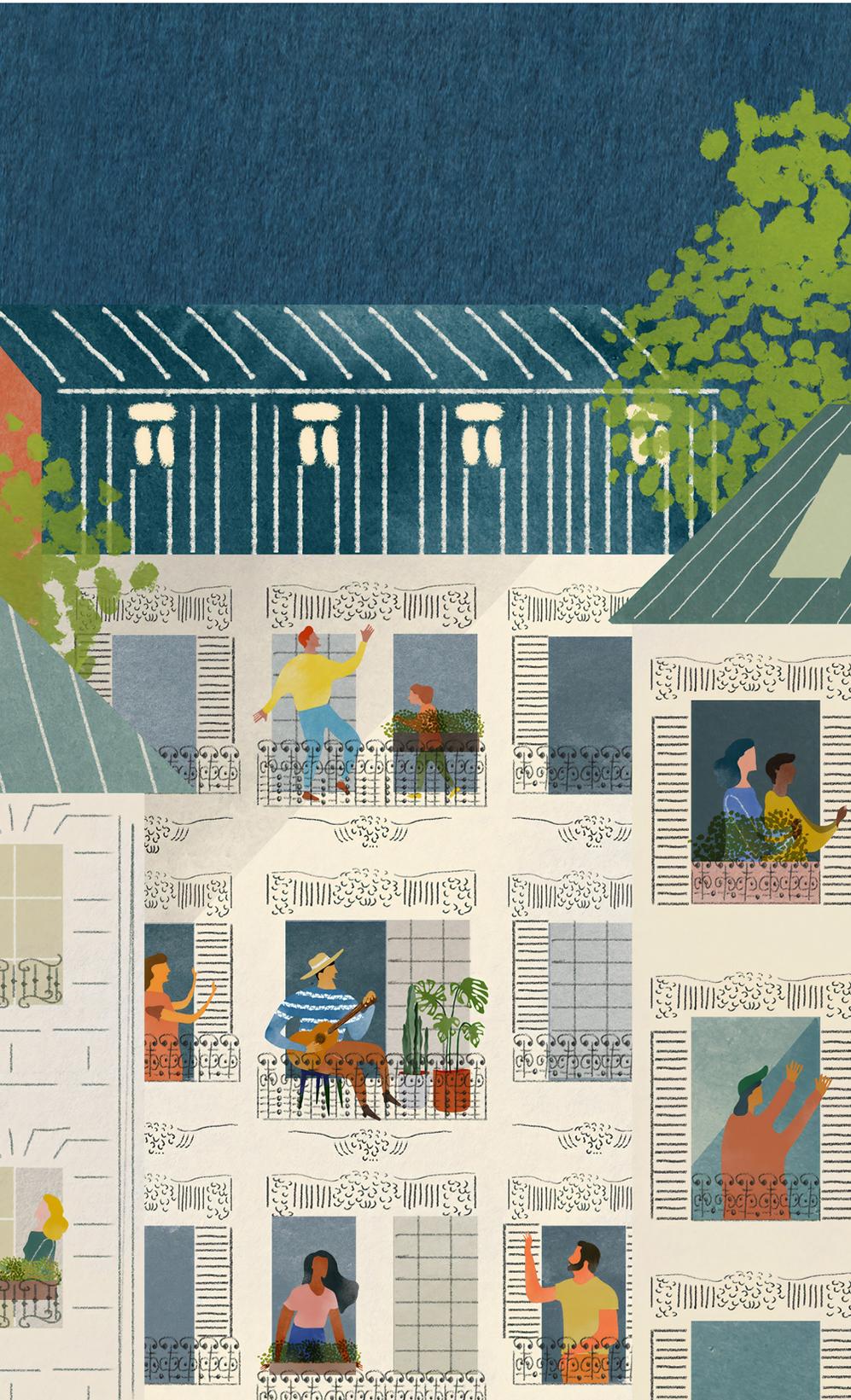


# N E X U S

The ACT Research Magazine



**The Bookshelf**  
2020 Books on Community

**Michael O'Neil**  
Extract from *Beyond 4 Walls*

**Louise Gosbell**  
The Inclusive Church

**Stephen Garner**  
The Distanced Church

**Michael Bräutigam**  
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Psychology and the Church

**and the usuals**  
calls for papers, events, ACT  
people online, conferrals,  
publications and news

# from the editor

Welcome to the new look NEXUS, the ACT research magazine.

For the first edition in 2020, we looked at the theme of COVID, and this was well received.

For this second and final edition for the year, I decided to look at Community, a key theme which had arisen in many reflections over the last year.

The NEXUS bookshelf had so many options that I limited it to books on Community from the last year.

One of the ACT Monograph Series books out this year was on the Church, and we have an extract from it in this issues. Check out the [entire series here](#) - while you were in lockdown, we were busy publishing, with a record number of books.

ACT faculty have been busy reflecting too - this issue includes pieces on the distanced church, the inclusive church and theology and psychology.

As well, please find all the usual sections which keep you in touch with the theological community.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the community of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Megan Powell du Toit



# THE NEXUS BOOKSHELF

This issue we look at 2020 books about community, as COVID has prompted reflection on this important theme.

## March

[\*When Narcissism Comes to Church: Healing Your Community From Emotional and Spiritual Abuse\*](#)

DeGroat takes a close look at narcissism, not only in ministry leaders but also in church systems. He offers compassion and hope for those affected by its destructive power and imparts wise counsel for churches looking to heal from its systemic effects. DeGroat also offers hope for narcissists themselves—not by any shortcut, but by the long, slow road of genuine recovery, possible only through repentance and trust in the humble gospel of Jesus.

## April

[\*Renovated: God, Dallas Willard, and the Church That Transforms, Jim Wilder\*](#)

Through conversations he had with Dallas Willard at the Heart & Soul Conference shortly before Dallas's death, Jim Wilder shows how we can train our brains to relate to God based on joyful, mutual attachment—which leads to emotional and spiritual maturity as our identity and character are formed by our relationship with God.

## June

[\*Roadmap to Reconciliation 2.0, Brenda Salter McNeil\*](#)

We can see the injustice and inequality in our lives and in the world. We are ready to rise up. But how, exactly, do we do this? How does one reconcile? What we need is a clear sense of direction. Based on her extensive consulting experience with churches, colleges and organisations, Rev. Dr. Brenda Salter McNeil has created a roadmap to show us the

way. She guides us through the common topics of discussion and past the bumpy social terrain and political boundaries that will arise.

## August

[\*The Beautiful Community: Unity, Diversity, and the Church at Its Best, Irwyn L. Ince Jr.\*](#)

Irwyn Ince boldly unpacks the reasons for our divisions while gently guiding us toward our true hope for wholeness and reconciliation. God reveals himself to us in his trinitarian life as the perfection of beauty, and essential to this beauty is his work as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The gospel imperative to pursue the beautiful community—unity in diversity across lines of difference—is rooted in reflecting the beautiful community of our triune God. This book calls us into and provides tools for that pursuit.

[\*The Other Half of Church: Christian Community, Brain Science, and Overcoming Spiritual Stagnation\*](#)

Why does true Christian transformation seem fleeting? And why does church often feel lonely, Christian community shallow, and leaders untrustworthy? Is lasting joy possible? These are some of the questions Michel Hendricks has considered both in his experience as a spiritual formation pastor and in his lifetime as a Christian. He began to find answers when he met Jim Wilder—a neurotheologian. Using brain science, Wilder identified that there are two halves of the church: the rational half and the relational half. And when Christians only embrace the rational half, churches become unhealthy places where transformation doesn't last and narcissistic leaders flourish.



[\*Wondrously Wounded: Theology, Disability, and the Body of Christ, Brian Brock\*](#)

The church has long proven itself a safe refuge despite the sad reality that it can be, and has been, unwelcoming toward those perceived as different. This is especially true of the contemporary church's response to those with disabilities--a response often at surprising variance with its historic practices of care. The church once helped shape western morality to cherish these individuals with love and acceptance. It is thus ironic when today's church neglects this care, or practices care with no awareness of the rich theological history out of which such moral sensibilities originally emerged. In *Wondrously Wounded*, Brian Brock reclaims the church's historic theology of disability and extends it to demonstrate that people with disabilities, like all created in God's image, are servants of God's redemptive work.

**September**

[\*The Colors of Culture: The Beauty of Diverse Friendships, Melinda Joy Mingo\*](#)

We are living in a time where fear and mistrust among people of different cultural and ethnic groups is becoming the norm rather than the exception. ...We can learn to see every human being from God's perspective and value their experiences even when we don't understand them. To truly connect with people who are different from us will

take the grace of God, compassion, and empathy. It will mean risking everything that we think we know about other cultures to initiate small steps toward befriending others. Mingo models reaching across cultures. Through vivid stories spanning several countries, Mingo shows the beauty of diverse friendships in her life. She takes risks and learns from her mistakes, recognizing that relationships are worth the cost.

[\*Reading Scripture as the Church: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Hermeneutic of Discipleship, Derek W. Taylor\*](#)

The Bible is meant to be read in the church, by the church, as the church. Although the practice of reading Scripture has often become separated from its ecclesial context, theologian Derek Taylor argues that it rightly belongs to the disciplines of the community of faith. He finds a leading example of this approach in the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who regarded the reading of Scripture as an inherently communal exercise of discipleship. In conversation with other theologians, including John Webster, Robert Jenson, and Stanley Hauerwas, Taylor contends that Bonhoeffer's approach to Scripture can engender the practices and habits of a faithful hermeneutical community. Today, as in Bonhoeffer's time, the church is called to take up and read.

[\*The Sacred Overlap: Learning to Live Faithfully in the Space Between\*, J.R. Briggs](#)

The widening of political, racial, generational, and religious differences often leads to an "us vs. them" mentality all too common today. In *The Sacred Overlap*, author J.R. Briggs communicates a refreshing vision that embraces tension and calls us to live in radical love and faithfulness between the extremes that isolate and divide people. *The Sacred Overlap* helps readers see that Christians are called to live with their feet firmly planted in two different worlds--in both heaven and earth--living naturally with grace and truth. Only then can a Christian be a faithful witness in the way of Jesus.

### October

[\*Uncommon Church: Community Transformation for the Common Good\*, Alvin Sanders](#)

Christians too often treat the poor as goodwill projects instead of people. Because of this mindset, many remain unchurched. Healthy, local, urban churches are needed because they combine personal empowerment and community transformation. Every poor neighbourhood needs uncommon churches that will seek the common good of their communities. Sanders engages hard truths about these neighbourhoods and provides a model for how to do ministry in difficult conditions. The local, urban church is the key to community transformation, as it plays three crucial roles of empowering, partnering, and reaching.

[\*A Church Called Tov: Forming a Goodness Culture That Resists Abuses of Power and Promotes Healing\*, Scot McKnight, Laura Barringer](#)

We need a better way. The sad truth is that churches of all shapes and sizes are susceptible to abuses of power, sexual abuse, and spiritual abuse. Abuses occur most frequently when Christians neglect to create a culture that resists abuse and promotes healing, safety, and spiritual growth. How do we keep these devastating events from repeating themselves? We need a map to get us from where we are today to where we ought to be as the body of Christ. That map is in a mysterious and beautiful little Hebrew word in Scripture that we translate "good," the word

tov. In this book, McKnight and Barringer explore the concept of tov—unpacking its richness and how it can help Christians and churches rise up to fulfil their true calling as imitators of Jesus.

### November

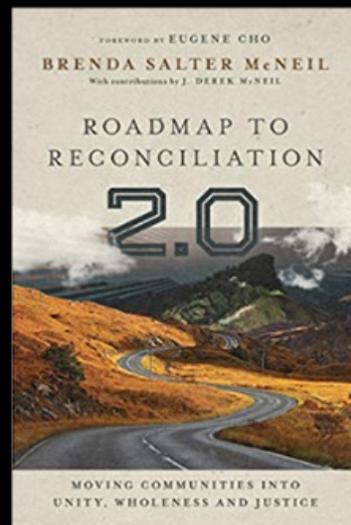
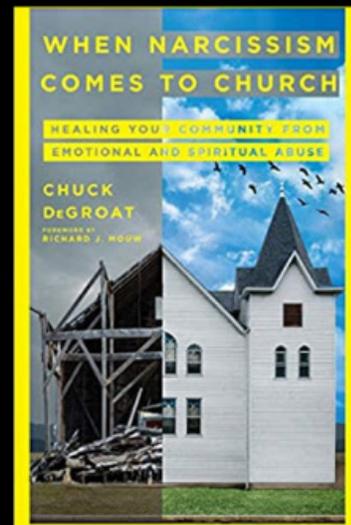
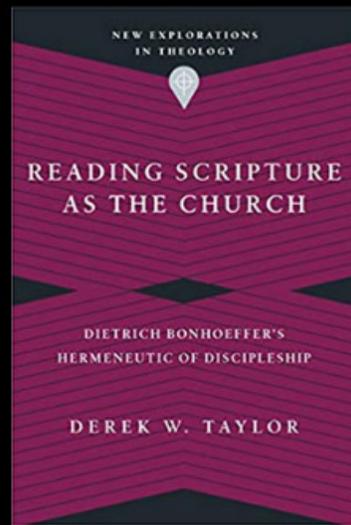
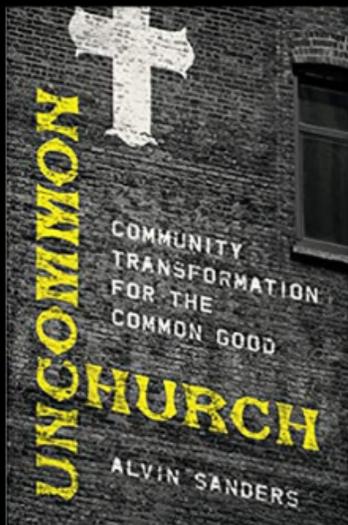
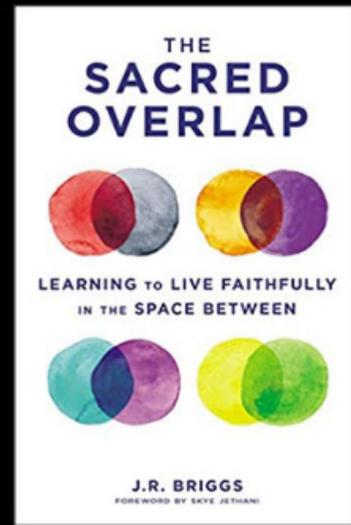
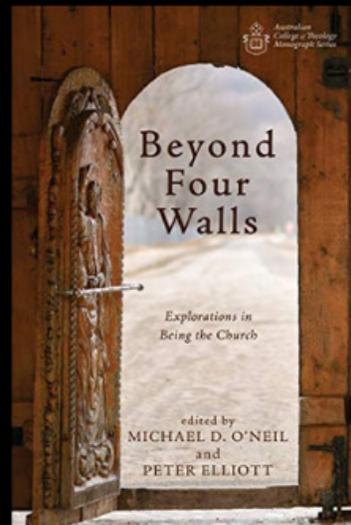
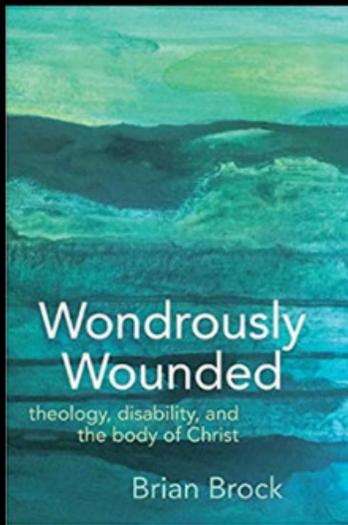
[\*The Hopeful Neighbourhood: What Happens When Christians Pursue the Common Good\*, Don Everts](#)

Everts explores an exciting reality that is revealed in Scripture, shown throughout history, and confirmed in the latest research: when Christians pursue the common good of the neighbourhood, the world stands up and notices. It turns out this is exactly what we're called to do. When Christians make good things, we bring blessings and hope to our local community. With original research from the Barna Group and Lutheran Hour Ministries on how Christians relate to our neighbourhoods, this book is filled with constructive, practical ways that Christians and churches bless those around us. As Christians join together for the common good, we bring hope to the world, credibility to the church, and glory to God.

### December

[\*T&T Clark Handbook of Ecclesiology\*, eds. Kimlyn J. Bender & D. Stephen Long](#)

Divided into 3 parts, this handbook provides a wide-ranging survey and analysis of the Christian Church. The 1st addresses the scriptural foundations of ecclesiology; the next outlines the historical and confessional aspects; the final part discusses a variety of contemporary and topical themes. Compiled and written by leading scholars in the field, it covers a range of key topics in the context of their development and importance in each stream of historic Christianity and the confessional traditions. The contributors cover traditional matters such as creedal notes, but also tackle questions of ordination, orders of ministry, and sacraments. It is extensive enough to provide a true overview of the field, but the essays are also concise enough to be read as reference selections.



# BEYOND 4 WALLS

Exclusive extract from Michael O Neil's chapter in ACT Monograph Series Book, *Beyond 4 Walls*

Part of the genius of the book of Jonah is not merely its inspired narrative, or the scope and beauty of the prophetic vision presented in it, but the *way* in which the prophet has set forth the message. The book itself is an exercise in theological reappropriation of the ancient traditions and Scriptures that shape Israel's identity and calling. . . .

Also embedded in the text and therefore part of the didactic structure and function of the book are confessional and theological materials from the tradition which synthesize the faith of the ancient people of God. I have noted already the role of Exodus 34:6–7 in the Hebrew Bible. Another confessional element is found in Jonah 1:9 where Jonah confesses the “Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land.” Not only is God the sovereign creator but, as the narrative makes clear, he rules and guides his creation, intimately involved especially in human affairs. God is also the judge who holds the nations to account, and finally the merciful redeemer, as the climax of the psalm makes clear: “Salvation is from the Lord” (Jonah 2:9). The book reflects at length on the relation of Israel and the nations, on prayer, on the nature of repentance, and as I have argued, on what it means to be the people of God.

Israel, therefore, is an elect people, called to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation in the midst of all the nations (Exod 19:4–6), and as noted, a “light to the nations.” Some care is required here if we are to avoid over-reading the book of Jonah, particularly with respect to the

idea of mission. According to Ronald Clements, the theology of election was a conscious attempt to relate the special bond between Yahweh and Israel to the existence of the surrounding nations, an attempt carried out in a period characterised by crisis and threat.<sup>1</sup> What is intriguing in Deuteronomy is, that “although it consciously considers Israel's position in relation to the nations, it does not develop from this any role or service that Israel is to play in regard to them.”<sup>2</sup> Horst Preuss concurs, saying, “any possible significance attributed to the chosen people's responsibility toward the foreign nations is passed by in silence. *Israel, first of all, must and ought to discover itself again.*”<sup>3</sup> According to Preuss, then, the first responsibility Israel has is to live in accordance with its own identity and purpose as the elect of God. Yahweh's redemptive activity on Israel's behalf has the purpose “of other nations coming to know and acknowledge him as God. Thus YHWH's activity on his people's behalf is exemplary of his intention for his world.”<sup>4</sup> In effect, Preuss wants to maintain a distinction between active and passive mission as the nature of Israel's calling. Israel is not called as an active missionary toward the nations, even in the case of the book of Jonah. Rather, Yahweh's “activity on behalf of his people shall possess the power of attraction that works outwardly in an enticing fashion to demonstrate the truth of YHWH

1 Clements, *Old Testament Theology*, 89.

2 Clements, *Old Testament Theology*, 95.

3 Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:33 (emphasis added).

4 Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, 2:300.



before the rest of the world.”<sup>5</sup> Israel mediates by what it is and what it experiences, that is, passively, a wider participation in its own community with God.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, 2:292. For Preuss’s comments on the book of Jonah specifically, see page 303: “The Book of Jonah is also misunderstood, if one interprets it as a call to undertake a mission to the heathen. Much more, it has to do with Israel’s not standing as a barrier between YHWH and the nations, due to its proud and egotistical certainty in its own salvation. Further, YHWH’s compassion toward the heathen is not to be indignantly contested or undervalued.”

<sup>6</sup> Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, 2:302. Thus, on page 305 Preuss goes on to comment, “The servant *was not to be* a light to the nations, and this is not mentioned as his mission, but rather he *is* this light; that is, his influence consists in the fact that ‘light,’ that is, salvation, is to be transmitted to the nations” (original emphasis). See also Clements, *Old Testament Theology*, 96, who arrives at a similar conclusion, stating that “the light that God had given

The picture in the New Testament is, of course, quite different, because the church is commanded to “go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19)—mission in the active sense. The church can take encouragement, however, from the book of Jonah with respect to its proclamation. The message of Jonah in 3:4, as terse and as unhelpful as it was—a declaration of impending doom rather than an announcement of good news and a call to salvation—nonetheless became the catalyst of a remarkable revival in the lives of the hearers.” It is clearly not Jonah but the word of God that converts Nineveh.”<sup>7</sup> The great revival of chapter three resulting in

to Israel would become a light by which other nations also might live . . . The picture is not that of a ‘mission’ in the strict sense of a going out to the nations, but rather that, when Israel returns to its homeland, it will bring the faithful of other nations in its train.”

<sup>7</sup> Cary, *Jonah*, 111.

the repentance of Nineveh had nothing to do with Jonah's depth of spirituality, degree of consecration, passionate ministry, spiritual anointing, prayerful preparation, learned exposition, eloquent rhetoric, love for the people, or dedication to God. On all counts, Jonah fails. The only reason that can be given for the spiritual awakening that grips Nineveh is the sovereign work of God accomplished through the proclamation of his mighty word. . . . Jonah is, of course, a parody, and preachers should *not* seek to emulate him in his lack of spirituality, preparation, and consecration. But the community of God's people, as a community of the Word, will necessarily also be a community that heralds the message of Christ, confident not in its own power or eloquence, but in the grace of the one who has called them to this service.

Nevertheless, Jonah's aim is not the creation of a company of preachers or missionaries but the formation of a renewed covenant community, an elect people, a kingdom of priests whose lives together are grounded in and shaped by the Holy Scriptures and the confessional materials deriving from them: a community of the Word. For this is a presupposition of mission, even in the New Testament. And the book of Jonah models how such a community might be nurtured: by means of creative retrieval of the sources of the faith, mined in Holy Scripture, and by theological reflection on and interpretation of those sources, aiming at a "conversion of the imagination" such that the people of God are wrested as it were, from the confining ideologies and belief structures of the surrounding culture, and empowered and envisioned to inhabit the world *differently*, as the people of the God whose world it is. Walter Brueggemann has written that,

The prophetic tradition is not so much about scolding and threat as it is a massive act of imagination that asserts that the world could be different . . . I suggest that the recovery of the biblical text is urgent, the most urgent "social action" that can be undertaken. For it is only when the past is brimming with miracle and the future is inundated with fidelity that the present can be re-characterized as a place of neighborliness . . .<sup>8</sup>

**Read on in this chapter as well as the other chapters by buying the book [Beyond Four Walls](#).**



# THE DISTANCED CHURCH

## Pragmatism, Creativity and Rhythms of Life

**A** while back, I was invited to be part of a panel on digital ecclesiology. Perhaps a little naively, and probably because I'm primarily a theologian, I took that to mean that we'd be focusing on how our theologies of the church interact with digital media. I do this kind of thing fairly regularly with students and church groups asking them to reflect on how being wrapped in media shapes our Christian lives. However, this panel discussion mostly avoided any talk of ecclesiology, focusing instead on pragmatic uses of technology in church contexts. I've been reflecting on this as I've watched churches grapple with COVID-19 and our imposed isolation and, as the memes have it, "suddenly, just like that...everyone was going to church on Facebook."

This almost instantaneous lurch from regular physical worship gatherings to remote synchronous and asynchronous modes, active interaction and passive consumption, shifts in authority and responsibility, and ongoing negotiation of this new reality has brought the practices and traditions of many Christian churches crashing unexpectedly into the digital world. While this is often manifested in pragmatism that overrides theology, I've also observed some hopeful signs of creativity emerging that point forward to a deeper attention to the rhythms of Christian faith and life and the world around us.

The pragmatic element to online engagement is often driven by the need to have something, anything ready for the next Sunday. Churches have tended to project their physical life and traditions directly into the online space. The familiarity of typical worship service upfront elements streamed to social media meets the uncomfortable unfamiliarity of worship band or preacher facing empty sanctuaries, inability to ‘pass the peace’ to another flesh and blood human being, and the lack of shared fellowship of face to face conversation and a cup of tea or coffee after the service.

One obstacle for online expressions of church has been the physicality attached to the administration of sacraments. For churches that downplay the sacramental nature of communion and baptism, seeing them, perhaps, as a non-mystical remembrance, moving to self-service online communion might be relatively straightforward. For those for whom the physical consecration of Eucharistic elements requires a priest, or where the elements need to be sourced from an approved provider, or those elements are understood to be altered in the administration of the sacrament, “going online” is significantly harder or even impossible. Moreover, other sacramental practices, such as anointing for healing or confession, will also be limited during social isolation, introducing anxiety amongst those faithful who see these things as essential to their Christian life and salvation, no matter the comfort offered by broadcast visual masses and suchlike.

This pragmatic streak also makes itself felt in a localised milieu, with a tendency for each congregation to attempt to replicate their own worship service and community to their members. The speed at which social distancing happened contributed to this go it alone tendency,, but perhaps there is also an element of not thinking as

collegially and ecumenically as one might. What might the witness of the gospel look like to those inside and outside the church if, on any given Sunday, Christians from a variety of churches gathered together online for collaborative worship that emphasised the commonality of the gospel of Jesus Christ, demonstrated church communities supporting one another? Might this not provide hope to a wider world in need of that?

Of course, there are counterexamples to these insular, pragmatic approaches. The Ongar MMU, an Anglican congregation within the Chelmsford Diocese in the UK, encouraged people across churches to mark their palms with a cross on Palm Sunday and share the photo with the hashtag #palmcrosses20. There have been many denominational social media groups to promote sharing of ideas, support and prayer for congregations at regional and national levels, such as the Facebook group ideas for resourcing ministry set up by the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, a similar group Resourcing UCA Congregations in Non-Contact Times in the Uniting Church of Australia.



Each of these provide a mix of helpful advice as well as spaces where people might reflect on the implications of being a distanced church.

Alongside these pragmatic concerns, there were stimulating signs of creativity. Many churches were already online, in ways ranging from the modest church website through to full-blown internationally telecast services delivered by satellite backed up with corporate-like social media presences. For many churches, though, connecting with their isolated members and wider communities has required them to engage imaginatively with new skills. One side-effect I've noticed has been a necessary decentralising of authority structures around the worship service and the corresponding empowerment of those outside of authoritative cohorts.

For some in leadership, this might be the catalyst they've dreamed of, getting more of the church involved, but for others, it might be deeply unsettling as they become increasingly side-lined or perceived as less relevant. Moreover, for those worried about retaining church membership or concerned about doctrinal adherence, the sudden plethora of churches showing their wares online will be deeply unsettling as their members discover what goes on outside of their regular church ecosystem. Additionally, when social distancing is over, will those who have been valued and empowered continue to contribute, or will the previous organisational and power structures be reverted to?

Moreover, this home-based focus is pushing churches to be more intentional in resourcing people outside of regular church gatherings and to examine the spiritual rhythms of life beyond the Sunday service. Common elements identified from churches all around the world sharing their own weekly rhythms include regular online morning and evening prayers, musical worship - streamed or interactive - throughout the week, daily activities for children, taking regular 'sabbath' breaks from news and digital media, intentionally eating more meals together as a household, spending time in prayer and contemplation, supporting working from

home, shared reading of the Bible, encouraging responsible contact with neighbours, and making people available to provide all manner of support. While not forming the kinds of rhythms that a monastic rule might have, the presence of these regular rhythms can provide much-needed stability and comfort in a world of confusion and anxiety.

One side-effect of this mode of gathering has also been the democratising of worship in the as it may now be easier for those with illness or disability to participate in gathered worship. Likewise, maybe the inability to gather physically will alert those who long for 'normal' physical church to recognise that isn't normality for those who are unable to join for worship and community because of illness or disability and to respond to that proactively.

The shift to be a distanced church and community in many parts of the world in the face of COVID-19 has been sudden and disruptive. The response of church communities has been driven in the first instance by pragmatism, but increasingly signs of creativity, empowerment of different members of these communities, and attention to rhythms of life are beginning to emerge. The challenge for the churches will be to nurture these new developments in ways that are sustainable and life-giving for the church and the world in the current situation and into the years after it.

Dr Stephen Garner is Academic Dean and Senior Lecturer in Theology at Laidlaw. An earlier version of this article was published as: Garner, Stephen. "The Distanced Church: Pragmatism, Creativity and Rhythms of Life." In *The Distanced Church: Reflections on Doing Church Online*, edited by Heidi Campbell, 55-57. College Station, TX.: Network for New Media, Religion & Digital Culture Studies/Texas A&M University, 2020. Used with permission

# PUBLICATIONS

## Consortium

Recent publications in Australia and New Zealand.  
[Find out more on the ACT Publications Page](#)

## Department of Bible and Languages

Colin Kruse, *The Letters of John*. Second Edition  
 PNTC, 2020. (MST).

Chris Seglenieks, *Johannine Belief and Graeco-Roman Devotion: Reshaping Devotion for John's Graeco-Roman Audience*, Mohr Siebeck, 2020. (BCSA)

## Department of Christian Thought and History

Richard Shumack, *Jesus Through Muslim Eyes*, SPCK, 2020. (MST)

Ruth Lukabyo, *From a Ministry for Youth to a Ministry of Youth: Aspects of Protestant Youth Ministry in Sydney 1930-1959*, ACT Monograph Series, W&S, 2020. (Youthworks)

Michael D. O'Neil & Peter Elliott, eds., *Beyond Four Walls: Explorations in Being the Church*, ACT Monograph Series, Wipf & Stock, 2020.

## Department of Ministry and Practice

Tim MacBride, *To Aliens and Exiles: Preaching the New Testament as Minority-Group Rhetoric in a Post-Christendom World*, Cascade, 2020. (Morling)

David Starling & Darrell Jackson (eds) *Not in Kansas Anymore: Christian Faith in a Post-Modern World*, Wipf and Stock/Morling Press 2020. (Starling; Morling; Jackson; Whitley)

Graham D. Stanton, *Wide-Awake in God's World: Bible Engagement for Teenage Spiritual Formation*

*in a Culture of Expressive Individualism*, ACT Monograph Series, Wipf & Stock, 2020

Johan Ferreira, *Theological Education in Asia: Discipleship and Suffering*, Wipf & Stock, 2020. (MST)

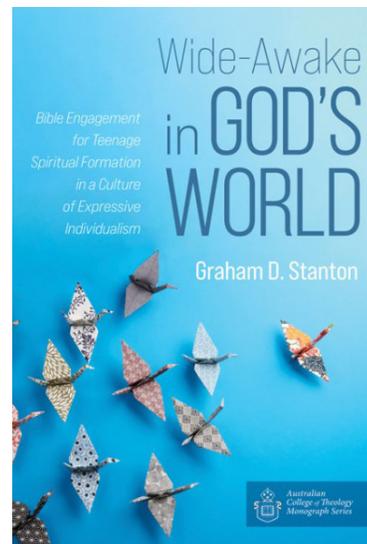
## Beyond

Kevin Giles, *The Headship of Men and the Abuse of Women: Are They Related In Any Way?* Cascade, 2020.

Graham Hill, *Salt, Light, and a City*, Volume 2, Cascade, 2020. (Stirling)

Glen O'Brien, *Wesleyan-Holiness Churches in Australia: Hallelujah under the Southern Cross*, Routledge, 2020. (Eva Burrows)

Mark Lindsay, *God Has Chosen: The Doctrine of Election Through Christian History*, IVP Academic, 2020. (Trinity Melbourne)



# OUR TEAM

## Strategy and Operations

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Dr Paul Yeates

*Quality & Inclusion Officer*

vacant

*Academic Quality Officer*

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Elisa Norris

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Asanka Gunerathne

*Academic Administrative Officers*

Coralie Scott

Rebekah Wall

## ACT NEWS

### College News

[Rev. Dr. Stephen Lewis as the new Lecturer in Old Testament and Hebrew at the Reformed Theological College.](#)

[Two of the ACT affiliated Baptist colleges, Morling and Vose, are merging.](#)

### Office News

Meredith Walker-Harding, our hardworking Quality & Inclusion Officer, has finished up at the ACT so that she can join *Common Grace* in advocacy.

The Director of Teaching and Learning position is in the process of being filled.

*Correction from June issue: Peter Judge Mears graduated from BST, not MST.*

# CONFERRALS

**July - November 2020**

## **Doctor of Ministry**

Pam Condie – Malyon – Doctor of Ministry

*The Views of Queensland Baptists Regarding the Ordination of Women.*

## **Doctor of Theology**

Andrew Stewart – MST

*The Three Accounts of Paul's Conversion in Acts 9, 22 and 26: A Study of Consistency and Creativity in Narrative Retelling.*

## **Doctor of Philosophy**

Lincoln Loo - MST

*The Catecismo of Martín Pérez De Ayala: A Window Into Christian-Muslim Relations in Sixteenth Century Spain.*

David Lowe – Vose

*Matthew 19:9 – A Deadly Exception.*



# INTEGRATING THEOLOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY

Dr Michael Bräutigam and Dr Judy Wilkie, Centre for Theology & Psychology, Melbourne School of Theology/Eastern College



Integrative endeavours at the university increasingly are encouraged. In fact, the ability to synthesise and integrate knowledge from various subject areas is a key requirement for academics today. Scholars recognise potential gain in looking beyond the horizons of their fields. Collaborative, multi-disciplinary efforts open fresh perspectives and may yield insights into old problems.

While integrating subjects within the field of humanities and arts might be relatively straightforward, the cross-disciplinary conversation between humanities subjects and the

natural sciences poses different challenges. Theologians long have interacted with philosophy or collaborated with philosophers.<sup>1</sup> However, things are more complex when one invites both theologian and psychologist to the table.

Here we look at the challenges and the prospects for a fruitful dialogue between theology and psychology. In our estimation the potential gain for Christian thinkers and practitioners far outweighs the perils. Integration can take place in the dialogue between theologians and

1 See *The Journal of analytical Theology* (<https://journals.tdl.org/jat/index.php/jat>).

psychologists who bring their views into mutual reflection. Integration is not a merging of subjects but emergent thought affecting understanding of each area, as happens with persons in relation.<sup>2</sup>

### Recognising the Perils

Thinkers are humans and so stand on equal ground. No scholar is infallible, no interpreter without bias. But the dialogue between Christian theological thought and psychological thought has had a power struggle. The dominant place of Christian theology prior to the twentieth century was displaced culturally by modernism and secularism, giving room to secular psychology. Christian theologians historically encouraged study of God's creation, confident that God who created the universe will reward studies of the natural world and of human beings as His creatures. But from a theological perspective, understanding humans as God's image-bearers requires understanding of God who revealed Himself in His creation.

Soul care within the church historically developed psychological understanding of people through both theology and philosophy, using revelation and reason. Neither relies upon the scientific method of empirical demonstration and replication. Psychologists also use reason to organise and interpret data and to relate it to practice. But secularists reject any supernatural explanation of reality and so diverge from theological understanding of reality.

Attempts to understand one another provide opportunity to bring the two closer together. Both theologians and psychologists seek to understand human behaviour, personality, and experience. But they examine by different methodologies, interpret observations through different worldviews, and express

2 We are therefore pursuing a "relational integration" as suggested by Steven J. Sandage and Jeannine K. Brown, "Relational Integration, Part I: Differentiated Relationality Between Psychology and Theology", *Journal of Psychology & Theology* (2015) 43.3: 165-178.

their findings in different terminology. As the theologian, guided by a theistic worldview, works with sacred texts, internal thoughts and external observations, the empirical psychologist, usually influenced by a secular-humanist perspective, prefers observations involving controlled experiments and interpretations that exclude theological explanations.

Examining the disciplines' historical backgrounds is illuminating. The beginnings of psychology are traced to the establishment of the first psychological experimental laboratory by Wilhelm Wundt in Leipzig in 1879. Now only 150 years old, scientific psychology is a much younger discipline than Christian theology, which dates to the time of Christ and earlier in its Jewish roots. Youth enjoying their new powers can be very enthusiastic and at times overly confident! German psychologist Michael Utsch speaks of psychology's "excessive hubris" (maßlose Selbstüberschätzung) in this context.<sup>3</sup> Christian theology historically experienced most of its heresies during the faith's first four hundred years. There is advantage in having a two thousand-year-old, well-examined tradition! But theology still has diverse views and must engage new cultural contexts, requiring new expressions. So theology continues to learn. Theologians know that their interpretations of infallible Scripture are fallible (Donald Macleod); psychologists are aware that their experiments involve axioms and premises that cannot be proven and may be replaced by new learning. Humility and mutual respect mark the way for dialogue.

Attempts to define the relationship between theology and psychology have been developed for several decades, predominantly in North America.<sup>4</sup> Various models of the dialogue part-

3 Michael Utsch, "Religion und Psychologie", in B. Weyel and W. Gräß (eds.), *Religion in der modernen Lebenswelt: Erscheinungsformen und Reflexionsperspektiven*, 296-314 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 313.

4 E.g. Rosemead School at BIOLA; see John D. Carter and Bruce Narramore, *The Integration of*

ners' roles and responsibilities have been put forward. Eric Johnson and Stanton Jones edited a "four views" book that offers comparative presentations and mutual reflections by Christians who broadly represent these views. The four are the 'biblical counselling/nouthetic' movement, which seeks to rely exclusively on Scripture and distances itself from psychology altogether, a 'levels of explanation' approach whereby the theologian and the psychologist are considered equal conversation partners with distinct non-overlapping perspectives, an 'integration' approach that considers what psychology offers under Christian guidance, and 'Christian psychology' which seeks to develop a distinctly Christian psychology.<sup>5</sup> The latter two models are hierarchical, examining psychological information with theological thinking in the driver's seat.

Steve L. Porter, a representative of this latter view, argues for instance that theology "is the queen of sciences, and hence, that psychology's role is to serve theology as a handmaid."<sup>6</sup> Historically, theology was in fact, the essential integrative element at the university, encouraging members of the different disciplines to communicate with one another and to engage in lively discussion. From the Christian worldview, theology informs and is the wellspring for all other disciplines.<sup>7</sup> Christian theology asserts that Jesus Christ is Lord, to whom all minds ought to bow and from whom we receive the

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*Psychology and Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979).

5 Eric L. Johnson & Stanton L. Jones, eds. *Psychology & Christianity: Four Views* (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000). David Powlison, David G. Myers, Gary R. Collins, and Robert C. Roberts represent these four views.

6 Steve L. Porter, "Theology as Queen and Psychology as Handmaid: The Authority of Theology in Integrative Endeavors", *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 2010, Vol. 29, No. 1, 3-14.

7 See my article, co-authored with James Eglinton, "Scientific Theology? Herman Bavinck and Adolf Schlatter on the Place of Theology in the University", *Journal of Reformed Theology* 7 (2013): 27-50.

mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16).

However, dialogue with scholars of a field that historically disavowed theology's role requires humility toward the conversation partner. 'Confident humility' is appropriate.<sup>8</sup> Theologians have left many important areas to the psychologist. Thus many pastoral practitioners have utilised psychologies with less theological examination or done biblical interpretation with less awareness of cultural lenses. Theology needs to become more accessible, relevant, applicable, and, of course more open towards integration. Pursuing dialogue and interaction is not easy but is vital for both disciplines.

### Recognising the Potential

Integrating theology and psychology has much potential on both academic and practical levels. For theology as a discipline, openness toward integration may facilitate its survival at the university as the world questions its value. Cross-pollination also benefits the academic theologian as it offers insights into the human personality, experience, cognition, emotion, and behaviour to which theological concepts apply. Likewise, interpreting experiences of transcendence, according to Karl Rahner requires "psychological competence."<sup>9</sup> Practical or pastoral care theologians can learn from psychologists about mental health and coping with stress, issues that the impact of COVID19 and lockdown on wellbeing have highlighted. Psychology can offer skills for communication and dealing with conflict in church and family relationships, and for counselling people with trauma or addictions, burnout or compassion fatigue and more.

Integration for the academically working psychologist can expand epistemological networks. Including the notions of transcendence and metaphysics offers a richer perspective to

8 Dan Kent, *Confident Humility: Becoming Your Full Self without Becoming Full of Yourself* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2019).

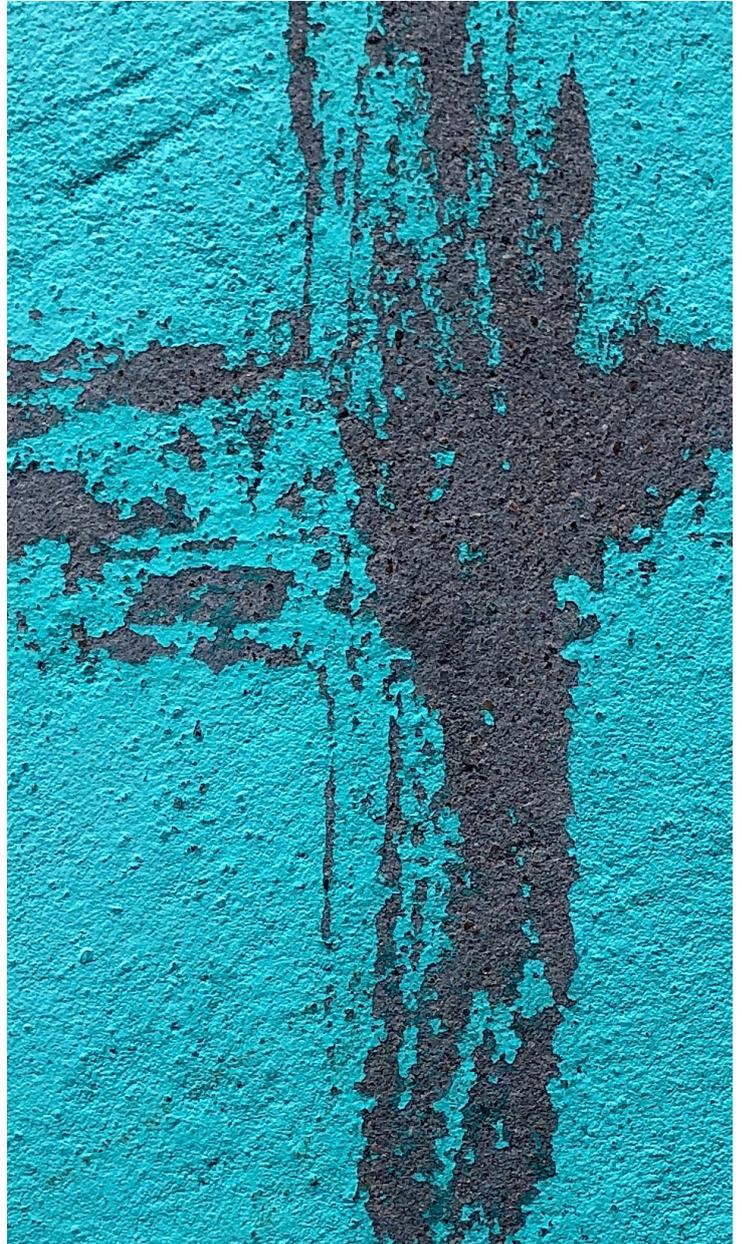
9 Karl Rahner, quoted in Utsch, "Religion und Psychologie", 302.

the psychologist scrutinising personal views. To Carl Rogers' and Abraham Maslow's insights into self-actualisation, positive psychology added themes like hope and forgiveness, but theology offers ground for these themes and for meaning and purpose, well-being, and flourishing. Both the empirical psychologist and the practitioner in the counselling setting will benefit greatly from understanding key theological doctrines. David Fergusson, speaking of integration, suggests that "traditional theological themes such as self-love, providence and vocation" holds much promise here.<sup>10</sup>

### **Christo-Centric Integration**

At the new Centre for Theology and Psychology we adopt a form of integration that respects the expertise and boundaries of each discipline, while engaging in a creative conversation that is infused with a clear Christ-centred focus. St. Paul describes the authority of Jesus Christ over all creation in his letter to the Colossians: "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together." (Col 1:16-17)

We seek Christ's wisdom and guidance in this integrative endeavour. As theologians and psychologists who submit to Jesus Christ we seek to equip scholars and Christian leaders in various fields of ministry. We seek to glorify Christ as we equip believers who participate in His action in this world and who support communities reconciled to Him.




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<sup>10</sup> David Fergusson, "Theology and Therapy: Maintaining the Connection", *Pacifica* (2012) 26.1: 3-16.

# ACT PEOPLE ONLINE

## Articles

### June

9 Gary Millar (QTC), TGCA, [My Mortality \(an article which doesn't mention C...-19\)](#)

### July

6 Rhys Bezzant (Ridley), [Why I Still Read the Bible](#), TGCA

13 Tim Patrick (BCSA) [RETHINKING THE INKING](#), Eternity News

Richard Shumack (MST) [Interview in War Cry UK](#)

24 John McClean (CC) [No Good Choice? Difficult Decisions and the Gift of Wisdom](#), TGCA

27 Murray Capill (RTC) [Don't Just Preach about Christ. Preach Christ!](#), TGCA

30 Mike Frost (Morling) [MY MATE PRAYS FOR ME. EVERY WEDNESDAY. I'M SO GRATEFUL](#), Eternity News

### August

5 Karina Kreminski (Morling), [A Bounded Life': embracing the local in a post-COVID world](#), Ethos

19, 27, 28 Andrew Moody (QTC), [Miracles and Greatness, Jesus: Just a Man Like Us?, Jesus, The Spirit and Us](#), TGCA

27 Denise Cooper-Clarke (Ridley), [WHY ARE SOME CHRISTIANS SO WORRIED ABOUT A COVID VACCINE?](#), interview by Kylie Beach, Eternity News

### November

3 Megan Powell du Toit (ACT), [THE GOSPEL IMPULSE: REAL EVANGELICALISM](#), Eternity News





# Podcasts

## Series

Megan Powell du Toit (ACT), Michael Jensen, [With All Due Respect](#), Eternity News  
 Jenny Salt (SMBC) [SALT - Conversations with Jenny](#), Eternity News  
 John Dickson (Ridley) [Undeceptions](#), Eternity News  
 Mike Bird (Ridley) and NT Wright [The New Testament in Its World](#), Zondervan

## Appearances

### July

10 Richard Shumack (MST) [Unbelievable? The Jesus of Islam and Christianity: Can we reconcile the two?](#), *Premier Radio*, UK  
 23 Gary Millar [Race & the Church](#), *Everyday Conversations*, TGCA

### August

4 Rob Smith (SMBC) [Best practice gatherings & singing in the COVID season](#), *The Pastor's Heart*  
 13 Alex Stark (TQ, student) [Doubt](#), *Everyday Conversations*, TGCA  
 15 Megan Powell du Toit (ACT), [Some Answers](#)  
 20 Bill Salier (YWKS), [Do Children Belong in Church?](#), *Everyday Conversations*, TGCA  
 23 Andrew Sloane (Morling), [Exploring Consciousness](#), *God Forbid*, ABC, Radio National  
 26 Richard Shumack (MST), [The Muslim Jesus](#), *Life & Faith*, CPX

### September

10 Rob Smith (SMBC) [Cultural Marxism & Cancel Culture](#), *Everyday Conversations*, TGCA  
 14 Tim Silberman (SMBC) [How overseas mission helps local evangelism](#), *The Pastor's Heart*  
 29 AJ Culp (Malyon) [Memoir of Moses](#), *OnScript*

# Calls for papers

[LATT Conference – Assessment in Theological Education, SCD, 23-24 April 2021, proposals due 16 November 2020.](#)

[Bavinck Centenary Conference, BST, 5-6 July 2021, proposals due 7 December 2020.](#)

[TRANSFORMING VOCATION CONFERENCE, Morling & Hubs, 15-17 JULY 2021, proposals due 1st March 2021.](#)

[Centre for Gospels and Acts Research Biennial Conference, SCD, 30 September - 1 October 2021, proposals due 1 June, 2021.](#)

## Events

**2020**

### **November**

**13 Yarra, VIC**

[Constructing Exile | Online Book launch](#)

**19 Moore, NSW**

[Ruth Lukabyo book launch, ACT Monograph Series.](#)

**20 Ridley, VIC**

[Annual Dinner with speakers Peter Adam, Andrew Thorburn](#)

**21 Alphacrucis, NSW**

[Christian Early Educators Conference](#)

**27 Online, AU**

[Book Launch: Evangelicals and the End of Christendom, by Hugh Chilton](#)

**28 Stirling, VIC**

[Stirling Leadership Summit, Meredith Lake, Mike Frost, Graham Hill](#)

**28 Trinity, VIC**

[The Kingdom of God is Near \(Webinar\) with Bob Derrenbacker and Rachelle Gilmour](#)

### **December**

**13 Whitley, VIC**

[Practical Theology as a Practice of Hope, René Erwich, online](#)

**2021**

### **April**

23-34 SCD, NSW

[LATT Conference – Assessment in Theological Education,.](#)

### **July**

**5-6 BST , QLD**

[Bavinck Centenary Conference](#)

**15-17 Morling & Hubs, NSW**

[TRANSFORMING VOCATION CONFERENCE](#)

### **September**

**30- 1/10 SCD, NSW**

[Centre for Gospels and Acts Research Biennial Conference](#)

# REBOOTING THE POST-PANDEMIC CHURCH

## Fostering Inclusion for People Living with Disability

A week before the official closure of schools due to COVID-19, we made the decision to take our two high-school aged daughters out of school. Our primary motivation was the health of our youngest daughter who has a range of conditions that impact her immune system and put her in the high-risk category. Like many other families, we began rearranging furniture and making adjustments around the house to accommodate remote learning. We dragged out the old Bunnings fold-out table for the girls to share as a temporary desk and, with much eye-rolling, placed a line of masking tape down its centre to divide the table precisely into halves. How else could they be expected to work from home in such close proximity without a clear demarcation of one teen's space from another?

At the same time, I had to learn how to adapt my teaching from the lecture theatre to my home office. I spent days watching tutorials on virtual teaching, scanning and uploading additional documents to the e-Library, and meeting one-on-one with students to direct them on how to navigate Zoom and Moodle. I trialled various lecturing locations around my office to try and maximise light and minimise visibility to my teetering towers of books. And I had to work out how to do all this in the company of three cats and three teenagers: the former desirous of launching their online careers by making cameo appearances in my lectures, the latter, duelling with me and every other inhabitant of Western Sydney to access the highly coveted – but probably fictional – stable internet connection.

But despite all the difficulties of adjusting to this new virtual life in lockdown, for the most part, we have risen to the challenge. As a nation, we recognised the necessity of physical distancing and we have sought new and creative ways of staying

connected with friends and family through digital means. As church communities, we have learnt to embrace a range of technologies though readily available were not previously considered necessary and we have made them work for our particular church contexts. For some churches that has meant pre-recording services which can be watched in full on You Tube while other churches have streamed full services on their church website or through social media platforms like Facebook. In addition, many churches have purchased Zoom licenses that have allowed for large numbers of people to meet together for prayer and Bible study groups. And while most people would agree that meeting together in the same physical space is still ideal, online platforms have provided a valuable means of connection that have seen us through a particularly difficult and isolating time.

But with COVID-19 restrictions beginning to ease in most places across Australia, the resounding cry I continue to hear from friends and families, my students and fellow church-goers is I cant wait until everything goes back to normal. And while there is a large part of me that wants to echo that cry, there is also another part of me that grieves the possibility that in rushing too quickly to get back to normal, we might just miss an incredible opportunity to simply pause and reflect on the way we 'do' church. Let's use this time to take stock of some of the 'temporary' modifications we have put in place during the COVID-19 season that have actually been helpful developments in fostering Christian community. Let's reflect on the new skills and abilities we have all developed and consider how we might be able to continue to use these skills moving forward. And rather than simply going back to normal, what if we take this opportunity to map out a new kind of normal for what it means for us to live as the Body



of Christ in Australia in the 21st century?

Since our church moved to online services in March 2020, my family and I have had a Sunday evening ritual of watching church together. Normally, we are split across at least two Sunday services between our serving responsibilities and our older girls attending the 6pm youth service. But with online church, we are able to participate in church together as a family. Our teenage daughters have a supply box filled with notepads, colouring books and coloured pencils which gets pulled out specifically to use during the service. Together, the five of us participate in the service – often in our pyjamas – singing, praying and learning together.

For our 13-year-old daughter Maisy, this is the first time she has felt completely comfortable ‘in church’ for a long time.<sup>1</sup> She has a range of health conditions, learning difficulties and anxiety which make church a Pandora’s box of potential anxiety-inducing situations. The people are overwhelming. The music is too loud. Mum talks too long to people after the service. And a million questions

<sup>1</sup> I have shared the content of this article with Maisy and only included information she was comfortable with me sharing about herself. I sought her permission for using her name in the article which she granted (to the extent to which a 13-year-old is able to offer it).

swarm her mind at once. What if a stranger tries to speak to her over morning tea? What happens if the order of service deviates from what she is used to? What happens if someone asks her to read out loud or spontaneously answer a question during youth bible study? What if she accidentally eats something contraband over morning tea and ends up with an anaphylactic reaction? The potential causes of stress for Maisy on any given Sunday are innumerable.

Due to her anxiety, Maisy spent the 6 months before lockdown sitting with us in the morning service at church rather than attending the service’s youth program. Each week she would draw or colour-in during the service and try and take in the content of the sermon as much as she was able. Due to difficulties with auditory processing, Maisy often needs help understanding new or complex ideas and often wants to ask questions immediately to gain clarification. But this can be difficult to do in the middle of a regular Sunday service or youth program. At home during lockdown, this has been a completely different story. As our church have pre-recorded whole services which get uploaded to YouTube (including music, prayer, bible reading, kids’ talk, and sermon), we are able to participate in the services from home and experience most of

the facets of a regular Sunday service but with greater control over the environment.

We quickly adapted to participating in church online realising that participating from home increases our ability to adapt our environment to suit Maisy's needs. Watching services online means, we have the ability to pause the service at any time to help Maisy understand a difficult concept. We can skip back and watch a section again, or even re-watch the entire service if we choose to do so. But it is not only the content of the service we have control over but other aspects of the physical environment also. Maisy is particularly sensitive to noise, especially music, but being at home means we can turn the volume down during the music and back up again during the sermon. Maisy also has a genetic condition called Ectodermal Dysplasia which means she is unable to moderate her own body temperature. While this is problematic in various ways, one of the greatest concerns for her is the potential to overheat which can lead to light-headedness, fatigue, and nosebleeds, or more significantly, seizures. At home, we can more easily control the temperature of the room to ensure she is comfortable without the risk of overheating. And the greatest perk of being at home for church for Maisy is the presence of her beloved feline Jinxy who takes up residence on her lap for the duration of the service. By removing some of the unpredictable elements of face-to-face church, Maisy is more relaxed and better able to concentrate and learn.

While we have seen the benefits of online church in our own family, our experience during the COVID-19 season is not unique. In discussing our situation with other parents of children with special needs, we have heard many similar stories of online church providing increased opportunities for participation and fellowship. For many families, watching pre-recorded church services means that they are able to control the length of time they sit down together with the freedom to break up

the service into smaller sections to make it easier to watch for children or are not able to concentrate for long periods of time. Families are also not restricted by the physical structures of a church. For many families, the absence of a ramp and accessible bathrooms<sup>2</sup> means they are simply not able to attend a particular church. However, online church does not present the same physical barriers.<sup>3</sup>

Many families have also shared about online services providing a liberation from the fears of their children disturbing others around them when they meet together in person. At home, their children are free to play with fidget toys, make repetitive behaviours ('stimming'), or make vocalisations without being 'tutted' or eye-rolled by fellow parishioners who find the child's behaviour distracting. With both pre-recorded services or through using the mute button during live Zoom services, parents can still participate in the service online while also allowing their children to move around as they need to. And just as we have found with Maisy, other families have also discovered that without the restrictions on noise and behaviour normally required in physical

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2 The term "accessible" has now replaced the term "disabled" in terms of physical accessibility to places such as toilets and car parking spaces.

3 While this article has focused on the ways that online church has helped to create greater connection for some people living with disability, I also recognise that there are many other people with disability who have found online church difficult due to issues such as lack of technology or wifi-access, for example. For examples on some of the ways the COVID-19 pandemic has made church harder for some members with disability, see Miriam Spies' article "COVID Exposed Christian Ableism: What Happens when Churches Reopen" *Sojourners* October 5, 2020, <https://sojo.net/articles/covid-exposed-christian-ableism-what-happens-when-churches-reopen>; Syovata Shalon Kilonzo, "Advancing a Disability-Inclusive Response to COVID-19" *World Council of Churches* 21 April 2020, <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/advancing-a-disability-inclusive-response-to-covid-19>.

church, their children are more relaxed and are better able to focus on the content of the service.

For many children with disability, a compromised immune system is just one complication associated with their conditions. When these children are unwell or at times when they are particularly vulnerable to illness or infection, church in person simply isn't an option. In these cases, it is not only the child that misses out on the teaching and fellowship that church provides but also the parent. When families have the option of online modes of church, illness and disability become less of a barrier to participation. This is not just of benefit to families with children with special needs but to a whole host of vulnerable adults in our church communities such as those older members with mobility issues, people with chronic illness or pain, and people with mental health challenges that make meeting in large crowds a difficult experience. In addition, online options are also of benefit to many Australians who live in rural and remote part of the country where physical attendance can be problematic. While disability advocates have long requested that churches make the most of existing technology and online attendance a possibility,<sup>4</sup> it has taken a global pandemic to facilitate the normalisation of this technology for mass consumption.<sup>5</sup>

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4 For example, see the website of David Lucas who is a vision impaired man who creates online services and prayers with a view to fostering inclusion for people with disability, <https://www.anordinaryoffice.co.uk/>.

5 For a person reflection on the COVID-19 situation and church for an adult with a disability, see Amie Spriensma, "Church, COVID-19, and Disability: A Personal Story," *Banner* 29 July 2020, <https://www.thebanner.org/our-shared-ministry/2020/07/church-covid-19-and-disability-a-personal-story>.

The benefits of online participation have not only been felt by people with disability and their families but also the wider church community. One unexpected blessing in this respect has been that Zoom has enabled greater understanding from others in the church about the daily challenges many families living with disability experience. One mother I know shared a story about carrying her phone around the house with her to participate in Bible study while executing her son's complex bedtime health regimen of various medications and physical therapy. Pre-COVID 19, this mother rarely attended Bible study because of her son's disabilities. Now with Zoom entrenched firmly in our vocabulary and tech usage, this mother has been able to participate consistently in the Bible study group. Not only this, but Zoom has also provided her Bible study group with a window into the complexities of her family life. As a result, her group are better informed about her struggles and have greater clarity about the ways they can pray and support the family. The group now have a greater comprehension of the elongated bedtime routines, lack of babysitting or sheer exhaustion that have often hindered this mother's participation in the group in the past. While most members of the group have recommenced attending in person, the group have embraced Zoom as a means of ongoing participation in order to accommodate this particular mother and other vulnerable members of their bible study group.

During lockdown, our family desperately missed face-to-face connection with members of our church community, but we also found some surprising benefits to participating in church online. While I would always choose to be physically present with others whenever possible, there are times when I am simply not able to attend church in person due to Maisy's various health conditions as well as my own. And when the options

available to me are online church or no church at all, then online church is not only appealing but a vital means of participation when I cannot be there in person. In our case, Maisy's health is generally stable enough for us to attend church fairly regularly outside of a pandemic. However, for others with more debilitating disabilities or for those who are more immunosuppressed than Maisy, regular attendance in person is simply impossible. As a result of intermittent attendance, many people in this situation find themselves on the fringes of their church communities. For these people, continuing with online church services in some capacity beyond the COVID-19 lockdown would help to provide a means of fellowship for people whose situation often prevents it. This is not a matter of people who are simply 'too busy' or 'too comfortable at home in their pjs' to want to attend physical church; these are people who are desirous of finding ways to connect with their brothers and sisters in Christ despite the challenges of their particular disability or health concerns.

The reality is, for many families living with disability, online church does present an appealing option. Not only are online attendees free from worrying about whether a church building has wheelchair ramps or accessible toilets, not only can families control the temperature and volume at home and throw in a feline for good measure, but online church also alleviates what is often the most unpredictable and stressful element of meeting together for church face-to-face: the question of acceptance. Will our family be welcomed and accepted by this church community? Will they embrace our difference and make accommodations for our disabilities? Or, as is sadly the response so many of my friends with disability have experienced in churches, will they be told that making adjustments to cater for the small number of people with disability in churches is not only 'a chore but a distraction from the real business of ministry'? Will the family be told that while they are welcome, it would

'probably be better for everyone' if their child with disability 'could be left at home on Sunday'? Will it be suggested that 'perhaps you could go to a different church that specialises in caring for people with disability'? Will the folks in the pews eye-roll and tut and shush the families who, red-faced, are making every possible effort to keep their children still and quiet while they wait for the children's program to start? Will their fellow church-goers recognise that even getting to church on a Sunday is a huge achievement or will they disparage them for arriving late and skipping morning tea? It is these questions and comments – all drawn from real life church encounters – that form of the basis of the statement in *Welcoming People with Developmental Disabilities their Families: A Practical Guide for Congregations* that the "biggest barriers people with disabilities and their families encounter are not inaccessible stairs but unwelcoming stares."<sup>6</sup>

My hopes moving forward from our COVID-19 lockdown experience in Australia are two-fold. Firstly, my hope is that our time in lockdown and our experiences of feeling isolated and distant from one another will lead us to greater empathy for those in our church communities who experience this kind of disconnect on a daily basis. We have now had our eyes opened to the possibilities of technology for fostering inclusion for those on the margins of our church communities. And, as Stephen Grcevich has written online, while in times gone by churches could have argued that they did not know how or were not equipped "to do ministry with people who are cut off for one reason or another from church. That argu-

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6 C.E. Taylor, E. W. Carter, N. H. Annandale, T. L. Boehm, and A. K. Logeman, "Welcoming People with Developmental Disabilities and their Families: A Practical Guide for Congregations," (Nashville: Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, 2014, <https://vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/assets/files/resources/CongregationPracticeGuide.pdf>), 4.

ment is no longer valid.”<sup>7</sup> And while some people continue to argue that “Internet Church isn’t Really Church”<sup>8</sup> or that online church “disembodies the Christian life...detach(ing) discipleship from everyday experience,”<sup>9</sup> our church communities should instead embrace the technologies at our disposal and continue to provide services both in-person and online in order to cater for those who are willing and able to meet in person as well as those who are unable to do so due chronic illness or disability. My hope is we will have a renewed desire for each of our congregants to feel a sense of acceptance and belonging in our church communities and that this would continue “to spur (each of us) on toward love and good deeds” as we continue “meeting together” whether that’s in person or online (Heb. 10:24-25).

Secondly, my hope is that our growing awareness of the barriers faced by the vulnerable and marginalised of our church communities will also inspire us to rethink the way we do physical church. If families living with disability are more comfortable at home than in person, we need to ask ourselves, are these issues to do with elements beyond our control such as a child’s illness or immunosuppression, or, are people more comfortable at home because our church communities are failing to extend compassion and grace to families grappling with the challenges of life with disability? My concern with heading back into our church buildings is not that the majority of church-goers will become so complacent that they will ditch meeting together in favour of the comfort of their own lounge room (in fact, I think

7 <https://www.keyministry.org/church4every-child/2020/6/14/why-families-think-online-church-is-indispensable-for-disability-ministry>

8 E.g., this 2018 opinion piece in the New York times by Laura Turner entitled “Internet Church Isn’t Really Church,” <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/15/opinion/sunday/church-live-streaming-religion.html>

9 Adam Ch’ng, “Online Church isn’t the Ideal – Don’t Get Used to It,” *Gospel Coalition Australia* <https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/online-church-isnt-the-ideal-dont-get-used-to-it/>.

our separation from one another has strengthened the resolve of many to want to meet in person). But rather, my concern is that families living with disability will find it easier to stay online simply because with virtual church services they don’t have to contend with the judgement and the lack of compassion so often shown to families living with disability. This is a loss not just for families living with disability but for all the members of the Body who do not get to experience the full expression of the mutuality and interdependence that Paul describes as key features of the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-24). In what ways can we take steps to remove some of the barriers that stand in the way of full participation in the life of the church for families living with disability.

While this pandemic will no doubt provide fodder for social discussions and academic presentations for years to come, as church communities, we have been provided a rare opportunity to stop, reflect, and even reboot. Now is our opportunity to take church and ‘turn it off and back on again.’ Now is the time to not simply ‘go back to normal’ but to forge a new kind of normal in our communities that embraces a variety of approaches to worship and fellowship that cater for the diverse needs of our church members. Now is not simply the time to rearrange the furniture to create spaces of 1.5 metres between parishioners, but instead, we have the opportunity to follow the lead of the men in Mark 2:1-12 who tore out the roof – these men literally tore down physical barriers – to ensure their friend with a disability had access to Jesus. How can we use this opportunity to ensure whether it is in person or online, people with disabilities and their family can attend church and bible study groups so that they too can have access to Jesus?

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