity and agreement". For example:

- 1 The history books of 1 & 2 Kings and 1 & 2 Chronicles don't seek agreement. They offer differing views on the benefits and detrimental consequences of Israel having a human king.
- 2 The Gospels come to us with four accounts accepted in the canon of Scripture, they are not seeking one, agreed-upon single narrative, but allow the four to complement and enhance the differences between them.
- 3 The priests, prophets and kings were seldom in agreement about what God was saying and doing and commanding and requiring. Their lives and messages sit side by side, seeking to help us with conversations about making meaning.
- 4 The prophets wrote to God's people while overlapping in time and space and there is no intention to give "one clear agreed-upon prophetic word" to God's people. Rather, in each instance, the stories hold together, offering reflections from the prophets, priests, philosophers and poets.

While this is not a conclusive list, it provides a framework within which I seek to do this work of decolonising our reading of the Bible, the gospel and Jesus. It creates new narratives and reaffirms narratives that come into conflict with stories of self-preservation to self-offering and self-sacrifice.

In order to be faithful in articulating voices from the margins, we need to reframe our points of departure. People on the margins of socio-economic, socio-

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A person with dark hair is seen from the back, looking at a wall covered in various diagrams, charts, and papers. The scene is overlaid with a blue tint. The person is wearing a blue and white striped sweater.

# THE BEGINNINGS OF A NON- DIRECTIVE APPROACH TO MISSION AND EVANGELISM

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Ian Mobsby



## INTRODUCTION

**In this short article I hope to unpack the basis and approach to a more non-directive approach to mission and why it is important for the church in our increasingly post-Christendom, postcolonialist context.** I also seek to address why it is so important for contemporary missionaries, evangelists and pioneers to feel comfortable with taking such a non-directive approach to mission. I hope this slightly provocative contribution will promote reflection on practice and catalyse the importance of dependence on God.

## GETTING BEYOND BEING CONTROL FREAKS

Thomas Merton helpfully commented:

Modern humans believe they are fruitful and productive when their ego is aggressively affirmed, when they are visibly active, and when their action produces obvious results.<sup>1</sup>

The challenge for most missionaries, pioneers and evangelists is that they are expected to make things happen.<sup>2</sup> They are required to deliver missional programmes with SMART goals to justify the cost of their income on a fixed-term contract through innovation and birthing a new expression of the church, usually in some form of difficult context. Accordingly, most pioneers that I meet are activists who are at their happiest when they are doing this. Not only does this bring all the great potential problems of work addiction, but it also comes with the very great danger of “needing to be in control” through being busy and being “a success”. I know this to be true because this has been my personal experience for a large part of my being an ordained pioneer priest in the Church of England.

Richard Rohr reminds us of the danger that as pioneers we are called to a life of “contemplation and action” or “prayer and action”, depending on your tradition. Sadly it is often the case that pioneers struggle with their prayer life and tend to focus on doing, because many of us are doers and not listeners. Being silent and being prayerful doesn’t fit with a busy work schedule. Many of us struggle with prayer and being control freaks, because we have experience of being burned by God or being burned by the church. This then creates the context for us becoming controlling because we basically then do not trust God with our lives.

There are insights to be taken from the 12-step movement of recovery from addiction, which tells us that our health is dependent on surrendering our lives to our “higher power” if we are to find healthiness and

well-being through non-controlling behaviour. Indeed, all addiction is, to some degree, created because of the inability to let go of being in control of some aspect of our lives. Being unable to surrender our lives to God, to not be able to trust God, results, I believe, in many pioneers making themselves their own “higher power” and therefore, in effect, a form of egoic God, as Thomas Merton affirms, which will not only do harm to ourselves but will also do harm to the very projects we are seeking to lead and serve. Again, I know this, because I have made this mistake repeatedly. It is unsurprising then that so many activist pioneers struggle with prayer, because prayer requires obedient submission and surrender to God, and that our success and desire to please our paymasters and to some degree a notion of the transcendent God is the result of being activist control freaks. If we are not careful, we can, through our activism, set up an unintended “idolrous aspect” to our vocation, which will not end well. Ironically, the most effective mission initiatives will occur when the pioneer is able to submit and surrender to God, and where the personal identity of the pioneer is not dependent on the outcome of the mission being a success. This is exacerbated by the reality that funders focus on expected success rather than faithfulness. This is a major challenge, when so much of our mission, particularly in the Church of England, is dependent on strategic development funding (SDF) bids. These “SDF” submissions are written like business plans, where pioneers are put in the extremely difficult position of delivering on God’s mission with short-term fixed aims and objectives. The mission itself is often set in extremely difficult contexts, where the very outcome measures of such bids almost expect the pioneer to be God, making commitments that it will be almost impossible to deliver. This is because so much of our strategic planning is based excessively on “mission as business planning” rather than as dependence on God. The squeeze on pioneers internally and externally then is significant. Externally, to meet the outcome expectations of projects, and internally, an inability to trust and let go and surrender to God regarding aspects of the pioneering vocation.

So how does the pioneer respond? As with all cultures, Christians are called to be in, but not of, expressions of contemporary culture. So how do pioneers exist and survive within the commodifying capitalist market systems that the church has absorbed to fund innovative mission? Clearly the first thing must be for the pioneer to submit and surrender their lives and their work to God, and the second is to remember that God’s mission is God’s, not ours.

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Merton, *Love and Living* (New York: Mariner, 2002). Adapted to ensure inclusive language.

<sup>2</sup> From here on when I say pioneers, I also mean missionaries and evangelists.



## GOD'S MISSION, NOT OURS

At the time of writing this article, I have been completing doctoral ethnographic research. I have been listening to those who would self-identify as being “spiritual not religious” who are de- and unchurched people with a strongly negative stereotype of the church as being irrelevant when, in reality, they had had little experience of it or had given up on it. Regarding those who have given up on church, many respondents of the research talked of the effect of fundamentalism in controlling forms of the church, or leaders and pastors who were in their view overly controlling. At the same time many have a yearning or thirst for spiritual things, of which I am certain; many are being unsettled by God the Holy Spirit to explore existential questions that have the potential to take them nearer to God. My great sadness is less with the “spiritual not religious” but more with the narrowness and often unavailability of pioneers to resource such mission.

At the heart of God's mission call is the truth that we are called to serve God in God's mission. As it so wonderfully says in 2 Cor. 5, often entitled “the ministry of reconciliation”: to join in with God, as God restores all things back into right relationship with God. This is the heart of mission; not just conversion or restoration, but communion – that all people, all things are being restored into active and unbreakable

relationship with God. When all mission and evangelism is understood in this way, it gets exciting again. This is why I am still so positive about the fresh expressions initiative with its deep Trinitarian understanding of mission as catching up with what God is already doing, and where prayer is about joining in with God. When mission is understood like this, it gets away from the terrible distortions of commodified and capitalist notions of mission and gets back to the relational and the transformational, which are the root of the gospel narrative on God's mission. So it is far less “conversions per £ spent” and much more reliant on guidance and being led by the Holy Spirit, indeed the Holy Trinity, creating the opportunity of building ecclesial

communities out of contextual mission. So how do we understand this more relational approach to mission?

## MISSIO DEI, MISSIO TRINITATIS, MISSIO ECCLESIAE

In Bevans and Schroeder's groundbreaking work *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* and their chapter on “Mission as Participation in the Mission of the Triune God (*Missio Dei*)”, they quote several authors, reminding us that mission is God's job description, and that the Trinitarian understanding of the *missio Dei* might hold out a new direction for mission theology.<sup>3</sup> Further, they remind us that God is a relational community of Father, Son and Spirit who are constantly involved in the world.<sup>4</sup> This relational centredness to mission is key to pioneers – that there is mission because God loves people, which lies at the heart of the pioneer vocation.<sup>5</sup> However, often people

forget the cascade and the connection between the *missio Dei*, *missio Trinitatis* and the *missio ecclesiae*. The mission of God becomes the mission of the Holy Trinity, the depth of perichoresis (inner dynamism of God in the three persons) of a God living out perfect love, perfect justice and perfect inclusion. Through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, this becomes the mission of the church, the *missio ecclesiae*. In this reading of theology, therefore, the pioneer is joining in with an

understanding of “communion-in-mission”, where the nascent gathering of a missional community in context seeks to catch up with what God is already doing, where God the Creator, the Father is the life-giving fountain of love, through the ministry of God the Redeemer, the Son, through the power of God the Sustainer, the Spirit. This Trinitarian understanding of mission liberates the pioneer from having to be the constant activist, to becoming instead the wise discerner, who seeks to follow where God leads. I love this approach, as it completely takes the pressure off having to be in control and lets the pioneer surrender mission to be directed by God as the source. So we do not need to try to be too clever to argue people into the kingdom, we don't have

“This is the heart of mission; not just conversion or restoration, but communion – that all people, all things are being restored into active and unbreakable relationship with God.”

<sup>3</sup> Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 292.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

to be supercool, hip and trendy to win souls, and we don't have to be uber-busy with all sorts of events and training to intellectually force people to make a choice. All these examples, for me, name the pressures of forms of mission that come from a pressured "business approach", which loses the point, largely because it assumes the secular business "scarcity" world view rather than the God-given "abundance" world view of the Gospels.

## CRITIQUING COMMODIFIED AND BUSINESS APPROACHES TO MISSION

The greatest challenge then is how we, as pioneers, seek to form missional communities that are countercultural in that they are not just about nice coffee shops or endlessly revamping forms of worship services. Rather, the focus should be on spiritual freedom, empowerment, radicality at the heart of the gospel and the insights of liberation theology for all people, no matter what their economic or social context. My concern for pioneers is that there is a lot of talk in these circles about metaphors from businesses – the stories of Kodak, The Body Shop, John Lewis and Apple. What about the stories of radical Christian communities like the Celtic monastic saints, the Desert Mothers and Fathers – why do we dumb down on the likes of St Benedict, St Francis and St Clare, for example? I think the other insight I have is that the form of faith we sometimes project is really dumbed down. I yearn for depth of discipleship that requires a depth of prayer and a true hunger for God; as Thomas Merton says, the pursuit of the true self, not staying with the shadow or false self that colludes unquestioningly with the unhealthiness of a market society. A more *ancient future* perspective. My overall reflection is that we are too enmeshed in a capitalist unrestrained market society, and not asking enough the countercultural questions around spiritual freedom as Jesus did. We do not need endless more trendy forms of attractional worship services, but instead how do we invite people into a transformative experience of life led by God? It is interesting that some forms of Buddhism have been able to retain this life-changing perspective in contemporary culture where Christianity has not, because we are seen as being part of the problem by many de- and unchurched people. So our pioneering and our pioneering imagination needs to get beyond commodified "business-shaped" expressions of mission and dig much deeper with forms of mission and

ecclesial community that have the same DNA as church but are radically visionary, contextual and counter to the market society that enslaves many.

## MISSIONER/PIONEER AS CURATOR

Both Jonny Baker and Mark Pierson have written extensively about curating worship that is missional coming out of the alternative worship movement.<sup>6</sup> I would like to extend this concept further, to talk about the pioneer as a curator of mission and evangelism. Curation of mission is a deliberately open-ended approach to facilitating some form of mission experience that draws on the Trinitarian approach to mission being God's, not ours, which therefore aims to provide opportunities for people to explore matters pertaining to Christian spirituality and faith on their terms, and in their timing. This approach assumes that God is seeking to enable people to experience the reality of God and God's presence with them through the Holy Spirit. It is this approach that I am drawing on as a basis to the doctoral research I am conducting, in exploring how a dialogical approach enables those who self-identify as "spiritual not religious" to explore spirituality as an effective activity for them to break down negative stereotypes concerning Christianity and open up opportunities to discover the faith on their own terms. My colleagues and I have been running an event called "Searching: Soul", utilising the "MeetUp" social media app as a way of facilitating dialogues in bars and pubs in central and south London. In such an approach there is nothing to sell, no clever thought you have to get across, no course, no apologetic, only space and room for people to explore. It is so basic but I have seen it work wonderfully, as it allows God to do what God does freely. In these groups a subject is chosen, each participant shares for five minutes without interruption, clarification questions are asked, and then open discussion occurs over a beer and food. This approach is entirely the opposite of the pioneer being in control, as it surrenders that control to those who attend and to God. It prevents any attempt to be a control freak, and therefore frees up the pioneer to pray and discern where God is in the conversation and seek to share wise words into the dialogue. I am hopeful that the beginning of a more open-ended approach to mission where the pioneer is called to be a missional curator is possible, and that there will be further applications of this approach to be explored in our increasingly post-Christendom, post-secular postcolonialist context.

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<sup>6</sup> Mark Pierson, *The Art of Curating Worship: Reshaping the Role of the Worship Leader* (London: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2012); Jonny Baker, *Curating Worship* (London: SPCK, 2010).

## CONCLUSION

Now that we find ourselves in a pandemic situation where the market society model has all but collapsed, many people are asking questions about such a cultural norm. As I have stated in this article, the pioneer is somewhat trapped in a church that is deeply enmeshed in our market society and has to navigate the internal and external pressures of such a situation that can result in pioneers becoming activist control freaks. It is my contention that a more Trinitarian approach to mission affords the opportunity for a more open-ended God-led approach to mission. This means the pioneer can utilise an approach of mission curation to facilitate mission experiences that are relevant and effective in our increasingly post-Christendom, post-secular and postcolonialist context. As a practitioner–researcher in this field, I am convinced that this approach will prove effective with mission engagement with those who define themselves as “spiritual not religious”. The challenge now, therefore, is to explore other applications of this more open-ended, non-directive form of mission approach.

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# TRUSTING THE *MISSIO DEI* IN THE MIDST OF MISSION INNOVATION EDUCATION

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Mark Johnston



## INTRODUCTION

**Te Taurahere Whatumanawa, the Taneatua Garden Project, is a story of mission innovation in one of our poorest small towns in New Zealand.** A husband-and-wife team, Maori non-stipendary Presbyterian pastors, spent years directing their energies to traditional pastoral ministry in their tribal hinterland, a few kilometres from their small home town. The expectations of their indigenous synod were that they would serve a faithful ministry as others before them, keeping people turning up to services of worship in the small rural chapel, conducting *tangihanga* (funerals) and providing Sunday school for local children. However, like so many of these traditionally shaped tribal parishes, the only people in the pews were the elderly, with a few *mokopuna* (grandchildren) from time to time. Meanwhile the statistics for poverty, youth suicide, domestic violence, drug and alcohol addiction and rates of incarceration for their community continued to tell the story of the blight of New Zealand's colonial past and contemporary neglect.

Several years ago a growing sense of unease that their ministry was not tackling the real issues facing their people prompted them to listen to the street and the community in which they lived and ask this question: What is God up to? What is the Spirit calling us to? In collegial partnership with another local Presbyterian European pastor, they began to midwife the birth of the Hughes Place Garden project in Taneatua.

From one perspective this was a community development ministry. By drawing on their own indigenous practices and values, they activated local assets and participative community building and mobilised their street to invest in the project. They focused on horticulturally skilling young people, reintroducing indigenous garden practices and herbal medicines, and developing sustainable and healthy sources of food production for struggling households.

Yet in the hands of these leaders, infused with Christian Maori spirituality, they began curating a spiritual place of hospitality (*manaakitanga*). "The gates are always open to the garden" (Rev. 21:25). "People can come and take what they need." It is meant for connecting people (*whanaungatanga*) and to rekindle stewardship of the natural environment (*kaitiakitanga*). It is a place of *wairua*, a place of Spirit where people can come and pray and be prayed for every Tuesday morning. Moreover,

when planting seeds and seedlings and at harvest, there is always prayer. It is also a place to celebrate with the "living ancestor" – Jesus. People from the street have requested baptisms in the garden. It is a place to eat; a pizza oven is in place and they are working out with their synod how to lead Eucharists in the garden. It is a place to play, with a children's playground and street library, and it is a place to sing: *waiata* (spiritual songs) often ring out around the street when people gather for events.

They have experimented. They have prayed. They have recast their ministry as pastors and taken church into the street: a church without walls, a garden in the community. It has not been easy. A flood swept through the town six months into the project and washed away many of their early efforts in the garden. They now look back on this as a cleansing act, since the land and those living on some of this land has had to battle with historic and modern curses. They have listened again and again as people have been drawn to the garden, some to look, some to give, and some to take. People in the neighbourhood are coming out from behind closed curtains; domestic violence levels in the streets around the garden have begun to

abate. Children and youths are finding new pleasures and meaning in sinking their hands into soil, weeding and watering and reaping the harvest.

"They have experimented. They have prayed. They have recast their ministry as pastors and taken church into the street: a church without walls, a garden in the community."

## WHERE I WORK FROM IN MISSION EDUCATION

At the time of writing, I am a practical theologian and educator on the staff of a small theological college. We are responsible for ministry formation and equipping for the NZ Presbyterian denomination. A central theological frame to our work is the *missio Dei*. Like so many mainline denominations, marginality in a post-Christian, secular and pluralist society has required us to recast our ecclesiology and sense of mission. However, when it comes to landing this in the midst of 140 years of local church practice and a much longer Reformed tradition, we have our work cut out. All too easily the practice and imagination for mission succumbs to church-centric anxieties. How do we mobilise outreach to reverse decline and irrelevance, how do we restructure our church systems to release resources for mission, how do we create dynamic and compelling expressions of church and how do we re-tool our clergy?

When we deploy mission education, we run the risk of preloading these concerns and anxieties without even a pause to consider the consequences: inflating human agency in mission, mission as production, trusting in our power to strategise, innovate, control and deliver. We are churches shaped and formed in modernity whose central wager is that we can do life well without God.<sup>1</sup>

Yet one of the key learning challenges for Reformed and European churches is to pay attention to God's agency and integrate a sense of the Spirit across the whole of life. If this is the mission of God then the first act of mission is listening and then learning to walk (not run) with what we are discovering. This means cultivating mission discernment as practice, posture and theological reflection within particular contexts.

So for us, mission education means developing mission discernment as practice, posture and theological reflection in our leaders, pioneers and faith communities. In the last three years we have taken a more intentional path by experimenting with some educational tools and then learning from early results.

## ACTION LEARNING

One of our first steps was to design action learning tools in mission discernment for those training for ordination, and then offer this also to existing ministry leaders. We developed two processes for learning in the midst of action.

"Listening in the Neighbourhood" and "Mission Action Experimenting" became synchronous courses online that required participants to lead action projects in their own communities. Participants formed their own discernment groups and undertook a coached series of spiritual and practical discernment practices. This was then reflected on and processed in their online cohort. This allowed for highly situated learning, so skill acquisition and reflection occurred in the midst of action and learning could be diffused quickly, applied and amplified. Such is the weight of inherited church-centric mission practices that supporting people to inhabit challenging new practices meant "you don't get it until you are doing it".

## NORTH-EAST CHRISTCHURCH PROJECT

These tools were deployed in new start work. Christchurch sadly is infamous for an earthquake and a massacre of Muslim worshippers. It is also a city that has seen rapid housing development as people have relocated westwards to avoid the areas devastated by the 2011 earthquake.

In 2017, the Christchurch Presbytery and our college placed an ordinand into a greenfield housing area to experiment with a "new mission seedling". She

recruited a team from neighbouring churches and began a Listening in the Neighbourhood process, and then moved into the Mission Action Experimenting mode over two years while supported within an action-learning cohort with her fellow ordinands.

Over time the team began convening new kinds of community and gathering spaces for young families,

building relationships, identifying cultural and geographical challenges, and discovering on-the-ground interests among unchurched people. Postures of listening and discernment still characterise the core team's language and actions even as the project evolves and new forms of action and a fledgling church community emerges.

## ST ANDREWS, HASTINGS

A recent graduate of our ministry programme who participated in these action processes in training has also deployed these approaches in a traditional church that is weighted to middle-class elderly retirees and small-business holders, along with a Cook Island Pacific congregation. Listening in the Neighbourhood invited people who had been faithfully turning up to church on Sunday for years to meet with God and with each other, across some of the old social and cultural divides, to begin listening for the Spirit in their neighbourhoods and city.

New discoveries were made, including the heightened realisation that a much-troubled suburb with high social need on the edge of the parish was calling to them. A number of their Cook Island families resided

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<sup>1</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh and Martin Robinson, *Practices for the Refounding of God's People: The Missional Challenge of the West* (New York: Church Publishing, 2018), 12–13.

there. A renewed sense that God could be in the neighbourhood as well as the church on Sunday sparked new conversations on what the Spirit might be stirring them to. Yet church and social good programmes had often drawn a blank in the past; benevolent programmes and a few revivalist churches had attempted various interventions but addressing intergenerational and structural poverty is an economic, social and spiritual long and costly end game.

Listening in the Neighbourhood was an invitation to dwell in this dilemma, not knowing what could be done, and not wanting to recolonise with social action intentions – however well-meaning. Ideas would come from the Spirit’s prompting as they walked and mixed in relationships across old divides. For an engineer in the parish, cycling one day in this community, in one of the brightest sunshine areas of NZ, the realisation dawned. Energy poverty was a key factor in cash-strapped households and a health hazard with so many downstream implications – in winter in particular; do you feed the kids, or turn on the heaters? What would it take to energise this community literally, and to give them back control of their own destiny?

Last year, he and a couple of the local church members turned up to another of our college’s mission education experiments, “The Lighthouse”. The year before, members of the Taneatua garden project and the north-east Christchurch project had been in attendance.

## THE LIGHTHOUSE – AN INNOVATION INCUBATOR AND EDUCATION WEEKEND

A theological ministry college that is serious about forming missional leaders needs to educate in innovation. So we tapped a dynamic associate professor of entrepreneurship at the University of Auckland who specialises in innovation education on the shoulder and asked her if we could learn to do this. She went one better and said, how about I join you?

For the last three years we have invited teams of church leaders to a weekend, bringing a new mission challenge they are working on and working that into creative opportunity. Over the weekend, the teams learn tools for mission discernment, workshop and test their ideas, and learn about innovation tools and postures they can apply when returning to their mission context.

Following last year’s Lighthouse, – the St Andrews team returned to Hastings and Power to the People *Tama-nui-te-ra: Great Son of the Sun* was conceived. The idea is a solar farm and community empowerment project owned and administered by a local church-sponsored trust, *Te Ra Power Ltd*. More than just a utility project, this is to become a missional expression working among households accessing the power, who are invited to share in community relationships of social and spiritual empowerment: a holistic approach to create a new kind of family (*whanau*) who share in this power. An

Figure 1



educational partnership with the local polytechnic for local youth skills development in solar energy is planned. *Te Ra Power Ltd* will also fund a community chaplain and community organiser. A business plan has received the green light, and local authority backing to raise five million dollars from external, civic and church sources is on track.

## EDUCATING IN THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION WITHIN THE *MISSIO DEI*

What we have attempted in experimenting with mission education finds a pedagogical home in theological reflection methods. What is often situated as a theoretical model of pastoral reflection in clergy formation is given a new lease of life in action-learning processes with people in a mission context. Mark Lau Branson's practical theology cycle in discerning God's initiative is particularly pertinent to our endeavours to develop mission discernment as practice, posture and theological reflection, as illustrated in figure 1.<sup>2</sup>

## CONCLUSION


The mission educators' journey for us is one of testing ourselves within the *missio Dei*, as we, a theological college, learn from local innovation and steps in mission discernment. We have resourced local initiatives and built tools and processes to assist in mission discernment and innovation. But this has always been and continues to be a co-learning process, as we research and listen to local stories and leaders, who show us how they are being led by the Spirit and entering into where God invites them to dwell and initiate Jesus-patterned responses.

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Lau Branson, "Disruptions Meet Practical Theology," *Disruption, The Fuller Magazine*, 12 (2018), accessed 30 April 2020, <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/disruptions-meet-practical-theology/>.





# CO-NAVIGATORS AND MAP- MAKERS: REFLECTIONS ON TRAINING LOCAL PIONEERS

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James Butler

**This article is an attempt to capture and reflect on the small group discussion I was part of at the *hui* conference. Our group was discussing how we can provide training for those who have naturally built Christian community around them and never even considered themselves pioneers; they have just been faithfully following and responding to what God is doing in their community.**

## A STORY

The group found it helpful to capture some of these stories of the people we were talking about, meaning we had actual people in mind when discussing this.<sup>1</sup> This is one of the stories shared. Alice (not her real name) is in her twenties. By the time she had finished school she had two children and had very little education beyond primary school. She had been given a council flat on a marginalised estate. An elderly woman from the estate had helped her, and actually helped her to find her way to God. She started going to the local church and gradually began to gather other children around her and bring them to church too. Unfortunately the church found the children too disruptive. They told her that the children she was bringing were too noisy and asked her to stop coming. She stopped attending the church but continued to gather children around her and was also beginning to connect with their parents. It was becoming difficult to gather everyone together at the same time. They inherited a rather run-down building on the estate, which they did up with the things they could find and borrow. They began to gather there and within a very short time there were 80 to 90 people, children and their parents. She is the kind of person that attracts people to her. From nothing she has developed a thriving Christian community. In the midst of all this the issues of abuse and poverty remained for her and for others in the community.

We realised that the key question we need to ask was: what does it mean to “train” Alice and those like

“We realised that the key question we need to ask was: what does it mean to “train” Alice and those like Alice who are local, indigenous pioneers?”

Alice who are local, indigenous pioneers? We couldn’t generalise to some imagined other but needed to connect with the stories of the people we knew.

## THE PROBLEM WITH THE WORD “TRAINING”

It was clear that language was going to be a bit of an issue. As a group of tertiary-educated, middle-class white people, we were at least alert to problems of power and colonialism. Even using the word “train” seemed to bring with it a whole wealth of assumptions: that she needed training, that we would be able to train her and that we somehow had the answers to her problems. Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* raises all these questions about education.<sup>2</sup> He denounces a “banking concept” of education, which makes students passive receivers of a particular world view that keeps them oppressed.<sup>3</sup> Instead he sees a need for students and teachers to move from monologue to dialogue and

be able to unveil reality (as opposed to the fragmented reality of the oppressor) and co-create new knowledge that brings transformation.<sup>4</sup> They become an active subject in their own liberation. Dialogue and co-creation became key points in our group’s discussion.

One question we asked early on was why, we thought, Alice might want to engage in education

with a group of pioneers. Why would she even need to if things were going so well? Our answer was education as gift. This moves us beyond Freire encouraging us to see that education isn’t just a means towards liberation but is a good in and of itself. It also means that rather than seeing the world as polarised between oppressor and oppressed, we wanted to recognise the gift that Alice brought to education – how she too fed into this common good of education.

## TRAINING AS GIFT

Gift doesn’t immediately solve our problem. Many have helpfully written about the problems of gift, of the disparities of power and the reciprocal obligations within

<sup>1</sup> Clearly if discussing this beyond the conference, these people would not just be talked about and remembered but included in the conversation.

<sup>2</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York, London: Continuum, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 3.

gift.<sup>5</sup> However, we saw the use of the language of “gift” as a means to developing reciprocal relationships.<sup>6</sup> In this view the wider learning of pioneers and the insights of academic theology are offered as a gift in a dialogue: not knowledge offering a universal understanding of the world but acknowledged as contextual and brought into dialogue.

Within our discussion we had another key question: if we are committed to mission as the *missio Dei*, the mission of God, then how do we maintain this discernment at the heart of theological education? This is a particularly western problem – the study of theology becoming separated from the practice of Christianity and spirituality.<sup>7</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez states in *We Drink from our Own Wells* that the root of spirituality is experience. Drinking from our own wells means encountering the Spirit in our own experience. Spirituality always grows out of a contextual experience and is an attempt to live according to the Spirit in that particular context.<sup>8</sup> Spirituality isn’t primarily individualistic; it is communal, but it recognises the importance of the personal. It is a people together on a journey of encounter with God. This journey, beginning in encounter and following the Spirit, is called Christianity. It is comprehensive, in that it encompasses “every aspect of human existence”, but it contains different streams, from people living and reflecting on the gospel in their own experience and context.<sup>9</sup> I want to push this slightly further to talk about how this is a discerning of the *missio Dei*, as people, pray, worship, live, work and serve in a context. Developing a contextual spirituality is an attempt to respond faithfully to the work of the Spirit. But this discernment is further enriched through dialogue with these other streams.

“Education, understood as gift and dialogue, is not about translating from one context to another, but a dialogue between people seeking to live faithfully in their own context.”

Through dialogue the act of co-creation happens, through the work of the Spirit, as different theological voices are brought together and God is disclosed in the dialogue.<sup>10</sup>

Education, understood as gift and dialogue, is not about translating from one context to another, but a dialogue between people seeking to live faithfully in their own context. They can offer their experience and wisdom to each other as a gift, learning from the other. In designing a way of doing training which takes seriously these ideas of gift, dialogue and co-creation, we particularly drew on three metaphors.

## THREE METAPHORS

### Co-navigators

The first metaphor was that of co-navigator. A navigator has a particular role on a ship: to guide the captain through difficult waters and unknown coastline. She

needs to have a deep, practical knowledge of the currents and the rock formations, and is able to read the weather and the tides. I am reliably informed by members of my group that if a boat is navigating seas unknown to the crew, they might take on a local navigator to guide them through the unknown waters, someone with local knowledge – an expert in their own context.

It seemed this idea of navigator was a helpful one. The teacher is the navigator, the one who knows the land and the sea, the currents and the tides in general. But in new contexts, a co-navigator is needed, who might not have the depth and breadth of knowledge of the navigator, but has specific,

contextual knowledge that is vital for the journey. Everyone brings a particular expertise, which is offered to the whole. In the case of Alice, she has very limited

<sup>5</sup> The key text on gift is Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W.D. Halls (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002); Bretherton explores power and types of gift in relation to fair trade in Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 186–87.

<sup>6</sup> Jonny Baker and Cathy Ross, eds., *The Pioneer Gift: Explorations in Mission* (London: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2014), 17.

<sup>7</sup> This is explored in depth in Ashley Cocksworth, *Prayer: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 41–74.

<sup>8</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*, trans. M.J. O’Connell, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: SCM Press, 2005), 37–38.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>10</sup> One helpful account is theology in four voices in Helen Cameron et al., *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010).

education, which may put her off seeking formal training, but the idea of co-navigating and co-creating allows her specific knowledge and experience, not only to be valuable to the training but to be vital.

Of course, both teacher and student are really co-navigators responding to the Spirit. It is the Spirit who leads and guides: the navigator. Another metaphor from pioneering that resonates with the discussion is Jesus as true north.<sup>11</sup> In any act of navigating, the most basic piece of equipment is the compass. In finding true north, everything else can be calculated in relation to that. While this might sound glib, in reality without this sense of true north our training of pioneers is missing. After all, if our whole purpose is to follow Jesus, in faithfulness to the *missio Dei*, through the Spirit, then losing sight of true north will be disastrous. Even the best navigator will run aground if his compass is off by a few degrees.

### Map-making

Map-making is a key job of a pioneer in exploring new landscapes. As new lands and seas are navigated, new maps are needed. We imagined the curriculum as a map, with key landmarks, or areas of knowledge and wisdom that had previously been navigated, rather than a linear progression. These areas of knowledge and wisdom might be missiology, pioneering, biblical studies, Christology, etc. Together the teacher and student can plot their own course through the landscape that works for them. Not only that but there may be new areas to explore and new maps to be drawn, which can be done in collaboration between the teacher and student.

Returning to the idea of co-navigators, different gifts can be brought to the curriculum. Co-navigating in a new context, the student will be aware of the issues and ways they have navigated them in the past, and the teacher will have wisdom about how others have navigated similar terrain in different times and places. Thinking of the curriculum as a map rather than a linear path or series of modules also requires connections to be made between them. If you are map-making together, the new learning is always being set in a new context and always connects to the landscape currently there. It expands the horizons rather than trying to push people into another map entirely. But it also relies on a dialogue, of mutual learning as people bring their own expertise. The metaphor of map-making makes clear that we shouldn't boil down the curriculum to its essential elements, but always recognise that it is navigated in a context.

### The treasure chest

With all the talk of navigating and map-making, perhaps

we just began to imagine we were pirates, but the third metaphor we came up with was the treasure chest. In this way education is envisioned as a collection of treasure, from experience, knowledge, wisdom and practice, which can be shared. All can bring things to add to the treasure chest and all can take things from the treasure chest. Wisdom and practice from different communities can be shared in a relational way. This attempts to recognise that the theological knowledge of someone with a tertiary education is just one gift among many. By bringing it into dialogue with the practical wisdom of the local leader, and with the experience of the seasoned pioneer, we can learn together about God and discern together the work of the Spirit. We also talked about the importance of a physical box – this isn't some disembodied online library of resources, but embodied wisdom connected to particular people in particular contexts. All these things attempt to recognise the contextual nature of learning, but not to get trapped into thinking that we can only work in our own contexts. It is then a gift to receive the resources, insights, challenges and even disagreements from those in other contexts as we all together seek to navigate the Christian life and faithfully follow Jesus.

## THREE PRACTICES

While there were plenty of practical ideas as the group discussed this, I offer you three that might encourage others to develop a creative response to these challenges.

### Bringing gifts

This draws on the idea of the treasure chest. How could the treasure chest be a physical thing within the training? People could then recognise their gifts and the gifts of the community within the wider training. This would go beyond some idea of people's own particular skills or spiritual gifts, but incorporate their experience, and the spirituality and practice they have developed together as a community. This may take time to recognise but people can be encouraged to value their own context, to share their experience and offer it to others – and indeed receive others' gifts.

### Assessment as gift

While this may feel like stretching the idea of gift too far, perhaps assessment could be reimagined as a sharing of gift. Not simply something written for the teacher to demonstrate learning, but a gift to the community to share experience and wisdom: a starting point for a conversation rather than a monologue to receive a

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<sup>11</sup> Baker and Ross, *Pioneer Gift*, 4–5.



mark. This would require creative ways of presenting assessment. It might even encourage peer-to-peer marking.

### Training as a team

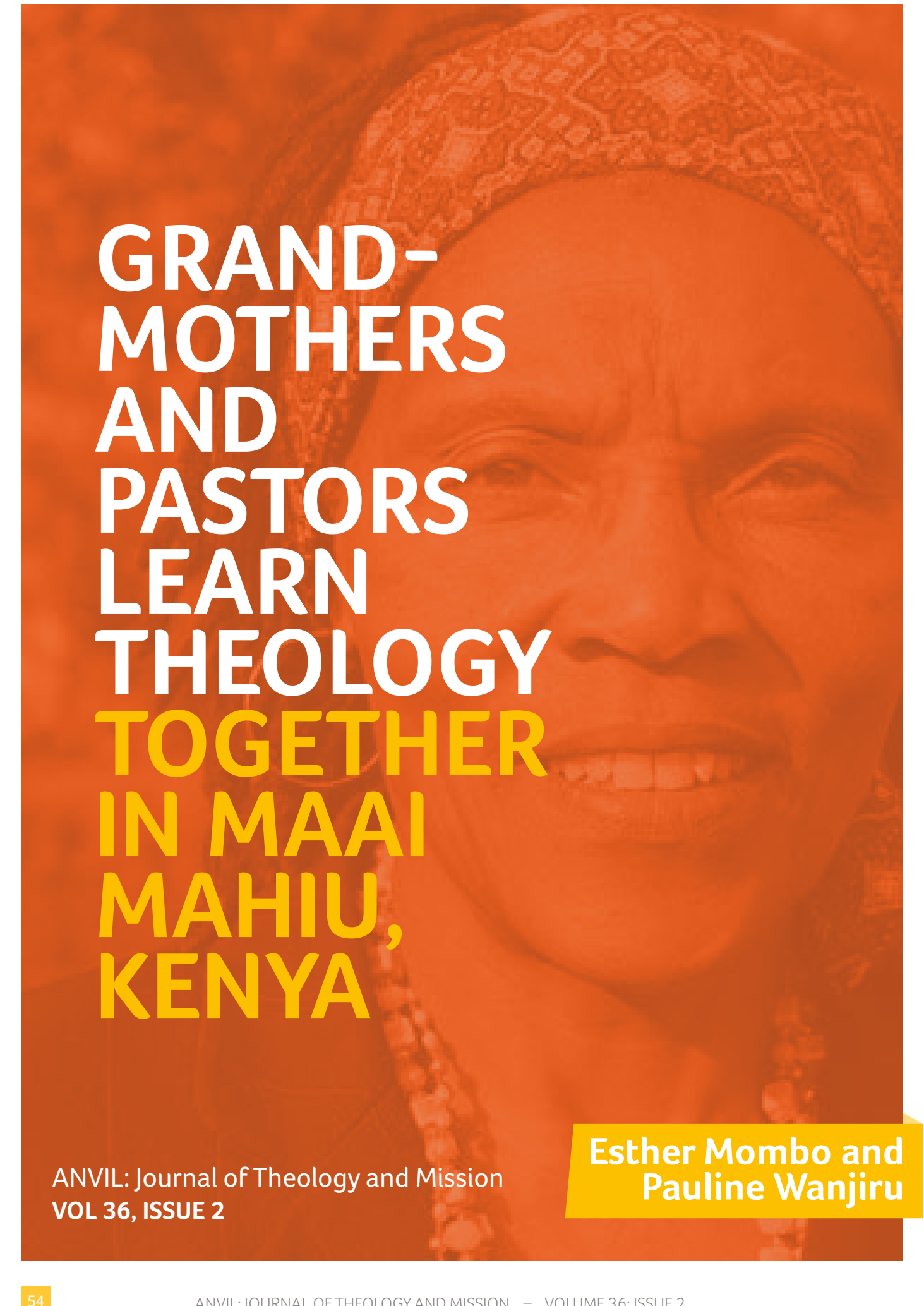
It might encourage us to move away from training individuals who are supposed to disseminate knowledge to others and instead encourage collaboration, co-creation and co-navigation among teams. This honours a sense of the Spirit being discerned together, the journey of Christianity being something that is communal, and the fact that spirituality comes out of a communal experience in a particular context. There are of course many challenges about training in teams, not least cost, but the group recognised that there could be huge value in developing training that encouraged this dialogue within a context as well as between contexts.

## CONCLUSION

We were conscious in thinking about Alice and other pioneers like her that we didn't want to draw her out of her context for education for the sake of it. Nor did we feel that having a set curriculum would serve her. Instead from the idea of dialogue, co-creation and education as gift we moved to consider teachers and students as co-navigators, relying on one another's expertise to sail together. This meant that there was mutual and reciprocal learning. Contextual knowledge wasn't just beneficial to learning, but fundamental. By thinking about the curriculum as a map, which was being drawn together, and navigating across a broader landscape, education is kept in a context at the same time as making broader connections. The idea of gift exchange sees gifts in a more diverse way and encourages people to recognise them in each other and their communities. Recognising this within the grand narrative of the *missio Dei*, without these local pioneers and their communities, we can lose sight of what the Spirit is doing and beckoning us to join in with. Education then becomes a journey of mutual discernment and together seeking to be faithful to God and join in with what he is doing.

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# GRAND- MOTHERS AND PASTORS LEARN THEOLOGY TOGETHER IN MAAI MAHIU, KENYA

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**Esther Mombo and  
Pauline Wanjiru**

***“Create a forum for us to teach the pastors. We see the church and the brothels competing for space in Maai Mahiu. The church has no impact, and those who are bearing the brunt of HIV and AIDS are the grandmothers of Maai Mahiu.”***

## INTRODUCTION

Can grandmothers teach theology? Are they trained theological educators? What curriculum do they follow – is it structured? Whom do they teach and where? The aim and objective of theological education is to equip those who are training to serve the community of the church in the wider society. This is by accompanying or journeying with people in their daily activities.

This may be in times of joy and/or pain as they seek to know who God is and where God is, especially when it hurts. Any form of theological education has to be contextual and relevant to the realities and needs of people to whom it is being offered. Both the curriculum and the delivery of the curriculum should be able to take into consideration the needs of the society – thus the need for curricula that are not static but have room to expand or are able to change with the changing times. The methods of delivery also require constant evaluation as the learners are not the same all the time.

The contours of theological education are changing, especially in the majority world as a result of the significant growth among the neo-Pentecostal, Pentecostal and charismatic churches. There are a plethora of denominational seminaries, public universities, unaccredited Bible schools, online and distance education, and short-term courses offered by different and varied groups. Training that is academic fits a particular group of people who can afford or who have the required grades for this training. Through training they are able to master theological constructs that have been handed down through history and are able to understand the issues around relevance and context. However, there are other groups of people that have no access to any formal theological training but feel called to ministry and are able to found churches and minister to the members. Lack of theological training for this group is at times a plus for them and at times a hindrance. Who teaches this group other than the members that they serve?

It is in this context that we look at the grandmothers teaching pastors on what it means to be church in the context of HIV and AIDS at Maai Mahiu in Kenya. The role of grandmothers as teachers in Africa is not new, but their teaching was confined to grandchildren through storytelling. In some communities, it was the grandmothers who taught the young people sex education. This is because of the relationship of grandparents and grandchildren being that of friendship, making them free to discuss difficult topics like sexuality. The unique group of grandmothers in Maai Mahiu was started by Comfort the Children International (CTC), now Ubuntu Life. We got involved

with the group as we run workshops through the World Council of Churches Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy programme. Using the methods of listening to narratives and conducting contextual Bible studies we managed to get the grandmothers, the youths and the pastors to share their stories of HIV. When we asked the grandmothers what we could do in terms of training for them, they said that they would like us to create a forum for them to teach the pastors. So we organised a workshop that brought the grandmothers and the pastors together

and then held two consequent workshops for the grandmothers alone and for the pastors alone.

***“Create a forum for us to teach the pastors. We see the church and the brothels competing for space in Maai Mahiu. The church has no impact, and those who are bearing the brunt of HIV and AIDS are the grandmothers of Maai Mahiu.”***

## METHODOLOGY

This paper uses two methods to capture the need for learning among the people in a community. The first method is the narrative in which the grandmothers locate their knowledge of God through experiencing the loss of their children to HIV and gaining new roles as mothers again to their orphaned grandchildren. Their narratives are a source of knowledge and a way of knowing the realities around them. The second method is contextual Bible study, which is an interactive reading of the Bible in community. In contextual Bible study, the community engages with the context of the Bible and their own context and then seeks ways of dealing with the realities that are a challenge to them. They also seek ways of dealing with these issues. In this study both methods created a safe space of sharing and learning.

## MAAI MAHIU TOWN

The town of Maai Mahiu is in the Rift Valley in Kenya and has had a heavy burden of HIV and AIDS, having been one of the places where heavy trucks stopped overnight on their way from Mombasa to Uganda and Rwanda. Dervla Murphy's book *The Ukimwi Road*, written in 1994, observed that Maai Mahiu was a growing town but it was vulnerable to HIV.<sup>1</sup> Since then a number of young adults in the early days of HIV died so a unique situation was created where grandmothers took over the responsibility of raising their grandchildren. Today some of the children are adolescents and young adults, some of whom face the same challenges their parents faced as HIV has not been extinguished. According to the grandmothers, Maai Mahiu has many churches and pastors of different denominations and from different backgrounds. Some have pastors who have received some training to run a church but others are self-made pastors and they have churches or what they call ministries. As well as the many churches and pastors, Maai Mahiu has a lot of brothels. It seems like the growth of the churches is in competition with the growth of brothels. The situation is brought to light when one listens to the grandmothers and the pastors of the town on the HIV and AIDS pandemic.

## GRANDMOTHERS AGAINST POVERTY AND AIDS (GAPA)

The grandmothers of Maai Mahiu were under the umbrella name of GAPA. They were over 40 years of age and attended different churches and/or ministries in Maai Mahiu, but they had a common narrative that united them. This narrative was caring for children infected with the HIV virus, and those who were not HIV positive had lost parents to HIV-related complications. The grandchildren's ages ranged from toddlers, teens and adolescents to young adults. Each grandmother had lost an adult child or children and she remained to care for the grandchildren.

## THE PASTORS IN MAAI MAHIU

The pastors came from the different churches in Maai Mahiu. A few of the pastors were from mainstream churches. The majority of the pastors were from independent churches and ministries without national membership. Most of them had not been through any formal theological training but were able to read the Bible and preach – they had felt God calling them to the ministry. For some of them pastoral ministry was not full time, but over and above other things they did. They

saw their ministry as preaching to the sinners to repent. Their congregations were varied in number, as were their places of worship. Each of the pastors understood that for Christians to belong to their church or ministry, they had to meet some membership criteria. Committed members are known by giving offerings, gifts and most importantly tithing.

## THE GRANDMOTHERS' AND THE PASTORS' MEETING

The methodologies employed in the meeting were both contextual Bible study and personal narratives. The grandmothers shared their narratives. The storylines were the same: the number of children who had died of the disease, the number of grandchildren they were raising and how the church was not there for them. The grandmothers spoke one after the other. We have picked three for this paper whom we have named grandmother one, two and three.

Grandmother one was 75 years old and had lost five daughters to AIDS; her husband died due to shock after their third daughter died. She had watched her five daughters waste away and finally succumb to the strange disease, as it was known in the early days. She, like many members of her community, knew very little about this body-wasting disease. There was so much stigma, shame, denial and discrimination of those who had contracted HIV and now had AIDS. Her five daughters left six children and the youngest was three years old. The children lived in her house and she had to fend for them. She had been a member of the church but because of the stigma related to HIV, the pastor and the members of her church were not close to her.

Grandmother two was 80 years old, living with diabetes and high blood pressure. She had lost four children to HIV and was left with 13 grandchildren aged between five and 25. She could not manage to do any manual work to earn a living to feed the now too-large family and hence depended on well-wishers, who provided food and also helped to pay for the children to go to school. The older children went to look for jobs in the community and what they earned is what was used in the house. Some of the children went to school while others went into the town to fend for themselves. Her fears were that they would contract the virus that had killed their parents. She was not able to attend church regularly because of her age, but at the same time the church had not been there for her, particularly the pastors, because of the stigma cast on those people whose children had died with HIV.

<sup>1</sup> Dervla Murphy, *The Ukimwi Road, From Kenya to Zimbabwe* (London: Flamingo, 1994).



Grandmother three was 70 years old, a widow and mother of 11, although four of them had died of AIDS. The first-born daughter died leaving behind three grandchildren; one had died and two are still alive. While she was nursing the two grandchildren, her second son died, leaving behind three children. The death of her daughters earned her negative judgement from the village. The neighbours said her children were dying because they were sexually immoral. She attended church but when her children died, the members did not come to console her or help her bury them. The pastor did not come to the funeral either because he feared to be identified with her family, which was accused of having immoral children. She continued to go to church but whenever the pastor preached, he would emphasise that HIV was the major way the sexually immoral were punished. He would argue that whoever had HIV was going to hell. Listening to her pastor say all this angered her and she contemplated leaving the church, but she decided against it because she thought that if she left, the pastor and the people would conclude that they were right in their thinking. She stayed in the church but did not believe what the pastor said about HIV and those who were HIV positive or who suffered from AIDS.

Grandmother three did not believe that her grandchildren who were HIV positive were immoral and that God would send them, or even all who were HIV positive, to hell. The reality and experience of pain helped her to believe that it was only God who understood her pain. She concluded that being a grandmother to her grandchildren was a mission God had called her to. The GAPA community for her was provided by God to be a space to share her story with others with similar stories and also a place to share God's word.

The narratives of the grandmothers brought up the challenges of being parents again in the midst of old age, poverty and disease. Unlike in traditional society where grandmothers spent time with grandchildren telling stories, sayings, proverbs and riddles as they communicated sex education among other things, the grandmothers of Maai Mahiu found themselves doubling up as the mothers and fathers to their grandchildren, taking on the roles of nurturers and providers, and teaching them values.

The narratives were about pain, and loss, but on the other hand there were stories of hope and faith in God. The grandmothers' pain and loss did not deter them from trusting and hoping in God. Some of them had reached out to the church but the pastors were not available to accompany them in their grief. The grandmothers' narratives were about real experiences – they were about being ostracised from the community and especially from their spiritual families.

## THE PASTORS' RESPONSE TO THE GRANDMOTHERS' NARRATIVES

The grandmothers' narratives raised issues with the church and the pastors. The issues they raised touched on the ministry of the church under the pastors' leadership. The narratives of the grandmothers were a critique of the church and the pastors at the time of need. The areas of criticism from the grandmothers included the hermeneutics of the Bible, the doctrine of sin and the nature of pastoral care. Given the time to

respond to the issues raised through the grandmothers' narratives, the pastors had little information about HIV and AIDS; to them, and others in the community, it was a strange disease. Their theological interpretation of the disease was based on the way they read about the incurable diseases mentioned in the Old Testament, especially Deut. 28:28.

The pastors said that they had believed and taught that a believer in Christ cannot contract HIV – that HIV is a disease for sinners. HIV was a result of sexual sin and was a judgement from God for the

sexually immoral. If one remained sexually pure through sexual abstinence for those who were not married and sexual faithfulness for those who were, HIV would not strike.

The pastors were afraid of the "disease". They did not have adequate knowledge of the basic facts of HIV; for example, how it is transmitted, prevented and managed. This led the pastors to offer inappropriate interventions. From the faith perspective, they located their theology in Deuteronomy 28: on curses and blessings. Following this theology, some of the pastors prescribed faith healing, which is dependent on the faith of the person who is unwell or who is providing care. They claimed that those who did not get healed did not have enough faith. By treating HIV infection as

“The narratives were about pain, and loss, but on the other hand there were stories of hope and faith in God. The grandmothers' pain and loss did not deter them from trusting and hoping in God.”

a judgement from God, prescribing faith healing based on the faith of sick person or the caregiver, and claiming that those who don't get healed have no faith, the pastors placed the burden of disease on the person who was suffering. This enhanced the burden of HIV – self-stigma as well as societal stigma where the person feels unworthy and sinful deserving death, resulting in self-stigma and denial. People around the persons living with HIV also stigmatised them.

It is this literal reading of the text that created more pain for the grandmothers when they listened to the preaching of the pastors. When they needed care and empathy they received condemnation and rejection deserving death, resulting in self-stigma and denial. The meeting of pastors and grandmothers was both a learning and a humbling experience for the pastors. For the grandmothers it was affirming for them to note that they were knowledgeable, and that their stories were a source of knowledge and a way of training the pastors about being church and offering pastoral care to the members of the church.

## THE LESSONS FOR THE GRANDMOTHERS AND PASTORS

**Theological education:** Of the pastors who dealt with the grandmothers, only ten percent had any formal theological education; this was through online distance learning, which was not accredited by the Kenyan Commission for Higher Education.

**Hermeneutics of the Bible:** The pastors had no knowledge of the tools of interpreting the Bible, which was a tool they used every day. They applied simplistic and speculative readings of the Bible that likened HIV to the incurable diseases mentioned in the Old Testament, especially in Deuteronomy 28. This made it difficult for them to respond in a manner that was life-affirming in their use of the Scriptures. The pastors realised the Bible was not a simple text and that it could be used to destroy lives, but if it is understood well, it can be used

to transform lives.

**The doctrine of sin:** The narratives of the grandmothers revealed the inadequacy of the theology of sin as understood by the grandmothers. The pastors linked HIV to sexual immorality, which was a belief that was popular in the early days of HIV. The pastors lacked the basic facts about HIV and how it was spread from one person to another. The grandmothers knew more about HIV transmission and understood that the orphans they were looking after had received it from the mother and were born with the virus. They had not been involved in any sexual immorality. The pastors had not been exposed to issues around ending Stigma, Shame, Denial, Discrimination, Inaction and Mis-action (SSDDIM) associated with HIV. The pastors were unable to deal with the shame and stigma associated with HIV because they did not have capacity and therefore they opted out of supporting those people living with HIV or those giving care.

## CONCLUSION

In this narrative from one context of HIV, two groups of people meet and challenge each other, affirm each other and together seek to walk the road of what it means to be a church. HIV becomes a mirror for both groups to understand the Bible, the doctrine of sin and pastoral care. These three areas that are significant for any theological education are not learned in a formal classroom but in the field of ministry. Ministerial formation becomes a place where ministry is practiced in addition to institutions of training.

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# PIONEER TRAINING IN SCOTLAND: CHALLENGES AND CONTEXT

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**Sandy Forsyth**



**Scotland is post-industrial, post-Christendom, in some senses postmodern, arguably post-democratic in the current UK context, and if you are a long-suffering supporter of the Scotland national football team like I am, often posted missing! The Scottish people also have a reputation for being resistant to change and rooted in an inherent pessimism, which is sometimes claimed to be derived from the nation's predominant Calvinist heritage, arising from the Reformation (or perhaps it lies in the heavy and persistent rainfall!). In turn, pessimism is said to stifle innovation and change. The comedian Frankie Boyle said, "Glasgow is a very negative place. If Kanye was born in Glasgow, he would have been called No You Cannae."**

Within Scotland, there are challenges of contextualisation and inculturation arising from marked differences in identity and culture across a small country, even within short geographical distances. In Kevin Bridges' words, "Edinburgh and Glasgow, same country, two very different cities. When a gun goes off in Edinburgh, it's one o'clock."

Pessimism, social conservatism and internal cultural differences might partly explain the near absence of "fresh expressions of church" in Scotland, despite a strong history of missional innovation. A whistle-stop tour since the Second World War would catch glimpses of the dynamic resurgence of faith in the 1950s under a focus of the "apostolate of the laity" through major figures in the church such as George MacLeod of the Iona Community and the minister and evangelist Tom Allan; the fleeting momentum, now dissipated, that sought to regain a local, contextual focus for church and mission in the years following the "A Church without Walls" report to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland of 2001; partnerships since then at high levels of the churches with those in England in the "fresh expressions" movement; lone but gifted voices who have been striving over the past two decades in Scotland to promote "fresh expressions" and pioneering; those within the central administration of churches who have endeavoured to nudge it further in this direction against much resistance; some parish ministers and Presbyteries who are already innovating in this way; and "lay" voices who yearn for the outlet, training and support to enable pioneering.

Despite all this, there is no discernible momentum, energy or results in the Church of Scotland or other mainstream denominations: the energy in Scotland is primarily to be found in the cities within independent, evangelical church-planting movements.

What has been the overriding factor of resistance in my own denomination, the Church of Scotland? In my view, it is to be found within a self-image that is welded into its constitution as a "national" church. The historical resonance in the institutional memory of this status, and the power and privilege of the Church within the warp and weft of the Scottish nation that came with it, has transferred to a "confessionalisation" of the parish system and a heavily overstructured form of Presbyterian governance. Both still seen as primordial markers of identity, proposals to form new and different forms of church are often met with incredulity and incomprehension, even though the inherited system is failing and near to collapse.

What Scotland desperately needs is pioneering as innovation.<sup>2</sup> In Stefan Paas's words, "More than ever before we need incubators of creativity, sacrifice and inspiration at the organizational margins of ecclesiastical life."<sup>3</sup> The hope would be that such "incubators of creativity" may renew, refresh and enliven the Christian churches in Scotland holistically and ecumenically – that is, for the benefit of the whole church, in old and new forms, under a mixed economy.

## THE BASIS OF FUTURE TRAINING

The report to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland of 2019 by the present writer sought to "kick-start" the absent energy required to initiate a shift in mindset and culture within the denomination as to mission and ecclesiology.<sup>4</sup> The central assertion of the report was that "the building of momentum in the creation of new worshipping communities is the most pressing missional concern in the Church of Scotland of our witness to the Gospel in our time".<sup>5</sup> The desire was to encourage a significant investment of human and financial resources in the enabling, resourcing and sustaining of pioneering. A goal of enabling 100 "new worshipping communities" over the next decade was set.

<sup>1</sup> Some aspects of this article have appeared in another article published since my talk at the *hui* in July 2019 – "Developing Training for Pioneer Ministry in the Church of Scotland: Reflections on Grounding Pedagogy and Lessons in Practice from Abroad," *Theology in Scotland* 26, no. 2 (2019), 7–27.

<sup>2</sup> See *Anvil* 34, no. 3, for a series of excellent articles on this topic.

<sup>3</sup> Stefan Paas, "Church Renewal by Church Planting," *Theology Today* 68, no. 4 (2012): 467–77, 475.

<sup>4</sup> Sandy Forsyth, "Inspiring New Worshipping Communities: Pathways for Pioneer Ministry and Church Planting in the Church of Scotland," in *The Church of Scotland, General Assembly 2019: Reports, Decisions, Legislation & Minutes – RDLM 2019* (Edinburgh: The Church of Scotland Assembly Arrangements Committee, 2019): 11–53, <https://ga.churchofscotland.org.uk/download/publications/reports-decisions-legislation-minutes-rdlm-2019pdf1580199022.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.



The report recommended practical pathways by which all Christians, lay or ordained, might be more fully enabled to express the gospel in their own contexts, beyond institutional structures. Having been passed by the General Assembly, the next challenge is of one of implementation, which has been slow. Implementation raises issues not only of structural realignment within the Church and the release of resources, but also the formation and delivery of avenues of training and support for pioneers as new initiatives, God willing, begin to take shape.

As for pioneer training, it would be disingenuous to suggest that Scotland is a *tabula rasa*. Not only does much continue to be learned from educators “down south” within CMS and elsewhere, but there are also strong foundations in the work of those who have already initiated and delivered pioneer training “from the margins” without institutional support or national coverage. This would include the work of John and Olive Drane, Doug Gay, Forge Scotland through Alan McWilliam, and the Cairn Network; prior courses in Mission Shaped Ministry and at the late Scottish School of Christian Mission; and present courses at some academic institutions, including the Scottish Episcopal Institute and New College, Edinburgh. That work needs to be celebrated and its vision and content incorporated into a broader platform with more widespread accessibility.

If pioneering is to penetrate the mainstream of the Church’s vision and action through a gathering momentum, how is pioneer training to be properly focused? What are its core purposes and goals? How can we “train” people for a lay or ordained ministry that is essentially practical, beyond the scope of traditional “courses”? How can we steel ourselves to set aside often cherished templates, both in training and missional practice, to embark together on a “journey without maps” in the movement of the Spirit?

When first wrestling with how to begin to conceive of the purpose and goals of pioneer training, I came across an article by Darrell Guder in 2009 entitled “Integrating Theological Formation for Apostolic Vocation”. Guder wrote:

It is apostolic vocation that defines Christian purpose. “You shall be my witnesses.” ... The test of missional theological formation must necessarily be the faithfulness of the lay apostolate when the church is scattered in the world.

For such witnessing communities to be faithful to their vocation, they require missional formation... The challenge before the theologians and seminaries who serve the church by teaching and equipping their future servant leaders is to discover how such theological formation for apostolic vocation is to be done today... It can only happen as the servant scholars of the church recognize that their disciplines are not ends in themselves but instruments for formation, for equipping, for that transformation that happens by the renewing of the mind.<sup>6</sup>

This struck me to be at the heart of the task ahead: (1) that the purpose of “training” pioneers is *formation* to enable and enhance their (often pre-existing) “apostolic and missional vocation”, not as an end in itself to satisfy the requirements of the church; (2) the necessary integration of all training with praxis; and (3) the need to reconceive the traditional subjects (even missiology perhaps), in what is taught, how, where, by whom and to whom, in terms of the missional vocation of each person.

This would be a process of formation in missional theology and praxis, in the understanding that, in Guder’s words: “Missional theology seeks to think the faith in terms of its practice, and to practice the faith in terms of its meaning and purpose.”

How is such “formation” to come about? A central strand for theological education that is focused on the purpose and outcome of the flourishing of apostolic and missional vocation is “formation” through “transformative learning”.

A widespread empirical study among a broad reach of denominations in England by Eeva John et al. published in 2018 reported on “the health and sustainability of theological education for ministry”.<sup>7</sup> It concluded that “the idea that theological learning ought to be transformational lies at the heart of any notion of formation”.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, “at the heart of transformative practice in the church” is the development by its leaders of “theological imagination” that “integrates knowledge and skill, moral integrity and religious commitment in their roles, relationships and responsibilities” of ministry and mission.<sup>9</sup>

Assuming that assertion to be correct and desirable, that “transformative learning” might lead to the flowering of “theological imagination”, how might “transformative learning” be unpacked further? In a 2016 article entitled

<sup>6</sup> Darrell Guder, “Missio Dei: Integrating Theological Formation for Apostolic Vocation,” *Missiology: An International Review* 37, no. 1 (January 2009): 72.

<sup>7</sup> Eeva John et al., “Life-changing learning for Christian discipleship and ministry: a practical exploration,” *Practical Theology* 11, no. 4 (August 2018): 300–14.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

“Transformative Learning and Ministry Formation”,<sup>10</sup> Neville Emslie identifies four stages in “transformative learning” that are common among its main proponents: “a disruptive event” that challenges previously held views, critical reflection, and the development and later integration into practice of new perspectives. The intended end outcome is that transformative learning leads the person to “think like an adult”, as “central to the goal of adult education... is the process of helping learners become more aware of the context of their problematic understandings and beliefs, more critically reflective of their assumptions and those of others, more fully and freely engaged in discourse, and more effective in taking action on their reflective judgments”.

It is thus a departure from “competency grids” as the tests for ministry, but instead the transformative learning experience means that “formation is not a moulding process but is a theological conformation of the minister to the pattern of Christ and his ministry, a fundamentally creative and obedient process of obedience to Christ in humility and service”.

The challenge is to resolve how the content, mode and delivery of teaching material can perform as instruments of transformation and equipping of the people of God, so as to bring about a deep and lasting impact in “theological imagination”. To do so they must engage character, world, context, experience, deep emotion and relationships – centred not only in ideas but in lives.

For pioneering, this focus might recognise the purpose in the formation and conformation of the pioneer to the pattern of Christ, in terms of the presence or potential of gifts of listening, team building and leading, discipleship and discipling, missional entrepreneurship, ability at conflict resolution, resilience, etc. – in other words the embellishment of the theological and creative mindset, practical skills and “personality traits” that might be appropriate for the challenges of pioneering, tailored as much as possible to the individual.<sup>11</sup>

## APPLICATION TO SCOTLAND

The traditional programme for ministry training in Scotland has focused on a long and cherished history of high-level academic education, with a secondary “on the job” application of theology to practice. It is thus based primarily on development “cognitively”. New appreciations must emphasise the centrality too of impact “affectively” and “behaviourally”. In Banks’s words, “The one-way relationship between theory and

practice, according to which the former precedes the latter, must give way to a more complex relationship between the two.”<sup>12</sup> Training must always be “on the way”, thus engaging dynamically with key notions such as “contextualisation”, cross-cultural translation and “indigenisation” of gospel and mission in its relationship with culture.

But how to achieve all of this locally and nationally, from a near standing start?

Following the practice of most denominations in the western world where pioneering and church planting has seen more significant engagement, it is assumed that in Mike Moynagh’s words, “lay and ordained pioneers of new communities will benefit from four types of support”: “an introductory course in the theology and practice of witnessing communities”; “being networked into learning communities” of their peers; “coaching or mentoring”, not so that such communities can be reproduced to a conformed model, but to set free their contextual uniqueness; and “connection to the wider church”, be it to a local parish, regional or national grouping.<sup>13</sup>

In that light, as first steps the 2019 report to the General Assembly recommended training and support with the following key components, beyond financial:

- Training: Nature, Mode and Providers – appropriate training to be provided to all leaders of “Church of Scotland Pioneer Initiatives”, whether lay or ordained; and to all lay members, elders and ministers in the Church of Scotland, or from other denominations, who wish to explore the possibility of beginning an Initiative. Training provided on a regular basis informally and regionally, integrated with reflective practice and predominantly practitioner-led.
- Training: Routes of Delivery – active partnerships of existing academic providers and Presbyteries for the provision of training for pioneering and church planting.
- Training: Candidates for Ministries – all candidates for all ministries to have training in pioneer ministry and church planting, and in entrepreneurial leadership, both in academic and practical settings, through courses, conferences and training placements. The Church should prioritise the allocation of candidates in training for all ministries to undertake training placements

<sup>10</sup> Neville Emslie, “Transformative Learning and Ministry Formation,” *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 13, no. 1 (May 2016): 48–63.

<sup>11</sup> See for example, Annemarie Foppen et al., “Personality Traits of Church Planters in Europe,” *Journal of Empirical Theology* 30, no. 1 (June 2017): 25–40.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 59.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Moynagh, *Being Church, Doing Life: Creating Gospel Community Where Life Happens* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2014), 301–03.

with accredited supervisors with experience of pioneering, church planting or innovation.

■ Mentor and Networks – each Church of Scotland Pioneer Initiative to work with a suitable “mentor” and be brought into regional and national networks of other Initiatives.<sup>14</sup>

Glancing back a year later, I applaud my optimism! To achieve this, crossing the chasm of the significant conceptual shifts required in Scotland would daunt even Indiana Jones! Applying some auto-ethnography to illustrate that chasm, for the Church it is similar to the processes that I face in reconciling the following movements:

■ From the certitude in precedent, rationality and tradition of my past career in law, and the learned academic mindsets of my doctorate in theology, both still strongly visible in the practice of our churches, to a state of training and form of church with ingrained fluidity and contextual open-endedness;

■ The gap between those “lost in a crowd” in the stands of my beloved Aberdeen Football Club, as those in the Church often are, to the Celtic team uniting in a “huddle” on the pitch before the game;

■ The movement for the Church in missional terms that was seen in seismic shifts in music from the “trad jazz” beloved of my parents to the bebop of Charlie Parker or free-flowing improvisation of Ornette Coleman; or from the “prog era” of my older friends, with its celebration of virtuosity bordering on pomposity in early 1970s bands such as Emerson, Lake & Palmer and Yes, to the visceral bursts of energy in the mid to late 1970s of the early punk of the Sex Pistols and of my favourite band, The Clash. “Trad jazz” and “prog rock” are still very much on the playlist in worship, ecclesiology and mission in the Scottish churches.

## CONCLUSION

In all of this, it is vital that the spontaneity of pioneering is enabled and not “trained to death”. The low base in Scotland, and the experience of our neighbours and

friends, means that some pitfalls may be avoided – it is one sense a creative luxury, but daunting in another, in the light of limited institutional support and mostly apathy or rejection. Key questions going forward, beyond the key element of implementation within institutional structures, may well include:

■ How do we gain momentum, and how is training the vanguard and enabler of that? Or does training simply reflect action and evolve as praxis gathers pace? Do we stop thinking and start doing, and then adapt?

■ How does training successfully integrate knowledge, skills and practical reality?

■ It is difficult to express the crossing of the chasm of understanding and ethos described above, towards a more entrepreneurial mindset, inductive learning, and peer-group understanding and formation of community, unless it is actually experienced in all forms of pioneer training. How can that movement be a lived reality? How can you structure without structure? And how do you “assess”?

■ What does need to be “taught”? As Guder proposes, how should traditional disciplines be adapted so as to integrate theological formation within missional and apostolic vocation (and not to cancel it out!)?

■ How do you pitch levels of training so that a spectrum of people from “lay, lay” to long-standing clergy might be engaged?

■ How can a national training “hub” be established for CPD of pioneers, and engagement of clergy in post, so that the integration is lifelong?

■ What is the extent of importance of mentors and networks – who and how, and to what end?

In seeking the swifter development of pioneering in Scotland, may we in that process move closer to living out in the Church the realisation of God’s will in the *missio Dei*. This Scotsman remains optimistic – from my seat at the bar, the glass still looks half full!

<sup>14</sup> Forsyth, “Inspiring New Worshipping Communities”: 27–31.

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# COMMUNITY PRACTICES TOWARDS BUILDING A CULTURE

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**Karen Rohrer**



**My fascination with formational practices started at a year-long residency I did in Center City, Philadelphia, right after seminary almost a decade ago. In that year I served three faith communities, but the animating space for formational practice was a formerly closed, cathedral-like Presbyterian church that had become a sort of avant-garde worshipping community/social service provider hybrid.** Broad Street Ministry took up the questions of what it means to be human and what kind of life might invite us into our own humanity together as part and parcel of the same question. Led by a career social worker and practising Buddhist director of social services, Edd Conboy, the staff confessed over and over that if there is something essential to our humanity in the Lord's Supper then it matters how we invite the hungry to be fed. If there is something essential to our humanity in our baptism then the way we offer bathrooms, personal care supplies and promises to care for one another matters deeply.

The staff, largely young people just out of college or just out of seminary, encouraged as we were by Edd, had the naivety to believe that our own Christian story must impact our social commitments. And so, during the meals that we served, the supplies and services we offered, and through endless staff meetings, we, as a team, dissected what our practices proclaimed. We had a staff person called a "hospitality enforcer" and while we worked with folks dealing with vulnerability, addiction, mental illness and even violence, we argued endlessly (and not at all hypothetically) about what if anything would cause someone to be banned from the community for longer than one meal – who were we after all to bar someone permanently from the table of grace? We instituted all kinds of processes that avoided lines entirely – as a line creates anxiety and triggers the trauma and fear that there is not enough, when we are called to proclaim a God of enough. And, poignantly, staff created a grab and go "poop kit" that they could grab quickly to support guests dealing with the sort of circumstances that caused them to have soiled themselves – because the promises we make at baptism are not always kept in sterile and hermetically sealed

**"Imagining new formational practices and seeking new ways to be disciples individually and communally is one of the major tasks of church innovators."**

pockets of affluence, but truly become human in the most human of circumstances.

I start here, because this is the backdrop upon which my thinking about practices is formed. Furthermore, because of those practices, the communal commitment to them, the difficulty of them and the tragic and hard but deeply holy space they created felt more like worship to me than any worship service ever has, and because the community I did that work with feels more like my community of faith than any other church I've been a part of. When I read James K. A. Smith's *You Are What You Love*, and he describes cultural liturgies, that is, the formational practices that serve liturgical functions (whether intended to be secular or not) in our common lives, the liturgy of Broad Street Ministry's social services is one I think of first.<sup>1</sup>

Carrying this experience with me, I moved in 2016 to Pittsburgh Seminary, where we have since launched our "Certificate in Church Planting and Revitalization", which invites 15 leaders (pastors and non-pastors, older and younger, seminary-trained and not) into a 15-month process of transformation with their communities. In this programme, our theory of change is that a critical mass of new practices and practitioners

can grow up in the midst of current community gatekeepers and make their entrenched boundaries irrelevant simply by their existence. The certificate is meant to clear little spaces for the roots of new practices and new practitioners to take hold and lay claim to a practice of the gospel that is also for them. As long as the gatekeeping is disrupted, the diversity of both traditional and new gospel practices and practitioners

will actually make for a healthy church ecosystem. Our programme attempts this both in the cohorts it convenes and the actual educational process we undertake to practice that kind of diverse ecosystem.

Imagining new formational practices and seeking new ways to be disciples individually and communally is one of the major tasks of church innovators. What are the practices – the liturgies, if you will, that we consider in this process? How can we ask the kinds of questions of our practices that the staff of Broad Street

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<sup>1</sup> James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016).

Ministry asked, even if we are living alongside different populations than they were?

As I mentioned, “cultural liturgies” is a term coined by James K. A. Smith, marking formational practices that serve a liturgical function in our common lives. He uses the example of a mall – icons on the wall, a Eucharist of sorts shared at the counter, tokens to take home. This example is a little dated now, but you get the sense of it. We do an exercise with our certificate students when we go to a new city where we ask them to participate in a “cultural liturgy” they encounter. We’ve invited students to join a street band, play in a pick-up soccer game, order a beer, walk into stores where they don’t speak the language, and even get to know Falun Gong practitioners passing out flyers. After they return, we ask them questions about their experience. And because learning and practice are both the content and method by which we teach, I invite you all to borrow this for your own context – whether it be a faith community, a learning community or a service community (or all three).

We start by sending people out to explore, but you can also pick up from the in-class moment, asking people to share with one other person about a cultural liturgy they experienced recently, somewhere over the last week or so – perhaps an Uber ride or TSA line, a commercial experience or a traffic interaction. Maybe even just being in a pub. Invite them to listen closely because they will be sharing what they hear their partner say.

We have them talk through these questions:

- 1 What happened? What signs, symbols, or rituals did you observe?
- 2 Who was the community envisioned or created by this practice? What drew people to this? Who did not belong?
- 3 What were the norms of the interaction?
- 4 How does the interaction form its participants?
- 5 In light of this secular “liturgy”, where is God moving in and through others? Where is God calling us?

This process, for our students, has enabled us to really get at the governing values of our programme, as we challenge ourselves and our students to proclaim values through practice. Those values are:

- 1 Risk speaking of God and how God relates to our lives – we hope that this work will push us to allow ourselves to envision that God is speaking and moving in our world.
- 2 Imagine a world wherein God is active and we *and those around us* are invited to participate, even in the midst of “liturgies” that seem secular.

- 3 Listen to the holy experiences of those around us, learn from them and let them inform our life together.
- 4 Remember that we are not necessarily the ones with the answers, and that the gospel can be borne to us (and in fact we need it to be borne to us) by those outside the church and outside the faith – and that those folks reside in our communities and should be part of our daily “liturgical” lives.
- 5 Recognise that this work takes trust and vulnerability, and we aren’t experts on the one way to practise faith.
- 6 Practise saying out loud what we are seeing and learning because if we don’t voice and share what we have heard and what we are learning, we don’t fully absorb it.

These values all bubble up in this structured conversation about practices. Be on the lookout for this as you invite folks to share what they heard from their partner; perhaps even articulate some of the values as you hear them. As students reflect what they have heard in this exercise, we often hear generative arguments coming up – arguments about values and their expression, about whether a certain liturgy forms people in this way or that way and what might be better. These conversations are a gift, even if they get tense. The different way we experience liturgies enables us to see their various strengths and weaknesses, so that we can avoid creating a community convened only around our idiosyncratic tastes and experiences. Indeed, these fruitful arguments were part of what made the staff meetings at Broad Street Ministry so long – what really does reflect the reality of communion in our eating together? What properly honours the God-given humanity of our guests? If we did it wrong, how can we do it better?

The arc of these sorts of arguments and conversations serves as a microcosm of the arc we have built into the certificate programme. The courses follow a particular logic that builds the strength of culture to support these conversations as well as cultivating the depth of conviction that enables the action that they eventually arrive upon.

The arc for such work, as we have found it, is this: listening; confessing, repenting and revisioning; sharing life together in formative ways; and facing change as a community. Our courses for the certificate reflect these key postures, with one course focused on each piece and an additional final gathering focused on an intervention each student has crafted in their own context with their community that brings together all those postures.

## LISTENING

In the course focused on listening, just as in those staff meetings at Broad Street, our practice looks something like this: We listen to God and to each other in contemplative practices, community discernment processes and one-on-one conversations. We don't know the answers, and the answers may not even exist yet. We observe, listen and wait as the questions unfold, without trying to answer them too quickly. We listen particularly for the hurts, complaints and pain points from one another and that we have heard from our communities. We give them space to be unsolved. There is space and silence in a sabbath time every afternoon. The content of the course allows us to explore the limitations of the binary thinking and the mind-body dualism of the modern era. We are invited back into our full sense and intuitions as we make space to listen with expectation rather than listening in order to fix.

## CONFESSION AND REVISIONING

From the course focused on listening, we move to confession and repentance – as we have taken time to listen openly and without defences, what have we heard that we must grapple with? What truth about ourselves, our church systems and our heritage do we need to face? Who and how is the church called to be? This course has us encountering and discussing the truth of colonialism and mission. There are logic patterns built into the Christianity we have inherited – racism, sexism, heteronormativity, hierarchy, individualism, capitalism, colonialism and empire. If we have learned our listening practice well, we have heard the voices of the hurt. In this course we look at the history of these patterns, where they came from and how they impact the western church to this day. Our listening course built our ability to sit with, acknowledge, mourn and repent of those histories. This course invites us to hear from the voices that have advocated for different ways of being and imagine how we might live as faith communities outside those dangerous, historic logic patterns.

## SHARING LIFE TOGETHER

These first two steps build trust and the muscle memory to sit with and process things that have gone poorly and imagine how to do them differently. From there we can envision and enact how we hope to be together. This is the step the cultural liturgies exercise comes from – what forms our regular life together in worship and beyond it, in this community? How does what we do help to mould who we are? How might we think about this more intentionally both individually and communally? As we live and move in this space of practice, the first two postures continue their work, and the regular rhythm of the community begins to emerge. In this rhythm and structure, trust builds over time. In

this practice, we learn that the first two postures were not aberrations but core to who we are, and that we can rely on each other to continue listening, repenting and revisioning what it is to be faithful together.

## FACING CHANGE AS A COMMUNITY

But then, what happens when change comes for us? How do we care well for our community amid this change – lead clearly, tell the truth, practice the faith, live our values, respond pastorally, manage complex change and listen well to our community, without totally freaking everyone out? In our certificate, this is when we challenge students to try it out – they have been listening, they have been confessing, repenting and revisioning, they have been doing life together – so we ask them to identify a change they need to face and walk with their community as they live that change in the context of the first three postures. We look at leadership examples, and particular techniques, we explore the positionality of the leader and the calling of the particular community, but most significantly, in this course, we encourage students to explore and ask questions of their community, now that the community is practised in the first three postures. From there, we've found that the community strength and identity often emerges in really compelling ways in the midst of the shift they are facing. And if they manage that shift, they continue to become themselves and are invited into the process of listening, repenting, revisioning and sharing life again.

During this final stage, we've seen a politically diverse congregation rally around a community member who was detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and in so doing, find its mission. We've seen a faith community welcome queer kids who were in danger outside into their building to offer a safe space to meet. We've seen a white megachurch congregation vision a satellite community in a historically black community that would come into the neighbourhood under the authority of leaders and non-profits already present, committed to supporting and investing in their infrastructure, rather than colonising them, competing with them or duplicating their efforts. We've seen secular dinner groups birth spiritual community, and generational patterns of community brokenness be healed with repenting, thoughtfulness, training and equipping. All of these shifts could have been ignored by busy leaders, thwarted by gatekeepers or died on the vine without the regular community practices that brought them to the fore and made them impossible to ignore. But when these shifts were brought to bear in their respective communities, those communities grew closer to their identities, and began to become the specific faith communities they were called to be.

In this work, I have found that we as church people, and just as human beings in community, often want to start

in the last step. After all, change is at our doorsteps already and it seems crazy to spend time listening and repenting, visioning and revisioning, sharing life over meals and worries over prayers, when work needs to be done. But one of the things we learn from formative practices we see out in the world and formative practices we do together as a faith community is this: we are not what Smith calls “heads on sticks” – we are full-body, full-hearted people who bring our whole selves to this work. The people we are and the stories we bring inform the communities we will become – and they should. Before we can build a strategy, we must co-create a culture. The reason we do and recommend the cultural liturgy exercise is because those liturgies are what constitute a culture – and all the embedded values, practices and callings therein. Once we can see the building blocks of culture out in the world, we can think about the cultures we are called to create. It doesn’t help much to have a strategy for our faith communities if we aren’t actually yet communities with practices, cultures and callings. But once we know ourselves in these things, we are able to navigate carefully and fully through change. We are able to morph to meet the needs of the moment without losing the core of who we are, because that core has been embedded in muscle memory. As communities of practice, we build a culture that is resilient, considered and valued by each practitioner, innovator and gatekeeper alike. And, in the face of change and in order to maintain unity, Edd Conboy, my former mentor and guide at Broad Street Ministry, who died just a few months ago, would remind us often, “Culture eats strategy for breakfast.”

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# FINANCIAL FREEDOM FOR FAMILIES

(A PROGRAMME BY CMS-AFRICA)

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Henry Mwaniki

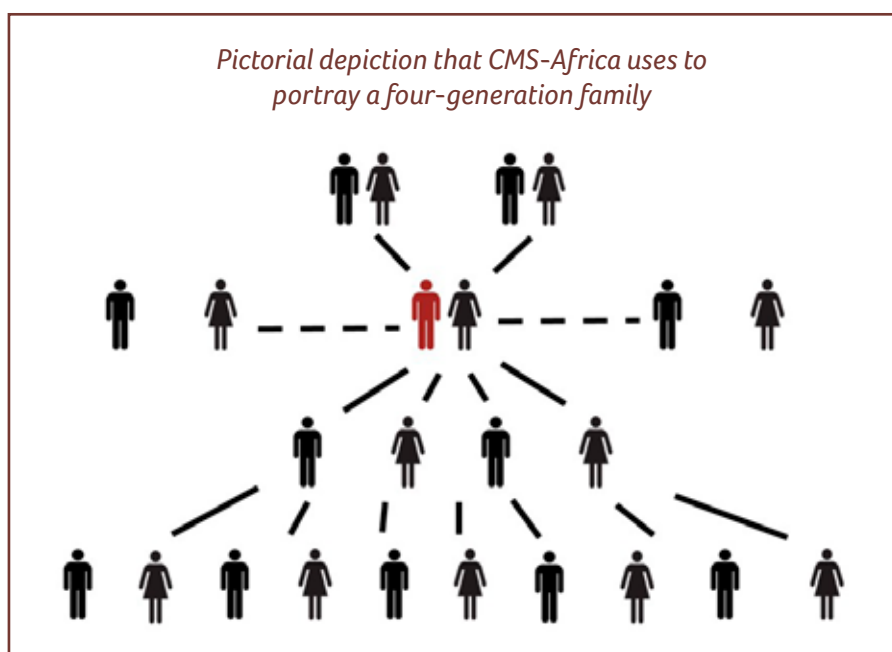
**Financial Freedom for Families (F4) is a financial literacy programme within the biblical stewardship range of CMS-Africa training interventions. CMS-Africa developed the F4 programme as a response to its observed uniqueness of the African context and how it affects management of personal and household finances.**

One of the unique aspects that CMS-Africa identified was that most heads of African households were of agrarian extraction and were at most two or three generations into a cash economy and were hence still learning its rules of engagement. Second was the proliferation of merchants of the “prosperity gospel” that take advantage of the desperate and gullible African audiences struggling to eke out a living while hoping for a miracle pill that will break their endless cycles of poverty. A third unique aspect that CMS-Africa identified was the absence of contextual, structured, experiential and pragmatic financial literacy training that is founded on biblical principles. The last aspect I will mention is the expanded view of what a family is and that tends to include one’s parents and their siblings, one’s own siblings (in some cases cousins) and one’s own children as well as the children of one’s siblings. Needless to say, this expanded view of the family unit exerts tremendous pressure and obligation on the average economically engaged African individual because of the lack of welfare states that provide social safety nets. Other pertinent concerns include low literacy (including financial literacy) levels, scarcity of resources that condemn most households to a hand-to-mouth existence and corruption.

CMS-Africa designed F4 to equip heads of African households to manage their financial resources appropriately to the glory of God and to employ prudent practices that would enable them to experience sufficiency, sustainability and financial freedom that would hopefully impact four generations – that is, their parents’ generation, their generation, their children’s generation and their grandchildren’s generation.

The F4 course seeks to challenge fundamental beliefs of scarcity by asserting that what one has is enough if prayerfully stewarded rightly using prudent financial principles and disciplines. Participants are invited to take on a six-part experiential learning journey that tackles the following areas:

- 1 The stewardship mandate and F4 course housekeeping aspects. The session helps participants appreciate what will be required of them during the course and are required to commit to a strict accountability arrangement of attendance, competency tasks and discipline checks. Having appreciated the implications of the course requirements, the participants have an option to either agree and demonstrate their willingness to abide by entering a written commitment or to withdraw from the course right at the start. Once commitment is ascertained, course materials are provided, baseline survey tools are administered, reading assignments issued and penalties for deviant behaviour (often in monetary form) agreed upon.



- 2 The ownership principle. In this session, the participants learn that it is God who is the ultimate owner of all things, that they are but stewards who are required to be faithful in their management of his resources and that they will give an account to him of how they conduct themselves. The session also explores other perceived “owners” of the resources that we have and the implications of ascribing ownership to entities other than God.
- 3 The third session delves into the principles of work, rest, planning (budgeting), saving by building of an emergency fund, investment and generosity. While emphasising that work is the primary way that God provides for his people, the reminder to temper our work with rest is underscored by drawing insights from Scripture and contemporary knowledge on the

importance of rest. Participants also gain in-depth understanding and guidelines on how to budget and build up their emergency funds for use in times of financial upheavals. The last part of this session affirms the wisdom of building an investment portfolio and challenges participants to start small with the little or much that they have.

- 4 The fourth session covers debt and diagnosing financial crisis. Common questions that feature during these sessions such as “What makes individuals end up in debt?”, “How do I get out of debt?” and “Is there good debt and bad debt?” are addressed as participants are guided through development of personal debt repayment plans. The other aspect of the session deals with financial crisis and equips participants to reflect whether they are dealing with self-inflicted financial crisis due to lack of requisite skills to manage personal/household finances, whether it is a testing by God or whether it is a temptation that they are battling, among other factors that may precipitate a financial crisis.
- 5 The fifth session looks into the role of relationships in wealth creation and the stewardship process. Key relationships that are highlighted include the steward’s relationship with God, spouse, children and business partners. Discordant relationships are also flagged during the session. These discordant relationships often appear in the form of a financially responsible spouse coupled with one who is not and whose reckless behaviour is detrimental to the household’s well-being, or a spouse (often male) that is intimidated by the other’s superior earning capability to the point of dysfunction in the home.
- 6 The last session wraps up the learning experiences with recapitulation of the lessons learned and undertaking of the end-line survey.

In order for the learning experience to be transformational, there are a number of elements that CMS-Africa has incorporated into F4 to enrich the learner’s experience and ensure knowledge, skill and attitude change is achieved during the course.

The first is the spacing of the sessions. Ordinarily, CMS-Africa trainings are done in seminar or workshop formats spread over two to five continuous days. However, F4 sessions are done in monthly intervals to allow for participants to internalise lessons learned and apply them. This means that the course runs for a period of six months, during which time we hope that the results of the participant efforts will have started bearing evident fruit – that is, they will see progress in building of emergency funds (savings), reduction of debt burdens, significant savings in day-to-day

expenditure, habit formation that reinforces financial discipline and prudence such as expenditure tracking, etc. This extended learning period also increases the likelihood of the occurrence of significant life events that are material to their personal/household finances, such as the birth of a child, loss of a loved one, moving house, promotion at work, business upheaval, loss of income, etc. These occurrences superimpose the reality of life over the learning experience and allow for the financial principles being learned to be tested and proven in real-life situations.

The second aspect is the incremental introduction of competency tasks that reinforce the lessons learned during the sessions. These competency tasks begin with record-keeping and advance on to tallying of records, then budgeting based on this data, followed by budgeting based on provided guidelines, development of debt repayment plans, then computation of net worth, development of cash-flow statements, financial goals and finally personal financial plans. This progression builds up over the six months and allows for the participants to grow in their ability to develop these critical tools around their personal/household finances. Another output that participants get to prepare is a will. These competency tasks are strictly tracked and implemented to ensure that participants have acquired and internalised the intended skills and knowledge.

A third ingredient is a rich pool of course resources, which constitutes the primary reading text, *Mixing God with Money* authored by Revd Dr Dennis Tongoi, F4 study guide (manual) and numerous course resources (templates) that aid the participant to unpack the F4 content and interact with it in great depth. During each monthly interval between sessions, the participant is required to complete reading assignments, complete study portions of the workbook and as explained earlier, fulfil competency task requirements.

Cumulatively, the F4 programme has been able to see over 800 participants equipped, at least 10 per cent of whom have gone on to become F4 trainers since 2013, when the current approach was rolled out. Six out of the seven countries where CMS-Africa has been working have been reached on the continent of Africa (Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan, DRC, Burundi and Rwanda), one nation in Europe (Switzerland) has had two cohorts drawn predominantly from African diaspora graduates and a third is ongoing as at the time of writing this article. The course resources are currently being translated into Arabic, Kirundi, Kinyarwanda and French.

The Watoto Church Neighbourhood Programme has benefitted from the F4 programme and its content has been incorporated into the Watoto curriculum that serves vulnerable women in Uganda. The women have managed to begin businesses, providing for their





families over the last two years of going through the programme. They have learned how to save and invest, budget and keep a record of every expense they incur in at home or at the business as well as give to the cause of mission.

Key outcomes of the F4 programme include increased household income, often characterised by multiple income streams, improved debt management, enhanced household nutrition and increased generosity.

1 July 2020 will herald a new five-year strategic period for CMS-Africa with the revised vision statement “Renewed Mindsets: Transformed Nations” and a razor-sharp intent to position itself as a Christian mission agency that exists to equip and multiply leaders in the church and society for community transformation. Although the world is still reeling from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, CMS-Africa is excited at the opportunity that F4 has in the new strategic dispensation to go into new geographies and cultures. F4 is already pilot testing online delivery via the Zoom platform and plans are underway to mainstream online delivery channels as an integral way to train F4.

Edith and Allen (opposite) learned F4 principles through Watoto Church and now run their own businesses in Kampala. Edith runs a retail shop and Allen runs a tailoring workshop, enabling them to feed their families.



**Henry Mwaniki** joined CMS-Africa in 2012 and is a lead facilitator of the Financial Freedom for Families programme. He has a background in microfinance and is trained in counselling psychology. Henry lives in Nairobi, Kenya, with his family and is involved in serving in prison ministry.







# ANVIL

## BOOK REVIEWS

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## 1. RECOMMENDED READING

### **Cathy Ross, Colin Smith, eds., *Missional Conversations: A Dialogue between Theory and Praxis in World Mission* (London: SCM Press, 2018)**

Setting out to review a book edited by colleagues is a strange experience. I felt I was putting myself under pressure to like it. Everything about it should appeal to me: a focus on contextual and pioneering mission; a commitment to explore the interface between theory and praxis; and the sense that it is in the midst of these kinds of conversation that fresh revelation occurs, and new learning and possibilities open up. Thankfully, it did not disappoint, and I found it a thought provoking, and indeed action provoking, read.

The concept behind the book is to bring practitioners and academics together to talk about different contexts and themes of mission. As Cathy Ross and Colin Smith admit in their introduction, this differentiation breaks down fairly quickly. They observe that in reality both practitioner and academic are involved in the same process of action and reflection. The book is comprised of two parts. The first part explores contexts for mission: the environment, migration, interfaith, economic disparity and urbanisation. The second part explores expressions of mission: community, new forms of church, southern mission movements, innovation and imagination. It concludes with an encouragement to develop a mission spirituality from Ian Adams.

The variety and diversity of contributors leads to a rich range of reflections. The book leans more heavily towards practice, as might be anticipated, which makes it feel grounded and engaged with the realities of life. This breadth is the real strength of the book, helping the reader to reflect on mission across a whole range of contexts and expressions. The purpose is more than just to provide an introduction to these different themes, although it does that well, but to encourage further reflection. It is, therefore, aimed at practitioners and pioneers, providing ideas, reflections and theological insight. Personally, my favourite section was migration by Daniel G. Groody and Amy Roche, which encourage deep reflection on particular experiences of migration and drew these into a deep theological conversation. The chapter on imagination from Jonny Baker and Ric Stott had a different pattern to the rest. Rather than each writing a chapter which referenced the other, the chapter actually unfolded as a conversation. One person would introduce an idea, and the other would respond and develop it, and so on. It worked well and I could not help wondering whether this structure might have drawn out more from the other conversations in the book.

In every chapter there was something that caught my attention, challenged my thinking or opened up a new idea. However, as I read I found myself wanting a bit more. On one level I found this a little frustrating, but, in reality, I think it probably means that the book was working as intended. As Michael Moynagh says in his chapter, good conversations lead to more conversations. If I didn't want more, if I did not have questions, if I didn't have my own thoughts that were triggered by reading, then this would not be a good conversation. As it is, I now feel the need to go and talk about these things with others and continue the conversation. This book was never going to be able to make definitive statements on all these themes and areas of mission, but as a conversation starter – one which gives you an overview, raises some important questions, provides some fresh insights and encourages the conversation to move forward – it works really well.

James Butler, CMS

### **Esther Acolatse, *Powers, Principalities, and the Spirit: Biblical Realism in Africa and the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018)**

The rise of world Christianity in the past 50 years, beginning in the 1970s and still ongoing today, will have serious implications on the subject of theology. It seems plausible to me to suggest that the entire subject is about to undergo a seismic shift. The theological voices of the past few hundred years, of European and North American men, have come short in the context of world Christianity. Their works were, for a long time, taken to speak to the church universal, their theology relevant to all Christians, regardless of their contexts. Western missionaries made them to speak to all Christians in the world, without caring where they were. Their theologies were the standard against which any other theology was measured. Theirs was *the* theology, non-Western Christians were doing *contextual* theologies.

Acolatse's book is testimony to the fact that all this is about to change. She shows us that non-Western Christians are humbly but boldly questioning and critiquing not just the universality of Western theology, but also Western theology itself. They are reading and interpreting the Scriptures for themselves and finding fault, often rightly so, with the Western theologies that have been passed down to the rest of the world as gospel truth. Because of this, many are resisting the influence on their theology. I have several times heard theology students in Africa ask: "What does Minneapolis have to do with Nairobi? And what does Edinburgh have to do with Accra?" A bishop of a fairly

large Pentecostal movement in Kenya told me, “we advise our young men and women to avoid Western theological institutions, they come back theologically well-informed but without the fire of the Spirit that is required to deal with the many principalities and powers that shape our lives.”

Acolatse’s approach seeks to do the opposite – she wants to build a hermeneutical bridge between the global north and the global south. She is a pastoral theologian and is evidently concerned about the unity and the witness of the universal church. One of the book’s intentions is “to heal the current bifurcation between the Christian West and global south by bridging the hermeneutical gap in the understanding and interpretation of the language of powers in the NT, thereby strengthening the church’s witness as one, holy and apostolic church” (p. 11). To do this, she discusses the subject of principalities and powers – a subject that easily reveals the great misunderstandings between theologians in the West and those in the rest of the world.

As an African Christian woman, formed at the feet of several leading African theologians and currently teaching in a Western institution, she stands confidently between the two worlds. She does not critique Western theology from a distance – she wrestles with two key German theologians, Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Barth, and in the end, to use the language of the book, she takes down the “principlality” of a demythologised, domesticated, Enlightenment-shaped theology. She states, “What Bultmann says could apply to a study of the phenomenology of religion, but as theology it is bankrupt, for it almost comes off as ethnography – and a bad ethnography at that. One cannot be outside, or even a participating observer, and claim to know what a religious experience and expression mean for a particular believing body (p. 64). On the other hand, Karl Barth seeks to reclaim the mythic power of the Scriptures in his theology and speaks of the possibilities of spiritual conflict between Christians and spiritual powers (pp. 116–18).

To make her argument, she draws upon several respected African theologians. Key among them is Kwesi Dickson, a fellow Ghanaian, who argues that there are continuities between the biblical and African worldviews, arguing that “The world [of the African] is experienced as holistic and dynamic, and this sensibility is at the heart of all life affecting every function at the individual and cosmic levels, the natural and spiritual, this-worldly and otherworldly, interpenetrate at the junctures of human existence – birth, life, death – which themselves are believed to be cyclical” (pp. 33–34). Consequently, African Christianity must speak of spirits to be useful to Africans.

In the end, it is evident that Acolatse is critical of both Western and African interpretations of the Bible on the subject of principalities and powers. Western Christianity has domesticated the Spirit of God and demythologised the Scriptures—the supernatural and miraculous events of the New Testament are not dependent on the Spirit. African Christians on the other hand have refused to demythologise and, I may add, have over-spiritualised their faith (and in the process, have made demythologising somewhat attractive, especially in Europe where African Pentecostal churches have mushroomed since the turn of the century). Overall, Acolatse seems keen to help the non-Western church escape Western hermeneutical approaches and I commend her for this. Western demythologised theology is impossible to contextualise in other parts of the world.

I find it interesting that she is making her critique not necessarily as an African Pentecostal Christian (which makes me wonder what she would do if she were actually making a Pentecostal critique of Bultmann, for instance). It is also worth noting that she is making the critique while in the West, wanting to make pastoral work in the West more responsive and effective. The goal is to turn toward remythologising theology. Hopefully, this can reinvigorate the quality of theological and cultural exchange between the global north and global south. Her pertinent argument in this book models for us all the future of global theological discourse in which theologies from different parts of the world critically engage each for mutual enrichment. On this subject of principalities and powers, she shows how we can engage in critical dialogue that brings us closer together rather than send us in our separate ways. She carefully demonstrates how non-Western theologies can speak to Western theologians in a manner than they can hear. That said, the book left me wondering if she could make the same argument without making use of Western theologians. Overall, I recommend the book, especially to postgraduate students of theology or missiology.

Harvey Kwiyan, Liverpool Hope University

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### **John Kaltner and Steven L. McKenzie, *Sleuthing the Bible: Clues that Unlock the Mysteries of the Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019)**

I loved this book. It is a detective trail to discover how the Bible came to be the way it is today. Using the lens and metaphor of police detection, the authors take readers/rookies on a rollicking ride around the biblical precinct, learning 15 needed skills. The first set of nine

clues – called smoking guns – are easily seen, but the second set of six clues requires more specialist skills and are called dusting for prints. This book brings pleasure by its tongue-in-cheek hermeneutics where the authors occasionally justify their academic credentials. Each author is used to engaging with either Jewish or Muslim constituencies and so is not just aware of the biblical text but interpretative approaches of Jewish and Muslim disciples and scholars.

This book is an enjoyable read that brings sensible hermeneutic and good exegesis. It raises relevant questions about sources, interpretation and implications. Refashioning hermeneutical categories in terms of modern policing may not be to everyone's taste but it makes interesting reading. I have taught biblical narrative for decades and I like the approach they take to encourage students to think afresh about how we understand and interpret the bible. The first section highlights easy-to-spot clues related to the narrative voice, physical description, aetiology, social custom, inconsistent messaging, repeated texts – doublets, hearing an echo, working with a repeated pattern or a broken pattern. All of these clues are described and explained in more common terms than traditional methodologies. In the second section the clues are harder to spot and require more "insider information". These are telegraphed information, the name, anachronism, hidden meaning, messy manuscript and the perspectival bias.

It is worth reading the whole book, which is peppered with insights throughout. Both authors rightly utilise the Bible to explore the meaningful life as interpreted by the canon of the Bible. The intrusive narrator clue helps explain why readers need to be on the alert, and highlights what the narrator wants to highlight or emphasise. Readers in later centuries need to be aware of the concerns of these intrusive narrators and the original audience the text is intended for. Any physical description of biblical characters requires a nuanced reading to discover what is actually being said and esteemed about the character. Aetiology is a very interesting clue and one that demands attention; I like the way they divide these into first and secondary importance. The authors of the Bible want to explain origins and how they see things through their cultural and sociological lenses. Furthermore, various views are legitimised, and others are not, and readers of the Bible use such material to assess the discernment of truth.

I rarely recommend a book for Bible students to buy and read, especially those in the introductory phase of biblical study, but this is one of them. Take time to enjoy the read, put your feet up and let your mind enjoy the imaginative ride. As you do further study I suspect you will be revisiting these clues noted here. Who knows,

you may even develop biblical detective instincts that you help you discern truth from error, biblical insight and nuance from popular misconception, and become a more mature imparter of God's word.

Paul Thaxter, CMS

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### **David Heywood, *Kingdom Learning: Experiential and Reflective Approaches to Christian Formation* (London: SCM Press, 2017)**

Kingdom learning proposes an approach to Christian formation that is reflective and experiential. At the heart of the book is really a call for Christian formation to be considered as adult learning and to adopt many of the principles and approaches of adult learning. In particular, Heywood emphasises the importance of learning being self-directed by the learner and reflective at its heart. The turn to adult learning is in response to the problems he identifies in the church (which for Heywood is particularly focused on the Church of England): that many people don't consider themselves "missionary disciples" with an active role to play in the ministry of the church, and that a clerical emphasis in the church has failed to provide Christian formation for adults and not had a vision for lay participation beyond helping the clergy.

In response Heywood turns to adult education. He also emphasises the concept of virtue and how practices develop good character. In this sense, chapter 2 is the key chapter that places theological reflection at the heart of theological education and Christian formation. The pastoral cycle is placed front and centre and is explained in detail. It is unfortunate, given the emphasis on lay discipleship, that the principle example used is about a vicar faced with a complicated situation involving a former prostitute wanting her child baptised. For me the subtle emphasis on the clergy in the examples and in the process of education, even in a reflective approach, was frustrating and undermined some of the points being made. It seemed to fall back into the clerical trap of seeing the vicar and the church leadership as the ones who empower the lay.

The third chapter looks at leading the learning community and how the course or programme can be adapted to be reflective. It thinks about theological education and Christian formation as an integrated curriculum across the church. Heywood explores how theological reflection allows people to reflect on their wider experience. Sharing stories of the frustrations of people who felt the church wasn't interested in their lives beyond the church, or in helping them to live as Christians in the workplace, he shows how reflective



practice provides a way to integrate these things in the life of the church. The final chapter thinks about the way theological education for clergy needs to be changed to enable this kind of learning and formation in the church.

For a book which has such a focus on transformation of the individual to become more Christ-like, the role of the Holy Spirit is left rather vague. That is not to say the Holy Spirit is not named as a key agent, in fact the Holy Spirit is regularly named as having a key role, but these often come at the end of long sections exploring principles of adult education rather than being integrated into the discussion of adult education theory.

The book has a carefully thought through and integrated structure, which does a good job of drawing together practice, adult education theology (particularly reflective learning) and virtue ethics. The problem is I'm not quite sure who the book is aimed at. While the aim of the book was to see lay people understanding themselves as "missionary disciples", it didn't appear to be aimed at them. It was more aimed at clergy and church leaders. However, as the book goes on it turns to theological educators training clergy, to train them to enable lay people to be missionary disciples. That said, it has helpful insights to offer all three of those audiences.

In conclusion, this is a detailed call to enable lay people to understand themselves as missionary disciples, and its emphasis on virtue and reflective learning is both helpful and appealing. I think pioneers and those involved in fresh expression might find much of this familiar and want something more radical. They may also want to see Christian formation more focused on mission and less centred on the life of the church. Even so, there is plenty that would be helpful and worth reflecting on in such contexts when resourcing missionary disciples.

James Butler, CMS

## ANGLICAN STUDIES

### **Andrew Norman, *A Church Observed: Being Anglican as Times Change* (Malton: Gilead Books Publishing, 2018)**

This is not just another book on Anglican theology. Andrew Norman offers us, as the title suggests, a unique account of Anglicanism from the perspective of a reflective insider. Norman's interest in worldwide Anglicanism was aroused as a curate in Paris and developed later when he served as the Archbishop of

Canterbury's Secretary for International, Ecumenical and Anglican Affairs. In fourteen chapters Norman traces the varied fortunes of worldwide Anglicanism over the past century, sometimes weaving into the narrative the experiences of his forbears, in particular his ordained grandfather Harry Nobbs, who served both in Canada and the UK. We get some insight too into public school religion as Norman reflects on his time at Ardingly College. Rather than summarising each chapter, readers may be better served by looking briefly at certain key features of Anglican identity, some of which may not be familiar.

We note first that the Anglican Communion now is made up of 40 autonomous provinces across the world. In order to understand this, it helps to remember that the growth of Anglicanism as a family of churches has been a lengthy process. In part, it accompanied the growth of trade in Africa and India. There were also individuals like Henry Martyn, a brilliant linguist who translated the Book of Common Prayer and the New Testament into Urdu. The mention of the BCP, for so long the only authorised liturgy in the Church of England, is a key marker of how the cautious conservatism of the English church was exported to the new churches of countries such as Nigeria. It took decades before the natural exuberance of the African churches saw native customs, especially singing, taking root.

The way in which the Anglican Communion handles doctrinal matters has come to the fore in dramatic ways in recent years. Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, Anglican authority is dispersed rather than centralised. This means that the Anglican Communion is a fellowship of churches characterised by their historic relationship of communion with the see of Canterbury. The Archbishop is the first among equals and thus possesses no coercive power. This is both the strength and the weakness of the Communion. Its strength lies in the fraternal bonds which undoubtedly exist between churches, but its weakness is all too evident when conflict arises in matters of belief and practice.

The two issues which have stretched the bonds of communion to the point of fracture both within and between provinces are the status of women and sexual ethics. In the Church of England, the setting up of the Forward in Faith movement following the synodical decision to ordain women created a situation of "impaired communion". This is where the frequently lauded notion of Anglican comprehensiveness as a positive attribute effectively breaks down. This state of affairs is also in part the consequence of the Anglican Communion being a non-confessional church. Its doctrinal position is governed by the application of the so-called Lambeth Quadrilateral which recognises that the paramount authority of Scripture has to be understood with the help of reason and tradition.

In the case of sexual ethics, the fault lines become even clearer. Where churches have been unable to accept any change to the “biblical” understanding of marriage and sexual ethics more generally, it seems directly due to their insistence that the authority of the Bible alone is clear in its teaching. At this point, where churches are unable to accept proposed changes and the reasons for them, then, as Norman states, the coherence of Anglicanism begins to unravel. We see the outcome of this tension in the creation of GAFCON (Global Anglican Future Conference) in rivalry with the Lambeth conference of bishops.

There is no doubt that the Anglican Communion is currently in a state of turmoil. Norman’s book is a sure-footed guide in this and his telling the story of the Anglican Communion in recent times from his own unique perspective is a valuable contribution to the available literature on the subject. It should be required reading for ordinands.

I finish this review with the words of Roman Williams who summarises the book as “Realistic, theologically acute - and above all, hopeful.”

Howard C. Bigg, Cambridge

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### **Anthony Milton ed., *The Oxford History of Anglicanism: Vol 1 Reformation and Identity, c.1520–1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017)**

Oxford (or, indeed, Cambridge) histories are not noted for sending a frisson of anticipatory excitement through the prospective reader. They are often regarded as important works of reference, but often a dull read. I am happy to report that “worthy but dull” is definitely *not* an accurate description of this first volume of the new *Oxford History of Anglicanism*. Volume I covers the period from the Reformation to the Restoration and, as the title and Anthony Milton’s introduction indicate, is concerned with the establishment of Anglican identity after the English Church broke with Roman authority and launched out as an independent Catholic and Reformed vessel on the sea of faith.

“Anglicanism” is conclusively shown to be in the process of formation in this period and where possible the authors eschew use of the term as misleading and anachronistic since, as Milton points out in his introduction, it implies that “the Church of England had a specific settled identity whereas in fact no such thing existed”. Indeed, a recurring theme is just how fluid Anglican identity was in this formative period with a number of groups and sub-groups appearing and disappearing within a relatively short period of time. Indeed, the Victorian Anglo-Catholic conception

of the Anglican *via media* is shown to be very much an anachronism – or plain wishful thinking – in this period; insofar as the new church had an initial centre of gravity it was very much a Reformed one.

Inevitably, chapters in books with multiple authorship can vary in quality but this volume maintains a high standard throughout. Chapter preferences will vary from reader to reader depending on personal interests. That said, I particularly enjoyed those chapters which helped to fill in gaps in my knowledge, notably those on Canon Law, cathedrals and the church during the Commonwealth period.

A mention needs to be made of the series introduction by the overall editor, Rowan Strong. This is a notable piece of historical writing and (if one overlooks the erroneous assertion that William Tyndale was “executed by the [Tudor] regime”) provides a short but substantial essay giving a compressed, accurate overview of Anglicanism’s fascinating but “inconsistent Christian identity”. It could profitably be put in the hands of all students studying this subject. If further contributions to *The Oxford History of Anglicanism* maintain the same high standard I look forward with eager anticipation to subsequent volumes in the series.

John Darch, Ellesmere

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### **Mark D. Chapman, Sathianathan Clarke, Martyn Percy, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Anglican Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015)**

This book is timely. The last time that anything comparable on the topic of Anglican Studies was published was in 1988 with the appearance of *The Study of Anglicanism*, still a valuable resource. The present volume overlaps with the earlier one on such key topics as Scripture, tradition and reason, but the passing of the years entails that its scope is far broader both geographically and topically. It may be true that Anglican Studies is only in its infancy, but this book represents a landmark in this field. It sets out a comprehensive set of themes across disciplinary boundaries which will act as a stimulus to Anglican Studies in the future.

To give an idea of the scope of the book, it is divided into seven major sections: Historiography, The Methods and Styles of Anglicanism, The Contextualisation of Anglicanism, Anglican Identities, Crises and Controversies, The Practice of Anglican Life and the Futures of Anglicanism, a total of 44 essays preceded by a substantial introduction. This volume is a broad-brush portrait of Anglican life and thought in all its rich diversity.

The origins of Anglicanism have long been a matter of scholarly debate. In popular thought, Anglicanism was brought to birth at the Reformation. This means that whatever claim the Church of England might have to be a Catholic Church in communion with all other churches was fundamentally transformed. Henry VIII, however, whatever his matrimonial woes, had little intention of a wholesale reform of doctrine. In the light of this, Kate Bruce's essay "Anglicanism Before the Reformation" offers an account of the essential Englishness of religion prior to the upheavals of the Henrician Reformation.

Readers with different interests will find a broad offering. Essays which caught my attention include Paul Avis on "Prayer Book Use and Conformity" and Grace Davie on "Establishment"; this latter essay, from the pen of a sociologist, was very helpful. Gerald West and Micah Eun-Kyu Kim write respectively on the Bible and Hermeneutics, though I found the radicalism of the latter a little too bracing. Inevitably, the topics of gender and sexuality are covered, here by Kathryn Tanner and Andrew Goddard and an important essay by Paula Nesbitt on doctrine tackles the matter of the Anglican Covenant with Anglicans mainly in the global south wanting a tightening of doctrine, a greater centralising of authority and authorising conditions for membership.

Underlying many of the essays in this volume lurks the question: can the Anglican Communion survive? The critical questions facing the Communion do not lend themselves to easy solutions. Issues such as sexuality and same sex unions are as much matters of culture as they are of theology. The Bible is read differently in Uganda than it is in North America. As far as the Church of England is concerned, the future is uncertain, but as Grace Davie says in her essay, the established church is held in great affection by many who are non-attenders and its demise is certainly not imminent! This is an important book and a very useful starting point for anybody wanting to follow up particular topics. Each essay has a full bibliography and a useful index. I commend it warmly.

Howard C. Bigg, Cambridge

### **Marcus Throup, *All Things Anglican: Who We Are and What We Believe* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2018)**

This short paperback (with fewer than 150 pages) is a very accessible, easily-understood introduction to the Anglican Church. It fulfils its aim and I will recommend it to others on that basis. Pages 1–114 describe aspects of Anglicanism while pages 117–140 provide "Essential

Resources" of the Apostles Creed (Baptism), The Nicene Creed (Sufficient Statement of Faith) and the 39 Articles of Religion. These are helpfully reproduced in the book for easy reference. There is also a glossary of Anglican terms for the uninitiated and a reasonable bibliography. Throup's approach benefits from being a participant in the Anglican Communion who lives with the diverse realities of the Anglican Communion.

He is a part of an Anglican Church that is present in 165 countries with more than 85 million adherents. The average Anglican member is likely to be poor, female and sub-Saharan African. The church is much stronger in the global south and the majority of members, over 70 per cent, now live in the global south. This implies, in view of declining numbers in the Western Church, that the Church of England has to learn to receive as well as to give, something that is not culturally natural to the Church of England. Anglicanism does celebrate diversity in unity rather than unity in diversity. Throup explores the formularies of the Church of England and their implications for today. He explains why the Church of England is both Catholic and Reformed and has welded together these two streams – something that remains enigmatic or often unknown to many Christians in Britain. I thought that diversity does seem to be rather limited though given other assumptions about ecclesial make-up and polity. Liturgy is considered broadly within Anglican parameters in chapter three. There is still much further we can go in contextualised Anglican liturgy, but Throup remains descriptive rather than prescriptive in his aims and approach. This means it is a less contentious book than it could have been, but it is a really helpful short introduction for people.

The essential of Anglican theology in chapter four is helpful and demonstrates and affirms a high view of Scripture as light, food and fire (p. 55). I found chapter five on "What happens when Anglicans disagree" really helpful looking at the notion of comprehensiveness and generous disagreement and bringing some clarity on the debate around homosexuality within the Communion. His chapter on vocation talks of a calling of all Anglicans to follow Christ in the world but also that with this calling there may be a further calling to take more responsibility in the church with its appropriate accountability. Bishops, priests and deacons were described, and he engages briefly with Ephesians 4:11–12, which notes apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers called to serve the church. He acknowledges that he does not map out an Anglican theology of vocation in this short book. He also presents a rather ideal view of vocation and for instance, he did not comment on the election of bishops around the communion which can often be tumultuous.

“How do Anglicans do mission?” articulates a commitment to integral mission as created originally by the Anglican Consultative Council in outlining the Five Marks of Mission, a broad manifesto for mission. The final chapter seeks to explain how the Anglican Communion works and explains briefly the four instruments of unity: the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates Meeting. He also looks at a Communion that faces crisis and he delineates the challenges of the principle of subsidiarity – where church decisions are made at a local level for different members of the Communion.

Many Anglicans within the Church of England may be asking more about what it means to belong to the Church of England within the Anglican Communion. I have already given this book to others who have asked such questions. It is succinct, informative, and readable and with the accompanying questions at the end of each chapter very useful for both personal and group study.

Paul Thaxter, CMS



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